

Sacred Pathways to Enjoy God.

There are the basics of our spiritual disciplines that include reading of scripture, worship, prayer in its many dimensions. These sacred pathways are meant to expand the way we view being with God and **enjoying His presence**. We are all meant to be in relationship with God and as God's people, He has made us with different temperaments and personalities. We are meant to feed ourselves spiritually, but so often it is a dry experience for most believers, left clueless of how to draw close to God. The pathways described are meant to provide exploration for you to find your individualized expression outside of corporate worship with the body of Christ. I would suggest that most often there will be a combination of several pathways for each person. Explore and enjoy God!

Naturalist

Creation is a sanctuary, a holy place. : You visualize spiritual truths by periodically going outside and allowing creation to bring illustrations of God and Truth. Let creation remind you of God, His beauty, His power, His judgment. (Rom.1:20) The idea is to view our physical world to express spiritual truths.

- Be intentional to study and/or rest outside. Psalm 23 states that He leads me beside quiet waters and He restores my soul. Allow nature to bring you closer to God's peace and learning to rest in Him.
- When you are outdoors, create it as a space of time that is quiet and you are alone where you can 'see' God.
 - Allow the Holy Spirit to awaken your perception of creation by considering its greatness, mountains, sky, moving water etc. Also consider the abundance of aspects of creation: a forest, sky, flowers, sand, birds or other types of animals or other things that is visible.
 - Expect to receive. Allow God to lead your mind, to capture your attention towards something and let Him speak.

Other practices to consider:

- Go on a praise walk and thank the Lord for everything you see.
- Reflect on nature in the Word as you are outside. (Is. 40; Gen.1; Ps. 33 etc.)
- Go on a prayer walk and intercede as names come to mind or be intentional to pray for those you pre-decided for the day. Allow what you see to be a word picture to you of interceding. .Express thanksgiving for what you see.

Sensate

Sight, sound, taste, touch and smell are viewed and enjoyed by you as gifts from the Lord. Allow yourself to experience with your senses the beauty of God to the extent that you don't want the mediocre and you lose more and more 'taste' of the world and more of what is real in the spiritual world.

Study of Scripture for you is to stop and allow yourself to be awed by the beauty of it. (Ezek. 3:1-3, 15; Eve. 1:10, 14-17) It is to see, feel and hear what is described as you read and meditate.

Processes to consider:

- Sound -by worshipping God with music, Ps. 96, 147, 149, and 150.
- Smell- allow scents to help condition you to consciously enter God's presence (consider Moses in Ex. 25:6, 30:7) Use scents in incense or candles to transition in to prayer is one possibility.
- Touch- to be focused in prayer is to maybe hold an object or have visible objects for different people or situations. (rock for disciples, rubber band for pliable hearts, nail to pray for others to embrace the cross) Be creative to integrate tangible symbols.
- Sight- this affects you most and can be used to affect your will to a deeper commitment to live out your faith. Create space that visually calls you to worship, a sacred space, whether it is the colors or pictures, the setting in general.
- Another suggestion is to draw. Draw a basic picture, simple symbolism, of God or a biblical truth. Add another picture of how you wish God or a situation to be and then on this drawing put what get's in the way of God or embracing Truth for you. The idea is to allow creativity with your sight as you read and/or pray.
- Taste- this is a powerful aspect and can bring out clusters of associated feelings or thought. Allow creativity of ways to bring associations about God and His Truth. (Salt, sweet, sour, bread; get the idea?)

Traditionalists

Religious practices, rituals, and types of sacrifice enable you to grow in your relationship with God. They are meant to be a way to embody spiritual truths.

Rituals- This enables you to make order out of chaos because they provide fixed points to orient yourself to a sacred space. Rituals keep you in God's presence.

Celebration/observances- These can be life giving in the way you implement them. (40 days of Lent or Advent) For you to celebrate church calendar seasons, Easter, Christmas, Pentecost etc. can be life giving.

Practices to consider

- Scripture- Meditating on the Word is meant to nourish all believers and for you scriptural rituals can add new meaning
 - Read the Word out loud. Read it out loud; reading it over and over until you know a section or verses by heart. Start with Psalm 50, 90 or 103.
 - Read it at the beginning of your day and at the end of your day or better yet, also in the middle of your day.
 - Choose portions of Scripture to study or meditate that correlate with the church calendar as in Advent/Christmas, Lent/Easter, Pentecost or Ascension. These remembrances inspire and help you to worship.

Prayer

- Use a prayer book whether it is from a book of prayers or a book of scripture prayers on different topics.

- Use an intercessory prayer list you have developed.
- Change your posture to kneel or use your hands as an offering of prayer.
- Use symbols to reflect upon that help you realize the value of the Cross, Christ or other Truth. These allow you to place your life, cares; anxieties etc and give them to God. Even the color of the symbol can carry significant implications for you.

Sacrifice- to practice intentional sacrifice keeps your idealized concepts of God and this life rooted in reality. This is the idea behind the practice of Lent and fasting, for example.

- Fasting is for this purpose. God can use it to chasten the demanding heart. It reminds you of your humanity and need for God' to re-center you in God.

Ascetic

More than any other spiritual temperament, this one truly goes against our culture in order to implement its practices towards loving God.

The 3 areas of this pathway:

1-Solitude-quiet and solitude nourish you. Spending time alone is essential to deepening your walk with God. This certain amount of time apart on a regular weekly basis is a non-negotiable to really recharge you.

2- Austerity-to experience God you may need your sacred space to be of low level sensory input so you aren't distracted.

3- Strictness (suffering and self-denial) - you want to use who you are and have for passionate pursuit of God. It is a way of expressing love to God. Investing in the hard work of developing your inner life is more important than anything.

Processes to consider

- Quiet Worship. Whether in the evening or morning, where you are able to experience a holy stillness with an expectancy to encounter God's presence.
- Being still. Trying to be silent is quite a struggle at first, yet reveals how distracted most people have become in our culture. You may hate it at first, but if persistent, this can become comfortable and finally enjoyable. Start off with a 5-10 min. spot and increase your time as you are able to enjoy that block of time without struggling.
- Fasting- The idea is to give up something that you enjoy for a time (i.e. coffee, chocolate, French fries, favorite food, TV show, face book etc.) Maybe worship in the car versus listen to other music or radio.
- Obeying- choose to obey the speed limit or 'gray area' regulations of your job or as a student to the university policies in order to put down your pride and strengthen humility in your life. You choose to submit accept another person's leadership. It is meant to expose and put down any arrogance which is so dominate in our culture.

- Reflect- it is an intentional reflection of your character. Practice obedience at a deeper level is meant to be a way for you to honor God more deeply.
- Take a retreat- This is a main practice of an ascetic where you schedule several hours a week away from everyone to draw near to God.

Activist

You are spiritually nourished through the ‘battle’ of confronting what you see as something wrong or unjust. You want to address it, confront it and press others to reconsider the truth or situation. Facing a trial with God builds fellowship with Him... You understand more than others that you can’t always be a ‘nice’ person if you are to be faithful to the Lord. You confront issues and situations out of a love for God, not just to be confronting or contentious. Whatever you do, you often want God to break through in a mighty way and that is what compels you to take risks.

Processes to consider

- Defending biblical Christianity and its beliefs.
- For social reform that has moral implications (i.e. sex slavery, child porn, abuse of children, poverty etc.)
- Actively confront error or evil. ‘Truth that equals confrontation.’ Francis Schaeffer.
- Run for political office
- Begin an agency or join one that makes a difference for others.
- Prayer – prayer walking is praying at a location where you desire to see change, your campus, government offices, over a map of a country, etc. Intercession is the prayer form of activism because you desire to confront and face evil and injustice.

Caregivers

Giving care is a form of worship for you. You love God by serving others. Whatever you choose, it should give you joy. You are giving God’s love in the way you show care in an active way to someone or a group.

Examples to consider:

Adopt a prisoner.

Help someone battle an addiction.

Volunteer for a rescue squad.

Help someone to learn to read.

Volunteer at a women’s shelter or a crisis pregnancy center.

Volunteer at a soup kitchen.

Fix someone’s car, do house repairs, clean or reorganize for someone that is in need.

The list is much longer. Choose what gives you joy!

Enthusiast

You enjoy celebration in worship and to choose to apply supernatural forms of faith that cause you to experience God with excitement and awe. Two elements in your experience with God are mystery and celebration. You desire to preserve the mystery of faith because you know there are certain things about God we, as believers, will never understand. You know God is in control and you are not.

The 2 basic elements of this pathway:

Mystery- God can provide direction and new insight for a trial, for encouragement or correction, but it should strengthen your faith. It can be in the form of a dream, but never be accepted if it contradicts Scripture. Journal your dream so you can reflect and judge it objectively. Possibly share it with a wise, spiritual mentor or leader. It is vital that you live in community and process experiences by living in relationships with accountability to guard against deception so you will remain grounded in biblical truth. The reality is that a dream can come from your soul, God or demons.

Expectancy

You need to have expectancy in your faith. You desire to know the greatness of God and appropriately expect God to do something!

Processes to consider:

- Choose to begin your day by asking God to bring someone into your day or week to which you can minister. This sense of ‘watching’ energizes your faith as you see God working in visible ways. Be intentional to celebrate in worship privately and with groups.
- Bible Reading –Use both your feelings and imagination to play out the true drama described. Put yourself in the scene and then apply how it then is meant to actualize truth in your life and others.
- Be willing to risk and stretch yourself in situations with natural obstacles. Spiritual risk taking fosters expectancy and charges up your faith.
- Prayer-be praying in ways that require God to come through in unexpected ways! You need to allow God to say, ‘yes’ or ‘no’ based on His omnipotence and omniscience.
- Worship-Keep the balance of celebration and reverence, the fear of the Lord in His awesomeness. You know there is much to be thankful for and so you are compelled to celebrate God in worship! So, place yourself consistently in worship both in community and privately.

Contemplative

You enjoy intentionally loving God. Your focus is more of the bride and the Bridegroom, of that relational experience of how to love God in deeper ways. Your desire for God, of adoration, is based on loving Him and Him loving you. You are energized by resting in God’s presence. You live for this love.

Processing of possible options:

- Speaking a simple daily prayer: “Lord, you are all I really need.” Or “Jesus, have mercy on me. I need your help.” These simple prayers recognize that Jesus is all; and who you really need always.
- Secret acts of devotion. You love to show love without being recognized: anonymous cash gift, intensive prayer and fasting, to give up something for a season, send anonymous note of encouragement, sing alone in His presence. Any of these help you enjoy and experience His love.
- Centering prayer-choose a word or short phrase of words to repeat softly until your mind is filled with thoughts of Jesus or the Father and fills you with reality of God. It helps you rest and enjoy God’s presence.
- Meditative prayer-it is a prayerful reflection of a scripture, a theme of scripture or seeing a certain object that prompts reality of your need of God.
- When read the Word, insert your name or another’s name where you can believe it to bring change.

Intellectuals

Choose to intentionally build up your mind as a way to draw close to God.

Processes to consider:

- Choose a regular reading program that gives God the opportunity to speak to your heart. Begin reading daily and choose to study specific passages from you readings.
 - Use some suggested resources: *How To Read the Bible for All It’s Worth* by Gordon Fee and *Knowing Scripture* by RC Sproul. Consider getting a good commentary...
 - Choose a book of the Bible and study it inside out at least once a year.
 - Study Christian doctrine as systematic theology, one suggested resource, *Systematic Theology* by Gruden. These involve studying topics like: God, humankind, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, End of Times etc.
 - Study Christian ethics. Study what we believe in a way that provides a framework for Christians to make a prayerful decision and helps others to understand how we should really live as believers. (*Evangelical Ethics* by John Davies)
 - Read about social issues (war, poverty, euthanasia etc.) in a Christian context. It is suggested that this would be a later read and study after some has been done of the suggested lists above.
 - Apologetics- study of how to explain and defend the faith in our world of unbelief and contend for truth of Christian doctrine in the midst of heresy and false doctrine. (*New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell, *Case for Faith* and *Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel)

* *Sacred Pathways* (Discovering your soul’s path to God), Gary Thomas.