

SPIRITUAL STYLES: THE NINE SACRED PATHWAYS¹

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This resource is designed to help you discover how you naturally connect to God, what your spiritual style is, and it also provides 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 spiritual style test
2. Identify your spiritual style(s) below
3. Try out some of the spiritual practices suggested for your style

Sacred Pathway Test

To find out your spiritual style, take the test at: <https://www.soulshpherd.org/sacred-pathways-survey/>

¹ Adapted from <https://annarborvineyard.org/participate/spiritual-formation/spiritual-styles-the-nine-sacred-pathways/>

The Nine Sacred Pathways

After you have identified your sacred pathway, read the descriptions of that style from the list below and see if this sounds like you. Below each description are some spiritual practices that fit naturally with each spiritual style (derived from the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* by Adele Calhoun.) The practices you can try are not limited to the ones listed. For more ideas you might like to check out the resources at the end of this document.

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

Prayer walk

- Slowly and deliberately walk through places for the purpose of intentional and listening prayer.
- Walking through your neighbourhood, 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.
- Becoming quiet and listening to God’s prayer for a particular place.

More resources on prayer walking can be found at WayMakers: www.waymakers.org

Practicing the Presence

- Developing a rhythm of living that brings God to mind throughout the day wherever you are.
- Intentionally recollecting yourself before God as you engage in the activities duties of life.
- Seeking to see others through the eyes of God.
- Stopping throughout the day to listen to God.
- Remaining open and teachable at all moments.

Unplugging

- Unplugging electronic devices that interrupt relationships.
- Refraining from use of email.
- Devoting time and attention to others without interruption.
- Communicating face to face rather than virtually.
- Settling into uninterrupted quiet with Jesus.
- Freedom from the compulsive and demanding nature of the technological communication and its toll on the soul.

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

Celebration

Celebration is a way of engaging in actions that orient the spirit toward worship, praise and thanksgiving

- Pursuing activities that bring the heart deep gladness and revelling in them before the Lord including: spending time with others, sharing meals, working, serving, worshiping, laughing, listening to music, dancing.
- Enjoying every good and perfect gift as coming from God.
- Cultivating a spirit of gladness.
- Taking yourself less seriously.
- Having holiday traditions that guide your celebration.
- Seek out church worship and social events.

Praying in colour

- Getting prayerfully creative and using doodles, colour, words, pictures as a way of expressing what is in your heart and seeking connection with God
- It is a visual, concrete and lasting way to pray
- It is useful if there are no words for prayer

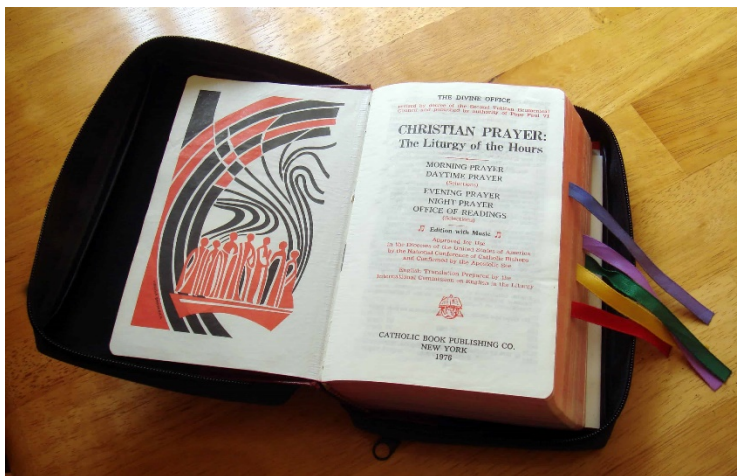
More resources on praying in colour can be found at: www.prayingincolor.com

Communion

The Lord's Supper celebrates God's redemptive plan through the sacrificial death of Jesus. Through this meal of bread and wine (or grape juice) we join ourselves to Christ and feed on him in our hearts through faith. Includes:

- Partaking in communion engages the senses.
- Keeping company with Jesus no matter what happens and having nourishment for the journey.
- Developing a deeper love for Jesus.
- More fully appreciating Jesus' sacrificial love for you.
- Appreciating the diversity of the other believers who take of the Lord's Supper with you.

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

Liturgical prayer is a written or memorized prayer that serves as a framework for individual or corporate worship and devotion. Includes:

- Praying prayers written by others.
- Praying or singing Scripture as a part of worship (e.g. the Lord's Prayer, psalms, responsive readings, doxologies etc).
- Praying prayers of the church that have come down to us from the past.
- Praying the Liturgy of the Hours.
- Praying the prayers written for each season of the church year.
- Keeping company with Jesus through the prayers and writings of others.

Try the Divine Hours at: <http://annarborvineyard.org/tdh/tdh.cfm>

Habit of prayer- fixed hour

Fixed-hour prayers call for regular and consistent patterns of attending to God throughout the day. Includes:

- Interrupting work at set times for prayer.
- Following the prayers in the Liturgy of the Hours.
- Following a personal liturgy for prayer at set hours of the day.
- Stopping at the top of every hour for prayer.
- Keeping company with Jesus throughout the hours of the day.
- Developing the ability to hear a word from God in the midst of daily activities.

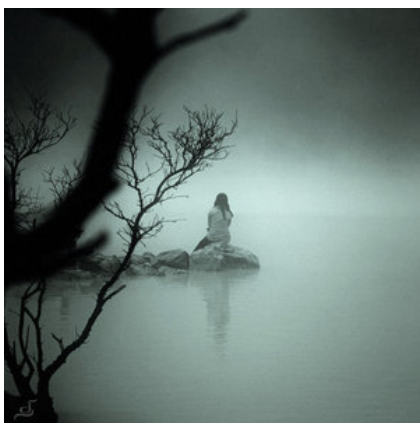
Try the Divine Hours at: <http://annarborvineyard.org/tdh/tdh.cfm>

Fasting

A fast 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. Includes:

- 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.
- Abstaining from habits or comforts in order to give God undivided attention.
- 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.
- Repenting and waiting on God.
- Seeking strength to persevere, obey and serve.
- Overcoming addictions, compulsions, whims and cravings.
- Keeping company with Jesus in relinquishment.

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

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. Includes:

- 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.
- Exercising without attending to noise; listening to God.
- Having personal retreats of silence.

Solitude

The practice of solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God. Includes:

- Giving God time and space that is not in competition with social contact, noise or stimulation.
- Taking a retreat.
- Observing Sabbath refreshment by abstaining from constant interaction with others, information and activities.
- Communing with God alone while you walk or run by yourself
- Practicing disciplines alone: study, prayer, examen, journaling and so forth.

Simplicity

To uncomplicated and untangle my life so that I can focus on what really matters. Includes:

- Assessing the things and activities that keep life convoluted, complicated and confusing; working to simplify these things.
- Setting priorities that flow from loving God above all else.
- Downsizing possessions.
- Eating simple foods.
- Enjoying simple pleasures that require no expense.
- Removing distractions and preoccupations with things.

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 modelled 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

Justice seeks to help others through correcting and redressing wrongs. It treats others fairly and shows no favouritism. Includes:

- Being responsible to God and others.
- Being a good steward of what you own.
- Supporting just causes with time, action and financial support.
- Treating others impartially and fairly.
- Providing for the poor, needy and oppressed through the means available to you.
- Volunteering for food-bank work and ministries that serve needs in the community.
- Refusing to buy products of companies that take advantage of the poor
- Volunteer with the Homeless Ministry

Walking prayer- intercede for a neighbourhood or town by walking through it

- Slowly and deliberately walk through places for the purpose of intentional and listening prayer.
- 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.
- Walking through your neighbourhood, 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.
- Becoming quiet and listening to God's prayer for a particular place.

*Intercessory **prayer***

Intercessory prayer invites us into God's care and concern for us, our families and friends, and the entire world. No concern is too trivial for God to receive with loving attention. However, intercession is not a means of manipulating heaven into doing our will. It is a way we become aware of God's prayer for a person and join in that intercession. Includes:

- Going to prayer meetings.
- Contributing to prayer chains, prayer lists
- Going on prayer walks.
- Participating in healing prayer.
- Praying for the world, for peace, for God's kingdom to come.
- Praying for personal concerns, tasks, transactions and relationships.

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

Service is a way of offering resources, time, treasure, influence and expertise for the care, protection, justice, and nurture of others. Includes:

- Mentoring, gifts of mercy and helps.
- Using your influence to better the lives of others.
- Using your gifts to build the kingdom of God.
- Doing service projects.
 - Serving the homeless
 - "Adopting" a prisoner
 - Helping a friend through a personal crisis
 - Lending money
 - Helping somebody battling substance abuse
 - Helping an illiterate person learn to read
 - Donating time at a battered women's shelter
 - Counselling at a pregnancy care centre
 - Working in a soup kitchen
 - Fixing somebody's car
 - Repairing a house
 - Helping somebody reconfigure their computer system
 - Watching the children of some tired parents
 - Volunteer with the Homeless Ministry

Hospitality

Hospitality creates a safe, open space where a friend or stranger can enter and experience the welcoming spirit of Christ in another. Includes:

- 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.

- Reaching out to and receiving the stranger or enemy with the hope that he or she might be transformed into a friend.
- Loving, not entertaining the guest.
- Welcoming others into your clique, club, group, life.
- Spontaneously inviting others for meals.
- Reaching out beyond your nuclear family to include others.
- Hosting exchange students.

Mentoring

To accompany and encourage others to grow in their God-given potential. Includes:

- Guidance, encouragement, and modelling given by a more mature believer to a younger one.
- Training that equips another to better use their gifts.
- Building authentic relationships that provide support, encouragement and help in specific areas.
- Providing or receiving influence, instruction, training and perspective.

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

Celebration

Celebration is a way of engaging in actions that orient the spirit toward worship, praise and thanksgiving. Includes:

- Pursuing activities that bring the heart deep gladness and revelling in them before the Lord including: spending time with others, sharing meals, working, serving, worshiping, laughing, listening to music, dancing.

- Enjoying every good and perfect gift as coming from God.
- Cultivating a spirit of gladness.
- Taking yourself less seriously
- Having holiday traditions that guide your celebration
- Seek out church worship and social events.

Conversational Prayer

Talking naturally and unself-consciously to God in group prayer times with others. Includes:

- Attending prayer meetings
- Having short, vocal prayer in planned and unplanned venues.
- Praying spontaneously with others around specific topics as they come to mind

Worship

Worship happens whenever we intentionally cherish God and value him above all else in life.

Worship reveals what is important to us. Includes:

- Focusing on and responding to God with your whole being.
- Offering my body as a “spiritual act of worship.”
- Regularly engaging with a worshiping community.
- Seeking first the kingdom of God, keeping secondary things second.

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

Breath prayer is a form of contemplative prayer linked to the rhythms of breathing. Includes:

- 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

Centering prayer is a form of contemplative prayer where the pray-er seeks to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the still centre of Christ’s presence. Includes:

- Resting in and gazing on Christ.
- Waiting before the Lord in open attentiveness.
- Attending to the presence of the spirit within.
- Taming scattered thoughts by attending to Christ through the use of a prayer word.
- Releasing distractions into the hands of God and returning constantly to his presence within.

Solitude

The practice of solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God. Includes:

- Giving God time and space that is not in competition with social contact, noise or stimulation.
- Taking a retreat.
- Observing Sabbath refreshment by abstaining from constant interaction with others, information and activities.
- Communing with God alone while you walk or run by yourself
- Practicing disciplines alone: study, prayer, journaling and so forth.

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

Bible study

Bible study involves engaging the mind and focusing attention on Scripture in an attempt to understand and apply truth to every part of my life. Includes:

- Attending to biblical instruction with an open mind and heart in order to grow in love and understanding of the truth.
- Systematically studying Scripture to gain the big picture of what God is doing on planet earth.
- Using study guides, manuscript studies, small group Bible studies etc.

Memorization

Memorization is the process of continually remembering the words, truths and images God uses to shape us. Memorization provides us with a store of learning, which can be accessed anywhere and anytime. Includes:

- Memorizing Scripture, hymns, poems, quotes, etc.
- Rereading portions of Scripture until they are committed to memory.
- Memorizing Scripture verses that clearly reveal God's plan of salvation.
- Memorizing books of the Bible, particular dates and times as well as where various verses are found.
- Learning by heart portions of Scripture that encourage you when you are tempted.

Witness

To witness means modelling and telling of the difference Jesus has made in one's life.

- Living in the presence of Christ in a way the world finds compelling and desirable.
- Intentionally engaging in life with people of different beliefs.
- Serving others to investigate the claims of Christ and the community of faith.
- Sharing the good news of Jesus at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way.
- Leading a Bible study with God seekers
- Comfortably expressing my Christian journey with words that appropriately connect with others.

Resources

- Sacred Pathways by Gary Thomas. Available as a book and audio book.
- Sacred Pathways Study Guide. Available for free from <https://garythomas.com/books/sacred-pathways/>
- The 3 Colors of Your Spirituality. Available from <https://toolshed.ncd-australia.org.au/catalog/21>

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