

Pathways to Intimacy with God

By Ron Goerzen

Purpose: Discover and develop our unique spiritual pathway(s), so we can be freed up to more uniquely and deeply experience intimacy with God.

Overview of the Sacred Pathways concept:

How much freedom do we have in how we worship God?

- Gary Thomas noticed that many Christians are stuck in a worship rut – an unsatisfying routine.
- Instead of having a vibrant friendship with God, they force themselves to use devotional methods or worship styles that don't fit the way God uniquely shaped them.
- Thomas wonders, if God intentionally made us all different, why should everyone be expected to love God in the same way?
- He develops his concept in his book, ***Sacred Pathways***, on which this material is based.

What is Thomas' idea of a "sacred pathway"?

- The way we relate to God, how we draw near to Him.
- It's how we most uniquely and intimately experience God, according to the special "pathway" that God has put within our souls.

Do we have just one pathway?

- Not necessarily. Most of us, however, will naturally have a certain predisposition for relating to God, which can be thought of as our predominant *spiritual* temperament.

Listing & Brief Description of the 9 Sacred Pathways:

-taken from <http://www.jeffrandleman.com/acred-pathways-by-gary-thomas/>

NATURALISTS: Loving God Outdoors

The naturalist sounds like exactly who he or she is: someone who prefers to leave everything behind and head into the great outdoors to connect with God. A walk beside the river or through the woods is more worshipful than reading a book or listening to a sermon. Naturalists are moved by God's creation. A view from a mountaintop connects them closer to God than a classical cathedral ever will. Naturalists seek God by surrounding themselves with all that He has made.

SENSATES: Loving God with the Senses

Sensates love to be lost in the awe and wonder of God. Sights, sounds, and scents add to the worship experience. A sensate desires to connect with God through the senses, and the more overwhelming, the better. Experiencing God through the five senses is a most effective inroad into the heart of the sensate.

TRADITIONALISTS: Loving God through Ritual and Symbol

Traditionalists are fed by the classic and historic dimensions of the faith: ritual, liturgy, sacraments, and symbols. Traditionalists have a desire for worship to have a ritual and structure; without these, they feel disconnected from God. Traditionalists tend to be very disciplined and organized in their faith.

ASCETICS: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

The ascetic would love nothing more than to spend every waking hour alone in prayer. The ascetic needs none of the symbols and structure of faith; anything along those lines would simply be a distraction. Ascetics tend to isolate themselves from others and any organized structure. Frequently seen as introspective, leaving everything behind in their quest for God is no trouble for the ascetic.

ACTIVISTS: Loving God through Confrontation

Activists love to set things right, even if that means confronting someone or something head on. The activist is quick to jump into a cause, or several of them, if it helps wage the war against injustice. Activists feel closest to God when they are standing against evil and calling sinners to repentance.

CAREGIVERS: Loving God by Loving Others

The caregiver is a servant. Serving another is the quickest way for this person to connect to God. The caregiver sees Christ in those who are needy, poor and downtrodden. The caregiver's faith is built by serving others. Caregivers often display the deepest compassion, seeing the needs of others and identifying practical ways to meet those needs.

ENTHUSIASTS: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration

The enthusiast loves the excitement and mystery of worship. Joyful celebration is crucial to the growing faith of this type of person. God moves by moving their hearts. If they don't feel moved during their worship, they wonder if they've experienced God at all. With some similarities to sensates, enthusiasts doesn't want to just know concepts, they want to experience them to the fullest.

CONTEMPLATIVES: Loving God through Adoration

A contemplative desires to just be in the presence of God. The idea of being the *beloved* son or daughter of a loving Abba Father, or the bride of the Bridegroom, depicts their relationship with God very accurately. The person who is a contemplative seeks to Love God with his or her entire being: their heart, soul, mind and strength. The contemplative is a humble person, seeking nothing else than to sit quietly at the feet of the savior and gaze into His face.

INTELLECTUALS: Loving God with the Mind

Intellectuals live in the world of concepts. Studying and learning are a prime way that this type of person experiences God to the fullest. Understanding doctrine and other key points about Christianity and the faith is the best type of connection for this person. Intellectuals get fed and feel close to God when they learn or grasp something new about God or their faith.

Question: "Do you think there are other Pathways that Thomas has not listed?"

Discovering my Sacred Pathways – see assessment

http://www.newhorizonsradford.org/docs/Sacred_Pathways_1_Discovery_Survey.pdf

Developing my Pathways:

- Read the book Sacred Pathways by Gary Thomas; Zondervan. Thomas has chapters describing each of the nine Pathways with excellent material on Biblical examples, temptations / dangers, along with practical suggestions to grow and develop unique to each pathway.
- Ponder and memorize Scripture passages that relate to my pathway.
- Experiment with specific activities unique to my pathway that are creative, and outside my normal way I spend time with God:
 - Enjoy music that is unique to my pathway – e.g., *I Love You, Lord* (for a Contemplative)
 - Light a scented candle or use a pocket piece (for a Sensate).
 - Fast, or attend a silent retreat (for an Ascetic).
- Come up with a personal mantra or motto. E.g., "*Wondering into Wonder*" or "*Seeing the Creator behind His Creation*" for a Naturalist.
- Read books by authors who share the same pathway with me.
- Other Resources that provide good ideas for the above development activities:
 - A Study Guide for Sacred Pathways by Adalee Lewis:
<http://www.missionariesofprayer.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/sacredpathways.pdf>
 - The Sacred Pathways – activity suggestions & warnings for each pathway:
<http://www.gracegathering.com/files/documents/The%20Sacred%20Pathways.pdf>