



BODY AWARENESS

This meditation is a body scan inspired by Yoga and mindfulness traditions

OVERVIEW

We recognize that we are embodied creatures and that we should not ignore our bodies in our faith lives. This meditation reconnects us with our bodies and opens us up to God's healing action in our bodies.

Scripture

MATTHEW 26:36-39

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 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."

MARK 3:11

Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"

Introducing the Practice

Throughout the Christian tradition, bodily postures and movements have played many different roles in prayer and worship. In fact, one of the Greek words used in the Bible and in early Christian literature that is often translated "worship" or "fall down before" literally means "to prostrate." To prostrate is to lie face down on the ground in a position of humility and reverence. Though full prostration is not a very common practice in American Christianity today, Christians in America often kneel during prayer to similarly express humility and reverence. Other bodily movements that different denominations use include bowing heads, folding hands, making the sign of the cross, standing for certain parts of the worship service, raising hands in the air, closing eyes, etc. The physical, bodily aspects of our prayer and worship are sometimes overlooked or done automatically without much thought, but it is clear that there are many ways that Christians use their bodies in prayer and worship. We are embodied creatures, and we should not overlook our bodies when it comes to faith. Full worship of God includes our minds, our hearts, and our bodies.

These bodily movements and postures, however, are not valuable in themselves. They are means rather than ends. God does not like us more or less depending on whether we lie down, kneel, sit, or stand. Rather, it is the attitude with which we do these actions that matters. When we use our

bodies in prayer and worship, we express the feelings of our hearts in a physical way. We incorporate our bodies in order to pray and worship with all of our being. By including our bodies in prayer and worship, we offer our full selves to God that he may move and work and be in us.

Our practice today is a body scan inspired by similar meditations from Yoga and mindfulness traditions. The purpose of this practice is not simply to relax and enjoy the stillness. In itself, that would not be prayer. However, prayer may arise out of relaxation if we use that relaxed state as a way of surrendering the tension in our bodies that impedes prayer and if we allow God to heal and restore our bodies in those relaxed states. Though this meditation may bring a state of deep relaxation, try to remain alert and intentionally focused on God during this time. By reconnecting with our bodies in this meditation, we can more mindfully and prayerfully go through the bodily movements in our worship and prayer practices.

Preparing for the Practice

Have everyone spread out to find a comfortable place to sit or lie down for this body awareness meditation. Make sure that everyone is still close enough to hear the voice of the person guiding the practice.

The Spiritual Practice

Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breathing. Take a few moments to slow down from your busy day and center yourself in this time and place. (silent pause)

The stress and anxiety in our lives are often impediments to prayer, and we store this stress and anxiety as tension throughout our bodies. Remember that the purpose of this practice is not relaxation but awareness. Rather than getting lost in the relaxation, use the feeling of being relaxed to intentionally let go of all the stress and tension you feel in each part of your body, clearing the way for deep prayer by doing so. Notice how the release of tension in each body part opens you up to an easier and more honest relationship with God.

Begin by directing your focus on your head and face. Feel the tension that you've carried in the muscles of your forehead throughout the day, and let this tension go. Ask God for healing and restoration in all the little muscles around your forehead, eyes, cheeks, jaw, mouth, and lips. Notice the change in feeling when you direct your attention to each muscle and intentionally release all the stress and tension you've been carrying in that muscle. (silent pause)

Now move down to your neck, shoulders, and upper back. Notice the weight of your clothes on your shoulders. Feel all the tension stored in these muscles and then release it all, surrendering control of these body parts to God and asking for healing and restoration in them as you do so. (silent pause)

Now bring your attention to your arms, right and left. Notice where your arms are and how they feel as they rest in your lap, hang by your side, or lie against the floor. Move your attention from your upper arms down through your elbow and into your forearms. Move from your forearms down into

your wrist and finally into your hands and fingers. Release all the control you are holding onto in these muscles, and ask God for healing and restoration in them. (silent pause)

Bring your awareness now to your chest, abdomen, and lower back. Feel the pressure of the floor or chair against your back, and the rising and falling of your chest as you breathe in and out. (silent pause)

Now move your attention down into your hips, buttocks, and thighs. Feel the weight of the chair or the floor against these parts of your body, and let yourself release any tension you are carrying here. Open these body parts up to the healing and restoration that God offers. (silent pause)

Bring your awareness further down through your knees into your calves and shins. Then move through your ankles into your feet and toes. Feel the sensations of your foot and each toe against whatever socks or shoes you may be wearing. Let go of any stress or tension you are holding here, and let God work to heal and restore them. (silent pause)

Now, in your own time, move back up through your body. Up through your knees, legs, hips, abdomen, chest, arms, shoulders, neck and face. Notice any differences or changes in how each body part feels at this point in the meditation than when we first began. (longer silent pause)

When you feel ready, gently open your eyes and come back into this moment and this space. As you do so, say a prayer of gratitude, thanking God for this opportunity to reconnect with your body, for the healing and restorative power that God provides, and for the blessing of having a body that is capable of doing all that you can do. May we go forth more mindful of our bodies, noticing how our bodily movements and postures affect our attitude toward God in prayer, and attentive to the ways that our bodies need our care and love.

Amen.

Duration: 15-20 minutes

Discussion Questions

1. Did this experience of your bodily sensations differ from the normal ways that you experience your body?
2. How do you think this practice can inform the normal ways that we use our bodies in prayer and worship?