

# ⊗ SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS

*for personal reflection — adapted from Gary Thomas' Nine Sacred Pathways*

## INVENTORY

Everyone can perceive God, but different people will perceive most naturally in different ways. On the dotted lines, score each of the following statements on a scale from 0 to 3.

**0 = Not true of me | 1 = Somewhat true of me | 2 = True of me | 3 = Definitely true of me**

It is normal to score highly across many pathways, and it okay to not relate to every statement under a given pathway. This resource is not based in empirical science, so these are not to be taken as hardened categories; it's just a tool for reflection. Make note of your pathways with the highest total scores.

### **ACTIVIST: Perceiving God through confrontation and action**

- ..... Has a strong sense of justice
- ..... Gets frustrated when others are wronged
- ..... Ready to fight for what they think is right
- ..... Not afraid to stand alone in an argument

### **SENSATE: Perceiving God with the senses**

- ..... Shows lots of physical affection
- ..... Notices beauty
- ..... Loves sensory stimulation (e.g. to smell flowers or body care items, to receive a massage)
- ..... Is a foodie

### **INTELLECTUAL: Perceiving God with the mind**

- ..... Gets very interested in certain topics
- ..... Likes to read, research, investigate, and ask "why?"
- ..... Interested in humor or what makes things funny
- ..... Enjoys teaching others or demonstrating what they have learned

### **CAREGIVER: Perceiving God by loving others**

- ..... Jumps in to clean-up when hosted by another
- ..... Spontaneously helps others, especially those who are hurting
- ..... Drawn to helping "behind the scenes"
- ..... Friendly and/or nurturing

### **ENTHUSIAST: Perceiving God in excitement and celebration**

- ..... Loves to dance and/or sing
- ..... Creative and/or artistic
- ..... Active imagination
- ..... Not worried about what others may think or say about how they appear

### **TRADITIONALIST: Perceiving God through ritual and symbol**

- ..... Loves routines
- ..... Hates unexpected changes
- ..... Reminds family or friend groups of things they do regularly
- ..... Feels once an activity has happened once/twice, it's permanent tradition

### **NATURALIST: Perceiving God outdoors**

- ..... Stops to look at or enjoy natural things while outside
- ..... Attracted to outdoor activities such as gardening, biking, camping, or hiking
- ..... Loves being out in nature
- ..... Interested in learning about the natural world

### **ASCETIC: Perceiving God in solitude and simplicity**

- ..... Enjoys being alone
- ..... Gets distracted by lots of sensory input
- ..... Becomes frustrated by noise (or likes silence)
- ..... Has created strict rules for themselves, or is generally a rule-follower

### **CONTEMPLATIVE: Perceiving God through focus and attention**

- ..... Affectionate and loving towards others
- ..... Spends a lot of time thinking, making connections in their mind
- ..... Can become hyper-focused on a task or activity
- ..... Always has reasons or intentionality behind decisions

# PRAYER RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on your strongest pathways, here are some recommendations of prayer practices to commit to for a period of time to see if they work for you.

## ACTIVIST: Perceiving God through confrontation and action

- Intercessory prayer walk (as you walk, present to God the matters of justice and fairness that bug or grieve you — pay attention for Jesus' solidarity or guidance)
- Listening prayer (ask: where are you inviting me to direct my passion today, God?)
- Organizing or leading prayer for others (with family? hosting others? at church? etc.)

## SENSATE: Perceiving God with the senses

- Physical/embodied prayer (light a candle to signify God's presence, mark/flip a visual calendar, savor a drink, place a hand on your heart, hold palms open in front of you)
- Add a "body scan" to times of exercise (where in my body do I feel tension/far from God? where in my body do I feel peace/close to God? — then, welcome God's Spirit to stay with you as you move out of prayer/exercise and back into your day)
- Journaling/coloring (one color for your words, another color for words you sense from God)

## INTELLECTUAL: Perceiving God with the mind

- Read or listen to theology or a devotional alongside the Bible ([ask a pastor for recommendations, based on your interest](#))
- Learning more about Jesus, or saints or mystics from history who showed God to the world in powerful ways ([ask a pastor for recommendations, based on your interest](#)), and then, in your mind, speaking to God about what moves you or draws you in
- Acknowledging God in cleverness, elegance, or other senses of alignment/resonance (in your mind or out loud, acknowledge God's Spirit as present in those moments)

## CAREGIVER: Perceiving God by loving others

- Listening prayer (who, specifically, can I show love to today, God?)
- Intercessory prayer for someone else (praying hopes and desires over someone else in-person, welcoming God's Spirit on behalf of them, listening for and passing on God's encouragement to them)
- Intentionally, prayerfully sharing with someone or being hospitable or treating someone the way Jesus would (speak to God ahead of time about how you hope to do such acts of service prayerfully, paying attention to God's presence in them)

## ENTHUSIAST: Perceiving God in excitement and celebration

- Make a playlist of worship or prayer songs ([find songs we sing for worship and prayer at BLC here](#)) and set aside time to listen attentively (listening as background music is great too, but the best thing for building a prayer practice would be short spurts of devoted time to get comfortable and even close one's eyes while listening)
- Organizing or leading prayer for others (with family? hosting others? at church? etc.)
- Imaginative prayer or reading of the Gospels (consider a Jesus story, and imagine yourself in the scene, as different characters — good to do with a grown up!)

### TRADITIONALIST: Perceiving God through ritual and symbol

- Repetition of favorite written prayers (“Our Father”, or something from the [“Divine Hours”](#) or the [“Book of Common Prayer”](#))
- Prayer rhythms (light a candle, enjoy the same drink, sit in the same chair, at the same time of day, doing the same routine, etc.)
- Prioritize the regular Sunday service communal prayer experience

### NATURALIST: Perceiving God outdoors

- Prayerful walks in nature (looking for God in all things)
- Acknowledging God in beauty, awe, wonder, or other senses of alignment/resonance (in your mind or out loud, acknowledge God’s Spirit as present in those moments)
- Gratitude (thank you, God, for...)

### ASCETIC: Perceiving God in solitude and simplicity

- Silent, prayerful walk (no agenda but to be in the presence of God’s Spirit, felt as peace and calm)
- Fasting from technology or food for a set amount of time (as a way to “make more space” for God’s presence)
- The Examen (review day/week, asking: when did I feel least alive/furthest from God? when did I feel most alive/closest to God?)

### CONTEMPLATIVE: Perceiving God through focus and attention

- Wordless breath prayer (slow, deliberate inhales and exhales, breathing in God’s love, gently breathing out stress/anxiety/distractions)
- Centering breath prayer (repeating a simple one-word or one-sentence prayer to calibrate our focus further and further in on God’s love and presence — e.g. “God is love” from 1 John 4, or “My soul finds rest in God alone” from Psalm 62, or “Shepherd, lead me by still waters” from Psalm 23)
- Gratitude (thank you, God, for...)

## HOW DO YOU KNOW IF IT’S WORKING FOR YOU?

Connection with God feels like:

- security and safety, sure that love is there for you
- creativity or guidance or companionship in what feels hard or stressful
- a swelling of compassion for others
- comfort with yourself, interior peace
- joy, gratitude (for big or little things)

You may not *always* feel these things during the actual times you’re practicing prayer; sometimes you can’t tell a regular prayer practice is doing much in the moment, but *in general* you may find you feel more connected and peaceful. *Think of it like **brushing your teeth** — if you brush once, it won’t make your teeth healthy, but if you brush regularly, it will.* We recommend setting a **checkpoint** to review how the practice you’ve committed to is going. If it doesn’t seem to be working, no problem! Try another one!