



# Sacred Pathways

## How Do You Connect With God?

*Do you find yourself envious of the ways other people connect with God? This resource helps you discover how you best connect with God and shows you the value of each and every path. Instead of trying to imitate another person's walk with God, you should focus instead on bettering your own "sacred pathway."*

*This resource is based on the book, Sacred Pathways, written by Gary Thomas. Broken into two parts, the first part is an assessment that you can take to find out on which pathways you most easily connect with God. The second section describes each of the nine Sacred Pathways.*

For each of the following descriptions, rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. Then add up your total score for each pathway.

<b>The Naturalist</b>	
I feel closest to God when I'm surrounded by what He has made—the mountains, the forest or the sea.	
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.	
I would prefer to worship God by spending an hour beside a small brook than by participating in a group service.	
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.	
A book called <i>Nature's Sanctuaries: A Picture Book</i> would be appealing to me.	
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.	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	

<b>The Sensate</b>	
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.	
I enjoy attending a "high church" service with incense and formal Communion or Eucharist.	
I'd have a difficult time worshiping 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 worshiping through second-rate Christian art or music.	
The words sensuous, colorful, and aromatic are very appealing to me.	
A book called <i>The Beauty of Worship</i> would be appealing to me.	
I would really enjoy using drawing exercises or art to improve my prayer life.	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	

<b>The Traditionalist</b>	
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.	
Individualism within the church is a real danger. Christianity is a corporate faith, and most of our worship should have corporate expression.	
The words tradition and history are very appealing to me.	
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.	
A book titled <i>Symbolism and Liturgy in Personal Worship</i> would be appealing to me.	
I would really enjoy developing a personal rule (or ritual) of prayer.	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	



<b>The Ascetic</b>	
I feel closest to God when I am alone, and there is nothing to distract me from focusing on His presence.	
I would describe my faith as more internal than external.	
The words silence, solitude, and discipline are appealing to me.	
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.	
A book titled <i>A Place Apart: Monastic Prayer for Everyone</i> would be appealing to me.	
I would enjoy spending time on a night watch, taking a short vow of silence, or simplifying my life.	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	
<b>The Activist</b>	
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, urging people to vote, or becoming familiar with current issues.	
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.	
The words courageous, confrontation, and social activism are very appealing to me.	
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.	
The book written by Frank Schaeffer, <i>A Time for Anger</i> , would be an important book for me to read.	
I would like to awaken the church from its apathy.	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	
<b>The Caregiver</b>	
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.	
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.	
The words service and compassion are very appealing to me.	
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.	
A book entitled <i>99 Ways to Help Your Neighbor</i> would be very appealing to me.	
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.	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	
<b>The Enthusiast</b>	
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.	
God is an exciting God, and we should be excited about worshiping 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.	
The words celebration and joy are very appealing to me.	
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.	
I would enjoy reading a book called <i>The Mystery and Excitement of Walking with God</i> .	
I spend more money on music and worship albums than on books.	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	



**The Contemplative**

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.

The most difficult times in my faith are when I can't feel God's presence within me.

The words love, intimacy, and heart are very appealing to me.

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.

I would enjoy reading a book called *The Transforming Friendship*.

When I think of God, I think of love, friendship, and adoration more than anything else.

**TOTAL:**

**The Intellectual**

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.

I get frustrated when the church focuses too much on feelings and spiritual experience. The need to understand the Christian faith and have proper doctrine is of far more importance.

The words concepts and truth are very appealing to me.

I feel closest 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.

A book on church dogmatics would be appealing to me.

I spend more money on books than on music.

**TOTAL:**

<b>PATHWAY:</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>
<b>Naturalist:</b>	
<b>Sensate:</b>	
<b>Traditionalist:</b>	
<b>Ascetic:</b>	
<b>Activist:</b>	
<b>Caregiver:</b>	
<b>Enthusiast:</b>	
<b>Contemplative:</b>	
<b>Intellectual:</b>	



### **The Naturalist**

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!” They may learn more from watching an ant colony or looking at a peaceful lake than from reading a book or listening to a sermon, though they may find fulfilling thoughts from the parables of Christ, which are based on nature, or the Psalms.

Naturalists are related to contemplatives, except that they are moved by creation in addition to the inner world. When they are out of doors, their hearts soar to worship God. A modern-day example might be the writer Annie Dillard. In her book *Holy the Firm*, Dillard wrote, “I know only enough of God to want to worship him, by any means ready at hand.” One of her primary means was spending time out of doors.

Like Dillard, naturalists learn to seek God by surrounding themselves with all that He has made. Notice how the physical beauty that surrounds Dillard continually mirrors the spiritual, unseen faith within her.

### **The Sensate**

Sensate Christians want to be lost in the awe, beauty, and splendor of God. They are drawn particularly to the liturgical, the majestic, and 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. Whereas some Christians might find such a sensuous onslaught distracting, these Christians delight in it. The five senses are God’s most effective inroad to their hearts.

W. Phillip Keller, author of the popular book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* strikes me as someone with sensate tendencies. In his book *Taming Tension*, Keller writes about being a university student confined to a “rather cramped and drab home” one winter. He found escape in a picture of a “...magnificent sunset scene. Again and again I absorbed myself in its loveliness. It was a tremendous uplift and inspiration amid what otherwise would have been unbearable surroundings.”

In the same book Keller talks about the role of music in his life. During his self-described “lonely years” in a foreign land. Keller took out his violin “to ease the heartache and inner pain. An hour of music making would set my heart to singing again.” He found that “even such a simple habit as humming or whistling can turn a doleful day into one filled with new hope and good cheer.”

Once Keller fully understood the meaning of Handel’s *Messiah*, he began playing it year-round. “At times when I am downcast or despondent over life’s sufferings, the melodies and message of this music, showing how Christ Himself also felt such grief and sorrow, have lifted me in a way that no other human agency could possibly have done.”

Sight and music, among other things, have played key roles in bringing Keller into new realms of worship and fellowship with God. Anything that touches the senses can be a powerful arbiter of worship for sensate Christians.

### **The Traditionalist**

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. The contemplatives’ unstructured “prayer of the quiet” would be confusing and fairly unfulfilling to them.



Rod Dreher, a movie reviewer for the *New York Post*, is a traditionalist. Dreher grew up attending informal Christian worship services. The emotional fervor of these services attracted him to the faith, but they weren't able to hold him—and his commitment fell off during his days in boarding school.

A brush with some modern-day Christian writing eventually led Dreher back to the faith, but this time he found himself craving more established ritual and structure. Much to his surprise, he soon found that liturgies weren't confining and dead, as he had supposed they were, but rather carried a depth and historicity that added a new aesthetic to his worship. "It was more beautiful than anything I have ever experienced," he said.

Dreher was drawn by the ritual, and he was moved by the fact that he was praying prayers that had been prayed by many Christians in earlier centuries. The structure of the services brought more discipline to his personal life. Experiencing the same ritual week after week has deepened his understanding of the faith and his commitment to it.

Now Dreher says, "I live more liturgically in my everyday life. It has created a greater depth and texture to my Christian faith."

### **The Ascetic**

Ascetics want nothing more than to be left alone in prayer. Take away the liturgy, the trappings of religion, the noise of 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 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."

Singer and writer Michael Card is a good example of the ascetic temperament. He lives in a Shaker-inspired home on one hundred acres in a rural part of Franklin, Tennessee. Card admires the Shaker emphasis on simplicity in architecture and lifestyle. His dream is to establish a small, silent retreat center on his land where pastors, artists, and songwriters could spend time with the Lord in prayer and fasting.

The lyrics of Card's songs, like the reprise in "The Things We Leave Behind," often advocate the simple life:

*Every heart needs to be set free  
From possessions that hold it so tight  
'Cause freedom's not found in the things we own  
It's the power to do what is right  
With Jesus, our only possession  
Then giving becomes our delight  
And we can't imagine the freedom we find  
From the things we leave behind*

### **The Activist**

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 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.



Francis Schaeffer is a good example of this temperament. Through he was known primarily as a “thinker,” Schaeffer’s thoughts usually led to activism. In his seminal work *How Then Shall We Live?*, Francis Schaeffer wrote that “as Christians we are not only to *know* the right world view but consciously to *act* upon that world view so as to influence society in all its parts and facets across the whole spectrum of life, as much as we can to the extent of our individual and collective ability.” Schaeffer goes on to commend great Christian activists such as Elizabeth Fry, Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce, and John Wesley.

Schaeffer believed that truth equals confrontation. Once an idea is unleashed, it has the power to change society, he said. His book, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, co-written with C. Everett Koop, was one of the first contemporary evangelical books to point out the wrong of abortion and to encourage Christians to active opposition. Schaeffer lived his beliefs; he played a significant role in helping to found one of the most strategic pro-life organizations still operating today (CareNet).

### **The Caregiver**

Caregivers serve God by serving others. They often claim to see Christ in the poor and the needy, and their faith is built up by interacting with other people. Such Christians may find the devotional lives of contemplatives and enthusiasts as selfish. Whereas caring for others might wear many of us down, this recharges a caregiver’s batteries.

Perhaps the supreme example of this temperament is Mother Teresa of Calcutta (born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu), who at the age of twelve was so struck by the accounts of poverty in India, she decided to be a Roman Catholic missionary. In 1946, as a member of a community of Irish nuns working in the Moti Jhul slums of Calcutta, she heard God’s call to change course: “I was to leave the convent and help the poor, while living among them.”

In 1950 she became an Indian citizen and founded her Missionaries of Charity as part of the Archdiocese of Calcutta. Many Americans do not realize that her work now extends to this country and throughout the world. Today some four thousand nuns, recognized by their white saris, small crucifixes, and Spartan lifestyle, run approximately five hundred convents in eighty-seven countries. Nuns work in inner-city convents in New York, Washington D.C., Atlanta, Los Angeles, and thirty other United States cities, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and caring for the diseased.

When she dedicated a convent in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1995, Mother Teresa said, “God died for you and for me and for that leper and for that person dying of hunger and for that person on the street...it’s not enough to say you love God. You also have to say you love your neighbor. Love, to be true, has to hurt. This requires people giving until it hurts. Otherwise it is not true love...be the good news to your home people first. Find out about your next-door neighbor.”

### **The Enthusiast**

Excitement and mystery in worship is the spiritual lifeblood of enthusiasts. As sensates want to be surrounded by beauty and intellectuals want to be grappling with concepts, enthusiasts are inspired by joyful celebration. These Christians are cheerleaders for God and the Christian life. Let them clap their hands, shout “Amen!” and dance in excitement—that’s all they ask.

If their hearts aren’t moved, and 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.

The writer Ann Kiemel Anderson strikes me as someone who well fits this profile, though she might also fit in one or two others. Anderson’s love of spending time with children, which shows her playful and childlike spirit, her delight in celebrative songs, and her belief in the power of God’s mystery to work out everything according to his will are all hallmarks of a true enthusiast.



### **The Contemplative**

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.

It’s difficult to give a well-known, modern-day example of a contemplative since a true contemplative is not going to seek the spotlight. However, virtually every Christian is familiar with the biblical account of Mary of Bethany, who sat and worshiped at Jesus’ feet and was commended by Jesus for doing so. If you love this story and feel a kindred spirit with Mary, you may be a contemplative.

### **The Intellectual**

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.

There are many well-known and well-respected Christian intellectuals in our own time, including Dr. J.I. Packer and Dr. R. C. Sproul. Though Dr. Packer has earned the respect of academic theologians worldwide, he continues to make the doctrines of academics accessible and useful to the people in the pew. His classic books, such as *Knowing God* and *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, are popular studies that make difficult theological discussions understandable to even the newest Christian.

*One of the ways to determine your dominant spiritual temperament is to list those Christians whom you most admire and seek to emulate. How would you describe each one? If you consistently find yourself picking leaders of a particular spiritual temperament, you may share that makeup.*

