



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **Let Me Say That Again: Pathways to Personal Worship**

**By Matt Hook, based on thoughts by Bill Hybels**

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Last summer Steve preached a sermon on the vitality of personal worship through Bible study, prayer, and reflection. Today, let me say that again...

Matthew 11:28-30 "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"

I think it was Mark Lowry who nicknamed his bed. He called it "the Word." That way, when his prayer partner called him in the mornings, Mark could always say stuff like "I'm in the word, man. I spent 2 hours in the word yesterday afternoon. I'm covered by the word." Or the one Leigh used in college: "I went to bedside Baptist and heard Pastor Sheets talking about the Great Comforter."

Don't you wish having a quiet time was as easy as getting a nap? Sometimes I think they're synonymous, because unless I plan carefully, when I sit down to have a personal devotion time that's what it turns into. I like to think of it as worshipping God with my subconscious. And I've seen some of you guys worship Him that way too, right here! (I won't name names, but I can see you! ☺)

But don't you know that there is a love that only comes from a quiet, close, daily walk with Christ? Don't you want that for yourself? You and I know the greatest contribution you can give to others is a fully yielded heart. A humble, step by step, hand in hand walk with the One who alone can keep your heart full of love, keep your mind tuned in to what matters, and keep your will fixed on the mission.

This is not new information to any of you. You know Jesus said "*abide in me.*" Listen again to His words, from the Message translation: "*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*"

Too many people admit (in hushed tones) that they can't keep company with Jesus, let alone establish and sustain a vital and close commitment; a daily walk with Christ. They feel ashamed when they hear of others' disciplines of fasting, prayer, journaling.

Is that you? Are you wondering "Is there something wrong with me? Am I wired up wrong? Why can't I establish and sustain a close vital walk with Christ?" It's worth being concerned about. After all, personal worship through Bible study, prayer, and reflection is vital. Let me say that again.

What's the problem? Maybe you've never found your pathway – your *getaway* – to a close vital walk with Christ. Just as we have different spiritual gifts, different personalities, different ways of experiencing love, different passions, and different experiences, we have **different pathways** by which we experience close

relationship and private worship with Christ. And hear the Good News: Jesus Christ knows what you're going through, and He is prepared and waiting to meet you there.

In his book Sacred Pathways, Gary Thomas identifies various pathways that give us access into the presence of Christ. I'd like to review 7 so that you might identify yours and you might worship God personally in a new and better way.

**First, the Relational Pathway:** Some people find it difficult to flourish if they try to do it alone. For these folks, solitude feels like solitary confinement. It's suffocating and frustrating. Bible studies feel fruitless and service alone feels like death.

Inject a strong dose of relationship, and watch what happens. Because they're in a group of people praying, they feel like they can pray like never before. When they study the Bible with a half dozen other Christ followers they feel enriched almost every time. Serving feels like no burden at all when they get to be a part of the team. And worship is the same. These people flourish when they design private worship that involves a small group. You can design a spiritual time which involve a small group of others.

**Second, the Intellectual Pathway:** This person's mind must be fully engaged before any spiritual progress can occur. These folks ask "Where's the beef? Where's the substance? Give me some data here." They keep intellectually stretching books. They gravitate to events that challenge their thinking. Their hearts and wills will never engage fully until their mind is completely convinced of something.

When a person with an intellectual pathway becomes fully engaged, watch out! There is no stopping these folks. When Martin Luther came to clarity on the message of the Gospel, that the just shall live by faith, when John Calvin grasped the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, when Chuck Colson fully comprehended the supremacy of a Christian worldview, nothing stopped these people. The Apostle Paul may have been wired this way. Read Romans and see Paul at his best. At one point he cries out "*We're never going to change the world until we transform minds!*" (12:2).

Do you know anyone like this? Don't feel guilty about your intellectual proclivity. Keep filling your mind to keep from drying up! Start a personal worship plan that starts with your mind, and love God with all of your mind – and watch what that does to your daily time with Christ.

**Third, the Serving Pathway:** For some reason some folks can't feel close to God until they are quietly laboring in kingdom vineyards. They aren't the thinker types, they're the doers. They read their bibles and pray and attend worship services, but if you were to ask them "When do you feel closest to God? When do you feel most centered and joyful and alive in Christ," they won't answer in church or singing or in prayer. They'll probably say when I'm serving, then I know that I'm an instrument in the very hands of God; when I'm doing something in the vineyard. When I'm helping out somewhere, then I know I'm helping in the Kingdom of God. I'm close to God.

Your serving may play a small part in the overall scheme of reaching people for Christ. If this is you, then put a plan together that centers on serving. I think it will lead you to the presence of God.

**Fourth, the Contemplative Pathway:** All throughout church history there has been a relatively small group of people that have felt like they've been marching to a different drummer. For some reason they don't fully understand, people and activities drain them. These folks feel they could spend almost limitless time in solitude. Give them a bible or a journal, and they could disappear for days. For contemplatives, just being in the presence of God is enough. They can spend hours reflecting on the goodness of God. Often these folks have enormous capacity for prayer and meditation. They often have very sensitive spiritual antenna and they can discern the activity of God where ever they are, whatever they're doing. They reflect on human suffering and the world and keep wondering why it happens and why so few people are moved by the condition of those who are suffering. They observe the beauty of a thing and wonder why everyone else in the Christian community just walks right past it. They're usually the ones who run out of gas in their car periodically and

don't change their oil for two or three years because they're always thinking of stuff. And though these folks feel a little out of step from the rest of us, they're often the folks who compose the songs that stir our hearts or write the books that help us think new thoughts about God. Contemplatives often serve as the conscience of the faith community. They call us back to caring about the poor. They help us focus on what Kingdom life is all about. They are crucial to the Kingdom.

Any of you know contemplative types? If you do, relate to them carefully. Don't tell them to "get busy." Rather urge them to live how they need to live and think the deep thoughts, because eventually something wonderful is going to come out of that reflection and it will bless the whole church. If you suspect this is you, exhale. Give yourself an extra measure of grace.

Fifth, the polar opposite: **the Activistic Pathway**. Unlike the contemplative, this person is at his or her best at a speed of mach 2, white knuckled, gasping for breath. These are the action folks. Because of their wiring, they revel in a challenge-intensive environment that chases them to the absolute edge of their potential; and when they're right on that edge, they feel very close to God. Know anybody like this?

They're activists and they catalyze others into action as well. If you think God made a mistake when he wired some folks up this way, realize we wouldn't be here were it not for the likes of John Wesley. The guy was a maniac. He rode more miles on horseback preaching than it is from here to the moon! Whitfield, Moody, and a host of other men and women who burst out of the starting blocks igniting Kingdom building work.

Sixth are those on **the Creation pathway: The Naturalists**: Green believers, tree huggers. You've known people who come alive when they get into the natural splendor of some kind – the mountains, the river, the desert, the ocean, a storm, a garden or even looking at the stars. Being in these environments is when they feel closest to God. These folks draw direct spiritual meaning from what they are beholding in the natural realm. They see the rocks and think about God's unshakable foundation. They see the stars and envision the vast omnipotence of God. They work in the dirt gardening and think of how God tends us through life and struggles.

It's a no brainer for those on the Creation/Nature path to tell you where they feel closest to God – somewhere in creation. It shouldn't surprise us: God originally created man and woman and put them in the garden. If this is you, what if your plan for private worship of God doubled or tripled the amount of time you spent in nature? (The golf course only counts half!)

**The Worship Pathway**: is the way that some people connect with God in God-honoring worship. The Worshiper feels closest to God in Spirit-filled worship. They stick 5 tapes or cds in their car and drive, praising God, making decisions, and personally worshipping Christ.

David, the author of many of the Psalms, may be the ultimate example. "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless the Lord. May I not forget any of his works.*" If this is you, you need to design a spiritual formation plan that involves massive amounts of worship.

As Christ followers, we worship God in celebration with others, and we worship God privately in devotion. We are to grow in both directions. So here are your assignments:

1. Identify which spiritual pathway is yours. Resist the temptation to compare your way with someone else's. Resist the temptation to identify the pathway you wish was yours. (Pathway envy).
2. When you identify that pathway, lean into it. Try it. Fill your life with it. Put your faith into action. That doorway will open and you will sustain a relationship with Christ that you've never known.
3. Develop an appreciation for all the pathways to Christ, and what they can offer you, even if it's not your primary way. Experiment with other pathways to Christ, and let it stretch you.

#### 4. Help one another identify your pathway.

Imagine the difference we could make if we led our lives with hearts that were in vital union with Jesus Christ. Personal worship through Bible study, prayer, and reflection is vital. Imagine the fruit we could bear. New creativity could flow, new power could be unleashed in and through our lives if we were all regularly accessing the presence of God through the pathway defined for us in our private worship. Remember Jesus himself says “*Come to me.*”

I’d like to pray for each one of your walks with Jesus Christ. So if as we went through these, you thought “Yep, I think mine’s the relational pathway,” would you stand to your feet right now, and just stay standing. I’m going to call for each of you. I’d like to say a prayer for you. Let’s pray for these folks...

O God, please free these folks who are standing to love you even more deeply by entering into the richness of community that enlivens their hearts so. Lead them to like-minded brothers and sisters with whom they can share this precious pathway into your presence. Surround them with loving brothers and sisters who can help form Christ deeply in them. For Jesus’ sake...

Those of you on the intellectual pathway, would you please stand? Nothing to be ashamed of... Let’s pray: O God, thanks for keen minds. Thanks for insatiable mental appetites and now I pray that these folks would fill their minds with that which will draw them close to your side. May their transformed minds produce powerful thoughts and actions in their lives, for your sake...

Now those of you on the serving pathway, please stand. Those of you who feel most close to God when you’re an instrument in his hands. God, please lead these special folks to places of service that remind them regularly that they are essential instruments in your hands. Surprise them with your presence and joy as they diligently labor in the things that matter most...

And now the contemplatives, would you stand? God, throughout history, your church has always been blessed by those who dared to steal away and listen closely to your quiet whispers. God, give these sensitive folks the courage to carry on that rich, kingdom tradition. How our church needs the fruit of that which is gained in unrushed moments of deep spirit-guided reflection. God bless the contemplatives.

And now the activists, stand please? (Stand still!) God, thanks for the tireless devotion of these folks; for their energy and how they energize others; for their tenacity, and how they inspire that in others; for their love of the Kingdom challenge. God I pray that you would meet these folks in the middle of their many challenges and reward them by reminding them in the midst of the challenge that their work is never in vain, when it is truly in the Lord.

And not those of you on the creation pathway, the naturalists, would you stand? God free these folks to avail themselves fully to the beauty of your creation. Give them the determination to arrange their lives for long moments by lakes and streams, mountains and valleys, woods or hills, and disclose yourself to them in your transforming love.

And now the worship pathway: God please remove any embarrassment to these who lift their hands and voices to the sound of your melodies. Fill their hearts to overflowing as they pour their hearts out to you in worship. And then move them to the kinds of actions that will produce more worshipers all throughout this world.

Lord Jesus, we want to be men and women after your own heart. People who walk with you closely, who listen to you intently, and who follow you boldly. We want to worship you personally. We want to abide in you and enjoy your presence from here to eternity, and we want to take as many people with us as we can. Help us toward that end, for Christ’s sake. Amen.