

# Bound together in the Spirit

by Barry St. Clair

**G**od works through covenants! From Genesis to Jeremiah to Jesus, God used covenants of commitment to "bind together" His children to help them follow Him. The Hebrew word for covenant is related to the words "fetter" (something that binds) and "between." A covenant, then, is an agreement between two parties, before God, that ties them together.

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Still, today, God desires to "bind together" those of us in youth ministry so that we will follow Him more closely. A covenant is a reflection of our commitment to a relationship with God and with each other. It also allows us to demonstrate our common desire to reach teenagers with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the early days of the Network, before networking was in vogue and before the Network was formally organized, a group of about twenty-five youth leaders from around the country gathered for several days each January "to play and pray." We met to discuss how we could reach every

student with the message of Christ. We laughed, talked, ate and skied—thinking and brainstorming about that desire. The themes of our discussions began to emerge as mutual commitments. We talked of creating a "covenant" that would be a written expression of our commitment to our common vision. After praying, discussing, writing and rewriting over a two-year period, we unanimously agreed upon a Network Covenant we felt God desired for us to establish with Him.

## The cost and value of a covenant

In a biblical covenant God gave certain commands and promises. His people agreed to keep the commands and reap the benefits of the promises. They would "bind" themselves to the covenant. The Network Covenant was written in response to God's commands and promises and is worth every youth leader's consideration as a binding agreement between us. The covenant will cost us. It demands that we "set the bar high" in our personal lives, in our home lives and in our ministries. The apostle Paul summarized the cost when he wrote, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1).

Fleshed out in our daily lives, that means that we run from all of the things that entangle us like lust, pornography, improper relationships, crude language,

jokes that are off-color, movies that are vile and violent, television that breeds sarcasm and wastes our time. You get the idea. Furthermore, in our families it challenges us to balance our schedules so that our spouses don't build up anger and bitterness toward us. It means that we nurture and encourage our families, giving them focused attention and helping them to know that someone else's eighth grader is not more important than they are. And, in ministry, it means that we stop dinking around trying to pacify parents, pastors and kids with programs that are really no more than a glorified baby-sitting service. It's time to stand with courage and call the people we are responsible for to a ministry modeled after Jesus' ministry. Our culture and the biblical mandate call us to equip and mobilize our disciples toward the kind of prayer, obedience, spiritual leadership, discipleship and evangelism that takes Jesus to the streets.

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# PRAYER IS

*"...first and always  
a relational  
privilege of grace."*

—Gary Bergel  
President  
Intercessors for America

"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God's mercy upon them, and give thanks. Pray this way for kings and all others who are in authority, so that we can live in peace and quietness, in godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, for He wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth."

— 1 Timothy 2:1-4  
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## INTERCESSORS FOR AMERICA



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None of the standards mentioned can be done by human effort. Keeping a covenant, especially a covenant with God, is impossible without His power at work in us to make it happen. The only way to experience the value of a covenant is to live by it. The only way to live by it is to humbly admit that "we don't have what it takes," and then boldly assert that through the Holy Spirit we "can do all things through Christ who strengthens us" (Phil. 4:13). I encourage you to take a moment, even now, to offer the issues you struggle with to God. Ask Him to release in you the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish His plans for you where you are. God will enable you to keep the covenant—and that's where the value lies—and He will fulfill His promises to you as a result.

Some of us have been bound together by this covenant for almost twenty years. As we have lived by it through God's power, we have experienced two huge benefits:

*First*, a shared and deepening passion for God. When we meet to pray, we experience intimacy and vulnerability with each other before the Lord. *Second*, we have become best friends. Someone said that friendship consists of sharing common experiences around a common goal. Binding myself to this covenant not only helps me pursue the goals of the covenant, but also gives me fellowship with others who are pursuing the same goals.

One person whose life God has bound together with mine is Paul Fleischmann. We never set out to develop a friendship, but it grew anyway. Common experiences around the common cause of reaching teenagers for Christ brought us together again and again. On our knees together, honestly confessing our sins. In a room for hours together, planning strategy. Picnicking on the beach together with our

families. Talking about painful personal issues together. Flying somewhere central just to spend time together. Holding each other accountable. Looking out for each other. Paul spent hours locating blood when my dad needed a transfusion. He flew to Atlanta to be with me after my wife died. Recently, he made a special effort to be at my wedding. We have a covenant relationship that will bond us as brothers for the rest of our lives.

## A covenant's radical power to influence and unite

When God made covenants with leaders like Abraham, David, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, He was really making a covenant with His entire people, whom they represented. Even though the people did not sign the covenant themselves, they were radically

affected by it. In the same way, when we sign the Network Covenant, all of those under our influence are affected by our action. In reality, they live under that covenant too. What will happen to our volunteers, parents and students when we prayerfully "bind" ourselves to this covenant agreement? Could it be that a new

zeal for personal holiness, an exemplary home life, and a life of discipleship and evangelism on your part would increase the zeal in the lives of others involved in your ministry?

Furthermore, a biblical covenant always caused people to unite. It was a serious oath, with God as their witness, and they were bound to it in unity. Today, I believe God is calling youth leaders across America to **UNITE** around the Network Covenant. The very terms of this covenant bring unity.

What will happen to our volunteers, parents and students when we prayerfully "bind" ourselves to this covenant agreement?







# Making a strategic investment (continued from page 13)

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." —Matthew 28:18-20

## Do you see the vision Jesus cast in Matthew 28:18-20?

**THE VISION** = Each of My followers is to make a strategic life investment by getting on the team of another person and helping them fully live out the life I've given them.

Here's the God-given vision that has recaptured my heart recently . . . go identify a few people that God has placed in your life, and live close enough to them to influence them on deep levels. While you do this, be humble enough to allow others to be on *your* team so you grow and develop too.

There is an old business axiom that states: *Begin all your activity with the end in mind or live with the end in sight.* That's good counsel for everyone, not just those building a company. In the Matthew 28 passage Jesus reminds us what one of those ends is: invest your life strategically in others.

Getting on the team of another person is not making their decisions for them or taking responsibility for their life and well-being. It is assisting God in helping a person fully live out the life He intends for them. Whether it's as a friend, mentor, boss, parent, coach, teacher, pastor, discipler, counselor or small group leader—take this seriously and make the investment.

## It's a sacred vision and task

Jesus didn't just tell His followers to do this, He modeled it. He saw the task of investing in others as a sacred assignment given to Him from the Heavenly Father. Intentionally investing in others is a sacred vision, not just a good idea. When the time came for Jesus to get on the team of a few other men, He thought carefully and selected with divine clarity.

*And it was at this time that Jesus went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples.*  
—Luke 6:12-13

I'm captured by the fact that the Lord prayed all night about something. When I first read that I couldn't believe it. I've prayed for long periods of time with

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# Bound together

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All of this because people like you all over this nation entered into a covenant! Please take a few moments to read over the Network Covenant. Relying upon the Holy Spirit, ask yourself if you are willing to "bind together" with God and your co-laborers in this meaningful commitment. If God is in it, it will be a source of great blessing for you and the world around you. (See the Network Covenant on page 5 or on the mailer in the center of this magazine). **NM**



Barry St. Clair has been involved in youth ministry for thirty years, and founded Reach Out Ministries in 1977. Currently, Barry serves as chairman of the Ministry Council of the National Network of Youth Ministries and on the executive committee of Challenge 2000. He is shown here with his bride of four months, Lawanna.

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