Definition

The word *loyalty* is not found in Scripture. The word *faithfulness* would at first appear to be a synonym. However, faithfulness and dependability relate to the work or service that a person performs, whereas loyalty involves a much deeper, long-term relationship. The Biblical concepts that best describe loyalty are blood covenants, bond servant relationships, and marriage vows.

Why Is Loyalty Important?

Every important relationship in life must be built on loyalty. Marriages must be based on this quality or they will not survive. Leaders look for this quality as a primary qualification for those who serve. Most of all, God requires loyalty of His disciples, and especially in the lives of those whom He uses mightily.

Loyalty in Covenants

The Hebrew word for *covenant* is *beriyth*. It conveys the idea of cutting a compact by passing between pieces of flesh. God illustrates this word in the covenant that He made with Abraham. This and other covenants are rich with symbolism that describes the depth and meaning of loyalty.

1. A covenant is made with those of like spirit. God said to Abraham, “I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17:1). Note: Scripture calls Abraham the friend of God and the father of faith. (See James 2:23 and Galatians 3:6–9.)

2. A covenant requires an initiator, who assumes the greater responsibility in maintaining the covenant. “I will make my covenant between me and thee” (Genesis 17:2). Note: In marriage, the man initiates the covenant and therefore has the greater responsibility to maintain it.

3. A covenant often involves a name change. “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram” (Genesis 17:5). Note: A name change also occurs in a marriage as the wife takes on the husband’s name and in salvation as we take on Christ’s name.

4. The purpose of a covenant is to multiply benefits and fruitfulness. “I will make thee exceeding fruitful” (Genesis 17:6). Note: These purposes are fulfilled with children in a marriage and spiritual children in salvation.

5. A covenant has relationships that last beyond the lifetimes of the covenant makers. “Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations” (Genesis 17:9).

The Canada goose protects its nest from intruders and will even lay down its own life in defense of its lifelong mate.
Although marriage does not continue after death, the relationships between the children and relatives do. Also, covenants with land continue with the land even under new ownership. The covenant of salvation continues beyond one’s lifetime. David honored his covenant with Jonathan after Jonathan died.

6. A blood covenant requires the shedding of blood. Every man child “must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh” (Genesis 17:13). When God made a covenant with Abraham, He instructed Abraham to take five different animals and “divide them in the midst.” (See Genesis 15.)

A Covenant of Friends

A powerful example of loyalty in Scripture is the friendship between Jonathan and David and the covenant they made with each other. The symbolism of this covenant is rich with meaning.

1. They had a oneness of spirit—“The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (I Samuel 18:1).

2. They exchanged their outer garments—“Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David” (I Samuel 18:4). Note: In salvation, Christ gives us robes of righteousness in exchange for our filthy rags.

3. They gave their weapons—When danger comes, the covenant-makers will protect each other even to the point of death. Jonathan gave David his sword and his bow. (See I Samuel 18:4.)

4. They exchanged belts—The belt (translated girdle in I Samuel 18:4) symbolizes the strength of a person. Covenant-makers pledge their strength to one another. In salvation, God’s strength is made available to us in exchange for our weakness.

A Covenant of Servants

Scripture illustrates the long-term relationship of loyalty in the provisions of a bond servant’s decision to continue serving his master for the rest of his life out of love for his master. (See Exodus 21:1–6 and Deuteronomy 15:16–17.)

1. The covenant of a bond servant was voluntary and based on love. If a servant chooses this covenant, then “the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free” (Exodus 21:5).

2. A bond servant covenant was confirmed in a legal transaction. “Then his master shall bring him unto the judges” (Exodus 21:6).

3. A bond servant covenant was made public through a symbol. “He shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever” (Exodus 21:6).

A Covenant of Family

Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi is one of history’s most inspiring stories. After Ruth’s husband died, Naomi told Ruth to return to her own people, because there was nothing more Naomi could do for Ruth. Ruth’s famous response was this, “Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will go with thee” (I Samuel 18:4).
lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16–17).

A Covenant of Marriage

Marriage is a blood covenant, not just a legal contract. All the rich symbolisms of a Biblical blood covenant are contained in marriage. Beginning with the groom as the covenant initiator (and therefore the one with the greater responsibility to maintain the marriage), the seriousness of marriage vows is emphasized in the following warning. “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay” (Ecclesiastes 5:4–5).

A Covenant of Believers

When Jesus established communion among His disciples, He actually presented it as a blood covenant. This is clear from the very words He used to describe it: “Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:26–28).

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (I Corinthians 10:16). The word communion is the Greek word koinonia, which is a deep and bonding fellowship with one another. This is consistent with the many commands of Scripture to love one another, because we are all members of the same body.

When we show disloyalty toward other believers, we violate the blood covenant that is made at the communion table and we receive the condemnation that accompanies such a violation. “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [die prematurely]” (I Corinthians 11:29–30).

Covenants vs. Contracts

- A covenant is based on trust; a contract is based on distrust.
- A covenant is built on unlimited liability; a contract is based on limited liability.
- A covenant is a sealed agreement; a contract is open to more debate.
- A covenant cannot be broken; a contract can be set aside.

Loyalty is demonstrating our commitment to God by staying with those whom He has called us to serve.

“Loyalty is the one thing a leader cannot do without.”
—A. P. Gouthey

How loyal are you?

- Do you doubt God’s sovereignty during adversity, or do you draw nearer to Him?
- Do you speak well of your authorities even during difficult times, or do you murmur?
- Do you protect your family even when circumstances make it difficult?
- Do you treat other believers as you would want to be treated?
- Do you commit to the success of those whom God has called you to serve?
- Are you willing to lay down your life for your family and friends?
- Are you committed to keeping your marriage vows, no matter what the cost?