

Discover Your Soul's  
Path to God

# SACRED PATHWAYS

 **GARY THOMAS**

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF SACRED MARRIAGE

STUDY GUIDE

## A Study Guide for Sacred Pathways

"This study has been prepared by Adalee Lewis and is offered for your benefit. It has not been written by Gary Thomas, nor have the suggested books been compiled by him. It is a labor of love offered by a reader to those groups who might appreciate a headstart in their own effort to study Sacred Pathways in a group format."

Copyright © Center For Evangelical Studies 2007

## Chapter Eight

## CONTEMPLATIVES

### Loving God Through Adoration

#### DESCRIPTION

“Contemplatives refer to God as their lover, and images of a loving Father and Bridegroom predominate their view of God. ...The focus is not necessarily on serving God, doing His will, accomplishing great things in His name, or even obeying God. Rather, these Christians seek to love God with the purest, deepest, and brightest love imaginable.” (28)

“...holding hands with God. ...we gaze lovingly at our heavenly Father and have our heart’s delight satisfied.  
...(Contemplatives) want nothing more than some privacy and quiet to gaze upon the face of their heavenly Lover and give all of themselves to God.” (181)

#### CAUTIONS

“Healthy contemplatives will understand that rich human relationships are a way to enjoy God’s love, just as is solitary and intimate prayer. ...God can reveal Himself to us just as much in a conversation with a fellow believer as He can when we are on our knees in prayer.” (189)

“Some forms of contemplation wander from the folds of orthodox Christianity... we should beware of any meditation that calls our ego to somehow be absorbed into God rather than talking about relating to God.”(189)

“Contemplatives must move beyond mere meditation...to an alignment of our will and obedience into conformity with Christ.” (190)

#### WELL KNOWN CONTEMPLATIVES

Mary of Bethany, Dr. James Houston (professor at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.); St. Teresa of Avila; Thomas Merton; Thomas Aquinas; Augustine, Julian of Norwich, King David

#### SCRIPTURES TO PONDER

Psa. 63; 116; 73; Song of Songs; Isa. 41; 49; 59; 61; Jer. 2:2; Mt. 26: 6-13; Luke 10:38-42; John 14-17

## SONGS TO ENHANCE WORSHIP

Abba Father Open the Eyes of My Heart  
 Faithful One Power of Your Love  
 Here I Am to Worship Purify My Heart  
 How Beautiful Reveal Your Father Heart To Us  
 I Love You, Lord Seekers of Your Heart  
 Joy of My Desire Trust His Heart  
 Knowing You What Wondrous Love is This?  
 Lord, I Thirst For You When I Look into Your Holiness  
 More Love To Thee, Oh Christ With My Whole Heart

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Make use of the Jesus prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner) or some other prayer (Make haste to help me.) Purpose: to practice the presence of God, reminding yourself that Jesus is Lord, you are a sinner, you need His mercy.
2. Practice secret acts of devotion - something you do for someone else without letting anyone else know about it.
3. Carry a pocket piece - something tactile to remind you who you serve, e.g. a small cross.
4. Dancing Prayer - allowing God to lead and follow Him wherever He takes you. Allow Him to speak and place requests before you.
4. Centering Prayer - Choose a word and focus on it (Jesus, God, peace, etc.) repeating it until it becomes a part of you. This is not "new age"; it is a way to close oneself in with God, away from distractions. You are resting in God's presence.
5. Prayer of the Heart - "focuses on emotional attachment to, or adoration of, God. ...Its aim is to love God, to have our hearts enlarged so that God owns more and more of us." (187)
6. Meditative Prayer - this is prayerful reflection of a biblical text or theme, use of something you can see, taste, touch, hear or smell. (Lectio Divina; placing yourself in the passage )

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When do you feel most loved by God? In what tangible ways does He show His love to you?

2. What is most important to you in your relationship with God?
  
3. Do you ever lose the sense of God's presence? What happens to you then - in your emotions? In your spirit? What do you do to restore that sense?
  
4. What is your favorite way to picture God? Are there any images of God that you find difficult to contemplate? Why do you think that is? As God to show you something about that.
  
5. What words come to mind when you think of God? Make a list of all the words and phrases you can think of to express your praise to Him.
  
6. How do you usually approach God? Do you ever feel fear? What might that be about? Talk with the Father about it and write down His response.
  
7. In what ways is it difficult for you to share your experiences with God with other people?

### RESOURCES

- Butler, Dom Cuthbert (1922). *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*. London: Constable.
- Curtis, Brent and John Eldredge (1997). *The Sacred Romance*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Merton, Thomas. *Contemplative Prayer*. Bantam Dell Pub Group. ISBN: 0385092199.
- Merton, Thomas (1973). *Contemplation in a World of Action*. Garden City, NY: Image Books.
- Montaldo, Jonathan, Thomas Merton. *Dialogues With Silence: Prayers & Drawings*. (2001). Harpercollins. ISBN: 0060656026
- Pennington, M. Basil (1977). *Daily We Touch Him*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday
- Thomas, Gary (1999). *Seeking the Face of God*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.
- Underhill, Evelyn (1936). *Worship*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Winkler, Dr. Gabriele (1978). *Prayer Attitude in the Eastern Church*. Minneapolis: Life and Life.