

MY SACRED PATHWAY

We all have a spiritual temperament that mostly influences how we best connect with God to worship and to grow. In the following statements please indicate which answers best describe you and how you relate to God.

AREA	Never True	Seldom True	Occasionally True	Very True
1. I feel closest to God when I'm surrounded by what he has made—the mountains, the forests, or the sea.				
2. I feel closest to God when I'm in a church that allows my senses to come alive—when I can see, smell, hear and almost taste his majesty.				
3. I feel closest to God when I'm participating in a familiar form of worship that has memories dating back to my childhood. Rituals and traditions move me more than anything else.				
4. I feel closest to God when I am alone and there is nothing to distract me from focusing on his presence.				
5. I feel closest to God when I'm cooperating with him in standing up for his justice: writing letters to government officials and newspaper editors, picketing at an abortion clinic, urging people to vote, or becoming familiar with current issues.				
6. I feel closest to God when I see him in the needy, the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned. I feel God's presence most strongly when I am sitting quietly beside the bed of someone who is lonely or ill or taking a meal to someone in need. You can count on me to offer a ride or volunteer for helping activities.				
7. I feel closest to God when my heart is sent soaring and I feel like I want to burst, worship God all day long, and shout out his Name. Celebrating God and his love is my favorite form of worship.				
8. I feel closest to God when my emotions are awakened, when God quietly touches my heart, tells me that he loves me, and makes me feel like I'm his closest friend. I would rather be alone with God, contemplating his love, than participating in a formal liturgy or being distracted by a walk outside.				
9. I feel closest to God when I learn something new about him that I didn't understand before. My mind needs to be stimulated. It's very important to me that I know exactly what I believe.				
10. I feel cut off if I have to spend too much time indoors, just listening to speakers or singing songs. Nothing makes me feel closer to God than being outside.				
11. I enjoy attending a "high church" service with incense and formal Communion or Eucharist.				

	Never True	Seldom True	Occasionally True	Very True
12. Individualism within the church is a real danger. Christianity is a corporate faith, and most of our worship should have a corporate expression.				
13. I would describe my faith as more “internal” than “external.”				
14. I get very frustrated if I see apathetic Christians who don’t become active. I want to drop everything else I’m doing and help the church overcome its apathy.				
15. I grow weary of Christians who spend their time singing songs while a sick neighbor goes without a hot meal or a family in need doesn’t get help fixing their car.				
16. God is an exciting God, and we should be excited about worshipping him. I don’t understand how some Christians can say they love God, and then act like they’re going to a funeral whenever they walk into church.				
17. The most difficult times in my faith are when I can’t feel God’s presence within me.				
18. I get frustrated when the church focuses too much on feelings and spiritual experience. Of far more importance is the need to understand the Christian faith and have proper doctrine.				
19. I would prefer to worship God by spending an hour beside a small brook than by participating in a group service.				
20. I’d have a difficult time worshipping in a church building that is plain and lacks a sense of awe or majesty. Beauty is very important to me, and I have a difficult time worshipping through second-rate Christian art or music.				
21. The words <i>tradition</i> and <i>history</i> are very appealing to me.				
22. The words <i>silence</i> , <i>solitude</i> , and <i>discipline</i> are very appealing to me.				
23. The words <i>courageous</i> , <i>confrontation</i> , and <i>social activism</i> are very appealing to me.				
24. The words <i>service</i> and <i>compassion</i> are very appealing to me.				
25. The words <i>celebration</i> and <i>joy</i> are very appealing to me.				
26. The words <i>lover</i> , <i>intimacy</i> , and <i>heart</i> are very appealing to me.				
27. The words <i>concepts</i> and <i>truth</i> are very appealing to me.				
28. If I could escape to a garden to pray on a cold day, walk through a meadow on a warm day, and take a trip by myself to the mountains on another day, I would be very happy.				
29. The words <i>sensuous</i> , <i>colorful</i> , and <i>aromatic</i> are very appealing to me.				
30. Participating in a formal liturgy or prayer-book service, developing symbols that I could place in my car, home, or office, and developing a Christian calendar for our family to follow are activities that I would enjoy.				

	Never True	Seldom True	Occasionally True	Very True
31. Taking an overnight retreat by myself at a monastery where I could spend large amounts of time alone in a small room, praying to God and studying his Word, and fasting for one or more days are all activities I would enjoy.				
32. Activities like confronting a social evil, attending a meeting to challenge the new curriculum before the local school board, and volunteering on a political campaign are important to me.				
33. I sense God's power when I am counseling a friend who has lost a job, preparing meals for or fixing the car of a family in need, or spending a week at an orphanage in Mexico.				
34. I would enjoy attending a workshop on learning to worship through dance or attending several worship sessions with contemporary music. I expect that God is going to move in some unexpected ways.				
35. I really enjoy having thirty minutes of uninterrupted time a day to sit in quiet prayer and "hold hands" with God, writing love letters to him and enjoying his presence.				
36. I feel close to God when I participate in several hours of uninterrupted study time—reading God's Word or good Christian books and then perhaps having an opportunity to teach (or participate in a discussion with) a small group.				
37. A book called <i>Nature's Sanctuaries: A Picturebook</i> would be appealing to me.				
38. A book called <i>The Beauty of Worship</i> would be appealing to me.				
39. A book titled <i>Symbolism and Liturgy in Personal Worship</i> would be appealing to me.				
40. I would enjoy reading the book <i>A Place Apart: Monastic Prayer and Practice for Everyone</i> .				
41. The book written by Frank Schaeffer, <i>A Time for Anger</i> , would be an important book for me to read.				
42. A book entitled <i>99 Ways to Help Your Neighbor</i> would be very appealing to me.				
43. I would enjoy reading the book <i>The Mystery and Excitement of Walking with God</i> .				
44. I would enjoy reading <i>The Transforming Friendship</i> .				
45. A book on church dogmatics would be appealing to me.				
46. Seeing God's beauty in nature is more moving to me than understanding new concepts, participating in a formal religious service, or participating in social causes.				
47. I would really enjoy using drawing exercises or art to improve my prayer life.				
48. I would really enjoy developing a personal rule (or ritual) of prayer.				

	Never True	Seldom True	Occasionally True	Very True
49. I would really enjoy spending time on a night watch, taking a short vow of silence, simplifying my life.				
50. I would like to awaken the church from its apathy.				
51. I would rather nurse someone to health or help someone repair their house than teach an adult Sunday school class, go on a prayer and fasting retreat, or take a lonely walk in the woods.				
52. I spend more money on music and worship tapes than on books.				
53. When I think of God, I think of love, friendship, and adoration more than anything else.				
54. I spend more money on books than music tapes.				

PATHWAY ANALYSIS

Record your response using the chart below. Enter the numerical value of your response in each statement's proper box.

Never True = 1; Seldom True = 2; Occasionally True = 3; Very True = 4

Now add the nine horizontal numbers recorded on each. Place the sum in the "TOTAL" column.

ROW	VALUES OF ANSWERS						TOTAL	PATH
A	1	10	19	28	37	46		Naturalist
B	2	11	20	29	38	47		Sensate
C	3	12	21	30	39	48		Traditionalist
D	4	13	22	31	40	49		Ascetic
E	5	14	23	32	41	50		Activist
F	6	15	24	33	42	51		Caregiver
G	7	16	25	34	43	52		Enthusiast
H	8	17	26	35	44	53		Contemplative
I	9	18	27	36	45	54		Intellectual

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SACRED PATHWAY

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.” His promise in John 15:5 reminds us that if we stay in close connection with him he will infuse our leadership with power, creativity, courage, and whatever else it takes for us to bear fruit for the glory of God.

Just as different leaders have many different personalities and combinations of gifts, so they have many different spiritual pathways. God makes each person unique. As such, different spiritual experiences may help different people draw close to God. Therefore, along with spiritual practices, an understanding of these sacred pathways can vitalize your personal relationship with Christ. When you find and engage in a pathway that feeds your soul, you are in a sweet spot of communion with God.

Following is a short overview of the nine spiritual temperaments. Once you’ve identified your own particular pathway, you’ll begin your journey of discovery as you embrace the pathway designed for you—your unique means of moving closer toward a vital union with Christ.

NATURALISTS: Loving God Out of Doors

Naturalists would prefer to leave any building, however beautiful or austere, to pray to God beside a river. Leave the books behind, forget the demonstrations—just let them take a walk through the woods, mountains, or open meadows. These Christians believe that nature clearly proclaims “God is!” Naturalists learn to seek God by surrounding themselves with all that he has made.

These people tend to grow best and relate to God most closely when they’re surrounded by nature. They come alive from head to toe whenever they are surrounded by natural splendor, be it mountains, deserts, plains, woods, oceans, or beaches. For these people, being in a natural environment dramatically increased their awareness of God. They often draw a direct spiritual meaning from nature. People who love the mountains, for example, see in the massive rock formations a reflection of the rock-solid faithfulness of God or a manifestation of his unchanging character. Ask people with a strong naturalist pathway when they feel closest to God, and it’s a no-brainer for them. Ask them where they would prefer to have their devotions, where they would most enjoy being with a small group of brothers and sisters, where they would most like to reflect for a while on their life, and they’ll answer, “Close to nature.”

SENSATES: Loving God with the Senses

Sensate Christians want to be lost in the awe, beauty, and splendor of God. They are drawn particularly to the liturgical, the majestic, the grand. When these Christians worship, they want to be filled with sights, sounds, and smells that overwhelm them. Incense, intricate architecture, classical music, and formal language wend their hearts soaring. The five senses are God’s most effective inroad to their hearts.

TRADITIONALISTS: Loving God through Ritual and Symbol

Traditionalists are fed by what are often termed the historic dimensions of faith: rituals, symbols, sacraments, and sacrifice. These Christians tend to have a disciplined life of faith. Some may be seen by others as legalists, defining their faith largely by matters of conduct. Frequently they enjoy regular attendance at church services, tithing, keeping the Sabbath, and so on. Traditionalists have a need for ritual and structure.

ASCETICS: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

Ascetics want nothing more than to be left alone in prayer. Take away the liturgy, the trappings of religion, the noise or the outside world. Let there be nothing to distract them—no pictures, no loud music—and leave them alone to pray in silence and simplicity. Ascetics live a fundamentally internal existence. Even when they are a part of a group of people, they might seem to be isolated from the others. Frequently introspective, sometimes to a fault, they are uncomfortable in any environment that keeps them from “listening to the quiet.”

ACTIVISTS: Loving God through Confrontation

Activists serve a God of justice, and their favorite Scripture is often the account of Jesus cleansing the temple. They define worship as standing against evil and calling sinners to repentance. These Christians often view the church as a place to recharge their batteries so they can go back into the world to wage war against injustice. Activists may adopt either social or evangelistic cause, but they find their home in the rough-and-tumble world of confrontation. They are energized more by interaction with others, even in conflict, than by being alone or in small groups.

The Activist has a single-minded zeal and a strong sense of purpose and mission. You have a passion to build the church and to work for justice. Challenges don't discourage you at all. If anything, a challenge brings a passion. Biblical example: Nehemiah.

Activists are at their best at a speed of Mach 2. They're happiest when white knuckled and gasping for breath. Because of their wiring they need—actually they *revel* in—a highly challenging environment that pushes them to the absolute edge of their potential. It's when they're right on that edge that they feel closest to God.

CAREGIVERS: Loving God by Loving Others

Caregivers serve God by serving others. They often claim to see Christ in the poor and needy, and their faith is built up by interacting with other people.

ENTHUSIASTS: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration

Excitement and mystery in worship is the spiritual lifeblood of enthusiasts. These Christians are the cheerleaders for God and the Christian life. Let them clap their hands, shout “Amen!” and dance in their excitement, that's all they ask. If their hearts are moved, if they don't experience God's power, something is missing. They don't want to just know concepts, but to experience them, to feel them, and to be moved by them.

CONTEMPLATIVES: Loving God through Adoration

Contemplatives refer to God as their lover, and images of a loving Father and Bridegroom predominate their view of God. Their favorite Bible passages might be taken from the Song of Songs as they enter the “divine romance.” The focus is not necessarily on serving God, doing his will, accomplishing great things in his name, or even obeying God. Rather, these Christians seek to love God with the purest, deepest, and brightest love imaginable.

The contemplative person loves uninterrupted reflection. Reflection comes naturally to you. You have a large capacity for prayer. Biblical example: Jesus.

Throughout Church history there have always been some Christians who feel like they’re marching to a different drummer. While other believers are joyfully filling their calendars with relational commitments or serving opportunities, these sincere Christians are carefully guarding their schedules, avoiding at all costs the patterns of busyness they see around them. For reasons they may not fully understand, these people are easily drained by relationships and activities. But they can spend almost unlimited time in solitude. Give them a Bible, a good piece of literature, a poem and a journal, and they’ll disappear for days. For them, just being alone with God is enough. They spend hours reflecting on the goodness of God and have an enormous capacity for prayer and private worship. They operate with sensitive spiritual antennae and can discern the activity of God wherever they are. Leaders whose primary pathway is contemplative need to give themselves an extra measure of grace. They need to give themselves permission to spend long hours in quiet reflection, even if others view it as inappropriate or strange, because for them that’s the door that opens into the presence of God.

INTELLECTUALS: Loving God with the Mind

Intellectuals might be skeptics or committed believers, but in either case they are likely to be studying (and, in some instances, arguing either for or against) doctrines like Calvinism, infant baptism, ordination of women, and predestination. These Christians live in the world of concepts. Some intellectuals, influenced by a personality type that may be shy or withdrawn, might avoid intellectual confrontation but still be “fed” primarily by intellectual activity. “Faith” is something to be understood as much as experienced. They may feel closest to God when they first understand something new about Him.

The intellectual person draws close to God through learning and study. You love theology, doctrine, debate, and deep research. You have little patience for emotional approaches to faith. When you face challenges, you go into a problem-solving mode and study them. Biblical example: Paul. People who thrive on the intellectual pathway are those whose minds must be fully engaged before they can make significant spiritual progress. For people wired up this way, once their minds are fully convinced, their hearts and will quickly follow and their convictions are rock solid. It is quite possible that the apostle Paul had an intellectual pathway. For him the transformation of the world depended on the “renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2). If you have an intellectual orientation, start developing a spiritual formation plan that focuses on the development of your mind. Love God with all your *mind* and watch what happens to your daily union with Him.

Source: This material was adapted from Gary Thomas’ book Sacred Pathways (Zondervan, 1996).