



Pray as David Did

Posture for Prayer

A couple of weeks ago, Angie and I were visiting my aunt in northern Ohio. Being that we arrived at about dinner time, we asked if we could take her to dinner and she suggested a nice eatery a couple of miles from her home. Sitting in a booth, we ordered our meals after which I suggested we ask a prayer before eating, and my aunt agreed. Then something awkward happened. Angie took my left hand and I reached across the table with my right hand in anticipation of holding my aunt's hand while we prayed. But instead of taking my hand, my aunt - who happens to be a devout Catholic - began to make the "Sign of the Cross" with her right hand then closed her eyes and bowed her head.

Most of us have probably experienced something similar to this in our lifetimes, especially if we find ourselves praying in "faith-mixed" company or visiting an un-familiar church. One person may pray with his eyes closed looking to the ground while another may pray with his eyes open facing the sky. Some stand quite still while others move around, and some like to hold hands while others keep their hands to themselves. We all have our own way of praying, oftentimes as a result of our upbringing.

Is there a correct posture for prayer? Is one person's way of praying better than another? Does it matter if we are standing, sitting, or kneeling during prayer? Is God moved by our physical stance during prayer more so than the content of our prayer? These are important questions, especially in light of the fact that as men and women, we often take note of a person's posture under certain circumstances. For instance, when our national anthem is played or sung, we notice if the person next to us is standing. A judge in a courtroom notices if the audience fails to stand when he enters the room. On the other hand, it's appropriate to sit in a classroom during a lecture unless you are called upon, and to stand otherwise would be out of place. If our posture is important in these situations, is it important to God when we come to Him in prayer?

In this study, I want to discuss what the Bible has to say in regards to how we physically pray our prayers. We'll discuss various postures for prayer along with a couple of variations that might be used with them. As it was in part one of this series, our goal is to learn ways to enhance our prayers and make them more effective.

Let's start by noticing various prayer postures.

Standing -

As was mentioned in Part 1 of this series, the Hebrew word for "pray" is derived from the root word "palal" (פָּלַל - St. 6419) which means to intervene or interpose. In other words, a prayer is oftentimes a petition to God. But there are times in scripture where a person is petitioning God but the word "palal" is not used. One example is where Abraham is petitioning God to not destroy the city of Sodom. In this example, we have a hint as to Abraham's posture while making his petition -

^{NKJ} **Genesis 18:16** Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way.

Abraham's three visitors, one of which was YHVH, had come to deliver a message, and now they were on their way to their next mission. Abraham went with them for part of the trip and on the way YHVH told Abraham the nature of their mission. When it became apparent that Sodom was likely to be destroyed, Abraham began to petition YHVH. Picking up the story in verse 22, we see that Abraham was more than likely standing before God while making his petition.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 18:22-23** Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

We often think of two people standing together or walking together as equals, and though Abraham may have been standing before God or even standing with Him (God standing, not sitting), Abraham made it very clear that he did not consider himself equal with God.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 18:27** Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord:

As a result of Abraham's petition, God had agreed to spare Sodom if there were but 10 righteous people found in the city.

Another example of a person who received an answer to a prayer made while standing is that of Eliazar - Abraham's servant. Eliazaar had been sent by Abraham to find a bride for Isaac. Eliazar had just arrived at a well in the vicinity of where Abraham's family lived and he made this petition -

^{NKJ} **Genesis 24:12-14** ¹² Then he said, "O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. ¹³ "Behold, *here* I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ "Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink' -- *let her be the one* You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master."

Eliezer was standing by the well watching a number of women approaching at the same time he was praying, and within minutes he had received the answer to his prayer.

Still another example is that of Hannah who asked that God would give her a son. She stood facing the Tabernacle and asked what is described as a long¹ prayer while Eli - the high priest - watched. It's interesting to note that while prayer, she made no sound, but did move her lips, which for some reason made Eli think she was drunk.

God answered her prayer, and after the child was weaned, she delivered him to Eli saying -

^{NKJ} **1 Samuel 1:26** And she said, "O my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I *am* the woman who stood by you here, praying to the LORD.

In all three of the previous examples, the petitioner was standing and God's answer came rather quickly. It is quite possible that these examples were the motivation for the first century custom of standing to pray.

^{NKJ} **Matthew 6:5** " And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Though this passage is often used as an example of misguided prayer, it was not their posture that was a problem, it was their hypocrisy. This is evident by the fact that Yeshua stood to pray on the mountain of transfiguration -

^{NKJ} **Luke 9:28-32** ²⁸ Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray . . . ³⁰ And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which

¹ The Hebrew word is rabbah that means "great"

He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him.

So it's quite evident that Yeshua at times stood up during His prayers, and when you combine these examples with others we find in the Tnakh, it's quite clear that standing to pray is an effective stance that brought results.

Sitting -

What about sitting to pray. In our culture, we seldom sit while praying except before meals. This seems to be Yeshua's custom as well. For example, when Yeshua fed the great multitude with seven loaves and a few fish, He first instructed them to sit down.

^{NKJ} **Matthew 15:32-36** ³² Now Jesus called His disciples to *Himself* and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat . . ." ³⁵ So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. ³⁶ And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude.

Though we are not clear whether or not Yeshua sat with them, it is clear that it was appropriate for the audience to sit while a prayer of thanks is being offered up. Yet we do have a clear example of Yeshua Himself sitting while praying. It is at His last supper while sharing His last words with his disciples.

^{NKJ} **Luke 22:14-19** ¹⁴ When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. ¹⁵ Then He said to them, "With *ferve*nt desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ "for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; ¹⁸ "for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

Never-the-less, there are examples in the Tnakh of others who sat while praying for other reasons. For example, David appears to be sitting in the sukkah that housed the Ark of the Covenant² as He petitioned God to establish his descendants as Israel's kings forever.

^{NKJ} **2 Samuel 7:18-27** ¹⁸ Then King David went in and sat before the LORD; and he said: "Who *am* I, O Lord GOD? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? ¹⁹ "And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord GOD; and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come. *Is* this the manner of man, O Lord GOD? ²⁰ "Now what more can David say to You? For You, Lord GOD, know Your servant . . . ²⁷ "For You, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed *this* to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.' Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You.

Therefore, we can conclude that sitting during prayer is acceptable to God as well.

Kneeling -

Though both a standing and a sitting posture are acceptable in prayer, and maybe even preferable to the petitioner in a public setting, our culture tends to prefer kneeling while praying in private. This is the case with Yeshua when He faced His greatest trial.³

^{NKJ} **Luke 22:39-42** ³⁹ Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. ⁴⁰ When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you

² David was in his own house when Nathan spoke to him, so it appears that David left his house to go pray.

³ Matt. 26:38 indicates that Yeshua prostrated himself instead of kneeling

may not enter into temptation." ⁴¹ And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

This was not the last prayer Yeshua uttered that night. We'll discuss it as we move forward, but let's now take a look at another prayer that was offered at a time of great trial - Daniel's prayer after King Darius signed a decree forbidding anyone to offer prayers to anyone but to Darius himself.

^{NKJ} **Daniel 6:10** ¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

As you will recall, this prompted the king to throw Daniel into a den of lions, but God delivered him from their jaws.

Though Yeshua and Daniel knelt to pray at a time of great trial, Solomon did so at a time of great joy. It was during the Feast of Tabernacles that Solomon dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, and his prayer of dedication has great meaning, especially for those of us who find ourselves scattered throughout the nations. In offering that prayer, Solomon knelt in front of the people and faced the Temple -

^{NKJ} **2 Chronicles 6:12-14** ¹² Then *Solomon* stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands ¹³ (for Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and he stood on it, knelt down on his knees before all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven); ¹⁴ and he said: "LORD God of Israel, *there is* no God in heaven or on earth like You, who keep *Your* covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts . . . "

Though I've included only a small portion of the prayer, a reading of the entire prayer reveals that Solomon knew that Israel would ultimately turn away from God and be scattered throughout the world. Never-the-less, the effect of the prayer was such that God sent fire from heaven to consume his sacrifices and God took up residence in the Temple.

There are a number of other examples in the New Testament that show God's servants on their knees in time of need; Steven while being stoned (Acts 7:60), Peter when he raised Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:40); and Paul (along with the Ephesians) as he prepares to set sail for Jerusalem knowing that he faced severe trials upon arrival (Acts 20:36).

Prostrate -

The final prayer posture that we'll discuss is that of prostrating yourself - falling with you face to the ground, either on your knees or lying flat. This posture seems to be the one that is most effective in moving God to have compassion on us. In one of Yeshua's parables, He makes this illustration in regards to forgiveness.

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:23-27** ²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ "And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ "But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. ²⁶ "The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ²⁷ "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

God is full of compassion for those who believe Him and turn to Him for all their needs. This is one definition of righteousness, and according to Alfred Edershim - a 19th century Biblical scholar - in first

century Jerusalem, prostrating oneself was only appropriate for a righteous man. In his book "The Temple - Its Ministry and Services"⁴, Edershim writes -

"In regard to the special manner of bowing before the Lord, a distinction was made between bending the knees, bending the head, and falling prostrate on the ground. The latter was not deemed 'fit for every man, but only for such as knew themselves righteous men, like Joshua."

Throughout the Tnakh we see a number of examples of various persons prostrating themselves, though in most cases, it was not done in prayer. One example of a person prostrating himself while talking with God is that of Abraham.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 17:1** When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. ² "And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." ³ Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him . . .

This event took place a number of years after God declared Abraham to be a righteous man⁵.

Though I mentioned earlier Yeshua's last recorded prayer before He was taken captive is one that was offered on His knees, but Matthew indicates that His face was to the ground as well.

^{NKJ} **Matthew 26:39** ³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Based on the two accounts of the same event, it's clear that Yeshua, like Abraham, was in a prostrate position, and other than His example, we see no other example in the New Testament of a person prostrating himself in prayer.⁶

We have seen 4 different postures for prayer, and we see that all of them were important - though for various reasons. This reminds me of a story I once read about prayer.⁷

Three preachers were in the church talking about effective prayer. One minister shared that he felt that the key was in the hands. He always held his hands together and pointed them upward as a symbolic form of worship.

Another minister suggested that real prayer was conducted on one's knees. That was the only way to really pray.

The third said that they were both wrong. The only position in which to pray was to lie on the floor, flat on your face.

As they were talking, a telephone repairman who had been working in the background and listening to their discussion, could not take it any longer. He blurted out, "For me, the most powerful prayer I ever prayed was while I was dangling upside down by my heels from a power pole, 40 feet above the ground!"

This story pretty much sums it up. In regards to prayer, posture is not as important as content.

Variations of Each Posture

⁴ The Temple - Its Ministry and Services, Alfred Edersheim, HDM Digital Copy, 7/30/99, page 57

⁵ Gen. 15:6

⁶ There are a number of examples of person's prostrating themselves for other reasons, but not for prayer.

⁷ Adapted from <http://www.christianpost.com/news/what-is-the-best-posture-for-prayer-143457/#7gsEzkcAjjjW79qE.99>

Yet within each posture, there are variations. For instance there are times when a person looks down to pray. Looking down appears to be the stance one takes when he feels ashamed of himself. Yeshua indicated such in this parable.

^{KJV} **Luke 18:9-14** ⁹ Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men -- extortionist, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' ¹³ "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' ¹⁴ "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

One example of this was when Moses prayed for the Israelites after the sin of the Golden Calf.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 34:8-9** ⁸ So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. ⁹ Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we *are* a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance."

Another example is of Ezra who after hearing that some of the Jewish men as well as some of the priests had married Canaanite wives -

^{NKJ} **Ezra 9:6** And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than *our* heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.

It appears that it was the same for Lot, who had seen the culture of Sodom degenerate toward open homosexuality -

^{NKJ} **Genesis 19:1** Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw *them*, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground.

As opposed to looking down in shame, it appears that looking up seems to imply a sense of confidence and triumph. In his psalm of praise to the god who defeats his enemies, David said that he would look up when he prays to God in the morning.

^{NKJ} **Psalms 5:1** Give ear to my words, O LORD, Consider my meditation. ² Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, For to You I will pray. ³ My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; In the morning I will direct *it* to You, And I will look up.

Yeshua looked up as well. Knowing that He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel⁸, when He saw literally thousands of people follow him along the shore line as He sailed from one place to another, He was confident that the prophecies about Him were being fulfilled⁹. Thus He was moved with compassion for the people, and when they became hungry, He fed them physical food just as He had been feeding them spiritual food. Mark's version of this story adds a little detail that was not included in Matthew's version that we referenced earlier.

^{NKJ} **Mark 6:39-42** ³⁹ Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. ⁴¹ And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave

⁸ Matt. 15:24

⁹ Jer. 50:4-7

them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among *them* all. ⁴² So they all ate and were filled.

Yeshua's prayers of confidence continued thru His ministry. When His friend Lazarus died, Yeshua had no doubt that God had given him power to raise Lazarus from the dead, thus He raised His eyes toward heaven and prayed.

^{ESV} **John 11:41-43** ⁴¹ Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² "And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me." ⁴³ Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

Then at the close of His life on earth, though anxious about what was ahead, He was confident that He had completed the job He was sent to do, and thus lifted up His eyes to pray..

^{NKJ} **John 17:1** Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ² "as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³ "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴ "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Conclusion

We've discussed four different postures for prayer along with variations that might apply to all of them. From what we've seen, Yeshua and other people of faith used all four depending on the circumstances

So is there only one correct posture for pray? It appears there is not. Instead, we should adapt the posture that best fits the circumstances and the purpose of the prayer. I believe that before we begin our prayer, we should consider the fact that we are praying to the King, the creator of the universe, the one who holds the key to life and death.

Shalom Alecheim