

“Different Ways of Connecting with God (Part 1 of 2)”

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We’re taking a little detour for a couple weeks to take a look at several different ways of connecting with God. Some people feel a strong connection with God in grand cathedral architecture, or in fancy church liturgy. Others feel a strong connection to God in applying reason to the faith, while still others feel a strong connection with God in mystical or miraculous experiences. There are others as well. The basic idea here is that what “works” for one person might not necessarily “work” for someone else – at least, not as easily. The question is, how do *you* most naturally connect with God?

Almost everything I am going to share with you today and next week derives from a book written by a contemporary German theologian named Christian Schwarz. I think some of his concepts are *brilliant*, and extremely helpful. Unfortunately, his books are not always easy to read, and it can be a somewhat tedious chore trying to make your way through them. I’m trying to do both you and me a favor by distilling down some of his key concepts into a format that will hopefully be helpful!

In preparation for writing his book on spiritual “styles,” as he calls them, Christian read about 400 other books on spirituality, including both contemporary works as well as classics from previous generations. He quotes from a wide range of theologians, teachers, and church leaders, including Henri Nouwen, Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, John Ortberg, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hans Kung, Leo Tolstoy, and Pope Benedict XVI, just to name a few. What he discovered is that there is a “standard role model for spirituality” that many books advocate. If you don’t fit the standard “mold,” you might think that you “just aren’t spiritual”, or you might feel a great deal of pressure to try to adapt yourself to that standard role model – an attempt which will never really succeed. Why? Because attempting to be spiritual in a way that does not match your natural, God-given “style” will likely lead to a great deal of frustration. Christian says “the fact that many books on spirituality favor a certain personality stereotype has done enormous damage.” He wrote his book on spiritual styles in an effort to undo some of that damage.

The question, as I said, is “how do you most *naturally* connect with God?” Every Christian, says Christian, has their own “native” style of spirituality. It’s like a Myers-Briggs type: you don’t choose it – you just *have* it. Some of you are more extroverted, others of you are more introverted; some of you are more “thinkers”, others of you are more “feelers”; trying to force yourself to be something you’re not is going to leave you feeling drained, and maybe fake. The same thing is true with spirituality. Everyone has a “native” style. It’s simply the one that comes most naturally to you, the one that feels most secure and comfortable. Each person needs to develop their *own* connection to God *in whatever way comes most easily and comfortably to them*. Today and next week we’re going to try to help you

figure out *what that is, for you*. Actually, that's just one piece of all this – there's another level to this that we'll get to next week. For now, this week, I just want to try to outline *nine different styles*.

But before I outline them, let's think for a minute about Trinity. You know the Trinity – the idea that there is one God, whom we know in three different forms: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each one of these *is God*. But each of them is different from the other. One God, three persons, blessed Trinity. The colors on this circle represent the different aspects of the Trinity. Green represents the Father; red represents Jesus; blue represents the Holy Spirit.

Now, think about churches. Different churches tend to emphasize one or two of these three dimensions of God more than the others. Some churches place a very strong emphasis on the cross, salvation, evangelism, and accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. These churches fall in the *red* dimension. Other churches place a strong emphasis on “being in the Spirit,” supernatural elements, and a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. These churches fall in the *blue* dimension. Still other churches emphasize knowing things about God, doing God's work in the world, and social responsibility. These churches fall in the *green* dimension. Evangelical churches tend to be “red”; Pentecostal churches tend to be “blue”; mainline Protestant churches (like us) tend to be “green.” Some churches straddle two zones – Catholic churches, for example, tend to be green/blue.

Spiritual styles are mapped out in a similar way. Some people more naturally connect to God in the “green” dimension, some people more in the “red,” some people more in the “blue.”

One more comment before I show you the nine styles. Christian wrote his book in German. It has been translated into English. I think a few things got lost or a bit muddled in translation. Some of the English names that are used for the styles don't entirely match what they mean! I wish that weren't the case. I'm not going to change the names, but I will let you know when a name is a little “off.”

The first style is the *sensory* style, up there near the top of the circle, in the green dimension, leaning slightly towards blue. People with this style enjoy expressions of faith that come *through the senses*. They appreciate art, architecture, and symbolism; they value beauty and see God's handiwork in it; they enjoy worship experiences that engage *all* the senses – sight, sound, touch, even taste and smell.

Next is the *rational* style, also in the green dimension, leaning towards red. People with this style enjoy using *logic* in their approach to God. Thinking and believing are intertwined. These people are suspicious of simple answers, strive for explanations, and integrate science in their approach to God.

Then comes the *doctrinal* style, straddling the line between the green and red dimensions. People with this style value Christian teachings that are solidly based on the whole witness of the Bible. They do not want the truth of the gospel compromised in any way, and are skeptical of elements that seem subjective or self-created. They are interested in maintaining the purity of the Christian faith.

Next is the *Scripture-driven* style, in the red dimension, leaning towards green. These people enjoy using Scripture to address personal situations in the here-and-now. Their focus is on practical application and the discovering God's will for us, so that we can grow to become more like Christ.

Then there is the *sharing* style, in the red dimension, leaning towards blue. These people enjoy sharing their faith by bringing the presence of God to other people, in tangible ways. Building homes for the poor. Bringing clean water to Africa. Going on medical mission trips. These people *experience God most* when they are *giving God away*. They enjoy sharing God's grace with people who really *need* it.

Next is the *ascetic* style, straddling the line between the red and blue dimensions. People with this style experience God most strongly when they remove themselves from worldly distractions. They don't need fancy church rituals or grand church buildings; they just want to follow Jesus, with as few distractions as possible. They might give up many of the pleasures the rest of us enjoy, like marriage, property, alcohol, or excessive amounts of food. They just want to live a simple, holy life.

The *enthusiastic* style is next, in the blue dimension, leaning towards red. The name is misleading; this style is not about being a "cheerleader." Rather, these people enjoy and appreciate incorporating supernatural elements in their approach to God. Indeed, they *expect* to see the supernatural, on a regular basis in their daily life. They enjoy worship that is loud and active, expecting that *at any moment* God is going to *act* in a miraculous way, bringing someone both healing and hope.

Then comes the *mystical* style, still in the blue dimension, leaning towards green. People with this style also value the supernatural, but they do so in more quiet ways. They enjoy practices that involve inner contemplation and prayer. Worship for them tends to be a more meditative experience. Many of them have a particular appreciation for images and symbols, which they use when they pray.

Finally, there is the *sacramental* style, straddling the line between the blue and green dimensions. It is not so much the sacraments themselves that are important for people with this style, so much as it is what the sacraments *represent*: the reality that *God has come to earth in human form*. What was transcendent has become imminently present. Anything that can capture or symbolize or represent the *incarnation* of God into our world is precious to people with this style: grand architecture, high liturgy, lofty music. Icons, for some people. Anything that captures the *transcendence* of God.

So those, in a nutshell, are the nine styles. *Which one are you?* If you're like me, many of the styles may sound appealing in some way. But *there's probably one style that is your most natural way of connecting with God* – the one where you comfortably and easily connect with God. Which one is it?

I've got good news: *we're willing to help you find it!* In the Adult Sunday School hour today, Michelle is going to offer people a chance to figure out *what your natural style is*. There's an exercise you can do to help you figure out your most natural way of connecting with God. If you are interested but can't stay for Sunday School today, let Michelle know – she is willing to work with you to find an alternate time. There are about six of us in the congregation who have taken the assessment, and most of us found it *immensely* helpful and illuminating. It helped make many of us feel less "guilty" for doing things that truly *feed* our souls. Please, *avail* yourself of this opportunity! I truly think it will be beneficial to you. Next week we'll talk about what to do after you know what your style is. I'll also tell you what *my* style is – and you are welcome to take guesses between now and then!

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