

Final Week

1. Overview of the 9 Pathways

1 Naturalists: loving God Outdoors

Naturalists are related to contemplatives, except that they are moved by creation in addition to the inner world. When they are outdoors, their heart soars to worship God.

Naturalists would prefer to leave any building, however beautiful or austere, to pray to God beside a river. Leave the books behind, forget the demonstrations. These Christians believe that nature clearly proclaims "God is!" They may learn more from watching an ant colony or looking at a peaceful lake than from reading a book or listening to a sermon, though they may find fulfilment from reading the parables of Jesus that are based on nature and selections from the psalms.

Three lessons that Naturalists learn:

1. Seeing Spiritual Truths in nature
2. Seeing God more clearly
3. Learning to rest wrapped in God's creation

Temptations

1. Individualism – escaping rather than recharging to return into the world.
2. Spiritual Delusion – test what you think you have heard & learned against the Bible & with help.
3. Idolising Nature – worship God not his creation.

2 Sensates: loving God with the Senses

Sensate Christians want to be lost in the awe, beauty, and splendour of God. They are drawn particularly to the liturgical, the majestic, the grand. When these Christians worship, they want to be filled with sights, sounds, and smells that overwhelm them. Incense, intricate architecture, classical music, and formal language send their hearts soaring, being able to dance.

Whereas some Christians might find such a sensuous onslaught distracting, these Christians delight in it. The five senses are God's most effective road into their hearts and the way they worship.

Think beauty, holistic, music ...

God gave us the senses – baptism involves a physical act of "dying & rising"

Temptations:

1. Worshipping without conviction. Getting carried along by an artificial mood.
2. Idolising Beauty.
3. Worshipping worship rather than worshipping God.

3 Traditionalists: Loving God through Ritual and Symbol

Traditionalists are fed by what are often termed the historic dimensions of faith: rituals, symbols, sacraments, and sacrifice. These Christians tend to have a disciplined life of faith. Some may be seen by others as legalists, defining their faith largely by matters of conduct. Frequently they enjoy regular attendance at church services, tithing, keeping the Sabbath, and so on.

They have a need for ritual and structure. The contemplatives' unstructured "prayer of the quiet" would be confusing and unfulfilling to them.

Temptations:

1. Serving God without knowing God. Without faith ritual is meaningless.
2. Neglecting social obligations. Not ministering to others.
3. Judging others. God not religion is sacred. Col 2: 16-17
4. Deifying rites. No symbol or ritual has value in itself, it represents a hidden reality.

4 Ascetics: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

Ascetics want nothing more than to be left alone in prayer. Take away the liturgy, the trappings of religion, the noise of the outside world. Let there be nothing to distract them—no pictures, no loud music—and leave them alone to pray in silence and simplicity.

Ascetics live a fundamentally internal existence. Even when they are part of a group of people, they might seem to be isolated from the others. Frequently introspective, sometimes to a fault, they are uncomfortable in any environment that keeps them from "listening to the quiet."

Their lifestyle, possessions and architecture (think of the Shakers) are likely to mirror this desire for simplicity.

Temptations:

1. Over emphasis on personal piety (holiness). A focus on outward signs not the heart
2. Neglecting social obligations. Not ministering to others.
3. Seeking pain for it's own sake.
4. Seeking to attain God's favour. Need to remember that fasting, sleeping on hard ground etc do not make God love us more.

5 Activists: Loving God through Confrontation

Devoting themselves to God in self-sacrificing activism. They find God in all their daily labour, live in his presence all day long surprisingly like contemplatives

Activists serve a God of justice, and their favourite Scripture is often the story of Jesus' cleansing of the temple. They define worship as standing against evil and calling sinners to repentance. These Christians often view the church as a place to recharge their batteries so they can go back into the World to wage war against injustice.

Activists may adopt either social, environmental or evangelistic causes, but they find their home in the rough—and—tumble world of confrontation. They are energized more by interaction with others, even in conflict, than by being alone or in small groups. Confrontation isn't an end in itself but they don't shy away from it.

Don't want to play it safe, happy to love on the edge & they expect to see God work in miraculous ways – rather like Enthusiasts.

Temptations:

1. Judging others. Lack of grace & hating the sinner as well as the sin.
2. Ambition. Becoming proud & ambitious, selfish.
3. Elitism & resentment. Feeling others are not loving enough, not courageous enough, not working hard enough & forgetting victory is a gift from God.
4. A preoccupation with activity ignoring piety. Thoughtful prayer is needed along with sincerity & effort. Don't be a hypocrite, reform begins with us.

6 Caregivers: Loving God by Loving Others

Caregivers serve God by serving others. Caregiving is not a chore, it's worship, joyful worship.

They are obedient to the many biblical challenge to love one other, show love etc. They often say they see Christ in the poor and needy, and their faith is built up by interacting with other people.

Such Christians may view the devotional lives of contemplatives and enthusiasts as selfish. Whereas caring for others might wear many of us down, this activity recharges a caregiver's batteries.

Temptations

1. Judging others as not being loving enough, doing enough. Being dismissive.
2. Self-serving – feeling validated by our actions & sacrifices
3. Holding Narrow Definitions – defining care in such a way as to exclude long-term action that creates long-term change
4. Neglecting those closest to us. Our families for instance 1 Tim 5:8 “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives ... has denied the faith...”

7 Enthusiasts: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration

Delight is their watchword.

Excitement and mystery in worship is the spiritual lifeblood of enthusiasts. As sensates want to be surrounded by beauty and intellectuals love to grapple with concepts, enthusiasts are inspired by joyful celebration. These Christians are cheerleaders for God and the Christian life. Let them clap their hands, shout “Amen!” and dance in their excitement—that's what they really want.

If their hearts aren't moved, if they don't experience God's power, something is missing. They don't want simply to know concepts but to experience them, to feel them, and to be moved by them.

They expect God to answer prayer & to move in new ways & are happy to accept dreams and God's supernatural power.

Temptations:

1. Seeking experiences for their own sake
2. Being independent & not relying on a community to be held accountable
3. Thinking good feelings = good worship
4. Not balancing reason with mystery

8 Contemplatives: Loving God through Adoration

Contemplatives refer to God as their lover, and images of a loving Father and Bridegroom best capture their view of God. Their favourite Bible passages may come from the Song of Songs, as they enter the "divine romance." The focus is not necessarily on serving God, doing his will, accomplishing great things in his name, or even obeying him, rather obedience flows from passionate love. These Christians seek to love God with the purest, deepest, and brightest love imaginable.

Activists may feel theirs is not real worship, Traditionalist may think them shallow, intellectuals may think them mysterious & Enthusiasts may think them boring!

There are many types of prayer such as Centring prayer & the Jesus prayer, praying through the stations of the cross & so on, prayers where you purposely seek to listen to the spirit or search your own heart for what you are feeling, all frameworks to help focus the mind on God.

Reading the bible with your imagination, senses & emotions eg using the Lectio Divina method or guided meditations on bible verses where you imagine yourself there.

Temptations

1. Losing balance, focussing only on our relationship with God & forgetting healthy relationships with others. God wants us to love the world he has made & love (& serve) other people.
2. Meditation that calls us to empty ourselves or be absorbed into God.
3. Remaining in adolescent infatuation rather than growing with self-discipline & self-sacrifice, we need to move beyond self-absorbed meditation to aligning our will with God's will.
4. Growing addicted to spiritual experiences. Spiritual joys are transient, joyfully & gratefully received but not the purpose of life.

9 Intellectuals: Loving God with the Mind

Intellectuals need their minds to be stirred before their hearts come truly alive. They are likely to be studying (and, in some instances, arguing either for or against) topics such as Calvinism, infant baptism, ordination of women, and predestination. These Christians live in the world of concepts.

Some intellectuals, influenced by a personality type that is shy or withdrawn, might avoid intellectual confrontation but still be “fed” primarily by intellectual activity. “Faith” is something to be understood as much as experienced. They may feel closest to God when they first understand something new about him.

Temptations:

1. Loving controversy (like the activists)
2. Knowing rather than doing (like the contemplatives)
3. Being proud about being right & happy to correct everyone else
4. Ignoring & despising emotions & sense

Discussion time

Can you form groups with people near you – COVID safe!

Who was a ...

Give each group a pathway for Q 3

Gordon brought up the idea that we are commanded to care & I realised that most if not all the pathways are commanded by God for all of us.

1. What is one of your favourite 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. Can you think of a bible verse that commands us to a pathway?

What denomination or movement in the church follows this pathway

If your pathway is the same - Why would you join them? Why wouldn't you?

4. Finding your path

We’re all different & you may find yourself fitting into 3 or 4 pathways rather than 1. You may be like Jesus & use them all!

Gary Thomas says:

“There is great freedom in how we can meet with and enjoy God. This is by his design and according to his good pleasure.”

What is common to all is **mark 12:30** you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

Don't worry about the Hwbre & the Greek & what heart meant then & means now & soul likewise what the essence is to love God with our whole mind intellect & thoughts & emotions & our whole body senses & activity.

To keep your love for God fresh & your heart alive & joyful – and to give you the desire & strength to serve & love others & build up the body of Christ, make sure you use the pathway that works for you regularly.

To grow more like Christ & understand your brothers & sisters make sure you experiment with other pathways all the time.