



Experiencing God through Sacred Pathways



(Adapted from the book, **Sacred Pathways**, by Gary Thomas)

Our experience of God was never meant to be of a 'cookie cutter' variety. He designed each of us uniquely. We often recognize that He gave us unique gifts, but we don't often think about how He designed us to experience Him in ways that may be different from our family, our friends or even the churches we may find ourselves a part of.

The whole transaction of religious conversion has been made mechanical and spiritless. We have forgotten that God is a person and, as such, can be cultivated as any person can. A.W. Tozer

Knowing and understanding how God uniquely designed you can allow you to enter into prayer and worship in a more authentic way. Explore your primary pathways using some of the practices mentioned and see what resonates with you.

Many times, believers try to mold their experience of God to fit what they have been told is the *right way* to be with God. This can lead to frustration and ultimately to not being able to communicate with and enjoy God to the fullest. This week we will look at some of the different ways that one can experience God and express and receive love for him.

The Nine Pathways

1. **Naturalist** ~ through nature
2. **Sensate** ~ through senses
3. **Traditionalist** ~ through rituals and symbols
4. **Ascetic** ~ through solitude and simplicity
5. **Activist** ~ through confrontation
6. **Caregiver** ~ through loving others
7. **Enthusiast** ~ through mystery and celebration
8. **Contemplative** ~ through adoration
9. **Intellectual** ~ through the mind

You probably will not fall completely into one category but may be a mix of several. One pathway may emerge as dominant. We will explore each pathway and then you will assess if it may be one through which God communicates with you.

NATURALISTS: Loving God Through Nature

“If we truly understood the growth of a grain of wheat, we would die of wonder.”

**“For the true Christian naturalist, creation is nothing less than a sanctuary,
a holy place that invites you to prayer.”**

DESCRIPTION

“Where we worship can have a profound impact on the quality of our worship. 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.” (36)

“...the Bible is meant to be read outside...The phrase “river of life” seems quaint when the words are projected up on a wall; but its power is nearly overwhelming when you stand by a swiftly flowing river.”

“God is made known to us ‘by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things of God.’ (40, from the Reformed tradition’s Belgic confession)

“...the mending and binding so necessary to heal our stress filled lives may flow through creation. For the spiritually oppressed or the socially injured, a pleasing or quiet natural environment can help provide a spiritual release. Resting by a clear, free-running river or sitting on a sunny slope in blooming desert grassland can bring peace and joy into very clouded souls.” (42, from Susan Power Bratton)

“Earth’s crammed with heaven and every common bush afire with God. But only he who sees takes off his shoes and the rest sit around it and pick blackberries.” (44, from Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

Psa. 29; 23; 84; Isa. 41:17-19; Mark 6:31-32; Jn. 4:35

CAUTIONS FOR A NATURALIST

- **Individualism**

Although the created order may be a place we connect powerfully with God, we need to remember that we do that in order to refresh and refuel so we can enter back into Christian community and do the work of Jesus.

- **Spiritual Delusion**

Nature can speak very powerfully to us but we want to always take what we are hearing or sensing and run it through the grid of Scripture to make sure we are not led astray.

- **Idolizing Nature**

Pantheism is the worship of nature. If you are a naturalist, you want to draw the distinction between worshipping nature and worshipping the God who created it. We can see and appreciate God's handiwork all around us but we need to be mindful of it being a means to God, not an end. God must always be the focus of our worship.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Take your Bible outside and read it; meditate while feasting your eyes and spirit on natural beauty
2. Rest
3. Work your way through one of Dr. Pamela Reeve's books
4. Worship as the dawn breaks
5. Go for a walk

WELL KNOWN NATURALISTS

St. Francis of Assisi, Jonathan Edwards, Bernard of Clairvaux, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Susan Power Bratton, Pamela Reeve, Annie Dillard

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where and when do you feel closest to God?
2. How is worship different for you when you are inside listening to speakers, etc. and outside enjoying nature.
3. What could you do (where could you go) that would help you worship more deeply on a regular basis?
4. How do you balance the need for natural beauty and quiet with the command to be in community? What kinds of community activities are satisfying to you spiritually and emotionally?

RESOURCES

Edwards, Jonathan. *"The Language and Lessons of Nature"*.

Muench, David, Marc Muench, *Francis of Assisi. Cantic of the Earth: The Words of Francis of Assisi Celebrated in the Photography of David Muench.*

St. Francis of Assisi, Frank Missant Shambhala, Cantile of the Sun. 2002.
Heaven on Earth: The Inspirational Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi.
Song of creation. (2003). *Laughing Elephant.*

Dr. Pamela Reeve, *Parables of the forest*, Parables of the Sea.

SENSATES: Loving God With the Senses

Most of us have been moved by a work of art, a piece of music, or something that is incredibly beautiful. For sensates, those who experience God with the senses, this is their primary way of connecting with God. Using their abilities of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste will move them into God's presence. Moving beyond pure intellect, sensates experience God within the realm of beauty; art, music, fragrance, textures, food, etc.

DESCRIPTION

"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 send their hearts soaring." These Christians delight in sensuous onslaught. "The five senses are God's most effective inroad to their hearts" (23,24, Sacred Pathways).

"Truth must be embodied to be realized. It must be incorporated to be understood. No religious movement has ever been forceful or popular without a rich corporeality: an image, a rite, a creed, a feeling, a feast, or vision or a sacrament has always been used to embody its truth." (55, quoted from Von Ogden Vogt.)

"Biblical accounts of the glory of God in the heavens are elaborate affairs, and rarely quiet" (52, SP).

"Because some very helpful activities in the history of the church (i.e. walking the stations of the cross, using incense, and other such activities) have occasionally become polluted or separated from a vibrant faith, some Christians have thrown most of them away. We have cut too far, however, amputation the arm because we fear an infection in the fingers" (58, 59, SP).

"Using our bodies to glorify God is much better response than denying the role of the body in worship" (67, from Vogt).

SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

Rev. 8:24; Deut. 6:5; Ezra 1:1-3; 1:26,27; 3:12,13; 43:3; Psa. 45:1; Mal. 1:11; Luke 7:36-38; Rev. 1:10, 13-17; Rev. 4.

taste: Psa. 34:8; I Pet. 2:3

touch: I Sam. 10:26; Mt. 14:36; Lk. 5:12-13; 24:39

look: Lk. 24:39; Jn. 1:36; 4:35; 19:37; Rev. 5:6; I Sam 16:7

hear: Deut. 30:20; Psa. 96; 147; 140; 150; Isa. 3:9; John 10:27; Jas 1:19

smell: Psa. 141:2; 2 Cor. 2:16; Eph 5:2

speak Psa. 34:1; ;119: 171; Isa 6:15

CAUTIONS FOR A SENSATE

- **Worship without conviction**

Worship, in any form, that is merely for the purpose of arousing emotions is not truly worship. Worship should always point us to God and move us into deeper relationship with Him. A sensate needs to use discernment when listening to beautiful music, looking at beautiful art, participating in sensually fulfilling worship. Not all that is beautiful is of God. Don't deprive yourself of corporate worship just because the building or music or form of the service isn't beautiful to you.

- **Idolizing beauty**

Beauty was created by God. Sensates have a special appreciation for beauty. It can usher them into the presence of God...or they can be swept away by the beauty alone. This does not mean that we cannot enjoy a work of art or a piece of music but underneath that joy is the knowledge that beauty, in any form, is the work of God.

WELL KNOWN SENSATES

Madeleine L'Engle; Mozart; Handel

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Listen to worship-producing music
2. Absorb worship-producing art
3. Sing scripture
4. Create a worship space for yourself: light a candle, set out meaningful articles, e.g., a cross.
5. Use a "pocket piece"
6. Enter into a scripture passage. Be one of the characters. Experience the passage.
7. Vary prayer posture: stand, sit, kneel, lie prostrate

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel when you are worshipping in a plain, unadorned church? How does it affect your ability to focus on God?

2. Have you been in a service that incorporated incense? an orchestra or pipe organ? Ritual dance? signing? processions of banners or crosses? other? How is your worship experience enhanced or hindered by these sensory additions to the worship service?

3. Have you yourself participated in dance or some other physical expression during a worship service? How did it affect your whole worship experience?

4. How does having something to touch, smell, look at or listen to affect your personal worship time?

5. How do you react to the statement, “we must take care that our worship of God doesn’t become worship of the worship experience alone”?

RESOURCES

Whitfield and Stoddart, *Hearing, Taste and Smell. Pathways of Perception.*

Nouwen, Henri J., *Return of the Prodigal Son.*

MacBeth, Sybil, *Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God.*

TRADITIONALISTS: Loving God Through Ritual and Symbol

Traditionalists value the traditions of the faith. They enjoy liturgy and certain church practices. Many Christians wish to remain in their own tradition but find parts of other traditions strengthen their faith.

DESCRIPTION

“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....Traditionalists have a need for ritual and structure.” (24)

“Many of the religious obligations I had felt ‘delivered from’ in my own youth, I later discovered as potential avenues of spiritual growth. Instead of feeling delivered, I felt cheated, as if I had been taught to live the Christian life without being given something very helpful to assist me.” (93)

“Rituals provide structure for our faith. Once we learn to use them, traditionalists can also incorporate the use of symbols, which provide meaning.” (81)

“Some people react to the word, religion, like a child reacts to the work, bedtime. They rightly fear a form of faith that has no substance, so they stress Christianity is a relationship, not a religion. However, in the context of a true faith, religious practices and rituals can be a powerful force for good – a friend, not an enemy, of a rich and growing relationship with God.” (70)

“There are three elements of the traditionalist pathway: ritual (or liturgical pattern); symbol (or significant image); sacrifice.” (73)

“Imbued with a vibrant faith, the repetition of ritual is a powerful force for good. Without present attention, however, ritual becomes an empty exercise that floods our souls with insincerity.” (91)

CAUTIONS FOR A TRADITIONALIST

- **Serving God without knowing God.**

An example of this would be going through the motions without acknowledging why you are practicing a ritual, using a symbol or sacrificing.

- **Substituting religious observances for community**

Individuals getting caught up in the symbolism of their faith, the liturgy of their worship service, their personal sacrifices but not being in community with others, not reaching out.

- **Judging others**

Recognizing that not everyone is moved by symbolism or ritual and that the observance of these things do not, in themselves, make a person more holy.

WELL KNOWN TRADITIONALISTS:

Kathleen Norris; Walt Wangerin; Clement of Alexandria; Bonhoeffer

SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

Gen. 12:7,8; Ex. 25:40; 40:12-15; Lev. 10:8-11; Num. 15:37-40; 21:4-9; Josh. 1:8; 2 Kings 18:4; Ezra 8:32, 35; Neh. 8:3; Jer. 7:4-7; Amos 5:21-24; Mt. 23:27; Lk. 4:16; Acts 3:1; 10; 16:13; 21:26; Rom. 3:25; 8:3; Col. 2; 16-17; I Tim. 4:1-5.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Contemplate the three elements of the traditionalist pathway.
2. Read Scripture aloud.
3. Select a Psalm to say every morning and one for each evening; Practice liturgical prayer (see Book of Common Prayer)
4. Set a regular time and place to meet with the Lord each day.
5. Follow the Church calendar and celebrate significant days, e.g. Pentecost, Advent
6. Develop meaningful rituals; Make plentiful use of symbols or ritualized gestures
7. Find areas of sacrifice

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did men and women in the Bible and in church history use ritual to embody spiritual truth?
2. What rituals, symbols, etc. would you like to incorporate into your life? How do you think they would affect your personal worship time? What would you like them to do for you?
3. What rituals are necessary for you to be able to worship easily?
4. What happens to your ability to worship when you are fellowshiping in a church of a denomination that has little formal liturgy?

RESOURCES

Bethge, Eberhard, *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Heath, Sidney, *The Romance of Symbolism*.

Jungmann, Joseph, *Prayer Through the Centuries*, trans. by John Coyne.

Nelson, Gertrude Mueller *To Dance with God: Family Ritual and Community Celebration*.

Norris, Kathleen. *Amazing Grace*.

Underhill, Evelyn (1936). *Worship*. New York: Harper and Row.

Wangerin, Walter (1992). *Reliving the Passion*.

Book of Common Prayer

ASCETICS: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

“Most of our solitude is forced, not chosen, creating loneliness rather than spiritual intimacy with the Father...” G. Thomas

Ascetics need solitude. It renews them and allows them to go back into community. Their relationship with God is deepened in solitude. They value simplicity. The things that are so meaningful to sensates are distractions to ascetics. They can appear to be strict with the way they live their lives as they behave in a way that shows their devotion to God. Conversely, they do not expect others to follow a strict lifestyle.

DESCRIPTION

Ascetics live a fundamentally internal existence. Even when they are part of a group of people, they might seem to be isolated from the others. ...uncomfortable in an environment that keeps them from 'listening to the quiet'." (25)

"It is in these dark, intense, lonely times that ascetics' souls awaken." (97)

"Ascetics live strict lives of self-denial so that they would be free to contemplate God." (102)

"True ascetics are strict with themselves but treat others with supernatural gentleness." (103)

"...modern ascetics...don't have time to find a desert to express our faith; inner detachment allows us to find a lonely desert in the midst of the busiest city." (100)

"He (St. Francis) devoured fasting as a man devours food. He plunged after poverty as men have dug madly for gold." (100)

CAUTIONS FOR AN ASCETIC

- **Personal piety**

They need to realize it is not a solitary journey. They always need to come back to an outward living of their inward journey. An ascetic will need to be intentional in seeking out other Christians with whom to fellowship. They need feedback from our brothers and sisters to be able to see ourselves clearly.

- **Pain for the sake of pain**

When they fast or choose to live, for a time, without some of the comforts of life, it is not an indication of the level of our spirituality. To practice asceticism, they need to realize they identify with Jesus suffering; they are not elevating our own.

- **Trying to gain favor with God**

Ascetics need to guard against a "works" mentality.

WELL KNOWN ASCETICS

Michael Card, John the Baptist, Daniel, Jerome, St. Francis of Assisi

SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

Num. 6; Isa. 64:6; Dan. 9:3; Joel 1:13-14; 2:12; Zech. 7:1-10; Mt. 4:1; 6:5-6, 16-17; 14:13, 22-23; Mt. 26:36-39; Mk. 1:35; 6:30-32; 14:32-36; Lk. 22:39-46; Jn. 17

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Worship in the quiet of the night; Rise in the early morning for prayer and worship
2. Practice silence – attend a silent retreat, participate in a silent meal

3. Fast; do physical labor as an act of worship
4. Practice obedience – ask God to reveal any rebellious attitudes
5. Simplify your life – clean a closet, have a yard sale, cull your books and papers
6. Look for ways and places to include others in your life.
7. Make it a point to worship regularly in a fellowship of believers.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does “solitude” mean to you? Can you find this even when you are with a group of people? Explain how you do that.
2. What does “austerity” mean to you? How do you incorporate it into your life?
3. What does “discipline” look like in your life? In what ways does it satisfy you? Where would you like to experience more of it?
4. What are ways you connect with those around you? How satisfying are those connections? Would you like to improve/increase them? Why or why not? How might you change your interactions to make them more satisfactory?

RESOURCES

Brother Lawrence, *Practicing the Presence of God*.

Duffey, Felix (1950). *Psychiatry and Asceticism*. London: B. Herder.

Foster, Richard. *Freedom of Simplicity; Celebration of Discipline*.

Merton, Thomas. *Basic Principles of Monastic Spirituality*. ISBN: 087243222x

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry*. Harper. SanFrancisco. (1991). ISBN: 0060663308

Nouwen, Henri J.M. *Solitude*.

Pennington, M. Basil (1983). *A Place Apart: Monastic Prayer and Practice for Everyone*.

ACTIVIST: Loving God Through Confrontation

DESCRIPTION

“Activists serve a God of justice, ...their favorite Scripture is often the account of Jesus cleansing the temple. They define worship as standing against evil and calling sinners to repentance. Activists may adopt either social or evangelistic causes, 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.” (26)

“Activists...are spiritually nourished through the battle.” (121)

“The true activist lives for God and for His love alone.” (124)

“...There is only one kind of person who can fight the Lord’s battles in anywhere near a proper way, and that is the person who by nature is unbelligerant; at least it looks that way. The world must observe that, when we must differ with each other as true Christians, we do it not because we love the smell of the bullfight, but because we must for Christ’s sake.” (121)

“The church has frequently had an uneasy relationship with activists and prophets. We fondly remember those who have died, but often loathe those who are still living.” (132)

CAUTIONS FOR ACTIVISTS

- **Becoming judgmental**

Activists tend to see the world and its issues in ‘black and white.’ The thought that the holier you become the more you will hate sin...but often, the holier you become the more you hate sinners. The ‘shadow-side’ to this temperament shows itself in acerbic tactlessness, running roughshod over others, not waiting for God or seeking discernment.

- **Elitism and resentment**

Not everyone is comfortable with confrontation. God designed us and calls us to what He has uniquely for us. Ultimately the confrontation is in God’s hands and we cannot take the credit.

- **Lack of insight to our own shortcomings**

“Take the log out of your own eye before you attempt to take the splinter out of your brother’s”. Don’t allow activism to be a substitute for your own walk with Jesus.

WELL KNOWN ACTIVISTS:

Franky Schaeffer, Elizabeth Fry, Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce, John Wesley, Tim and Beverly LaHaye, Charles Colson, Elijah, Peter, Habakkuk; Josh McDowell; Rush Limbaugh; James Dobson; Martin Luther King Jr.; Franklin Graham

SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

Psa. 7; 68; 10; Pr. 24:11-12; Ezek. 33:1-20;

SUGGESTIONS

1. Consider God’s faithfulness in the light of so much undone in the world. Consider His great patience. He is working even when we see no evidence of it. Don’t give up.

2. Ponder John 4:34
3. Seek to develop tact, gentleness, persuasiveness, true love for others. Seek a mentor.
4. Invest energy in: producing and transmitting literature; social reform; “marches”; prayer walks; food pantries; crisis pregnancy center. Be creative.
5. Thoroughly research any activity before joining it. Ask God for wisdom first. Seek counsel, confirmation and accountability.
6. Be careful that intervention doesn’t become accusation. Understand the difference between, “That’s wrong!” and “I don’t like that.”
7. Remember that everything you say must be truth. But you don’t have to say it just because it is true.
8. Consider carefully the outcomes you desire from your efforts.
9. Develop your ability for self-examination and contemplation of God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What issues make God angry?
2. Think of the last social or Christian cause you were involved in. Did it draw you closer to God? In what ways? Was there anything about it that pulled you or others away from God? Explain.
3. How do your activities fit into your worship of God?
4. How do you feel when you are working for a cause and other Christians don’t seem interested in it, or, even when they are interested, don’t do anything to help? Are you able to resolve these feelings? How do you do this? What other things might you do?
5. Is your current church involvement one in which you can use your activism? What would you like to see different? What would you like to try?
6. How does your desire to motivate and change affect your relationships with other people? Are there changes you would like to see in your interpersonal interactions, your approachability? What might these look like?

RESOURCES

Merton, Thomas. *Contemplation in a World of Action*. (1999).

Schaeffer, Francis. *The Mark of the Christian; Bad News for Modern Man*.

Schaeffer, Franky, Francis A. Schaeffer. *A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality*.

Schaeffer, Franky. *Bad News for Modern Man; Is Capitalism Christian? Toward a Christian Perspective on Economics*.

CAREGIVERS: Loving God by Loving Others

DESCRIPTION

“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. Such Christians may (consider) the devotional lives of contemplatives and enthusiasts (to be) selfish. ...caring for others...recharges a caregiver’s batteries.” (27)

“Mother Teresa ...looked behind the eyes of the poor, the sick, and the needy, and said she saw the image of God. She learned to love God by loving others.”(135)

“For caregivers, giving care isn’t a chore but a form of worship. Martyrs need not apply.”(135)

“Some Christians will have a particular gift and calling for (caregiving). These 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 they change an adult’s diaper than when they sit quietly in prayer.” (149)

“Activists and caregivers may have more in common than you might think... both can work together– one to help solve the underlying problem, the other to give comfort until the problem is addressed.” (147)

CAUTIONS FOR A CAREGIVER

- **Judgmental**

When we are a caregiver, we can judge others for being called to be with God in different ways. Although we all need to care about others, it is a natural thing for a caregiver.

“Caregiving is not a license to judge others who serve God in different ways...all Christians are called to care for others...there are different ways this obligation can be fulfilled... it is not for us to judge the validity of someone else’s worship.” (146)

- **Gaining our own self worth through care-giving**

When we do not have an accurate view of who we are in God’s eyes, we can do for others to earn His favor. We need to develop our own relationship with God and have our care-giving flow from that place, not take the place of it.

“Caregiving as a temperament means we express our love to God by reaching out to others; it’s the picture of a heart overflowing with love and spilling out onto those around us. Caregiving as a disease is actually an act of taking; it’s an act of deception, loving others so that they will love or need us in return.” (147)

- **Narrow definition**

Caregivers may judge the activist when, in reality they are working on different sides of the same problem...caregivers giving comfort and aid and activists working on change.

WELL KNOWN CAREGIVERS

Henri Nouwen, Mother Teresa, Mordecai

SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

Esther. 2:11; 4:1; 4:13-14; 8:7-8; Ezek. 16:49; Story of the Good Samaritan; I John 3:14,17; Phil. 2:4; Heb. 6:10; Jas. 1:27; I Pet. 4:9-10; Mt. 25:35-36; Jas.1:27

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. "Adopt" someone – a prisoner, neighborhood child or elderly person; Open your home to students, neighborhood kids
2. Help a friend through a crisis, counsel at a crisis pregnancy center
3. Work in the inner city, e.g. Mission Year (Bart Campolo)
4. Help someone battling substance abuse
5. Volunteer on a rescue squad, work in a soup kitchen

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the ways in which you have served others? What motivated you to help them?
2. What "return" (positive or negative) do you receive when you help others? These can be spiritual, emotional, etc.
3. How do you feel about people who are not actively ministering to the poor, sick, etc.?
4. Do you ever minister to others out of your own need? Or because you feel you have to? Or don't know how to say, "No"? Contrast that experience with a time when you freely helped someone out of a desire to minister to him/her.
5. Think about your relationships. Do you have relationships with people who do not "need" you? If not, how might you begin to develop friendships outside your circle of ministry?

RESOURCES

Mother Teresa, Becky Benenate, Joseph Durepos. No Greater Love.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. Can You Drink the Cup?

Sjogren, Steve (1993). Conspiracy of Kindness

ENTHUSIASTS: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration

“In a cynical and depressed world, enthusiasts point towards faith, mystery and expectancy.” G. Thomas

DESCRIPTION

“Excitement and mystery in worship is the spiritual lifeblood of enthusiasts. ...enthusiasts are inspired by joyful celebration... cheerleaders for God and the Christian life. Let them clap their hands, shout ‘Amen!’ and dance in their excitement, that’s all they ask. ...They don’t want to just know concepts, but to experience them, to feel them, and to be moved by them.”(28)

“Enthusiasts enjoy a celebratory form of worship as well as many of the more supernatural forms of faith. ...like to let go and experience God on the precipice of excitement and awe.” (152)

CAUTIONS

- **Seeking experiences for experiences’ sake**

They need to guard against the experience becoming more important than entering into a deeper love relationship with God. “Just because we feel good during a time of worship doesn’t mean we have offered up our will in an appropriate manner...just because we feel down or ‘flat’ doesn’t mean we aren’t effectively worshipping God.” (170)

- **Being independent**

They need to be part of a body to create balance between their own individual experience and how that experience fits into the whole.

- **Balance feelings with reason**

For a long time, the church has taught us to be wary of our feelings, saying that they cannot be trusted. Our feelings are God-given and need not be divorced from our experience with God. But, we also need to be aware that our feelings need to be balanced with our ability to reason and that good feelings don’t necessarily translate into good worship. We cannot confuse the mystery of God with things such as witchcraft, using mediums, contacting the dead, etc. And, we need to balance how we interpret the mysteries of God. We are called to balance our belief that God’s ways are not our ways and at the same time, use our God-given ability to reason.

“In the midst of a celebration it’s easy to forget how fearful and awesome God is. Without reverence, however, celebration degenerates into shallow triviality.” (165)

WELL KNOWN ENTHUSIASTS:

Ann Kiemel Anderson, King David, Graham Kendrick; Zig Ziglar; Barbara Johnson; James Robertson; Charles Swindoll; Jack Hayford

SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

I Chron. 13:8; 15:16; 16; II Chron. 29:26; Luke 19:37-40; Acts 16:25; Eph. 5:18-19; Acts 3:7; I Cor. 14:40; Acts 8:9-24

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Spend time just listening to God. Write down what you hear Him saying.
2. Cultivate the mystery of expectancy: ask God to bring someone in your path to whom you can minister; Start a conversation with a stranger.
3. Spend time with children: lead music at children's church; act out Bible stories for them.
4. Use your imagination to put yourself into the scene when you are reading Bible passages. Try to understand how the participants were feeling, thinking, acting.
5. Use your imagination to consider how you might act on the teaching of the Scriptures, e.g., the Beatitudes; teachings about forgiveness; tithing.
6. Be part of a strong church that holds its members accountable. Ask for a prayer partner or a mentor.
7. Take a course; learn an evangelistic method to give you a witness structure.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think about unanswered prayer in your life. To what do you attribute this? How do you respond when God says, "Wait."
2. What are you expecting/wanting from God right now. Talk with Him about it. What does He tell you?
3. In what ways does God speak to you in your daily life? What forms does it take? What does He say? How do you react?
4. How do most like to celebrate God? What are some other ways you might like to experiment with?
5. How do you feel when others around you don't sing at all or sing softly throughout a song service, don't raise their hands or move at all during worship?
6. What changes would you like to see in the worship services at your church that would make worship a more satisfying experience for you?

RESOURCES

Carothers, Merlin R.. Answers to Praise: Letters to the Author of Prison to Praise.

Carothers, Merlin R. Power in Praise: Sequel to Prison to Praise. (1993).

Carothers Merlin R. Prison to Praise.

Kiemel, Ann. I Love the Word Impossible. (1976).

Kiemel, Ann. *It's Incredible*. (1980).

CONTEMPLATIVES: Loving God Through Adoration

Contemplatives desire to enjoy God and know Him in even deeper ways.

DESCRIPTION

“Contemplatives refer to God as their lover, and images of a loving Father and Bridegroom predominate their view of God. ...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.” (28)

“...holding hands with God. ...we gaze lovingly at our heavenly Father and have our heart's delight satisfied.

...(Contemplatives) want nothing more than some privacy and quiet to gaze upon the face of their heavenly Lover and give all of themselves to God.” (181)

CAUTIONS:

- **Losing perspective**

Contemplatives can get lost in their love for God and neglect other people as well as wonderful things in life; impacting their community, good music, good books, good movies. Balance is important.

“Healthy contemplatives will understand that rich human relationships are a way to enjoy God's love, just as is solitary and intimate prayer. ...God can reveal Himself to us just as much in a conversation with a fellow believer as He can when we are on our knees in prayer.” (189)

- **Absorbing ego**

Contemplatives need to be aware that there are some 'contemplative' philosophies that are not aligned with Christianity. As Thomas says, “God is always God and we are always human.... We can relate to God but we cannot be absorbed into God (GT 189).”

- **Forgetting virtue**

The more deeply we fall in love God, the more we should be aware of our own sinfulness and be motivated to continue to allow God to transform our lives. Contemplatives need to allow their love for God to move them into alignment with His will for their lives.

“Contemplatives must move beyond mere meditation...to an alignment of our will and obedience into conformity with Christ.” (190)

WELL KNOWN CONTEMPLATIVES

Mary of Bethany, Dr. James Houston (professor at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.); St. Teresa of Avila; Thomas Merton; Thomas Aquinas; Augustine, Julian of Norwich, King David

SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

Psa. 63; 116; 73; Song of Songs; Isa. 41; 49; 59; 61; Jer. 2:2; Mt. 26: 6-13; Luke 10:38-42; John 14-17

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Make use of the Jesus prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner) or some other prayer (Make haste to help me.) Purpose: to practice the presence of God, reminding yourself that Jesus is Lord, you are a sinner, you need His mercy.
2. Practice secret acts of devotion – something you do for someone else without letting anyone else know about it.
3. Carry a pocket piece – something tactile to remind you Who you serve, e.g. a small cross.
4. Dancing Prayer – allowing God to lead and follow Him wherever He takes you. Allow Him to speak and place requests before you.
4. Centering Prayer – Choose a word and focus on it (Jesus, God, peace, etc.) repeating it until it becomes a part of you. This is not “new age”; it is a way to close oneself in with God, away from distractions. You are resting in God’s presence.
5. Prayer of the Heart – “focuses on emotional attachment to, or adoration of, God. ...Its aim is to love God, to have our hearts enlarged so that God owns more and more of us.” (187)
6. Meditative Prayer – this is prayerful reflection of a biblical text or theme, use of something you can see, taste, touch, hear or smell. (Lectio Divina; placing yourself in the passage)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When do you feel most loved by God? In what tangible ways does He show His love to you?
2. What is most important to you in your relationship with God?
3. Do you ever lose the sense of God’s presence? What happens to you then – in your emotions? In your spirit? What do you do to restore that sense?

4. What is your favorite way to picture God? Are there any images of God that you find difficult to contemplate? Why do you think that is? Ask God to show you something about that.

5. What words come to mind when you think of God? Make a list of all the words and phrases you can think of to express your praise to Him.

6. How do you usually approach God? Do you ever feel fear? What might that be about? Talk with the Father about it and write down His response.

7. In what ways is it difficult for you to share your experiences with God with other people?

RESOURCES

Butler, Dom Cuthbert (1922). *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life.*

Curtis, Brent and John Eldredge (1997). *The Sacred Romance.*

Merton, Thomas. *Contemplative Prayer.*

Merton, Thomas (1973). *Contemplation in a World of Action.*

Montaldo, Jonathan, Thomas Merton. *Dialogues With Silence: Prayers & Drawings.*

Pennington, M. Basil (1977). *Daily We Touch Him.*

Thomas, Gary (1999). *Seeking the Face of God.*

Underhill, Evelyn (1936). *Worship.*

Winkler, Dr. Gabriele (1978). *Prayer Attitude in the Eastern Church.*

INTELLECTUALS: Loving God with the Mind

“Any form of Christianity that rejects or even denigrates the importance of the mind is not a biblical Christianity.” Gary Thomas

DESCRIPTION

“Intellectuals...are likely to be studying...doctrines like Calvinism, infant baptism, ordination of women, and predestination. These Christians live in the world of concepts. “When intellectuals’ minds are awakened, when they understand something new about God or His ways with His children, then their adoration is unleashed. (They) may feel closest to God when they first understand something new about Him. (20)

“Intellectuals remind us of the high calling of loving God with our mind. ...The Bible is emphatic that our mind is one of the key elements that we can use to love God.” (194)

CAUTION FOR AN INTELLECTUAL

- **Loving controversy**

In 2 Timothy, Paul shares concerns regarding Timothy and his tendency to move into arguments. He guards against the temptation to argue versus teaching.

- **Knowing rather than doing**

...an intellectual can spend long seasons contemplating a challenging verse or concept.” (194)

- **Being proud**

Intellectuals can feel the need to correct others when they feel something they have said is wrong. At times, a sharp mind is not matched by discernment. Often, it would seem that intellectuals self-worth comes from being able to demonstrate that intelligence. “There comes a point when we stop teaching and start arguing. It’s a fine line, but we need to make sure we don’t cross it.” (209)

WELL KNOWN INTELLECTUALS

Dr. J. I. Packer; Dr. R. C. Sproul; C. S. Lewis; Dorothy Sayers, Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien; Elizabeth Elliot; Calvin; Plantinga; Eugene Peterson; Colson; Gary Thomas; Bonhoeffer.

SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

Deut. 33:10; I Ki. 4:29-34; Psa. 49; Pr. 1:5-7; 2:3-4; 4:7; Mt. 22:37; I Cor. 13: 2-3; I Tim. 1:3- 7; 6;4,5; II Tim. 2:23-25; Titus 3:9-11; Luke 2: 46-47, 52; James 3:1

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Study the basic disciplines of theological training
2. Invest in biblical study: reading through Scripture; meticulous study of portions of Scripture;
3. Read books that help understand what Scripture says - books on theology; books on church history.
4. Do a year-long in-depth study of one topic
5. Listen to theology tapes/CDs while driving – Mars Hill tapes are very good.
6. Study the seven basic topics in systematic theology: God, humankind, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, eschatology, and revelation.

7. Study Christian ethics
8. Gain understanding of both internal and external apologetics.
9. Study the creeds

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How thankful are you for your intellectual capacity? How do you express this and to whom?
2. In what ways have you applied your intellectual understanding of the Gospel to the service of others? In what other ways could you do so?
3. What are some of the most exciting discoveries you have made about God recently? How have they influenced your worship times?
4. What most annoys you about other styles of worship? Ask God for His perspective on this? What does He say to you?
5. How do you react to the statement, “worship is God revealing Himself to You, not You discovering God”?

RESOURCES

Clouse, Robert, Richard V. Pierard, and Edwin M. Yamauchi (1993). *Two Kingdoms: The Church and Culture Through the Ages*. Latourette, Kenneth Scott (1975). *History of Christianity*.

Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. (1978). MacMillan Publishing Company. McDowell, Josh. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict & More Evidence that Demands a Verdict*.

Noll, Mark (1992). *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*.

Packer, J.I. *Knowing and Doing the Will of God*.

Recommended Reading & Resources

Recommended Reading

Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God, Gary Thomas

God is Closer Than You Think, John Ortberg

Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation, M. Robert Mulholland Jr.

Stream of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Christian Faith, Richard Foster

Online Resources

Spiritual Pathways Assessments

http://www.lifequestonline.org/survey_pathways.aspx

Spiritual Gifts & Spiritual Walk

<http://www.lifequestonline.org>