

Uncommon Prayers (Part 3)

This week we will continue to look at some uncommon prayers. We will start off by examining the prayer of vows. Vows were made in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Some were made foolishly, and some are unbiblical. Because of the prevalence of vows in scripture it is important for us to understand the power they can have and to recognize them as a type of prayer. It is also crucial that we are aware of the consequences of breaking them and at the same time, the blessing that goes with fulfilling them. From there we will explore meditative prayer. Biblical meditation is very different to Eastern meditation. Whilst meditation in and of itself is not prayer per se, prayers that stem from a meditative heart tend to be extremely powerful. Believers who know how to effectively pray in this manner demonstrate a maturity in engaging heaven.

5. Prayer of vows

Barnes notes on the Bible: **A "vow" is a solemn promise made to God respecting anything.**

1 Sam 1:10-11 In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. 11 And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

Acts 8:18 Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken.

We see that New Testament believers would sometimes take a vow and do something symbolic as a sign of this. Bensons Commentary: *Salmasius has justly observed, it could not be a vow of Nazariteship, for then the hair must have been burned in the temple, under the caldron in which the peace-offerings were boiled, Numbers 6:18. It was the custom, it seems, on the accomplishment of vows, for persons to shave their heads, Acts 21:23-24.*

When a vow is taken it is important to do so from a place of faith, peace and joy as opposed to subconsciously taking a vow stemming from resentment. This is called a bitter root judgment. Examples of this are "I don't need a man in my life so I will never get married." This is the counterfeit of Godly vows that are based on thanksgiving, faith and consecration. Bitter root judgements tend to stem from wounds, pride and self-protection.

When people get married, they exchange vows before God. This is a type of prayer of vows. A lot of songs we sing are actually a declaration of vows to the Lord. We need to be conscious of what we are singing. A lot of our worship songs are prayers of consecration, and prayers of vows. Many vows are made in the context of establishing covenant with God. Other vows are purity vows or vows of some form of abstinence. Young people today make chastity vows and wear purity rings as a reminder of such vows they make. This is powerful because it is so easy to betray your future spouse before ever meeting them. These purity vows can be powerful as a commitment to walk according to a particular standard. The vow is a way of pre-deciding how you will live. For example, you can make a covenant with your eyes like Job did. *Job 31:1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.* Part of such covenant making involves a prayer of vows. Some vows are linked to specific callings or commissioning. Sometimes one is only released from a vow upon the death of the other party, such as in the case of marriage, whilst in other cases the vow is seasonal.

Barnes notes on the Bible: *The most remarkable vow among the Jews was that of the Nazarite, by which a man made a solemn promise to God to abstain from wine, and from all intoxicating liquors, to let the hair grow, not to enter any house polluted by having a dead body in it, or to attend any funeral. This vow generally*

lasted eight days, sometimes a month, sometimes during a definite period fixed by themselves, and sometimes during their whole lives. When the vow expired, the priest made an offering of a he-lamb for a burnt-offering, a she-lamb for an expiatory sacrifice, and a ram for a peace-offering. The priest then, or some other person, shaved the head of the Nazarite at the door of the tabernacle, and burnt the hair on the fire of the altar. Those who made the vow out of Palestine, and who could not come to the temple when the vow was expired, contented themselves with observing the abstinence required by the Law, and cutting off the hair where they were.

Jesus places a big qualifier on the concept of vows.

Mt 5:33-37 33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' 34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Tom Wright (2005) states, *Some Christians have taken Matthew 5:33-37 to teach that we must not, under any circumstances, utter an oath or vow. So they refuse to take an oath in a court of law, in a marriage ceremony, or in any other situation. Is that our Lord's point here – to create a new prohibition that didn't exist under the Law of Moses and thereby to overcome men's tendency to be untruthful? Part of me would love for it to be that simple, but I do not think it is.... Oaths were used to resolve disputes, to seal agreements or covenants, or simply to affirm the truthfulness of important declarations.... The oaths exchanged between Abraham and Abimelech at Beersheba in Genesis 21 served both to end a dispute and to establish a covenant. They were used to resolve a dispute over ownership of certain wells, and to seal a covenant to perpetuate the agreement about the wells (see Genesis 21:22-34).... I don't believe Jesus' point in Matthew 5 is that oaths are evil or that an oath can never be legitimate. I believe His point is that the swearing of oaths as practiced by the scribes and Pharisees was evil, in its entirety – because they deliberately swore their oaths by everything EXCEPT God in a foolish effort to sidestep their accountability TO God!*

These oaths were made in God's name reinforcing that God was the only God. In Matthew 5, Jesus is addressing a practice that had become prevalent in His times. This is where people were generally untruthful and would make oaths (evasive oaths) swearing by something lesser than God to try to validate their words. They did not realise that God is a witness of all things anyway. This warning is reinforced by James.

James 5:12 Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned.

Vows assist you when making covenants with God

Judges 11:29-40 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, 31 whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

32 Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands. 33 He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.

34 When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break." 36 "My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised, now that the Lord has avenged you of your enemies,

the Ammonites. 37 But grant me this one request,” she said. “Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry.”

38 “You may go,” he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. 39 After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite tradition 40 that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Many scholars believe that she was not sacrificed like other nations did, rather her devotion was such that she would never get married. This account demonstrates the seriousness with which people took vows.

A covenant is a solemn agreement between two parties. God is faithful to keep His covenants. I believe that covenants are very powerful in the context of starting businesses or ministries. There are times when God will lead His children into making powerful covenants with Him. I was blessed with the free printing of my first book in 2005 by someone who wanted to honour me for what my dad had done for him in his career. I made a commitment (vow) that I would also give away the proceeds from those first books as a type of first fruit offering. I don't think it is by accident that one of my areas of greatest productivity is in the area of books. Here is a good example of a vow that Jacob made. Jacob, going into Mesopotamia, vowed one-tenth of his estate, and promised to offer it at Bethel to the honor of God.

Gen 28:20-22 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear 21 so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the Lord[a] will be my God 22 and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.”

The prayer of vows must be taken very seriously

Deut 23:21 – 23 If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. 22 But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. 23 Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the Lord your God with your own mouth.

It is better to not make a vow than to make one and then break it.

The prayer of vows is verbalised

Numbers 30:2 When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.

The prayer of vows results in worship as you fulfil the vow

Tom Wright states, A vow is a specific kind of oath in which the person making the vow solemnly swears to pay something to God in return for God's favor or blessing in a certain matter. In the Law of Moses, there is a very strong connection between vows and votive offerings. A votive offering was a special form of the peace offerings (Leviticus 7:16). It is an offering made in fulfillment of a vow.

Ps 22:25 From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you[a] I will fulfill my vows.

Ps 66:13 I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you —

Ps 76:11 Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all the neighboring lands bring gifts to the One to be feared.

You can see from these portions of scripture how the Psalmist anticipated fulfilling his vows as an act of worship. There is something precious about fulfilling your vows. **It blesses God's heart as an act of worship. It is God's nature to fulfil His promises, so when we do so, there is an element of identification with His nature.**

The prayer of vows is powerful because God is honoured when we fulfil them.

If you have made vows in immaturity or foolishness there is also God's grace. But remember, the release from vows needs to be carried out in the spirit of repentance. Leviticus 27 deals with redeeming or taking back your vow. King Saul made a foolish vow to God which involved executing his son, Jonathan (1 Sam 14:24-46). The people would not allow Saul to carry out his promise and it seems clear that it was not God's will for Saul to carry out a foolish vow that he made rashly. This is especially true when carrying out a vow involves doing something outside of God's laws and God's purpose.

6. Meditative prayer

Meditation in and of itself is not prayer, but prayers that stem from a meditative heart are very powerful.

What is biblical meditation and how is it different to Eastern meditation? **Eastern meditation is practiced in order to empty the mind, and Biblical meditation involves uttering and muttering the Attributes and deeds of God with the goal of filling the believer's spirit and soul with the life-giving Word of God.**

God observes and notes that many meditate on wicked things then suddenly try to pray.

Ps 63:6 On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.

Locate yourself in scripture and meditate on it. Find life verses and get the most out of them.

Gen 24:63 He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching.

Meditation is something you do intentionally like Isaac did. You set aside time for it.

When you study these scriptures on biblical meditation you see the impact it has on the prayers we pray.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Josh 1:8 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Ps 1:1-2 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.

If you are not actively meditating on God's word you will be engaged in the counterfeit; sitting with mockers or walking in step with the wicked.

Ps 19:14 May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Your prayers will not be pleasing to the Lord if the meditation of your heart is not.

Ps 49:3 My mouth will speak words of wisdom; the meditation of my heart will give you understanding.

Ps 104:34 May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.

Ps 119: 15,78, 97-99, 148 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways... 78 May the arrogant be put to shame for wronging me without cause; but I will meditate on your precepts.... 97-99 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. 98 Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. 99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes..., 148 My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.

What type of prayers come from a meditative heart?

Many people pray soulish prayers because their hearts have not meditated on the Word of God.

Ps 143:5 I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.

Ps 77:10-12 10 Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand. 11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. 12 I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds."

What level of faith does this type of meditation produce? What type of prayers do you pray when you have just been reflecting on how wonderful God's works are?

Phil 4:8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

May God lead us as we pray the prayer of vows. May we experience His grace to help us in fulfilling such vows. May God help us to always pray from hearts that have been meditating continuously on His goodness and greatness.