

NATURALIST: Loving God out of doors

"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 parables of Christ, which are based on nature, or the Psalms."

TODAY

Take your Bible outside and consider Ps 84 while feasting your eyes and spirit on natural beauty.

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Rest
2. Work your way through one of Dr. Pamela Reeve's books
3. Worship as the dawn breaks
4. Go for a walk

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where and when do you feel closest to God?
2. How is worship different for you when you are inside listening to speakers, etc. and outside enjoying nature?
3. What could you do (where could you go) that would help you worship more deeply on a regular basis?
4. How do you balance the need for natural beauty and quiet with the command to be in community? What kinds of community activities are satisfying to you spiritually and emotionally?

SENSATE: 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. 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."

TODAY

Consider Ps 84. As you do so, use an object from the selection provided (or produce a drawing) to enhance your meditation and worship.

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Listen to worship-producing music
2. Absorb worship-producing art
3. Sing scripture
4. Create a worship space for yourself: light a candle, set out meaningful articles, e.g., a cross.
5. 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
6. Enter into a scripture passage. Be one of the characters. Experience the passage.
7. Vary prayer posture: stand, sit, kneel, lie prostrate

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel when you are worshipping in a plain, unadorned church? How does it affect your ability to focus on God?
2. Have you been in a service that incorporated incense? an orchestra or pipe organ? ritual dance? signing? processions of banners or crosses? other? How is your worship experience enhanced or hindered by these sensory additions to the worship service?
3. Have you yourself participated in dance or some other physical expression during a worship service? How did it affect your whole worship experience?
4. How does having something to touch, smell, look at or listen to affect your personal worship time?
5. How do you react to the statement, "we must take care that our worship of God doesn't become worship of the worship experience alone"?

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

TODAY

Consider Ps 84 and write a prayer to use each day. Create a list of prayer requests and think about how to bring them to God throughout the day.

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Consider how you could include God in your day eg set your alarm on your phone to remind you to pray at set times throughout the day
2. Read Scripture aloud.
3. Select a Psalm to say every morning and one for each evening; Practice liturgical prayer (see Book of Common Prayer)
4. Set a regular time and place to meet with the Lord each day.
5. Follow the Church calendar and celebrate significant days, e.g. Pentecost, Advent
6. Develop meaningful rituals; Make plentiful use of symbols or ritualized gestures
7. Find areas of sacrifice

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did men and women in the Bible and in church history use ritual to embody spiritual truth?
2. What rituals, symbols, etc. would you like to incorporate into your life? How do you think they would affect your personal worship time? What would you like them to do for you?
3. What rituals are necessary for you to be able to worship easily?
4. What happens to your ability to worship when you are fellowshipping in a church of a denomination that has little formal liturgy?

ASCETIC: 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 in 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'."

TODAY

Consider Ps 84. You may want to find a quiet place alone to avoid distractions and become still with God.

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Worship in the quiet of the night; Rise in the early morning for prayer and worship
2. Practice silence – attend a silent retreat, participate in a silent meal
3. Fast; do physical labour as an act of worship
4. Practice obedience – ask God to reveal any rebellious attitudes
5. Simplify your life – clean a closet, have a yard sale, cull your books and papers
6. Look for ways and places to include others in your life and make it a point to worship regularly in a fellowship of believers

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does "solitude" mean to you? Can you find this even when you are with a group of people? Explain how you do that.
2. What does "austerity" mean to you? How do you incorporate it into your life?
3. What does "discipline" look like in your life? In what ways does it satisfy you? Where would you like to experience more of it?
4. What are ways you connect with those around you? How satisfying are those connections? Would you like to improve/increase them? Why or why not? How might you change your interactions to make them more satisfactory?

ACTIVIST: Loving God through confrontation

"Activists serve a God of justice, and their favourite Scripture is often the account of Jesus cleansing 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 or evangelistic causes, but they find their home in the rough-and-tumble world of confrontation. They are energised more by interaction with others, even in conflict, than being alone or in small groups."

TODAY

Consider Ps 84 and how God's courts are the only true place of justice.

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Consider God's faithfulness in spite of so much that is 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 2 Peter 2:21-23 What is the ultimate way God confronts injustice?
3. Seek to develop tact, gentleness, persuasiveness, true love for others. Seek a mentor.
4. Invest energy in: producing and transmitting literature; social reform; "marches"; prayer walks; food pantries; crisis pregnancy centre. Be creative.
5. Thoroughly research any activity before joining it. Ask God for wisdom first. Seek counsel, confirmation and accountability.
6. Develop your ability for self-examination and contemplation of God

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What issues make God angry?
2. Think of the last social or Christian cause you were involved in. Did it draw you closer to God? In what ways? Was there anything about it that pulled you or others away from God? Explain.
3. How do your activities fit into your worship of God?
4. How do you feel when you are working for a cause that other Christians don't seem interested in enough to help with? Are you able to resolve these feelings? How do you do this? What other things might you do?

CAREGIVER: Loving God by loving others

"Caregivers serve God by serving others. They often claim to 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."

TODAY

Consider Ps 84 and how God cares for us. Think about how you can use your gifting as an act of worship this weekend.

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. "Adopt" someone – a prisoner, neighbourhood child or elderly person; Open your home to students, neighbourhood kids
2. Help a friend through a crisis, counsel at a crisis pregnancy centre
3. Help someone battling substance abuse
4. Volunteer on a rescue squad, work in a soup kitchen

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the ways in which you have served others? What motivated you to help them?
2. What "return" (positive or negative) do you receive when you help others? These can be spiritual, emotional, etc.
3. How do you feel about people who are not actively ministering to the poor, sick, etc.?
4. Do you ever minister to others out of your own need? Or because you feel you have to? Or don't know how to say, "No"? Contrast that experience with a time when you freely helped someone out of a desire to minister to him/her.
5. Think about your relationships. Do you have relationships with people who do not "need" you? If not, how might you begin to develop friendships outside your circle of ministry?

ENTHUSIAST: Loving God with mystery and celebration

"Excitement and mystery in worship is the spiritual lifeblood of enthusiasts. As sensates want to be surrounded by beauty and intellectuals want to be grappling 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 all they ask. If their hearts aren't moved, if they don't experience God's power, something is missing. They don't want to just know concepts, but to experience them, to feel them, and to moved by them."

TODAY

Consider Ps 84. What God is saying to you personally? Respond to God out loud or by writing or with praise.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Find a passage that talks about God and pray it out loud, moving around the room.
2. Incorporate worship music into your daily time with God
3. Keep track of your dreams. Write down any that seem significant. The meanings should be fairly obvious to you. Talk with someone about them.
4. Spend time just listening to God. Write down what you hear Him saying.
5. Cultivate the mystery of expectancy: ask God to bring someone in your path to whom you can minister; Start a conversation with a stranger.
6. Use your imagination to put yourself into the scene when you are reading Bible passages. Try to understand how the participants were feeling, thinking, acting.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does God speak to you in your daily life? What forms does it take? What does He say? How do you react?
2. How do most like to celebrate God? What are some other ways you might like to experiment with?
3. How do you feel when others around you don't sing at all or sing softly throughout a song service, don't raise their hands or move at all during worship?
4. What changes would you like to see in the worship services at your church that would make worship a more satisfying experience for you?

CONTEMPLATIVE: Loving God through adoration

"Contemplatives refer to God as their lover, and images of a loving Father and Bridegroom predominate their view of God. Their favourite Bible passages might be taken 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 God. Rather, these Christians seek to love God with the purest, deepest, and brightest love imaginable."

TODAY

Consider Ps 84. Take time to pour out your love to God. What love response do you want to offer Him? (a poem, letter, or act of secret giving to another)

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. 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.) Purpose: to practice the presence of God, reminding ourselves that Jesus is Lord, we are sinners, we need His mercy.
2. Practice secret acts of devotion – something you do for someone else without letting anyone else know about it.
3. Carry a pocket piece – something tactile to remind you who you serve, e.g. a small cross.
4. Dancing Prayer – allowing God to lead and follow Him wherever He takes you. Allow Him to speak and place requests before you.
5. Centring Prayer – Choose a word and focus on it (Jesus, God, peace, etc.) repeating it until it becomes a part of you. This is not “new age”; it is a way to close oneself in with God, away from distractions. You are resting in God’s presence.
6. Prayer of the Heart – “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.” (187)
7. Meditative Prayer – this is prayerful reflection of a biblical text or theme, use of something you can see, taste, touch, hear or smell. (Lectio Divina; placing yourself in the passage)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When do you feel most loved by God? In what tangible ways does He show His love to you?
2. Do you ever lose the sense of God’s presence? What happens to you then – in your emotions? In your spirit? What do you do to restore that sense?
3. What is your favourite way to picture God? Are there any images of God that you find difficult to contemplate? Why do you think that is? As God to show you something about that.
4. What words come to mind when you think of God? Make a list of all the words and phrases you can think of to express your praise to Him.
5. How do you usually approach God? Do you ever feel fear? What might that be about? Talk with the Father about it and write down His response.

INTELLECTUAL: Loving God with the mind

"Intellectuals might be sceptics or committed believers, but in either case they are likely to be studying (and, in some instances, arguing either for or against) doctrines like Calvinism, infant baptism, ordination of women, and predestination. These Christians live in the world of concepts. 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."

TODAY

Consider Ps 84. What does the passage say? What is the context, the audience? What more do you want to know about this passage? How can you pursue your questions?

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Invest in biblical study: reading through Scripture; meticulous study of portions of Scripture;
2. Read books that help understand what Scripture says - books on theology; books on church history.
3. Do a year-long in-depth study of one topic
4. Listen to theology tapes/CDs while driving – Mars Hill tapes are very good.
5. Study the seven basic topics in systematic theology: God, humankind, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, eschatology, and revelation.

REFLECTION QUESTION

1. How thankful are you for your intellectual capacity? How do you express this and to whom?
2. In what ways have you applied your intellectual understanding of the Gospel to the service of others? In what other ways could you do so?
3. What are some of the most exciting discoveries you have made about God recently? How have they influenced your worship times?
4. What most annoys you about other styles of worship? Ask God for His perspective on this? What does He say to you?
5. How do you react to the statement, "worship is God revealing Himself to You, not You discovering God"?

Quotes from Thomas, G. L., *Sacred Pathways*, Zondervan, 2000, pp. 22-29. Suggested activities and reflection questions from: *A Study Guide for Sacred Pathway* by Adalee Lewis.