

# Prayer in the Navajo Bible

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## Introduction

Should we kneel when we pray? Is it alright to stand? In the book of Acts there are two passages that speak of Paul kneeling to pray. This does not sound unusual, but there is some background that we should understand. This is not something everyone did in New Testament times. I don't mean praying. Everyone prayed. But the question we consider here is how they prayed – standing or kneeling.

## How to Pray

Today Christians often kneel when they pray. Jews most often stand. Both customs appear in the New Testament and we are not commanded to do the one or avoid the other.

### Standing

Jesus says, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25, NIV).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in Jesus' story about the Pharisee and the publican (or tax collector),

"The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men— robbers, evildoers, adulterers— or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 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'" (Luke 18:11-13).

The Pharisee stands to pray and is not forgiven. But the publican also stands to pray and he *is* forgiven. The Pharisee is not forgiven, not because he stands, but because he is proud and feels no need of anything God can give him. He already has what he wants. The tax collector prays standing, just as the Pharisee does, but his prayer is heard because he humbles himself before God and asks for mercy. In this story the fact that both men stand is not an issue.

### Kneeling

In other passages people kneel when they pray. For example, in Luke 22:41, Jesus "withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed" (Luke 22:41, NIV). There are also three places where Paul kneels to pray (Acts 20:36; 21:5). In Ephesians 3:14 Paul says, "For this reason I kneel before the Father."

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In the Old Testament, Solomon kneels when he dedicates the temple he had built (1 Kings 8:54; see also 2 Chronicles 6:13; 7:3; 29:29). So far we have been talking about people kneeling, but we haven't given a passage that says this is something we should do. Such a passage is Psalm 95:6, which says, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker."

Returning to Paul's example, we now quote the two passages from Acts that were mentioned earlier.

When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. (Acts 20:36)

But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. (Acts 21:5)

Kneeling on a beach is like kneeling in a sandy desert. It's not a convenient thing to do, so praying in this way must have been important to Paul. Actually, we have no example of Paul standing to pray. Nor do we have any example of Jesus standing to pray. So if in doubt, kneel.

On the other hand, the Bible does not condemn the practice of standing to pray and we should not go beyond Scripture by making unnecessary rules. Making a rule for ourselves that we should avoid standing, like Jews, would be more Jewish than standing to pray.

## Working

A posture I would like to recommend for prayer is whatever position you happen to be in while you work. Silent prayers that rise to God from people doing what needs to be done are like sweet incense that arise before Him. Such prayers can be less like a worship service and more like a conversation with God.

## Conclusion

One Christian writer I especially like says, "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend."<sup>2</sup> So stay in touch with God. Pray. The best advice I can offer on exactly how to pray is, Do it. If you open your heart to God, He opens His heart to you. If you pray from a sincere heart, you can be sure God is listening. Pray.

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.