

EXPLORING COVENANT AND THE COVENANT PRAYER

A SESSION PLAN

What does covenant mean?

Ask the young people if anyone knows what the word 'covenant' means. Don't worry if they don't know, as it isn't a commonly used word in today's world.

Explain that a covenant is an agreement: a coming-together of two people or groups of people. It is often more than a formal agreement; it a relationship. Each party involved has responsibilities as part of the covenant.

Explain that covenant is an important concept in the Bible, and that God makes a number of covenants at different points in the biblical story.

Covenants in the Bible

Below are a number of stories from the Bible where God makes a covenant with the people. You may prefer to pick one or two of these stories to look at together as a group, or you could look at the stories in more depth over a number of weeks.

- **Covenant with Adam: Genesis 1: 26-30, 2: 16-27**
- **Covenant with Noah: Genesis 9: 1-11 (background in Genesis 6-8)**
- **Covenant with Abraham: Gen 12: 1-4, 15: 13-20, 17: 1-12**
- **Covenant with Moses/Israel: Exodus 19: 3-8, 20:1-17, 24: 3-8**
- **New Covenant: Jeremiah 31: 31-34, Matthew 26:26-28**

For each story...

1. Take some time to read/explain the story using the Bible references given (you may want to add more background to the stories).
2. Explore and discuss with the young people the two aspects of the covenant:
 - What was God's promise?
 - What was required of the people?
3. Allow some time for the young people to raise and discuss questions they may have about the story. Don't feel like you need to have all the answers! Be on this journey together with your young people, and encourage them to share their views and ideas in response to others' thoughts and questions.
4. Ask the young people how they might have responded to the covenant.

You may need to explain to the group about the overarching story of the Bible being that the people struggled to keep the covenants with God as they didn't remain faithful. Throughout the books in the Old Testament we see the people of Israel failing in their relationship with God, as their lives were not focused on or reliant on God. This is why God spoke about a 'New Covenant', which wasn't an outward set of requirements, but a relationship of the heart. Jesus' death is seen as establishing the new covenant, where people can be in a relationship with God, not through any actions that they have done, but because they have received forgiveness from God.

Introducing The Methodist Covenant Prayer

Explain to the group that Methodists hold an annual Covenant Service to celebrate all that God means to them. They affirm that they will give their whole lives and all their choices to serve God. This first began in 1755 – over

250 years ago. Most churches hold the service in the New Year, but some hold it in September, at the beginning of the Methodist year.

The traditional Covenant Prayer (shown below) makes it very clear that this commitment is a serious one. It is about giving your whole life to God. Most people find it quite tough to say the prayer and really mean it. But the prayer is so central to the Christian life that other Churches also use it as a way of showing commitment to God.

Many people like to think they belong to themselves. But this prayer is about doing what God wants, not what we want. It can feel very hard to give up our own choices, but this prayer is like a love poem to God. It is only said by choice!

Spend some time reading the prayer together with the group and discussing any sections that don't make sense. Ask the young people what their initial response is to the prayer – do they like it? Which bits do they think would be the hardest to say and really mean it?

You may be able to find someone at your church who would be willing to speak to the young people about what the prayer means for them when they say it each year.

The Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours.
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,
wherever you may place me,
in all that I do
and in all that I may endure;
when there is work for me
and when there is none;
when I am troubled
and when I am at peace.
Your will be done

when I am valued
and when I am disregarded;
when I find fulfilment
and when it is lacking;
when I have all things,
and when I have nothing.
I willingly offer all I have and am
to serve you,
as and where you choose.
Glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.
May it be so for ever.
Let this covenant now made on earth
be fulfilled in heaven.
Amen.

A movement pattern for the prayer

Ask the young people to make a chant of this prayer, and a movement pattern to go with it. Get them to work in small groups, and perform their chant and movement pattern to the others.

A poetry activity

Ask the young people to write a seven-sentence poem using the stems from the prayer. Tell them it is a poem about a turning point in life. For example: I am no longer... In all that I do... When there is... When I am... When I have... I willingly... May it be...

Or alternatively use these sentence starters: I am no longer... Line me up with... Let me be... Give me... I freely give... So now... Let it be...

An art activity

Ask the young people to illustrate the meaning of one line of the prayer. Or use the activity sheet below to design seven symbols, logos or pictures for the different sections of the prayer, which express the meaning of each section. The young people can sketch them in the blank column.

ACTIVITY SHEET

<p>I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things,</p>	
<p>wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I may endure; when there is work for me and when there is none; when I am troubled and when I am at peace.</p>	
<p>Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded;</p>	
<p>when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking; when I have all things, and when I have nothing.</p>	
<p>I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose.</p>	
<p>Glorious and blessèd God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever.</p>	
<p>Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.</p>	