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Yoga and the Christian Faith

O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! Psalm 95:6 (NRSV)

“The body ought to pray as well as the soul. Body and soul are both better for it.” CS Lewis, *Letters to Malcom: Chiefly A Book on Prayer* p. 17

Many of us who have grown up in Western Christian environments have been told to be cautious concerning any form of bodily or spiritual practice that may have roots outside of our own cultures. Yoga has not been immune to these fears. Many Christians with their hearts desiring to honor God fully have avoided the practice because of its use as a spiritual exercise in the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

And yet, there are several practices that are used by, or even stem from, different religions that we have no difficulty modifying. My favorite practice to compare yoga to is singing. Many religions their sing sacred songs, but songs can also be largely secular, or they can represent our faith tradition. We have not banned singing- in part because it biblical to sing as part of worship! (Acts 16:25, Colossians 3:16, Psalm 68:4-5, etc.) It is the content of our hearts and the aim of our song that matters. The same applies for yoga.

Likewise, prayer that utilizes body positions is also biblical. Abraham “fell on his face” before God, as did the Leper seeking Jesus (Genesis 17:1-22, Luke 5:12). Moses prayed with his hands outstretched (Exodus 9:27-29), King Solomon knelt in prayer (1 Kings 8:45.) Jesus prayed looking up to heaven (Mark 6:41, John 11:41, etc.)

Over the years, many Christians have thoughtfully engaged with yoga as a form of Christian worship. There is the Christian Yoga Association, YogaFaith, and Holy Yoga to name a few. There are yoga classes that begin with a scripture reading and end with a devotional.

As a culture, we are often good at being suspicious of our bodies and the practices we engage with them. Yet utilizing breath and movement in fitness or worship is not antithetical to our Christian faith. Learning to worship God with our bodies is one more path we can use to honor the God who created us, sustains us, and breathes life into us.