

A COVENANT PRAYER IN THE WESLEY TRADITION

“I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.”

At the beginning of the new year congregations of the Wesleyan/Methodist family renew their covenant with God using the traditional Covenant Service. You will find it in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. A piece of this important part of our tradition is the Covenant Prayer (above).

John Wesley adapted this prayer from the Puritan tradition that was so important to his parents, Samuel and Suzannah, and life in the Epworth rectory. It informed his theology and preaching. He expected the people called "Methodists" to pray this prayer at the beginning of each new year as a way of remembering and renewing their baptismal covenant.

The prayer describes the life of a participant with Christ in his mission. It is a practical description of what Jesus was talking about when he said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Baptism marks the beginning of life in Christ and his *ecclesia*, a people who "profess to pursue holiness of heart and life; universal love filling the heart and governing the life." The Covenant prayer helps us remember what this Jesus-way of life looks like and what loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind and loving our neighbor as ourself requires of us.

When we pray this prayer we remember that we are baptized. We renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin. We accept the freedom and power God gives to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. We confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, trust wholeheartedly in his grace, and promise to serve him as Lord, in union with the church. And we renew our promise to live as faithful members of Christ's church and serve as his representatives in the world.

The Covenant Prayer describes missional life devoted to following Jesus and serving as Christ's representative in the world he loves and is working to redeem. It tells us that being a Christian is more a way of life than a system of beliefs. The Covenant Prayer describes the Jesus way of self-giving and self-emptying love.

This way of living and loving is possible only in a community centered in the life and mission of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Wesley and the early Methodists annually prayed the Covenant Prayer presuming everyone was part of a class meeting or band that met weekly for accountability and support for living this prayer. And everyone had a discipleship coach in their class leader who encouraged and prayed for them.

Covenant Discipleship is a contemporary adaptation of the "method" of Methodism the Covenant Prayer presumes.