

*Do you prefer structured prayer or spontaneous prayer? Is your spirituality closer to Saint Ignatius or Saint Augustine? Take this quiz and find out which spiritual path is best for you.*

With all the options a modern parish offers, why does one person prefer an adult-education session for stimulating thought? Or another choose a parish holy hour for a deepening of devotion? Or still another opt to serve in an inner-city breadline? While yet another hasn't missed Christmas Eve midnight Mass in 20 years—because it was such a meaningful family tradition when growing up/ What helps you develop spiritually often is dramatically different from what attracts the person in the next pew to a deeper spiritual life.

Historically, spiritual directors have often warned against casting spiritual seekers into one mold. Saint Ignatius of Loyola said there is “no greater mistake in spiritual matters than to force others to follow one’s own pattern.”

Huston Smith, in *The World’s Religions* (Harper, 1991), quotes noted spiritual director Father Surin: “[Those spiritual directors are mistaken] who get a plan in their heads that they apply to all the souls who come to them, trying to bring them into line with [that plan] as one would wish all to wear the same clothes.”

## 4 ways to become holy

How can you identify these different spiritual pathways and apply them to your own spiritual development? We are all familiar with the two Great Commandments in the Gospel of Luke, on which Jesus based the core of his message: “There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test [Jesus] and said, ‘Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘What is written in the law? How do you read it?’ He said in reply, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:25-27).

Scholarly interpretations of this passage usually conclude that you should love God with every fiber of your being and your neighbor as you love yourself. But to me, the passage also suggests that

there are four separate pathways—*heart, strength, mind, and neighbor*—and each of us is naturally inclined to follow one of them.

For example, Ronda Chervin, a university professor and convert to Catholicism, explains in *Great Saints, Great Friends* (Alba House, 1990) that a “head” spiritual pathway differs markedly from a “neighbor” spiritual pathway.

“There are at least two ways of imitating St. Francis in compassion for the poor. One is by working with the needy directly. How much I admire those who run soup kitchens, take the destitute off the streets, visit convalescent homes, or participate in any of the other fine programs for relieving the suffering of others. Yet I have a horror of doing this.

“Brought up in a family of intellectuals, and very healthy ones at that, I was never taught to admire corporal works of mercy. What counted much more was to do something creative, original, interesting.”

Through much of recorded history, many observers of humanity in different cultures have noted that there are four distinct dispositions or temperaments that seemed to describe how

people behave differently. For example, as far back as the fifth century B.C., Hippocrates, the father of medicine, described four different temperaments. He based his conclusion on careful observation and recording of human behavior. Even in religion, Hindu wisdom postulates four central – but quite different – religious pathways.

Today, models such as the temperament theory, four-style behavior theory, and the four basic personality types are used widely in business, education, and religious life. These theories help us understand how we behave differently. In spiritual matters, these pathways are not intended to stereotype or reduce a complex world to a vastly oversimplified matrix. Instead, they attempt to help make it easier to understand ourselves, others, and how we try to reach God in our own way.

The four paths in this model are the path of intellect (mind), the path of devotion (heart), the path of service (neighbor), and the path of asceticism (strength). Remember that all people have all four tendencies to some degree, just as most hands of cards contain all four suits, but it makes sense to lead with the suit that is strongest. Also, some people

have strength in more than one path.

For a better understanding and application of the content of this article to your own spiritual life, stop reading now and complete the exercise on the next page.

### **Pathway 1: The path of intellect**

Those who journey on this first pathway use their rational powers in their quest for God. Here is what they might say about themselves:

The most independent of the four types, I am driven to acquire knowledge and set very high standards for myself and others. Naturally curious, I can see many sides to the same argument or issue. I am excellent at seeing possibilities, understanding complexities, and designing solutions to real or hypothetical problems.

I have vision and am a great innovator; I excel at seeing the big picture as well as possibilities. I welcome change and do not like to do repetitive or illogical tasks. I need freedom to work my ideas independently and value being appreciated for my intellectual competence and ingenuity.

Two saints who likely followed this pathway are Saints Thomas Aquinas and Teresa of Avila.

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) entered the University of Naples at the

age of 14. Because of his introspective nature as a young schoolboy, teachers often mistook him to be slow and stupid, nicknaming him the "Dumb Ox." But he was determined and brilliant. His wealthy Italian family tried to stop him from become a Dominican friar. They even imprisoned him in a family castle for a year and sent a prostitute to tempt him.

*These pathways attempt to help make it easier to understand ourselves, others, and how we try to reach God in our own way.*

As a Dominican theologian of great renown, Thomas wrote in his masterpiece, the closely reasoned *Summa Theologica*: "Now all truly human action is rational, intelligent action. Hence the first of the theological virtues to be considered is the virtue of faith. Faith is an intellectual virtue. It perfects man's mind."

Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), like Thomas, was declared a Doctor of the Church. She, too, was endowed with great intelligence, a vivid imagination, firm determination, and selfless courage. She entered the convent as a young woman, but for nearly 20 years, this

Spaniard was slow to take her religious vocation seriously. Once she did, however, she reformed her Carmelite Order with a whirlwind energy sustained by brilliance and superhuman insight. In her spiritual masterpiece, *The Interior Castle*, Teresa describes seven "mansions" or levels of spiritual development in a highly reasoned, logical structure.

Those who travel the pathway of the intellect are comfortable using the prayer method best known as "discursive." Msgr. Chester Michael and Marie Norrisey suggest in *Prayer and Temperament* that a key ingredient is the orderly progression of thought from cause to effect or effect to cause. These wayfarers have tremendous desire to understand, think through, clarify, envision, and thereby manage the realities of their lives. They want to master and excel in whatever they attempt, or they may not even try.

Their spirituality is centered on the earnest pursuit of all the transcendental values: truth, goodness, beauty, unity, love, life, spirit. As in the cases of Teresa and Thomas, they are willing to exert superhuman effort to achieve their goals. Because of their disdain for second best, they seek total truth and authenticity in their own lives and work hard to

reach the whole truth about themselves, about others, about God, about sanctity.

Roy Oswald and Otto Kroeger, in *Personality Type and Religious Leadership*, note that in this type of prayer, a person takes a virtue or fault or theological truth and "walks around it," studying it from every possible angle. This individual uses questions such as who? what? why? how? where? when? and with what helps? and applies them to the topic selected.

This prayer starts but doesn't stay at the intellectual level because the individual desires to change. It moves on into action, as did Thomas and Teresa.

## **Pathway 2: The path of devotion**

Thomas à Kempis, in *The Imitation of Christ*, wrote that he would rather feel contrition than know its definition. Another medieval text, the *Cloud of Unknowing*, cautions: "By love He may be gotten and held, but by thought or understanding, never." This is a clear choice of heart over head. (Note the tendency of medieval wayfarers on one pathway to misunderstand and therefore completely reject another pathway! Unfortunately that practice has not been limited to the Middle Ages.)

Those most comfortable in this pathway might describe themselves this way:

I place a high value on authenticity and integrity in people and relationships, and I tend to idealize others. It's as if I'm on a perpetual search for the meaning of life. I focus on human potential and am gifted at helping others grow and develop. I am naturally empathetic, I am excellent at resolving conflicts, and I know how to bring out the best in others. When I praise a job well done, I often praise the individual.

I'm usually warm, informal, and personal. My gift is to make everyone work well together by getting others to appreciate one another's special gifts. I am enthusiastic and work best when I receive personal, affirming feedback. I may burn out more quickly than other temperaments by trying to be too helpful.

Although so many saints seem to have traveled this pathway, two obvious examples of the path of devotion are Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque.

Saint Augustine (354-430), as a young man, abandoned himself to a life of pleasure, taking a mistress and fathering a child. Always restless and seeking, he spent years embracing and then dropping a succession of movements (such as Manichaeism and Neo-

Platonism). Then, while teaching rhetoric in Milan, he listened to the sermons of Saint Ambrose. Augustine became more enamored of Christian belief, but his lifestyle held him back.

One day, wandering in a garden, he heard a child's chant, "Take and read, take and read." He took up a nearby Bible, opened it to Romans 13:13-14 – "Pout on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provisions for the desires of the flesh." His life was changed forever.

His life and his words reveal the great passion and emotion that drove him. "Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new," he wrote in Confessions. "You called, You cried, and You broke through my deafness ... You touched me, and I burned for brace."

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), a Visitation nun in France, was driven by a love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. To the disbelief of man around her, she received private revelations from him, whose message was: "See this Heart that has loved so much and been so little loved in return ... If you love Me, pray and sacrifice for those who not believe in My love or do not care about My love." She did much to help spread around the world a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

synonymous with love for humankind.

*"Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new. You call, You cried, and You broke through my deafness."  
– Saint Augustine*

Those who travel the path of devotion tend to use the creative imagination to transpose the world of scripture to today's situation. Oswald and Kroeger suggest that it is as if the scripture passage is a personal letter from God addressed to the wayfarer. (Augustine, hearing the child's voice, read the randomly selected Romans 13 as a ringing message pointed directly at him.)

As Michael and Norissey note, for those on this pathway, the essential element of spirituality is experiencing a personal relationship with God. Because they read between the lines and catch the inexpressible, the spiritual, the hidden meanings, they best understand symbols and their use in the liturgy. Spiritual journaling, recording thoughts and inspirations, leads to discovering deeper insights in life, making connections, and experiencing new spiritual growth.

This path concentrates on meditations that access the feelings and expand the ability to relate to, care about, and love others. They prefer unstructured meditations to develop the capacity to love and to be in continual relationship with God, others, and self.

### **Pathway 3: The path of service**

This is the pathway of faith in action. It is Mother Teresa embracing the poor and dying of Calcutta. It is the recently beatified Father Damien de Veuster spending his life serving the lepers of Molokai. Those following this spiritual pathway might describe themselves thus:

I am excellent at recognizing practical problems, and I approach them with flexibility, courage, and resourcefulness; I enjoy making changes in response to some immediate need or crisis, for I'm a natural troubleshooter. I prefer to deal with facts and real problems, not ideas and concepts. I am a keen observer of human behavior and can be a good negotiator.

Often, I am skillful with tools and instruments. I am resourceful, exciting, and like to have fun. I like action and drama, and do best when there's a short-term, practical, hand-on task to be done. I am easily bored with routine and often look for ways to make my life more exciting. Because of that, I

am also an effective risk taker.

Two saints who seem to have traveled this pathway are Saints Francis of Assisi and Thérèse of Lisieux.

Saint Francis of Assisi (1189-1223) spent his youth as a partier, a spender, and a charmer. As a soldier, his daring efforts led to a year's imprisonment by the neighboring Perugians. Once he was freed, he wandered into the ruins of the chapel of San Damiano. In a vision he heard the crucified Jesus say: "Go and repair my church, which, as you see, is falling into ruin."

He began rebuilding the chapel until one day he realized that was not the real message. Always rushing full-tilt, he loved with a characteristic rashness and single-mindedness — kissing the leper and staying up all night praying the simple phrase: "My god and my all."

When he set out to imitate Christ, he took an all-or-nothing approach. Like Mother Teresa today, Francis preached more by example than by eloquence. His most famous prayer is that of a doer: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon ..."

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) spent the last seven of her 24 years in the Carmelite convent of Lisieux. Her great gift that she

revealed in her autobiography was to be present to every moment, to act in the here and now.

Thérèse wrote: "But this love of mine, now to show it? Love needs to be proved by action. Well, even a child can scatter flowers, to scent the throne-room with their fragrance ... That shall be my life, to scatter flowers — to miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word, always doing the tiniest things right, and doing it for love."

Those who travel the pathway of service approach prayer differently. They must be free, unconfined, and able to do whatever their inner spirit moves them to do; they are impulsive and don't like to be tied down by rules. They love action and are easily bored by the status quo. They are crisis-oriented, good at unsnarling messes, and able to get things moving.

People on this path are also flexible, adaptable, easy to get along with, open-minded, willing to change their position. One thinks of Saint Peter impetuously jumping into the water to join Jesus as a typical action of one on this pathway, which leads to acts of loving service — a most effective form of prayer. Prayer is response and action for these people.

According to Oswald and Kroeger, all these good acts are accompanied "by a free-flowing, spontaneous, informal praising, and loving dialogue with God." All of God's creation is a guide, a Bible for those on this pathway.

God speaks to them through every sense impression: what they see, hear, smell, feel, or taste. This kind of prayer makes full use of the five senses and is flexible and responsive. These wayfarers can easily meditate on the beauties of nature — a sunset, a daisy, a snowcapped mountain. In prayer, those on the path of service respond to the events of Jesus' life rather than to his teachings.

Michael and Norrissey note that the approach of those on this path is their prayer of continual awareness, punctuated perhaps by intercessions such as, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Saint Thérèse's dedication was to do all the small tasks of daily life with the knowledge that each one is a part of the total harmony of the universe. What she did, she did with *total concentration* — each act was the most important thing to be doing at this moment.

Father Anthony de Mello, S.J. claimed that this level of *awareness* is the highest form of contemplative prayer.

## Pathway 4: The path of asceticism

The path of asceticism emphasizes structure, tradition, and discipline. Sometimes called the path of discipline, it is less a path of self-denial than one of detachment or purification. Those who gravitate toward this pathway might describe themselves like this:

I value stability, orderliness, cooperation, consistency, and reliability. I am practical, organized, thorough, and systematic. But I am also driven by a desire to serve needs of society. I take great pride in doing something right the first time. I bring order and stability to the institutions to which I belong; I am a stabilizer.

I like traditional ways of doing things and am usually willing to devote a great deal of time and energy to making sure that institutions function well. I am loyal to my institutions (family, church, nation). I am thorough and hard-working.

Two saints who exemplify this pathway are Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1501-1549), as a youth, pursued pleasure, dueling, and living up to the image of a dashing *caballero*. He was wounded as a soldier in battle, his leg shattered. During a long recuperation period, he read about many lives of the saints. Moved to

make a pilgrimage to Montserrat in Spain, he kept an all-night vigil before the revered Black Madonna statue and abandoned his sword at her altar.

At 33, he returned to school (with 10-year-olds for classmates) and eventually attained his master's degree at 43. Ignatius wrote *The Spiritual Exercises*, a disciplined step-by-step means of achieving holiness and wholeness. His watchwords were *right order* and *service*. His exercises are designed to lead his followers toward ordering their lives and giving service to others through meditative prayer and fasting.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821) was an American wife of a businessman, mother of five children (in eight years), widow, convert to Catholicism, teacher, and finally a sister and founder of a religious order. She was deeply compassionate, but was also sustained by tradition and discipline: mortification, solitude, and examination of conscience.

In prayer, those on the path of discipline project themselves back into a scene by use of their sensing imagination. By becoming a real part of the event, they draw some practical application for today. Michael and Norrissey note that this traditional method of prayer goes back to 1000 B.C to the Israelite way of

praying—to remember an event, to immerse oneself in the event, thus reliving and participating in the event in a symbolic way.

### Suggested Reading List

Rev. Thomas A. Baima, "Building on the Faith that Candidates Bring, Part II: What Attracts a Candidate to Christianity?" *Catechumenate Magazine* (Liturgy Training Publications, September 1993)

Gloria Hutchinson, *Six Ways to Pray from Six Great Saints* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1981)

Chester Michael and Marie Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament* (Open Door, Inc., 1984)

Mary Neil, O.P. and Ronda Chervin, *Great Saints—Great Friends* (Alba House, 1990)

Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership* (Alban Institute, 1988)

In *The Spiritual Exercises*, Michael and Norrissey remind us, Ignatius described his meditation on the Nativity scene this way: "I will make myself a poor, little, unworthy servant, and as though present, look upon them, contemplate them, and serve them in their needs with all possible homage and reverence. Then I will reflect on myself that I may reap some fruit."

Ignatius' methodical way insisted on order. The

exercises aim, Ignatius tells us, "at the overcoming of disorderly affections, so that the retreatant may make a decision that is in keeping with God's will." Emphasis on order also implies the need to be loyal to a tradition—sometimes there is a yearning to return to the ways that "used to work."

### **Getting on the right path**

The awareness of different pathways to deepen your spiritual life can be quite liberating. It is rare that you find yourself comfortable exclusively on just one pathway; often there is

another one that you find nearly as appealing. But it is just as rare to think we can—or should—walk all four pathways with equal aptitude and energy. In the exercise you completed, you probably preferred one or two pathways more than the others. Although the exercise allows for it, very rarely does one choose all four pathways with equally high numbers.

Christ invited us to love God with all our being, with all our heart, with all our intellect, with all our strength—and our neighbor as ourselves. Knowing our preferred pathways can also help us realize where our personal gifts and our

challenges are, and how we each need to develop spiritually.

Just as important, we can begin to acknowledge and appreciate that others will naturally be drawn along other very different pathways, yet all four journeys have the same ultimate destination.

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# Find your spiritual pathway

Instructions:

1. There are four words in each row across—choose the word that is **most** descriptive of you **here and now** (not what you would like to be some day), and circle "5" in front of that word.
2. Pick the word that is **least** descriptive of you here and now, and circle "1."
3. Circle a "3" next to the second most descriptive word and a "2" next to the third most descriptive.
4. Do the same for each row.
5. When you are finished, total up the circled numbers in each vertical column and write the sum in the box below each column.
6. Enter your four scores on the lines on page 20. The highest score represents your preferred spiritual pathway.

5 3 2 1 independent	5 3 2 1 compassionate	5 3 2 1 spontaneous	5 3 2 1 factual
5 3 2 1 logical	5 3 2 1 creative	5 3 2 1 adventurous	5 3 2 1 thorough
5 3 2 1 straightforward	5 3 2 1 empathetic	5 3 2 1 adaptable	5 3 2 1 systematic
5 3 2 1 visionary	5 3 2 1 idealistic	5 3 2 1 self-determined	5 3 2 1 dependable
5 3 2 1 demanding	5 3 2 1 committed	5 3 2 1 observant	5 3 2 1 organized
5 3 2 1 speculative	5 3 2 1 curious	5 3 2 1 enthusiastic	5 3 2 1 realistic
5 3 2 1 original	5 3 2 1 expressive	5 3 2 1 playful	5 3 2 1 loyal
5 3 2 1 challenging	5 3 2 1 perceptive	5 3 2 1 vivacious	5 3 2 1 responsible
5 3 2 1 clever	5 3 2 1 friendly	5 3 2 1 excited	5 3 2 1 traditional
5 3 2 1 questioning	5 3 2 1 imaginative	5 3 2 1 tolerant	5 3 2 1 detailed
5 3 2 1 decisive	5 3 2 1 personable	5 3 2 1 fun loving	5 3 2 1 devoted
5 3 2 1 tough	5 3 2 1 verbal	5 3 2 1 pragmatic	5 3 2 1 conscientious
5 3 2 1 strategic	5 3 2 1 concerned	5 3 2 1 risk taker	5 3 2 1 reliable
5 3 2 1 change agent	5 3 2 1 supportive	5 3 2 1 troubleshooter	5 3 2 1 consistent

Total Column 1

Total Column 2

Total Column 3

Total Column 4

**Path of intellect  
Thomistic prayer**

Column one \_\_\_\_\_  
About 12% of the population follows this path, using the syllogistic method of Saint Thomas Aquinas known as Scholastic prayer. The main emphasis is on the orderly progress of thought from cause to effect.

People of this prayer type prefer neat, orderly forms of the spiritual life, as opposed to the free-spirit, impulsive attitude of the Franciscan approach. Their spirituality is centered on the earnest pursuit of all the transcendental values: truth, goodness, beauty, unity, love, life, and spirit. Like Saint Teresa of Avila, they are willing to exert superhuman effort to achieve their goal.

Because of their disdain for second best, they seek total truth and authenticity in their lives and work hard to reach the whole truth about themselves, about God, and about sanctity. This intense pursuit of truth colors their whole spiritual life.

Books of prayer frequently call the Thomistic method of prayer "discursive meditation." In this type of prayer, one takes a virtue or fault or theological truth and studies it from every possible angle.

Change of behavior is an essential part of this prayer—it doesn't stay at the intellectual level. There is generally a bias against this type of prayer today because it was so much in vogue before Vatican II.

**Path of devotion  
Augustinian prayer**

Column two \_\_\_\_\_  
The majority of saints are of this spiritual temperament, as well as 12% of the population (but half of those who go on retreats or belong to small faith groups).

This method uses creative imagination to transpose the world of scripture to our situation today—as if the scripture passage is a personal letter from God addressed to each one of us (like Saint Augustine picking up Romans 13 and reading a message pointed directly at him).

The essential element of this spirituality, going back to New Testament times (Jesus, Saint Paul, the early church fathers), is experiencing a personal relationship with God. Because they read between the lines and catch what is inexpressible and spiritual, those who follow the path of devotion best understand symbols and their use in the liturgy.

This path concentrates on meditations that loosen the feelings and expand the ability to relate to and love others. The stress is on the love of self, others, and God.

Those on this path can follow the four steps of the *Lectio Divina*: listen to what God says in scripture; reflect prayerfully and apply it to today; respond to God's word with personal feelings; remain quiet and stay open to new insights.

**Path of service  
Franciscan prayer**

Column three \_\_\_\_\_  
About 38% of the population are this spiritual type—but far fewer of this type come to church regularly.

Like Saint Francis of Assisi, those who follow the path must be free, unconfined, and able to do whatever their inner spirit moves them to do. They don't like to be tied down by rules.

One thinks of Saint Peter impetuously jumping into the water to join Jesus as a typical action of this type.

Franciscan spirituality leads to acts of loving service, which can be a most effective form of prayer. The gospel stories about Jesus have a special appeal, particularly the Incarnation of God in the life of Jesus, which is the center around which Franciscan life and spirituality revolve.

Franciscan prayer is flexible and free-flowing, making full use of the five senses, and it is spirit-filled prayer. Those on this path can make a meditation on the beauty of a waterfall, flower, meadow, mountain, or ocean—all of God's creation.

There is more stress in prayer on the events of Jesus' life than on his teaching. Like Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, prayer is done with total concentration—as if this is the most important thing to be doing at this moment. Thérèse did all tasks knowing that each was a part of the total harmony of the universe.

**Path of asceticism  
Ignatian prayer**

Column four \_\_\_\_\_  
More than half of churchgoers practice this type of prayer of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It involves imagining oneself as part of a scene in order to draw some practical fruit from it for today.

This spirituality goes back to the Israelite way of praying in 1000 B.C., to remember and immerse oneself in an event, thus reliving and participating in the event in a symbolic way.

This is how Ignatius meditated on the Nativity scene: "I will make myself a poor, little, unworthy servant, and as though present, look upon them, contemplate them, and serve them in their needs with all possible homage and reverence. Then I will reflect on myself that I may reap some fruit."

His preoccupation with order to was evident in his *Spiritual Exercises*, which, write Thomas Clarke in *Playing in the Gospel*, aimed at overcoming "disorderly affections, so that the retreatant may make a decision that is in keeping with God's will."

According to Clarke, "Most souls who are willing to endure the discipline of the 30 days of intense prayer activity of the Spiritual Exercises are rewarded with an unforgettable spiritual experience that frequently changes the direction of their lives."

