



# Find your spiritual path

## 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 "4" 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. Repeat the above steps 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. Whichever column has the highest score represents your preferred spiritual pathway:

column 1 — path of intellect  
column 2 — path of devotion

column 3 — path of service  
column 4 — path of asceticism

4 3 2 1 independent	4 3 2 1 compassionate	4 3 2 1 spontaneous	4 3 2 1 factual
4 3 2 1 logical	4 3 2 1 creative	4 3 2 1 adventurous	4 3 2 1 thorough
4 3 2 1 straightforward	4 3 2 1 empathetic	4 3 2 1 adaptable	4 3 2 1 systematic
4 3 2 1 visionary	4 3 2 1 idealistic	4 3 2 1 self-determined	4 3 2 1 dependable
4 3 2 1 demanding	4 3 2 1 committed	4 3 2 1 observant	4 3 2 1 organized
4 3 2 1 speculative	4 3 2 1 curious	4 3 2 1 enthusiastic	4 3 2 1 realistic
4 3 2 1 original	4 3 2 1 expressive	4 3 2 1 playful	4 3 2 1 loyal
4 3 2 1 challenging	4 3 2 1 perceptive	4 3 2 1 vivacious	4 3 2 1 responsible
4 3 2 1 clever	4 3 2 1 friendly	4 3 2 1 excited	4 3 2 1 traditional
4 3 2 1 questioning	4 3 2 1 imaginative	4 3 2 1 tolerant	4 3 2 1 detailed
4 3 2 1 decisive	4 3 2 1 personable	4 3 2 1 fun-loving	4 3 2 1 devoted
4 3 2 1 tough	4 3 2 1 verbal	4 3 2 1 pragmatic	4 3 2 1 conscientious
4 3 2 1 strategic	4 3 2 1 concerned	4 3 2 1 risk-taker	4 3 2 1 reliable
4 3 2 1 change agent	4 3 2 1 supportive	4 3 2 1 troubleshooter	4 3 2 1 consistent

\_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL,  
COLUMN 1

\_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL,  
COLUMN 2

\_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL,  
COLUMN 3

\_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL,  
COLUMN 4

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# What is your spiritual path?

Discover the four basic spiritual pathways and see how they apply to your own spiritual development—and vocation discernment.

BY ROGER O'BRIEN AND THE VISION EDITORS

**T**HROUGHOUT HISTORY spiritual directors have warned against casting spiritual seekers into one mold. Saint Ignatius Loyola said there is “no greater mistake in spiritual matters than to force others to follow one’s own pattern.”

Many observers have noted four main dispositions, or temperaments, that help describe how people behave on their spiritual journey: the path of intellect, the path of devotion, the path of service, and the path of asceticism. These four main pathways are anchors in the Catholic spiritual tradition and worth exploring in some depth to help you understand your own spiritual preferences. What helps you develop spiritually often is dramatically different from what attracts the person in the next pew to a deeper spiritual life.

The Spirituality Quiz is designed to help you understand your spirituality type. Your quiz results may confirm what you already know about your spiritual leanings, or you may feel called to explore a different pathway. Consider your results an invitation to know yourself better and explore different forms of prayer, worship, and meditation. It is best to not feel bound by or limited by your result—your spirituality could very well be a combination of these four pathways. It is merely a tool to give you more insight into your preferences when it comes to living out your Christian call.

Religious orders represent a rich multitude of spiritualities drawing on these traditions but their spirituality is also far more nuanced and complex than these categories. Do not limit your exploration of religious communities to the traditions and saints associated with these spiritual paths. Simply use it as a starting point. Remember: Drawing closer to God and unraveling the mystery of God is the work of a lifetime.

Your quiz results will show you which of the four basic spiritual paths described below you currently find yourself following.

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## Path of intellect (Thomistic prayer)

The method of Saint Thomas Aquinas is known as scholastic prayer. The main emphasis is on the orderly progression of thought from cause to effect. People drawn to this prayer type prefer neat, orderly forms of the spiritual life as opposed to the more free-spirited 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, 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.

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## Path of devotion (Augustinian prayer)

This pathway to spiritual growth uses creative imagination to transpose the world of scripture to today's situation—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, and the early church leaders), 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 understand symbols and their use in 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 *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)

Like Saint Francis of Assisi, those who follow this path must be free, unconfined, and able to do whatever their inner spirit moves them to do. 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 that 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; 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 rather than his teaching. Like Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, prayer is done with total concentration as if it 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)

This pathway 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. in which one remembers and immerses oneself in an event and thus relives and participates in the event in a symbolic way.

That is how Saint Ignatius of Loyola meditated on the figures in 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."

Ignatius' preoccupation with order was evident in his Spiritual Exercises, which he aimed at overcoming "disorderly affections, so that [people] may make a decision that is in keeping with God's will," says Thomas Clarke in *Playing in the Gospel*. 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 whole direction of their lives."

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