Spiritual Pathways Information

Have you recognized that people connect with God in different ways? A book, Sacred Pathways, written by Gary Thomas, provides nine labels for some of these ways, and shows you the value as well as the dangers that are involved with each.

Why these labels are helpful...

This information can help you engage in deeper relationship with God. By understanding the way(s) you connect most with God, you can engage more clearly as well as avoid potential dangers. This self examination also helps point out the ways we don’t connect with God so that we may grow in those areas. Just because a way to worship God is not something we gravitate to, does not mean we should not embrace it and grow.

A very important overall goal...

While this self examination will help us to grow and become more effective in our connection and relationship with God, it is not just for our own benefit. This is an exercise to help us become better at connecting to God personally so we can become better at connecting with each other as a church.

How it works.

Take the assessment. The assessment will ask you to score 5 statements for each category. The score you create allows you to see which categories are your strengths and which are your weaknesses.

Online assessment — [https://groupleaders.org/spiritual-pathways-assessment](https://groupleaders.org/spiritual-pathways-assessment)

Next, use the descriptions of the 9 ways people connect (worship) God so that you understand how the author has come to define them. With a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each category, the assessment will help a person become more effective at growing in faith.

Much of this information is copied or altered from the Chi Alpha Discipleship Tool, a online PDF found at; [https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/2988a589/files/uploaded/sacred-pathways.pdf](https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/2988a589/files/uploaded/sacred-pathways.pdf)
Who Are Naturalists?

- Naturalists connect with God in the “cathedral” of the out-of-doors.
- Naturalists are motivated and inspired in their faith when studying biology and ecology.
- Naturalists gain joy and reverence for God when they interact with the beauty and complexity of the natural world.
- Scriptural references that speak to a naturalist are found in places like Genesis where God’s first connection with man is in a garden, along with Psalm 19, Psalm 23 and Romans 1:20.

What Are Naturalist Pitfalls?

INDIVIDUALISM: Jesus spent time outdoors to prepare to go back into the world. We must make sure we are not using creation to escape the duties of following Jesus.

SPIRITUAL DELUSION: Anything “received” on a walk with God should not be considered authoritative, but merely advice that must be tested. The Bible is our only sure guide. Satan can provide counterfeit experiences that can lead us astray.

IDOLIZING NATURE: Be wary of the heresy of pantheism – the worship of nature. It is not true that God is in all of nature, or that nature is God. The Bible teaches, “the earth is the Lord’s.” Pantheism twists it to “The earth is the Lord.” Nevertheless, do not allow the lie of pantheism to rob you of worshiping God through an appreciation of what He has made.

Naturalist Worship Worthy of Mention:

- Consider the greatness of creation – space, stars, mountains, sky, and oceans all portray the immense power, wisdom and goodness of God.
- Consider the variety of creation – plant and animal life have more variety than we could ever examine in a lifetime. God is capable of doing a multitude of things at once.
- Consider the beauty of creation – beauty in God’s world comes in many shapes, colors, shades. God’s beauty cannot be revealed through one form.
- Consider the abundance of creation - count stars in sky, sand on shore, trees in forest. We serve a God of plenty whose love and mercy are inexhaustible.
- Spend time in nature and worship God within your enjoyment.
SENSATES: Loving God with the Senses

Who Are Senates?

- A sensate is moved by sensuous worship more than anything else (the five senses of taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight).
- When worship is provided through intellectual information, it cripples a sensates ability to connect.
- Ex: Ezekiel feels wind, sees lightning, hears the sound of wings, and is asked to eat a scroll that tastes sweet. After all this he is stunned for 7 days. Ezekiel 1, 3
- Ex: John is overwhelmed by sights and sounds as he writes to the 7 churches of Revelation.
- Sometimes experiencing God comes with overwhelming stimulation.
- Religious exercises without ways to engage the senses are stale.
- Using our bodies to glorify God is a much better response than denying the role of the body in worship, and then turning around and using the body in areas that lead to sin.

What Are Sensate Pitfalls?

WORSHIPPING WITHOUT CONVICTION OR CONTENT: Words may be sung with no real emotion; the words we sing don’t really matter. Music can make us feign a commitment that just isn’t there, causing us to become callous, insincere believers.

IDOLIZING BEAUTY: Someone could leave a very beautiful service satisfied by the sensuous experience without having entered the true presence of God.

WORSHIPPING WORSHIP: Sensory stimulation is not the same thing as a true commitment of the will. Be cautious of using your senses in a way that causes you to worship the act of worship.

Sensate Worship Worthy of Mention:

SOUND: “Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name” Psalm 96. Use musical instruments – Psalms 147, 149, 150. Read the Scriptures out loud. We often have our hearts and thoughts challenged when we hear the Word of God.

SMELL: Burning incense does not wipe out sin or find favor with God, but it can help us pray. It is a means, not an end.

TOUCH: Holding a paper clip while you pray could help you focus on a marriage that is falling apart; a rubber band could help you pray for a pliable heart. Carry a nail in your pocket on Good Friday to reaffirm your commitment. There are numerous ways this may help you.

SIGHT: Check out the religious art of Rembrandt and others. We may find that looking at someone or a picture of someone while we pray for them increases our ability to pray.

TASTE: Taste some salt as you pray for your influence in a non-Christian environment. Jesus says He is the bread of life; remind yourself of this when you taste it.
TRADITIONALISTS: Loving God Through Ritual & Symbol

Who Are Traditionalists?

- A traditionalist enjoys rituals practiced throughout church history—God invented and sometimes commanded religious practices.
- Religious practices are a way traditionalists realize Biblical truths.
- God knows our reaction to symbols can reveal our hearts for Him. A traditionalist finds reverence in the symbols found in rituals.
- Peter and John observed the ritual of regular, set times of prayer. Paul willingly underwent the ritual of purification. Abraham and Moses built alters.
- The NT teaches no one will be saved through religion, but also clarifies that Christians can be nourished by certain religious practices.

What Are Traditional Pitfalls?

SERVING GOD WITHOUT KNOWING GOD: Religion can help faith, but it doesn’t replace faith. Remember the truth of “Christianity is a relationship, not a religion.”

NEGLECTING SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS: It is not enough for us to practice ritual; we must reach out and minister to others. Amos 5:21-24. Jesus says that religion without substance is hypocrisy.

JUDGING OTHERS: Religious practice can erode church unity if it is used to criticize, measure, or divide. Colossians 2:16-17.

REPEATING MECHANICALLY: Without genuine thought and attention, ritual becomes an empty exercise that fills us with insincerity.

Traditional Worship Worthy of Mention:

RITUAL:
- People in church history read Psalms 50, 62, 90, 103, & 140 daily or regularly.
- Create an intercessory prayer list, include writing and repeating your own prayers.
- Enjoy the rituals your church provides.

SYMBOL:
- Symbols can help us live rightly and stay focused. Cross jewelry, rings and other symbols can be effective reminders to practice holiness and pray.
- Christian symbols and art in your home or office may be of great help in your life of faith.

SACRIFICE:
- Fasting during Lent (or practice giving something up at any time, to connect to God, for a season).
- Give up something permanently or dedicate something to the Lord’s use.
- Give your money sacrificially.
ASCETICS: Loving God in Solitude & Simplicity

Who Are Ascetics?
- The ascetic enjoys solitude, austerity, simplicity, commitment, discipline, severity, and solitude. An ascetic enjoys many things found within the monastic lifestyle.
- Ascetics are often distracted by their senses so they prefer to shut them out. Naturalists may seek out a beautiful lake; an Ascetic may seek a barren wasteland.
- John the Baptist lived a solitary and ascetic life.
- Jesus fasted for 40 days in solitude, and had moments of solitude. Mark 1:35; Matthew 26:36. Jesus shows us that prayer is often done alone in solitude.
- Ascetics stress deeds before words and are strict with themselves but treat others with great gentleness. They are strict because they want to reserve their time and energy to passionately pursue God.

What Are Ascetic Pitfalls?
OVEREMPHASIZING PERSONAL PIETY: Actions of piety must be balanced with reaching out to others. God calls people to solitude as well as actions of compassion.
SEEKING TO GAIN GOD’S FAVOR: Trying to earn God’s approval or forgiveness by developing disciplined commitments for God is damaging. There is nothing we can do that can make God love us any more.

Ascetic Worship Worthy of Mention:
SOLITUDE:
- Create a prayer room in your home.
- Arrive early to work or class to be alone.
SIMPLECTICITY: Examine your home and possessions to look for ways to simplify your life/eliminate distractions.
STRICTNESS:
- Fast—deny yourself some pleasure, entertainment, or comfort, and then focus on purity of mind and heart.
- Rise earlier than normal one day per week.
- Try to be silent for a few hours at a time.
- Take a personal retreat for several hours, an afternoon, a day, weekend or a week at a time.
- Endure hardship rather than fight it; don’t choose to be pampered.
- When difficulties come, embrace them, learn from them, and mature in you faith.
- Dedication and disciplined practice is more important than sleep, food or entertainment.
- Some ascetics have found the middle of the night to be one of their best times of prayer & worship.
ACTIVISTS: Loving God Through Confrontation

Who Are Activists?

- Activists are spiritually nourished through the battle, mainly found in social, cultural and political topics.
- An activist is not often deterred by confrontation.
- An activist wants to right the wrongs they see in the world.

What Are Activist Pitfalls?

BECOMING JUDGMENTAL: Maturity is displayed in fighting sin, coupled with compassion toward other sinners. A self-righteous, critical attitude is not a reflection of the compassion of Christ. Matthew 7:2-4

AMBITION ISSUES AND SEXUAL FAILURE:

- There seems to be a relationship between a person’s ambition and sexual temptation, especially in men.
- The ambitious person often struggles with selfishness.
- The very qualities that help you succeed as an activist may tempt you to fail as a Christian.

ELITISM AND RESENTMENT:

- Activism can lead to emotional depletion; finding ways to be filled and renewed spiritually is necessary.
- An activist may enjoy confrontation and not understand why others may fear it thus condemning others for their lack of participation.
- Often, activists have little appreciation for other spiritual gifts or callings.

PREOCCUPATION WITH ACTIVITY AND STATISTICS:

- For an activist, we must leave the results to God or we’ll be consumed and driven by success rather than by the Holy Spirit. Beware: some activists just cannot accept defeat.
- Activists should stand on a stool with three legs: sincerity, effort, and thoughtful prayer.

LACK OF EMPHASIS ON PERSONAL SANCTITY: “There is only one kind of person who can fight the Lord’s battles in...a proper way, and that is the person who...is unbelligerent. ... The world must observe that, when we must differ with each other as true Christians, we do it not because we love... the bullfight, but because we must for God’s sake.” F. Schaeffer

Activist Worship Worthy of Mention:

WRITING: Many writers have changed the destinies of millions through the written word, i.e. Harriet Beecher Stowe.

SOCIAL REFORM:

- John Wesley said there is “no holiness but social holiness...and to turn Christianity into a solitary religion is to destroy it.”
- Charles Finney refused to baptize Christians who still believed in slavery.
- The Bible calls for us to reach out to less fortunate. James 1:27; Matthew 25:35-36.
- To act, one must be fully informed, prayerfully decisive, and dedicated.
- Activists must also actively confront error and evil. Sometimes truth equals confrontation.

PRAYER AND ACTIVISTS: Of all the pathways, prayer is crucial to the activist. Cultivate an active prayer life!

- Prayer Walks: Intercede for a dorm floor or classroom building by walking around it in silent prayer.
- Pray for unreached people groups with a map out or the newspaper.

PROCESSIONS: Engage in Christians marching for causes that honor Jesus. This was very popular during the Baroque period 1550-1750.
CAREGIVERS: Loving God by Loving Others

Who Are Caregivers?

- A caregiver is concerned and active in meeting the needs of others.
- A caregiver finds satisfaction in responding to the needs of others.
- The parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us that attending to spiritual concerns is no excuse for refusing to get our hands dirty.
- A few scriptural references to caregiving are Philippians 2:4, Hebrews 6:10 and James 1:27.

What Are Caregiving Pitfalls?

JUDGING: Caregiving is not a license to judge others who serve God in different ways and it is not for us to judge the validity of someone else’s worship. (Martha & Mary)

SERVING OURSELVES THROUGH SERVING OTHERS:

- Some people serve others for self-validation and so others will need them in return.
- Selfish caregiving can be something that is taking instead of giving.

NEGLECTING THOSE CLOSEST TO US: In our zeal to love others, we must remember that God makes home the priority. See 1 Timothy 5:8. Don’t neglect your spouse or family while you save the world.

Caregiving Worship Worthy of Mention:

The caregiver temperament has many different avenues of loving God through serving others:

- Nursing sick people
- Visiting the elderly
- Repairing things: house, car, and more.
- Helping a friend through a personal crisis
- Helping someone battle substance abuse
- Helping an illiterate person learn to read
- Donating time at a battered women’s shelter
- Counseling at a pregnancy care center
- Making recordings for the blind
- Researching a cure for a disease
- Helping somebody with technology issues
- Watching the children of some tired parents
- Giving free cookies out on campus (or to the youth group!)
- Raking leaves and other physical task needs of elderly
- Providing free firewood for needy
- Shoveling snow
- Removing trash from dorm rooms on your floor
ENTHUSIASTS: Loving God with Mystery & Celebration

Who Are Enthusiasts?

- Enthusiasts enjoy celebratory worship and many of the more supernatural forms of faith. They expect God to move in supernatural ways.
- People with this spiritual temperament like to let go and experience God on the edge of excitement and awe.
- In a cynical world, enthusiasts point toward faith, mystery, and expectancy. When the situation seems impossible, enthusiasts say, “Now God’s really going to move!”
- Sometimes God gives enthusiasts something to say that is helpful and insightful and then they think, “Where in the world did that come from?”
- Sometimes a prayer is answered in a way that makes coincidence seem impossible.

What Are Enthusiast Pitfalls?

SEEKING EXPERIENCES FOR EXPERIENCES’ SAKE:

- Beware – Many spiritual manifestations are expressly forbidden for a Christian. Duet. 18:10-12
  The enemy can use the enthusiasts ways of worship to trick Christians.
- Be careful to remain true to seeking God rather than searching for new experiences.
- Remember, celebratory worship must still include reverence.

JUDGEMENT:

- Enthusiasts can be judgmental when others don’t meet their level of expecting God to answer prayers.
- Others reluctance to celebrate enthusiastically is not wrong or a lack of maturity.

BEING INDEPENDENT:

- Enthusiasts need to be rooted in a strong church to help them interpret their encounters with God.
- Never accept a dream that clashes with the revelation of Scripture. Dreams can bring insight into a situation, or give you a warning, but never make a major decision based solely on a dream.

EQUATING “GOOD FEELINGS” WITH “GOOD WORSHIP”: Feelings come and go. Enthusiasts shouldn’t apologize for enjoying them, but they should avoid becoming dependent upon them.

Enthusiast Worship Worthy of Mention:

- Expect God to give you specific answers to specific prayers. Journaling can help keep balance as well as motivate praise when specific answers come.
- Believe God to heal or respond in a supernatural way in real situations in your life.
- Step out in faith. Whether it’s building a business, writing a poem, planting a garden, painting a picture, creating something can be a profoundly holy experience.
- Note: For some who have lost their ability to celebrate, spending time with children might be a good way to recapture the joy and wonder of your faith.
CONTEMPLATIVES: Loving God Through Adoration

Who Are Contemplatives?

- The contemplative seeks to worship God within the truth of His love and likes to be caught up in the rapture of God’s love for them.
- A contemplative finds strong connection to God with focused attention on their one on one relationship with Jesus and His love for them.
- “There are so many Christians who have practically no idea of the immense love of God for them, and of the power of that love to do them good, to bring them happiness.” – Thomas Merto
- Contemplatives remind us that each Christian can do one thing that nobody else can: give our personal love and affection to God so strongly it burns all other bonds. Duet. 7:7-8 & Psalm 63

What Are Contemplative Pitfalls?

LOSING BALANCE: Beware that your love for God can prevent enjoying the company of others or creation.
BEING MISUNDERSTOOD: Martha, a caregiver, was rebuked for judging Mary, a contemplative.
CREATING A VACUUM: Be cautious of practices that speak of emptying yourself and creating a vacuum. A Christian wants to be filled with the Holy Spirit, not emptied out.

Contemplative Worship Worthy of Mention:

THE JESUS PRAYER:
- Contemplatives often use the Jesus Prayer, when they are anxious, frightened, uptight, spiritually dry, or being tempted. The purpose of this prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” is to practice the presence of God.

SECRET ACTS OF DEVOTION:
- A secret act of devotion is something contemplatives do so they can connect with the love of God. Examples include: anonymous gift of cash to someone in need, a poem written to God - then burned, a song sung only in the presence of God, taking time for intensive prayer for others with fasting.

CENTERING PRAYER:
- Choose a word [(e. Jesus or Father, etc.) as a focus for thoughtful prayer. Repeat the word silently in your mind for a set amount of time (say, 15 minutes). Fill your mind with thoughts of Jesus, or love, joy, or peace. The goal is not to create a spiritual experience, but to simply rest in and enjoy the presence of God.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS:
- Simply read through the events of Christ’s crucifixion, i.e. death sentence given to Jesus, Gethsemane, women mourning for Jesus, being stripped, beaten, mocked, nailed, Jesus speaking to John about Mary, dying, removed from cross, laid in tomb. At each point pause and picture the truth of Scripture this episode highlights.
INTELLECTUALS: Loving God with the Mind

Who Are Intellectuals?
- When intellectual’s minds are awakened and they understand something new about God, His ways, or His qualities, their adoration is unleashed.
- If intellectuals are not learning new things about God, their relationship with Him feels stagnant.
- The intellectual likes spreading the Gospel to the world not just in the way they live but also in the way they think deeply.
- A intellectual likes the study of God’s word so they can conform their thoughts to the thoughts of God and enable right living.
- Note: A vast majority of the difficulties Christians experience in life are caused because we don’t understand the Scriptures well enough.

What Are Intellectual Pitfalls?

LOVING CONTROVERSY:
- Discussions aimed at being right rather than caring for the welfare of the other person is not Godly. 1Peter3:15, 1 Timothy 1:4, 6:4-5; 2 Timothy 2:23-25

KNOWING RATHER THAN DOING:
- Knowing what is right is not a substitute for doing what is right.
  - According to the book of Proverbs, the truly wise person is someone who actively applies the ways of righteousness which they have studied.

BEING PROUD:
- Pride is a common failing among intellectuals. It is demonstrated by the common desire to correct virtually everyone.

Intellectual Worship Worthy of Mention:
- Consider getting an MA from a seminary after undergrad studies.
- Many seminaries offer one-week courses during the summer – this could set your study agenda for the entire year following.
- Pick one topic a year for in-depth study. (Think of how much stronger you could be as a Christian by doing this.)
- Many courses are available through audio or video formats.
- The five basic building blocks for a Christian mind: church history, biblical studies, systematic theology, ethics, and apologetics. These are each excellent topics to feed an intellectuals soul.
- Note: Intellectual pursuit has played a key role in advancing God’s work throughout history.