

Access Points for Prayer—"Sacred Pathways"

As Catholics, we hold firm to the fact that God is constantly seeking us out with an over-the-top love that is awash throughout all of creation. Trinitarian theology tells us that all things, everywhere, are rich with the outpouring of this love. The grace of our Seeking God is available through endless modes, moments, portals, and experiences.



As images of God and blessed with free will, it's up to us to *choose to be found* by noticing the graces and opportunities saturating every moment, interaction, and opportunity.

How can we talk about these intangible graces in concrete, tangible ways so as to guide teens (and our children, our spouses, our friends, ourselves) towards discovering and being discovered by God?

[Sticky Faith](#) offers a great overview of Gary Thomas's Sacred Pathways, nine access points through which human hearts and minds find God. For example, some of us are thinkers, some are doers, and some are sensates. It is through these preferences that we most often sense ourselves being 'found.' Thomas has created a really nice connection between our spiritual side, Multiple Intelligence Theory, and the necessity of building numerous access points into prayer prompts and session plans *with everyone*, not just teens. Others have streamlined Thomas's work to a more usable seven access points:

Relational: I connect best to God when I am with others.

Intellectual: I connect best to God when I learn about God, creation, physics, etc.

Worship: I connect best to God when I worship.

Activist: I connect best to God when doing great things.

Contemplative: I connect best to God in silence.

Serving: I connect best to God while completing Kingdom tasks.

Creation: I connect best to God in nature.

One of the great strengths of this hybrid approach is the [Spiritual Pathway Assessment](#), a tool for helping all of us identify the access points that are the richest fodder for our faith journeys. It's by far the best tool I've come across for helping teens and adults alike recognize the potential access points to transformational prayer that God has built into them. I've used this on Kairos retreats with Juniors and it's been an awesome addition. Why?

1. Most everyone loves a self-quiz. Especially teenagers.
2. Teens really are hungry for something more and something that matters. The mere idea that we can help them get closer to that something creates curiosity, interest, and hope. They dive into the inventory.
3. The assessment works. Most everyone walks away with either clarity or affirmation about their access points. Moreover, the assessment rings true to their experience.
4. The [debriefing tool at this link](#) offers clear characteristics, examples, strengths, cautions, and ways to stretch for each type. In other words, the assessment offers to take them further along the PATH, if they are willing to put in the effort and continue the journey.
5. Follow up conversations can lead to post-retreat goodness. For example:

"Servers" find each other and the synergy of conversation and passion can spawn a service club at school.

'Aha' moments happen all the time when two heretofore mere classmates realize they share a really deep

intellectual desire to understand a church teaching.

An idea for a 'Camping Kairos' bubbles up from the creation seekers.

Take the assessment yourself. See if it rings true for you, too

Journaling—The preference of the Linguistically-Leaning

Temp4Tim! Journaling is the tour de force for the linguistically-leaning brain.



You'll have a lot of them in your class or small group (particularly among the ladies), so offering faith journaling will prove fruitful.

Fred Duckworth offers these simple tips, along with a small set of excellent prompts in his online [journaling pamphlet for teens](#). You may not want to use all of these in your intro to journaling, but might eventually touch on them all. Numbers 1, 3, 4, and 7 are a good starting place because they head off the incessant questions about directions, right and wrong, and "How long does this have to be." Breaking out of the habit of

“I have to for a grade” and creating a habit of “I want to know You better” will take some undoing of thinking patterns. Stick with it. Be joyful about your own prayer. Encourage every step they take.

1. Begin with prayer: Ask the Holy Spirit, who is your Counselor, to open your heart and guide you to the truth.
2. Date every entry: It’s important to record the date of each journal entry to help you see the progress you’ve made.
3. Write what’s on your heart: Start talking to God and share your joys, victories, desires, frustrations, anger, fears, hurts, heartaches, and praises with Him. You can record special events, spiritual insights, revelations, strengths, weaknesses, goals, prayers, dreams, memories and scriptures you love.
4. Do not worry about mistakes: Don’t be concerned about spelling, penmanship or content. Thinking too long about what you’re going to write may hinder you.
5. Listen and record: Record what God impresses on your heart. (His voice will always line up with His written Word.)
6. Use a highlight pen (for Bible reading and journaling): Highlighting scripture and specific words God speaks to your heart will enable you to easily locate them in your journal and re-read them later. (Sometimes God speaks repeatedly, trying to get our attention to warn us or prepare us for the future.)
7. But, most of all, remember that there is no right or wrong way to journal. Rather, your journaling style should reflect your unique relationship with God.

Check out the [Prayer Coach Power Move](#) post for some ideas on journal types. **Once they’ve got something to journal in they’ll need some prompts.** Following Jesus on the PATH has Think About It and Pray About It sections at the end of each

chapter. Those can be used as journal prompts. In addition, here are some starters and prompts that will keep them going. Modify at will!

- [Adventures in Guided Journaling](#) A plethora of pre-made, free, journaling pages. Use them as a springboard into faith by way of a guided group conversation and prayer, or re-work in your own format, changing only bits and pieces to serve our deeper purpose.
- [15 Minutes That Can Change Your Life](#) At the bottom of this page is a simple, 5-step, compact habit you can teach your kids. Their brain responds well to the movement through the five 'Rs' with the added benefit of teaching a solid prayer approach. Check out the [sample prayer sessions](#) using the habit, too. They begin at the top of the page.
- I've found all sorts of good things in this [Journal Writing Page](#). True, it is not Catholic or particularly spiritual, but its ideas are easily adaptable to our mission. Check out the last 3-4 pages in particular and rework the prompts and suggestions using PATH metaphors—The Frame and the ULC, The Yoke, virtues, NTH's or temptations, etc—and you'll have some excellent prompts at your disposal.
- [Smash Journal Starters](#) Prayer prompts. Funny, unusual, unexpected. You'll think of 20 ways to use them.
- [Journaling4Faith](#) Check out the drop down box under 'Writing Prompts' and you'll score some excellent ideas for prayer journal entries about gossip, anger, taming your tongue, messages, etc.
- [35 Prayer Prompts](#) New and creative ways to engage your kids in creating a regular habit of prayer and reflection. [35-Prayer-Prompts](#)
- [Bible Journal Prompts](#) I need say no more...

- **Post-it Prayers** Admittedly, I'm a Post-it advocate. The entire outline of *On the PATH* was organized out of individual thoughts written on individual Post-Its that were then constantly moved around on a white board until order came out of the chaos. How can you use them as prayer? Give your kids a stack as the session starts. Have them jot down the ideas, prayers, thoughts (we know that is the Holy Spirit) that come to them. You can purposely build STOP times in to the session, saying, "What's on your mind? Write it on a Post it." Have them attach the notes to their desk, or place them directly into the next page of their journal. At the end of class, give 10-15 minutes of Post-it prayer time so they can move those thoughts around and talk to Jesus about the messages he is sending right now. On another day, have teens do a brain dump. One thought/concern/stress/worry per Post-it. Create themes on your board/walls (family, friends, future, world, school, etc.) and have teens post their prayers. This is great for illustrating that we all carry crosses, no one is alone, and we all need some TLC. Finish with a brief journal entry, or a spontaneous group or leader-led prayer of Thanksgiving for co-travelers on the PATH.
- A focused Google search will also yield good results. For example: "Thanksgiving Journal Prompts," "Friendship journal prompts," "Scripture journal prompts," "Anger journal prompts," "Listening journal prompts."

Prayer Coach Power Move—The

Journal

"The purpose of practice is to make your actions automatic; no thought is required. Build in the muscle memory and the psychomotor pathways, and tell your mind to get out of the way."

Dan Kelbick was speaking about the basketball free throw when he said the above. The perfect throw results from the perfect habit which allows the mind/body connection to 'flow.'

Creating a habit of prayer is similar to creating any other habit, including the perfect free throw: it takes self-discipline, repetition, and is helped along by pursuing small term goals. While the perfect shot will take years of mastery, the roots of most new habits—including a prayer habit—can be in place in about 21 days.

Our youthful friends are poised to learn ANYTHING. This is because of the explosion of brain growth that takes place between the ages of 12 and 24. Creating a habit of prayer during these years can be wildly successful precisely because of this brain plasticity. Surely, this is a part of God's plan in enabling us to seek and choose Him!

You play the role of coach in this endeavor. Your task is to offer guidance, feedback, and fruitful, constant access points that will help your teens establish neural passageways for prayer. With you as their guide, they will begin laying ruts in the road of the white matter of their brain. The dynamic nature of the adolescent brain, coupled with discipline and repetition, will help those ruts deepen rapidly, forging a habit of prayer that has great promise of 'sticking.'

When it comes to guiding groups of teens in learning to pray, I like to use a constant basic format (journal) for everyone, and then offer a variety of creative exercises, experiments, access points, and approaches for all to try out. I'll make a

big deal out of this, stressing that this relationship building is really powered by God's grace at work. Our job is just to get out of the way so he can reach us. While we may feel awkward trying meditation, do we really want to get in God's way if that's how he wants to reach us? Any avenue we refuse to investigating could lead to a detour along our PATH! Instead, challenge the skeptical teen to stand in the Upper Left Corner and say, "Alright. Let's try this together."

I encourage the use of prayer journals because they

- are visual reminders
- track habits, progress, obstacles, and growth
- uncover missed patterns and messages
- give concrete edges to an often abstract activity (some of our younger teens will be less comfortable with the abstract)

One caveat: I steer away from electronic journals. While there are fun and useful apps for this, they are, of course, stored on devices that also store games, social media, and homework. That's just too many distractions and temptations for most of us—teens and adults alike.

There are all sorts of journal templates on line. If you school or organization has the capabilities, it isn't that difficult to create your own for students. Of course, you could always fall back on the ubiquitous composition notebook, but a special format will encourage more faithful interaction.

Here are a few links for journal making and journal pages.

[Smash Prayer Journals](#) Super fun guidelines for creating personalized faith journals. Would be a great year long project in conjunction with Confirmation Preparation and forming a habit of prayer and reflection. Step by step format reflects Catholic content and is easy to adapt to the particulars of your groups. Leans heavily towards the girls, so you'll have to get creative in finding/scouring for

resources for the boys. For example:

- scrapbook paper/cloth remnants in masculine colors and themes
- flat hardware/desk supplies—washers, metal brads, paperclips, rubberbands
- twine, cording, string, leather
- templates of baseball cards (turn into saint cards)

[Chat Prayer Journal Page](#) Downloadable daily prayer page with CH@T as its moniker. For the free-flowing writer; no prompts here, beyond the C-H-@-T.

[Daily Prayer Journal](#) Good for the younger set with six distinct areas of response. Could be used daily or as a Monday morning reflection, a mid-week check in, or as a planner for the weekend.

[Better is one day in your court](#) Simple three part page. Straight forward.

[Daily Bible Study Notes Page](#) At \$2.50, you could download this PDF, make copies and use it for a weekly bible prayer session. Use it to help begin a collection of templates that can build variety into a weekly reflection journal.

Do you have a journal idea to share? Leave a comment or picture!

Job #1—Know Him

I've been a Catholic all my life, including 18 years of education at all Catholic schools, and even have B.A and M.A in Theology. How is it possible that—in all those years—there was no effort or syllabus designed to help me with the important stuff: building a faith life?

As a general unfortunate rule, the Catholic Church doesn't pass on the "faith" very well. We pass on the facts, and we pass on the teachings, traditions, rituals, and rubrics. More often than not, we're left to fend for ourselves when it comes to figuring out how to find, build, and maintain a connection to a personal God who loves us intimately.

Let's decide NOW that Job #1 one in all of our families, classrooms, youth nights and PSR or CCD classes is to guide these precious young lives towards a fruitful, vibrant, life-altering relationship with Jesus Christ. If they don't have their own experience and story of him, all our facts and history will fall on deaf, bored, and skeptical ears.



There's bad news, of course. Relationship building with our non-techy God can be a seriously uphill battle with teens. The digital culture has led to the death of downtime and silence,

replacing them with obsessive connectivity and selfie saturation. But that's the reality. As a Catholic teacher, you are contemporary apostles, evangelizing the sometimes difficult.

How? **It starts with passion.** Read the Acts of the Apostles. Peter, Paul, Stephen and the rest were emboldened, and the Church grew like a wildfire: "Three thousand were baptized" and "their number grew to 5,000" on different days. The impassioned passages of this book teach us the vital cornerstones of evangelization:

1. Make it crucial. We do our kids a lifetime disservice if we underplay the magnitude of being connected with the Big Guy. It's truly Life or Death, PATH or LOST, Heaven or Hell. We must be on fire with the mandate to bring them closer to Jesus. THIS is why they come to us. They just don't know it yet. They can learn to recite prayers and locate the facts they need with Google. Let's get to the heart of the matter when they are with us.
2. Walk the talk. They will know if you aren't rooted. Get into your own habit. Dive deeper into your faith life. You can't guide to a place you've never gone. If you are on fire, awesome! Spread the fire. If your personal faith has fallen down the rungs of the 'to do' list (work deadlines, kids soccer lessons, dinner planning...) *it's time to make time.* We can't give what we don't have and we can't receive his grace and guidance without making Knowing Him priority #1 in our own lives.
3. Give it primacy of place. As you build your lessons or start your conversations, put relationship building first. Slash anything else, but hold this sacred. Period. The apostles proclaimed the Jesus story and insisted he came to save all who lived in his love. That's what our kids need to hear and believe.

While Acts reminds us to be zealous in our message, every public speaker worth her salt know she's got to **design the presentation to increase the odds of the message being**

received.

In her book, "The Teenage Brain," Frances Jensen lays it out. Our teenagers are working with "a jacked-up, stimulus-seeking brain not yet fully capable of making mature decisions." We can't fight Mother Nature, so let's work with her. Make your lesson plan match their brains' need for variety and stimulus by sticking to two mantras:

CHANGE IT UP: Novelty is a strobe light inside a developing brain that is on hyper-drive. So use it for good. *Since our message is the same, our springboards need to change constantly in order to train the teen brain to make the mature decision to get on the PATH.*

Begin by evaluating the physical potentials of your meeting space, group work, and manipulatives:

- Change your setting—classroom, church, under a tree, prayer garden, cemetery
- Change the lighting, shading, use candles, flashlights, glow sticks (really)
- Change the desk layout [Floor plan ideas](#)
- Change their position—in a chair (change seats mid-session for a perspective shift), on the floor, standing, walking, kneeling, in a meditative yoga position
- Give input from the back of the room, while walking around, mid-aisle.
- Change up how you form groups and who is in your groups every time
- Vary your group work approach. [Group Work ideas](#)
- Everything shouldn't be white or one-dimensional. Use fabric, textiles, crafts, small bits of hardware, colored paper, markers, puff paints, recycled materials. The more unexpected your prop the more effective.

INCREASE ACCESS POINTS. Multi-sensory and multi-intelligence

lesson plans are the “It” thing. And well they should be. Not only are these brains in hyper-drive, they also have individual preferred modes of learning. A one-size-fits-most approach isn’t going to hack it.

Give yourself permission to start small if the idea of multiple access points is new to you. A couple approaches built into a prayer time or learning session is a doable and not overwhelming goal. Then take notes. What worked? What flopped? What was underwhelming? Next time you use a lesson similar to that one, add another layer. Tweak and build. Tweak and build.

Access points to have on your radar:

- Spatial
- Visual
- Smell, taste, and memory
- Intrapersonal
- Problem solving and reasoning
- Large physical movements
- Music
- Interpersonal
- Linguistics

Coming soon...More on creating multiple Access Points

Smashing Idols

Thanks to [Rethinking Youth Ministry](#) and [Practical Youth Ministry](#) for the inspiration!

“Smashing Idols” Build some tactile reflection into your discussion of those things that lead your teens to be LOST (Let Other Stuff Triumph).

Students are given a pot of Play Doh and directed to create an image that symbolizes whatever comes between them and God. There are [instructions](#) that walk students through this experience, including the final smashing.

Post your Hits

Thanks to [Rethinking Youth Ministry](#) and [Practical Youth Ministry](#) for the inspiration!

“Post Your Hits”– A good interactive prayer for winding up a session on responding to Hits while on the PATH. Part of our goal is to help teens recognize and rename Hits as a ‘cross.’ Jesus took all sorts of Hits during his ministry (denial, mocking, sarcasm, jealousy), as well as the ultimate hit of his Passion and Crucifixion. Since he’s come to show us how to live fully, we know that Hits and crosses are a realistic part of life. But we can look to him to learn how to respond to and carry them as people on the PATH.

This prayer piece invites participants to build a visual reminder that we all carry crosses, and part of our task as members of the Mystical Body is to share the burden—our own and another’s—as we work to get back to the Garden together.

Make a one dimensional cross, such as the one constructed using blue duct tape. In a retreat setting, the floor will work. In a classroom, try a part of your white board, or a

bulletin board, perhaps the back of your classroom door or a window to the outdoors (witnessing that we bear our crosses to the world).

Leave out a supply of markers and Post-It pads. Either distribute or hang the [Instructions](#).

Dim the room lights, light a few candles, bring up “[Carry My Cross](#)” by Third Day or Avril Lavigne’s “[Keep Holding On](#)”. Ask participants to work through the instructions, write their thoughts down and then place them on the cross.

Shared Shredding; Shared Strength

☒ Noisy but very effective.

A concrete, hands-on activity for identifying where we need God’s grace. As a bonus, the set-up is communal, so this prayer exercise witnesses that we are all hopeful sinners seeking strength and mercy together in the Land of OP.

Some ideas for use:

- In conjunction with Chapters 15 and 16 in *On the PATH: Confronting NTHs and Temptations: In the Moment or After the Fact*.
- As preparation for Confession or during the Advent or Lenten season.
- as part of a retreat reconciliation session, but substitute burning of papers for shredding.

- After a [teen-friendly examination of conscience](#). Even better, have your teens make iMovie or slideshow examinations in small groups. Share them/pray them together. Then follow up with this activity.

You'll need:

- A paper shredder
- waste basket
- colored paper and pens for all

Your Intro:

You'll need to lay the groundwork of communal sin and the Body of Christ. We really are all in this together, on the PATH, on the journey home. My holiness is bound up with your holiness; my eternal life is bound up with yours. None of us lives in a cave; all of our lives affect and effect others.

Invite participants to consider the NTHs or temptations that they are beginning to recognize within themselves.

Their work:

Encourage teens to write or draw about their NTHS/temptations. You can give them any or all of these prompts, one at a time:

- Name the Negative Thinking Habit or the temptation you feel has the greatest power over you.
- Identify any individuals or relationships in your life that suffer because of your weakness before this NTH/temptation.
- Describe a particular situation when this NTH/temptation got the best of you.
- Write a prayer...brief but honest...asking for Jesus to help you grow stronger in this area.
- Action plan: Name an action step you can take to avoid this temptation in the future. OR, name an action step you will take to mend a relationship that has been

broken by its effects.

Your Intro:

When all reflections are complete, say: "Since we are on this PATH together, bound up in the Body of Christ, we must learn to count and rely on each other to help us master our weaknesses. Where I am weak, your strength can help me. When you want to give up or say, 'This holiness thing is too hard. God wants too much!' I am here to help you keep to the PATH and to cheer you on.

Can I have a volunteer to get us started? You don't need any special skills beyond the ability to operate a paper shredder. (Thank your volunteer; give her a blank paper to practice shredding. Have all clap for her.) Volunteer 'X' represents the strength someone else in this room needs. If you are prideful, she represents humility. If you are short tempered, she represents patience. If you are quick to judge, she knows how to hold her tongue.

Our next volunteer will hand his or her paper to Volunteer X. She will not read it, she'll just shred it. By shredding it she's saying, "Nothing is impossible with God. He put us here to help you. You can master this." Finally she'll offer a hug or a firm handshake. This last step is crucial. It represents all of us saying "We want you to keep to the PATH. We want you to overcome this temptation. We're on your team. You're not alone."

You model:

- I'll go first. I'll give my paper to X (do so).
- She doesn't read it, but immediately shreds it, so I know it's not impossible to beat this temptation and that you are all here to help me (she does)
- Then she hugs me (initiate hug as needed). Now I know that everyone in the room is on my team and looking out for me so I don't become LOST.

Their turn:

Thank X for volunteering and have her sit down. Say, "Since I am feeling stronger because I have all of you on my side, it's my turn to share the strength. Who will come forward with their paper? (Wait for volunteer Y, then go through the steps of handing over, shredding, and hugging) Great! Now it is 'Y's turn to represent all of us, so I can go and sit down. Who will come up next?" and so it goes until all have given over their list, shredded and been hugged.

Be sure that your original Volunteer X comes forward at the end to have her paper shredded and receive her hug.

Close with an act of contrition followed by a spontaneous prayer of thanks that you or a student leads.