

A hiker wearing a plaid shirt, a tan cap, and a large black backpack is seen from behind, walking on a dirt path through a forest. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that filters through the trees. The path leads into the distance, flanked by tall grass and trees.

# Explore

discovering new  
SACRED PATHWAYS

GUIDE BOOK

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# Introduction

## **I find that many of us face the same dilemma in our walk with God**

– our love for God has not dimmed, but there are seasons where we can fall into a soul-numbing rut. Our devotional time seems like a shadow of what it used to be, we’ve been serving in the same ministry for so long we could do it in our sleep, and it seems as if nobody in our small group has had an original thought for three years. “Is this really all there is to knowing God?”

To complicate matters, the church has often taken a cookie-cutter one-size-fits-all approach to spiritual growth, and we end up feeling guilty about not living up to these narrowly accepted measures of spirituality. But that’s not how relationships work! No one-size-fits-all recipe can guarantee a great relationship, and it’s no different in our relationship with God. God doesn’t just put up with our differences, he enjoys them, adapts to them; after all, he’s the one who created you uniquely. So this fall we encourage you to be you, and to find out how God has wired you to connect with him. Have fun exploring some new rut-busting pathways in your relationship with the Father.

Enjoy the journey, let’s go exploring!

*Pastor Terry*

# Simplicity

Pursuing simplicity means uncomplicating our lives: taking time to say no to excess, clutter, and even things we would normally consider necessities, so that we can make space to refocus our whole selves on God. Two easy ways to practice simplicity are reducing and fasting.



## Why explore this pathway?

Pursuing simplicity helps us identify the things that we are treating with the attention, attachment, and dependence that should only be shown to God, and bring our will back in line with God's will.



## Caution!

**Don't Forget Your Purpose:** Be careful not to let reducing or fasting itself to become your goal. These things are meant to point you towards God.

**Start Small:** You don't have to become a monk to embrace simplicity. Start small, but be strict with the simplicity you've embraced.

## First Steps

**Get Your Bearings:** What are the things that take up the most of your time, attention, or money? What would it look like to reduce these things and replace them with God?

**Explore:** Reduce or choose to fast from the thing(s) you identified. If it doesn't hurt a little, you're probably not sacrificing enough. Here are some suggestions to get you started.

1. **Friday Night Fast** – Take part in the Christian tradition of not eating meat on Friday, or even abstain from a whole meal, and spend that time in prayer with God.
2. **Closet Closeout** – Go through your closet and choose to keep only several articles of each kind of clothing, bringing the extra to a second hand store or charity.

**Share:** Talk to someone about what you're doing, what you're learning, and where God is leading you through these practices. Ask them to pray for you as you continue to explore!

## Notes and Reflection:

# Sabbath

Sabbath is a block of time (traditionally 24 hours) set apart to stop all forms of work and enjoy rest. Observing a Sabbath allows us to join with God in delighting in the good world that He has created. Sabbath is an invitation to stop our **doing for** God so that we can **be with** God.



## Why explore this pathway?

Practicing Sabbath helps us fight against the pull to achieve or strive for God's grace and love, our need to be in control, and the cultural message that our value or worth comes from our achievements or work. By spending time enjoying the good things in God's world, we embrace our identity as God's beloved children, and express gratitude to God for who He is and who He says we are.

## Caution!

**Keep God Involved:** Sabbath isn't just an excuse to do things you like. It's taking time to be with God and celebrate Him as you enjoy His good world.

**Pursue God, Not Pleasure:** Not everything that brings us joy or pleasure is something God is pleased with. Sabbath activities should fall in line with what God finds good in the world.

## First Steps

**Get Your Bearings:** What gives you joy and delight? This will be different for each person, but part of Sabbath is enjoying and delighting in creation and its gifts.

**Explore:** Whether it's 4 hours, 8 hours, or a 24 period, make Sabbath time a part of your weekly rhythm. Make sure you include a few things that you identified in your survey. Here are common ways to practice Sabbath.

1. **Practice a Hobby** – Whether it's golf, food, carpentry, painting, video games, or a good book, enjoy the things that help you explore the richness of God's world.
2. **Get Outside** – In Genesis 1, God takes time to enjoy the world He created. Surrounding ourselves with that same natural world helps bring us close to God.

**Share:** Sabbath isn't something you have to do alone! So go out for coffee, walk with friends, or just spend time relaxing together. Community is a good thing that God has created, and experiencing the joys of togetherness is something God delights in.

## Notes and Reflection:

# Sign Language

Sign language is a whole way of communicating without using words! God has created us to be creative, and this creativity can help us speak to and listen for God in diverse ways: our prayers can be communicated through music, art, wood-working, incense, food, etc. He has given us 5 senses through which we experience His world: sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and touches that can convey God's messages to us, and our prayers to him.

## Why explore this pathway?

"Sign Language" takes us out of our taken-for-granted rhythms and opens us up to hearing from God and experiencing His character in new ways. It also inspires us to communicate in deeper ways that words cannot express.



## Caution!

**Worshipping without Conviction or Content:** Sometimes worship can become a motion that we go through, without any heart attached. Whether you're singing, looking at a piece of art, or lighting a fragrant candle, move beyond surface-level enjoyment and get to the truths about God that exist before your senses.

**Worshipping Worship:** Sensory stimulation is not the same thing as a true commitment of the will. Be cautious of using your senses to worship worship, or be satisfied with just a sensuous experience.

## First Steps

**Get Your Bearings:** How do you usually engage your senses or creativity in communication or worship to God? Where do you find beauty and wonder in the world? How could you praise God through your experience of beauty through your senses and creativity?

**Explore:** Take 30 minutes to engage your senses and worship God. If you're not sure where to start, here are some suggestions:

1. **Religious Art** – Spend time focusing on the religious art of Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and others. Take in the looks on the faces, the gestures, and the postures. How do these paintings convey the meaning of the Biblical story? Now draw your own prayer!
2. **Tactile Prayer** – Hold a paper clip while you pray for a broken relationship; fun tack when you pray for God to mold and shape you; carry a nail in your pocket to remind yourself of the suffering of Christ.

**Share:** Gather some friends and take communion together. Focus on the tastes of the bread and the wine/ juice. Share what they communicate to you about God.

## Notes and Reflection:

# Service

Offering your resources and influence to care for, protect, nurture, and pursue justice for others, especially those who are vulnerable or in need.

## Why explore this pathway?

When we show love to the people that God loves (everyone), we come to understand God's own heart for us, and for His world. Very few things bring us closer to the God who IS love than doing our best to love others like He does.



## Caution!

**Serving Others Through Serving Ourselves:** Some people with esteem problems feel a need to serve others for self-validation. When caregiving becomes an act of taking, an act of deception, it is done so others will love or need them in return.

**Neglecting Those Closest to Us:** In our zeal to love others, we must remember that God makes home the priority (See 1 Timothy 5:8). Don't neglect your family while you save the world!

## First Steps

**Get Your Bearings:** Who are you caring for? How can you serve the socially or spiritually vulnerable by caring for their needs? How can you show hospitality to everyone that enters my home?

**Explore:** Identify an individual, family, people group, or demographic that your heart breaks for, and find out ways to serve them in your area. If you're not sure where to start, here are some suggestions:

1. **Be Neighbourly** – Help out your neighbours! Offer to babysit their kids (for free), rake their leaves, buy/make them supper. Whatever it is, find something they could use help with and serve them!
2. **Spending Time** – Many vulnerable people simply need the gift of time. Find opportunities to spend time with seniors, orphans, or those living with mental or physical illness.

**Share:** Gather some friends and serve together. Help someone in your small group: serve together at a local charity: work together to bless and surprise someone hurting with appreciation, love and support.

## Notes and Reflection:

# Solitude

The practice of solitude means uninterrupted time, in a distraction-free, isolated environment, to be alone with God. In solitude we remove all distraction so that we can contemplate God, simply be in His presence, and pursue the deepest love for Him.

## Why explore this pathway?

We are bombarded with information, opportunities for busyness, and interruptions. Our attention spans are fried. This makes it difficult for us to hear God. Taking time to shut out the things that compete for our attention helps us center ourselves in God's love and presence, allowing us to hear what we otherwise might not.



## Caution!

**Overemphasizing Personal Piety:** Don't fall into the trap of making your spiritual disciplines only about you. Our need for spiritual refreshment must be balanced with our obligation to reach out to others.

**Seeking to Gain God's Favor:** There is nothing we can do that can make God love us any more. His love is absolute and His forgiveness is based on a prior work completed by Jesus, not our current spiritual practices.

## First Steps

**Get Your Bearings:** When and where can you make space and time for solitude? Can you make this time and space in your own home, or will solitude need to happen outside your home?

**Explore:** Set aside time (try to start with an hour) to be completely alone with God, without any distractions. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you as you spend time contemplating and loving God. If you're not sure how to start, here are some suggestions to get you started:

1. **Early Bird/Night Owl** – Stay up a little longer at night, or get up before everyone else in your home in the morning. Use that time to reflect on God's presence in the day behind you, or contemplate His presence in the day before you.
2. **Silence** – Choosing to keep from expressing ourselves through voice can help us become better listeners. Take time, during solitude or during your day, to refrain from speaking. Allow yourself to grow in your capacity to notice and listen.

**Share:** Start a conversation with someone about your practice of solitude. Ask if they would consider this practice, and compare experiences. Remember to pray for each other as you continue to explore!

## Notes and Reflection:

# Study

When we study and learn about God, we connect with Him through the minds that He gave us. By studying the Bible, the history of how God has acted in the world, ethics, theology, and apologetics, we develop our understanding of who God is, and we start to see the different, complex parts of our world through His eyes.

## Why explore this pathway?

Life is messy: right and wrong, and the work of God are not always clear. By increasing in knowledge and understanding, we become better able to see the truth of God, and correct and teach the Church.



## Caution!

**Loving Controversy:** When you have an opportunity to correct others, do it with love. Winning an argument is far less important than being gracious and loving to others. (See: 1 Timothy 1:4, 6:4-5; 2 Timothy 2:23-25).

**Knowing Rather Than Doing or Being:** Knowing what is right is not a substitute for doing what is right, and knowing about God is not the same as knowing God, and having a relationship with Him. Don't let knowledge become a substitute for loving God and others.

## First Steps

**Get Your Bearings:** Ask yourself: What am I curious about? What questions do I have about God, the Bible, the world, the Church in history, or the hot button issues in the world today?

**Explore:** Choose one of the things you're curious about, and start studying! Try to look at a wide range of perspectives, not just the one that you would agree with most. If you're not sure where to start, here are some suggestions:

1. **The Bible Project** – Videos that walk through biblical books, themes, word studies, and even how to read the Bible! Their podcast goes even deeper, for those who really want to dig in.
2. **C.S. Lewis** – This beloved author was a deep Christian thinker who took difficult topics like evil, the nature of God, heaven and hell, and the basics of Christianity, and wrote about them in ways that are easy to access.

**Share:** Comparing our viewpoints to others, and listening with an open mind, is a vital part of studying, and helps us move beyond our own limited understanding. Talk to friends or family about what you're learning, or even start a study group that meets periodically to discuss a specific issue or idea!

## Notes and Reflection:

# resources

## How are you wired to connect with God?

If you'd like to learn better how to connect with God, a fantastic resource we recommend for further exploration is:

***Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God*** by Gary Thomas

A free Study Guide for the book is available:

[www.garythomas.com/books/sacred-pathways](http://www.garythomas.com/books/sacred-pathways)

Sacred Pathways unfolds nine distinct spiritual temperaments that offer unique approaches to loving God. If you'd like to better understand and reflect on your own unique approach to connecting with God, try taking this Spiritual Pathways Online Assessment:

[groupleaders.org/spiritual-pathways-assessment](http://groupleaders.org/spiritual-pathways-assessment)

If you've every felt "left out" spiritually, ***A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God by Larry Osborne*** will bring you fresh insights to the nagging fears and doubts you have about the tidy formulas and cookie-cutter approaches that seem to always be presented in order to have a growing walk with Christ. This is one of those rare books that takes you on a path with God without insisting that you be more disciplined, more structured, and that you have to read a lot!

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