



THE ULTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

If you listen closely, you'll hear it. It is the story of how God has acted throughout history, seeking to redeem the world. The truly awesome thing about this is that God chooses to tell it through those who have entered an eternal covenant with Him through Jesus Christ.

God has told His story through many people already. Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, Ruth, Esther, Job, Daniel, Paul, Timothy—each of these folk played a special role in helping spread God's story to others. Now God desires to tell His story through you! God wants to establish His covenant with you so that His story will be told accurately, with wisdom and compassion.

Each of us knows that God loves us. However, I'm not sure that we all live in God's love. Let me explain. We allow so many things to get in our way of understanding the loving-kindness that God offers to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. The truly amazing thing is that no matter what we have done, His love is always there, waiting for us to accept it. In order to show us what this love looked like, Jesus came to earth in the form of a man. As He grew up and moved among the people, He demonstrated this type of love in every action and relationship. This love carried Jesus to the Cross where He was crucified—an act of love that for many of us defies explanation. Why would a good man die for those He had never even known? Because Jesus was also God, and He desperately desired to restore humanity to its proper relation to Him. This is the essence of true love—that God would give His own Son to

die for our sins in order that we might be saved! No wonder the Bible says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

When we really understand and accept God's love for us, we can't help but pass along that love on to others. This is the Good News—the gospel! We need to share the love of God at school, at home, at church, at work—anywhere there are lost and hopeless people in the world.

To properly tell God's story, we first need to be involved in activities that will help us tell that story accurately. That is the purpose of this book. It is our hope to expose you to some practices that will help you better understand and live out the covenant that God has established with you. We also want you to be able to help others understand this covenant for themselves. However, in order to do this, we must first understand what this covenant with God means.

COVENANTS AND *HESED*

The concept of covenant is almost unknown in the Western world today. It is a concept that comes from ancient societies and still exists among some people today who are primarily in third world countries. As you read the Bible, especially the Old Testament, you have probably noticed that covenants were common. People established covenants with one another to serve as the basis for their relationships with others, whether it be individually, through the tribe, or even nation to nation.

The English word "covenant" comes from the Latin word *convenire*, which literally means "to come together." The Hebrew word most often translated "covenant" is *berith*, meaning "to bind." With these two definitions in mind, we can fairly say that a covenant is an awesome expression of committed love and trust. A covenant was usually made to define, confirm, establish, or make binding a relationship that had been in the making for quite a while. Once made, a covenant was for life.

Except in rare circumstances, the parties of the covenant always followed a set plan for how the covenant ceremony would take place. This included many steps, but the two primary ones were that an animal sacrifice had to be made and that there had to be a representative of each party present. These representatives would offer a pledge, a promise, to one another that they would keep the principles worked out in this covenant.

Once a covenant was established, it was to be continually worked out in everyday situations by both parties. *Hesed* is the Hebrew word used to describe the ongoing relationship of the parties in covenant, who worked out the principles of the covenant and agreed to keep its promises and responsibilities. Scripture translates *hesed* in a variety of ways, such as "mercy," "goodness,"

“steadfast love,” “loyal love,” and “kindness.” However, the translation that is most often used is “loving-kindness.” This really captures the essence of the covenant that God established with humanity through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

God, in His “loving-kindness,” calls us to participate in this most intimate relationship with Him. This is not a short-term covenant. It is an unbreakable bond that we accept because of what God has done for us. God is the One who has done all of the work in establishing this covenant. Now He offers it to us to accept. It is in this new covenant with Jesus Christ that we are called to live out His story today. Jesus Christ stands as our representative in making this covenant.

DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship is the natural result of a person who has experienced God’s *hesed* by entering into covenant with Him. When we accept Jesus as our personal Savior, we also agree to be obedient to what He would have us do. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus instructs His disciples with these words: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Discipleship, then, is the process of learning how to follow Jesus. It typically happens one-on-one, as a new or growing Christian commits to meeting with another, more mature Christian (usually an adult) for personal accountability and spiritual growth. The goal is that the older disciple would be able to guide the younger disciple in his or her spiritual walk, helping the younger one discover the practices that assist in this walk, and enabling the newer disciple to grow toward spiritual maturity. In so doing, the older disciple fulfills his or her responsibility to teach others to obey every instruction God has given to us. And the younger disciple fulfills his or her responsibility to live out what it means to bear the name of Christ—that of being called a “Christian.”

Over the course of this book we will address four primary avenues to help us grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. These are:

Contemplation—learning to read and study the Bible

Communication—learning to both talk to and listen to God

Community—learning the importance of being in fellowship with one another

Compassion—learning why we are called to reach out to others in need

As you work through this book, we invite you to keep a journal, a notebook of some sort where you can record how you are growing as a disciple. People have been using journals for centuries as a way to converse with God, study His Word, make commitments to Him, and keep track of how God has been at work in their lives. Using a journal is no magic potion for instant discipleship, but rather a tool to help us on our journey.

We have provided you with some sample journal pages in this book that correspond to the above four practices. These are located in section 2 of this book. However, due to the length of this book, there aren't enough pages for you to use every day. Therefore, we encourage you to either make photocopies of these pages, or download additional copies of the pages from www.barefootministries.com. You might even prefer to use a spiral-bound notebook and write in the headings yourself based on the pages we have provided. The key here is not how you create your journal, but rather that you have one. As we proceed through these chapters, we think you will begin to recognize just how important a journal can be in our discipleship process.

YOUR COVENANT WITH GOD

Are you up for this adventure with God? Are you willing to make this kind of covenant with God to live out His story through your life as you learn to be His disciple? If so, let me invite you to read, carefully consider, and then sign the covenant located on page 11. By signing this covenant, you not only indicate your willingness to accept the *hesed*, the “loving-kindness” of God, but also commit to a process of lifelong discipleship. In signing this covenant, you are agreeing that you will live your life in such a way that God will be able to use you to continue to tell His story. The rest of this book is designed to help you do just that. In fact, it is in the daily living that the principles of the covenant, the *hesed*, are worked out.

While the commitment on our end may seem large, think for just a moment about the commitment that God has already made. Through His Son, God has given us the opportunity to live in relationship with Him. Through the Holy Spirit, God comforts us, encourages us, leads us, and makes us holy. No matter how much this commitment costs us, it cost God much more—the death of His Son.



For more information about the idea of covenant, check out the book *The Covenant* by James Garlow (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City). It is a great explanation of this important spiritual principle.

DISCIPLESHIP COVENANT

Understanding that God has created a covenant with me and that I enter this covenant with Jesus Christ as my representative, I commit to meet with and know God more through an ongoing ministry of discipleship.

Because the process of discipleship is not a solitary activity, I also commit to meet on a regular basis with someone who has already been on this discipleship journey for some time and is further along than me. This person will help me bring to maturity the process of spiritual growth that God has already begun in me.

To help me come to spiritual maturity, I commit with my discipleship partner to practice the following:

- ❖ CONTEMPLATION—the study of God's Word on a daily basis.
- ❖ COMMUNICATION—take significant time to talk with and listen to my Heavenly Father.
- ❖ COMMUNITY—engage in Christian fellowship with my brothers and sisters in Christ.
- ❖ COMPASSION—explore ways to live out the love of Christ to others.

We, the undersigned, agree to the principles and commitments outlined in this covenant and understand that this is a lifelong commitment to one another.

Jesus Christ

Covenant Representative

Teen

Parent

Discipleship Partner

Date

DISCIPLESHIP COVENANT