Now That I Know My Temperament...

The contents of this handout are adapted from Gary L. Thomas’ book on spiritual temperaments (Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God). The author defines a sacred pathway as the way we relate to God, specifically how we draw near to Him. We do not necessarily have just one pathway, but many of us have a certain predisposition for relating to God. This is our spiritual temperament. There are at least nine distinct spiritual temperaments that determine how a person worships and relates to God. The nine temperaments are: naturalist, senses-centered, traditionalist, activist, self-disciplined, caregiver, enthusiast, contemplative, and intellectual.

A good reflective question to use when pondering these different pathways and temperaments is to ask yourself, “When do I feel most loved by God? In what tangible ways does He show His love to me?”

The Naturalists: Loving God Outdoors
Naturalists (nature lovers) prefer to be outdoors. Any place that has trees or streams or open sky can be God’s cathedral. Getting outside isn’t just about softening the soul—naturalists often learn their best lessons in the out-of-doors. A naturalist might learn more from staring at an ant colony than listening to a sermon. “Earth’s crammed with heaven and every common bush afire with God. But only he who sees takes off his shoes and the rest sit around it and pick blackberries.” ~Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Helpful Spiritual Practices for Naturalists:
• Prayer walking: slowly and deliberately walking through a place for the purpose of intentional and listening prayer. Walk through your neighborhood, a park or a part of town. As you do, pray for the people and activities that are going on there. Allow the visual nature of this journey to prompt prayers.
• Prayer sitting: becoming quiet and listening to God by praying in a particular place—under a tree, out in a field, alongside a river bank or the shore of a lake.
• Practicing the Presence: developing a rhythm of living that brings God to mind throughout the day wherever you are. This is a practice of intentionally recollecting yourself before God as you engage in the activities and duties of everyday life. This is also a discipline of seeking to see others through the eyes of God.
• Unplugging: Unplugging electronic devices helps us detox from the addictive nature our smartphones can have on us. Refraining from the use of email or other social media for certain periods of time (hours, days, or a season, such as Lent). Engage in the discipline of communicating face-to-face rather than virtually.

Suggested Activities for Naturalists:
1. Take your Bible outside and read it; meditate while feasting your eyes and spirit on natural beauty. Pay attention for verses that speak of the beauty and goodness of creation
2. Rest (take a blanket and go sit in a quiet place in a park!)
3. Worship as the dawn breaks (okay, only if you are a morning person!)
Experience and Senses-Centered: Loving God with the Senses

Sense-based (senses-centered) people are moved more by the use of their senses as an inroad into their hearts. Sometimes this temperament is called “sensate.” When they worship, they want to be filled with sights, sounds, and smells. Things like incense, architecture, and music send their hearts soaring. Taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight are the means through which they experience God. They see God in beauty, and tend to be creative, artistic, and aesthetically inclined. They also enjoy God’s creation.

Spiritual Practices for the Senses-Centered (Sensate):
- **Celebration**: this is a way of engaging in actions that orient the spirit toward worship, praise and thanksgiving. This may include any of the following: sharing meals, working, serving, worshiping, listening to and/or performing music, dancing (either watching or performing).
- **Cultivating a spirit of gladness/gratitude**: (each day finding something to give a prayer of thanksgiving about)
- **Holiday traditions that engage the senses** (think pumpkin spice and cinnamon!)
- **Partaking communion**
- **High liturgical worship** (with incense, bells, rich hymnody, etc.)
- **Prayerful doodles, coloring words and/or pictures as a way of expressing what is in your heart and on your mind** (a helpful resource: [www.prayingincolor.com](http://www.prayingincolor.com))

Some Suggested Activities for the Senses-Centered (Sensate)
1. Listen to worship-producing music
2. Go to a museum or a beautiful church. Enjoy worship-producing art
3. Sing Scripture
4. Create a worship space for yourself: light a candle, set out meaningful objects like a cross or an icon or even a beautiful screensaver on your computer or phone,
5. Use a “pocket piece” (carry a stone or prayer beads or something tactile)
6. Enter into a Scripture passage. Be one of the characters. Experience the passage.
7. Vary your prayer posture: stand, sit, kneel, lie prostrate

Traditionalists: Loving God through Ceremony and Symbol

Ritual and ceremony are means by which a traditionalist seeks to make order. So, impromptu things feel chaotic to a traditionalist. They are attracted to and anchored by the historic dimensions of the faith. They want to live a disciplined and ordered life of faith with regular church attendance and predictable, structured worship.

Spiritual Practices for the Traditionalist
- **Praying the Liturgy of the Hours** (this is sometimes called fixed hour prayer—regular and consistent patterns of attending to God throughout the day)
- **Using a structured liturgy like the “Daily Office”** (morning, noon, and evening prayers—
like in the Anglican *The Book of Common Prayer (you can find it online!)*

- Praying or singing Scripture as a part of worship (e.g. the Lord's Prayer, psalms, responsive readings, doxologies etc).
- Fasting (self-denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer). Bringing attachments and cravings to the surface opens a place for prayer. This may include abstaining from food, drink, shopping, desserts, technology (computer/video games), television, etc.) A partnering with God for changing habits. Seeking strength to persevere and obey. Overcoming additions, compulsions, whims and cravings.

Some Suggested Activities for the Traditionalist
1. Read Scripture aloud.
2. Select a Psalm to say every morning and one for each evening; Practice liturgical prayer (see Book of Common Prayer)
3. Set a regular time and place to meet with the Lord each day.
4. Follow the Church calendar and celebrate significant days, (e.g. Advent, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, etc.)
5. Develop meaningful rituals; Make plentiful use of symbols or ritualized gestures
6. What rituals, symbols, etc. would you like to incorporate into your life? How do you think they would affect your personal worship time?

Activists: Loving God through Taking a Stand
Activists love God by standing up for righteousness and justice. Activists tend to be involved in social reform, or actively confronting error and evil. Many are writers, preachers, politicians, academics, or artists. They are energized by interaction, even if it involves conflict. (They love the story of Jesus clearing out the moneychangers in the temple). The 'shadow-side' to this temperament shows itself in a tendency to be tactless, forgetting to listen to others, not waiting for God or seeking discernment.

Spiritual Practices for Activists
- Justice in all areas of life (food, clothing, consumer habits, ethics, being a good steward)
- Volunteering
- Prayer walking (interceding for a neighborhood by walking through/praying)
- Intercessory and healing prayer
- Prayer meetings, active with prayer lists
- Living out/living into “Thy will be done”

Suggested Activities for Activists
1. Consider God’s faithfulness in the light of so much undone in the world. Consider His great patience. He is working even when we see no evidence of it. Don't give up.
2. Ponder John 4:34
3. Seek to develop tact, gentleness, persuasiveness, true love for others. Seek a mentor.
4. Invest energy in marches, prayer walks, food pantries—places involving issues you feel strongly about. Be creative.
5. Thoroughly research any activity before joining it. Ask God for wisdom first. Seek counsel, confirmation and accountability.

6. Consider carefully the outcomes you desire from your efforts. How do your activities fit into your worship of God?

7. Be intentional about developing your ability for self-examination and contemplation of God. Activities tend to be so outwardly directed that they ignore their inward journey. Having a balance can help you be a significant change agent “for the life of the world.”

**Self-Disciplined: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity**

People who are naturally self-disciplined are often drawn towards this kind of spirituality. A fancy word for this kind of temperament is “ascetic” (or asceticism). Ascetics gravitate toward solitude, austerity, simplicity, and deep commitment. Self-disciplined (ascetics) types prefer to be left alone to pray. They aren’t afraid of discipline or solitude, indeed they experience God more profoundly when away from distractions. They prefer to be left alone to pray in silence and simplicity. They tend to be very introspective. We practice silence, not just so we can hear God, but also so we can hear our neighbor.

**Spiritual Practices for the Self-Disciplined (Ascetic)**

- Silence. Silence is experienced as a regenerative practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise.
- Practicing disciplines alone (such as study or prayer or examen, journaling and so forth).
- Simplicity (untangling one’s life to focus on what matters). Downsizing possessions. Eating simple foods.

**Some Suggested Activities for the Self-Disciplined**

1. Worship in the quiet of the night; Rise in the early morning for prayer and worship
2. Practice silence – participate in a silent meal, stop talking/texting intentionally between certain hours of the day
3. Fast; do physical labor as an act of worship
4. Practice obedience – ask God to reveal any rebellious attitudes. To facilitate this practice, maintain a prayer journal or use the spiritual discipline of “Examen”
5. Simplify your life – clean a closet, have a yard sale, de-clutter your books and papers
6. Look for ways and places to include others in your life.

**Caregivers: Loving God by Loving Others**

For caregivers, acts of mercy are a very practical way for them to show their love for God, but also to grow in their love for God. Caregivers may hear God more clearly when caring for someone than when they sit quietly in prayer. For them, caregiving isn’t a chore, but rather, a form of worship. Caregiving as a temperament means we express our love to God be reaching out to others; it’s the picture of a heart overflowing with love and spilling out onto those around us. Activists and caregivers can work together – one to help solve the underlying problem, the other to give comfort until the problem is addressed.
**Spiritual Practices for Caregivers**
· Service/service projects (volunteering at a homeless shelter, helping somebody battle substance abuse, helping an illiterate person learn to read, donating time at a battered women’s shelter, working in a soup kitchen, repairing a house, watching the children of some tired parents).
· Hospitality
· Mentoring
· Gifts of mercy and helps

**Suggested Activities for Caregivers**
1. “Adopt” someone – a neighborhood child or elderly person you dedicate yourself to caring for
2. Help a friend through a crisis, counsel at a crisis pregnancy center
3. Work in the inner city, volunteer on a rescue squad, or volunteer in a soup kitchen
4. Help someone battling substance abuse or some other difficulty. (The Chinese word for “crisis” is the overlapping of the words “danger” and “opportunity.” A caregiver can help guide someone in crisis out of danger and in to hope and opportunity.

**Enthusiasts: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration**
Enthusiast seems like a weird word. It means fan (or zealot or aficionado or devotee). Excitement and mystery in worship is the spiritual lifeblood of enthusiasts. Enthusiasts are inspired by joyful celebration. They are cheerleaders for God and the Christian life. Let them clap their hands, shout ‘Amen!’ and dance in their excitement, that’s all they ask. They don’t want to just know concepts, but to experience them, to feel them, and to be moved by them. The necessity of maturity will probably lead virtually every enthusiast through the canyon of unanswered prayer, where expectancy runs dry and the only mystery seems to be where God is hiding. By the same token, celebration – as a way of engaging in actions that orient the spirit toward worship and praise and thanksgiving is a way of positioning one’s self to have a heart of deep gladness and the ability to revel before the Lord.

**Spiritual Practices for Enthusiasts**
· Conversational prayer (talking naturally and un-self-consciously to God)
· Prayer journaling

**Suggested Activities for Enthusiasts**
1. Time with others (sharing meals, working, serving, worshiping, laughing, listening to music)
2. Regularly engaging with a worshiping community
3. Cultivating a spirit of gladness
4. Taking yourself less seriously
5. Having holiday traditions that guide your celebration
6. Journaling (keep track of your dreams; write down any that seem significant; meet regularly with a spiritual director or mentor)
7. Spend time just listening to God. Write down what you hear Him saying.
8. Cultivate the mystery of expectancy: ask God to bring someone in your path to whom you can minister; start a conversation with a stranger.
9. Be part of a strong church that holds its members accountable. Ask for a prayer partner or a mentor.

**Contemplatives: Loving God through your Emotions**
Images of a God as a loving Father and Christ as Bridegroom dominate their view of God. Contemplatives seek to love God with the purest, deepest, and brightest love imaginable. Healthy contemplatives will understand that rich human relationships are a way to enjoy God’s love, just as is solitary and intimate prayer, for God can reveal Himself to us just as much in a conversation with a fellow believer as He can when we are on our knees in prayer.

**Spiritual Practices for Contemplatives**
- Lectio Divina
- Breath Prayer - Make use of the Jesus prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner) or some other prayer (Make haste to help me) to practice the presence of God.
- Meditative Prayer – this is prayerful reflection of a biblical text or theme, use of something you can see, taste, touch, hear or smell.
- Centering Prayer (choose a word and focus on it—Jesus, God, Peace, etc.) repeating it until it becomes a part of you

**Suggested Activities for Contemplatives**
1. Practice secret acts of devotion – something you do for someone else without letting anyone else know about it.
2. Carry a pocket piece – something tactile to remind you Who you serve, e.g. a small cross.
3. Dancing Prayer – allowing God to lead and follow Him wherever He takes you. Allow Him to speak and place requests before you.
4. Practice “prayer of the heart – “this focuses on emotional attachment to, or adoration or, God. Its aim is to love God, to have our hearts enlarged so that God owns more and more of us.

**Intellectuals: Loving God with the Mind**
Intellectuals remind us of the high calling of loving God with our mind. Scripture is emphatic that our mind is one of the key elements that we can use to love God. Our first search, our primary calling, is to get wisdom and understanding. Intellectuals feel that to be growing in Christ, they need to have their mind stimulated with Scriptures and other reading materials and intellectual pursuits. They need to be challenged, if they are not learning new things about God then their relationship with Him feels stagnant.

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Spiritual Practices for Intellectuals
- Bible study (systematically studying Scripture to gain the big picture of what God is doing)
- Study (alone or in small groups). This is not just study of Scripture, but reading to learn and know more about the faith.
- Memorizing Scripture, hymns, poems, quotes, etc.

Suggested activities for Intellectuals
1. Study the basic disciplines of theological training
2. Invest in biblical study: reading through Scripture; meticulous study of portions of Scripture
3. Read books that help understand what Scripture says - books on theology; books on church history, memoirs and biographies of famous Christians, etc.
4. Do an in-depth study of one topic
5. Listen to theology tapes/CDs, podcasts while driving
6. Study the seven basic topics in systematic theology: God, humankind, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the Church, and eschatology (the “end times”).
7. Study Christian ethics
8. Study the creeds (remembering that the root word, credere, is Latin for “from the heart” and not from the head!)