

The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith¹⁰⁴

Part One

“Whatever comes in to your heart and mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.”

A. W. Tozer

A. The Purpose

1. “We have two objectives in writing this book. First, we want to aid you in understanding your own faith journey by helping you discover where you may be along the way and recognize where you have been. Second, we want you to appreciate where others are on the critical journey at similar or different stages.” (xxiv)
2. “*The Critical Journey* does not tell you exactly how or when to move along your spiritual journey. It does not offer any formulas for spiritual growth. But it does describe the various phases of our spiritual journey and illustrate how people act and think when in those phases.” (xxiv)
3. “This is a book especially for those who want to be or are on the spiritual quest for a greater realization of God in their lives.” (5)

B. The Model

1. “One conceptual change I have made is to view the model as a circle rather than a linear progression that could imply “higher is better.” This is a circle in which God is at the center and people at each stage on the perimeter are loved and cared for.” (xvii)
2. “Remember that, as with all models used for discussion and understanding, no framework can totally capture a dynamic process.” (7)
3. “The stages on your journey are very fluid. We move back and forth between them regularly, and we can experience more than one stage at a time.” (7)
4. “We view stages of faith as sequential and cumulative, rather than resulting in the label ‘better.’” (8)

¹⁰⁴ Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich. *The Critical Journey*. Sheffield Publishing Co. Salem, Wisconsin. 2005, 1995

5. “We submit, however, that each of us has a specific *home* stage (some report two home stages of equal intensity) where we operate most of the time and which best characterizes our faith.” (9)

C. Cages: Getting Stuck

1. “People usually get stuck at a particular place in the journey because we find it more comfortable to sit than to move.” (9)
2. “Another sign of stuckness is having to be right and convincing others of our rightness, at any stage of our journey of faith. Rightness becomes more important than the journey.” (11)

D. Crisis: A Time for Moving

1. This is a God-led journey
2. “The journey of faith is our personal journey, and movement on the journey is the place of mystery, holy ground. Moving from one stage to another reverences timing. It involves bringing our responses in sync with God’s grace in our lives. God does not make us move until God’s grace allows us to move.” (14)
3. “It is easy to mislead people into thinking that they can move themselves to the next stage by just doing the things listed, talking to the right people, or setting their mind to it.” (13)
4. “A second consideration in moving to other stages is whether we can make the move alone. Does moving require the help of another? Our observation and experience suggests that it generally does, depending on the stage involved.” (14)

E. Stage One: The Recognition of God

1. “We believe that people enter into a relationship with God in one of two different ways. Some come through a sense of awe, others out of a sense of need.” (34)
2. Characteristics of Stage One
 - a. A sense there is a greater meaning in life
 - b. A sense of innocence
 - 1) A sense of starting over
 - 2) A sense of freshness/cleanness
3. Caged at Stage One
 - a. Worthlessness

- 1) “We can get stuck at this stage or caged when, instead of feeling love and awe, we think of God and others as constantly having expectations of us that we cannot measure up to.” (43)
- b. Isolation
 - 1) No one cares for us. No one is paying attention to our lives. We withdraw from God and others.
- c. Martyrdom
 - 1) Playing the role of a martyr. Life is hard. Because of our sense of worthlessness, we feel we deserve what we get. This usually results in some expression of anger, either repressed or acted out.
4. Moving from Stage One to Stage Two
 - a. Become part of a strong group.
 - 1) “Seems to be key how people move from the first to the second stage.” (46)
 - 2) “Ease into belonging.” (46)
 - b. “Perhaps just acknowledging that there is indeed something worth working for is a major move toward the belonging stage.” (46)
 - c. “Many find the move to the second stage strongly tied with the recognition of and a desire to follow a significant leader or belief system.”
5. Catalysts for movement
 - a. Accepting self-worth
 - 1) “The movement from stage 1 to stage 2 requires an acknowledgement that we are basically worthwhile human beings and that we are loved just as we are.” (47)
 - b. Reduced Isolation
 - 1) “We need to accept the caring of the community that is reaching out to us if we are to find belonging.” (47)

F. Stage Two: The Life of Discipleship

1. This stage is best characterized as a time of learning and belonging. (53)
 - a. This is a taking stage, a filling stage. (53)
2. Characteristics of Stage Two
 - a. In addition to finding meaning in life (Stage One), we now find meaning in belonging.

- b. "The group gives us a sense of identity and security." (54)
 - c. A sense of "rightness"
 - 1) We feel we have found answers
 - d. Security in our faith
 - 1) "There is comfort at this stage, knowing that we personally do not have to figure out the answers since someone can help us with them." (58)
 - e. Robert Guelich: "In more recent years, I have learned how important it is to have a community of faith with whom to identify and to share my journey. The emphasis for me now is more in the sense of community of shared life and faith than on the 'learning.' I have even found that the needs of this stage can best be met not by belonging to the right church as such, but by a group of people within a church or from several churches with whom I can share my journey and whose journeys I can share for my enrichment. Learning still takes place. But it comes more in the form of discovery and enrichment as we share our journeys of faith." (60)
3. Caged at Stage Two
- a. Legalism
 - 1) "It is very seductive at this stage to believe that what is right for us in the faith is what is right for everyone else as well. We often believe that the religious or moral rules by which we live as a faithful disciple should be followed by everyone else. There is a tendency to become legalistic and moralistic, rigid in our understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Punishment of offenders can become an obsession with those caged at stage 2. Whatever the group's orientation, whether liberal, conservative, or in between, its teachings, doctrines, codes of conduct must be adhered to or the offender is alienated." (62)
 - 2) "The major difference between people caged at Stage 1 and those caged at stage 2 is this: at stage 1 we think we are wrong and weak; others are right and strong. At stage 2 we think we are right and strong; others are wrong and weak." (64)
 - 3) Us Against Them Mentality
4. Moving from Stage Two to Three
- a. Recognize our Uniqueness

- 1) “The move from the second stage to the third stage in our journey basically requires us to jump in, concentrate on self-development in the appropriate areas, and take risks in our faith in order to gain enough confidence to participate in the productive life.” (64-65)
 - b. Identify Gifts
 - 1) Recognizing we have gifts and they are worthwhile
 - c. Seeing yourself as a contributor
 - d. Seeking Responsibility
5. Catalysts for movement
- a. Risk taking
 - 1) “We must take risks, deal with uncertainty, volunteer, say yes, try something new, if we are going to grow at this stage.” (66)
 - b. Acceptance of gifts
 - 1) “The second reason we fail to move is an outright denial of the gifts that we have, usually out of fear of using them or having them rejected.” (66)

G. Stage Three: The Productive Life

1. The “doing” stage
2. Characteristics of Stage Three
 - a. Finding your role in the community
 - 1) Based on the discovery of your gifts
 - b. Responsibility
 - 1) Serving faithfully
 - c. Find God, Find a Friend, Find a Job
3. Caged at Stage Three
 - a. Overly Zealous
 - 1) Leads to over-work and burn out
 - 2) We don’t understand why others don’t work as hard as we do, which leads to resentment, criticism, and judgmentalism
 - b. Self-centered
 - 1) A feeling of being indispensable
 - c. Life as performance

4. Moving from Stage Three to Four
 - a. Loss of certainty
 - 1) All our work does not deliver the personal satisfaction we expected
 - 2) We begin to question if some of, if not all of, the things we believe is true
 - b. Faith or personal crisis
 - 1) “That crisis makes many of the former truths and answers inadequate or inappropriate for the next phase in the journey. It often initiates a slow, deep, anguishing questioning of our faith, our relationship with God.” (83)
 - c. Feel abandoned
 - 1) By God and others
 - 2) “Losing the certainty and reality of God, we do not know yet how to ask or where to turn in the darkness. We feel overwhelmed. This is clearly the most alarming place of all the journey.” (83)
5. Catalysts for movement
 - a. Letting Go of Success
 - 1) “The accomplishments and success at stage 3 are very gratifying. We feel confident, competent, well respected, liked. We really don’t want to face the clouds of uncertainty at stage 4. So it is difficult to voluntarily move into this transition. We usually sense we have already started to lose something we cherish, or what we cherish does not give us what we want as it once did. Grief usually accompanies the transition from stage 3 to stage 4.” (84)
 - b. Accepting Vulnerability
 - 1) “We know at some less conscious level that we are moving into an area of uncertainty, loss, confusion, perhaps bleakness. We feel more loss than gain. It is very difficult to strip spiritually before God and come to terms with spiritual integrity. We cannot flee from God but are called face to face with God, and that may make us more vulnerable than we have ever been before. Unless we are willing to lean into these fears, we will likely move to stages 2 or 3 where that vulnerability is reduced and security is more readily available.” (85)

*The authors at some point make the observation that the church has done a pretty good job with people in Stages One through Three. Unfortunately, the church as a whole has not been very successful in leading and pastoring people through the next few stages.