

Connecting with God During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dr. Myra Perrine

In the book, “What’s Your God language,” people are encouraged to meet God through their unique spiritual temperaments, the most natural way we connect with God. When we know how the Lord has wired us, we suddenly begin to discover more meaningful new ways to encounter Him. We even start to see Jesus and ourselves in ways we might not have imagined before.

Here are the nine spiritual temperament categories. With which do you most resonate?

The Activist loves God by demonstrating a tenacious desire to see evil confronted and good prevail, offering a prophetic voice against wrong.

The Ascetic requires extended times of silence and solitude, experiencing God more profoundly in quiet, undistracted places.

The Caregiver loves God by meeting people’s practical needs (sometimes before being asked), and is a "doer of the word" who often labors in the background.

The Contemplative’s greatest passion is adoring God and spending time gazing into the face of Jesus, speaking the language of lovers.

The Enthusiast worships God with gusto, is at home with spiritual mystery, and feels closest to God when worshipping Him in the congregation.

The Intellectual connects with God through the mind, believing faith is to be understood as much as experienced, often gravitating toward challenging books and topics.

The Naturalist feels closest to the Lord when surrounded by nature, and experiences an increased sense of God-awareness when outdoors in His beauty.

The Sensate gets lost in the awe and majesty of the Lord, loving Him through the senses as expressed in intricate architecture, classical music, incense, or icons.

The Traditionalist uses ritual, symbol, and sacrament to know God, feeling most connected to Him when worshipping or reading liturgy and scripture in conjunction with the saints of old.¹

At this time, the whole world is quarantined because of the COVID-19 virus. Many of us feel disoriented and unsettled. We may not only be grieving the myriad of losses from the pandemic—lives lost, jobs terminated, school years ended, weddings postponed, food scarcity, exercise restrictions, graduations canceled, trips delayed, etc.—we may also feel sad because the familiar places and ways we’re used to connecting with God are no longer available. For the Naturalist, time spent outdoors might be limited. The Enthusiast isn’t allowed to gather with others to sing and celebrate the Lord. The Caregiver must find new ways to love God by serving those at home (unless he/she lives alone). And

¹ *What’s Your God Language: Connecting with God Through Your Unique Spiritual Temperament* contains a Spiritual Temperament Inventory so people can see more precisely how they are wired. The book is available on Amazon.com.

Traditionalists can no longer worship by taking communion at church. Yet God is still very much present to us; He is as close to us as He has ever been. We may not *feel* or *sense* His presence in the ways we are accustomed, but this might be the opportune time for us to adventure out of the familiar and discover fresh ways to connect with the living God during our current reality. Here are some exercises you may want to try:

1. **Watching the news**

Karl Barth, a twentieth-century theologian, suggested that Christians should encounter life with the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other. He believed that a meaningful, vibrant faith was meant to be lived in conjunction with the reality of what is happening in the world around us. In other words, a “salt and light” Christian must learn to interpret current events through the lens of the Bible, and our Bible reading must be seen through what is happening in history every day.

These days, as you listen to the news, begin by praying for an awareness of God’s presence, especially in the lives of the individuals, families, communities, and nations discussed. Ask God to work in the situations that burden you (even if it seems like it’s a one-way conversation). Keep a journal nearby so you can write down the names and experiences of those you sense the Lord prompting you to pray for in the days ahead.

Then jot down Bible verses that apply to what you are seeing, and pray them over those on the news. For example, when you hear people being interviewed who lack peace, claim John 14:27 for them: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you: not as the world gives. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” For first responders who are tired and need strength, pray Psalms 10:17 over them: “Oh Lord, You hear the desire of the afflicted; You will strengthen them.” As you intercede, stand in their place and ask your omnipresent Father to intervene. He hears you and will answer.

2. **Buying groceries and other necessary supplies**

When going to the store these days, many of us find ourselves standing in line to get in; then the items we need are missing. As you shop, pray for those around you—in the line or with shopping carts/bags. Ask the Lord to show you His provision, and claim Matt 6:31-34: “Don’t worry at all about having enough food and clothing. Your heavenly Father already knows perfectly well that you need them, and He will give them to you if you give Him first place in your life and live as He wants you to. Don’t be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time.” Share the hope you have with others when you can.

My friend, a consummate Caregiver, met an earnest young man named Donny in the grocery store last week. He’d been laid off from his job and offered to carry her groceries to her car. He’d just arrived from Puerto Rico, and as he began to tell her his predicament, she decided to share the Lord with him, quoting from Jeremiah 29:11-12: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Call on Me; come and pray to Me, and I will listen.’” She could see the heart of this anxious, lonely young man melt as she reached out her gloved hand and took his. She felt prompted to give him a small monetary gift; then she ask if she could pray for him. He was visibly touched and blessed.

Ask the Lord to lead you to the Donny’s in your neighborhood who need encouragement and maybe even a touch from your gloved hand.

3. Homeschooling

As you start the school day with your kids, picture Jesus by your side. Ask Him to show you what He wants to impart to your children. During their writing time, invite them to make a list of the friends they miss and would like to send a card. Make writing real for your children by having them create a card for each friend or far-away family member, or the first responders in your city, etc. Let them draw pictures on their cards, and help them find a Bible verse to share on each one.

Do you know your children's spiritual temperament? If they are of an appropriate age (I've seen 3-4-year-olds demonstrate distinct spiritual preferences), go over the nine categories with them, and have them decide which one(s) they like best. Then pick an exercise from #6 below to help them connect with God, feeling free to modify the activities as needed. Afterward, talk with your children about how they sensed Jesus with them today.

4. Living alone

God invites us to share our hearts with Him. David said, "Oh my people, trust in the Lord at all times; pour out your heart to Him, for God is our refuge" (Psalms 62:8, NLT). The Lord also wants us to tell Him what's on our minds: "Come, let us reason together" (Isaiah 21:18). Thankfully, no matter what we are thinking or feeling, God wants us to bring our authentic, honest selves to Him.

Journal what you are feeling. Try to name each feeling: fear, loneliness, depression, weariness, thankfulness, exhaustion, sadness, joy, etc. The Psalms are filled with prayers written directly to God using words that express deep feelings poured out from the heart. Allow a psalm to be your avenue of expression to the Lord. For example: "Oh God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my body longs for You in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalms 63:1).

Or: "How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?" (Ps 13:1-2).

Ask Jesus to give you the courage and clarity to express your heart and mind to Him. Perhaps you want to do that by writing your own psalm, poem, or song. Remember, God wants you to come to Him authentically. He calls you by name (Isaiah 43.1) and considers you His friend (John 15).

There is a document on this website entitled, "The Life-Long Journey of Knowing a Loving God." After you read it, do the reflection exercises in the back. Then write a prayer, committing your steps to the Lord (Psalms 37:5). Call or FaceTime some friends, family members, or colleagues this week who may be alone as well. Read them what you've written, then pray together.

5. Leaving your home or the mission-field unexpectedly

Jesus was a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief. The Son of Man had to leave His Father and all of heaven to come to earth to become one of us.

Talk to Jesus about your losses and grief. Draw a picture of where you are now, what you left, and where Jesus stands amid your current reality. If you'd like, share your picture with your family, then write a song of lament and sing it to Him together.

Walk around your house, allowing each family member to select one item to bring back with them to the kitchen table. Have them choose something that represents God's mercy and grace during this time. After you have all brought your items to the table, share one by one how you *know* (no

matter what you feel) that God is with you, blessing you, protecting you, and guiding you. Pray together as a family.

6. **Specific exercises for each spiritual temperament**

The following are activities from which to choose, depending upon your spiritual temperament:

Activists: Pick up the invisible sword of the spirit and go to battle in prayer against the virus. Walk around the house and proclaim aloud that God is the Victor. Quote and declare scripture, such as Zech. 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O My people! Shout with joy! For look—your King is coming! He is the Righteous One, the Victor!”

Ascetics: Set aside a large chunk of time to connect with God in quiet. Put aside your computer, cell phone, or any other distraction. Fast one meal or the whole day while taking time to listen for God’s voice. Say, “Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening” (1Sam 3:9). Write down what you hear and meditate on it this week.

Caregivers: Find an act of service you can do for someone who is struggling, and do it as unto the Lord. You may want to write a letter, email a picture to someone who needs encouragement, or drop a flower arrangement off on someone's front doorstep. Talk with Jesus about the satisfaction that comes from serving, since He’s the One who said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life for many” (Mark 10:45).

Contemplatives: Respond in your journal to Ps 27:8—“When You said, ‘Seek ye My face,’ My heart said, ‘Thy face, oh Lord, I shall seek.’” As you seek the Lord’s face today, pay close attention to His eyes. He sees you and says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you (Psalms 33:13, 18). What do you see when you look into His eyes? Talk with Him about that now.

Enthusiasts: Put on some of your favorite worship music and dance around the house. Invite God’s Spirit to be your dance partner. Find a scarf or a piece of cloth to wave as you dance. If you have an instrument, use it to praise Almighty God. “Praise His unequalled greatness. Praise Him with the trumpet and with lute and harp. Praise Him with the drums and dancing. Praise Him with stringed instruments and horns. Praise Him with the cymbals, yes, loud clanging cymbals. Let everything alive give praises to the Lord! You praise Him! Hallelujah!” (Ps 150:2-6)

Intellectuals: Find a good article on-line that recounts how God has used difficult times in past centuries to bless and mature His people. Write out as many ways as you can think of that describe how the Lord might be turning the traumatic effects of this virus into good for all humankind. In what ways is He redeeming what the enemy meant for evil? How is He turning this quarantine into a blessing and using it to expand His Kingdom, as well as maturing those who follow Him? Offer your list to God in prayer.

Naturalists: Walk outside or go to your window and observe one piece of created beauty that was made by the hand of God. Perhaps it’s a flower, or maybe you see His heart expressed in your pets (your dogs, cat, goldfish, etc.). Study the details, and worship the Lord as you let His created beauty touch your heart.

Sensates: Find a cross in your home or make one out of sticks. Feel the weight of the cross as you hold it in your hand. Remember all that Jesus carried for you when He drug His cross to Golgotha.

Feel how your sin hurt Him. Then surrender afresh the weight of all you've done (and not done) to our matchless Savior, the One who is full of mercy and grace.

Traditionalists: Take some bread and wine (fruit juice, water, whatever you have) and prepare to take communion. If possible, do this with your family or others living with you. Read aloud Matt 26:24-28: "During the meal, Jesus took and blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it to His disciples. 'Take, eat. This is My body broken for you.' Taking the cup and thanking God, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink this, all of you. This is My blood, God's new covenant poured out for many people for the forgiveness of sins. I'll not be drinking wine from this cup again until that new day when I'll drink with you in the kingdom of My Father.' Then they sang a hymn together." Take communion slowly and with great attention to Christ's sacrifice: His broken body and poured out blood. Find a hymnal if you have one and read/meditate on the words of one of your favorite hymns. Sing it to the Lord together as a family.

May these exercises draw your heart to the One who loves you more than life itself. This day, as you remember God's absolute, unalterable covenant love for you, may His timeless truth bless you.

He gives food to those who trust Him; He always remembers His covenant (Psa. 111:5).

Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for a child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on My hand (Is. 49:15-16).

Just as you trusted Christ to save you, trust Him, too, for each day's problems; live in vital union with Him. Let your roots grow down into Him and draw up nourishment from Him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all He has done (Col. 2:6-7).

I have loved you even as the Father has loved Me. Remain in My love. When you do what I ask you to, you remain in My love, just as I obey My Father and remain in His love. I have told you this so that you will be filled with My joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! (John 15:9-11)

Live in such a way that God's love can bless you as you wait for the eternal life that our Lord Jesus Christ, in His mercy, is going to give you. Keep yourselves in the love of God. Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into His glorious presence without a single fault. All glory to Him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are His before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen (Jude 21, 24-25).