



146: Life With God: Start With Your Senses

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 146.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but it's also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or even if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum of entertainment while you're in the right place. You'll get a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step. This is the final episode in a short series here on the podcast, all about starting with your senses. And let me just tell you this topic has been right on time for me. I have so enjoyed the simple practice of getting out of my head and into my body by paying attention to what I see, hear taste, smell, and touch one place where we might not often think to consider our five senses is inner life with God.

It's easy to get caught up in thoughts about God or to become granular about what we believe exactly about every current event, about where we stand among the different camps and about how we want to accurately articulate our faith to people. And in all of that, we might forget about Jesus who walked in dust, ate sweet fruit, touched blind eyes and deaf ears, and stood near the sea of Galilee with the wind on his face. After talking the last few weeks about feeling stuck and feeling scared, it felt right to come back to our faith, but first a word from this episode sponsor KiwiCo because as I think about getting into our bodies and maybe even using our hands, we continue to adapt to new changes with each passing month.

But with a little out of the box problem solving, we've discovered new ways to tackle life's day to day challenges, including how to keep kids engaged in activities that can be educational and entertaining. That's where KiwiCo comes in. KiwiCo aims to inspire young innovators with seriously fun and enriching projects delivered right to your doorstep with kid-friendly instructions, enriching content and award-winning projects. KiwiCo crate lines appeal to all ages and interests and offer something exciting for everyone. Personally, the Maker Crate was a big hit with my older kids and me too. When it arrived at our house, I loved how it challenged us to use our creative muscles and strategic thinking skills long after we logged off our devices for the day. And right now, you can get 30% off your first month plus free shipping on any credit line at kiwico.com/nextrightthing. That's K I W I C o.com/nextright thing. KiwiCo has something for everyone, whether you're four or 44. Now onto today's episode. Listen in.

I grew up in a small Southern Indiana town going to church with my mom and my sister at a small Baptist church in the literal middle of a cornfield. Sundays were for potlucks, worship meant hymns. Sunday nights meant youth group and handbell choir. We did move around a lot when I was younger, and we

moved from Indiana to Iowa, to Columbia, South Carolina, and that's where sharing Jesus in our youth group meant having backyard Bible clubs and having puppet shows and making lots and lots of lemonade. That was when discipleship meant a survival kit workbook with lots of fill in the blanks and GAs on Wednesday nights. Y'all remember GAs, Girls In Action? Well, I do. Faith felt like the scratchy cloth on a wooden pew and a stifling hot car just after church. It smelled like fried chicken in the fellowship hall and Wendy's French fries and a white church fan.

And as for how faith looked, it looked like Sunday mornings and quiet times and reading your Bible and prayer. I have my mother to thank for introducing me to Jesus, and I have small Baptist churches to thank for teaching me one way to walk with him. But as always is the case for any growing faith, my associations with faith and God Jesus and the Spirit, well they've changed over time. What's not changed is my belief down to my core that God is good and that God is with me. But my experience of God's goodness has not always been steady. And my understanding of what it means to walk with God continues to evolve. One of the most life-giving realizations about life with God over the past, I don't know, decade or so has been to understand that life with God doesn't have to look just one way.

In his book, *Sacred Pathways*, Gary Thomas talks about nine different spiritual or what he called "sacred pathways." We will most likely resonate with at least one of them, probably a mix of them. And we might even change the different ways we connect with these different pathways over time. I thought one lovely way to put a bookend on our month-long conversation about the senses would be to talk about how our senses come into play when we relate with God. And so I wanted to use Gary's list as a way to talk about that. And just a brief disclaimer, this list is adapted both by me and by Keith Keesler, who's one of my former professors now colleagues at Friends University. So if you look up Gary's list, it's mostly what I'm about to share with you, but a little bit different. Now, no matter what list you look at, this is not a science and it's not a test. It's just a tool. And it's one of many tools as you consider how you might most naturally connect with God. So see if you can recognize your own spiritual pathway or spiritual personality. As I talk through these nine different ways to connect with God.

#1. The Naturalist

This person feels closest to God outside in the middle of creation, whether it's in the mountains, the forest or near the ocean. Being in nature awakens the naturalist to God's presence and beauty. Some examples might be Saint Francis or the poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. If you've grown up thinking that life with God has to look like deep study or long prayer with lots and lots of words, it could be a relief to think about the pathway of the naturalist being one way to express your connection with love for and union with God.

#2. The Traditionalist

This person loves God through the historic dimensions of the faith like rituals, symbols, and liturgy. This person might enjoy praying the Psalms or following fixed prayer and maybe celebrating all the seasons of the Christian calendar. One example of a traditionalist might be someone like Phyllis Tickle, who compiled the *Divine Hours* prayer book.

#3. The Contemplative

This person seeks God through quieter disciplines, such as solitude, meditation, journaling. This person might relate to the 16th century monk, Saint John of the Cross, who said "Silence is God's first language." One biblical example might be Mary of Bethany who sat at Jesus' feet or a modern day example, or could

be my friend, Adam S McHugh, who wrote *The Listening Life*. When it comes to experiencing their walk with God through their five senses, a contemplative might be more apt to use their ears or even their eyes.

#4. The Visionary

This person loves God by dreaming big or dreaming a great dream and setting out to accomplish it. The visionary feels God's presence and delight as she uses her gifts for his kingdom. Some examples might be John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, and a modern-day example could be Jenny Allen, who's the founder of *If Gathering*. I don't know if it's true, but to me a visionary seems to be someone who would be tactical, who would be someone who was aware of kind of the right now experience as well as a vision in his or her mind's eye. Not just of what is, but of what could be.

#5. The Socialite

This person connects with God best around other people journeying with and confiding in them for the socialite community plays a vital role in experiencing God's presence. And she's inspired by the example of the early church in Acts 2, where it talks about how they shared life with one another. She may also value intimate settings for living out the faith like small groups and having mentoring relationships. I think of how Christ dwells within all of us and in my imagination, the socialite is someone who maybe would say that saying, I've heard before that, I can't remember where, but I've heard it various places, which is the Christ in me greets the Christ in thee, that recognizing Christ is in me. And I see myself reflected in the lives of others. The socialite might be someone who would really resonate with that phrase.

#6. The Intellectual

This person loves God through using her mind to think deeply about God and matters of theology. Faith is something to be understood as much as to be experienced. One example is C S Lewis, who said his heart came alive whenever he was working through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in his teeth and a pencil in his hand. Talk about the sense. I love that.

#7. The Caregiver

This is someone who loves God by being compassionate and loving others. Even if it means significant sacrifice, this person believes he or she is serving Christ. When he serves those who are in need, finding the act to be energizing rather than draining. One example could be Mother Theresa, who is the founder of the Missionaries of Charity. She said inspiring things that I'm sure we've all at some point quoted things like, "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love." Or "If you can't feed a hundred people, than feed just one."

#8. The Worshiper

This person experiences God through joyful celebration and music. She wants to linger in the awe in the beauty and the splendor of God and loves to express action for him through song or art or some other medium of expression. For example, singer songwriters, Rich Mullins and Andrew Peterson come to mind.

#9. The Activist

This person loves God by fighting for justice. She's compelled by a vision of the world where God's kingdom is fully present, believing she must stand up for the marginalized and confront those who oppress others. For example, Martin Luther King Jr. comes to mind.

Now I know that we are all a mix of all of these personalities, and I don't even know if this is an exhaustive list, but I do think that considering the different ways or pathways by which we all experienced, God can be really helpful. And thinking about how our faith manifests itself differently, depending on our faith background, our current season of life, our personality, and also which of the five senses that we might tend to turn to more often, it just seems like that we can very easily disconnect our faith and our minds from our lived experience, but that's just not the way Jesus did it.

He came to earth as a person and walked among us with experiences and he had those five senses and arguably a lot more senses through which he not only experienced God, his father, but also the people and the places around him. I've so enjoyed this month-long conversation about the senses, both here in the podcast episode, as well as on Instagram, where we've had even more conversation about it, but in closing and by way of reflection today, I just want to read you from one of my favorite books of blessings by John, O'Donohue called *To Bless The Space Between* and several of you have mentioned this blessing to me over the last few weeks. And so I wanted to close this series out by simply reading it together. And I hope this can be for you a time of reflection and maybe a consideration on how your five senses can perhaps bring you into the presence of God in ways you maybe hadn't considered before.

In the words of John O'Donohue, "May the touch of your skin register the beauty of the otherness that surrounds you. May your listening be attuned to the deeper silence where sound is honed to bring distance home. May the fragrance of a breathing meadow, refresh your heart and remind you, you are a child of the earth. And when you partake of food and drink, may your taste quicken to the gift and sweetness that flows from the earth. May your inner eyes see through the surfaces and glean the real presence of everything that meets you. May your soul beautify the desire of your eyes, that you might glimpse the infinity that hides in the simple sites that seem worn to your usual eyes."

I hope this simple reflection can be a kind encouragement as you move about your day and simply do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 146 of *The Next Right Thing*. Well, I hope this simple practice of paying attention to your senses in your life with God can be just one more wrong on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow, because while it's true, this is a podcast about making decisions. The bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

As always, you can find me and a transcript of every episode emilypfreeman.com, and you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman. If you want to restart and remembering what it means to simply do your next right thing, and you haven't grabbed a copy of *The Next Right Thing* book yet, maybe now's the time with 24 short chapters. It could be a good book to start with a chapter a day. And in less than a month, you have 24 practical reminders to help you stay in today and simply do your next right thing.

Well, in closing, here's another question for reflection to consider in relation to your senses. I'll ask it here first and you know, I'll probably repeat it on Instagram this week.

When you think of God, what image comes to mind?
Thanks for listening. And I'll see you next time.