

## THE POSTURE OF PRAYER

### INTRODUCTION

I don't know about you, but in order for me to go to sleep I have to be in a particular position in or I just will not be able to fall asleep. I mean I look at people who can fall asleep anywhere, and I'm like WHAT?!?!?!?! Every once in awhile I'm able to fall asleep if I'm completely exhausted in our recliner, but the people who can regularly fall asleep like that, I just don't get it. I mean I have to be curled in bed, under my blanket. So yes, this means I also have to have our room at just the right temperature, or a fan blowing on me in order to be able to curl up the blanket. But even for me that isn't enough. I have to have my teddy bear here to curl up under my arm, otherwise my weight on is on my arm, and it's not comfortable enough for me fall asleep because I can't fall asleep on my back or my stomach, just on my side. Oh, and did I mention I can't have someone touching me, or I can't fall asleep at all? I have to have just the right position or posture in order to fall asleep and get the rest that I need. Some of you may be the same way, but others of you might be like my friend Rob who can fall asleep in any position at any time. Like, head hits the pillow and BOOM you're asleep. Maybe it's not sleep, but some other activity, that you have to have just the right posture. Maybe it's your batting stance, or how you sit/stand at your desk. Maybe you have to sit at your stove anymore to get cooking done. Maybe a physical therapist or chiropractor was told you to correct your posture and start sitting up straight in order to help with your back pain. Our posture and the position we put ourselves in can make a big difference in the ultimate outcome.

### TENSION

What about when we look at other things in our life too? Last week Steve started a new series about Learning to Pray like Jesus. When we pray, do we put ourselves in the posture that we should? One of my biggest surprises this year was when we went to pray one night before dinner and little Maddie put her hands together and bowed her head. This is not something that we had been actively teaching her at home, but sure enough when we finished praying we asked Natalie about it, and she told us that Miss Pam was teaching them to do this on Wednesday nights. So what does our posture have to do with prayer. This morning I want to take a few minutes and look at the different postures we find Jesus in when He prays.

### TRUTH

#### **JESUS PRAYED ON HIS KNEES**

*He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:41-44)*

Kneeling was a sign of someone's willingness to surrender their life to God. When they would kneel in prayer they were going down to the dust from which all mankind came. It is a defenseless position, showing ultimate surrender. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying this prayer, He was asking God to take away the cup of giving up His life on the cross, but ultimately He was in complete surrender to God.

#### **JESUS PRAYED STANDING UP**

*About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in*

*glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. (Luke 9:28-32)*

This is considered to be the oldest posture for prayer. This position has traditionally been used to acknowledge that God is beyond us. That He is not of this world, and that He is greater than all of this world. It is a sign of one looking beyond this world to God because He is greater. This posture is still the most common posture of prayer in Eastern churches and in Jewish synagogues. It is used for thanksgiving, blessings, and general prayers.

### **JESUS PRAYED SITTING DOWN**

*When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."*

*They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"*

*Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."*

*Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"*

*Jesus answered, "You have said so."*

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks (said a prayer of blessing), he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." (Matthew 26:20-26)*

This is one of the most uncommon postures we find in the Bible, and actually throughout ancient culture. It wasn't until the Roman Catholic Church invented pews in the Middle Ages that this started to become more common place. The Protestant Movement, while rejecting most things "Catholic" kept this due to the nature of long sermons, and so it became the normal posture in many western churches. However, we do find David praying this way 2 Samuel 7. He comes before God praising His name and seeking the guidance after Nathan reveals to him that God is going to establish a kingdom through his offspring. Often we take a position of sitting down it is a sign that we are ready to hear and to learn.

### **JESUS PRAYED WITH FACE TO THE GROUND**

Going back and looking at Matthew's account of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, he says this:

*Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39)*

Lying face down was a sign of ultimate dependence and surrender. Christ was surrendering everything to the will of the Father.

### **JESUS PRAYED LOOKING UP**

*And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. (Matthew 14:19).*

Looking up was a sign of confidence in God. Looking up, was a way of saying, God I have complete trust in You, that You are true to Your word. We see this confidence Jesus has right as He is about to turn five loaves of bread and two small fish into a meal that would feed 5,000 men plus women and children, and still have 12 baskets of leftovers. Talk about confidence in God.....

### **JESUS PRAYED WITH HANDS LIFTED**

*When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. (Luke 24:50-51)*

Jesus was using this posture to send others. This was right as Jesus was going to leave earth, and He blesses his disciples, and sends them out into the world to continue His mission.

Now what is interesting in these is that we never find Jesus bowing his head and closing his eyes. I think one of the great things to realize about this and seeing the various postures Jesus takes is that there is no one right way to physically be while praying. I mean I remember while growing up tattling on someone because their eyes were open while someone was praying, to which my parents quickly responded, "How did you know their eyes were open unless yours were too?" Oooooops (give a facepalm). I mean, we do things like bowing our heads, putting our hands together, and closing our eyes to be able to focus and avoid distractions. Our physical posture can be very important when we pray. Sometimes when we pray we do other things like pray with our hands outstretched to signify surrender. Sometimes we pray on our knees to show reverence. Sometimes we curl up in a ball on our bed and sob because we feel like we are in such despair at the time, that is the only way we feel like we can pray at the time. But I don't believe our physical posture the most important part when we are praying. What about the posture of our heart? Next week Steve is going to be drawing ideas of what we can learn from the model prayer, or the Lord's prayer, but I want us to take a brief look at what Jesus has to say right before giving the people this prayer:

*"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:5-8 NIV)*

You see some of the people at the time were praying with an improper posture. They were out standing where everyone could see them pray. They were out on the street corner so that they would be seen. While Jesus is talking about where these people physically were, I don't believe it is their physical posture that was the problem, but it was a problem of the heart. Their intentions in their prayers seemed to have absolutely nothing to do with their relationship and communication with God. Their prayers were about drawing attention to themselves. They wanted people to see how close they were to God, by broadcasting their conversations with Him

for all to hear. The posture of their heart said - hey look at me, I'm closer to God than you are, otherwise you would be out here with me too. He says them same thing about the length of their prayers. It is not really the length of their prayers that mattered, but it was that their heart was in the wrong place, they were wanting to be seen, and recognized for their prayers. They wanted to be seen as more righteous. Clearly praying before even thousands of people wasn't a wrong posture - Jesus did it before feeding the 5,000. Clearly praying a long-winded prayer isn't wrong, Jesus spent all night before He set apart the 12 apostles. It has to do with the posture of your heart.

## **APPLICATION**

So how do we position our heart to be in the proper posture? I think we can gather some clues from what Jesus teacher in Matthew 6.

1) Pray Alone

2) Pray with Thanksgiving

- But be careful of the thanks we give. It can tell the nature of our heart as well. Jesus told this parable in Luke 18.

*To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'*

*"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

*"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

The Pharisees prayer of thanksgiving was once again making it all about Him.

3) Focus Your Prayers on God and Others