

# Covenant Relationships

## 1 Samuel 18:1-3

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself . . . And Jonathan made a **covenant** with David because he loved him as himself.

Jonathan and David give us an example of a **covenant relationship**--one in which there is unconditional acceptance, loyalty and commitment to one another. It is the fulfillment of Jesus' words in **John 13:35**, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." In the book of Acts, it was the quality of life and fellowship that caused the world to look and say, "**Behold, how they love one another.**" The New Testament Greek word for this love and fellowship is *koinonia*. It means a relationship with God and other Christians that is interwoven in covenant and implies a deliberate, deep commitment with open, honest caring and sharing. It was commonly used to refer to an enduring commitment of a business partnership or a marriage.

Authentic relationships take effort and work. The key to friendships is not trying to find the right person. It is being the right person. A friend is a person whose needs you can meet, not someone you look for to meet your needs. The commitment is to be a friend, not the desire to have a friend. Relationship means the mutual sharing of life between two or more persons. We need friendships. True enjoyment is not found in what we do but in our relationships. The Bible tells us that life is found in loving. Reaching out can be uncomfortable, but it is what a true Christian must do.

A **covenant relationship** is on a more intimate level than an ordinary friendship. This relationship implies that whatever we have is available to our covenant brothers and sisters. This is a promise we can only make to a limited number of people. While we can only make this covenant commitment to a few people, through it we receive strength to minister to the world.

The elements of a **covenant relationship** are -

(1) The **covenant of affirmation...** There is nothing you have done or will do that will make me stop loving you. This God-like love takes the initiative in affirming and not giving up. Like Jesus, He appointed twelve, to be with Him. **Mark 3:14**

(2) The **covenant of availability...** I am committed to going beyond myself, anything I have--time, energy, insight, possessions--is at your disposal if you need it to the limit of my resources. Everything Jesus had was available to His disciples. He committed Himself and resources to a few, regardless of inconvenience or cost.

(3) The **covenant of prayer...** I promise to pray for you in some regular fashion, believing that our caring Father wishes His children to pray for one another. In Peter's temptation, Jesus said, I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.

(4) The **covenant of openness...** I promise to be a more open person . . . disclosing my feelings, hopes, and longings. The degree to which I do so implies that I cannot make it without you . . . that I trust you with my problems and dreams. Jesus openly expressed His love for His disciples and in the garden He honestly admitted His needs and asked for prayer.

(5) The **covenant of honesty...** I will try to mirror back to you what I am hearing you say and feel. I will risk speaking the truth in love that we grow up in every way unto Christ who is the head - **Ephesians 4:15.**

(6) The **covenant of sensitivity...** I promise to be sensitive to you and to your needs to the best of my ability. I will try to hear you--see you--anticipate where you are--and draw you out of the pit of discouragement or withdrawal. It costs to be sensitive. Jesus confronted Peter in **John 21:15-17** and reconciliation took place. Sometimes through the eyes of another person, we see ourselves better.

(7) The **covenant of confidentiality...** I promise to keep confidential the things we share in order to provide an atmosphere of openness. Why is confidentiality so important? There can be no love without trust. When we trust others, we can open up to love, give and receive. Confidentiality opens the door to the deeper

relationships of **James 5:16** to confess your faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

(8) The **covenant of accountability**... I promise, that if I discover areas of my life that are under bondage, hung-up, or being misused, I will seek Christ's liberating power through His Holy Spirit . . . I will be accountable to you to become what God has designed me to be in His loving creation. Accountability is the foundation of any love covenant for it recognizes when there is a problem and gives permission to share with others. Out of accountability flows the love, acceptance and forgiveness we need. The relationship helps us to work out a plan of action. It is truly a beautiful thing to be able to say, "What happens to me matters to you."

God's love is the basis for any kind of **covenant** group. (**1 Corinthians 13:8**) It is only when we allow God's love to flow into us that we can love the way He does. This love is the fruit of God's Spirit, not ours. "To these He gave Himself totally. " The world is not impressed with our church buildings or busyness, but by love-caring and involvement in word and deed.

When you belong to Jesus, you belong to others in Jesus. You are in the family of God. Unity is only possible because we all have the common life of God. God knows the tendency of your life is to operate in the body at the advisory level, or to want to minister, but not to be ministered to. You were not meant to make it alone. You need others. We are to grow in love toward all believers, working for the unity of the church, Christ's body. Thus, a small group of believers is God's perfect place for working out love in everyday relationships.

A **covenant** group gives acceptance... takes you just as you are. It allows you to be the real you. You are not forced into someone else's side of who you really are. It means your ideas are taken seriously since they reflect you. You can talk about how you feel inside and why you feel that way, and someone really cares.

Acceptance means you can try out your ideas without being shot down. You can even express heretical thoughts and discuss them with intelligent questioning. You feel safe and secure. No one will pronounce judgment on you even though they don't agree with you. It doesn't mean you will never be corrected or shown to be

wrong. It simply means it is safe to be you, and no one will destroy you out of prejudice.

It is important to become a member of such a group even though you may in the past have had some negative experiences. You are saying to yourself, "If I give of myself in this way, I will be vulnerable and maybe get hurt again." You may be right. But to love you must go out on a limb, and somebody might just saw it off. And as you tumble down, you may wonder whether it was worth it. C.S. Lewis thinks it is. He says:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to be sure of keeping your heart intact--you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safely in the casket of your selfishness. And in the casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will not change, it will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from the dangers of love is in hell.

Until you have made the **covenant** commitment, it's hard to imagine an in-depth relationship with others, where things, fame and money, amount to nothing. The relationship means everything. David and Jonathan had that kind of relationship. Jesus made that commitment when He gave up the glory of heaven for you. Jesus and the early Church were in the company of the committed. They experienced koinonia, love and fellowship in the body of Christ.

**IS THIS COVENANT RELATIONSHIP A PRIORITY WITH YOU?** Will you get together weekly in a small group or with a friend? I pray that as the Lord works in your life, you will become this kind of friend, taking the initiative to love sacrificially, unconditionally, developing a sense of loyalty and intimacy, opening your heart and sharing your life with others. **God is a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God.** He works in the earth through covenant. America was founded on covenant with God. However, we have become a nation of covenant breakers. As a result, we do not understand covenant. A foundational understanding of covenant helps us understand how to develop meaningful

relationships. He must have those who walk in this type of relationship to accomplish His purposes in the earth.

**Trust is a necessary element in covenant relationships.** When trust has been broken, it is often difficult to reinstate. Often Christians believe they are supposed to trust everyone. Jesus didn't and He doesn't expect you to either. Guidelines are given for developing trust. These principles will help ensure the building of strong relationships.