Discipleship Series 50+ Class – All Saints Presbyterian Church Fall 2020 – October 11, 2020 <u>Week Five: Stages in the Faith Journey</u>

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." – St. Augustine of Hippo, <u>Confessions</u> (Lib 1, 1-2, 2.5, 5: CSEL 33, 1-5)

A few questions to start the conversation...

- Where would you say you are in your Christian faith journey?
- Are you where you want to be? Where do you want to be a year from now?
- What is the Lord saying to you recently about your spiritual life?
- What is the most important spiritual lesson you have been learning in the last 6 months?
- Does your current spiritual life taste like reheated mashed potatoes?

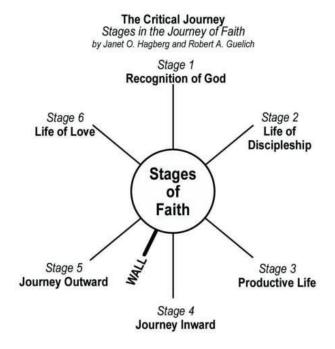
1. Janet O. Hagberg & Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey—Stages in the Life of Faith* (2005)

A. <u>Stage 1 – Recognition of God</u> Conversion—discover and recognize God; humbled feeling. "God, I believe in you."

"Whether it is in infancy or at a later point in life, we begin our journey with an awareness or awakening to the reality of the God of the Bible." — Michelle Van Loon, <u>Becoming Sage</u> (2020), p. 35.

Characteristics of Stage 1 (p. 34-40)

- <u>Sense of Awe</u>: "Whatever route leads us to begin the spiritual journey, awe most likely underlies it at some point. Awe comes from being impressed with someone or something. It is a delightful, endearing trait. It is a very comfortable state because it is so simple, so unquestioning, so real."
- <u>Sense of Need</u>: "When we encounter God out a deep need, it is as though we have been given life again because we truly accept that we are loved and accepted."



- <u>Natural Awareness</u>: "Some people at this stage clearly and completely experience God first through their senses. We are not given to thinking about God. Rather we simply experience the presence of God."
- <u>Greater Meaning in Life</u>: "Some people experience this stage as the fulfillment of a longing or desire to get deeper into life, to penetrate beyond the surface, the superficial."
- <u>Sense of Innocence</u>: "Stage 1 elicits a ready acceptance of anything having to do with God. Because we feel so awed, and we accept the fact that our faith is itself a miracle, we want to live in this unconditional acceptance wherever we are."

B. <u>Stage 2 – Life of Discipleship</u> Learning about God and being grounded in Him. "God, I belong to you."

"[It's] all about learning the written (and unwritten) rules of how we live our faith within community. There's a sense of security and excitement as we discover our spiritual identity in the context of a group and form friendships with other believers just like us." — Michelle Van Loon, <u>Becoming Sage</u>, p. 37

Characteristics of Stage 2 (p. 53-59)

- Meaning of Belonging: "Being open to friendship and companionship from others on the journey makes a big difference at this stage. Those from and with whom we journey clearly determine what and how we experience this phase of faith... It feels good to be with people who understand us."
 "...we experience God through association with others. The group forms our concepts of who and what God is. Often key figures, particular leaders, exhibit what we are seeking to experience. They become models to us."
- <u>Answers Found</u>: "We are not confident in ourselves to know what to believe or how to learn about God and know God better. We are dependent on a more advanced person in the faith or a guiding principle or cause to lead us and tell us the way to a fuller life."
- <u>Sense of Rightness</u>: "I found it' best describes the feelings we have. First, I found it, no one found it for me, nor could they find it for me. I feel delighted and fortunate to have discovered the way and want to learn more about it and how to live it. Second, I found it. What was unknown to me, hidden from me has been discovered. I was lost but now found, accepted, reinstated, real."
- <u>Security in our Faith</u>: "There is comfort at this stage, know that we personally do not have to figure out the answers since someone else can help us with them. Finding out what the workable answers are for us is a relief. There is a feeling of being safe, not having to worry because there is somewhere to go, someone who knows, a set of guidelines, a group that supports us..."

C. <u>Stage 3 – Productive Life</u> Working for God—we're active, diligent, rewarded, exalted. "God, I'm working for you."

"[We're] focused on doing things for God. This often expresses itself in the form of taking on greater areas of service or responsibility in your church."— Michelle Van Loon, <u>Becoming Sage</u> (2020), p. 38

Characteristics of Stage 3 (p. 74-81)

- <u>Uniqueness in the Community</u>: "Because our gifts are unique to each of us, each person can play a different role in the community of faith. Our gifts need to be used. They are given for the common good of the community faith. By using them we contribute something specific to the community in return for all that we have been given..."
- <u>Responsibility</u>: "Frequently, the tangible form of productivity...comes in a specific leadership role or in a position within the faith community... Suddenly, we are asked to chair the group!"
- <u>Symbols & Rewards</u>: "...responsibility, authority, recognition, titles, praise from others, influence, respect, allegiance. When we are fruitful, there are rewards, either personally (a job well done, people changed, balanced budget, a spiritual goal reached) or from the community of faith (more responsibility, plaque, thanks, praise)."
- <u>Spiritual Goal(s) Reached</u>: "...it may be a sense of having reached a level of spirituality or maturity in the faith that leads to a desire to do something with what has been attained or experienced.... No one else can prescribe for us at this stage what will be our source of satisfaction in the acknowledgment

of gifts or the reaching of goals. These are ours to discover, create, or acknowledge. That is another reason this stage of fruitfulness is so exciting. We discover what we can be and how we can contribute."

D. Stage 4 – Journey Inward

Rediscovering God—we feel alone, unsettled; we hit The Wall. "God, where are you?"

"If we're continuing to grow, we will most likely at some point move from an earlier sense of abundance and fellowship to what St. John of the Cross famously described as 'the dark night of the soul'... an existential sense of loss or disorientation. It may accompany a loss or transition, such as the death of a family member or close friend, children leaving home, or a workplace layoff, but is not always connected to an inciting incident. It can also grow from the question, 'Is this all there is?" — M. Van Loon, p. 39

Characteristics of Stage 4 (p. 94-101)

- <u>Life or Faith Crisis</u>: "Our formula of faith ... does not work anymore, or so it appears. We are stumped, hurting, angry, betrayed, abandoned, unheard, or unloved. Many simply want to give up. Their life of faith may even seem to have been a fraud at worst, a mirage at best." "Suddenly, something in one's strict adherence is called into question. One of the foundation blocks crumbles.... Gnawing questions become more and more unmanageable, questions about what we believe and have believed and about how we live and why we do and do not do certain things."
- <u>Loss of Certainties</u>: "At stage 3...so many things seem to be true, certain and successful. Then things begin to unravel, and some people find themselves asking a lot of questions about themselves, doubting the full emergence of their selves. This insatiable appetite for more growth and development of meaning is especially true for those with intellectual curiosity...."
- <u>Search for Direction</u>, not answers: "The answers, such as being in control or being spiritually powerful, now have a hollow ring for many in this stage. We crave something more personal, more fulfilling. The 'God-shaped vacuum' of the French philosopher Pascal now has been recognized, but there is confusion as to how to fill it. To get to the stage of productive living, we had learned things like obedience, innocence, belonging, and being in the center. They no longer serve us, and we begin slowly to change our approach to God. We move from a posture of knowing to seeking. At this stage, all we can say is that we are seeking a direction so vague and unclear that it is frightening. We know that we are no longer seeking an answer."
- <u>Pursuit of Your Integrity</u> in relation to God: "Stage 4 allows us, invites us, and compels us to know ourselves and to know God in all God's fullness. We may experience a complete turnabout in our concept of both ourselves and God. This often comes through a slow process."
- <u>Release God from a Box</u>: "[We] discover painfully that God is not who we had thought God was.... Instead of having had God pretty well figured out and having accepted or rejected others' views of God, we now have to contend with a God who is much more personally available to us."
- <u>Apparent Faith Loss</u>: "One of the most difficult aspects of this stage [is] the sense ... that we really are losing our faith and being disloyal to the group, the church..."

The Wall (part of Stage 4) ...

 "Not everyone goes through the Wall. Some stop to get stuck at earlier stages.... Others decide at the Wall to return to an earlier stage. Still others get stuck in front of the Wall, not wanting to submit to God." (p. 115) "The process of meeting the Wall requires going through the Wall, not underneath it, over it, around it, or blasting it. We must go through it brick by brick, feeling and healing each element of our wills as we surrender to God's will. Our ego and will are transformed and made new.... [W]e cannot go through the Wall by ourselves. We need God to lead us; otherwise our will would be in charge. Even approaching the Wall is uncomfortable because we feel both a pending loss and great longing for new life, healing, or meaning." (p. 119)



... and Going Through The Wall (p. 119-123)

- <u>Discomfort</u>: "Some call it 'the dark night of the soul,' a time of feeling withered and alone, searching and not finding, or grieving and feeling loss. Sometimes we feel so alone we think God has left us. Sitting alone in dark ambiguity is the result."
- <u>Surrender</u>: "Something is always given up. That differs for each person. It usually is something central to one's identity. Giving up does not mean losing. It does mean release and detachment in whatever form...."
- <u>Healing</u>: "It is impossible to get though the Wall without recognizing past and present parts of us in need of psychological and spiritual healing and transformation. God does the healing as we sit humbly before the Presence and obediently follow God's agenda...."
- <u>Awareness</u>, Forgiveness, Acceptance, Love (a four-phase movement in ourselves moving toward others):
 - Awareness: We need awareness of our shadow sides, hidden parts and blind spots.
 - □ Forgiveness: It means forgiving ourselves and others.
 - □ Acceptance: We accept and embrace ourselves and celebrate our humanness.
 - □ Love: Love for ourselves, love for God, love for others
- <u>Closeness to God</u>: "We experience God in a new and different way as we move through the Wall. Even when we feel God is absent, we sense...we are being kept on the journey [and] in process...."
- Discernment: "The Wall invites us to consider anything that God brings before us and to be open to understanding when it is of God. In a word, that means discernment. It means we suspend judgment, knowing, analyzing, or reverting to the tried and true—the good, old way. It may mean learning that all the good we thought we were doing was really a form of diversion from what God wants us to do or be. It means taking a risk and really listening to God in new ways, perhaps seeing God now as Provider, Healer, Friend, or Parent. It means letting go of rules, dogma, definitions, rational arguments, or whatever was our light and strength before. It means taking risks with people we love and people we do not love. It asks us to defer our judgment and let God lead, even when the results are ambiguous."
- <u>Melting and Molding</u>: "The hymn, 'Spirit of the Living God,' appropriately describes the Wall. It describes the moments of melting down and reshaping."
- <u>Solitude and Reflection</u>: "We simply cannot go through the Wall while working sixty hours a week, whether at home, or in an office, or on the road. We must set aside time for solitude—time to walk, to listen to God's voice, to think, to feel, and to reflect. This, too, is highly individual, since one person's

way of experiencing God differs from another's. But racing around defending our busy lifestyle is definitely not a way to solicit God's help. It simply means that we are not yet ready."

E. <u>Stage 5 – Journey Outward</u> Surrendering to God—we're transformed. "God, I want to pass on what You've given me."

"Stage 5 faith is focused on discovering the richness of living in companionship with God.... [W]e move toward generativity, where the focus of our activity comes in passing along the wisdom born of our life experience and our communion with God." — Michelle Van Loon, <u>Becoming Sage</u> (2020), p. 42

Characteristics of Stage 5 (p. 134-141)

- <u>Renewed Sense of God's Acceptance</u>: "[W]e grow into the full awareness that God truly loves us even though we are never fully whole. God loves us in our humanness... We gain a renewed sense of God's unconditional love for us as seen both in the ultimate and continuing sacrifices God makes on our behalf. God never leaves us." "Wholeness does not make us stronger; it allows God to work through our weakness. Wholeness means being very aware of our faults but not letting them trip us."
- <u>New Sense of Horizontal Life</u>: "[T]he ponderous work of the most intense healing lies behind us. We continue to be healed and come more alive in various ways throughout life, but the concentrated darkness is over for now."
- <u>Sense of Calling, Vocation, or Ministry</u>: "At this stage we begin to experience God's choices for us as our calling. We are not in charge. We do not do the planning. We feel compelled by God to live differently, to work differently, to obey our call. We long for God, for the sense of oneness with love. ...The calling comes from God at this stage, not from another person..."
- <u>Concern and Focus on Others' Best Interest</u>: "At stage 5, winning, losing, accomplishing tasks are secondary to us. The focus is more on the process, not getting there, and on our role with others. Our major concern is not ourselves. This behavior is beyond duty, done out of love, and compelled from a fullness and wholeness. It's miraculous but real."
- <u>Deep Calm or Stillness</u>: "Be still my soul' is a strong theme at stage 5. There is a new longing just to be simply in the presence of God's fullness. Frequently during the day, thoughts of God pervaded us." "We know about loving others. Out of our quietness comes a deep understanding and wisdom that sustains our horizontal journey. In fact, our inner stillness, coming from peace with God, is the source of our outward journey... most of our journey at this point is to stay in close touch with God."

F. <u>Stage 6 – Life of Love</u> Reflecting God—we're transcended. "God, I'm coming home."

"A faith moving toward completion is marked by an ever-deepening surrender to God as life on earth is relinquished to Him and we prepare for death. This quiet, reflective period may be marked by physical suffering and will certainly be marked with the accumulated grief of losses of family and friends. But this time will also be a spiritually rich period that welcomes and integrates the growth of all the earlier stages. Stage 6 is marked by God's love and compassion for others and self." — Michelle Van Loon, p. 43

Characteristics of Stage 6 (p. 153-157)

 <u>Christ-like Living in Obedience to God</u>: "...Christ's life represents not just an example but a model for our lives.... We are like vessels into which God pours his Spirit, constantly overflowing. We are Spirit-filled but in a quiet, unassuming way."

- <u>Wisdom Gained from Life's Struggles</u>: "For us life's struggles provide a source of wisdom..."
- <u>Compassionate Living for Others</u>: "...we can reach far beyond our own capacity and love our fellow human beings with deep compassion, because we know all come from and are loved by God.
- <u>Detached from Things & Stress</u>: "...we become aware that the more of God we have, the less of everything else we need. We do not renounce material possessions. We...learn to need them less."
- <u>Menial or Premier Life</u>: "We choose to do anything God asks, whether the most menial or the most prestigious things. We can be close to God either way."
- <u>Abandoned Life</u>: "We seem to disregard our own needs and not care for ourselves at this stage. This is because those needs are secondary to our need to totally obey God and listen for God's direction."

2. Observations About the Stages of Faith—What the Christian journey looks like (p. 7-16)

- <u>Fluidity and Overlap</u>: "We move back and forth between [stages] regularly, and we can experience more than one stage at the same time."
- <u>Higher May Not Be Better</u>: "...higher or later numbers sound better. Consequently, we make the mistake of thinking that people at those stages are somehow better... On the journey of faith, this is not the case." The stages are different, but one stage is not better than another, the stages are simply different and reflect where a person is.
- <u>Home Stage</u>: "...each of us has a specific home stage...where we operate most of the time and which best characterizes our life of faith.' "We do move around from stage to stage—back and forth."
- <u>Stuck & Trapped</u>: "Thinking back to the journey analogy, we generally accept that journeys suggest moving, however slowly. ...We can get stuck along the way...like getting stuck in the mud... People usually get stuck at a particular place in the journey because we find it more comfortable to sit than to move. It may be too frightening to move. After a while sitting still moves from comfort to stuckness. When stuck long enough, we get trapped."
- <u>External and Internal</u>: "In the first three stages, our faith or our spirituality takes its expression most frequently in what are prescribed by external standards, whether by the Church, a specific spiritual leader, a book, or a set of principles... Stage 4 through 6 represent a difficult personal transformation and remerging that require a rediscovery on a different level of what faith and spirituality are all about. These are inner healing stages for which the journey cannot be prescribed."
- <u>Understanding Others</u>: "[B]ecome aware of the journey of others and to appreciate those journeys."
- <u>Crisis Moves Us</u>: "We cannot escape most of the crises in our lives, nor should we.... [T]hese events frequently provide the energy for movement on our spiritual journey, even when we are stuck...."
- <u>Similarities of Stages</u>: "Strong similarities emerge in certain pairs of stages.... Stage 1 and 4 are easily confused. The major issue in both stages is self-worth...Stages 2 and 5 are easily confused. The central issue is giving."

Spiritual Stage	General Characteristics
Dead	Unbelieving. Rebellious
Infant	Ignorant. Confused. Dependent.
Child	• Self-centered/-absorbed. Idealistic. Prideful. Low view of self. Interdependent.

3. Jim Putman, Real-Life Discipleship—Building Churches That Make Disciples (2010)—

Young Adult	Action/service-oriented. Zealous. God-centered. Other-centered.				
i cang / taan	Mission-minded but incomplete understanding. Independent.				
Parent	Intentional. Strategic. Reproduction-minded. Self-feeding. Mission-minded.				
	Team-minded (unity matters). Dependable.				

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<u>Spiritual Stage</u> Dead	 Typical Beliefs, Behaviors & Attitudes Disbelief in the supernatural, or belief in many supernatural forms (multiple deities, interactions with the dead, superstitions, astrology and so on) Disbelief in God (atheism) or belief in the possibility of God (agnosticism) or belief in a different God (member of a cult or the occult) Belief in one God but many ways to get to Him Anger toward Christians or the church or family Confusion about God, Jesus and the church Ignorance regarding biblical truth (spiritually blind) Belief that answers sought lie in worldly prestige, power, fame, and so on Belief that they are as good as anyone else, so they don't need a Savior Belief that they have done too much wrong so fear they can't be saved
Infant	 Unaware of what's needed and Biblical teaching about one's life and purpose Ignorance about or frustration toward Christianity and the church Belief that Christians make no mistakes; unrealistic expectations of themselves Belief that they are defined as the culture would define them Worldly perspective about life with some spiritual truth mixed in
Child	 Excitement over having deep relationships Disillusionment because of their high expectations of others Belief that feelings are most important, which leads to spiritual highs and lows Lack of wisdom about how to use what they're learning—e.g., too aggressive when sharing faith, or too legalistic in approach to dealing with friends & family Belief that people are not caring for them enough Tendency to mimic mature Christian's behaviors to look good and gain praise Tendency to serve others in a ministry as long as the benefit outweighs the cost Enthusiasm about new teachings Confusion and unyielding nature regarding complex issues because they have an incomplete view of biblical subjects More knowledge about what Christians say than what the Word says
Young Adult	 Desire to serve others for others' good and the glory of God Tendency to feel responsible for how others respond to the message; possible pride if one accepts the message and possible discouragement if one doesn't Desire to serve but not strategic about how to train others Naivety about other believers—for example, they believe that others are on fire for Jesus because everyone seems to be "fine" at church Tendency to be black-and-white about what should happen in a church
Parent	 Ability to think in terms of what a team (rather than an individual) can do A coaching mindset Desire to see the people they work with mature and become fellow workers who love them and aren't dependent on them to complete the mission

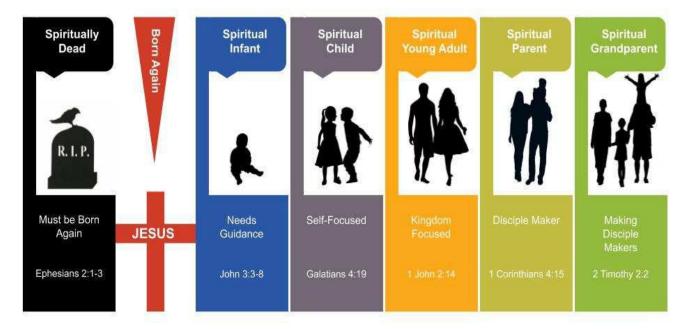
Spiritual Stage	Spiritual Needs
Dead	 A secure relationship with a more mature believer A picture of the real Jesus lived out in front of them Answers, evidences for Christianity An explanation of the gospel message An invitation to receive Christ

Infant	 Individual attention from a spiritual parent Protection An explanation of the truths (new truths) found in the Word of God An explanation and modeling of the habits of a growing believer 		
Child	 A spiritual family Help for how to start feeding themselves Teaching about who they are in Christ Teaching about how to have a relationship with Christ Teaching about how to have relationships with other believers Teaching about appropriate expectations concerning other believers 		
Young Adult	 A place to learn to serve A spiritual parent who will debrief then about ministry experiences Ongoing relationships that offer encouragement and accountability Help for establishing boundaries Guidance regarding appropriate expectations of people they will serve Help in identifying their gifts Skills training 		
Parent	 An ongoing relationship with co-laborers A church family Encouragement 		

Spiritual Stage	What's Being Said				
Dead	"I don't believe there is a God."				
	 "The Bible is just a bunch of myths." 				
	 "Evolution explains away a need for God." 				
	• "I'm not a Christian because Christians are responsible for all wars in history"				
	 "There are many ways to get to God." 				
	• "I am a Christian because I go to church and I am a good person."				
	"I have been a good person, so I will be okay."				
Infant	• "I believe in Jesus, but my church is when I'm in the woods or on the lake."				
	• "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian."				
	• "I gave my life to Jesus and go to church, but I don't need to be close to others"				
	• "People have hurt me, so it's just me and God."				
	• "I don't have time to be in relationship with another Christian."				
	• "My spouse is my accountability partner. I don't need anyone else."				
	• "I pray and read my bible. That is good enough for me."				
	• "My ministry is my work. I provide for my family. I don't have time for church."				
Child	idn't know the Bible said that."				
Child	• "I love my small group; don't add any more people to it."				
	• "Who are all these people coming to my church? Tell them to go elsewhere!"				
	 "I'm not coming to church anymore. It's become too big, with too many people." "My small group is not taking care of my needs." 				
	 "I don't like the music today. If only they did it like" 				
	 "I'm not being fed in my church, so I am going to one that meets my needs." 				
Young Adult	 I love my group, but there are others how need a group like this." 				
	 "I think I could lead a group with a little help. I have three friends I have been 				
	witnessing to, and this group would be too big for them."				
	 "Look how many are at church today—it's awesome! I had to walk two blocks 				
	from the closest parking spot."				
	• "Randy and Rachel missed group and I called to see if they are okay. Their kids				
	have the flu, so maybe our group can make meals for them. I'll start."				
	• "In my devotions, I came across something I have a question about."				

 Parent (People talk about what they love. When spiritual parents talk about what God is doing with them, it is not bragging or name-dropping. Humility is evident.) "This guy at work asked me to explain the Bible to him. Pray for me." "We get to baptize someone from our small group tonight. When is the next 101 class? I want to get her plugged into ministry somewhere." "Our small group is going on a mission trip, and I have given each person a different responsibility. Where do you think we should go?" "I realized discipleship happens at home, too. Will you hold me accountable to spend time discipling my kids?" "I have a person in my small group who is passionate about children. Can you
have the children's ministry people call me?"

Stages of Spiritual Growth



Questions for Study

What are the characteristics of:

- A Spiritual Infant?
- A Spiritual Child?
- A Young Adult?
- A Spiritual Parent?
- A Spiritual Grandparent?

Questions for Discussion

What do you do to help someone to move from:

- Spiritually Dead to to Spiritual Infant?
- Spiritual Infant to Spiritual Child?
- Spiritual Child to Spiritual Young Adult?
- Spiritual Young Adult to Spiritual Parent?
- Spiritual Parent to Spiritual Grandparent?
- 4. Coach the Bible Website (www.coachthebible.com)-

This website has several assessment tools that can be used to assess where someone is in their spiritual journey. After the assessment there are a number of tools and lessons to encourage someone to take a next step with Jesus. The assessment tools are free and easily downloadable.

5. From the Navigator Growth Guide (p. 12)-

	Coaching	Discipling	Counseling	Mentoring
Goal	Reach next level of excellence and contribution	Maturity as Christ's disciple	Getting "unstuck" and becoming well	Being successful in a current or future organizational position
Source for change	Help coachee discover and utilize his or her own resources for change	Provide instruction, example, and application of basics of Christian life	Asking questions and giving advice	Drawing from a more senior person's experience
Process	Driven by an agreed upon process with needs determined by coachee	Driven by discipleship curriculum and goals	Driven by needs of counselee	Driven by needs of protégé and position