

HIGH POINT

Helping Churches, Disciples and Leaders

Flourish

Coaching

Teaching

Resourcing

... you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God

Ephesians 3:19 (NLT)



Embrace Your Own Best Way to Connect Richly with God



Dr. Mike Johnson - Director

I recently read a Puritan prayer to my wife that had spoken richly to me. Her response was less than enthusiastic. On reflection, I shouldn't have been surprised. We have very different ways of connecting well with God. Do you ever feel odd or guilty that a particular worship experience didn't move you? Perhaps someone recommended a devotional to you, but when you read it, it left you feeling empty.

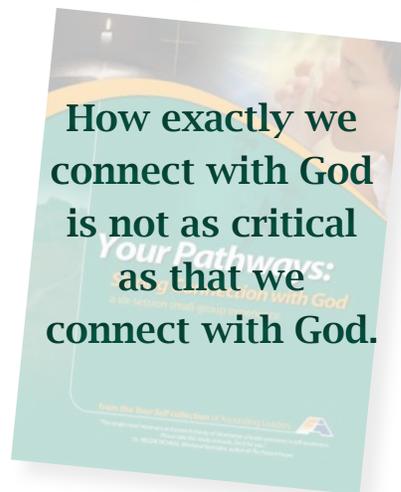
Let me encourage you NOT to feel guilty, but instead to pursue ways that DO connect you to God and affirm the diversity of means available for connecting more deeply with Christ.

Gary Thomas delves into this in his book, *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God*. He identifies nine different ways (or paths) that help people connect intimately with God. He also explains that most of us have

three or four pathways that help us connect especially well—nourishing our body, mind, and spirit and drawing us into a closer, more intimate relationship with God.

Discovering this helped me flourish spiritually. Knowing that my strongest pathways are in quiet alone times (the Ascetic pathway) of reflection (the Contemplative pathway), especially when I am outdoors (the Naturalist pathway) and reading Scripture or a piece of literature that is thought provoking (the Intellectual pathway), reminds me of the kinds of settings I need to experience often in order to stay fresh with God, flourishing spiritually.

Continued on page 4 >>>



2005-2007—Birth and Early Growth

Ten Years and Counting

God is writing Ascending Leaders' story. Here's a synopsis of our first decade—the highs and the lows—our own Journey Wall.



Founding Board: Asher Lewis, Mike Johnson, Jerry Holleman, Dave Kingma



Current Board: Asher Lewis, Bob Ryan, Bob Terpstra, Ryan Faber, Jamie Boersma, Jim Zwiers, Luke Wolters, Mike Johnson



Staff: Teri Watson, Mike Johnson, Judy Hagey, Sunny Hyun, Paula Schoof

Designed a 3-step model of personal study, small group time, and triads for application.

Heard many stories of people's "Aha" moments with God.

Developed Group Guide training and Charting Your Course retreats followed by Christ Habits, Spirit's Fruit, Your Self and Your Influence modules.

2008-2009—Choppy Waters, Rough Sailing

Sought to adapt to the changing and increasingly challenging environment brought on by economic recession

Shortened Group Guide training.

Some adaptations had unintended consequences of weaker relationships with those using materials.

Made materials more accessible by converting modules to workbooks and available to the public.

2009-2012—Even Rougher Waters

Moved to on-demand printing with Kwik Kopy, eliminating the need to hold inventory.

Staff reductions, salary freezes.

Disappointing results of Busy to Engaged campaign.

Sought and received grants to produce 25 workbooks.

Pursue relationships with other ministries in an effort to "transplant."

2012-2014—Wonderful Surprises: Finding Our Disciple-Making Place

Partnership with Christian Reformed Faith Formation coaching experiment enlarges our presence.

Unexpected opportunities to teach for Calvin and Fuller seminaries.

More requests for coaching than one person can accommodate.

Discovering God in Contemplation and Nature

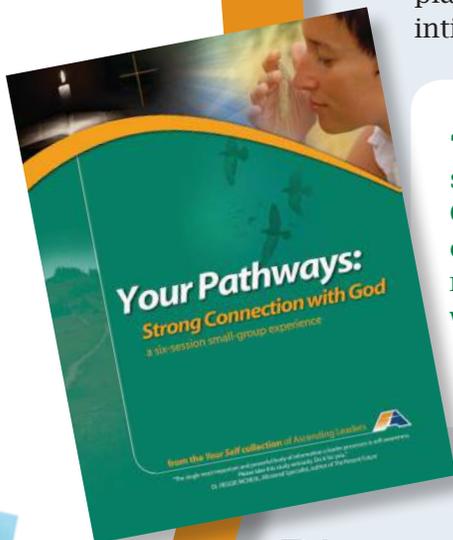


Sabo Cortez
Pastor - Church Planter
Covenant Grace Church
Temecula, CA

Sébastien (Sabo) Cortez was introduced to the spiritual temperaments as a student in Dr. Mike Johnson’s “Congregational-Wide Adult Discipleship” class at Fuller Seminary. *Your Pathways* is required homework for the class. A husband, father of four, church planter and part-time student, Sabo was skeptical about working through such intimate, personal exercises and Dr. Mike’s insistence that students explore a *personal* relationship with God. Sabo’s theological tradition valued the intellectual pathway and Sabo felt comfortable with that. To his surprise, he discovered that he also finds a strong connection in contemplation, caregiving and as an activist—a discovery he found freeing. “I realized that I have freedom in how I approach God. He is honored when we approach him in the way He created us to do so.” Now Sabo welcomes the opportunity to connect with God during early morning prayer walks through the vineyard near his home. Understanding that his roles as husband and father and enthusiastic church planter are also legitimate pathways to God has given Sabo a more vibrant, intimate connection with his Maker.

“Seeking the face of the Creator behind the creation awakens a Naturalist’s spirit. Savoring the out-of-doors is a way of expressing appreciation for the Creator. We heighten our awareness and adoration of the creator when we consider the greatness, the multitude and the beauty of creation. Creation resounds in expression of God’s abundance, proving a place to commune with the Maker of heaven and earth.”

Your Pathways: Strong Connection with God, p. 12



Discovering God in Ritual and Symbols



Rachel Young
Associate Pastor of
Spiritual Formation
Clear Lake Presbyterian Church
Houston, TX

“My small group studied *Your Pathways* during a significantly difficult season of my life. I had just taken a medical leave of absence from my job and was feeling the absence of God in the midst of chronic illness. I felt lost - like I didn’t know myself or God very well anymore. The study reminded me of the ways my soul is refreshed by God’s presence. I had neglected these pathways in the midst of the stress and busyness of my life. Because I’m a naturalist, I intentionally took more prayer walks; as a traditionalist, I began attending a more liturgically traditional worship service. Over time, I found that not only my body healed, but also my spirit, as I drank in God’s loving presence in ways congruent with who God created me to be.”

“Traditionalists value rituals for adding structure to their faith and symbols for adding deeper meaning to what they believe. Religious symbols awaken the mysterious, representing an unseen reality, reminding them of soul-searing truths.”

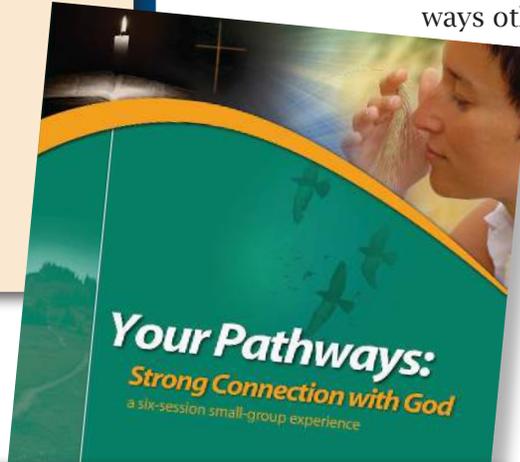
Your Pathways: Strong Connection with God, p. 27

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You will flourish when you shed the guilt about what does NOT connect you with Christ and instead joyfully pursue ways that DO connect you to God. To help with this, our team of writers compiled a six-session workbook called *Your Pathways: Strong Connection with God*. This study will help you find pathways that lead you closer to God. It will not only help you nurture a more vital life with God, but will also help you appreciate the rich and varied ways others connect with God.

Your Pathways has been extremely helpful in my personal relationship with God, and we are hoping to implement it in our church as a way of helping our people discover the uniqueness of their pathway. Can't wait to share it with our church!

Eddie Kirkland, Vicar
The Parish Anglican Church
Alpharetta, GA



In this issue of the *HighPoint*, we share a few stories of those who found pathways to a closer walk with God. (Perhaps you will recognize your own pathway or experience in one of them.) We also give you a glimpse of the FORWARD Gala and Dinner held in April to celebrate our first ten years of ministry. Those with the Enthusiast pathway enjoyed vibrant worship; the Texas bluebonnet centerpieces moved Naturalists to sense the Creator's presence, while Activists were moved by AL's anniversary gift of vision coaching services to a New Mexico church that serves the Zuni Native American population.

It is clear that God is using AL's fortitude, perseverance and courage to help disciples and leaders flourish. One way we're doing that now is by making *Your Pathways* accessible either as a free pdf download or the print version available for purchase on Amazon. Did you know that Ascending Leaders receives a percentage of all your Amazon purchases when you register at smile.amazon.com and choose AL as your nonprofit? What a great way to grow spiritually and support our mission at the same time.

Discover **YOUR** strongest connection to God.



NOW AVAILABLE as a FREE pdf at ascendingleaders.org

OR order a print version for yourself and your small group from Ascending Leaders' website for \$9.95 or Amazon for \$11.95.

Nine Pathways to God

| PATHWAY | EXPERIENCES GOD |
|------------------|---|
| 1 Enthusiast | With mystery and celebration |
| 2 Naturalist | In the out-of-doors |
| 3 Activist | Through seeking justice and confrontation |
| 4 Sensate | With the senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting |
| 5 Ascetic | In solitude and simplicity |
| 6 Traditionalist | Through ritual and symbol |
| 7 Contemplative | Through adoration |
| 8 Caregiver | By loving others |
| 9 Intellectual | With the mind |

Your Pathways: Strong Connection to God, p. 5

Take a FREE inventory of your spiritual pathways at <http://goo.gl/L1r1fcf>.
Use **Your Pathways** to dig deeper.

Mike

A Night to Share the Vision



Ryan Faber - Emcee

Gina Johnson - Scripture Reader

Mike Johnson - Director's Address

Sebastian Cortez - Keynote

Jamie Boersma - Invitation to Partner

Reconnect with Old Friends



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3947 Field Crossing
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DiscipleForward is a half-day workshop for pastors and ministry leaders designed to help you build your congregation's spiritual growth!

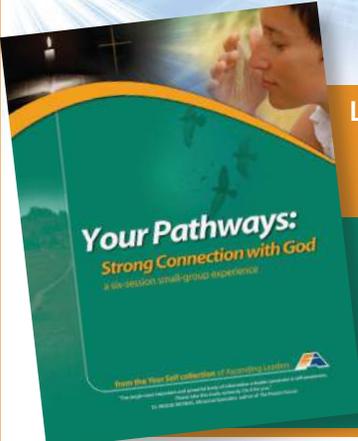
FIND A WORKSHOP NEAR YOU
 at Eventbright.com ([discipleforward](http://discipleforward.com))

| | |
|-----------|----------------------|
| August | 13 - Redlands, CA |
| September | 3 - Clear Lake, TX |
| | 9 - Grand Rapids, MI |
| | 30 - Seattle, WA |
| November | 5 - Houston, TX |
| | 12 - Des Moines, IA |
| | 18 - Zeeland, MI |

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for YOU & YOUR SMALL GROUP

Discover **Your Pathways!**



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“Because of your investment in Ascending Leaders, God is doing amazing things at our church.”

Sabo Cortez, Pastor
 Covenant Grace Church
 Temecula, CA



Your personal gift or church's offering helps us multiply the impact of our coaching, teaching and resourcing.



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