

Spiritual Pathways Discussion Guide

*Based on the book "Sacred Pathways" by Gary Thomas ([buy it here](#))
Discussion Guide by Rev. Cody Sandahl*

Introduction

When I (Cody) was growing up in Texas, there was definitely a "right way" to be a faithful Christian. Faithful Christians were expected to go to church every Sunday (even on vacation), participate in a small group or Bible study, and have at least fifteen minutes of a quiet time every day. As I have seen and experienced other Christian faith traditions, I have discovered other checklists for being a faithful Christian. Some faith traditions emphasize giving a full tithe (10%, and that's pre-tax in case you're wondering). Other faith traditions expect people to express certain spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues. Other faith traditions emphasize the Sacraments. It seems we do not lack for checklists on the "right way" to be a faithful Christian.

It seems to me that all of these checklists are partial glimpses of a broader and more beautiful truth: our Creator designed us to connect with Him in ways as diverse and unique as this universe that we live in. We each have a kind of spiritual personality that influences which spiritual practices resonate most within our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls.

If you have heard of *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman, you can think of these spiritual pathways as your spiritual love languages. Your dominant spiritual pathways, your spiritual personality, are how you best experience love from God and express love toward God.

We have three main goals over the course of this discussion.

Goal #1: To help you understand the spiritual practices (pathways) that resonate most with your spiritual personality.

Goal #2: To give you the tools to invest heavily in your resonant spiritual pathways.

Goal #3: To give you experiences in other spiritual pathways so you know how to shake things up when you're feeling stuck in a spiritual rut.

I highly recommend buying Gary Thomas' book *Sacred Pathways*. Even if you don't read it cover-to-cover, it serves as an excellent reference if you want to dive deeper into your resonant spiritual pathways.

The Spiritual Pathways

- **Naturalists**: Loving God Outdoors
- **Sensates**: Loving God with the Senses
- **Traditionalists**: Loving God through Ritual and Symbol
- **Ascetics**: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity
- **Activists**: Loving God through Confrontation
- **Caregivers**: Loving God by Loving Others
- **Enthusiasts**: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration
- **Contemplatives**: Loving God through Adoration
- **Intellectuals**: Loving God with the Mind

Session #1 (Naturalists: Loving God Outdoors)

Highs, Lows, and Prayer Requests

Share with the group your joys, concerns, and prayer requests since the last time you met. I recommend writing down the prayer requests and sharing them with the group each time so people can be praying between sessions.

Opening Discussion

- What are some of your most memorable moments in nature or outdoors?
- Where was God during those moments?

Scripture

Psalm 8

1O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

2Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

3When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

4what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

5Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

6You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

7all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

8the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

9O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Going Deeper

- In Psalm 8, how does being in nature affect David?
- What are some things in nature that connect David with God?

We are going to take a few minutes to experience one aspect of this spiritual pathway. St. Francis of Assisi's Canticum of the Sun is one of the classic Christian expressions of a spiritual naturalist. The words of his poem are the basis of the hymn *All Creatures of Our God and King*. We are going to watch a video of that hymn with photos of God's beautiful Creation in the background.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Od3gO6qDLNA>

The naturalist pathway includes a few potential pitfalls as well. A naturalist can be prone to withdraw too far from other people, missing the people who are a "very good" part of God's Creation. A naturalist can be prone to idolizing nature, loving the feeling they get outdoors without connecting it to the Creator. A naturalist can be prone to losing their grounding in the foundations of our faith in Jesus while pursuing the emotions of their outdoor experiences.

- When have you seen someone fall into those pitfalls? Which ones are most likely to affect you?

Spiritual Practices

To overcome the potential pitfalls and experience a full connection with God through the naturalist spiritual pathway, consider these spiritual practices.

- **Connecting Creation to the Creator.** When you experience something profound in nature, pause to intentionally pray to the One who blessed you with that experience.
- **Use nature to expand your awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence.** Nature reveals God's greatness, God's beauty, and God's penchant for creating diversity rather than uniformity. Seek to notice the Holy Spirit's presence in similar ways when you aren't in nature as well.
- **Listening to God in nature.** Set aside time to sit outdoors and let God do the talking.

Whether you resonate with this spiritual pathway or not, take the time to experience it at least once before we meet again.

Before we meet again, I'm going to experience this spiritual pathway by...

Closing Prayer

Session #2 (Sensates: Loving God with the Senses)

Highs, Lows, and Prayer Requests

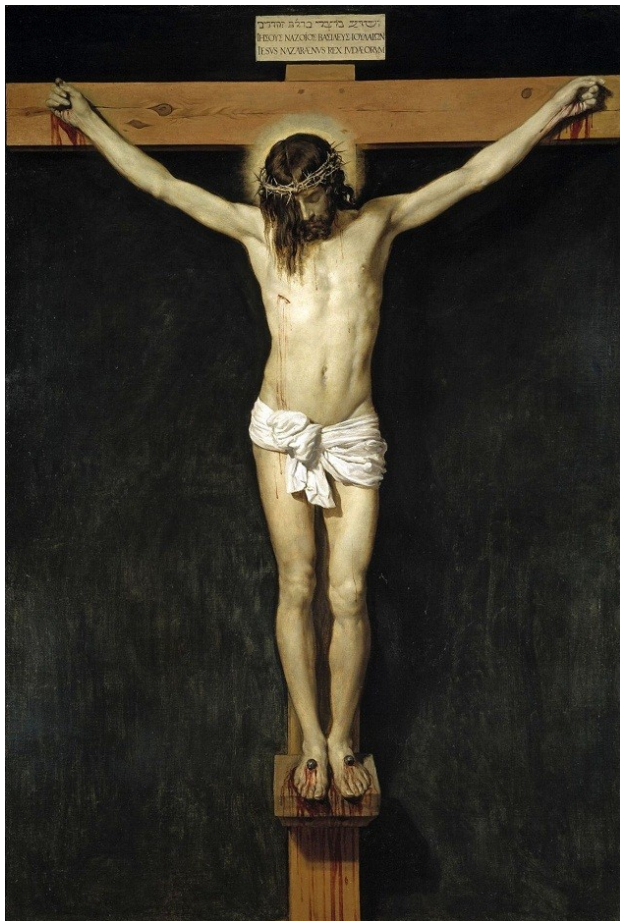
Share with the group your joys, concerns, and prayer requests since the last time you met.

Opening Discussion

- Tell us about how you experienced the previous spiritual pathway since we last met.
- What are some of your most intense sensory experiences (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches)?
- What strikes your senses in these famous Christian paintings?



The Last Supper, Leonardo da Vinci



Christ Crucified, Diego Velázquez



The Return of the Prodigal Son, Rembrandt

Scripture

Ezekiel 3:1-15

He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. 2So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. 3He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey. 4He said to me: Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them. 5For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel— 6not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. 7But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. 8See, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads. 9Like the hardest stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not fear them or be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. 10He said to me: Mortal, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart and hear with your ears; 11then go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them. Say to them, “Thus says the Lord God”; whether they hear or refuse to hear. 12Then the spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the Lord rose from its place, I heard behind me the sound of loud rumbling; 13it was the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, that sounded like a loud rumbling. 14The spirit lifted me up and bore me away; I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me. 15I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who lived by the river Chebar. And I sat there among them, stunned, for seven days.

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” 4The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

5And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” 6Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” 8Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

Going Deeper

- How do Ezekiel’s and Isaiah’s visions of God in heaven incorporate the senses?
- Some Christian traditions use simplicity to connect with God, others use visuals like architecture, paintings, or multimedia, and others incorporate incense and other senses. Which of these elements help you connect with God and which distract you?
- Describe (with as many senses as possible) what you imagine it is like to worship in heaven.

The sensate pathway includes a few potential pitfalls as well. A sensate can be prone to worship the experience rather than the God on the other side of the experience. A sensate can also focus on beauty to the point that they are worshipping beauty itself instead of the Creator of beauty. Finally, a sensate might worship in a way that goes through the motions of the experience without having conviction about their faith.

- When have you seen someone fall into those pitfalls? Which ones are most likely to affect you?

Spiritual Practices

Communion (or the Lord’s Supper) is one of the most sensory activities in the Christian faith. It is a spiritual practice that can demonstrate the greatest strength of sensates by connecting people with God and each other. It can also demonstrate the pitfalls of going through the motions or worshipping the experience itself. As we experience Communion together, try to center your heart, mind, and soul on the Savior who instituted this sacrament.

- As you taste or smell the bread, how does it speak to your faith in Jesus? (ex: hard, sweet, nourishing, etc)
- As you taste or smell the juice, how does it speak to your faith in Jesus? (ex: sweet, smooth, bitter, etc)
-

- Drawing is another way to tap into the sensory side of your mind and soul. Draw yourself in relationship to God right now. Stick figures are fine!
- Share your drawing with the group and explain how it depicts your relationship with God right now.

Whether you resonate with this spiritual pathway or not, take the time to experience it at least once before we meet again.

Before we meet again, I'm going to experience this spiritual pathway by...

Closing Prayer

Session #3 (Traditionalists: Loving God Through Ritual and Symbol)

Highs, Lows, and Prayer Requests

Share with the group your joys, concerns, and prayer requests since the last time you met.

Opening Discussion

- Tell us about how you experienced the previous spiritual pathway since we last met.
- What are some spiritual traditions that have been meaningful to you?

Read these excerpts from Justin Martyr's "First Apology" (ca 150). Martyr is a Christian, writing about Christian practices for non-Christians who misunderstood and attacked them for their faith. What sounds familiar about these Christian practices? What sounds different?

From Chapter 65. Administration of the sacraments.

Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands.

And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. This word Amen answers in the Hebrew language to *yevocto* (so be it).

And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.

From Chapter 67. Weekly worship of the Christians.

And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things.

And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.

Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.

And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.

But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.

For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.

Scripture

Genesis 12:7 – 8; 13:18

7Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. 13:18So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the Lord.

Leviticus 10:8 – 11

8And the Lord spoke to Aaron: 9Drink no wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons, when you enter the tent of meeting, that you may not die; it is a statute forever throughout your generations. 10You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; 11and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.

Revelation 5:9-14

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Going Deeper

- Gary Thomas sees three main elements in the traditionalist pathway: ritual (or liturgy), symbol (or significant image), and sacrifice. Where do you see those elements in the Scriptures above? Would you add anything to his list?
- When have you sacrificed as a result of your faith? How did it affect your relationship with God?

The traditionalist pathway includes a few potential pitfalls as well. The traditionalist might serve God by habit and tradition without knowing God personally. The traditionalist might focus on worship or ritual without ever considering the social or justice aspects of the Gospel. The traditionalist might judge others who are not as religious. Or the traditionalist might see the rituals themselves as holy instead of seeing God as holy.

- When have you seen someone fall into one of those pitfalls? When have you?

Spiritual Practices

To overcome the potential pitfalls and experience a full connection with God through this spiritual pathway, consider these spiritual practices.

- **Meditating on Scripture or Classic Prayers.** When meditating on Scripture, imagine that you are sipping rather than guzzling. Less is more! Choose a few verses (or the Lord's Prayer, Apostle's Creed, or Nicene Creed) and repeat them or re-read them multiple times. There are different frameworks for meditating on Scripture if you need a little help. For a summary of *lectio divina*, see <https://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/lectio-divina-beginners-guide>
- **Celebrating the Christian Calendar.** You might already have rituals for Advent and Lent, but what about Christ the King Sunday? What about Epiphany? Take a look at some of the other dates on the Christian calendar and schedule your own remembrance or spiritual practice on those days. <https://www.calendarlabs.com/holidays/christian/2021>
- **Disciplined Times for Prayer.** Choose specific times to pray each day, and make it a discipline rather than an afterthought. Dr. Pepper used to encourage people to drink a soda at 10, 2, and 4 each day. I bet you have specific times of the day to drink coffee or tea. What specific times can you set aside to pray?
- **Using Symbols In Daily Life.** If you tend to be impatient in the car, can you hang a cross or fish on your rear-view mirror to remind yourself to practice the peace of the Lord? If you tend to wake up grouchy, can you place a note on your bathroom mirror? What symbols can you place in your daily routine to remind yourself to choose the character and conduct of Christ?

Whether you resonate with this spiritual pathway or not, take the time to experience it at least once before we meet again.

Before we meet again, I'm going to experience this spiritual pathway by...

Closing Prayer

Session #4 (Ascetics: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity)

Highs, Lows, and Prayer Requests

Share with the group your joys, concerns, and prayer requests since the last time you met.

Opening Discussion

- Tell us about how you experienced the previous spiritual pathway since we last met.
- If you have ever experienced spiritual fasting or a spiritual retreat, tell us about your experience.

Scripture

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 7Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 11Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Daniel 9:2-3, 20-22

2In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. 3Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

20While I was speaking, and was praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God on behalf of the holy mountain of my God— 21while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen before in a vision, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. 22He came and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding.

Going Deeper

- The ascetic uses suffering, self-denial, or solitude as a spiritual practice to bring themselves into the presence of God.
 - In Daniel 9:3, why does Daniel say he fasted, wore sackcloth, and covered himself in ashes? Why does Jesus go to the wilderness and fast in Matthew 4:1?
- Another way to think about asceticism is to imagine every week like Lent. People often give up or take on something for Lent as a way to prepare their hearts for Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.
 - If you have had a meaningful experience through this Lenten discipline, share your experience with the group.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that if we do not have some element of the ascetic in us, we will find it difficult to follow Christ. How do you react to that statement?

The traditionalist pathway includes a few potential pitfalls as well. The ascetic might feel **overly proud** of their personal piety and judgmental toward others. The ascetic might start to see their **pain or self-denial as a goal** instead of a means to a spiritual end. The ascetic might seek to **manipulate God** through their acts of devotion.

Pastor Cody will share his story of manipulative fasting.

Spiritual Practices

To overcome the potential pitfalls and experience a full connection with God through this spiritual pathway, consider these spiritual practices.

- **Being Still**

- **Fasting** – removing something from your life and replacing that time with intentional time for prayer
- **Obeying** – following God’s direction into difficult actions or ways of serving
- **Retreats** – pausing the rest of your life for a day or more to intentionally seek the Lord
- **Living Simply** – focusing on what you need rather than what you want
- **Enduring Hardship** – modeling faithfulness in the hard times in your life or intentionally seeking hardship (ex: carrying a sharp nail in your pocket during Lent) to remind yourself to dedicate time to seek the Lord

Have you ever experienced these spiritual practices? If so, share your experience with the group.

Whether you resonate with this spiritual pathway or not, take the time to experience it at least once before we meet again.

Before we meet again, I’m going to experience this spiritual pathway by...

Closing Prayer

Session #5 (Activists: Loving God Through Conflict)

Highs, Lows, and Prayer Requests

Share with the group your joys, concerns, and prayer requests since the last time you met.

Opening Discussion

- 1 Tell us about how you experienced the previous spiritual pathway since we last met.
- 2 Can you think of someone from your life or from history who you believe practiced conflict in a Christ-like manner?

Scripture

Isaiah 58:1-14

Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. 2Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.

3“Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. 4Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. 5Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

6Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

8Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. 9Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, 10if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. 11The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. 12Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

13If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; 14then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Going Deeper

- Looking at Isaiah 58, God seems to care about personal holiness (ex: fasting, keep Sabbath) *and* God seems to care about social injustices as well (v6-7).
 - How much time and energy do you invest in your personal holiness versus social injustices?
 - How can a church like FPCL with such a wide range of political and theological views invest in justice together?

The activist pathway includes a few potential pitfalls as well.

- Becoming judgmental
- Sexual temptation often goes with increased ambition
- Elitism and resentment against those who are afraid of conflict
- Preoccupation with activity or stats – need sincerity, effort, *and* thoughtful prayer
- Lack of emphasis on personal sanctity

Spiritual Practices

To overcome the potential pitfalls and experience a full connection with God through this spiritual pathway, consider these spiritual practices.

- **Prayer Walk** – praying for a city block to come to faith, praying for the government while walking around the building, etc.
- **Procession** – gathering with other Christians to walk together in visible unity or visible prayer
- **Intercession** – praying with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other (Karl Barth)

Whether you resonate with this spiritual pathway or not, take the time to experience it at least once before we meet again.

Before we meet again, I'm going to experience this spiritual pathway by...

Closing Prayer

Session #6 (Caregivers: Loving God by Loving Others)

Highs, Lows, and Prayer Requests

Share with the group your joys, concerns, and prayer requests since the last time you met.

Opening Discussion

- Tell us about how you experienced the previous spiritual pathway since we last met.
- Who is someone from your life who has demonstrated exceptional caregiving? Was their motive faith or something else?

Scripture

Luke 4:16 - 21

16When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 18“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 19to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” 20And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Going Deeper

- What’s the difference between loving others as an act of obedience and loving others as an act of worship toward God?
- In the famous passage from Matthew 25:31-46 (sheep and the goats), Jesus calls us to see him inside the people around us. Indeed, he calls us to treat needy people as if we were encountering Jesus himself.
 - When have you seen that mindset and heart-set in someone?
 - What might that look like at FPCL or in your life?
- One of Gary Thomas’ core contentions is that all of these spiritual pathways (but especially caregiving) are acts of worship.
 - Why do you think worship is primarily known as singing songs and listening to a sermon?
 - What ways outside of a Sunday morning service have you worshiped God?

This spiritual pathway includes a few potential pitfalls as well.

- Judging others
- Constantly being busy without attending to our relationship with Jesus (Mary and Martha in Luke 10:41-42)
- Serving ourselves by serving others
- Neglecting those closest to us

Spiritual Practices

To overcome the potential pitfalls and experience a full connection with God through this spiritual pathway, consider these spiritual practices.

- “Adopting” a prisoner
- Helping a friend through a personal crisis
- Lending money
- Helping someone battling substance abuse
- Helping someone learn to read, learn to speak English, or study for the citizenship test
- Working at a soup kitchen
- Fixing someone’s car
- Making recordings for the blind
- Watching children of tired parents
- Providing financial counseling or budgeting help to someone struggling to manage money

Whether you resonate with this spiritual pathway or not, take the time to experience it at least once before we meet again.

Before we meet again, I'm going to experience this spiritual pathway by...

Closing Prayer

Session #7 (Enthusiasts: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration)

Highs, Lows, and Prayer Requests

Share with the group your joys, concerns, and prayer requests since the last time you met.

Opening Discussion

- Tell us about how you experienced the previous spiritual pathway since we last met.
- Have you ever had a meaningful or impactful dream?

Scripture

Genesis 24:1-27

24Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. 2Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh 3and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, 4but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac." 5The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" 6Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. 7The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. 8But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there." 9So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

10Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. 11He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was toward evening, the time when women go out to draw water. 12And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. 13I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. 14Let the girl to whom I shall say, 'Please offer your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels' —let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master." 15Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder. 16The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. 17Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me sip a little water from your jar." 18"Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. 19When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." 20So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. 21The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful. 22When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, 23and said, "Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" 24She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." 25She added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night." 26The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord 27and said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin."

Going Deeper

- Where do you see mystery in this story?
- Where do you see spiritual expectation in this story?
- Where do you see celebration in this story?

This spiritual pathway includes a few potential pitfalls as well.

- Seeking experiences for their own sake (spiritual thrill-seeking)
- Being independent to the point of losing your grounding
- Lack of accountability to a Christian community

- Equating “good feelings” with “good worship”

Spiritual Practices

To overcome the potential pitfalls and experience a full connection with God through this spiritual pathway, consider these spiritual practices.

- Keep a journal of your dreams and pray for the Holy Spirit to speak to you through them
- Pray alone or with a group with the expectation that God will do something
- Take a spiritual risk that is outside of your comfort zone and requires the Holy Spirit to be successful
- Create something that honors the character of God
- Meditate without seeking knowledge or answers

Whether you resonate with this spiritual pathway or not, take the time to experience it at least once before we meet again.

Before we meet again, I’m going to experience this spiritual pathway by...

Closing Prayer

Session #8 (Contemplatives: Loving God Through Adoration)

Highs, Lows, and Prayer Requests

Share with the group your joys, concerns, and prayer requests since the last time you met.

Opening Discussion

- Tell us about how you experienced the previous spiritual pathway since we last met.
- What do you think of when you hear the word “adoration?”

Scripture

Psalm 63

1O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. 2So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. 3Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. 4So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. 5My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips 6when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; 7for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. 8My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. 9But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; 10they shall be given over to the power of the sword, they shall be prey for jackals. 11But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

Luke 10:38-42

38Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. 40But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” 41But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Going Deeper

- How does David (in Psalm 63) demonstrate his devotion and adoration for God?
- This scene about Mary and Martha comes right after Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Why do you think Luke placed those two stories side-by-side?

This spiritual pathway includes a few potential pitfalls as well.

- **Losing Balance** by focusing on delighting in God to the exclusion of delighting in the people and world God has made
- **Emptying Yourself Without Filling with Christ.** Many Eastern meditative practices empty ourselves, but Christian meditation must continue past that point to be filled with the Holy Spirit and the presence of Jesus.
- **Forgetting Virtue.** In addition to eliminating distractions and lessening vice or sin (which are contemplative practices), the Christian is called to practice virtue and actively be present in the world.
- **Addicted to Spiritual Experience**

Spiritual Practices

To overcome the potential pitfalls and experience a full connection with God through this spiritual pathway, consider these spiritual practices.

- **Following Prayer** – allow God to lead in prayer instead of you setting the agenda. Ex: “Lord, I don’t know how to pray or what to pray about. I’m placing myself before you. What should we discuss?”
- **Centering Prayer** – resting silently in the presence of God by meditating on your breath or one or two words (Abba, Glory, Amen, Mercy, etc)
- Ex: <https://www.lindsayboyer.com/centering-prayer>
- **The Jesus Prayer** – Meditate on “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”
- **Prayer of the Heart** – focus on your feelings as you enter God’s presence. Where is your adoration centered? ON God or something else? What are you feeling in God’s presence?

- **Stations of the Cross** – see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stations_of_the_Cross#Scriptural_form

PRACTICE: Centering Prayer

- Keep your back straight instead of slouching to help focus your mind and body.
- Relax everything else and breathe slowly and deeply.
- Choose a sacred word of one or two syllables as the symbol of your intention to be open to God's presence. Choose any word with which you are comfortable to remind you to be present to God. Examples of a sacred word: Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust, Holy, Glory, God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen, Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, silently begin to repeat the sacred word, which points you gently towards God's presence. When you are ready, you can let go of the sacred word and simply rest in God.
- When you notice that you have become engaged with your thoughts, gently disengage yourself and turn towards God's presence, returning to the sacred symbol if necessary.
- As long as your intention is to be with God and let God act upon you, you can't do the prayer wrong

Whether you resonate with this spiritual pathway or not, take the time to experience it at least once before we meet again.

Before we meet again, I'm going to experience this spiritual pathway by...

Closing Prayer

Session #9 Intellectuals (Loving God with the Mind)

Highs, Lows, and Prayer Requests

Share with the group your joys, concerns, and prayer requests since the last time you met.

Opening Discussion

- Tell us about how you experienced the previous spiritual pathway since we last met.
- Think of the smartest people you've known. How did their minds influence (positively or negatively) their approach to faith and life?
- What's something surprising or insightful you have learned in your faith?

Scripture

Proverbs 2:1-15 – My child, if you accept my words
and treasure up my commandments within you,
2making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
3if you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for understanding;
4if you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasures—
5then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.
6For the Lord gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
7he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,
8guarding the paths of justice
and preserving the way of his faithful ones.
9Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
10for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
11prudence will watch over you;
and understanding will guard you.
12It will save you from the way of evil,
from those who speak perversely,
13who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
14who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil;
15those whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.

Going Deeper

- According to Solomon, what will wisdom and knowledge do for the person who truly seeks them?
- According to Solomon, how are understanding, wisdom, and knowledge connected with loving and knowing God?
- Where do you struggle to learn as much as you would like to in your faith?

This spiritual pathway includes a few potential pitfalls as well.

- Loving Controversy
- Knowing Rather Than Doing
- Being Proud

Spiritual Practices

To overcome the potential pitfalls and experience a full connection with God through this spiritual pathway, consider these spiritual practices.

- Learning **Church History**
- Learning **Biblical Studies**
- Learning **Systematic Theology**
- Learning **Christian Ethics**
- Learning **Christian Apologetics**

Whether you resonate with this spiritual pathway or not, take the time to experience it at least once before we meet again.

Before we meet again, I'm going to experience this spiritual pathway by...

Closing Prayer