

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

Rev. Bill Pinches

Mason First Presbyterian Church

Mason, Michigan

March 24, 2019

Last week we looked at nine different ways of connecting with God – nine different styles of spirituality. These are laid out in a book called *The 3 Colors of Your Spirituality* by the German theologian Christian Schwarz. The basic idea is that every one of us has a “native” style, the one that comes most naturally to us, the one that feels most secure and comfortable. We walked through the nine styles last week, and we gave you an opportunity in Adult Sunday School to identify your own style. If you missed it, talk with Michelle – she is willing to meet with you at another time. Today we’re going to review the key points from last week, I’m going to reveal what *my* natural style is, and then we’ll talk about what to *do* once you know your style. How does it help your walk of faith? How can you grow?

Here are the nine styles. I am going to walk through them again – in a different order this time!

First: the sacramental style. People who have this style value physical expressions of spiritual realities. The sacraments, for one. Grand cathedral architecture. Icons. Anything that embodies a spiritual truth in some tangible form helps people with this style feel connected to God.

Next: the mystical style. People with this style emphasize God’s presence within us. They value spiritual practices like contemplation and meditation that help us experience the Holy Spirit within.

Next is the enthusiastic style. People with this style look for “signs and wonders,” experiences that reveal the supernatural power of God. Miracles, for example. The term “enthusiastic” is misleading; what they are *enthusiastic* about is the Holy Spirit, actively at work, in power, here and now.

Then there is the ascetic style. These people just want to follow Jesus, as simply as they can. They will remove things from their life that distract them from focusing on God. They tend to be frugal; they might not drink alcohol; they might never marry. They just want to live a holy, simple life.

Next is the sharing style. These people are very mission-minded. They feel closest to God when they are giving other people the love of God in very concrete and tangible ways. If someone is hungry, they just want to feed them! It feeds their souls to give God away.

Then comes the Scripture-driven style. People with this style thrive on practical applications of God’s word. What does the Bible say to the very specific situation you are dealing with? That’s the question that matters most to them. Their goal is to become more and more like Christ over time.

Next is the doctrinal style. People with this style strive to understand the truth revealed in the

whole of scripture. They feel close to God when they grasp the whole witness of scripture. They want to keep Christianity pure, not mixed up with other ideas; they don't want the faith to get watered down.

Next is the rational style. These people value reason and knowledge and seek to apply it to their faith. They incorporate science into their understanding of God. They value questions, and they are suspicious of simplistic answers. They want explanations that are logical, that make empirical sense.

Finally, there is the sensory style. These people perceive God through their senses. They value the beauty of creation and artistic expressions of faith. They might enjoy holding something while they pray. Even the right *tastes* and *smells* can help these people experience God.

That's a brief summary of the nine styles. The question I asked last week was, *Which one are you?* But let's push this a little further today. First of all: which one am I? Anyone want to take a guess?

When I took the assessment, I landed in the doctrinal style. I have to be honest: I was not happy with that! I was associating it with heavy-handed preachers who lay things out in stark black and white, leaving no wiggle room whatsoever – a style of preaching I have never really enjoyed. I thought it meant that I must enjoy reading theology in my spare time – which, frankly, I don't! I'm also not very good at debating obscure doctrinal details, like the exact sequence of events that will happen when Christ returns. But what I realized was that I was reacting to the *name*. When I stopped to think about it, I realized that ever since I was in seventh grade, I have been trying to make sense of the Bible, trying to get the whole thing to fit into one coherent package. It's what led me to seminary. It's why I struggle, every single week, trying to articulate as precisely as possible the meaning of the scripture. I want to make sure I get it *right*. It's a drive I have, an inner compulsion, that I cannot turn off. It's why I sit out there, early on Sunday mornings, editing my sermon. I'm trying to get it *right!* I realize now: God blessed me with the "doctrinal" style of spirituality. *It's the primary way I feel connected to him.*

See, these styles are *natural* to us. I didn't choose this style; it chose me! And you – you have a style – a natural way of feeling connected with God. It's what *feeds* you. What *drives* you.

So, what do you do, once you know your style? The first thing to do – is *enjoy* it! Don't feel *guilty* about it! Don't try to make yourself be something you're not! Get *comfortable* with it. Recognize that it's an important part of who you are. If you ever feel distant from God, go do something that feeds you, in your style. I feel connected to God when I'm working on my sermons, when I'm writing lessons for my Bible study, when I'm pursuing some biblical question and trying to figure out the answer. *It feeds my soul.* What feeds *your* soul? What feeds *me* isn't necessarily the same thing that feeds *you!*

Maggie Knust told me I could share this with you. When she took the assessment, she landed in the "sensory" style. She recently went to Thailand, to visit her daughter, who is there for a couple years. Do you know what Maggie did while she was there? She went on a bird-watching trip. Why? *Because things like that feed her.* She feels connected to God when she is in God's creation. It feeds her soul.

So what do you do? *Enjoy* your style. *Revel* in it. Give yourself permission to do more things in your style. Let's say you have the sharing style. Maybe you need to go on that trip to the Pine Ridge

Indian Reservation that the Mission Committee is planning for this fall!

But there's another, equally important, thing you can do, thing you *need* to do. You need to get *balance* in your life by learning from people who have styles that are very different from your own.

Let me back up. I talked last week about three different types of churches: green churches, red churches, blue churches, to use these colors, each color representing an emphasis on God the Father, or God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. What happens when a church gets *really extreme* in a particular direction? When a "red" church goes too far out on the red dimension, it becomes fundamentalist and judgmental. When a "blue" church gets too blue, it degenerates into emotionalism. And when a "green" church gets too green, it accommodates itself to the culture around it, and other churches think, "They're not really Christian." Every church needs to *stay connected* to *all three* aspects of God.

The same thing is true of us as individual Christians. Sometimes, Christians think that everyone needs to approach God the same way *they* do. They think that everyone should value the things that feed *their* soul, and fail to realize that *different* things feed *other* people's souls. Sometimes people become so headstrong in their *own* way of relating to God that they become closed-minded and judgmental of other people's ways of relating to God. *This can happen in ANY of the nine styles.*

So what do we need to do? We need to grow in our own style. But we also need to *balance* it by *learning* from people whose natural way of connecting to God is very different from our own.

So let's take me. I'm in the doctrinal style. I can relate easily to my neighbors in the rational style and the Scripture-driven style. I also have a pretty decent feel for the sensory and sharing styles. But the farther around the circle I go, the less I relate to *their* way of connecting with God. By the time I get to the mystical and enthusiastic styles, I am on *very* unfamiliar ground. Contemplative prayer? I've never felt very good at it. Chasing after miracles? I have a tendency to want *proof!*

So how can I grow? *By learning from people who have very different spiritual "styles" than you do.* What "works" for *them*? Christian suggests you want to find people on the other side of the circle, and spend time *listening* to them (without judging them) about how *they* feel connected to God. Honestly, that may be too much of a stretch for some people. Maybe you don't need to go *all* the way around the circle. I know that, for me, ever since my trip to Greece a year and a half ago, I have been fascinated by icons, and by the Greek Orthodox Church. That's over in the "sacramental" style. It's a whole different style of spirituality than my own. But it's clear to me that there are people for whom those practices mean a very great deal. They help them feel connected to God. *I can learn from that.* I'm not going to change my "native" style. But I can *balance* it by coming to appreciate *other* styles.

So I want to encourage you: if there's some other "wing" of Christianity that is intriguing you, some other expression of the faith, by all means, *explore* it. Consider it part of your spiritual journey. You will still get most of your spiritual fuel from your *native* style. But you will also have more *respect* for other Christians whose practices are very different from your own. You will be more well-rounded, more balanced. You will be wiser, more mature, and more aware of the enormous magnitude of God.

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