

# COVENANT

## “NO LONGER MY OWN”

- Week 1 -

A covenant is a contract, an agreement, between two people. If one party holds up their end of the bargain, the second party is trusted to do their part in return. Makes sense, right? We have covenants everywhere in our lives, both official and unofficial. We receive a loan from the bank, and we're expected to make payments to fulfill our end of the contract. That's a covenant. Relationships are built on covenants. We enter into them committing to do our part and expecting the other person to do theirs. A friend promises to loan us the entire 10 season DVD set of the tv show, "Friends," and we agree to return the set with every DVD in the right case. (Take this last one very seriously. Your entire relationship could depend on it.) Our life is built on covenants.

**Question 1: What is a "covenant" you are currently in, official or unofficial, and how is it affecting you? Does it provide a sense of security? Is it causing extra stress? What would it mean if you were "out" of that contract?**

One of the most important covenants, and one we often neglect, is our covenant with God. That's what this series is about. We'll spend the next 6 weeks exploring our side of the contract and the problems we encounter, and then what God promises on God's end. And hopefully, at the end, we'll arrive at a place of surrender, trusting God in all areas of our life, living into the fullness of our Holy Covenant.

In the coming weeks, we'll talk about specific areas of our relationship with God, but we should probably start with the issue that is at the crux of all problems we encounter when pursuing our covenant relationship with God, and that is the issue of *control*. We *really* like to have control of our own lives! We struggle desperately to gain control of every aspect of our lives that we possibly can. We sign contracts to guarantee a salary or tenure at our jobs. We go to the gym and join weight-loss programs, so we can try to control our health. We take Beyonce's advice and "put a ring on it," so we have security in our relationships. We like to feel as if we are in control.

**Question 2: Scale of 1 to 10, how big of a “control freak” are you? What are the areas in your life you try to control? Do you try to control some more than others? Why do you think that’s true? What does it feel like to be out of control?**

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**W**e seek to have control in our lives because the alternative can be terrifying. Feeling like we have control gives us a sense of comfort and security and eases the fear that comes with the uncertain. The *insecurity* born from being out of control makes us panic. It increases our anxiety, and so we fight to control every aspect of our lives.

The problem is that control is an illusion. Anyone who has ever had one of those areas suddenly ripped from his or her control knows this. Unexpectedly fired from a job, given a devastating health diagnosis, crushed by the end of a relationship... there are things in life that simply cannot be controlled.

**Question 3: Feel free to share an experience when something happened to you that was out of your control. How did you feel in that situation? What was the outcome?**

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**S**o what do we do? If life cannot be controlled, what’s the point? Is there any hope at all? Well, the book of Proverbs in the Bible has some insight. The author writes:

**<sup>5</sup> With all your heart you must trust the Lord  
and not your own judgment.**

**<sup>6</sup> Always let him lead you,  
and he will clear the road for you to follow.**

**-Proverbs 3:5-6 CEV**

If the author thought we were able to be trusted with controlling our own lives, he would have said, “Okay, y’all, you only need to trust God a little bit, and depend on yourself for the rest.” But he didn’t! He said to trust in the Lord with ALL your heart, and DON’T depend on your own judgment. So, the antidote to this endless, futile struggle for control in our lives is trusting God to hold up God’s end of the bargain. And what is God’s part? “He will clear the road for you to follow.” This doesn’t mean there won’t be ups and downs. This doesn’t mean you don’t still have to put one foot in front of the other and walk the road. It means trusting that God will take care of you on the journey.

Giving up control of our lives means trusting God with the outcome.

**Question 4: What is the hardest part about trusting God with the outcomes in our lives? What would help you trust Him more?**

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To help us through this series, we will be breaking down the lines of an historic prayer, written by the founder of the Methodist movement in the 1700s, John Wesley. This prayer came from a service he wrote that was intended for Christians, and churches as a whole, to renew their side of their Covenant with God. This prayer is an excerpt from that service and is commonly called, “The Wesley Covenant Prayer.” At the end of each lesson, we’ll pray this prayer. And you are encouraged to pray this prayer at the beginning or end of every day throughout the six weeks of this series. Memorize it. Let it become a reminder of your covenant relationship with God.

The first line of this prayer speaks exactly to this issue of control, and is what we will finish with today:

**I am no longer my own, but thine.**

This puts our need for control in a new perspective. We struggle so hard to control our own lives... but our lives aren’t ours to control in the first place. We are not ours, we are God’s. Our lives are God’s, and if we would just give over control to the One who is supposed to be in control in the first place, things would go so much more smoothly.

God expects us to still do the work, to walk the path. But giving up control means trusting God with the outcome. And when we trust that God will hold up His end of the Covenant, promising to take care of us, to clear the road we’re walking, a sense of peace washes over us.

So, to close, we’ll pray the Wesley Covenant Prayer, and then spend a few moments in silence, reflecting on that first line: “I am no longer my own, but thine.” Ask yourself, what are you trying so hard to control in your life? What would it mean to trust God with the outcome?

Let us pray:

**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 for thee,  
or laid aside for thee.  
Let me be exalted for thee,  
or brought low for thee.  
Let me have all things,  
let me have nothing.  
Let me be full,  
let me be empty.  
I freely and humbly yield all things  
to thy pleasure and thy disposal.  
And now, sweet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
I am thine and thou art mine.  
And may this covenant made on Earth,  
be ratified in heaven.  
So be it.**