

Sacred Pathways Inventory

by Bill Gaultiere

Understanding which Sacred Pathways best help you to connect with God and experience the presence of Christ is very helpful to your spiritual growth and your ministry to others. It's a wonderful blessing in soul friendship to share our experiences with the Lord – how we're connecting with him or how we're struggling to make the connection.

This *Sacred Pathways Survey* will help you to better understand yourself and your relationship with God, your strengths and your weaknesses, what to do in times of stress, and how to challenge yourself. It's a blessing to share this survey with friends. Along these lines we recently used this when leading a retreat for a church staff. Our Sacred Pathways Survey is inspired by and adapted from Gary Thomas' wonderful book, *Sacred Pathways: Discovering your Soul's Path to God*.

Instructions

This Sacred Pathways Survey looks at how you experience God. Based on your personality and spiritual background you have preferred ways of connecting with God. These questions fall into nine Sacred Pathways, which are similar to the ones that Gary Thomas identified in his book, *Sacred Pathways*. Use the rating scale below to respond to each question/statement according to what is true of you (not what you wish was true) and then enter the numeric value in the blank:

3 Definitely True of Me — **2** True of Me — **1** Somewhat True of Me — **0** Not True of Me

The Sacred Pathways Survey

I feel closest to God when...

1. I am in the beauty of nature. _____
2. I am singing praise songs to God. _____
3. I learn something new about God or life with him. _____
4. I practice spiritual traditions from my family or church. _____
5. I deny myself normal pleasures in order to pray. _____

- 6. I can see, hear, or touch God in some way. _____
- 7. I'm caring for someone who is hurting. _____
- 8. I'm joining with others to defend the cause of the poor and needy. _____
- 9. I am quiet and alone, focused only on God's presence. _____

To be spiritually renewed I need to...

- 10. Spend time outside enjoying God's creation. _____
- 11. Celebrate God and his love with music and songs of worship. _____
- 12. Read the Bible and think deeply about what God is saying. _____
- 13. Reconnect with the history, liturgy, or symbols of my spiritual tradition. _____
- 14. Fast from food or media or simplify my life in some other way. _____
- 15. Experience God in a tangible way (e.g., receiving communion, kneeling by a cross, lighting a candle, or appreciating spiritual architecture). _____
- 16. Feel his compassion flow through me to another person (e.g., when listening, encouraging, or praying). _____
- 17. Be part of a cause to promote the care of those who are less fortunate than me. _____
- 18. Silently contemplate God's love. _____

It's especially helpful for me to connect with God through...

- 19. Appreciating the wonders God has created. _____
- 20. Offering enthusiastic expressions of thanks and praise to God. _____
- 21. Studying the Bible thoughtfully. _____
- 22. Using a Christian calendar or daily Bible readings and prayers provided by my church. _____
- 23. Keeping my life simple and uncluttered. _____
- 24. Imagining myself in a Gospel story, work of religious art, or spiritual movie. _____
- 25. Supporting a friend who is going through a hard time. _____

26. Helping a sick neighbor, providing food for the hungry, or ministering to the elderly, abused, or imprisoned. _____
27. Meditating on Scripture or a devotional book that draws me into deeper intimacy with God. _____

I benefit especially from speakers and authors who help me to...

28. Appreciate God's beauty and the wonders of his creation. _____
29. Give joyful thanks and praise to God! _____
30. Teach me new insights about my life with God. _____
31. Remember the stories and practices of Bible heroes and saints from the past. _____
32. Be disciplined to make more space in my life and my soul for God. _____
33. Experience the "touch" of God's presence on me. _____
34. Become more effective in caring for people who are struggling. _____
35. Stand up for justice and make an impact for the disenfranchised. _____
36. Love God all the time in the secret place of my heart. _____

Scoring your Sacred Pathways Inventory

There are four categories of nine statements in this Sacred Pathways Survey. Each of the numbered statements corresponds to one of the nine Sacred Pathways. Add up the point values for each of the Sacred Pathways and enter the sum in the table below (should be 0 to 12). Then based on the total points for each Sacred Pathway, rank them from 1 to 9, with 1 being your most preferred path.

Sacred Pathway	Description	Question #s	Total Points	Rank
Nature	Appreciating the beauty of God's creation.	1, 10, 19, 28		
Enthusiastic Worship	Celebrating God's goodness with thanks and praise.	2, 11, 20, 29		
Learning	Gaining insights about God and life with him.	3, 12, 21, 30		

Tradition	Following time-honored spiritual traditions and practices.	4, 13, 22, 31		
Asceticism	Abstaining from comforts to make more space for God.	5, 14, 23, 32		
Sensation	Experiencing God with your physical senses or imagination.	6, 15, 24, 33		
Caregiving	Offering God's compassion to those who are hurting or struggling.	7, 16, 25, 34		
Social Justice	Actively engaging with others to serve the poor and needy.	8, 17, 26, 35		
Quiet Prayer	Being absorbed with God in quiet solitude (contemplation).	9, 18, 27, 36		

Application

Your Sacred Pathways Survey indicates the ways you are best able to connect with God and those that are hardest for you. All the pathways are good and helpful, but limited. Your profile relates to your personality and spiritual tradition. As Jesus taught us, the real value of any pathway is not how it makes you feel about yourself, but the degree to which it helps you to *love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself* (Mark 12:30-31).

What are the two or three sacred paths that you ranked the highest? The lowest? It's helpful to know clearly your strengths and weaknesses for connecting with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. You might star your strongest paths and underline the ones that are harder for you.

In your normal rhythm of life with Jesus you want to emphasize the Sacred Pathways that most help you to engage deeply with God (the ones you ranked the highest in). Also in times of stress or when you're feeling distant from God it's important to emphasize using your preferred pathways. In contrast, to grow in well-rounded spiritual maturity (which is to have the character of Christ) it's helpful to learn from other people how to use the pathways that are challenging for you (the ones you ranked lower in).

Balancing your Sacred Pathways (Using Spiritual Disciplines)

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 (like we help people to do in our [Lectio Divina Guides](#)) 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 from the Bible](#).

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

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 its Nature Setting](#) 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 helps 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

Small Group Questions

It's a wonderful exercise to take the Sacred Pathways Survey with your small group or a soul friend and then to share your results. These questions will help:

1. What is one of your favorite sacred pathways? Tell a story about using this approach to connect with God and why it was important for you?
2. What is a sacred pathway that you're not naturally good at but you've used it and found it meaningful? Share an example or story of doing this and why it's been helpful.
3. When you feel distant from God which sacred path are you most likely to use? Is it helpful to you or is there maybe a more helpful approach for you at that time?

* Our Sacred Pathway Survey categories are adapted from *Sacred Pathways: Discovering your Soul's Path to God* by Gary Thomas. I modified Gary's pathways, especially Social Justice. The questions in our Sacred Pathways Survey are inspired by Gary's survey, but are my own. Also I used a different format for presenting and scoring my survey questions.