**Nine Sacred Pathways**

-Book by Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God*; available in AMBS library (248.4 T454)

-A sacred pathway “describes the way we relate to God.”

-“People have different spiritual temperaments, [and] what feeds one doesn’t feed all.” (p. 18)

-All of these approaches are valuable in helping people encounter God.

-Our preferences are shaped by our personality, our upbringing, and our experiences, may change throughout our lives.

-Awareness of different preferences helps us understand others better. A common pitfall for each spiritual pathway is

judgmentalism, thinking that those who practice a different way (often the ones we least prefer) are not as good.

-Learning to value all of these approaches in our own life will help us move toward spiritual maturity.

**Naturalist**

Encounter God through nature; moved by natural beauty or the awe of how the universe works

Potential pitfalls: escapism: excuse to not engage others; nature is not the church; pantheism: viewing nature as God;

how do you encounter God in places where there is not much nature, or where nature is damaged or destroyed?

Helpful tools and practices: Wild Church movement; use nature as your location for praying, journaling, reading scripture,

etc.; reflect on what you learn about God or faith from different aspects of nature (greatness, glory, variety,

abundance); beholding (gazing versus just looking); combine with activism to take action to protect creation

**Enthusiast**

Encounter God through joyful celebration and expressive worship; want to experience God’s presence and power, to feel

moved by God’s spirit; value physical expressions (moving body), mystery/miracles, spontaneity, excitement; expect God to continue to act in our world

Potential pitfalls: seeking experiences rather than seeking God; expecting God to answer every prayer as they desire; lack

of thoughtful reflection can lead to a shallow/narrow faith or dangerous expressions; may not provide needed resources in times of pain and struggle

Helpful tools and practices: incorporate worship music into your time with God; read scripture out loud, dramatize it;

record your dreams and meet with a spiritual director who can help you understand them; when reading Bible, imagine what characters felt as they encountered God; write your own prayers or psalms; incorporate movement into your prayers, do liturgical dance

**Intellectual**

Encounter God through ideas, concepts, thinking, knowing, intellectual activity; faith is something to be understood; feel

close to God when you learn something new about God (faith feels stagnant without new understandings); not just thinking about God: experience faith as thinking with God; important to understand the Bible and theology

Potential pitfalls: using the mind to defeat others rather than build them up; forgetting to practice the things we learn; not

appreciating things that are subjective or based on emotion; pride, wanting to correct everyone else; believing you must understand everything before claiming faith, getting baptized, etc. (forgetting that some of faith is mystery)

Helpful tools and practices: invest in biblical studies that move beyond a literal reading; join a study group, or lead one;

use commentaries and other quality resources; balance academic reading with lectio divina; take seminary classes!

**Traditionalist**

Encounter God through historic dimensions of faith: rituals, symbols, sacraments, religious practices; value structured

worship

Potential pitfalls: going through the motions without thought or without understanding the meaning behind the ritual; not

giving space for spontaneity; neglecting social obligations (prophetic critiques such as Micah 6:8)

Helpful tools and practices: pay attention to the church calendar, feast days; practice set hour prayer (morning, noon,

evening, bedtime); use a prayer book such as the Anabaptist Prayer Book or Book of Common Prayer; read through the psalms, or read one psalm in several translations; liturgical prayer; memorize scripture; develop a call to worship and repeat it frequently; observe the Lord’s Supper and other sacraments

**Ascetic**

Encounter God through solitude and simplicity, discipline, self-denial, austerity; like to be left alone in prayer; prefer to

remove distractions, might give up things (fast) to draw closer to God; introspective, encounter God in their inner spirit and in stillness; demonstrated in monastic lifestyles; aims for deep commitment; strict with themselves but treat others with gentleness

 Potential pitfalls: practices can become legalistic, can lack joy; seeking pain for its own sake rather than as means to

God; turning inward to the point that relationships with others are left unattended; doing things to earn God’s favor

Helpful tools and practices: be intentional about creating time and space to spend alone; live simply; eliminate distractions

in your everyday life; try fasting (from food, TV, Facebook, etc.); practice silence, attend a silent retreat; wake up early to spend time in prayer or worship; kneel to pray; use daily chores as an act of worship; endure hardship rather than fight it; learn and grow from difficult times

**Sensates**

Encounter God through senses: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch; like to be lost in the awe, beauty, and splendor of

God; drawn to liturgical, majestic, grand, or beautiful worship; embraces role of body in worship

Potential pitfalls: may struggle to worship if senses aren’t engaged; worshipping without conviction or content; waiting for

others to create a helpful space

Helpful tools and practices: create a worship space to use, including candles, incense, music, musical instruments,

meaningful items; use a pocket piece to remind you to pray; vary your prayer posture: stand, sit, kneel, lie prostrate; use prayer labyrinth; draw or color while you listen to scripture or music; meditate on an icon or religious art; worship in beautiful spaces; taste salt, bread, etc. as you pray

**Caregiver**

Encounter God through serving others, especially the needy

Potential pitfalls: may feel overwhelmed by others’ problems; may struggle to care for themselves when surrounded by

needs of others; may place to much of their identity in what they have to give (self-validation through serving others); may create unhealthy dependencies

Helpful tools and practices: take time to help someone each week; create service groups; journal about experiences; keep

prayer cards for different concerns; write letters to people with biblical or hymn texts; pray a breath prayer that reminds you that you are loved just because youare you (in: Because you made me; out: I am loved); at the end of each day, ask God to cover the needs you cannot (“May your love, God, be the bridge between what \_\_\_ needed and what I could give”)

**Activist**

Encounter God through working for causes they are passionate about, through trying to bring about social change; desire

to see justice in the world and take concrete action in confronting injustice; can include people with very different social causes!; see conflict as a necessary part of the breaking in of God’s reign; frustrated by apathy

Potential pitfalls: losing sense of love and compassion for those they oppose; confrontation without care; lack of integrity

(seeing the speck in another’s eye but not the plank in theirs); justifying methods that compromise their message; not respecting boundaries; not sustaining the faith behind their causes through spiritual practices; Messiah complex (thinking it is them rather than God who saves the world)

Helpful tools and practices: pray for patience and understanding; prayer walks through a neighborhood; intersperse

reading of scripture and newspaper, as well as prayer; have a mentor or group for support and accountability; develop your ability for self-examination and contemplation of God

**Contemplative**

Encounter God through being with God and being aware of God’s presence; take pleasure from being faithfully present to

God and adoring God; gaze on God and get caught up in an experience of love

Potential pitfalls: hard to carve out time in our culture for silence and reflection; might become too isolated, need balance

of engaging people

Helpful tools and practices: read mystics such as Thomas Merton and Richard Rohr; centering prayer (rest in presence of

God, let go of thoughts); adopt a simple repeated prayer; practice secret acts of devotion (telling no one); have a

spiritual director; attend a silent retreat; practice meditation (Hebrew word means “chew the cud”); attend Taize worship; write letters to God.

Could add: Communitarian, Artist/Musician

Questions for group discussion:

-What feels right / accurate about where you landed in the Nine Sacred Pathways inventory (your top and bottom three preferences)? What surprised you?

-Considering this tool and the document on “Spiritual Formation at AMBS,” what kinds of spiritual practices will deepen and/or expand your spiritual life in the year ahead?