

### **The Caterpillar Stage**

In this stage of the butterfly's life (which follows right after hatching from an egg) the main task is consumption. The caterpillar's purpose is simply to eat as much as possible in order to fuel the growth that will take place in the future. During this stage the caterpillar will outgrow and shed its skin as many as four or five times.

This represents the learning stage of growth in life, where we are consuming as much knowledge and information as we can about something new that we want to understand and master. We are enjoying life, family and friends; maybe taking the gifts God gives us for granted (skating through life). There is also some "shedding" of ideas during this phase as we sort through what fits or doesn't fit into our current life. This is often a stage of great excitement and energy for us as we enjoy the flow of creativity and inspiration it brings.

### **The Chrysalis Stage-Protective Stage God puts us in to Deal with Crisis/Tragedy**

This is the most intriguing stage of butterfly development, which appears catastrophic from the perspective of the caterpillar. When the little crawler is fully grown and can eat no more, it simply dangles from a branch and spins a protective cocoon around itself so it can safely rest and digest all the food that has been consumed in the previous stage. Though the chrysalis appears unchanged from the outside during this stage, there is dramatic transformation taking place inside: the body of the caterpillar is slowly dissolving while the previously dormant precursor cells of the emerging butterfly ("imaginal cells") gradually develop, migrate together and create a brand new being.

This stage is the one we most often misunderstand. We usually don't recognize the need for rest, retreat and recovery when we're trying to grow or create something new, and we don't necessarily welcome change, and therefore, miss out on the emergence of inspiration that comes during these times of necessary relaxation and "cocooning." Because of our sorrow, God has placed us in the protection of our cocoon to hopefully grow in faith, in order to understand our loss. It's a needed stage and naturally we take the caterpillar perspective and view this stage as a crisis or downturn, all while frantically trying to push growth forward at all costs.

### **The Butterfly Stage-Our New Lives**

At last in this final stage, the fully developed butterfly is ready to emerge from the chrysalis. After breaking free, the butterfly's wings are still folded and wet and more rest time is necessary to allow blood to flow into the wings. Finally when the unfurled wings are fully dry, the butterfly is ready to take flight and share its beauty with the world.

During this stage there is an intentional "breaking free" that has to occur with proper timing before "flight" is undertaken. When we've gone through the other stages and are finally ready to display our new selves and growth to the world, we have to leave behind the old way of doing things and move forward with courage and some risk-taking, while recognizing the fragility of our new "wings."

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After investigating these stages of butterfly development what can we learn about our own growth processes? Here are some take-aways...

**1. Don't rush through the Caterpillar Stage.**

We recognize that most of us would much rather see ourselves as a beautiful butterfly than a creepy caterpillar. We tend to reject this stage of our development because it is hard work and not glamorous, and we try to get through it as quickly as possible. But we know from stage development theory that steps cannot be skipped or hurried. When we rush through the essential learning process of the Caterpillar Stage we fail to strengthen and nourish the infrastructure that will be necessary to sustain us through future growth.

**2. Don't try to take flight too soon.**

In our hurry to become butterflies we may try to leap forward before we have wings to carry us. These attempts will nearly always result in a fall, which will require us to start all over again. Most of my "failures" have resulted from exactly this problem: I've pushed myself to the launch phase before I'm ready and subsequently have fallen many times. We must learn to be patient and go through all the necessary stages before we can take flight with our new ideas.

**3. Don't give up during the Chrysalis Stage.**

This is one of the most important aspects of the Butterfly Principle: there must be time allowed for rest and retreat during the process of growth. If we don't slow down and take the time needed for recovery we may be forced to retreat by some sort of crisis or difficulty that arises. In the past I've viewed the loss of excitement and the onset of weariness that occurs during the Chrysalis Stage as a sign that I am on the "wrong track" and many times have just given up altogether. This stage is crucial for shaping and "crystallizing" the mission of our growth in faith, while allowing everything superfluous to dissolve away—the tendency is to interpret this stage as a crisis because we didn't understand the purpose of taking this time for rest.

**4. Let go of expectations.**

In transformation, we have the hope of emerging as beautiful Monarch butterflies, but many of our endeavors turn out to be tiny moths instead. It is critical to recognize that we need to let go of attachments and be content with whatever emerges from the Chrysalis (let God take over); for nature has a need for moths, as well as butterflies.

**5. Be content with where you are.**

Most importantly we need to recognize that it's okay to be resting in the Chrysalis state. We live in hope of the emergence of a beautiful butterfly—our transformation.