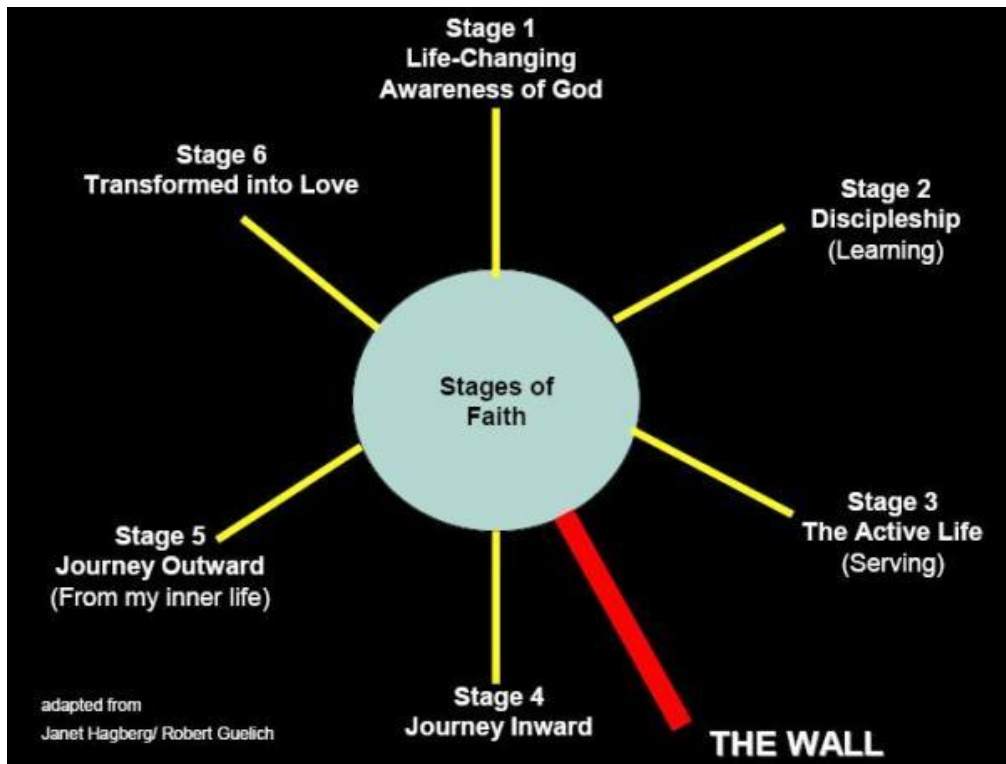


“The Critical Journey”

Stages of Faith

Janet Haberg and Robert Guelich



Theories around Stages of Faith and Spiritual Formation point out that most Christians are in Stages 1- 3 and some move past the wall and into Stage 4, often through Dark Night of the Soul.

The hope is to give our people at Windsor ways to continue to grow to go deeper and wider in their relationship with Jesus and to continue to be shaped in their journey at the same time realising that it is the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot not control what stage they are at but we can continue to invite them to keep growing.

Stage One: Awe, Relief

God’s love and acceptance comes through mostly in the miraculous experiences at this stage. We may experience relief from pain, release of guilt, a sense of being heard for the first time. We are awed by God’s love, and overwhelmed by the miracles of beauty, the mystery of new life, and gifts of time and goodness.

Ways to Move Forward

The ways others have described moving to Stage Two are these:

Become more a part of a strong group in order to get a sense of belonging. Allow your life to take on more significance by taking in the words and teachings you are learning. Find a leader you trust and resonate with, who will help you find the way to God that corresponds with your needs and the beliefs of your community.

Stage Two: Forgiveness

Our experience of God's love at this stage is being forgiven. We are freed from our initial load of guilt and depravity. We can now grow in our path, our program. It is just beginning for us, but we feel as if we've reached a summit already. We are grateful.

Ways to Move Forward

It is crucial to recognize ourselves as unique creatures of God and to discover what our gifts are. We need to accept opportunities to give back, to help out, to contribute. Our scope broadens beyond our own community and we experience a larger vision or world view. We are available to be leaders in a variety of ways; from being a 12 Step sponsor to chairing a church committee to leading a cause.

Stage Three: Empowerment

God's love allows us to feel good about the gifts God has given us, allowing us to use those gifts for the good of others. This empowers our work. We extend that empowerment to others.

Ways to Move Forward

This transition, from Stage Three to Four is one of the most difficult ones to make since it represents the most far reaching change of any stage moves, except for the move from the Wall to Stages Five and Six. We move from feeling secure and confident to a place of deep questioning. This does not happen overnight but it gradually erodes our confident-looking faith. Either a personal or faith crisis shakes our strongly held beliefs or assumptions and we feel adrift on a restless sea, fending for ourselves. Our sense of God is shaken and we can find no new direction, only more question

The Wall: Transformation

Grace appears in unusual ways and when we least expect it. We may lose a job, for instance, and find out that this was the only way in which we could take the risk to change careers or to get into work that is more suited to us. God brings us through the depths to a place that is better, even if we don't earn as much money or have as much power as we did before.

Our hope at the Wall is that we will move forward one day at a time and receive enough of God's love to carry on.

Stuckness at this Stage: Avoidance of the Wall

The way in which we get stuck here is to avoid the Wall using our favourite method; scale it, dig under it, dance around it, jump over it, or drill holes through it. We also may go back to earlier stages as a relief from the intensity of the Wall. Or we may find our faith cannot survive the Wall so we abandon our faith and the Wall all together. This usually results in a constant search in other places to replace our faith, or bitterness and calcification.

Ways to Move Forward

Pray for clarity to see what needs to be done and the courage to do it. Let ourselves experience what we are so afraid of and embrace God's forgiveness, acceptance and love. As we move forward, our intimacy with God will increase manifold and we will begin to experience deeper solitude in God's grace.

Stage Four: Faithfulness

God's unconditional love for us slowly emerges as a dimension of this stage that we were not expecting. So often when we feel we are losing our faith or struggling, we think that those in authority will be displeased. If, at these times, we can take in God's love, we find God's grace and love are abundant. What a discovery. God's grace also allows us to discover new elements in our relationship with God that we never knew were there.

Ways to Move Forward

In the move into Stage Five we will rediscover God and who God is in our lives. If we are willing to take God more personally we can move into those next places. Usually we need to consider a professional guide (counsellor, spiritual director, therapist, soul friend) since we will be called on to give up our ideas, control, and ego. If we can ask God to help us stay with this process and commit to it, no matter what, we will not recognize ourselves on the other side of the Wall.

Stage Five: Acceptance

Acceptance of self and others that allows me to live from my security in God. When our home is in Stage Five, the Journey Outward, we have been through so much and have learned to trust God so completely that we are willing to let go to God. We know that God will take us to the places we need to be and we are willing to do what God calls us to do, because we know that is what is in our best interest.

Ways to Move Forward

It is helpful at this stage to just let God move. There is no need to strive, to work, just let your life keep evolving, growing deeper. Ask for wisdom and more intimacy with God. And reflect on what it means to be Christ-like; to allow God to have as much say in your life as Jesus allowed God to have in his life.

Stage Six: Life as Grace

Our work and our ministry at this stage is love; our ministry of love heals people; and healed people heal others. We live out wisdom, which is seeing with the eyes of God, hearing with the ears of God and feeling with the heart of God. We have healed and embraced our inner wounds and continue to walk in a healing path. We experience intimacy with God and interior freedom. As a result we are able to identify with the inner wounds of others, experience chaos with a Christ-like manner, and allow ourselves to be guided by intuition and illumination from God's Holy Spirit

Dr Robert Mulholland My working definition of spiritual formation is fourfold: (1) a process (2) of being formed (3) in the image of Christ (4) for the sake of others.

Scripture is quite clear in its insistence that we have fallen short of God's purposes for our creation. It is equally clear in its revelation that God works graciously through all the aspects of human life to bring us to the fulfilment of God's will for our wholeness. Thus spiritual formation is a process of involvement with God's gracious work. Once we understand spiritual formation as a process, all of life becomes spiritual formation.

For the sake of others Spiritual formation in the image of Christ will also be seen to move against the grain of our culture and prevailing perspectives which tend to create God in our image. The image of Christ will be seen as the ultimate reality of human wholeness, the consummation for which each heart longs. It will also be seen to be cruciform in the essence of its nature; a dying is involved in our growth toward wholeness, a cross on which we lose our old self with its bondages and brokenness.

Questionnaire

A gentle guide to help people discern where they may currently be on their faith journey.

Instructions:

Invite your Life Group members to answer honestly and prayerfully. Let them know that

- this is *not* a test,
- stages are not “better” or “worse,”
- people can move forward and backward,
- and the Holy Spirit leads the process.

Notice which statements “feel true” rather than over-thinking their answers.

1. Stage One – Awe & Relief

How true are these statements for you? (1 = Not at all | 5 = Very true)

- ☐ I often feel overwhelmed by God’s love or beauty in new or surprising ways.
 - ☐ Being part of a faith community helps me feel safe and grounded.
 - ☐ I rely on trusted leaders to help guide my spiritual understanding.
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2. Stage Two – Forgiveness & Belonging

- ☐ I’m eager to learn, grow, and understand the Bible or doctrine more.
 - ☐ I’m discovering my spiritual gifts or the ways God has wired me.
 - ☐ I feel ready to begin serving or contributing in meaningful ways.
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3. Stage Three – Empowerment & Serving

- ☐ My faith is most real to me when I am doing work for God or the Church.
 - ☐ I love helping others discover their gifts and step into ministry.
 - ☐ At times I wonder if I’m doing too much or if something deeper is missing.
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4. The Wall – Disorientation & Transformation

- ☐ I feel spiritually stuck, confused, or unsure where God is.
 - ☐ A life crisis or faith crisis has shaken what I once believed confidently.
 - ☐ I sense God is doing something deeper in me, even if it’s painful.
 - ☐ Old answers no longer satisfy me; I have more questions than clarity.
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5. Stage Four – Faithfulness & Inner Journey

- ☐ I'm learning to receive God's unconditional love in new ways.
 - ☐ I'm discovering parts of myself — motives, ego, wounds — that God is healing.
 - ☐ I'm comfortable admitting "I don't know" or letting go of old certainties.
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6. Stage Five – Acceptance & Surrender

- ☐ I trust God's leading without needing to control outcomes.
 - ☐ I feel a secure sense of identity rooted in God rather than in what I do.
 - ☐ My life feels like it's unfolding with God rather than being managed by me.
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7. Stage Six – Life as Grace

- ☐ I am increasingly motivated by love rather than obligation or fear.
 - ☐ I notice God's presence in everyday life, even in chaos.
 - ☐ I feel called toward healing others through empathy, prayer, or presence.
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Five Life Group Discussion Questions

These are spiritually open-ended and safe for any stage.

- 1. Which stage description resonates with you the most at this moment — and why?**
(People don't need to share a "stage number," just a feeling or insight.)
- 2. What part of the journey encourages you — or challenges you — in a personal way right now?**
- 3. When in your life have you experienced the "Wall" or a season that felt like a deep unravelling? What was God doing in you during that time?**
- 4. How do you sense the Holy Spirit inviting you to grow next — deeper, wider, slower, more open, or more surrendered?**
- 5. What practices, people, or rhythms help you stay attentive to God's forming work in your life?**