

Knowing Me, Knowing You: Spiritual Types - 1st May 2022

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 May 2022

Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] If you don't know me, my name's Matt, a vicar here at St. John's, and as Ruth was saying, we've got this new series that we're starting for the next few weeks called Knowing Me, Knowing You, and as Ruth alluded to, yes, indeed, at least one of us knows it's a famous song by ABBA. I guess it's got a nice ring to it, but before you start thinking, Mamma Mia, and sending out an SOS, wondering if that really is the name of the game, and if so, you'll be thinking, what a load of rubbish. However, I do, I do, I do, I do, I want you to take a chance on me this morning. Okay. I'm not saying you have to lay all your love on me. I'm not saying you have to say, thank you for the music, or even gimme, gimme, gimme, all your money, money, money. Okay. But I guess, if I'm honest, I have a dream that this really will be a Super

Trooper Sunday series. All right. ABBA puns aside, though. What's the series all about? Well, the plan is to think about what it might mean for us to grow in our self-awareness, our awareness of each other, and ultimately, our awareness of God. It's about trying to ensure our awareness is as comprehensive, perhaps, and as all-encompassing as possible, hence the mirror ball in the slide here. It's the idea of reflecting on ourselves, but also all that's going on in every sphere around us.

So we're going to mix it up by looking at some stories from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, as we know it, the New Testament as well. We're going to have some talking heads at the front here. There'll be an encouragement, though, and an opportunity to be a bit more interactive as well as we go through these weeks, and more of that later this morning as well. For today, though, I'd like us to start by unpacking a bit of self-awareness, and in particular, to think about what different types of spirituality we might have. And by that, I mean different ways in which we might choose or prefer to connect with God. So although each of us are unique with different characters and personalities and so on, I think it is possible, perhaps, for us to broadly describe our own spirituality, our own preference for how we connect with God in one of four main ways this morning. So, for example, and for a start, we might describe one way of connecting with God as being a head type of way. If you're this type of person, if you connect with God best in what we might say is our head, you'll probably very much value thinking about God and life. You'll be a reflective kind of person. It's an intellectual kind of spirituality, I guess, which means maybe you find a Bible study. It's often the best way for you to connect with God. You perhaps appreciate meaty sermons or vegetarian sermons, depending if that's your thing. You prefer maybe thought-provoking discussions and small group stuff, perhaps. You like words, and you naturally question or examine maybe what you're being asked to sing on a Sunday or say, to see if you agree with it, if you believe what's up on the screens. When you pray, which can be either silently or out loud, it's usually language-based for this kind of person, maybe for you. Not so much maybe praying with pictures or with kind of physical objects that you might hold in your hand as you pray. As such, you're into the idea, I think, of seeing God as being revealed to us and that we're called to know God better.

Good news is, if this is your kind of spirituality or your kind of preference, you're an integral part of any church community, but there's a danger that sometimes you can be seen by others perhaps as a little bit dry, a little bit clinical perhaps. So that's a head kind of spirituality, we might call it, the first of four broad spiritual types. And I wonder, as you hear me describe in that kind of way, maybe you're thinking, yeah, I resonate with a lot of that. That describes a lot of how I prefer to connect with God. Hold that thought in mind, because alternatively, another one is more of a heart spirituality. And if this is you, it probably means you're very much into, I guess, what we call a heartfelt faith, you know, where your feelings are maybe more reliable than your thoughts. And so as such, it's not perhaps quite as an intellectual way, it's more of an emotional way of connecting with God. Perhaps you really value singing and music, maybe dance and movement. You place a high value on the Bible, yeah, God is still revealed in that same way that more heady people might prefer.

But the Bible, perhaps for those of a heart disposition, is primarily about helping us to connect with the heart of God, so that we might become more holy. If you're this kind of person, maybe you'll find sharing your faith with others comes quite naturally to you, just as maybe you find yourself praying for other people to know the transforming power of God in their lives. Now, you might pray in ways that are more imaginative, more picture-based, perhaps. Maybe when you worship, you experience the presence of God in physical ways that move you. You're very much in a real life, you're grounded, but God is here and able to be experienced. You too, if this is you, you're an integral part of any church community. But I guess the flip side is there's a danger.

[6 : 07] You can sometimes get a bit frustrated with those who seem a bit tightly wound up and unable to let themselves go a bit. And again, just as with the head type of spirituality, you might feel, as I'm describing that, actually, for the most part, that's me. That's how I prefer to relate to God.

Hold that thought, because the third type of spirituality we're going to consider is that of being a contemplative type. Now, this approach, well, your understanding of faith is that it's a journey where you don't so much speak to God, but hear from him. You appreciate space, you appreciate stillness and solitude, the kind of inner silence in order to connect with God.

You might be quite an introspective person, maybe preferring simplicity and meditation as a way of hearing God's voice. Maybe you find journaling, writing things down is a helpful way to help you to pray. You like being at creation, you find God present in creation, you'll find yourself praying, perhaps, while walking around. You'll probably appreciate mystery and wonder. And for you, maybe communion is a key part of how you connect with God. You're more emotional than intellectual in how you approach things. But God is not so much revealed as one who is spirit. He's to be discovered, if you like. Again, if this is you, you're an integral part of any church community.

But there's a danger if this is your kind of preference. You can retreat a bit from everyday life sometimes, or batten down the hatches, perhaps. Be a bit passive and reclusive sometimes, rather than getting stuck into things. So again, if that's a description that you think, actually, yeah, that's more my kind of way of doing things, hold that in mind, because there's a fourth and final way of connecting with God, a fourth preference, I guess, which you might call a kingdom spirituality. And if this is you, you're more likely to be a kind of visionary kind of person who tries to make a difference to the world around you, believing that social change and social justice are the priorities of the gospel. You don't care much for church labels and perhaps how things are done within a system, but you do care about transforming society. You like to express your faith, with your hands, hands on. You like to express your faith practically, willingly giving of your time and resources. And as a result of that, perhaps, your prayer life is focused on results. Now, your Bible reading centers, perhaps, on how we apply the truth of scripture to the world around us. You're intellectual, in your approach, it's thought through, but you appreciate God as spirit, seeking to discover what God's already doing in the world and then joining in. Once again, you're an integral part of any church community, but there is a danger, perhaps. You can be a bit critical or impatient of others if they don't quite seem to get your passions for justice or social transformation or whatever. They are the main four categories I think it's possible for us to perhaps put ourselves into one or the other. Head, heart, contemplative, and kingdom. Now, like any categories, obviously, it's not hard and fast. None of us will be completely one type or another, and we might have a hierarchy, a one, two, three, four of ways we prefer. But I suspect as we go through this, there was one of those four that was more like the way you prefer to do business with God, your spiritual type, your way of connecting with God. You might have a close second choice, though. I think I have in this, and I'll tell you that later. You might have one that you think, that is definitely not me.

That's way down the bottom of the four. But I wonder, if you had to choose this morning, which one of these four would be your top of the pops? Which would be the one that you think, yeah, for today, at the moment, in this season of my life, that's me. That's closest to the way I relate to God. And so here's the interactive part, because we're going to move around a bit this morning.

[10:39] Oh, yeah, says some. And you can tell which kind of person they are. I'm going to ask you to move to a side of the room which best reflects and represents your spiritual type, your preference for how you connect with God. So the eagle-eyed amongst you, excuse me, will have seen there's contemplative over in that corner there. We've got head, just on the screen, over here. We've got heart over there. And we'll whack kingdom up here. And hopefully, there's a bit of space in each area, so that we can gather with our like-minded spiritual types. Now, you might find, actually, I don't want to do this. That's fine. You can sit in the middle somewhere. You might need to move.

Other people are all congregating around you. But you don't have to do this. But if you've got, and you're not committing to anything, by the way, we're not going to take lists and names and all that kind of stuff. But generally, if you can gravitate towards one of these four, that'll be helpful.

And then we might look at some questions together. So I'll give you a couple of minutes. Make your choices. Move around. Shift the chairs if you need to. And make your way to your preferred corner. And as we're roughly in our group, you can feel free to grab some chairs if standing up's not your thing. We'll just spend a few minutes going through a few questions together. And you can do these in twos or threes. You can do it in a big group if you want, depending on how many there are. These are the kind of questions maybe we want to consider between us. What do you notice, for a start, about the makeup of the room? Perhaps where are there more people than less people?

Age profiles, gender profiles, perhaps, that kind of thing. What do you think is good about this? And what might be the drawbacks as a church? Are you surprised at who you're standing with?

Work that one out. Do you feel like swapping? If so, you're welcome to. And then what do you think we might learn from this exercise? And then we'll have a little bit of feedback. But we'll have five, ten minutes on these questions, and we'll pull our wisdom. Okay.

[12 : 32] Nice to hear all the chatter. Let's have a little bit of feedback from each of the four corners of the earth here. There's a middle group as well. Okay. You can carry on these conversations later, I'm sure.

But I might just go around each of the four kind of preferences. And there's a maverick group in the middle who couldn't quite decide. We'll come to them as well. But contemplatives, how are we doing?

Anything you want to share that you think has been significant in this that's come out for you? Yeah. No, we don't share. Contemplatives don't share. What are you thinking about? Go on, Ian. What have you noticed?

I was thinking, because we did do this a few years back. Yep. And it's interesting. There's a lot more. A lot more in this group now, which I think is really encouraging. Why do you think that is? Well, maybe what's happened over the last two or three years, people have, you know, that reflection, that sort of, and there has been more solitude, isn't there?

So maybe that's a reflection of that. Okay. I actually think I'm there. In the middle between the heads. Yeah, I should be sort of halfway, but I didn't want to be on my own. That's very good of you.

[13 : 43] But yeah, I just think it's encouraging, actually, that there's more over in this side. Because it's your preference, it's encouraging. Well, absolutely. Any other thoughts from the contemplatives among us? Anything that struck you on this? Go on, Val.

Depends what mood I'm in, really. What group I'm in. Okay. Definitely. Day by day, or month by month, or year by year, even? Almost day by day. Okay. Oh, my God. Yeah. Like it. Like it.

All right. Final thoughts in this corner. All right. Great stuff. Stay there. Contemplatives. Thank you for contemplatives. Yes. How are we doing, Kingdom people? Not so many of us here, but go on, Paul.

Okay, so we had a quick look around, and my interpretation was that the wiser ones, the more intellectual ones, seem to be in that group and this group. Not so many younger people.

No, no, no. Not so many younger people. And when I say that, so you grow in your faith, and that generates wisdom, and perhaps that's why you are more so in those groups.

[14 : 48] Also, I think that the heart group, quite a few people could have put themselves in the heart group as well. It's one of those 50-50 things.

Okay. And I think if you're unsure, then perhaps that would be the way you would go. But the kingdom group, I think these are more outward thinkers. Well, sort of givers, doers.

Yeah. But yeah, generally a mixed bag. I could have quite easily been in that group, and like we said over here earlier, on the day. And what's your least one? Least one would probably be there, but that's because...

That's the contemplatives. Not because I don't think I'm intellectual. It's just because I don't read a lot, and I generate it more through being with other people. Interesting. Great stuff. Thanks, Paul. Paul, any of the kingdom wisdom here you want to share?

Ruth? Yeah, I looked at this group, and I thought, these are the people who do things, isn't it? Which is quite exciting. Or at least some of them, I think they were pretty active people. And I also love that when Paul was given the microphone, the first thing we do is we tell everyone else.

[15 : 52] I think we are the rebel group. Yeah, yeah. There's a confidence which comes with that. That's great. We'll come back to you in a minute. Head people over here. How are you doing? Can you give us some intellectual feedback on how this has gone?

What do you reckon? What struck you about this? Any spokespeople from here? Or are you all still reflecting internally on this? Basically, mine's the same as Ian said, because I remember doing this a while back.

And Dave said to me, he said, I'm surprised how many's in the heart group. I said, I'm not, because I remember when we did it before, that was the main group, and there were very few in the other.

So I just think it's encouraging that we're sort of all becoming a lot more in the different groups now. There's lots of change, I suppose, with the congregation, with what Ian said as well.

But I think, like Ian said, I'm halfway in the two, because I don't think any of us, you know, I don't class myself as intellectual for one thing, but I do like reading, and I'm more the organising and thinking type.

[16 : 59] Yeah. Great. Thanks, Mary. Any other head thoughts from this group? That'll do, though, Mary. Thank you very much. All right. We will come back to you, I promise. But, hello, people.

The Heart Gang are here. Why have you come over here? What struck you about the group you're in? What struck you about the fact that the other people aren't in this group? What do you think, pros and cons? It's big.

There are a lot of us. Yep. Anyone want to say what we were chatting about, perhaps in their little pairs or threes? Go on, Ron. Good work. Good work. Yes.

I've been coerced into this. But I think everybody can see this is probably the larger group. I feel as though I could drift over there, there, or there, being any one of the groups.

Yeah. More between this and that, but any one of the groups. And what I found interesting was that they're fairly equal in male and female as well, rather than more male in the head group or whatever.

[18 : 04] Yeah. Interesting. I've just talked about it. All right. No, no. Thanks, Ron. That's great. Any other heartfelt thoughts over here? That was one. Thank you. It might just be me, but in terms of drawbacks, I was thinking, and I was discussing with Rachel, that the fear of being sort of that emotional-driven heart person is that you can go with those human emotions or just the circumstances and that you don't then think about the promises and the bedrock and the stability of God in that head sense.

Yeah. Does that make sense? Yeah. Feelings rather than... Yeah, yeah. Trying not to let the emotions sort of over the heart bit, override other things. Yeah, yeah. That's great. Thanks, Helen. Thank you. All right.

Nice one, heart people. Thank you. And then the final little maverick group in the middle here. We've broken all the rules and have decided they can't decide. Go on, Don. What's your thinking in the middle here?

If somebody were to ask me, where are you with God? I think of it in terms of, if you're in a house and somebody says to you, where do you live?

If I look through one window, I will give them a description of where I live. But if I look through another window, I will give them a completely different description of where I live because it looks different.

[19 : 27] So if I imagine four windows, one in front, one behind, one either side. But where I live, my relationship with God, it's not single.

Yeah. For me, it's all around. And there are times when there is a need for me to be more heart with God or for me to be more head with God.

And I will drift. But generally, this is where I'm happy. With God around. A smorgasbord of spirituality. Great stuff, Don.

Does that sum it up for you guys in the middle? Yeah? Yeah. Go on, Jack. I think it's important to say we're genuinely not indecisive here in the middle. You sure? Let's get that one out of the way first of all.

No, we're not. Well, no, we're not sure. And actually, we all assumed when we started here that we're all this way. We're not. I'm that. And slightly this way, that's why I'm stood here.

[20 : 28] Whereas you're that way. And for the benefit of YouTube, that means contemplative. And then you were more heady. Yeah. Yes. And then, at the moment, you're where?

I'm trying to get as centre as I can. Sorry. Fair enough. But the last important part is you said, and you made a really good point of it's important not to label as well, isn't it?

Yeah. It's important to not to label. And it'd be really interesting to do this one again in six months or 12 months. Because I bet this room will look quite different again. Okay. Thanks very much, Jack.

Great stuff, everyone. Do return to your seats if you wish, or you can stick with the people you found as soulmates. So just before we turn back to some sung worship, it's very helpful to hear all that.

Thank you very much for the feedback and your willingness to engage in this way this morning. I just want to offer a couple of suggestions of the kind of things that we might draw from that little exercise. And I think, firstly, it's worth emphasising that, as Don was saying and Jack was saying at the end there, a healthy church community, Ian was alluding to this too, needs people of all four spiritual types.

[21 : 37] It's kind of obvious, but it's worth saying, I think. And the reason I think we can be confident in that, because if we look at the life of Jesus, we see all four spiritual types actually on display in abundance.

So Jesus, he certainly had a head approach. He knew the scriptures inside out and could debate with the best scholars and teachers of his day.

He certainly had a heart approach, connected with God through his feelings, whether that was times of real joy and celebration, or times such as in the Garden of Gethsemane, you know, a real intense emotional trauma.

Equally, though, Jesus had a contemplative approach. Often we're told, taking himself off to be alone, spent a lot of his time immersed in nature and his surroundings, and he used his surroundings, it seems, as we can see from the illustrations he's got in his parables and so on, to feed his relationship and his understanding of his heavenly father.

But then Jesus also had a kingdom approach. That shot through all his preaching, his teaching. He practically demonstrates in a hands-on way the difference that God's ways make to our everyday lives, both as individuals, but also as society.

[22 : 46] And so if we see each of these four spiritual types in the life of Jesus, I'd say that's all the affirmation we should need to know that our own preference, whatever it is and however it changes over time, is legit and it's rooted in the example of Jesus.

But I think as well, I want to say that if our spirituality, if the way we connect with God is to grow and develop in the months and years to come, there's probably a need for us, again, Jack was summing this up nicely just now, there's probably a need for each of us to step out of our spiritual comfort zone from time to time and try something different.

You know, just as each of us will probably have a favourite or preferred way of relating to God at the moment, it's maybe helpful for us to think about the one which is our least favourite, the one which makes us feel uncomfortable.

And yet for rounded spiritual growth, for a deeper awareness of how those who are different to us tick as well, it's maybe a good idea to try and develop our shadow side by exploring and trying out other ways to connect with God.

And again, Ian was saying during the lockdown, perhaps the contemplative approach has been forced on some people, perhaps all of us, to consider more profoundly. So for example, just a couple of quick examples on this.

[24 : 08] If you're a head type person over there, if you're a head type person, maybe there's a value in doing something intentionally hands-on and practical in that kingdom way, maybe helping out with drop-in or the community store, something that actually is grounded in the everyday action stuff.

Equally, if you're more of a slightly insular, contemplative kind of person, maybe try standing up here and giving your testimony one Sunday in front of others, you know, that might be a kind of heart thing that more contemplative types might find releases something afresh in them.

Then again, if you've never sat for half an hour with a candle lit for 30 minutes in silence, or you've never gone on a pilgrimage, or you've never tried fasting, maybe try it if you're more of an active kind of kingdom kind of person.

If you've never read a study or guidebook on the Bible or listened to a podcast teaching, if you're not really head orientated, try it. See what God unlocks in that. I think for me, I'd probably say my primary spiritual type, certainly over these last couple years is that of a kingdom approach.

That's what has been driving me, I suppose. Closely followed by a head one. I do like to think things through with God. The older I get, I am becoming more contemplative, certainly much more than I used to be.

[25 : 31] But the area that's my least preferred way of connecting with God is that emotional heart type way, which ironically is the one where the majority of the church seem to be at. So, it could be a pro or a con.

I was either the wrong church or was the right church in a balanced kind of way. Who knows? Who knows? But I'm quite an introvert. You know, I need my own space. I don't find emotional vulnerability that comfortable. And experience, get self-conscious in sung worship and so on.

And I love God, but I'd rather express that love and connect with God in a kingdom, a heart, or a contemplative way than more of a heart, feelings, emotional kind of way.

So, that's my shadow, if you like. That's my weak spot. And I wonder what God might be calling me to engage with more fully in order to give me a more rounded understanding of the breadth and the spectrum of the ways in which I personally can experience and relate to God.

So, what about you? I'm not going to ask you to move to your least one or to say it out loud or anything like that. But I think as we go through this series over the next few weeks, have a think about what your least preferred way to relate to God is your shadow side, if you like.

[26 : 42] Because I wonder, in this season ahead, if that might just be the way in which God might be wanting to meet with each of us in new ways which unlock new depths in our faith.

Now, that'll do, I think, for today. It's going to be an ongoing series for the next couple of months. And we'll continue to unpack this as we go. But let's just pray for a minute and then hand over to Ruth and then the band as well.

So, dear God, I want to thank you for the way in which you've enabled us to engage with this this morning. Thank you for the way in which we've been able to explore these ideas of these four different spiritual types. And as was mentioned, we're grateful, Lord, that we're in a diverse community here.

So, thank you, Lord, that each of us has something to contribute and something to teach each other about connecting with you. We ask, God, that as we reflect on what our preference but also our shadow spiritual type might be, that we would grow in our trust of you to gently lead us on our walk with you in the right direction, in the right way, at the right pace.

Would you help us to be open to new ways that you might want to lay before us as ways to connect with you? Bottom line is, Lord, we want to grow as your people.

[28 : 02] We want to grow in our self-awareness. We want to grow in our awareness and appreciation of each other. And ultimately, we want to grow in our awareness of your presence in our lives. So, help us.

By your Spirit, with us and in us, we pray, to grow in each of these kingdom, head, heart, and contemplative ways, we pray.

Amen. Amen.