

Um, when Seth asked me to speak, I  
thought of pulling from maybe a sermon  
that I had done before in Russia or  
somewhere and that I would was more  
familiar with. And, but I really felt the  
Lord leading me to talk about something  
that I'm not so comfortable or familiar  
with, something that things the Lord's  
still. Teaching me, leading me through,  
and rather than something I feel like  
I've figured out. So we'll learn and grow  
together as we take a look at this.

A lot of this has come from a  
book by Janet Hagberg and Robert Gulick  
called The Critical Journey Stages in the  
Life of Faith. So

we'll be looking at some of  
that. I do have some slides  
that we will help us on  
illustrate that. In those  
were by, uh, the illustrations are  
courtesy of David Schmeiser and it was  
used with his permission. So this helps  
to kind of illustrate this. I'm going to

do kind of an overview of this, these stages of growth and then we'll go back and look at a couple of particular areas that I think is. Important in the Lord was highlighting for me, so let's jump in.

The first stage here in this journey is this recognition of God, and this may be a new believer that's coming to know Christ. You know, things are exciting. There's a sense of awe of who God is.

And a sense of natural awareness of God and getting a greater meeting in life.

OK, we're going to do just a quick overview here of the phases, and then I'll go back and show some of those.

So the recognition of God's, the first stage, then the life of discipleship, the productive life, the journey. Inward, the journey outward, and then this life of love. Now this is not quite so simple as a progression through your life.

Sometimes you might bounce back and forth

between stages. You could maybe do it as a spiral where you go back and go through these stages again at a deeper level. But think of it maybe as kind of the home stage where your life is at what you identify with and typically return to. So that's a little bit of an overview and then we'll get more into this recognition of God. So this is exciting time. We see this a lot new believers, but also be. Someone who's just, you know, God's revealing himself to them in a deeper way. Maybe you've been a Christian for a while and, and God's just, you know, lighted a new spark for you. I forgot to get my water and I have to grab that.

And this is.

Where God is orchestrating this transformation, it's you're feeling this new harmony and peace. You may go out in nature and you know the trees are greener and the flowers are brighter, or the sun is brighter and

the flowers are more colorful as you  
may be just experiencing. God's not even,  
you know, fully understanding it all, but  
you're experiencing God. There's a sense  
of trust, trusting God and for the  
future. Sometimes there can be. You can  
fall into superstition on what that  
means. Would maybe something like you  
think of God as you know, the  
Santa Claus? Where you, you know, pray the  
right thing, you do the right things, you  
follow God's rules for life and  
everything works out. And you know, some  
of these ideas where you may not have  
a that full understanding of God, but  
it's an exciting time. And  
then we move into the life  
of discipleship. And  
this is where we find um  
meaning from.  
Belonging. Belonging to a group,  
often you see.  
The leader or a belief system playing  
a large playing a large part in

this kind of a loyalty excitement about,  
you know, a great leader or a  
belief system, a denomination, a church.

There's it's a time where you're being  
discipled by others. People are investing  
you. And discipling you and teaching  
you. And you have this sense  
of this, my tribe, my people.

We see this in the Israelites  
as the the Israelites were the  
chosen people of God. And there's  
this identity as we are the  
people of God. And that  
you may gather around A  
cause, something that's important to  
you, something that you value.

And you know, champion that cause  
bringing other people along with you, you  
have a lot of comfort in this group  
atmosphere and and the support of those  
around you. Sometimes you can end up in  
a legalistic mindset in this phase. So  
that's something to be aware of and avoid  
if I just do all the right rules.

Do all the right things, then everything will work out. And you know, we could tend to be judgmental and other people that aren't following the same set of rules that we have. We are, we are the people that have it right. Everyone else is is not quite there yet. It's easy to fall into that in this phase.

And then after the life of discipleship, it tends to lead toward this life of productivity where you're maybe volunteering in the church, serving God, finding ways to, you know, start to invest in other people.

Maybe you're joining committee, maybe you're serving on the tech team, maybe you're greeting people, other things, involvement in church life that where you're not just receiving as you were mainly in this stage, two more receiving from other people. There are more mature now you're giving and sharing that with other people. Umm.

During this time there's a sense

of, you know, this responsibility is

sense of being useful for God.

There's a value placed on symbols

and.

The, the sense of our community

is unique and I'm a part

of this, this excitement of being

used by God, getting spiritual goals

accomplished. You know who can stop

us as we're working and and

serving in God's community.

And there's a lot of fulfillment as

you find success and you find out

that you can be useful as part

of God's God's people, God's church.

There's a you tend to want to

call people. Listen to me. Hey, everybody

should know what you know what our

churches. Is excited about everybody

should know the truth of who God is

and wanting to share that with other

people. A lot of confidence in in what

you know to be right and who God

is. This can sometimes though lead to

burnout because you're working and serving and your final fulfillment and people are appreciating. What you're doing and and you keep taking on more and more and eventually that could lead to a burnout where you get you just trying to do too many things on too many, too many different ministries and you can be fulfilled in that, but also just exhausted and burned out.

There can be disappointment sometimes, you know, you can reach out to someone, trying to help someone. Or maybe you're disappointed in the leader. The leader's not doing things the way you thought he should. Or other leaders. It could be just, yeah, you invest. A lot of times you're investing in someone. And then they disappoint you and they, they don't, you know, they turn away from Christ or they fall back into sin, something like that. It could be disappointment in yourself. So these are some of the things that we can run



into during this phase of the productive life, but for the most part, it's a it's a very exciting time when you're finding fulfillment. And, and the passage that was read this morning, there's an example of this in the life of Elijah just before that passage was where he was. At Mount Carmel and there was this big showdown of the prophets of bail versus God and, you know who could bring fire to consume the sacrifice. And God answered, the sacrifice was burned up. The profits of Bill were, you know, shown to be a week and. And, and they were destroyed. And Elijah was like, yeah, this is awesome, God's awesome. Look what we're doing. Everybody can see God is God. And there's this high point of excitement. And then as UM. But not very long after that, we see that chapter that was read this morning where, you know, he was running for his life. And so that is the.

That and that leads us into this next phase, which is the inward journey. And a lot of these, these first phases are more. These first 3 phases are more external, where we're, you know, involved in the church life, involved in God, things more outside of ourselves, other people are interacting with us. As we go into these later phases, it becomes more of an internal God working in us internally, in our hearts, and much deeper level. So let's look at this journey inward. Often this starts with a crisis. Something goes wrong, all the things that we thought we had. Figured out about God. This is how our life is supposed to work out. Now something now it starts to fall apart. God doesn't do what we expected. There's a tragedy in our life. We find it's more difficult to overcome sin than we thought, whatever that situation is where things are. Not so clear,

not so certain.

We can lead have some uncertainties in  
our life and faith we're where we're not.

We're not so much even searching for  
answers and we're just searching for  
direction. Like where do I go? This is  
not the way I thought it was going to  
turn out. What do I do next? One of  
the examples of that is. Peter, Peter  
wanted someone who is a with a lot of  
confidence. He was one of the leaders of  
the disciples and he always knew what to  
do 1st and jump in first and speak first.

And he was always right there until Jesus  
died and then he was taken away to the  
cross. And Peter was like, I, I don't  
even know the guy. I don't yeah, just  
I'm, I'm not having nothing to do with  
this. And he had that time where he  
denied Christ and. So

he was an example of someone who came to  
that disillusionment where all the things  
I thought way I thought it was going to  
happen didn't happen. And now what I

don't know what I don't know what's next

to Elijah is another example of that. In

the passage we're reread, we'll get into

that a little more. Later on, but

he's running for his life, he's fleeing

from Jezebel, he's going and hiding in

a cave. He's despairing of his life.

He's like, God, just take my life.

Everything's a disaster. It's not no use

trying. It's a very personal journey. A

lot of times other people. Don't know

how to help us in this phase. It's

just something we often just have to deal

with and work through with. Between US

and God there can be help from wise

counselors and people that have gone

through some deep things in their life.

They can counsel us through that, but for

the most part. A lot of

people are not able or equipped to help

us through that. We're unclear on what

the direction is next. Where are we going

to go next? Were some

of that confidence in God we we're we're

sure that you know, we may understand that he is the answer, but we don't know how that's going to play out and we have to let go of our ego and our confidence in ourselves and just trust God. It can be described as the dark night of the soul where everything just seems dark and. Disappointing and discouraging. And one aspect of this we'll talk about more later is the wall. They're usually, and I've seen different illustrations of this. Sometimes it's shown at the before or at the beginning of this inward journey or after or during, but at some point during this inward journey. We'll run into this wall where we're confronted by our will, meeting God's will face to face, and which is going to win. Are we gonna fight our way through this? Are we going to get our own way? Are we going to hold on to our own confidence and our own abilities? Or are we going to relinquish control and surrender? And let God take over.

It's also could be that dark night of the soul where things are just so dark and we don't know where to turn next. But the wall is specific to that time of yielding our will to God and letting Him take over. It's a good time for solitude, being quiet and spending time just alone with God and seeking Him because a lot of people, other people may not have the right answers for you. A lot of times when you're in this phase, some of the things that other people may say might not be helpful. So.

It may be only the Lord is able to help you through that.

So again, these first 3 phases are more of a external how we relate to other people. The last three phases are more of an internal growth and internal journey.

This this process was really helpful reading this as from people that have studied this in in detail.

To help me just understand that process  
of growth from a bigger perspective.

So then after this inward journey, we  
turn to this outward journey where we're  
beginning to reach out to those around  
us more. And it's we tend to  
have at this point, we've gone through  
this dark night of the soul and  
we had more of a sense of.

From God's love for us, God's  
acceptance for us, um.

And it's more of this.

Outward is it's more of a horizontal,  
we're again, not just dealing with our  
internal, that internal process, but  
we're reaching out to people around us.

But it's more maybe not in such an  
organized fashion. Maybe we're just, you  
know, God's putting someone on our heart  
to, to reach out. Court may not be like  
organized ministry by the church. It may  
be just something that God's doing in us  
and we're prompted to to reach out to  
someone. So we're useful in a different

way. It might not be as obvious to other people in the church how God's using us, but he's just prompting us to do something and we're and we're doing it.

We also have a sense of calling. And a vocation and ministry concern about others and their interest instead of just our own, our own

needs. And it tends to come with

a deep calm and a stillness and

a peace and knowing that we're doing

what God is wanting of us and

we're surrendered to. Him and.

Being able to be used by him in a deeper way.

And then we let go of this anger, the

grief. A lot of the things that plague us

through these earlier phases were we've

let go of that. We've surrendered to God

and God's able to use this. And

then comes the life of love.

Now this is a time where we're in

a phase of just Christ, like living.

We're living like Christ. The best



example of this is Christ himself, where  
we give our all. We're not concerned  
about our own needs. We've  
gained wisdom through life struggles.

We're in a in a habit  
of just compassionate living for others,  
trusting God and not trying to  
work our way to pleasing God.

There's a detachment from stress and  
the things, material things don't really  
matter. To us.

It's just not not our concern anymore.

We don't get so stressed out and  
we're willing to.

Do whatever menial task, whatever kind of  
service the Lord calls us to, no  
matter how small or great, we're just  
serving Him. Jesus is that perfect  
example. As He said, sell your  
possessions and give them to the poor.

Seek His Kingdom first. Seek His  
righteousness and not. Of material  
things. And so in this phase we've we've  
kind of resigned ourselves to the things

of the world and are just concerned about  
living beyond ourselves and pleasing  
Christ and living for others. We're in  
this union with God now. I would say  
there's only a few of us have made  
it this far. I certainly don't feel like.  
From living in this stage, you know,  
when I think of this phase, I  
think of people like Mother Teresa, Marie  
Clark, David Tomlinson, you know, people  
that have achieved this level of  
maturity. Maybe someday I'll get there. I  
don't know, But I think that's something  
we can. Look to as  
the Lord begins that deeper work in  
us and transforms this. To be honest,  
I think a lot of people don't  
get beyond that stage 3 and as  
of this, these writers of the study  
found that most of most church members,  
most people following Christ get to about  
stage 3. And they find this life of  
productivity and they're involved in the  
church and ministry and and that's kind

of where it's at. And then it's easy to  
bump into the wall and then back back  
into that's, that's uncomfortable. I'm  
going to go back to where I'm  
comfortable. And that's that life of  
productivity being involved in the life  
of the church that feels satisfying.  
Fulfilling, and it's a lot.

Less stressful than than giving our all  
to God and going through that wall.

Let's look a bit more closely.

At the Inward Journey, and we'll just  
do a quick review here. So the  
recognition of God is something that  
humbles us and recognizes that he is  
doing everything for us and in us.

Then we have this life of discipleship  
which grounds us and and gives us  
understanding. Of you know who God is,  
the teachings of God's Word and the value  
of those in the church that invest in  
us, then we have this productive life  
that. Rewards and exalts us  
and is exciting and then we go

into these maybe not so pleasant phase  
of the journey inward which unsettles us  
and shakes us up in our thinking

of how God should be and the  
wall which takes off the mask of  
I'm in control. I can handle this.

Then we just have to surrender to God  
and then this journey outward where we  
were transformed into focusing on those  
around us, and finally, this life of love  
which transcends us, where God is just  
using us and filling us and empowering us  
to live this life of love.

And again, thanks to Dave Schmeiser for  
these illustrations. I can  
leave this up, but we're gonna go back  
and look a bit more deeply into.

The stage 4 of the inward journey  
because that was the area that I  
think many of us can get stuck  
in. One example, as  
was mentioned, was Peter's denial of  
Christ. Another example was the disciples  
on the road to Mayus. I'm just

gonna look at Luke 24 if you  
want to look there briefly. I'm going  
to read the whole passage, but I  
want to highlight some things there. So  
this is. After Jesus died  
and before he was revealed to  
them again after his death.

24.

So the there was disciples on  
their way to this village of  
Emeus and they were talking to  
each other and Jesus came alongside  
them in Luke 24 verse.

15 They were talking about these things  
that happened as Jesus died. And Jesus  
asked them, what's this dispute you  
having in another? And they stopped and  
walking and looked discouraged. And one  
of them said in verse 18, are you the  
only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't  
know what happened? And he said what  
things? So they began to tell him and.

And then?

Turn the frame. There was a verse

where it mentioned that we had thought  
that he was the one.

I'm trying to find it.

There it is, verse 21. But we were  
hoping that he was the one who was  
about to redeem Israel. So they had these  
hopes. They hoped He was the one. And  
now apparently not because it's been 3  
days and he's dead and their hopes were  
dashed. Job, what's  
another example, you know, where his his  
trust in God was still there, but things  
didn't make sense anymore and his friends  
weren't much help. You know, they told  
him, Job, come on you, you got to  
have some sin in there. God doesn't just  
do this for, you know, for no reason.  
And. Still, he, he  
just had to trust God and have that, you  
know, again, the his friends weren't very  
helpful in that time. He just had to rely  
on his relationship with God and allow  
God to get him through that. And then the  
example of Elijah where he was running

for his life, hiding in a cave.

Trying to get away and and just saying

God just take my life cause Jezebel's

gonna kill me anyway. Just this is not

working out the way I thought.

And that leads us to

this place of the wall

where we're forced and, and

faced with this choice of

giving up our will and

accepting what God is asking

of us or rejecting that

and maybe balancing out. Back into

one of these other stages where we're

more comfortable. This could be different

things for different people. It could be

a deep, unresolved hurt or a traumatic

memory from the past that you just don't

want to deal with. It could be an

addiction or a secret sin that you don't

want to give up, that you're just

fighting and wrestling against. Brought

on could be a broken relationship maybe

where you're waiting for the other person

to change. It could be

a sense of complacency and an

unwillingness to give up our comfort

zone. It could be

a reevaluation of your understanding of

who God is or of who you are.

It. Could be this dark night of

the soul. It might involve going to

counseling. Maybe you have people that

are encouraging you to go to counseling

and you don't want to do it because you

know it's gonna stir up feelings that you

don't want to deal with. They're going to

tell you things that you don't want to

think about or consider. Um,

it's a unconditional

love and.

Giving unconditional love, it could be an

accepting that emotional cost of what you

know, loving someone unconditionally is

gonna cost us something emotionally. And

are we willing to do that? So

this is a time of discomfort, of

surrender, of healing, awareness of who



guide is. Even if he's  
not who he thought he  
was before. Forgiveness, acceptance,  
love. It's

a melting of ourself, a molding of  
our will and to and to God's  
will, reshaping that into God's will, a  
closeness to God, and a time of  
solitude and reflection.

Umm, this was Elijah when he was in  
The Cave and God revealed himself to him.

Cave is a great place to hide away  
and have solitude and, and you know,  
often people were in their worst times of  
their discouragement and fleeing for  
their lives end up in a cave.

There's different types of resistance or  
ways we resist when we're at this wall.

Some people will try to scale the wall.

You know, you have a strong ego. I'm  
going to get through this. I'm going to  
scale the wall. I'm going to get over it  
and no matter how hard you try, you  
just can't get over it. It's too big

some. People try to deprecate themselves.

Ohh, I'm worthy. I'm terrible. I can't do

this. It's impossible. It's like trying

to dig under the wall, and the

foundations of that wall are deep. You

can't get under it. You can't get over

it. Some people

are intellectual and they try to reason

with a wall. If I can just find

the right answer, if I can just

understand how life works, I'm gonna get

rid of this wall. Some people are high

achievers that will try to I'll just

build some, you know, another wall next

to this or build some stairs. And I'll

get over the wall. But no matter how hard

we try, we never can quite get over that

wall. Some people are doctrine Arians.

They're trying to drill holes in the wall

and and see, well, if I just get the my

theology right and get find the right

scripture, I'll be able to find a way

through this wall.

Or maybe an ordained leader trying to

claim spiritual power. And if I pray  
hard enough, God will crumble that wall.  
But the answer is not getting around  
it, over it, under it, but it's  
actually going through it. And that  
involves us giving up our ourselves.  
In our will and surrendering fully  
to his rule, I think of  
Jesus in the garden of Yosemite  
and Luke. Luke 22.  
Starting in verse 39.  
As he went to the Mount of Olives  
and he came to this place and he  
asked the the the disciples to pray that  
they wouldn't enter into temptation, and  
then he went by himself to.  
A place by himself to pray to  
God and said Father, if you are  
willing, take this cup away from me.  
Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be  
done. So if there was any other  
way that he could avoid.  
This next steps, he was asking  
God to please do something different,

but at the same time he  
was accepting God's will in in  
this. Moment instead  
of his. And then  
the Angel came from heaven, strengthening  
him and and he was still in this  
anguish, and he prayed more fervently  
until his sweat was like drops of blood.

I mean, this is intense. This is this  
is not just OK, cool God, whatever you  
want. This is an intense struggle that  
even. Jesus went through.

And yet he yielded his will to the  
fathers and accepted God's will, even  
though it wasn't what he would have  
chosen. And again, this  
we see the the other disciples weren't  
very helpful during this time. He had to  
go back by himself. He came back and  
they're sleeping. They're not really the  
support that he needed. And that's why  
this time is so often a time where  
we just have to work through this.

Between US and God, and we can't

necessarily rely on those around us. It's  
relied maybe in these earlier phases  
we've had other people that could help us  
and now it's kind of we just gotta work  
through this between us and God. Now  
there is people that are experienced in  
helping through these people through  
these phases that have gone through  
themselves. And counselors that are  
helpful. So it's not that you can't seek  
out help from others, but it's just often  
the other people in the church that you  
brush up against may not be the most  
helpful.

As I was thinking of this, there's,  
you know, other implications for us not  
only in our personal life, but in  
our life as a church. And there  
are some cautions for as different people  
are entering this stage, there's some  
people that are not ready for that  
personal. Reflection or deeper  
involvement. And those people may feel  
left out and threatened or unappreciated.

So if God is leading you  
to this deeper reflection, deeper  
personal time, be patient with those  
that may not be ready for  
that yet.

Um, and.

Also, resist, you know, shaming, rescuing  
or guiltting people for being in the wall  
or not being in the wall. We're all  
at different stages and phases in this  
process of growth, and we may return from  
one stage to another and bounce back and  
forth, sometimes even in a short time,  
sometimes certain. Ages may take us years  
to get through, so be patient with others  
that are not in the same place that  
you are. There was someone I had the  
privilege of walking through.

Part of this, you know, inward journey  
with someone recently. And I said  
something last week that wasn't very  
appropriate. It wasn't timely, it wasn't  
helpful. And so yesterday I had to go  
and meet with him and, and ask for

his forgiveness because it it wasn't

helpful at this point in his life.

What I had said and so we just need

to be really careful whether we're the

person going through that phase ourself

or seeing someone else going through that

phase. It may look like the person is

losing their faith and maybe someone

that's been involved in ministry and now

they're pulling back from ministry and

and we're like, what's wrong with him?

I used to be such a great, productive

member of our church, and now they're

withdrawing. What's wrong? Well, they may

be going through this deep inward journey

and we we need to give them space and

allow for that.

I also thought of an example of

the Israelites where when the Israelites

were crossing over the Jordan, there were

certain tribes that were giving their

inheritance on the east side of the

Jordan, but God still asked them to

go across the Jordan River for their

warriors to fight. With their brothers  
and help their brothers to take that  
promised land. And then after that  
conquest was over, then they could go  
back with their families and settle on  
the side where God had given their  
territory. So maybe we're helping others  
to get through that. And  
then returning to where the stage that  
the Lord would have for us. So  
just beware of judging and comparing  
Matthew 7, you know, says judge, don't  
judge that you will not be judged.  
Measure that you judge and you will  
be judged. So be careful about judging.  
Hearing others also wanted to  
look at Galatians chapter 6  
verses 2 through 5.  
Starting verse 2, carry one another's  
burdens. In this way you will  
fulfill the law of Christ. For  
if anyone considers himself to be  
something when he is nothing, he  
deceives himself.



Let each person examine his own work,  
and then he can take pride in  
himself alone and not compare himself  
with someone else. For each person will  
have to carry his own load. And  
then Second Corinthians 10.

Verse 12.

For we don't dare classify or compare  
ourselves with some who commend  
themselves, but measuring themselves by  
themselves and comparing themselves to  
themselves, they lack understanding. So  
it's easy to compare ourselves with  
others, and we can feel better about  
that or feel worse about that. Either  
way, it's not really helpful. Because  
the measure of. Measure  
of our maturity is Christ and our  
goal is to be like Christ. And  
again, we're each on different stages, so  
let's be patient with other people. I  
also think this can apply the same  
process can apply to extent of where  
we are as a church and God

may be. Leading our church to  
reevaluate our identity and become more  
outward focused. And that may be  
uncomfortable and unfamiliar territory.

We we're comfortable where we were  
and changes is sometimes not very  
interesting. Some of us like change,  
some of us like new things.

Some of us maybe like to just be  
comfortable and um. And be,  
you know, enjoy our familiar, familiar  
territory. God may be asking us to  
grow and stretch in ways that are  
challenging. So I would just encourage  
you and instead of.

You know, as we face, maybe it's in  
your personal life, Maybe it's something  
as we faced as a church to not  
when we face that wall where we're we're  
resisting, we begin to, you know, our our  
own wills, like I don't like this then  
to surrender that and no matter how  
painful or scary. That maybe to surrender  
that to God both as a church

and individually, in order to move into  
the next stage that he's calling us  
to. And  
that's, it's not comfortable, it's not  
pleasant, It's not, um.  
And it's, it's not, it may be  
as rewarding as some of these stages  
where we're doing ministry and serving  
and seeing God do great things. It's  
just a time where we have to  
surrender to him. And I also wanted  
to conclude with the verses in Joshua  
chapter 1 and Mike. Thompson spoke on  
this a few months ago about the Jordan  
River, that time when they were crossing  
the Jordan River and the flood stage. And  
four times in that chapter these words  
were spoken. Be strong and courageous. So  
when we face that wall and that difficult  
time in that dark night of the soul,  
be strong. And courageous 4 times over,  
which repeated be strong and courageous  
because the Lord is going to do something  
great. And it may be challenging, it may

be scary, it may be uncomfortable, but

the Lord's going to do that.

As we trust him, so