

Naturalists

Loving God out of Doors

Description

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 – just let them take a walk through the woods, mountains, or open meadows. 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 fulfilling thoughts from the Psalms or the parables of Christ, which are based on nature.

Things a Naturalist Might Say

“I feel cut off if I have to spend too much time indoors, just listening to speakers or singing songs. Nothing makes me feel closer to God than being outside.”

“Seeing God’s beauty in nature is more moving to me than understanding new concepts, participating in a formal religious service, or participating in social causes.”

Possible Pitfalls

- Using creation merely as a means of escapism and losing sight of the idea that our interaction with nature is a means of re-energising and re-engaging with the rest of the world
- Finding organised worship unimportant because we prefer to worship outdoors

Helpful Tools and Practices

- Use nature as a venue for other spiritual practices such as certain types of prayer, journaling, reading etc
- Pay attention to the specific elements in nature and what they might say about some of the different traits of God – God’s greatness, beauty, variety, abundance etc
- Let nature lend itself to certain biblical narratives, for example, read the story of Jesus walking on water while you’re at the beach

Intellectual

Loving God with the Mind

Description

For intellectuals, knowing God and knowing about God are closely linked. These Christians live in the world of concepts. Linking ideas about God, Scripture, philosophy, sociology etc helps connect their faith with their everyday lives. To an Intellectual engaging in the world of ideas is not just thinking “about” God so much as thinking “with” God! Some intellectuals, influenced by a personality type that may be shy or withdrawn, might avoid intellectual confrontation but still be 'fed' primarily by intellectual activity.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.

Things an Intellectual Might Say

“I feel closest to God when I learn something new about him that I didn’t understand before. My mind needs to be stimulated.”

“I get frustrated when the church focuses too much on feelings and spiritual experience. Of far more importance is the need to understand the Christian faith and have proper doctrine.”

Possible Pitfalls

- Using the mind to defeat others rather than to build them up
- Forgetting to practice the things we learn, to bridge the gap between mind and heart and to seek application
- Discrediting the thoughts and opinions of people who aren’t able to articulate their thoughts and opinions effectively and systematically. This can also lead to pride
- Approaching things that are subjective or based on emotion with great cynicism

Helpful Tools and Practices

- Invest in biblical studies – be it a philosophical dilemma, a doctrinal topic, a socio-historical survey of a biblical time period, or approaching a book of the bible with a commentary in hand
- Find other intellectuals to work through a book or other academic material with for the sake of discussion and application
- Consider further learning

Ascetic

Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

Description

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'.

Things an Ascetic Might Say

"I'd love to take an overnight retreat by myself at a monastery where I could spend large amounts of time alone in a small room, praying to God and studying his Word, and fasting."

"I feel closest to God when I am alone and there is nothing to distract me from focusing on his presence. What I want most on a Sunday is some time to be still and quiet."

Possible Pitfalls

- Legalism – when helpful and life-giving practices turn into spiritual “must do’s” that we use to win God’s favour
- Turning inward to the point that our relationships to others are left unattended
- Forgetting that all spiritual disciplines and practices are a means to an end, not an end themselves. Sometimes, ascetic experiences can in fact turn into idols

Helpful Tools and Practices

- Be intentional about creating time and space to spend alone
- Live simply. Seeking to eliminate distractions in the every day realm and living minimalistically can invite fresh air and open spaces into the life of an ascetic
- Try fasting. You can fast from food entirely, for a half day, from certain types of food, or from things like TV and Facebook
- Practice silence on your own or by attending a retreat
- Wake up early to spend time in prayer and worship
- Use daily chores and maintenance as an act of worship

Sensates

Loving God with the Senses

Description

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. Whereas some Christians might find such a sensuous onslaught distracting, these Christians delight in it. The five senses are God's most effective inroad to their hearts.

In the Bible the temple is a good example of sensate worship, the majestic architecture, chanting, bowing and lighting of incense engaged worshipers in physical ways with the glory of God.

Things a Sensate Might Say

"I'd have a difficult time worshiping in a church building that is plain and lacks a sense of awe or majesty. Beauty is very important to me and I have a difficult time worshiping through second-rate Christian art or music."

"I enjoy worship services that involve incense, formal communion and lighting candles... stuff I can touch, taste, feel, smell and see! Church should have a sense of majesty and flow."

Possible Pitfalls

- Struggling to engage in services that don't engage the senses
- Feeling constricted by music that we don't feel connected to
- Waiting for others to create a helpful space rather than taking the initiative privately

Helpful Tools and Practices

- Create a worship space for yourself to use regularly. Use a favourite chair or rug. Light a scented candle, put on music that inspires or connects you to God, set out meaningful articles like a cross.
- Use a "pocket piece" i.e. An object as a symbol to remind you to pray e.g. a nail to remind you of Christ's sacrifice
- Enter into a scripture passage. Be one of the characters. Experience the passage.
- Vary your prayer posture: stand, sit, kneel, lie prostrate

Activists

Loving God Through Seeking Justice and Repentance

Description

Activists are inspired to action and feel connected to God when working for causes they are passionate about. They have a deep desire to see justice in the world and connect strongly with Jesus' declaration in Luke 4,

*God's Spirit is on me;
he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and
recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the burdened and battered free,
to announce, "This is God's year to act!"*

Activists don't just want to pray about injustice, they feel most alive when taking concrete action in confronting systems and structures that marginalise the vulnerable. Other activists feel strongly about evangelism and seek creative ways to connect people with the message of the gospel. Where others fear conflict, activists see this as a necessary part of participating with the breaking in of the Kingdom of God.

Things an Activist Might Say

"I get very frustrated if I see apathetic Christians who don't become active. I want to drop everything else I'm doing and help the church overcome its apathy."

"I feel closest to God when I'm cooperating with him in standing up for his justice: protesting exploitive policies, writing letters to government officials and newspaper editors."

Possible Pitfalls

- Becoming frustrated with others who don't share our passion
- Allowing frustration in the battle to justify methods that compromise our message
- Allowing busyness to detach us from sustaining activities such as relaxation and prayer
- Forgetting that ultimately the healing of the world is God's responsibility, we just play the part He asks us to.

Helpful Tools and Practices

- Consider God's faithfulness in spite of so much that is undone in the world
- Consider God's great patience He is working even when we see no evidence of it - don't give up!
- Seek to develop tact, gentleness, persuasiveness, true love for others - seek a mentor.
- Thoroughly research any activity before joining it - ask God for wisdom first. Seek counsel, confirmation and accountability
- Develop your ability for self-examination and contemplation of God

Caregivers

Loving God by Loving Others

Description

Caregivers serve God by serving others. They often see Christ in the poor and needy and their faith is built up by interacting with other people. Such Christians may find the devotional lives of contemplatives and enthusiasts as selfish. Whereas caring for others might wear many of us down, this recharges a caregiver's batteries.

Matthew 25:35-45 *"I was hungry and you fed me, was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me." "Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'*

Things a Caregiver Might Say

"I feel God's presence most strongly when I am sitting quietly beside the bed of someone who is lonely or ill or taking a meal to someone in need."

"I grow weary of Christians who spend their time singing songs while a sick neighbour goes without a hot meal or a family in need doesn't get help fixing their car. Enough with the meetings, let's actually help someone!"

Possible Pitfalls

- Struggling to care for themselves when surrounded by the pressing needs of others
- Being frustrated by others lack of concern for those in need
- Neglecting those closest to us
- Placing too much of our identity in what we have to give

Helpful Tools and Practices

- Do an inventory of those closest to you: How many of them don't "need" you? Consider whether you have enough relationships that can sustain you and give back
- Try practices that develop an awareness of God's activity alongside yours and help you recognise what you can and can't carry. A prayer at the end of each day offering those you minister to back to God might be helpful
- Develop daily practices that remind you that you are loved just because you are you! For example: A five minute breath prayer each day. In breath: *Because you made me.* Out breath: *I am loved*

Contemplative

Loving God Through Adoration

Description

The contemplative enjoys the simplicity of being with God and cultivating an awareness of God's loving presence. God's love and images of a loving Father and Bridegroom predominate their view of God. Their primary concern is not on doing things for God, rather, contemplatives gain great pleasure from being faithfully present to God and adoring him.

Some Christians may perceive contemplatives as being overly mystical; however, the Bible contains many examples of contemplation and adoration. For example:

- Jesus retreating to the wilderness to be alone with the Father
- The Psalms are full of images of intimacy and adoration
- The apostle John exemplifies the contemplative life with his focus on God's love and positioning oneself at the breast of Jesus

Loving God through adoration requires making sufficient space for silence, reflection and practicing the presence of God. Nurturing intimacy with God for the contemplative is like rain to a parched ground; it refreshes and causes life to spring forth.

Things a Contemplative Might Say

"I feel closest to God when I'm alone."

"I love and need silence and undisturbed space in my life."

"When I sense God's presence I come alive."

Possible Pitfalls

- Our culture does not lend itself to silence and reflection, so there's the need to intentionally and regularly carve out time in a place where there'll be no distractions
- Be aware of introversion and isolation – contemplatives need to be reminded to come down from the mountain and engage with humanity
- Being judgemental of others busyness

Helpful Tools and Practices

- Check out material by Brother Laurence, Thomas Merton, Richard Rohr and other mystics
- Set regular time aside to be still and know that God is God
- Attend a silent retreat
- Practice 'breath prayer'
- Practice biblical meditation (the Hebrew word for meditation means to 'chew the cud'). Fill your mind with an aspect of God's character or focus on a verse of Scripture and immerse yourself in it
- Consider fasting

Enthusiast

Loving God With Mystery and Celebration

Description

Excitement and mystery in worship is the spiritual lifeblood of enthusiasts. They are cheerleaders for God and the Christian life! Quiet reflection doesn't sit comfortably with enthusiasts; they are drawn to joyful celebration and the experience of God's presence and power. In fact, experience is key for enthusiasts; they don't just want to discuss concepts about God, they want to experience the Spirit, to feel the Spirit and be moved by the Spirit.

Some Christians may perceive enthusiasts as being 'over the top'; however, there are many examples of expressive worship and supernatural encounter running throughout the Bible. For example:

- Dancing and other demonstrative physical expressions of worship
- Miracles and supernatural
- Hebrew culture was/is celebratory

Loving God through mystery and celebration involves spontaneity and living with a hopeful expectancy of God's intervention in the affairs of humanity. Enthusiasts affirm God's ongoing action in the world.

Things an Enthusiast Might Say

"God is an exciting God, and we should be excited about worshiping him."

"I don't understand how some Christians say they love God, and then act like they're going to a funeral whenever they walk into church."

"I feel closest to God when I feel his presence."

Possible Pitfalls

- Seeking experience rather than seeking God
- Lack of thoughtful reflection can lead to a shallow/narrow faith
- An emotional based faith that doesn't cope well with pain and struggle
- Dismissive of other Christians who are more reserved in their expression of worship and do not have encounters or experiences

Helpful Tools and Practices

- Incorporate worship music into your time with God
- Record your dreams
- Engage your imagination when reading the Bible, what did the characters of Scripture feel and think as they were encountering God?
- Write your own prayers or psalms
- Understand that Scripture also has examples of people who lived with pain and struggle and didn't experience God's intervention
- Pray with an expectant faith

Traditionalists

Loving God Through Ritual and Symbol

Description

Traditionalists are fed by what are often termed the historic dimensions of faith: rituals, symbols, sacraments, and sacrifice. They value expressions of worship that are structured and require discipline.

Some Christians may perceive Traditionalists as being legalists; however, there is a rich vein of engagement with rituals and symbols running throughout the Old and New Testaments. For example:

- The Feasts of Israel (Passover, Pentecost, the Day of Atonement etc)
- The erecting of memorials and altars as places of worship
- The Sabbath
- Observing regular, set times of prayer
- Communion
- Baptism
- Handkerchiefs transmitting God's healing presence
- Anointing with oil

The key to loving God through rituals and symbols is understanding and engaging with the meaning or the 'spirit' behind the practice or the image. When one connects with the dynamic sitting behind the external it becomes a life-giving expression of worship for the worshipper.

Things a Traditionalist Might Say

"I feel closest to God when I'm participating in forms of worship that provide me with structure for my times with God."

"I love things that connect me to the history of the Church."

"I appreciate the discipline of ritual, too much change can make me uncomfortable."

Possible Pitfalls

- Going through the motions: Without careful attention ritual can become an empty exercise
- Not understanding the meaning behind the practice
- Not giving space or opportunity for spontaneity

Helpful Tools and Practices

- Learn about Celtic Christianity
- Use the Book of Common Prayer
- Liturgical prayer
- Write your own prayers or psalms
- Follow the Church calendar
- Practice set hour prayer (morning, noon, evening and bedtime prayer)