

# Covenants

## Can Transform Our Relationships

By Emily Abel

As a child, I was proud to be able to define a big word like *covenant*. Whenever the topic came up at church, I would proudly burst out, “A covenant is a promise between me and God!”

Growing up, I made covenants through baptism and in the temple, and my definition remained mostly unchanged. I saw covenants as a set of rules for me to follow, and then God would hold up His side of the bargain by bestowing promised blessings.

To me, covenants seemed to be something to check off a list of life to-dos. I could see how other gospel practices, like prayer and fasting, were about developing a *relationship* with Heavenly Father, but covenants seemed to be about Heavenly Father’s *rules*.

Well, it turns out that my childhood definition was a good start, but it needed a few more lines if covenants were going to transform my life the way God intended them to.

### Filling in the Missing Pieces

These words from Elder Gerrit W. Gong of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were a helpful starting place for my evolving definition of *covenant*:

“By divine covenant, we belong to God and to each other. Covenant belonging is a miracle. . . .

Covenants can give us power to love ourselves, serve others, and return to our Heavenly Father and Savior.

“. . . It is not to give up on ourselves, on each other, or on God.”<sup>1</sup>

Since finding that quote, I’ve realized that covenants have a daily impact on our lives. When we truly live by the covenants we’ve made, we don’t give up on ourselves, on the people around us, or on God. Our covenants help us understand the true nature of our relationships and give us the power we need to develop them.

Covenants are about more than following rules; they are about strengthening relationships!<sup>2</sup>

Let’s look at three key relationships in our lives and how our covenants can transform them: our relationship with ourselves, with others, and with our Heavenly Father and Savior.

## Recognizing Our Eternal Identity

Everyone craves a sense of identity. When I was in high school, I founded much of my identity on my love for dance. As I was consistently taking dance classes and giving performances, “dancer” was a core part of who I was.

But then I graduated from high school, and life took me on a path away from dance. Without dance, I lacked a daily drive, and I ached to feel like I was part of a group again. I struggled with despondent feelings for weeks as I tried to rediscover who I was and where I belonged. This difficult experience taught me that while some identities are fleeting, others can enrich our lives forever.

Elder Gong taught:

“With infinite love, [God] beckons us to come believe and belong by covenant.”



“. . . The age-old paradox is still true. In losing our worldly self through covenant belonging, we find and become our best eternal self—free, alive, real.”<sup>3</sup>

Being a member of a dance group was a meaningful, instructive experience, but focusing too much on my label as a dancer distracted me from my eternal identity.

What helped me refocus on my eternal identity was reminding myself of my baptismal covenants. By deciding to shape my identity first and foremost around being a disciple of Jesus Christ, I found the belonging I craved.

I also realized that making and keeping sacred covenants with God helps us keep our focus on Christ, which will help us excel in all areas of life. I believe Christ cares about my love for dance and has helped me find success in doing it; I just had to learn to not let dance be the basis of my identity.

This mortal journey will look different for everyone, but keeping covenants and staying on the covenant path can bring all of us the power we need to become our best selves.<sup>4</sup>

## Deepening Our Love for Others

Loving relationships are one of the most fulfilling parts of life, but they can also be hard to build and maintain. Through our covenants, we will better understand how to love the people around us. Elder Gong said, “In the revelation of our true, divine selves through our covenants with God, we learn to recognize and love our brothers and sisters as He does.”<sup>5</sup>

Covenants can transform our perspective of earthly relationships. For example, after a friend of mine was baptized in her forties, she said she had a different understanding of her role as a mother. Knowing that Heavenly Father would guide her through the gift of the Holy Ghost gave her reassurance that she could help her children overcome their individual challenges.

Being a covenant keeper can bless our earthly relationships in many ways, including the following:

- When we remember the eternal nature of covenants,

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we can find increased hope, strength, and patience in difficult relationships.

- As we become better at keeping promises, we can develop a deeper level of trust in one another.<sup>6</sup>
- “Mourn[ing] with those that mourn” (Mosiah 18:9) can help us develop feelings of closeness and love.
- When we recognize that we are all children of Heavenly Father, our hearts can be filled with love for even complete strangers (see Doctrine and Covenants 18:10–11).

Those are just a few examples. But I am grateful that as we keep our covenants, Heavenly Father can lend us power to develop the attributes and perspectives needed for successful relationships.

## Strengthening Our Relationship with God and Jesus Christ

While it is true that the same words are used when individuals make certain covenants (such as baptism and the temple endowment), there are two words that were spoken when I entered these covenants that made them unique: *Emily Abel*. Those two words turned universal covenants into my personal invitation for Christ to be present in my life. Because of those covenants, I am now, through priesthood power, bound to Christ “by loving ties,”<sup>7</sup> and He is now bound to me. The same is true for every person who makes covenants.

Dr. Ellie L. Young, associate professor of clinical psychology and special education at Brigham Young

University, said: “Being bound to Christ means that we know Him. We feel His comforting love. We feel His guiding hand in our lives.”<sup>8</sup>

Our covenants are, at least in part, about learning to love our Heavenly Father and Savior and to know Their voices (see Alma 5:60). And seeing our covenants as part of a personal, evolving relationship with Them is essential to returning to the covenant path when we stray. When we do make a wrong turn while trying to walk the covenant path, They call out and invite us to return. Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are always willing to forgive when we sincerely want to come closer to Them.

Now I know that honoring my covenants means having a strong *relationship* with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Even after we commit a major sin, our covenants are not forever nullified if we repent. Our Father in Heaven and Savior invite us to come and begin making repairs. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ’s Atonement shines.”<sup>9</sup>

In a world with so much competition, I am grateful for covenants that help me remember my infinite worth. In a world filled with complex relationships, I am grateful that covenants can guide my interactions with others. And in a world full of challenges, I am grateful for my Heavenly Father and Savior, who will help me navigate my way safely home. ■

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### NOTES

1. Gerrit W. Gong, “The Miracle of Covenant Belonging,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2019, 28–29.
2. See Gérald Caussé, “It Is All about People,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2018, 111.
3. Gerrit W. Gong, “Covenant Belonging,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 80.
4. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “You Matter to Him,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 22.
5. Gerrit W. Gong, “The Miracle of Covenant Belonging,” 28.
6. See Ronald A. Rasband, “Standing by Our Promises and Covenants,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 53–56.
7. “Our Savior’s Love,” *Hymns*, no. 113.
8. Ellie L. Young, “The Transformative Power of Covenants” (Brigham Young University devotional, June 11, 2019), 2, speeches.byu.edu.
9. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Laborers in the Vineyard,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2012, 33.