



Is Kneeling the Only Appropriate Posture in PRAYER in Public Worship?



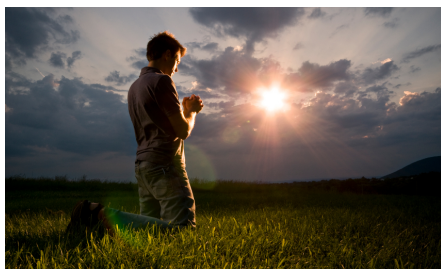
A brief survey of Bible passages on prayer and a closer look at Ellen White's most quoted statement on prayer and her posture in public worship

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Different Postures in Prayer in Scripture

According to Scripture, prayers are presented to God by His people in different circumstances and physical postures. For the sake of brevity, the texts below are never exhaustive but all-encompassing in the sense that these passages present varied but appropriate and acceptable postures in prayer.



Kneeling. Daniel prayed on his knees three times a day (Daniel 6:10), Stephen fell on his knees and prayed before he died as a martyr (Acts 7:60), and Peter knelt before the corpse of Tabitha to pray for

her before she came back to life (Acts 9:40; see also Acts 20:36; Ephesians 3:14) and others.

In addition, Kneeling with eyes open, looking up, hands uplifted with the palms up or looking down with eyes averted or closed and hands folded were common practices. Today, we prefer closing our eyes entirely as we focus our thoughts outside of ourselves and from our surroundings.



Standing. The other appropriate posture of prayer in the Bible is the posture of standing. Standing before the Lord in prayer was a common practice. One of the most impressive cases is found in 2 Chronicles 20. Jehoshaphat invited the people to pray. He stood up in the assembly in the house of the Lord: ***“Then Jehoshaphat stood in the as-***

sembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court” (2 Chron 20:5) and proceeded to pray. It wasn’t just him. ***“Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the Lord”*** (2 Chron. 20:13). The result was a major deliverance and victory.

In the case of Hannah, the Bible reveals that when she prayed to God in the house of the Lord petitioning for an answer, she was praying whilst standing. She explained to Eli the priest: ***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”*** (1 Samuel 1:26). As a result of Hannah’s prayer, Samuel, the prophet of Israel was born.

The Jews used to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to display their piety. Jesus condemned the pride but not the practice of praying while standing (Matt. 6:5). In the story of Jesus about the Pharisee and the Publican,

both were standing. But the one who stood with bowed heart **went home justified** (see Luke 18:9-14).

Jesus endorsed standing when He said to the disciples, **“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses”** (Mark 11:25).

Luke records Jesus praying while standing at His transfiguration in such a way that His face and clothes were seen dazzling with glory by the disciples who were lying down. Whilst standing in prayer and whilst being transfigured, He was joined by two Patriarchs who also stood with him:

“Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with Him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with Him” (Luke 9:28-32).



Sitting Down. The practice of praying while sitting down is rare in the Bible, but not absent. A good example is King David, who “went in and sat before the Lord, and he said . . .” (2 Sam. 7:18). However, an extraordinary answer to prayer and the fulfilment of the promise was given whilst the disciples were together continuously in one accord, in prayer and supplication before receiving the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus whilst they were sitting down: **“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting”** (Acts 1:14; 2:1,2).



Lying Down on Bed. We also find in the Bible cases in which people prayed during the night from their beds. While on their beds they remembered the Lord and meditated on Him:

Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah (Psalm 4:4). And another text: **When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches** (Psalm 63:6).



Prostration. When prostrating, people placed their full body horizontally on the ground with their faces on it. It became the traditional posture for desperate, penitential, or intercessory prayer and is still used in Eastern churches, which have plenty of room because they don't have pews. Matthew recorded Jesus prayed in this posture: **“Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt”** (Matthew 26:38,39).

This brief review indicates that in the Bible there was not a particular posture in which God's people were required to pray. Scripture has a diversity of options and possibilities. Even Jesus, our perfect example, uses different postures in prayer and not just kneeling. Therefore, any attempt to select one posture as superior and indispensable over the others is not a Biblical theology.



What Can We Find in the Writings and Practice of EGW regarding Prayer Posture?

People often quote Mrs. White's statement in Selected Messages, book 2, p. 311:

"I have received letters questioning me in regard to the proper attitude to be taken by a person offering prayer to the Sovereign of the universe. Where have our brethren obtained the idea that they should stand upon their feet when praying to God? One who has been educated for about five years in Battle Creek was asked to lead in prayer before Sister White should speak to the people. But as I beheld him standing upright upon his feet while his lips were about to open in prayer to God, my soul was stirred within me to give him an open rebuke. Calling him by name, I said, 'Get down upon your knees.' This is the proper position always."

So the Bible allows for standing, sitting, kneeling and prostrating in prayer. Does Mrs. White take precedence over Scripture?

The answer is 'No.' Neither she herself nor the Seventh-day Adventists historically would say 'Yes' to that. This is because the standard of doctrine and truth is the Word of God.

Now, how do we understand her particular comment noted above? It is important to understand that it is wrong to build a conclusion on EGW concerning the subject of prayer posture from an isolated quotation without a comprehensive look at her practice and her other statements regarding the matter.

EGW's Standing Prayer Posture Practice. The following records are examples of her posture in prayer in the public:

Congregation Rises to Feet for Consecration Prayer. "I invited all who wanted to give themselves to God in a sacred covenant, and to serve Him with their whole hearts, to rise to their feet. The house was full, and nearly all rose. Quite a number not of our faith were present, and some of these arose. I presented them to the Lord in earnest prayer, and we know that we had the manifestation of the Spirit of God. We felt that a victory had indeed been gained." — Manuscript 30a, 1896. (Published in Selected Messages, book 1, p. 150.)

Ellen White and Audience Standing for Consecration Prayer. "Who now, I ask, will make a determined effort to

obtain the higher education. Those who will, make it manifest by rising to your feet. [The congregation rose.] Here is the whole congregation. May God help you to keep your pledge. Let us pray." {3SM 269.3} [Praying] "Heavenly Father, I come to Thee at this time, just as I am, poor, weak, unworthy, and I ask Thee to impress the hearts of this people gathered here today. I have spoken to them Thy words, but, O Lord, Thou alone canst make the word effective..." — The Review and Herald, April 8, 1909. (Sermon at Oakland, California, Feb. 8, 1909.) {3SM 269.4}

Call and Response at the General Conference of 1909. "My brethren and sisters, seek the Lord while He may be found. There is a time coming when those who have wasted their time and opportunities will wish they had sought Him. . . . He wants you to keep in the line of reason and in the line of labour. He wants you to go forth to our churches to labour earnestly for Him. He wants you to institute meetings for those outside of the churches, that they may learn the truths of this last message of warning. There are places where you will be gladly received, where souls will thank you for coming to their

help. May the Lord help you to take hold of this work as you have never yet taken hold of it. Will you do this? Will you here rise to your feet and testify that you will make God your trust and your helper?"[Congregation rises]. [Praying] "I thank thee, Lord God of Israel. Accept this pledge of this Thy people. Put Thy Spirit upon them. Let Thy glory be seen in them. As they shall speak the word of truth, let us see the salvation of God. Amen."—General Conference Bulletin, May 18, 1909.

From Mrs. White's manuscripts, here are two reports of Sabbath services in which she did not call for the people to kneel at the end while she prayed: [Sabbath,

July 17, 1909, Buffalo, NY:] 'Who of you will accept of Christ, and give your life to Him as you never have done before? Who will search the Scriptures to see what is truth? Who will seek all the comfort and encouragement that Christ has given, and I have mentioned only a few items. Who will do so? Let them rise right up. (Congregation rises.) Thank God.' [Praying:] "Heavenly Father, we come to Thee at this time, and present to Thee the covenant that has been made by this people, that they will seek the Lord with all their hearts, that they may find Him. Let Thy blessing come to this people, I pray Thee. Let Thy great grace be upon them. Sweep back every mist and every cloud of darkness, and let the sunlight of Thy glory into their souls, that they may keep this pledge that they have made to thee in standing upon their feet today. . . . (Manuscript 123, 1909).

Elder D. E. Robinson, one of

Ellen White's secretaries from 1902 to 1915 reported: "I have been present repeatedly at camp meetings and General Conference sessions in which sister white herself has offered prayer with the congregation standing, and she herself standing."—D. E. Robinson Letter, March 4, 14.]--letter 342, 1906. {3sm 266.1}

Now, let's look again at her statement and understand the context:

"One who has been educated for about five years in Battle Creek was asked to lead in prayer before Sister White should speak to the people. But as I beheld him standing upright upon his feet while his lips were about to open in prayer to God, my soul was stirred within me to give him an open rebuke. Calling him by name, I said, 'Get down upon your knees.' This is the proper position always."

We can clearly see that this is a pastoral or intercessory prayer. This is part of the Divine Worship before the speaker addresses the congregation. This is the reason why all over the world, the Adventist church promotes kneeling during this prayer at this particular occasion.

Thus, William Fagal, Director of the Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office Andrews University Berrien Springs, concluded that "The 'always' here, as I understand it, applies to the person offering that main prayer for the congregation in the service."

Concluding Remarks

True worship is a lifestyle, not just an activity. While dedicated

times of intense communion with God are vital to our spiritual health, we are also told to "pray without ceasing" (1Thessalonians 5:17). Our bodies are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1–2) and our hearts filled with "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" (Ephesians 5:19–20). Our hearts are to be in a continual state of worship and prayer everyday—that's a lifestyle!

The General Conference summarises the church's liturgy in worship:

*"During worship, the Adventist church allows for praying sitting down, standing up or kneeling down. Since worship should be characterized by order, it is important that when the community of believers comes together to seek the Lord, we all follow the common liturgical elements accepted in our worship services. Those who in church kneel down to pray when the rest of the community is praying standing up may be unintentionally displaying piety in a questionable way" (A.M. Rodriguez, *Kneeling in Prayer*, BRI, General Conference).*

Hearts and minds that are bowed in sincerity when approaching God are far more important than prayer postures. God is different than us. "For man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:17). Without a corresponding heart posture, the physical actions are empty showmanship. Psalm 51:17 eloquently summarises God's desire for our worship: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."