

'I am no longer my own but yours...'

A study on the Methodist Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours.
 Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
 put me to doing, put me to suffering;
 let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
 exalted for you, or brought low for you;
 let me be full, let me be empty,
 let me have all things, let me have nothing:
 I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
 to your pleasure and disposal.
 And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 you are mine and I am yours.
 And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

Methodist Worship Book, page 290.
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You can find another version of the prayer on page 288/289 of the *Methodist Worship Book*.

Background notes

Methodists hold an annual Covenant Service – a celebration of all that God has done and an affirmation that we give our lives and choices to God. It is an invitation for people to renew their covenant relationship with God. Most churches hold the service at the beginning of the New Year, but some hold them in September at the start of the Methodist Year.

The Covenant Service goes back to John Wesley's time. He wanted a form of worship which would help people open themselves to God more fully. In 1755 Wesley created such a service, using material from the writings of the seventeenth-century puritans divines, Joseph and Richard Alleine. Over succeeding generations the Methodist Church has made changes to the service so that it continues to be relevant to congregations using it.

The aim of the service is to help people hear God's offer and God's challenge; to provide space for God to prompt and for people to respond. Yet, more than this, for the Covenant Service is not just a one-to-one transaction between individuals and God, it is an act of the whole faith community.

Both the Covenant Prayer and Service are regarded as jewels of Methodism and one of the most distinctive contributions of Methodism to the liturgy of the Church in general. Other churches are now discovering it and making use of it in their worshipping life.

Explore

Read through the prayer slowly, a line at a time.

- What jumps out at you?
- What would you find easy to say?
- What would you find difficult to say?

Think how it might apply to your life – the whole of your life.

- What things might God be asking you to stop?
- What might God be asking you to continue?
- And what new things may God place in your life?

Make connections

What God offers through the Covenant is a loving relationship. It is not a business contract set up between God and humanity for the provision of certain goods and services. Rather, it is the means of grace by which we accept the relationship God offers and then seek to sustain it:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant ... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **Jeremiah 31.31, 33 (NRSV)**

These words are read out as part of the Covenant Service.

The focal point of the service is the Covenant Prayer (above). It embraces the whole of life, in all its parts. Most people find it quite tough to say this and really mean it. It is uncomfortable and challenging. It asks questions of our faith and demands that we examine our relationship with God.

The Covenant Prayer has been compared by some to a set of New Year resolutions, but ones that emphasise the importance of doing and being as much as believing. But more than that, the prayer represents a commitment to being a disciple and putting God first in our lives and in everything about our lives: what we do, what we say and who we are. It is both a surrender to, and a trust in, God.

The final few words are a gracious reminder: 'You are mine and I am yours'. We don't pray and live just in our own strength – but in God's.

Live in faith

Write down your thoughts in a letter to yourself. You may want to end the letter with a reminder of these words of Jeremiah: 'I will be their God,' says the Lord, 'and they shall be my people.'

Now put the letter in an envelope, seal it and address it to yourself (with a stamp).

Give it to a trusted friend and ask them to post it to you in six months time. It will be an encouragement and a reminder of your commitment, the prayer you pray and your journey of discipleship with God.