

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 paying
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 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 their interest instead of just our 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 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 guilting 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