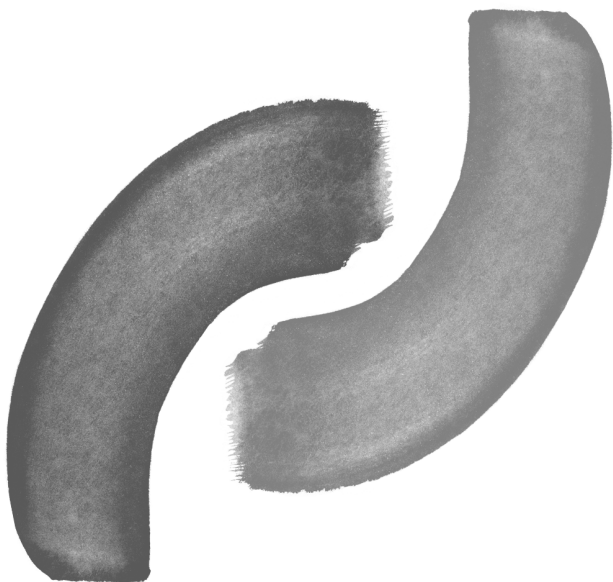


QUICK THEOLOGY

Should Christians Practice Yoga?



JEREMY JENKINS

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phylicia@phyliciamasonheimer.com

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Introduction

I wandered the maze of narrow alleys in the Indian city I was exploring. Every few minutes I noticed another sign for a yoga center. Targeting tourists and Hindu pilgrims, these centers appealed to the worldwide popularity of yoga as a spiritual discipline and a form of exercise. In none of these centers would one find a yoga that resembled the yoga of the West. Nothing in this city, this country, or the Hindu religion is completely separated from the sacred. Yet when I am home in the very secular United States, I see similar signs calling for people to attend yoga studios. In these studios there will rarely be Hindu offerings made or ancient Hindu mantras recited. Despite this, it is impossible to deny that the most sanitized yoga found in the West finds its roots in the sacred yoga of the East.

So where should the Christian stand on the issue of yoga? I have received this question more than almost any

other, and I have often avoided answering it. It seems as if the question is somewhat of a golden calf for some, who ask the question knowing which answer they want to hear. On social media I regularly witness Christians who are ridiculed for questioning the permissibility of yoga. They are called Pharisees, legalists, and more. I also see some Christians insisting that yoga is not permissible for Christians, even labeling it as demonic without knowing anything about yoga other than the fact that it comes from another culture.

The reason why I have begun to speak out on the topic is because I believe Christians must be well reasoned in their moral decisions. We must not make claims based on our feelings, preferences, or cultural biases. We must be willing to entertain the idea that there are behaviors and practices that Christians should abstain from, but we don't get to decide the criteria these behaviors are judged by. We must first look to the wisdom of God's revelation in Scripture to see if what we are claiming aligns with God's Word.

In the case of yoga, we must understand of what yoga's roots actually are from a Hindu perspective. We must find out what role it plays in the lives of the millions of Hindus who practice it. We must develop a deeper understanding of the New Testament's teaching

on Christian freedom to ensure that we are not making spiritual decisions based on our feelings or preferences. And we must be willing to take a long, slow look at the matter at hand and question whether there are boundaries we should put on our own freedom.

So we put in the hard work. We listen to the wisdom of the counsel of God's Word. We pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit. We look at the example of Christ. Then we turn our eyes to the world and wonder how and where we might possibly fit. Like a square peg into a round hole, we find ourselves uncomfortable as we endeavor to be in the world but not of the world.

Do not be mistaken. Journeys like this are not only academic or intellectual—they are also missional. They are the heart of the Christian's charge to take the gospel to all nations, tribes, and tongues. Part of that call is the difficult task of interpreting culture and choosing to love our neighbors by inviting them to a more rich and true life. This is not a way of our making and choosing; rather it is God's way. Part of joining God's Kingdom and adopting His culture is laying down the things about our human cultures that are not honoring to Him. It can be hard. It will be offensive to some of our fleshly sensibilities. Yet it is always worth it.

So is yoga one of these things that should be laid

down by the Christ follower? We begin the journey by first laying down our likes, dislikes, and preconceived notions to find out.