



Adult Sunday Morning Class  
Stamford Church of Christ  
Facilitated by Chris Altrack  
D.Min.

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## Part Two: Traditionalists, Ascetics and Activists

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### Spiritual PPP

Last week, how have did you experience the ...

1. *Presents of God* - provisions, gifts, blessings
2. *Presence of God* - companionship, comfort, strength, assistance
3. *Plans of God* - answered prayer, God's movement, transition, fulfillment

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*Invite a Friend* - let's grow our community through a simple invitation to a fellow Stamford member, a friend or family member to join us next week.

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## The Traditionalist



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16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. (Luke 4:16)

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"Religious practices are the way men and women embody spiritual truths ... Abram expressed his faith by building altars ... Jesus' custom was to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath ... Peter and John both observed regular, set times of prayer ... Paul, the champion of receiving salvation by grace through faith, nevertheless observed the religious custom in Philippi of praying by the riverside on the Sabbath." (Thomas pages 81-82)

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"There are three main elements of the traditionalist pathway:

1 - **Ritual:** the power of rites is quite simply the power of reinforced behavior ... [rituals include] 1) Celebrations and Observances (Easter, Holy Week, Christmas Eve services); 2) Scripture and Ritual Practices (meditating on Scripture, reading/praying Psalm); 3) The Christian Calendar (Christmas, Easter, Advent, Lent, Ascension Day, etc.); 4) Rule of Prayer (a patterned way of praying every day); 5) Scheduled Prayer (praying regularly at set times during the day)

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"There are three main elements of the traditionalist pathway:

2 - **Symbol:** [a cross, a fish, making the sign of the cross, baptismal cloths, wine/bread of communion, anchor, arrow, etc.] Symbols preserve a "moral memory" essential to right living (see Thomas pages 93-94).

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"There are three main elements of the traditionalist pathway:

**Sacrifice:** ("Sacrifice is at the heart of a holy life. At times, we will be called to give up something we cherish that has illicitly nourished us in the past ...") (see Thomas page 99).

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### Spiritual Practices for Traditionalists

**Liturgical Prayer** - a written or memorized prayer that serves as a framework for individual or corporate worship and devotion. Includes praying or singing Scripture (e.g. the Lord's Prayer, psalms, responsive readings, doxologies etc) and praying the Liturgy of the Hours or the Daily Offices.

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### Spiritual Practices for Traditionalists

**Fixed-hour Prayer** - calls for regular and consistent patterns of attending to God throughout the day. Includes following the prayers in the Liturgy of the Hours and stopping at the top of every hour for prayer.

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### Spiritual Practices for Traditionalists

**Fasting** - the self-denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer. Includes abstaining from food, drink, shopping, desserts, chocolate, TV, radio, music, email, cellphones, or computer games to allow space for listening to the voice of Jesus.

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### Traditionalist Assessment

Score the following on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 = not true at all and 5 = very true.

- 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

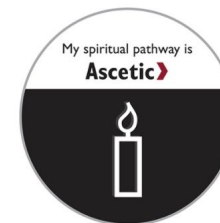
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### **Consider the following:**

1. How can I take advantage of the pathway most "natural" to me?
2. In what ways is God inviting me to stretch into pathways less "natural" to me?
3. How do I respond to other people/ groups who emphasize a pathway different from mine?

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### **The Ascetic**



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15 But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. 16 But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray. (Luke 5:15-16)

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"The ascetic temperament gravitates toward solitude, austerity, simplicity, and deep commitment." (see Thomas page 108).

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There are at least 8 acts of ascetics (see Thomas pages 116-123):  
**1-Watching in the night** ("While others slumber, the ascetic lifts his or her soul to God.")  
**2-Being still** ("Some monastic communities have become famous for their vows of silence ... While this is not practical for many laypeople, we can appreciate some of the benefits of stillness by adopting it for shorter periods.")

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There are at least 8 acts of ascetics (see Thomas pages 116-123):  
**3-Fasting** ("The ascetic is willing to give up the 'delights and consolations of this world' so that he or she can enjoy the delights and consolations found in God.")  
**4-Obeying** ("While laypeople are not likely to enter into the strict obedience of a master/ disciple relationship lived out in monastic times, we can still learn the blessing of obedience by obeying government authorities and employers.")

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There are at least 8 acts of ascetics (see Thomas pages 116-123):  
**5-Working** ("It's startling to realize that Jesus was a common laborer for 90 percent of his life.")  
**6-Taking Retreats** ("Limited retreats can be a mainstay of the ascetic's faith.")

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There are at least 8 acts of ascetics (see Thomas pages 116-123):  
**7-Living Simply** ("Ascetics will work to create simple living environments.")  
**8-Enduring Hardship** ("In a desire to draw near to God and take on God's character, ascetics embrace hardship rather than fight it.")

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Spiritual Practices for Ascetics:

**1-Silence** - Silence provides freedom from speaking as well as from listening to words or music. It includes setting a period of time in which you don't speak but isolate yourself from sounds and having personal retreats of silence.

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Spiritual Practices for Ascetics:

**2-Solitude** - The practice of solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God.

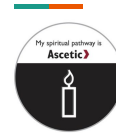
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### Spiritual Practices for Ascetics:

**3-Simplicity** - This includes assessing the things and activities that keep life convoluted, complicated and confusing; working to simplify these things.

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### Ascetic Assessment:

Score the following on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 = not true at all and 5 = very true.

- 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

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### **Consider the following:**

1. How can I take advantage of this pathway if it is most "natural" to me?
2. In what ways is God inviting me to stretch into this pathway if it is less "natural" to me?
3. How do I respond to other people/ groups who emphasize a pathway different from mine?

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### **The Activist**



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12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." (Matt. 21:12-13)

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"When activists live to see justice and righteousness worked out so that it is visibly evident in the church and in society, and they do this as a way of loving God, the confrontation will actually bring fulfillment, not exhaustion; thanksgiving, not anger; and often a deep sense of intimacy with God rather than a deeper sense of self-righteousness." (see Thomas page 133).

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"Persons of this temperament can join such luminaries as Elijah and Moses, who showed evidence of profound and courageous activism." (see Thomas pages 127-130)

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"Moses began his career as an activist (albeit a misguided one!) when he killed an Egyptian in defense of a fellow Isaelite ... Shortly thereafter, Moses the activist rescued some young women who were being pushed by unruly shepherds ... Then there is Moses classic confrontation with Pharaoh ... After great perseverance, Moses finally saw Israel gain freedom."

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"Elijah's confrontations with the rulers of Israel rival Moses' confrontations with Pharaoh. Elijah displayed great courage in his confrontation with Ahab and the prophets of Baal ... Elijah reveals classic activist symptoms (the negative kind) in his feelings of isolation and exhaustion ... "

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#### Spiritual Practices for Activists

**1-Justice** - Justice seeks to help others through correcting and redressing wrongs. It treats others fairly and shows no favoritism. It includes supporting just causes with time, action and financial support and providing for the poor, needy and oppressed through the means available to you.

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#### Spiritual Practices for Activists

**2-Walking Prayer**- intercede for a neighborhood or town by walking through it: especially walking through housing projects and government facilities, in places of need, fear, conflict, and decision-making, blessing the rooms and praying for the activities and people that gather there.

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### Spiritual Practices for Activists

**3-Intercessory Prayer** - invites us into God's care and concern for us, our families and friends, and the entire world.

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### Activist Assessment

Score the following on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 - not true at all and 5 - very true.

- 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

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