



# Spiritual Pathways

*ways we connect to God*



# Spiritual Pathways

Just as we have different personalities and temperaments, we each gravitate toward unique ways to connect with God and refresh ourselves spiritually.

One of the greatest benefits of knowing our spiritual temperament is the ability to build on that strength without feeling guilty for our weaknesses.

Conversely, we need to be stretched in some areas to keep in balance. Before you take the Spiritual Pathway Assessment on the following pages, spend some time reflecting on these questions:

**When you have some time and want to experience renewal or recreation, what do you do?**

**What happens to you when you go too long without this activity?**

We all have different ways to refresh ourselves.

Some like to do a mental activity, yet others prefer little or no brain use. Some of us are refreshed by physical involvement, yet for others the last thing we want to do is exert our bodies. Some of us are refreshed by being alone, but others of us go nuts unless we can hang out with at least one other person – and preferably a whole crowd.

This reality about our differences underscores an important truth when it comes to our spiritual growth and transformation. God made each of us unique. Just as we enjoy a variety of ways to refresh ourselves physically and mentally, God has also given us a variety of ways to refresh ourselves spiritually and connect with Him. These ways of connecting with God are called “spiritual pathways.”

**A spiritual pathway is the way we most naturally connect with God and grow spiritually.**

Each of us has a “preferred” spiritual pathway, and we naturally gravitate to that way of connecting with God. Most of us don’t use just one; we tend to prefer one or two main pathways. There’s also usually at least one pathway that is very unnatural for us, and it takes some stretching for us to experiment using that pathway.

Identifying and developing your unique spiritual pathway(s) can help you experience God’s presence in your ordinary day. Once you’ve discovered your pathway, the goal is for you to feel great freedom and joy in using it.

# Spiritual Pathway Assessment

Respond to each statement below according to the following scale:

3 = consistently/definitely true of me

2 = often/usually true of me

1 = once in a while/sometimes true of me

0 = not at all/never true of me

Put the number in the blank before each statement.

Transfer the numbers you gave for each assessment statement to the grid on the following pages.

Total each column. The highest number identifies your preferred spiritual pathway; the next highest number, your secondary pathway.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When I have a problem, I'd rather pray with people than pray alone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. In a church service, I look most forward to the teaching.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. People who know me would describe me as enthusiastic during worship times.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. No matter how tired I get, I usually come alive when a challenge is placed before me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Spiritual reality sometimes feels more real to me than the physical world.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I get distracted in meetings or services if I notice details in the surroundings that haven't been attended to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. A beautiful sunset can give me a spiritual high that temporarily blocks out everything bothering me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. It makes me feel better about myself to hang out with people I know and like.

- \_\_\_ 9. I've never understood why people don't love to study the Bible in depth.
- \_\_\_ 10. God touches me every time I gather with other believers for praise.
- \_\_\_ 11. People around me know how passionate I feel about the causes I'm involved in.
- \_\_\_ 12. I experience a deep inner joy when I am in a quiet place, free from distractions.
- \_\_\_ 13. Helping others is easy for me, even when I have problems.
- \_\_\_ 14. When faced with a difficult decision, I am drawn to walk in the woods, on the beach, or in some other outdoor setting.
- \_\_\_ 15. When I am alone too much, I tend to lose energy or get a little depressed.
- \_\_\_ 16. People seek me out when they need answers to biblical questions.
- \_\_\_ 17. Even when I'm tired, I look forward to going to a church service.
- \_\_\_ 18. I sense the presence of God most when I'm doing His work.
- \_\_\_ 19. I don't understand how Christians can be so busy and still think they're hearing from God.
- \_\_\_ 20. I love being able to serve behind the scenes, out of the spotlight.
- \_\_\_ 21. I experience God in nature so powerfully I'm sometimes tempted not to bother with church.
- \_\_\_ 22. I experience God most tangibly in fellowship with a few others.
- \_\_\_ 23. When I need to be refreshed, a stimulating book is just the thing.
- \_\_\_ 24. I am happiest when I praise God together with others.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. “When the going gets tough, the tough get going” – that’s true about me!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. My family and friends sometimes tease me about being such a hermit.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. People around me sometimes tell me they admire my compassion.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. Things in nature often teach me valuable lessons about God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. I don’t understand people who have a hard time revealing personal things about themselves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. Sometimes I spend too much time learning about an issue rather than dealing with it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. I don’t think there’s any good excuse for missing a worship time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. I get tremendous satisfaction from seeing people working together to achieve a goal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33. When I face a difficulty, being alone feels most helpful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 34. Even when I’m tired, I find I have energy and desire to care for people’s problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35. God is so real when I’m in a beautiful, natural setting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 36. When I’m tired, there’s nothing better than going out with friends to refresh me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 37. I worship best in response to theological truth clearly explained.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 38. I like how all the world’s problems – including mine – seem unimportant when I’m praising God at church.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 39. I get frustrated with people’s apathy in the face of injustice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 40. If the truth were told, I sometimes feel guilty for enjoying silence and solitude so much.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 41. I am happiest when I find someone who really needs help and I step in and offer it.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 42. Others know that if I'm not around, I'm most likely outside in a beautiful place.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 43. People around me describe me as a people person.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 44. I often read lots of books or articles to help me work through a problem.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 45. When I get overwhelmed, there's nothing like a good worship service to get me back on track.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 46. I should probably take more time to slow down, but I really love what I do, especially ministry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 47. Sometimes I spend too much time mulling over negative things people say about me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 48. I experience God's presence as I counsel someone who is struggling or in trouble.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 49. When I see natural beauty, something wonderful stirs in me that is difficult to describe.

# Spiritual Pathway Assessment Scoring

Transfer the numbers from the assessment to this grid and total each column.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48	49
Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
A Relational	B Intellectual	C Worship	D Activist	E Contemplative	F Serving	G Creation

- A. Relational – I connect best to God when I am with others.
- B. Intellectual – I connect best to God when I learn.
- C. Worship – I connect best to God when I worship.
- D. Activist – I connect best to God when doing great things.
- E. Contemplative – I connect best to God in silence.
- F. Serving – I connect best to God while completing Kingdom tasks.
- G. Creation – I connect best to God in nature.

# Relational Pathway

## Characteristics:

- Spiritual growth comes most naturally when you're involved in significant relationships.
- Small groups and other community life experiences are key.
- Your life is an open book and you're surprised when others aren't as open as you are.
- Being alone can drive you crazy.
- In times of growth (like confronting sin, guidance for decisions, accountability, expressions of love, etc.) God will often speak to you through other people.

## Examples:

- Apostle Peter
- John Wesley

## Build on Strengths:

- You need a relationally rich life.
- Use your spiritual gift to serve others.
- Pray with others in community.
- Learn in a class with other people or in a small group.

## **Some Cautions:**

- Guard against superficiality.
- Be sure to have a few deep relationships – people who love you, challenge you, encourage you, and give you wise counsel.
- You can grow dependent on others and become a spiritual chameleon (you change depending on who you're with).

## **Ways to Stretch:**

- Develop a capacity for silence.
- Monitor your talking, don't talk all the time!
- Keep some of your experiences with God secret so you don't get addicted to what other people think.
- Study Scripture for yourself so you're not so dependent on the opinion of others.
- Invite close friends to speak words of truth to you.

# Intellectual Pathway

## Characteristics:

- You draw close to God as you're able to learn more about Him.
- The study of Scripture and theology comes naturally to you.
- You have little patience for emotional approaches to faith.
- You are a thinker (thinking trumps feeling).
- When you face problems or spiritual challenges, you go into a problem-solving mode.
- (you could do with less music and more sermon)

## Examples:

- Apostle Paul
- C.S. Lewis

*The road to your heart usually leads through your head – you hear God best as you learn; you come to life when you're deeply immersed in great books, classes, deep thought, new learning...*

## Build on Strengths:

- Read great books that challenge you.
- Expose yourself to lots of teaching (seminary classes, lecture tapes, etc.)
- Find like-minded people with whom you can learn (if you quit learning, you grow stagnant)

## **Some Cautions:**

- Guard against becoming all head and no heart.
- Don't confuse being smart with being spiritually mature.
- Remember that the right gauge of spiritual health and maturity is love, not intelligence.
- You love to be right and that can be dangerous.

## **Ways to Stretch:**

- Devote yourself to corporate worship and private adoration and prayer – let your learning lead to worship.
- Engage in self-examination to assess whether or not you are being loving as you interact and share your knowledge.

# Worship Pathway

## Characteristics:

- You have a deep love of corporate praise and a natural inclination toward celebration.
- In difficult periods of life, worship is one of the most healing activities you engage in.
- In worship, your heart opens up and you come alive and enthusiastically participate (you'd like more singing and less sermon).

## Examples:

- King David
- Darlene Zscheck

## Build on Strengths:

- Experience worship on a regular basis.
- Use worship tapes or CDs and make your car a private sanctuary.
- Learn about other worship traditions and incorporate what you learn into your personal worship time.

## **Some Cautions:**

- Be careful not to judge those who aren't as expressive as you in worship – don't assume they don't love God as much or aren't experiencing the Holy Spirit.
- Guard against an experience-based spirituality that always has you looking for the next "high."

## **Ways to Stretch:**

- Engage in the discipline of study – make sure your mind is filled with knowledge of God and to keep that area growing so that your heart and emotions are solidly rooted.
- Serve God in concrete ways as an extension of your worship.
- Remain committed to your community of faith even when worship isn't all you'd like it to be.

# Activist Pathway

## Characteristics:

- You have a single-minded zeal and a very strong sense of vision.
- You have a passion to build the church; a passion to work for justice.
- Challenges don't discourage you, they energize you.
- You do everything you can to bring out the potential God has placed in other people.
- You love a high-paced, problem-filled, complex, strenuous way of life.

## Examples:

- Nehemiah
- William & Catherine Booth, founders of Salvation Army to relieve the suffering of the poor in the city

## Build on Strengths:

- Create a sense of challenge in your life by immersing yourself in tasks that demand the best you have to offer.
- Find a team of people you can invest in and work with to accomplish big goals.
- Stay active – when you're not active you get frustrated and stagnant.

## **Some Cautions:**

- You may run over people or use them because you're so focused on the goal.
- Guard against going too long without pausing to reflect on what you're doing; otherwise you can end up not even knowing your own motive, spiritual condition, or emotional state.

## **Ways to Stretch:**

- Spend time in solitude and silence – striking a balance with actions helps to raise awareness of inner motives.
- Cultivate a reflective discipline like journaling.
- Develop close spiritual friendships with one or two people – have them ask you how they see God working *in* you, not *through* you.

# Contemplative Pathway

## Characteristics:

- You love uninterrupted time alone.
- Reflection comes naturally to you.
- You have a large capacity for prayer.
- If you get busy or spend a lot of time with people, you feel drained and yearn for times of solitude.
- Presence of God is most real when all distractions are removed.

## Examples:

- Mary, Martha's sister
- Henri Nouwen

## Build on Strengths:

- First thing you need to hear is that you have permission to build on your strengths!
- You need regular, protected, intense times of solitude and stillness.
- Faithfully follow the intuitions and leading that come in your times alone with God.
- Act on what you hear from God in the silence.

## **Some Cautions:**

- You have a tendency to avoid the demands of the real world because they don't live up to your ideals.
- Be careful not to retreat to your inner world when friends, family, or society disappoint you.
- Resist the temptation to consider your times of private prayer and solitude as less important than the more public acts of ministry performed by others.

## **Ways to Stretch:**

- Choose a regular place of active service.
- Stay relationally connected, even when those relationships become difficult or challenging.
- Connect with those who have an activist pathway – pray for them and get involved in some aspect of their ministry.

# Serving Pathway

## Characteristics:

- God's presence seems most tangible when you're involved in helping others.
- You're often uncomfortable in a setting where you don't have a role (but if you have a role like setting up chairs, etc. you're more comfortable).
- You constantly look for acts of service you can engage in and often don't even need to be asked.

## Examples:

- Dorcas in the book of Acts
- Mother Theresa
- Jimmy Carter

## Build on Strengths:

- Get plugged into a community so you have opportunities for meaningful service.
- Look for glimpses of God's presence in the people you serve, and in the execution of your tasks.
- Prepare to serve first by praying so your service is genuinely spiritual service.
- Cultivate an awareness of those moments when you sense God with you as you serve.

## **Some Cautions:**

- Be careful not to resent other people who don't serve as much as you do.
- Remember that God loves you not because you are so faithful in serving Him, but because you are His beloved child.
- Don't confuse serving with earning God's love.

## **Ways to Stretch:**

- Balance your service with small group and community life.
- Learn to receive love even when you're not being productive.
- Practice expressing love through words as well as actions.

# Creation Pathway

## Characteristics:

- You respond deeply to God through your experience of nature.
- Being outdoors replenishes you – moves your heart, opens your soul, and strengthens your faith.
- You're highly aware of your physical senses, and often art, or symbols, or ritual will help you grow.
- You tend to be creative.

## Examples:

- Jesus (*Jesus lived in continual connection with God – exemplified all the spiritual pathways – but seemed especially drawn and often withdrew into nature*)
- George Washington Carver

## Build on Strengths:

- Spend time outdoors.
- Find a location for getaways.
- Make beauty a part of your spiritual life (candles, art, music, flowers)

## **Some Cautions:**

- You may be tempted to use beauty or nature to escape.
- You will find that people are sometimes disappointing.
- Guard against the temptation to avoid church, thinking that you can better worship God in nature on your own.
- Learn to see beauty in other people and allow God to speak to you through them.

## **Ways to Stretch:**

- Stay involved in a worshipping community.
- Be willing to help out in less-than-beautiful settings.
- Take Scripture with you into nature and meditate on God's Word as you enjoy creation.

# Make the most of your Spiritual Pathway

**Give yourself permission to be who you are in God. Celebrate your pathway and enjoy it. Be willing to engage in activities that move you out of your comfort zone and force you to stretch a little.**

Each pathway has strengths and cautions. It's easy to default only towards our strengths and forget that we need to grow in other areas as well. Don't fall into the trap of saying "Oh, I'm a relationship type so I'm off the hook with solitude." One of the cautions for those who have a relational pathway is to guard against being overly influenced by others, so solitude is an important stretching exercise – even though it may never come naturally. For each pathway, the cautions or temptations will tell you where you need to stretch.

Be careful not to envy someone else's pathway. It may be easy to think, "The activists are the ones who really get things done in this world. I'm not like that, so I guess I'll always be second-class." Embrace the unique person God made you to be.

Beware of the temptation to judge someone else because of his or her pathway. A contemplative may think, "What's the matter with those activists? Why can't they pray for long periods of time like I can? Don't they have any depth?" Part of growing in community means we learn to neither envy nor judge each other, but help and learn from one another.

Explore and develop the other pathways. Most people can relate easily to more than one. You may find several of them important to your spiritual growth – but at some point every one of them can be useful to you.

# Some questions for you to reflect on

What are one or two activities I need to engage in regularly to stay connected with God?

How might I incorporate these activities into my daily or weekly routine?

What was a “strength” I identified with for my main spiritual pathway?

A “caution”?

What is something I'd maybe like to try as a "way to stretch"?

Is there a spiritual pathway I'd like to explore more and begin to develop?

*"The danger in finding a way to God  
is that people grow to love the way  
more than they love God."*

*-Meister Eckhart*

How could I guard against this danger as I start incorporate my main spiritual pathway into my daily life?

For more information on Spiritual Pathways:

***An Ordinary Day with Jesus:  
Experiencing the Reality of God in your Everyday Life***

John Ortberg

***Invitation to a Journey***

M. Robert Mulholland

***Prayer and Temperament:  
Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types***

Chester Michael & Marie Norrisey

***Sacred Pathways***

Gary Thomas

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