

GETTING STARTED

MAKING A COVENANT

WEEK 1

Making a Covenant: ROPES Exercise

Materials:

- White board or giant Post-it Notes
- Markers

As you set the stage for this eight-week study, a covenant allows you to establish boundaries and guidelines for your time together. A covenant can serve as an important foundation for your students, especially if you have formed a new group for this study.

Creating a covenant should be a collaborative process. The group should list the expectations they have of one another and agree on ground rules for the sessions. We encourage you to explore together ideas such as consistency, commitment, confidentiality, and accountability. To invite your students into the covenant-making process, you might paraphrase or read the paragraph that follows.

Creating a safe place for sharing and growing together requires covenant. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, covenant means making a promise to each other and to God. Such a covenant is made up of vows you decide on as a group. With these vows, you promise to respect and value one another. Together, we will create a covenant that will guide our work during the next eight weeks. After we complete our covenant, each of us will sign our name and live out the promises we make about how this group will be together.

Now you can help your students decide on guidelines by consensus. You might ask students to begin brainstorming some ideas by asking this question:

- What needs to be included in our covenant to create a safe place for you to grow into the person God created you to be?

Once students have generated a few ideas, help them to formalize guidelines and articulate their covenant. You can use the steps that follow to guide students through the process.

- Write the words “Group Covenant” at the top of the large piece of paper or on a whiteboard. Then write the word “ROPES” vertically along the left-hand side.
- Explain that, like a safety net, the ROPES will serve as mutually agreed-upon guidelines to which everyone will adhere during your time together.
- Say: “Ropes can connect people and bind them together. But if the ropes are too tight, they can trip people or even trap them.”
- Ask: “What kind of rope is needed to keep our group bound together?”
- Invite the student to say words (related to group covenant) that begin with each of the letters of the word *ROPES*. For example: *R* might be *respect* or *responsibility*; *O* *openness* or *ownership*; and so forth. Ask the students to explain why they have recommended certain words and what those words mean to them. Add your own suggestions to the list.

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- Once you have several words for each letter, encourage students to come to a consensus about which guidelines are chosen. You may choose more than one word for each letter.
- Record the covenant on a large sheet of paper. Have students sign the covenant as evidence of their commitment to one another and to their participation in the study. Bring the covenant to each session for the duration of the group. You can post your ROPES on the wall as a visual reminder. You also might make copies to give to each member of the group.
- Periodically during the study, have the group evaluate whether the covenant is being followed and whether it still works for everyone. ROPES can be edited and changed to accommodate the group's needs.