

Which way to look?

*“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 18:13 (NIV)

*“After Jesus said this,
he looked toward heaven and prayed:”*

John 17:1 (NIV)

In Jewish society in biblical times it was the common practice for a devout Jew to look toward heaven when he or she prayed. For example in Psalm 123:1 (NIV) we read, “I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven.”

It is well accepted that the best way to communicate with other people is face to face.

A sad thing about our society today is that many people do not make that connection with friends, preferring to text or email the person instead.

We are drawing away physically from people as we make more immediate connections electronically. The personal touch is gone because of the efficiency of technology.

When a person looks up to God in heaven it is an action of intimacy and warmth. When we really know the Lord we look to heaven when we pray, confident that we’re accepted and loved.

Eye contact is so vital in a really close relationship. Making eye contact indicates that we are communicating with each other. I may be speaking, but I am also watching to see if you are understanding.

So the verse about Jesus looking to heaven is perfectly natural for someone who knows and loves the Lord.

In our verse, though, the tax collector looked down, showing a very humble spirit as he prayed. He knew that he was not deserving of God’s time, so

his humility showed in his lack of eye contact with heaven.

The way to start a relationship with our Creator is to have the attitude of the tax collector. We must start with the very simple prayer he exemplified and ask the Lord for mercy because we are sinners. So we begin our spiritual journey with the downward look.

Then, as our relationship with the Lord grows, we may find ourselves looking up to heaven and our heavenly Father just as our children looked up into our eyes when they were small. Wherever you are in your journey be certain that you find grace to finally look up in prayer.