Well, this is different, isn't it? We sing one song and then I'm up here to preach? A couple weeks ago, when I sent out the service timeline to Emily, so she could work through songs for the service, she sent me a message back, curious as to why I placed the sermon here. I know this sermon might be one of the most challenging practically. It’s on the physical postures of praise. And, I essentially told Emily that my hope is that this sermon will help prepare you to think about how you can apply the sermon in the songs we'll be singing together.

As you think about the physical postures of praise, you might have similar hesitations as you did last week when I preached on the emotions in our corporate worship. You can have a fear that we’re going to go berserk in our corporate worship, allowing for some kind of animal circus. But in reaction to that kind of fear, you may be the type of person who barely has any physical response in corporate praise. And you could be very content with that. In fact, you could have a sense of pride over it because you view yourself as respectable and self-controlled. Others of you might long for more physical expression. And some of you could be just as prideful as those who don’t move. You can think, “You’re not spiritual unless you raise your hands, etc.”

To start off the sermon, let me say this: as church family members, we are pursuing Jesus together. We’re not against each other. We are for each other. All of us are in a process of sanctification. And, even as I preach this sermon, I confess that I don’t know what all the applications should be from what I’m preaching. However, I do pray that we would be dependent on the Spirit – and that we would be submissive to the Scripture’s call to us as a church family.

Last week, in concluding the sermon, I talked on two applications of engaging our emotions in worship. Then I said that this week’s sermon was going to give more application. Last week, I briefly touched on engaging our countenance, shouting and clapping in worship. These are what I refer to as postures in worship. They are ways in which we approach God in our worship. This week, I’m going to speak on seven postures of worship: the internal posture, shouting, bowing, standing, dancing, clapping, and lifting hands.

Even as I stated some of these, I can imagine some of you cringing on the inside. I can imagine that because that’s something I might do in hearing this list. And, in hearing this list, you could think, “Why does worship have to be so complicated? Why can’t we just sing, sit, stand and be done?! I get that. I think there are legitimate concerns when it comes to postures of praise:

1) **This could become man-centered.** In Matthew 6:1, Jesus says to beware of practicing your righteousness in order to be seen by men. Our worship can end up being focused on us, and we

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1 This manuscript is still in the rough draft phrase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.
could think we’re really spiritual because a lot of people raise their hands or bow down on the ground. This is not what we’re aiming for, and yet, in our pride, we can go this route.

2) **This could become legalistic.** If we simply look at what we’re doing with our bodies and not engaging our hearts, then we only have an appearance of godliness, but we’re denying the power. This is at the heart of legalism. Contentment with ourselves and our actions, without genuinely trusting the Lord. You see how legalism can function even with body postures? Some might think legalism is only with those who don’t like postures. But that’s not so. We can cling to anything and think we’re fine because we do this or that. Or, even in this sermon today, you could be thinking that God commands everyone to do all of these things all the time (or every Sunday). That’s not the case. Postures are made for man not man for the body posture. They’re for our good, not for our legalistic selfish tendencies.

3) **Encouraging these postures can be distracting.** Based on what I’ve already said, if we’re man-centered and legalistic, we’re distracted from God. But when I say distracting, I mean that people could be concerned of being distracted by others as they’re worshiping. If we see someone bowing down and another person raising hands and another person sitting in their chair, that’s going to be distracting to my worship. And, isn’t congregational worship supposed to encourage congregational worship. I’m not just supposed to think of me. I’m supposed to think of encouraging others when singing! This is probably my biggest concern when it comes to postures of praise.

For even these three reasons, we could see why I shouldn’t even preach this message. And yet, I’m going to preach it. Why? Because the Bible moves past these concerns and commands us to engage our bodies in corporate worship. In reality, we shouldn’t be shocked by this. We can’t help but recognize how our postures communicate things. Think of when a soldier salutes. What is he communicating? What about when a man gets down on one knee and he has a ring in his hand? What’s he saying? What does it mean when someone comes toward you with their head down and their eyes won’t look at you? All of these postures communicate. In fact, depending on the study, human beings communicate more with their body than with their words. Between 75%-95% of communication is non-verbal.

And yet, we expect that when we come in corporate worship, we’re not going to communicate that way with God? We’re shutting off a huge part of ourselves that God has created when we don’t engage our whole selves. You could say, “But Pastor Timothy, that’s for some people, not others.” Or, “It’s easy for you to say, Pastor Timothy, you’re just an animated person.” But we’re all animated. We all move. We all use our bodies in communication. Therefore, it’s a gracious act of God that he commands us to engage our entire beings. When we look at the book of psalms, we discover that God wants our whole selves in worship.

That said, sometimes when I’ve heard people preach on bodily postures, it seems as though they simply gloss over them and say, “All that matters is the heart.” Bow down? No, you just need a heart that bows. Lift hands? Just lift your hands to the Lord? Is this all the psalms are encouraging? Heart and not body? Has God created us as only spiritual beings with no bodies? That’s more of an ancient Greek gnostic teaching than it is Christian teaching. After all, when we look in Scriptures, we actually see examples in corporate worship where people are falling down before God. Think the elders in Revelation 5:8, who fall down in worship. Is that literal? Or, in 1 Kings 8:22, Solomon raised his hands in front of the whole assembly. Are these just talking about the heart falling down or the hands of the heart being raised? No. And there are
more passages than these in the Scriptures. This reveals to us that when the psalms talk about physical posturing, the Scriptures mean it. In fact, the psalms command it. Instead of our postures being a distraction for others from God’s glory, the Scriptures reveal our postures can be a display of God’s glory for others.

I cannot let my fear regarding postures keep me from obeying the commands of God. Therefore, we must believe that God’s Word will address the concerns we may have, so that God is glorified and we are strengthened corporately in our worship as we engage our mind, our emotions and our bodies in praise.

_With this backdrop, let’s pray together before we go further in the sermon this morning. [Pray for Calvary Baptist Church, with a new Pastor: Ben Hernandez.]_

I’ve already described that the Scriptures command various postures in praise. But now I want to move on to why postures? and What kinds of postures? As we go through this sermon, think through what this means for you as we move into congregational singing later in the service. So, let’s start with:

1. **Why physical postures?**

At this point, some people might think that this is a new-fangled invention of a young generation that just wants to be touchy-feely. However, this past week, when I was looking into the doctrine of postures in praise, I discovered that there are evidences in the 16th century (the Reformation time-period) of physical postures in corporate worship. In John Calvin’s _Institutes of the Christian Religion_, he speaks of raising hands and bowing. In speaking of raising hands for prayer, he writes that it is a “ceremony known to all ages and nations, and still in common use” (_Institutes, 3:20_). This means that not only was it known in his day, but in the days before him.

But, more important than realizing that these postures were in previous, older generations, we must see whether or not Scripture affirms this. I’ve already shown verses that reveal that. So, now we say “Why?” Well, let me give two reasons:

- **To physically represent spiritual realities.**

I’m going to read from Psalm 95:6-7 to help explain: **Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.**

If we take this one psalm as an example, we see the psalmist telling us to worship and bow down. We are to kneel before the Lord. Why? Answer: he is our God, we are his sheep. So, the psalmist says that in order to more accurately represent humility before God, we should ascribe all worth to him and then bow down.

So you can see how bowing communicates a heart that is humble before him. That said, engaging in different postures doesn’t simply represent where your heart is. Sometimes engaging in certain postures actually preaches to your heart how it ought to respond. Similar to the psalms where David will speak to his soul and tells his soul how to respond; postures also speak to our souls. A professor by the name of E.J. Hutchinson writes, **“Worship of God without the heart is useless; but, at the same time, what we do with our bodies is closely bound up with what we do with our hearts, and not in a symbolic way merely. The**

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Posture of the body ought to be emblematic of the posture of the heart, yes. But, ideally, the posture of the body serves to form the posture of the heart as well. ... Kneeling is not just a sign of submission; kneeling aids in producing submission” (https://calvinistinternational.com/2015/04/09/calvin-on-posture-in-worship/).

A couple weeks ago, I was meeting with someone from Ventura, and they were telling me about a previous church experience. He said that at some point in time, their church asked the people to get on their knees during the corporate confession of sin. Everyone together. They were gracious. If people couldn’t physically do that, they understood, but they asked that people do this together. This person told me that this actually communicated quite a bit as they communicated their sin and humbled themselves in bowing. And then they’d hear the word of forgiveness in Jesus, and they would then get up! The movement to the floor and back up communicated to their hearts.

This is how posture is supposed to work. And there’s another reason why I think postures are so important in worship.

- To express that Jesus saves us wholly.

I have mentioned this verse in previous weeks, but it’s worth stating again. Jesus summarizes the Law and said that we are to “... love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”3 But how can we do this? The problem is that we humans are born not loving God with our entire being. Sin has twisted its fingers into every nook and cranny of our beings, and no matter how hard we try, we know we fall short. As a result, we don’t love humans as we ought to.

Then we realize that the Bible states that all of our sins, words and thoughts are brought into judgment before God. The list of our offenses are long. Yet, there’s hope. In Colossians, Paul says that the handwriting of all of our sins written against us were nailed to the cross. That means, Jesus became the sin list! And on the cross, Jesus wholly endured the consequences of sin.

But he didn’t stay on the cross. Three days later, he rose from the dead. Conquering sin and also our enemy of death. He did this in the flesh. And, I’m saying this specifically because that means his rescue come to our flesh and our spirit!

Therefore, in our flesh, we worship God in the spirit! And Jesus rescues us wholly. We have now been set free to worship God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength! And, notice, the word is “all.” All our heart and strength is involved in worshipping God. With our entire beings we should glory in God’s worth and want to grow in glorying in him.

So, when we engage our bodies in worship, we are confessing that Jesus has saved us wholly!

With these basic understandings then, what are postures that are encouraged in the book of Psalms? Keep in mind, I’m simply focusing on the book of Psalms. I’m focused here because psalms is the worship book of the Bible. They’re instructive on how congregational worship should look.

2. What are the postures of praise in the book of psalms?

I have seven postures to discuss this morning. These may not be all, but I’m fairly certain this is the bulk of the postures given in the psalms. One I will not speak on this morning is singing because I’m going to talk about that in a later week. So, let’s start with the first one:

**Internal posture of humility (51:17).** In Psalm 51:16-17, we read, “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

Right here, you may be thinking, “I thought you were talking about external postures, Pastor Timothy?! Why are you dealing with the heart?” I need to make this explicit. As Hutchinson said, worship without the heart is worthless. The heart is most important. Humility of soul is more desirous from the Lord than being a person who bows down, kneels, lifts hands and cries in a service. If your heart is not into the worship of God, you’re as full of life as a tomb.

God will not delight in all the sacrifices if you don’t have the attitude of humility and awe before God. Remember again that worship is not about us. We would hopefully all admit this, but in this consumeristic culture where we constantly are rating things and giving “stars” for service, we do this with corporate worship, too.

You think, “Well, the songs weren’t what I like.” Or, we evaluate everyone else. But God’s fingers are pointing at you. Where was your heart? Will you worship God? Can you imagine getting to Heaven and God saying, “You never worshipped me in corporate worship?” And your response was, “Well, there was no electric guitar, God!” Really?

We don’t gather together in corporate worship, and walk away like consumers. When we gather to worship, may we come prepared and in humility. May we come recognizing our sinful tendencies while also praying that we keep our eyes on the magnificent, profound glory of God himself! The One who made all that we can see and cannot see, is the One who has summoned us into his presence here. And not only are we here, but our worship makes it into the throne room of Heaven! Jesus has given us this privilege. So, with broken and contrite hearts, let’s glory in the God who loves us!

This internal posture is most important and it’s a responsibility we each must think of as we approach congregational worship. Understanding this, we can now talk of external postures.

**Shouting (27:6).** Psalm 27:6 says, “And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.”

In addition to singing, the psalmist states that he will sacrifice with shouts of joy! Have you ever thought of shouting as a sacrifice to God? What does it mean that shouting is a sacrifice? Well, through shouting we are making clear who we glory in. In a way, this is a sacrifice because it’s making explicit whose side we are on. We are for God. Shouting makes that clear.

In our day, within the church, shouting can be thought of a sacrifice, too, because it costs us something to do this – especially in western churches like ours. Culturally, we just don’t shout in church. But clearly, the

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ancient Jewish people did shout at times. And, I believe it is only appropriate at times for us to shout as well.

In this text, the shouting is shouting for JOY! It’s not a shout of anger. It’s not a shout of trying to get other people attention so that they look at you shouting. It’s a shouting of joy in God – delight in him, who he is and what he has done. When shouting, it’s saying, “Look at him! He has rescued me!” That’s what the psalmist is saying here.

Last week, you may have heard it, but someone decided to shout during our singing portion. When I heard him shouting last Sunday morning during our worship time, I was refreshed. I was encouraged. I was emboldened in my own worship. Shouting can make clear that God is our focus.

But you could ask, “How often should we shout?” To that, I would say, “I have no idea.” Some of these postures don’t seem to be postures that are as common as others. For example, when we get to dancing, we read just a couple passages in psalms that speak of dancing. And we don’t really have references to dancing in the New Testament. But when it comes to raising hands, that’s found in the Old and New Testaments, and it’s mentioned much more often.

There seem to be postures that happen more often than others. But even in saying this, I don’t want you to feel like, “Ok, I never have to worry about that one!” Please don’t think that way. Shouting is appropriate! It is necessary in congregational worship. So, let me ask you. Can you shout with joy? Hold on, let’s test it. Can you shout with joy?

Many of you are going to do this tonight while watching two teams throw a ball around. I believe our shouts for joy should be greater in congregational worship of God than the shouts people have when a team makes a touchdown or wins a game. That game is a drop in the bucket in eternity. No one will be reconciled with God because someone ran 50 yards. But, Jesus has conquered our greatest enemies: sin and death! He has given us eternal life and glory in God himself! He has given us all we need and could ever dream! Let’s shout for joy, amen?

Let’s be praying and asking the Lord to free us to engage in shouting with joy to the Lord. I don’t know exactly how this will look. But, I hope we pray that it would be appropriate for the help of the body of believers, for our own souls and ultimately for the glory of God!

**Bowing (95:6-7, 38:6).** Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

I mentioned this earlier with this posture, but I’ll ask again. Why is the psalmist encouraging us to bow down? Because he’s our Lord. He’s our Maker. He’s God! And what are we? People of his pasture. We are sheep in his hand! He’s so big. We are so small. And yet, we are dearly cared by God.

Psalm 38:6 communicates bowing in a little different way. He’s bowed down because he’s in so much pain in his life. He communicates the desperation before the Lord. He’s weak and feeble, but the Lord is strong. He bows in recognition that God can do whatever he wills, but he’s desperate for the Lord.

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For all of these reasons we should bow. And, the encouragement in the psalms is to bow in congregational worship. Let us worship and bow down. It’s in the plural. And the habit of bowing is found in different passages of corporate worship. Have you ever bowed in congregational worship? If not, why not?

At this you could say, “Well, if I bow down and I’m weeping, how will people think about me?” We’re very concerned about what people think of us, aren’t we? It’s understandable, but as I said last week, we cannot let fear of people keep us from worshipping God. I know, you might say, “Well, people won’t get it. People will look down on me.” But what if this is part of the process of God training us as a congregation? We are not going to get this perfect, but at least we’re wanting to grow together and encourage each other in worshipping God in these ways!

Let’s bow to communicate God’s glory, our need and also his love for us! So, don’t be surprised if I encourage people to do this all together (like that church I told you about earlier). But you could think, “Pastor Timothy, there’s no room to bow! Have you seen how close these rows are?” My response is: there are aisles! If you are compelled to preach to your heart by bowing, do it. There’s freedom in this! And honestly, I think this posture is one that I’m personally thinking I need to incorporate. My heart so often wants to rebel or be cold. I need to remind my soul to bow before the Lord.

In all of this, don’t wait for me to tell you to do this. Just do this! Engage your soul by preaching to it through this posture. If you’re feeling cold and dry before the Lord. Or, if you’re heart is cold and rebellious to the Lord – maybe you need to get on your knees and bow and sing in order to draw your heart to the reality of who God is.

**Standing (22:23, 24:3).** Psalm 22:23 says, You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! 7 Psalm 24:3 states, “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? 8

We don’t just stand because we don’t want to sit. Theologically, standing signifies a security and steadfastness. To stand in the Lord’s presence means that he accepts and welcomes you. To stand in worship is to boldly confess that God has accepted you! Have you ever thought that way? You today stand in the presence of God, and the author of Hebrews states that we have entered into the presence of God in our worship!

But standing doesn’t just communicate our status. Standing, according to 22:23, says we stand in awe. Focus your attention on God. You stand in awe of God. You’re claiming that God is worthy of awe by standing. I stand in awe. I stake my claim that he is worthy!

It’s understandable, then, why people would stand so much in congregational worship!

**Dancing (149:3, 150:4).** Here’s the one that honestly makes me feel the most uncomfortable. And you probably join me in feeling that way. But, I have to go back to the Scripture. I have to ask, “Is my uncomfortability scriptural or not? Let me read from two psalms.

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Psalm 149:3 says, “Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!”\(^9\) Psalm 150:4 says, “Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!\(^{10}\)

When you read Psalm 149, it starts with “Let them praise... with dancing.” Let might sound to us like, it’s allowable. But then Psalm 150 says “Praise him with... dance.” That’s not merely an allowance. It’s a command. In reality, the “let” of 149 is essentially just as much a command as Psalm 150.

But some may say, “What does he mean by dance?” I remember hearing of one person who taught on David dancing with the ark of the covenant, and he tried to argue that David was essentially doing nothing more than song leading – waving his arms around. Do you think that David’s wife would be upset because he was song-leading? No. The word dance means dance. But, it’s not provocative. It’s not sensual. Even as I say this, I have to recognize that I essentially grew up thinking that any form of dancing was always provocative. Being taught that essentially makes your conscience heightened whenever there is dancing. Because I was taught it’s all provocative, all dancing seemed provocative. But, since the Scriptures exhort this form, clearly it’s not always provocative.

At this point, you could say, “What does this look like in our services,” and to that, I say “I honestly don’t know for sure.” But this past week, I had an interesting email from one of the elders. He was expressing to me how grateful he was for last week’s sermon. And then he told me about a conversation he had with Bob Ross, who is currently shut-in due to weather and health issues. Let me read what he wrote: “I was telling Bob of the content of Worship and Praise to God Almighty with all our heart and soul and mind and strength! After confessing that I fall far short of such exuberance we both thought of King David dancing in the street! (And that maybe we should widen the aisles in the sanctuary ;-).” So, maybe this elder and Bob Ross will start the dancing in the church!

Again, in all seriousness, I don’t know what the modern application of this is, but I do think we should be confronted by Psalm 150. Psalm 150 is the final psalm of the psalter, encouraging all musical instrumentation in the corporate gathering – and right in the midst of that, there’s the command of dance. I simply can’t get around that.

As you hear this, you could have the fear that now people are going to go crazy. I pray that’s not the case. If God’s glory is our aim, then I believe that our desire is his glory and praise – not self-centered craziness.

**Clapping (47:1).** Psalm 47:1 says, “Clap your hands, all peoples!”\(^{11}\) Again, it’s a command. Clapping is appropriate. This past Sunday night, I taught the children’s time, and I asked the kids why we clap after offertory. They said, “To encourage the people because they worked hard and did a good job.” I figured that would be the response, and maybe that’s why you clap. There’s nothing wrong with giving honor to whom honor is due. But Scripturally, clapping is done to praise God. When we clap in corporate worship, we might clap to say “thank you,” but more importantly, our clapping should rise higher. Praise God for the words of the song! Praise God for how he’s given us instruments that can lead us in worship. Praise God for people helping us to praise him! We clap to rejoice in God!

If the trees of the field clap their hands, and God considers that as worship from creation, then how much more has he set us free to worship him with our hands and with our minds! Let’s clap! In so many contexts,

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we clap in this world. Then why don’t we take that posture with regards to God. I’ve clapped my hands together when eating a certain delicious food. I’ve clapped my hands watching my child walk. I’ve clapped my hands listening to musicians. And God is greater.

But keep in mind. I’m not clapping to encourage God and say, “Keep going, God. You’re doing a good job!” I clap because I’m saying I rejoice in God and his work. This is what Psalm 47 continues to proclaim. God is the all-powerful. I clap to confess I agree that God is great and good.

**Lifting Hands (134:2).** Psalm 134:2 states, “Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!”

I’m only reading one verse, but lifting hands are a common expression of worship in the psalms and throughout the whole of Scriptures. That’s why I’m ending on this one. Lifting hands signifies a purity before the Lord. It also signifies praying – lifting up our hands as an expression of need for God. In some ways, it makes me think of when a child comes to a parent and lifts their hands up. Why do they do that? They want to be picked up!

Lifting hands is a sign that God fills our need and that we need God. Do you see a pattern. In so many postures, we are communicating our weakness and God’s greatness. We’re communicating “I’m needy,” and that God fills our needs! Ventura, I personally love the posture of lifting hands. With me, I’m reminded over and over again that I’m God’s child. I raise my hands to signify that I need him to hold me. Sometimes I only raise one hand. And I often raise my left because the Scriptures say that I am at his right hand – the place of honor, and that I’m walking with him.

I raise hands to remind myself over and over again that the Lord carries me. Without him, I wouldn’t be able to walk this race of life. And, as I raise my hands, the psalmist reminds me that my hands have been cleansed by Jesus who makes me clean.

In all of these postures, not only do they remind us of what God has done or who he is today, but the postures also focus us forward into eternity. I’m reminded of Philippians 2:9-11 where we read, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Is that bowing down figurative? Absolutely not. It’s real. With our bodies and mouths, the Lord will receive all the glory. And he receives the glory because he humbled himself to the point of death, even death on the cross. He gave all so that we could receive all – God himself! Then we get to Revelation and read of elders bowing and the congregation of Heaven bowing down! The body and voice will be engaged in all eternity future. So, let’s prepare for that today!

Let’s **Live in the reality of God’s reign today and live in anticipation of the future kingdom!** Preach to your heart, through postures, that God is worthy to be worshipped with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. I pray our postures would not distract us, but instead that they would put God’s glory on display in our congregational worship.

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