



This month our retreat centre team enjoyed hosting a 'pathways to God' retreat. We had spent some months in preparation and each of us were able to explore new ways of relating and enjoying our relationship with God. We all have several pathways that we are used to, but there are others that we can discover that are able to bring a whole new level of intimacy with God. One of our team members, Wilrens Hornstra, put together the following summary from the book, 'Sacred Pathways' by Gary Thomas. I have added a few comments throughout.

**Naturalist:** For the naturalist, creation is as much a cathedral as any church building. Indeed, God's very first temple was a garden, in Eden, and his ultimate temple in Revelation 22 has features of a garden as well. In the mean time, "The earth is full of his glory" (Is. 6:3), so it must be possible to tap into this as a bridge into his presence. Some of us, the naturalists, are better at this than others. They simply thrive in nature. Here are three different aspects of this pathway. Firstly, in creation, we see something of God's splendour and greatness. Second, creation teaches and illustrates many principles and truths. And finally, creation is a place to rest and recuperate – while praying, worshipping, and contemplating. This is the ideal pathway for me and daily walks with my dog become an open space for my spirit to engage.

**Traditionalist:** The traditionalist thrives on ritual and symbol. The obvious expression of this pathway is a traditional, liturgical church service and the use of ancient prayers and other ancient texts. But it is also possible to create our own rituals, prayers, and liturgies as well as our own symbols. The standardized words help us to focus our mind; the symbols serve as bridges on the deepest level of our soul and spirit.

One way to introduce some ritual into our lives is to observe the Christian holidays (holy-days!) of the church calendar. After all, ever since Moses (see Lev. 23), God's people have had some form of a ritual calendar. Every team would do well to establish some special celebrations, feasts, customs and rhythms through the year. This creates variety, expectation and seasons in the team life that can add stability.

**Sensate:** The sensate most readily meets God through the five senses, through things one can see (architecture, visual art, dance), hear (great music), smell (incense and fragrances), touch (an embrace, something to handle), or taste (Lord's Supper, a meal). Beauty and sensate experience enraptures this person. There is some overlap, therefore, with the naturalist pathway and also with the traditionalist one, although the sensate does not have to be outside and the activity does not have to be traditional.

The sensate also tends to enjoy connecting to God by initiating – not merely receiving – artistic, creative, and sensate experiences, that is, through *doing* and *making*: a painting, handicraft, a dance, a shape, an arrangement etc. Over recent years we have been more and more open to hands on experience in worship and in application of teaching. What took us so long!

**Ascetic:** The ascetic way is marked by discipline, austerity, abstinence, simplicity, and strictness. It is not that these earn merit; they are embraced in order to focus more fully on God by avoiding distraction. One form of abstinence is solitude; this is where the ascetic and the contemplative meet: they are both usually practiced in solitude, although this is not essential.

Obviously, any form of fasting (doing without or abstaining from something) fits well with the ascetic temperament. Other activities listed in the book include: night watch, silence, obedience or submission, work, retreats, a simple lifestyle, and the endurance of hardship. There are times that we all need a touch of the ascetic in all our lives. How important it is for us to take time out for solitude in the midst of the crazy, busy lives we lead.

**Activist:** Activists are energized by confronting evil or injustice. It is in pursuing a cause that they experience connectedness with God. These are the warriors who thrive in battle and the evangelists who love to proclaim. They are more likely to enjoy praying when walking about or in a public procession or vigil than in the seclusion of their inner room. This sounds like the classic YWAM leader doesn't it? I know I have some of this!!

If you are an activist, you will probably need some of the other pathways and spiritual disciplines to keep your activism healthily connected to the True Source. You will also need others to keep you grounded. But don't let them put you in a box that does not fit. Your best way up is to mount your horse and ride out for justice or truth.

**Caregiver:** The pathway of the caregiver (servant, helper) is first of all outward bound, not upward. Still, it is easy to recognize the spiritual pathway to God in this pathway. As Gary Thomas puts it, serving is about "loving God by loving others". At the same time, in caring and serving we identify with God and become his hands and feet in this world, which easily leads to real closeness between him and us. And last but certainly not least, we meet Jesus in the person we are serving.

Even though all of us are called to this in some ways, there are some of us who live this as their natural passion and pathway into God's presence. They feel most alive when doing something for someone else – especially if this is a person in need or unable to help themselves. Understanding this pathway can set some free to worship in a whole new way.

**Enthusiast:** This is the pathway for those of us who thrive on worship and celebration. Different from the ascetic and contemplative, it usually involves community, although one can of course worship in solitude as well. The enthusiast is also attracted to the miraculous, charismatic, supernatural, and to challenges or acts of faith. Again this would be a regular corporate form of worship for YWAMers. It's fun, faith building and energising. It is also a classic form of worship utilised by the streams of churches that are non-conformist. As an enthusiast myself, I do well in exploring new ways of worshipping and relating with the Lord.

**Contemplative:** In *Sacred Pathways*, this chapter is subtitled "Loving God through Adoration". It is about delighting in God and spending time in his presence for its (his) own sake: "... contemplatives simply want to bath in the ocean of love God has for his children, while the rest of us seem sadly content to experience that love drop by drop" (p. 193).

Contemplation sounds like a form of thinking, but it is not intellectual thought, and includes a wide array of prayer forms, too. Simply put, it means to consider God and

'look' at him. The language of the contemplative is the language of love, relationship, and intimacy.

**Intellectual:** It is difficult for some enthusiasts and contemplatives to understand how powerfully some of us can be drawn to the Lord through a stimulated mind. When intellectuals' minds are awakened, when they understand something new about God or his ways with his children, then their adoration is unleashed.

The intellectual pathway leads to the worship of God through study and learning. Gary Thomas lists a number of theological disciplines (such as church history, biblical studies, systematic theology), but other fields of science and scholarship could also be included.

It is reminiscent of Gordon Fee's passionate claim in his book 'Listening to the Spirit in the Text' that "the proper aim of all true theology is doxology" (that is, giving glory, *doxos*, to God, or in other words: worship).

**The last word:** Having read through the summary of the 9 pathways, identify the ones you most relate to. There are often two or three that we feel comfortable with and tend to practice. Then ask the Lord if there are some new expressions that you could add into your life through the exploration of other pathways. Recently I have found the addition of an Ignatious daily 'examen' both challenging and stimulating for my spiritual life. It involves a series of positive and challenging questions to debrief my day, and to remember where, when and how I encountered the Lord. Other additions have included speaking out breath prayers throughout the day. (simple prayers you can pray in one breath), and the lectio divina, a form of meditation that is powerful in moving truth from your head to your heart. Let me know if you want some further information on these and I will send it to you.

In order to develop our relationships in general, it takes intentionality, time and effort. It is the same with the Lord. So take a few moments and take some initiative over these coming months to add a new dimension to your life with God.

Until next month

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