

Covenant Sunday

Sunday 11th January 2026

Welcome

- What is the strongest memory you have of ice or snow?

Word

Read 2 Timothy 1:6-10

1. What inspires, intrigues, irritates or interests you?

Discipleship takes courage. As Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:7, God gives us a spirit of power, love and self-discipline – not timidity. True discipleship is Spirit-empowered boldness shaped by Jesus, focused on growth and transformation. When it becomes timid, it risks turning inward – choosing maintenance over mission and belief over action.

2. What fears or hesitations might hold people back from bold obedience?
3. As we move from ‘Step Up, Stand Out’ to ‘Break Ground, Bring Hope’, as a Covenant theme, where is God inviting us to be courageous and dig deeper, clear away resistance, and make space for renewal in our lives, relationships or community?

Read Colossians 1:27, 1 Peter 1:3 and Exodus 34:6

4. What do you notice, or feel God saying through these Scriptures?

Colossians 1:27 declares, ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’, revealing the foundation of Christian hope as a deep recognition of his living presence within us. This hope is rooted in God’s character, as seen in Exodus 34:6 where he reveals his glory through compassion, grace, patience, abundant love and faithfulness – qualities that offer hope not

only to us but also through us to the world. Peter describes it as a ‘living hope’ in 1 Peter 1:3, born through the resurrection of Jesus Christ – a hope that renews, sustains and transforms.

5. Where might God be inviting us to break new ground, relationally, spiritually or missionally, so that living hope can bring light and restoration to others?

Read Hosea 10:12 (if you can, read it in several translations and paraphrases) and reflect on the image of hard, dry, unploughed soil.

6. What differences in interpretation or emphasis do you notice? Which version speaks most deeply to you, and why?
7. How does this image speak to you?
8. What unploughed ground is God stirring you to address? What in your heart and life may God be asking you to remove, to make way for the ‘ploughing’?
9. What does it look like to sow righteousness for yourself?

Today, agriculture is highly mechanised. Farmers use GPS-guided tractors, automated ploughs and soil sensors to prepare fields. But ancient farmers would have used simple wooden ploughs, often pulled by oxen or donkeys, sometimes tipped with bronze or iron for durability. Preparing the field involved removing large rocks that could obstruct ploughing or hinder seed growth. Labourers walked the fields, lifting or prying out stones and stacking them along the edges.

10. What areas of the heart or habits could feel like ‘unploughed ground’, and how might facing them with courage lead to deeper spiritual clarity and renewal?

In the ancient Near East, farmers waited in hope for seasonal rains. Hosea 10:12 evokes this trust, God ‘showering his righteousness’ like rain on dry soil. This is active hope: seeking God with expectation,

believing transformation will follow. Breaking ground becomes the way to renewal, within and beyond us.

11. How does the image of God ‘showering his righteousness’ like rain on dry soil invite a trust in his timing and provision?

‘A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain This is the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines – they are a way of sowing to the Spirit By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done.’

— Richard J Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

12. How does Richard Foster’s quote help us understand what it means to break up unploughed ground and wait faithfully for God’s transforming work?

‘Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude.’

— Dallas Willard

13. How does understanding that grace is ‘not opposed to effort, but is opposed to earning’ reshape the way I approach spiritual disciplines and growth?

14. What is one area of my life, spiritually, relationally or missionally, where I sense God inviting me to break new ground and trust him more deeply?

15. How can I carry the hope of Christ into my everyday interactions, becoming a source of light and restoration in the places I live and serve?

Worship & Witness

- People may have shared the ‘hardened ground’ in their hearts and lives. Pray into those areas and ask God to soften hearts.
- Pray for your communities and the surrounding needs to which you can bring hope as a small group.
- Pray for those who are struggling to hold hope for themselves. Pray that God meets them in their need and helps to anchor them in his promises and faithfulness during the waiting seasons.
- Pray for God to embolden people with courage to continue this.

A Prayer to read aloud:

May you go with courage, ready to break new ground within your heart, your relationships and your community. May the Spirit guide you as you clear away what hinders growth, making space for God’s transforming presence. May you be rooted in living hope, carrying Christ’s love into the broken places of the world. And may you reflect his light and restoration within you, among you, and through you wherever he leads.

Optional Extra Prayers:

- What are the concerns in your local area?
- What is there to thank God for?
- Who needs our prayers today?
- How can we continue to be more aware of the needs around us?
- How can we courageously break ground and bring hope to our community or frontline?

Pointers for personal reflection at the start of 2026:

- What obstacles harden my heart or hold me back from deeper intimacy with God?
- What spiritual practices help me create space for God’s transformation?
- How can I be part of breaking ground missionally, bringing living hope, love and restoration to others?