



THE NINE SACRED PATHWAYS

This resource is designed to help you discover how you naturally connect to God, what your spiritual style is, and it also provides a few practices to try out based on your particular style. In *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God*, Gary L Thomas describes nine different spiritual styles or “sacred pathways.” We all love and connect to God in different ways. God created us all with a certain personalities and spiritual temperaments, which make us gravitate towards certain types of practices and prayers. God wants us to feel free to worship, according to the way he made us. A sacred pathway describes the way we relate to God, how we draw near to him. We can identify our sacred pathway and use practices which come naturally to that pathway as an easier way of connecting to God. We do not necessarily have to have just one pathway, most of us, however, will naturally have a certain predisposition for relating to God, which is our predominant spiritual temperament.

There are three steps to this process:

1. Take the Sacred Pathways Test at <https://groupleaders.org/spiritual-pathways-assessment/>
2. Discern the Results and Identify your Spiritual Temperament below
3. Try out some of the spiritual practices suggested or write out a couple ideas that come to mind. You might find helpful 'Spiritual Practices' from other pathways helpful as well.

The Nine Sacred Pathways

1. Naturalists: Loving God Outdoors

The naturalist seeks to leave the formal architecture and the padded pews to enter an entirely new “cathedral,” a place that God himself has built: the out-of-doors. Any place that has some trees or a stream or, at minimum, open skies, can be God’s cathedral. Naturalists have found that getting outside can literally flood parched hearts and soften the hardest soul. Naturalists often learn their best lessons in the out-of-doors. Three particularly come to mind: they visualize scriptural truths, they see God more clearly, and they learn to rest.

Spiritual Practices

- Slowly and deliberately walk through places for the purpose of intentional and listening prayer.
- Walking through your neighborhood, a park, your town giving to God the people and activities that go on there.
- Taking a group of children or adults on a prayer walk; talking to them about what it is like for them.
- Allowing the visual nature of this journey to prompt prayers.
- Stopping throughout the day to listen to God (3 to 6 times a day, maybe setting a timer)
- Unplugging electronic devices that interrupt relationships.
- Refraining from use of email on the weekends.
- Communicating face-to-face rather than virtually.

What would you add to the list? What practice could you possibly experiment with? _____

2. Sensates: Loving God with the Senses

Sensates are moved more by a sensuous worship experience than by anything else. By sensuous we are referring to the five senses: taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight. When we embrace the use of the senses—which God created, after all—we open up entirely new avenues of worship. God created our senses, enjoyment through the senses was his idea. Sensates experience God in concrete, visible, palpable symbols. They see God in beauty, are creative and artistic and enjoy God's creation.

Spiritual Practices

- Pursuing activities that bring the heart deep gladness and reveling in them before the Lord including: spending time with others, sharing meals, laughing, listening to music, dancing.
- Having holiday traditions that guide you into celebration.
- Seek out church worship and social events.
- Hosting home "Nights of Worship" for musicians and artist to come together and worship before God in the round.
- Getting prayerfully creative and using doodles, color, words, pictures as a way of expressing what is in your heart and seeking connection with God.
- Partaking of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament of communion

engages the senses with others in organic spaces.

What would you add to the list? What practice could you possibly experiment with? _____

3. Traditionalists: Loving God through Ritual and Symbol

Religious practices are the way men and women use the physical world to embody (non-physical) spiritual truths. There are three elements of the traditionalist pathway: ritual (or liturgical pattern); symbol (or significant image); and sacrifice. Through ritual and ceremonies traditionalists in turn make order out of chaos.

Spiritual Practices

- Liturgical prayer is a written or memorized prayer that serves as a framework for individual or corporate worship and devotion. Includes
- Praying or singing Scripture as a part of worship (e.g. the Lord's Prayer, psalms, responsive readings, doxologies etc).
- Praying the Liturgy of the Hours.
- Habit of prayer- fixed hour Fixed-hour prayers call for regular and consistent patterns of attending to God throughout the day. Including Interrupting work at set times for prayer.
- Fasting is the self-denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer. Bringing attachments and cravings to the surface opens a place for prayer: This physical awareness of emptiness is the reminder to turn to Jesus who alone can satisfy.
- Abstaining from food, drink, shopping, desserts, chocolate and so on to intentionally be with God.
- Abstaining from media: TV, radio, music, email, cellphones, computer games to allow space for listening to the voice of Jesus.
- Observing fast days and seasons of the church year.
- Addressing excessive attachments or appetites and the entitlements behind them, and partnering with God for changed habits.

What would you add to the list? What practice could you possibly experiment with? _____

4. Ascetics: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

The ascetic temperament gravitates toward solitude, austerity, simplicity, and deep commitment. It's the "monastic" temperament, so to speak, representing believers who aren't afraid of discipline, severity, and solitude— indeed, believers who find that these elements awaken their souls to God's presence. Ascetics experience God away from worldly distractions and have no need for anything other than God and the Spirit.

Spiritual Practices

- Silence is a regenerative practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise. Silence provides freedom from speaking as well as from listening to words or music.
- Setting a period of time in which you don't speak but isolate yourself from sounds.
- Driving or commuting without the radio on.
- Leaving the TV off; spending time in silence with God alone.
- Having personal retreats of silence.
- The practice of solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God.
- Observing Sabbath refreshment by abstaining from constant interaction with others, information and activities.
- Practice the Ignatian Daily Examen
- Assessing the things and activities that keep life convoluted, complicated and confusing; working to simplify these things.
- Eating simple foods.

What would you add to the list? What practice could you possibly experiment with? _____

5. Activists: Loving God through Confrontation

Activists love God by standing up for righteousness and justice. Activists need to find the right balance— indeed, the balance modeled by Christ who regularly interspersed times of spiritual refreshment with intense ministry. Activism can take the form of Christian activism, social reform, or to confront error and evil. Writers, preachers, politicians, academics, artists, and homemakers can all be activists, faithful in their own sphere to stand up for the truth. Activists will never be satisfied playing it safe. They need to

experience the exhilaration of seeing a miraculous God come through in miraculous ways.

Spiritual Practices

- Justice seeks to help others through correcting and redressing wrongs. It treats others fairly and shows no favoritism.
- Being a good steward of what you own.
- Providing for the poor, needy and oppressed through the means available to you.
- Spending time being with the poor
- Refusing to buy products of companies that take advantage of the poor.
- Interceding for a neighborhood or town by walking through it
- Walking through housing projects and government facilities, in places of need, fear, conflict, and decision-making, blessing the rooms and praying for the activities and people that gather there.
- Participating in healing prayer that address wounds and emotional injuries.

What would you add to the list? What practice could you possibly experiment with? _____

6. Caregivers: Loving God by Loving Others

For caregivers, acts of mercy are a very practical way for them to show their love for God, but also to grow in their love for God. Caregivers may hear God more clearly when caring for someone than when they sit quietly in prayer. Caregivers have found that one of the most profound ways they can love God is to love others. For caregivers, giving care isn't a chore but a form of worship.

Spiritual Practices

- Service is a way of offering resources, time, treasure, influence and expertise for the care, protection, justice, and nurture of others.
- Signing up for a Mentoring program.
- "Adopting" a prisoner
- Lending money
- Help somebody battling substance abuse
- Help an illiterate person learn to read

- Donate time at a battered women's shelter
- Counseling at a pregnancy care center
- Watching the children of some tired parents
- Sharing your home, food, resources, car and all that you call your own so that another might experience the reality of God's welcoming heart.
- Spontaneously inviting others for meals.

What would you add to the list? What practice could you possibly experiment with? _____

7. Enthusiasts: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration

Enthusiasts enjoy a celebratory form of worship as well as many of the more supernatural forms of faith. People with this spiritual temperament like to let go and experience God on the precipice of excitement and awe. Enthusiasts long to preserve the mystery of faith. They understand that there are certain things about God and Christianity that we simply can't fully understand. They are open to the spiritual world and believe in a God who is powerful and who acts.

Spiritual Practices

- Cultivating a spirit of gladness by daily rehearsing at dinner the goodness found in the day.
- Throwing a party to celebrate someone's worth even if it's not their birthday.
- Taking friends to a sunset and then afterward sharing what the sunset reminds you of.
- Writing a poem to express how you feel about God's presence in your life.

What would you add to the list? What practice could you possibly experiment with? _____

8. Contemplatives: Loving God through Adoration

The contemplative seeks to perform the first work of adoring God. God is known and described as the heavenly spouse in whom all the contemplative's delight is met. While some seek to serve the Lord, others seek to celebrate him, and still others seek to explain

him, the contemplative seeks to gaze lovingly into God's face and be caught up in the rapture of a lover's experience. Contemplatives live for the love of God. They want nothing more than some privacy and quiet to gaze upon the face of their heavenly lover and give all of themselves to God.

Spiritual Practices

- Breath prayer is a form of contemplative prayer linked to the rhythms of breathing.
- Repeating a simple one-sentence prayer that begins with a biblical name of God that is meaningful to you; follow the name with a word or a phrase expressing your deep God-given desire; connect the prayer to your breathing and return to it throughout the day until it becomes a soul reflex
- Saying a traditionally scriptural breath prayer known as the "Jesus Prayer": "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner" Breath prayers include phrases of Scripture: for example, "My soul glorifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46), "My soul finds rest in God alone" (Psalm 62:1); breath prayers can be short prayers of love and desire, for example, "Shepherd, lead me by still waters," or "Come Holy Spirit, come."
- Centering prayer is a form of contemplative prayer where the pray-er seeks to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the still center of Christ's presence.
- Waiting before the Lord in open attentiveness.

What would you add to the list? What practice could you possibly experiment with? _____

9. Intellectuals: Loving God with the mind

Intellectuals feel that to be growing in Christ, they need to have their mind stimulated with Scriptures and other reading materials and intellectual pursuits. They need to be challenged, if they are not learning new things about God then their relationship with him feels stagnant. Intellectuals remind us of the high calling of loving God with our mind.

Spiritual Practices

- Focusing attention on Scripture in an attempt to understand and apply truth to every part of my life.
- Practicing Lectio Divina or listening to a Lectio Divina podcast

- Reading through the Bible in one year.
- Weekly memorizing Scripture, hymns, poems, quotes, etc.

What would you add to the list? What practice could you possibly experiment with? _____

©2016 The V3 Movement (BGAV) JR Woodward & Dan White Jr. The ideas and information in this document are the intellectual property of the BGAV and the accompanied names, and are not to be shared, copied, sold, etc. with other parties without permission from The V3 Movement. * This article was created with excerpts from *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God* by Gary L Thomas