

COVENANT

“FULL OR EMPTY”

- Week 6 -

Let's start by wrapping up Gratitude Week. Remember, the key to humility is gratitude. So, when we prayed, “let me be...brought low for thee,” thankfulness is the key to being humble. So...

Question 1: Did you do your daily *examen*? Did it help to make you more thankful, and, therefore, more humble? Either way, look back over the last 7 days. How have you seen God at work in your life this past week?

Today is the last day of our series. (Deep breath, it's okay to shed a little tear.) And as such, we're going to look at what might be the most difficult of all the lines in the prayer.

**Let me have all things,
let me have nothing.
Let me be full,
let me be empty.**

You're probably thinking, “Okay, hold up. This has gone too far! We've prayed for suffering. We've prayed to be laid aside. We've prayed to be brought low or ‘trodden underfoot.’ And now we're supposed to pray to have nothing and to be empty?! Nope, nope, nope. I'm out.”

And you'd be justified in feeling that way. As we've said from the beginning, this is not an easy prayer to pray. But it's a *necessary* prayer to pray. Remember, when we pray this prayer, we aren't *asking* God to make these things happen to us. That's not how God works. Rather, we're just saying that when they do, we're still going to trust God with the outcome. If we're going to give God control of our *entire* lives, we

must let God have the ups *and* downs, the good *and* the bad. It's why this prayer is so powerful. It contains both.

So, what does it mean to "have nothing" or to "be empty"? Well, emptiness is scary. The emptiness of space is the source of many great sci-fi thrillers. The emptiness of a bank account is the source of great worry in many lives. The emptiness of a box of Girl Scout cookies is the source of great sadness. Emptiness is scary.

Question 2: What area of your life do you fear being "empty"? Maybe it's something intangible like relationships or self-worth or energy. Maybe it's something practical like finances or job satisfaction or your refrigerator. (And lest we miss our last chance for a scale of 1 to 10...) 1 to 10, how scared of that emptiness are you?

Have you ever tried to carry way too many bags of groceries all at once? You know the situation. You got out of the car, loaded plastic bags up to your biceps, grunted like a weightlifter at the World's Strongest Man competition, and roared to the front door as if it were a Herculean trial in order to prove your worth, only to find you didn't have a free hand to turn the knob. One concussion later from a failed Cirque de Soleil balancing act while attempting to open the door with your foot, you find yourself sprawled on the floor in a milk-puddle surrounding by boxes of Ramen and rolling cans of Hamburger Helper, realizing, at this point, that 8 trips would have been faster.

Sometimes, you have to put something down in order to pick something else up.

Jesus knew this. In fact, in a poignant moment with his disciples where he's trying to get that very point across, he predicts his own death. He's telling them that they must go to Jerusalem where he will be betrayed and killed, but that he'll rise again on the third day. He's going to lay down his own life, so that the entirety of humanity might be saved. Sometimes, you have to put something down in order to pick something else up. He then challenges his followers similarly.

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. ²⁵ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

-Matthew 16:24-25

Jesus accepted the emptiness he was about to face. But he knew it was something that had to happen for his purpose to be fulfilled. It wasn't until he rose again and appeared to the disciples again that they really understood what he meant.

Question 3: Take 60 seconds in silence to answer that question for yourself. What is something that is standing in the way of your relationship with God that you are hanging on to? What is something God might be asking you to give up? After a time of silence, feel free to share if you're comfortable doing so.

Emptiness isn't always a bad thing. Sometimes we're carrying way too many spiritual grocery bags, and we don't have a free hand to receive the amazing things God wants to give us. Jesus asks us to lay down those things that are standing in the way of our relationship with him. Being hollowed out in that way is a scary prospect. It's vulnerable. It's uncertain. It's uncomfortable. But when we are emptied out and we set down the things we're holding so tightly, God then has room to hand us God's amazing gifts, like peace and hope and comfort.

This is the root of surrendering to God the complete control of our lives. When we become that open, that vulnerable, that honest, and give up our own way, as Jesus asks, when we lay down our lives, God can take them and fill them up to overflowing. But only if we first are emptied out. Now is your chance. If there is something that has been standing in the way of your relationship with God, lay it down. Pray, "God, let me be empty. I can't carry this anymore. Forgive me for letting it stand in the way of my relationship with you. Take it from me and fill me with your peace."

Maybe you're already feeling empty, but in a different way. You've been pouring yourself out and pouring yourself out, into work, into relationships, into parenting or school or life... and you feel exhausted, like you have nothing more to give. Maybe you feel hollow, like you're at the bottom of your emotional barrel, because of the loss of a loved one or a relationship or any sort of disappointment. Whatever it is, you can lay that burden down, too. Pray, "God, I feel empty. I can't carry this anymore. It's too heavy. Take this burden from me, and fill me with your peace."

Take time in silence for anyone to pray this prayer, and appoint someone to close in prayer after a few minutes. If anyone would like to share their experience, allow time for that. Be vulnerable. Be supportive.

Today's line of the Wesley Covenant Prayer is a heavy one to pray. But remember, emptiness isn't always a bad thing. If we're carrying too much that stands in the way of our relationship with God, laying them down gives us empty hands into which He can pour His peace. Or, if we're already feeling empty, God can take that brokenness and restore us to the fullness of life. So, when we pray, "let me be full, let me be empty," let it be reminder that we can lay all our burdens at God's feet and have our hearts filled to overflowing.

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.

Conclusion

The prayer ends with a reminder. We've gone through all the specifics and the tough stuff, but Wesley hammers the Covenantal nail home one last time.

**And now, sweet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
I am thine and thou art mine.**

It's the reason we can pray this prayer with confidence: No matter what we are put to or who with, whether doing or suffering, employed or laid aside, exalted or humbled, having everything or having nothing, whether we are full or empty... ultimately and completely, we are God's and God is ours. That is our hope and our strength. That is the foundation of our relationship with our Creator. That is our Covenant.

Feel free to finish with a series wrap up discussion:

What did you learn?
How has it changed you?
What will you do about it?

And as you go, remember, no matter what you are enduring, good or bad, full or empty, you are God's and God is yours.

So be it.