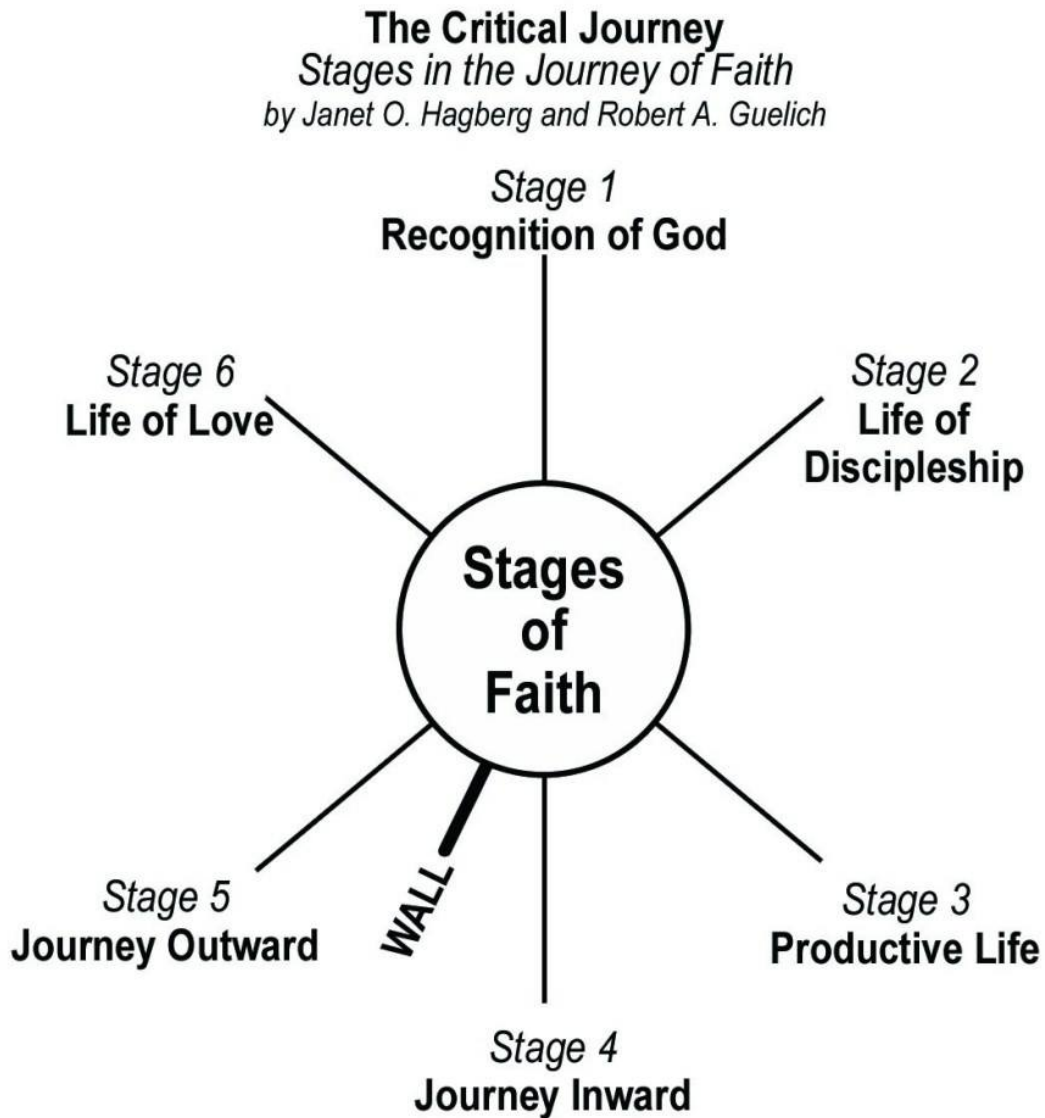


Know Yourself: Stages of Faith

Session • Introduction • Activation

In *The Critical Journey*, These stages are fluid in that we can move back and forth between them in various seasons. We can experience more than one at the same time. We can also get 'stuck' or lost in a particular stage. We do, however, all begin at stage 1 and we cannot mysteriously skip a stage and arrive at the following one. One of the problems with this kind of model is that we can presume that a numerical order means that one stage is better than the other. On the journey of faith, this is not the case. The authors encourage us to look at our own lives. "We experience childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, older adulthood and senior citizen status. Each stage builds developmentally on the previous experience, but we are not inherently better people as adults than we were as children."

We need all the stages of faith for full spiritual formation.



Below is a brief overview of the six stages on the journey of faith. As you read through them, try to

identify, without judgement, where you currently are in your journey with God.

Stage 1: Recognition of God

This is where we all begin on the journey of faith. We may experience it as children or as adults. This is a time of discovery and accepting the reality of God's presence in our lives. This stage is characterized by a sense of awe and also a sense of innocence. There is a natural awareness of God, a sense of our need of him and also an experience of greater meaning and purpose for our lives. This stage reminds us of the awesome power of God and the finiteness of our lives.

Stage 2: Life of Discipleship

This stage is a time of learning and belonging. We are like apprentices, absorbing as much as we can from

people we respect and trust. It is a very social time of interacting with others on a similar journey; there is often a sense of excitement as a result of belonging to something bigger than ourselves. This stage represents the best of community. It is also often characterized by a sense of rightness; there is a feeling of certainty and security in our faith.

Stage 3: Productive Life

This is best described as the 'doing' stage.

It is a very active phase when we are consciously engaged in working for God. We have become aware of our unique gifts and we want to put those to use in our community of faith and in the world. Often we take on a specific leadership role or responsibility. There is a sense of productivity and

fruitfulness, along with a feeling of having reached a spiritual goal.

Stage 4: Journey Inward

This stage is marked by a deep and very personal journey inward. It can often feel unsettling at first and yet can lead to great freedom for those who journey through it. Many of the certainties and securities of previous stages begin to unravel and we are confronted by doubts and questions that can lead to a crisis of faith. We move from a posture of knowing to one of seeking deep inner direction for our lives; we are compelled to know ourselves and know God more fully. We can experience pain in discovering that God is not who we previously thought he was.

The Wall

The Wall belongs to Stage 4 but it is so critical that it is considered separately. The Wall represents our will meeting God's will face to face. We are confronted with the reality of whether we are willing to surrender to God. The Wall is a place of wrestling, of dying to self and waiting to be reborn. Going through the wall unmask us and involves a painful but transformative rediscovery of who God is and who we are. Many never have the courage to journey through it.

Stage 5: Journey Outward

This is the next stage after rediscovering God and accepting love. We are fully surrendered, with eyes wide open to the great and painful mysteries of life. We now begin to reemerge from our inward journey with a

fresh focus on others and a renewed sense of calling, but from a new, grounded center and from a sense of fullness. We become aware that God's purpose for our inner lives is lived out in the world. We don't burn out, we live from a place of deep calm and stillness. Our inner stillness is the source of our outward journey.

Stage 6: Life of Love

In this stage, we reflect God to others more clearly and consistently than we ever thought possible. We have entirely lost ourselves and yet have truly found ourselves in God. We are humble, wise, selfless and deeply compassionate. Christ's life represents a model for our lives. Obedience comes naturally. We are spirit-filled in a quiet, unassuming way. We

live with a Christ-like detachment from material things. We do not fear pain, trauma, disappointment or even death.

- Where do you most identify right now?
- Do you feel a sense of interior freedom in this stage or is there a sense of being stuck or having regressed?
- What is the greatest joy/struggle in your current stage of faith?
- How can you embrace the uniqueness of this stage in your journey of faith?
- What is God's current invitation to you in journeying forward in your life with him?

Additional Resources

Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich have also created a **Spiritual Life Inventory** that can help you discover which stage is your 'home' stage, or the place on the journey that you find yourself spending most of your time in. You will need to print this separately and tally up your results by hand.