

Spiritual Disciplines and "Sacred Pathways"

How do you relate to God? Take this assessment and find out which of the nine Spiritual Pathways best describes you. Score the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not true at all and 5 being very true. Record your results in the space provided below each section.

NATURE

_____ 1. I feel closest to God when I'm surrounded by what He has made - the mountains, the forests or the ocean.

_____ 2. 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.

_____ 3. I would rather worship God by spending an hour beside a small brook than by participating in a group service.

_____ 4. 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.

_____ 5. A book called Nature's Sanctuaries: A Picture Book would be appealing to me.

_____ 6. 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.

_____ *Total of all your answers*

SENSES

_____ 1. I feel closest to God when I'm in a church service that allows my senses to come alive - when I can see, smell, hear and almost taste His majesty.

_____ 2. I enjoy attending a "high church" service with a formal communion.

_____ 3. 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.

_____ 4. The words sensuous, colorful and aromatic are very appealing to me.

_____ 5. I'm naturally drawn to museums and concerts more than I'm inclined to take a walk in the woods, work in a soup kitchen or read a book by myself.

_____ 6. I would really enjoy drawing exercises or classical music playing in the background to improve my prayer life.

_____ *Total of all your answers*

TRADITIONS

_____ 1. 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.

_____ 2. I begin to feel closest to God when I am symbolically sacrificing for God.

_____ 3. The words "tradition" and "history" are very appealing to me.

_____ 4. Participating in a formal liturgy or "prayer book" service, developing symbols that I can place in my car, home or office, and developing a Christian calendar for our family to follow are activities I would enjoy.

_____ 5. A book about Liturgy would be appealing to me.

_____ 6. I would really enjoy developing a personal rule (or ritual) of prayer.

_____ *Total of all your answers*

ACTIVIST

_____ 1. I feel closest to God when I am cooperating with Him in standing up for His justice: writing letters to government officials and newspaper editors, picketing at a place of injustice, urging people to vote or becoming informed about current issues.

_____ 2. 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.

_____ 3. The terms "courageous confrontation" and "social activism" are very appealing to me.

_____ 4. Activities such as confronting a social evil, attending a meeting of the local school board to challenge the new curriculum and volunteering on a political campaign are important to me.

_____ 5. The book *Fighting Modern Day Slavery* would be appealing to me.

_____ 6. I would rather stand in the rain for an hour to confront an evil than sit in a room by myself for an hour and pray, take a walk through the woods or spend an hour reading a book.

_____ *Total of all your answers*

SOLITUDE

_____ 1. I feel closest to God when I am alone and there is nothing to distract me from focusing on His presence.

_____ 2. I would describe my faith as more "internal" than "external."

_____ 3. The words “silence,” “solitude” and “discipline” are very appealing to me.

_____ 4. Taking an overnight retreat by myself at a monastery where I could spend large amounts of time alone in a small room praying, studying God's Word and fasting for one or more days are all activities I would enjoy.

_____ 5. I would enjoy reading a book about Silence and Prayer.

_____ 6. I would really enjoy spending time on a night watch, taking a short vow of silence or simplifying my life.

_____ *Total of all your answers*

CAREGIVER

_____ 1. 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 by the bed of someone who is lonely or ill or when I am taking a meal to someone in need. You can count on me to offer a ride or to volunteer for helping activities.

_____ 2. 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.

_____ 3. The words “service” and “compassion” are very appealing to me.

_____ 4. 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 in an orphanage in Mexico.

_____ 5. A book titled “99 Ways to Help Your Neighbor” would be very appealing to me.

_____ 6. I would rather nurse someone to health or help repair someone's house than teach an adult Sunday school class, go on a prayer and fasting retreat or take a lonely walk in the woods.

_____ *Total of all your answers*

ENTHUSIAST

_____ 1. 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.

_____ 2. 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.

_____ 3. The words “celebration” and “joy” are very appealing to me.

_____ 4. I would enjoy attending a workshop on learning to worship through dance or a worship session with contemporary music. I expect that God is going to move in some unexpected ways.

_____ 5. I would enjoy reading the book *The Mystery and Excitement of Walking With God*.

_____ 6. I spend more money on music and worship downloads than on books.

_____ *Total of all your answers*

CONTEMPLATIVE

_____ 1. 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.

_____ 2. The most difficult times for me are when I can't feel God's presence within me.

_____ 3. The words "lover," "intimacy" and "heart" are very appealing to me.

_____ 4. I really enjoy having 30 minutes of uninterrupted time each day to sit in quiet

prayer and "hold hands" with God, writing love letters to Him and enjoying His presence.

_____ 5. I would enjoy reading *The Transforming Friendship*.

_____ 6. When I think of God, I think of love, friendship and adoration more than anything.

_____ *Total of all your answers*

INTELLECTUAL

_____ 1. I feel closer 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.

_____ 2. 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 to have proper doctrine.

_____ 3. The words "concepts" and "truth" are very appealing to me.

_____ 4. 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.

_____ 5. A book on church history would be appealing to me.

_____ 6. I spend more money on books than music.

_____ Total of all your answers

The highest number of points possible in each section is 30. The higher your score, the stronger the dominance of this spiritual temperament is in your life. But remember, most of us have more than one temperament. Any score of 15 or higher indicates a tendency toward this temperament.

Spiritual Disciplines and the Pathways¹

In these nine main Sacred Pathways we can see how certain pathways complement others. Often we find that we're strong on a particular path but not the contrasting one. (The contrasting pathways have ways they overlap.) Consider your Sacred Pathway Survey results in light of these relationships between contrasting approaches to connecting with God.

For each of the three Sacred Pathway polarities below mark an "X" somewhere on the continuum to indicate which style of connecting with God that you prefer:

Intellectual vs. Experiential (Learning vs. Enthusiastic Worship and Sensation)

Learning is a pathway that especially trains our minds to focus on God and our life with him. Studying the Bible, listening to sermons, and reading books that aid in your discipleship to Jesus are some important spiritual disciplines that relate to this path.

Enthusiastic Worship and Sensation are two sacred paths that complement the path of Learning because they can focus more on the experiential and emotional aspects of our connection to God. *Giving thanks and praise to God*, along with *celebration* (these can be done privately or in a body of believers) are examples of disciplines that can help us to worship the Lord enthusiastically. If we *engage our imagination and emotions in our meditations on Scripture (Lectio Divina)* then we're traveling on the path of Sensation. We can have a similar experience with *meditating on a work of art or using an approach to prayer, like a breath prayer*.

Which side of the continuum do you prefer in your approach to God or maybe you're in the middle? Mark an "X" on the continuum:

Intellectual <-----> **Experiential**

¹ <https://www.soulshpherd.org/sacred-pathways-survey/>

Structured vs. Spontaneous (Tradition vs. Nature)

Following the traditions of your church, denomination, or followers of Christ from ancient times is a structured way of connecting with God. *Using a liturgy, church calendar, Bible reading program, or daily devotional* are some disciplines that help you to use the sacred path of Tradition and participate with other people (directly or indirectly) in an organized program of spiritual growth.

Nature is a complement to Tradition because it involves so much spontaneity and fluidity. In Nature you don't quite know what to expect! The same nature setting changes depending on the season, time of day, weather, and animals. *Taking a prayer walk, sitting beside a stream with Jesus, or praying a psalm in nature* are examples of disciplines that go with the path of seeking God in Nature.

People who prefer a structured approach to their spiritual life tend to stick with the same spiritual disciplines while those who prefer spontaneity will want to keep changing up the ways they seek to connect with God. For instance, the idea of practicing a "rule of life" (or "rhythm of life") in which a range of spiritual disciplines are practiced over time is probably more appealing for those who like structure.

Which side of the continuum do you prefer in your approach to God or maybe you're in the middle? Mark an "X" on the continuum:

Structured <-----> **Spontaneous**

Solitude vs. Community (Asceticism and Contemplative Prayer vs. Caregiving and Social Justice)

Generally, most of the sacred pathways can be practiced alone or in community. Either way, the two sides are meant to come together. Solitude with Jesus facilitates a depth of engagement with him that we can then share with other people. Authentic community with other disciples of Jesus gives us strength to go into solitude with the Lord. In fact, we may experience a private intimacy with Jesus while in community with others, for instance by engaging in five minutes of silent prayer as part of a small group or church service. Asceticism and Contemplative Prayer are two pathways that especially emphasize our private relationship with God. *Fasting and simplicity* are disciplines that help us walk the path of Asceticism or self-denial. *Silence (in solitude or in community)* is the key discipline for helping us to practice Contemplative Prayer.

Caregiving and Social Justice are two sacred paths facilitate community. *Listening to someone who is hurting, soul friendship, and intercessory prayer* are specific disciplines that relate to Caregiving. Serving the poor and

needy and going on mission trips are disciplines for the path of Social Justice.

Which side of the continuum do you prefer in your approach to God or maybe you're in the middle? Mark an "X" on the continuum:

Solitude <-----> **Community**