

Christ as a Light

Christ as a light. Illumine and guide us

Christ as a shield, overshadow us

Christ over us, Christ under us

Christ beside us on our left and our right

This day be within and without us

Lowly and meek, yet all powerful

Be in the hearts of all to whom we speak

Be in the mouth of all who speak to us

This day be within and without us

Lowly and meek, yet all powerful

Christ as a light, Christ as a shield

Christ beside us on our left and our right

The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith¹⁰⁵

Part Two

I have come to believe that by and large the human family all has the same secrets, which are both very telling and very important to tell. They are telling in the sense that they tell what is perhaps the central paradox of our condition-that what we hunger for perhaps more than anything else is to be known in our full humanness, and yet that is often just what we also fear more than anything else.

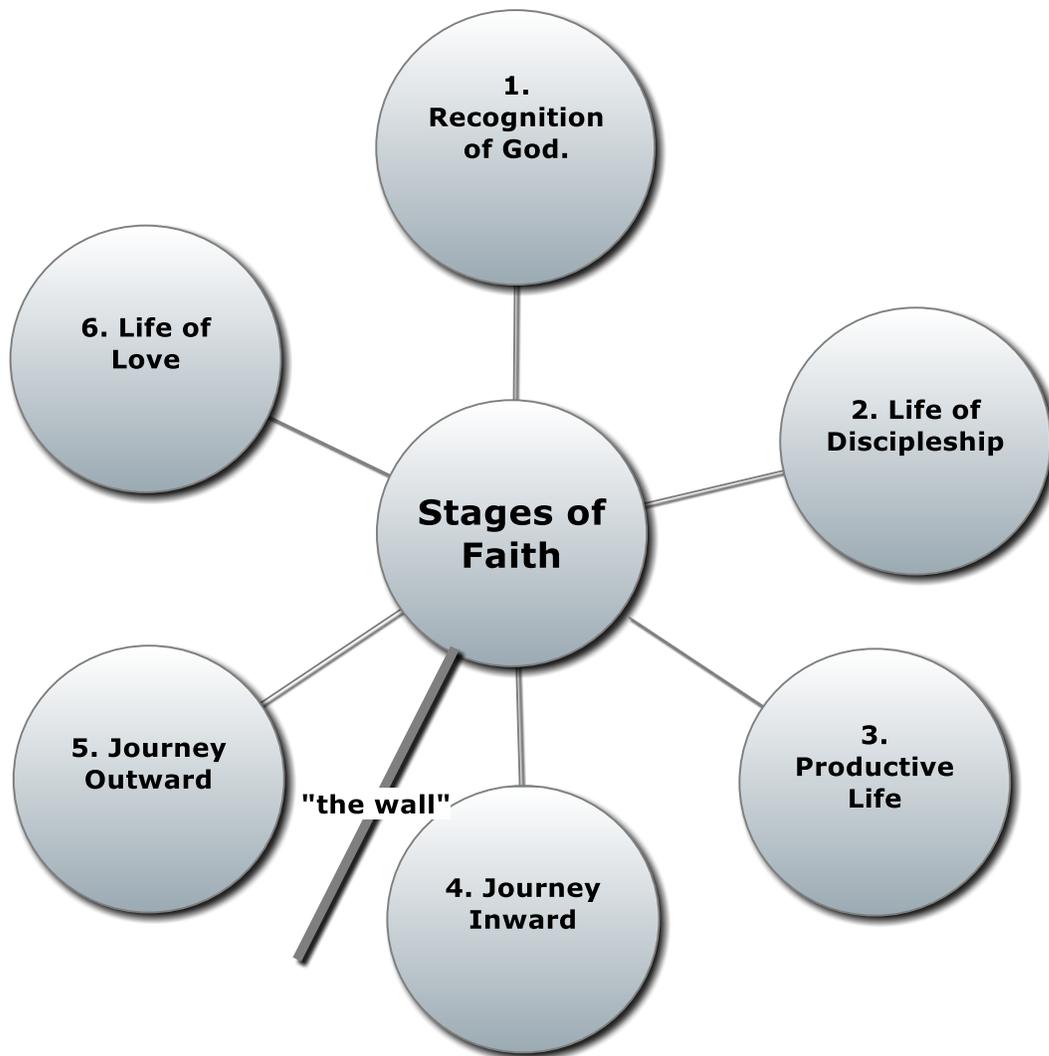
It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are even if we tell it only to ourselves-because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real things.

It is important to tell our secrets too because it makes it easier that way to see where we have been in our lives and where we are going. It also makes it easier for other people to tell us a secret or two of their own, and exchanges like that have a lot to do with what being a family is all about and what being humans is all about.

Finally, I suspect that it is by entering that deep place inside us where our secrets are kept that we come perhaps closer than we do anywhere else to the One who, whether we realize it or not, is of all our secrets the most telling and the most precious we have to tell.

Frederick Buechner *Telling Secrets*

¹⁰⁵ Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich. *The Critical Journey*. Sheffield Publishing Co. Salem, Wisconsin. 2005, 1995



A. Stage Four: The Inward Journey

1. "Stage four does not even look like part of the journey for those at home in stage 3." (94)
2. "Stage Four, The Inward Journey, is aptly described by its title, for it is a deep and very personal inward journey. It almost always comes as an unsettling experience yet results in healing for those who continue through it. Until now, our journey has had an external dimension to it. Our life of faith was more visible, more outwardly oriented, even though things certainly were happening inside us. But the focus fell more on the outside, the community of faith, nature, leadership, the display and use of the Spirit's gifts, belonging,

and productivity. At this stage, we face an abrupt change (at least many do) to almost the opposite mode. It's a mode of questioning, exploring, falling apart, doubting, dancing around the real issues, sinking in uncertainty, and indulging in self-centeredness. We often look hopeless to those around us." (93)

3. Characteristics

- a. A loss of certainty in life and faith
 - 1) "In stage 4, the answers are replaced by questions." (98)
 - 2) We find ourselves looking for direction, not answers.
- b. A pursuit of personal integrity in relation to God
 - 1) At this point, we have done all the right things (recognition of God, discipleship, and service) but find a deep void in our lives.
 - 2) "Stage 4 allows us, invites us, and compels us to know ourselves and to know God in all God's fullness." (97)
- c. A pursuit of discovering who we are, the person God has made us to be, as opposed to who people want us to be.
- d. In this stage, we discover that some of our image of God is faulty. We may have put him in a box, think we have him figured out, only to find that he doesn't stay in the box we have made.
 - 1) Some of that image of God may have been shaped by previous authority figures in our life (father, pastor, church, leader, teacher, etc...)
 - 2) Jonah is an example of someone who had God in a box
- e. We experience a crisis of faith
 - 1) This is often preceded by a personal crisis
 - 2) Death, loss of a job, home, or relationship.
 - 3) E.g – Elijah fleeing Jezebel. He experienced fear, flight, depression, and a death wish, self-pity

4. Caged at Stage Four

- a. Always questioning
 - 1) Never believe we have enough answers to proceed
 - 2) Lingering doubts bring us to a standstill
- b. Stuck in self-assessment
 - 1) There must be something wrong with me

- 2) Navel gazing
 - c. We are uncomfortable with the level of intimacy God is bringing us into with himself and others.
 - 1) It is too threatening and risky. We want to keep things at a more surface level.
 - d. Immobilized
 - 1) “People get stuck at this stage because of a lack of or loss of intimacy, with self and others. We feel we are on this journey by ourselves. We can learn from others, even be in groups together, but we cannot connect fully with them for fear of being found out. We cannot reach inward and are unable to reach outward. We are immobilized. Sometimes we are unable to reach inside to do the work of healing necessary to move with God. We may have been so hurt in childhood, by the Church, in a marriage, or by family that we are numb. We cannot feel because feeling would be too painful. Now at stage 4, when asked to journey inward, we may even want to be healed, but we think it cannot happen to us. The risk of looking inside is too great. So we have to sit and stew. We may experience physical ailments that have a metaphoric character. God is calling, and we are facing a choice. It is a critical juncture and we are stuck.” (106)
5. Moving from Stage 4 to 5 (Going through the Wall)
- a. Relinquishing self-centeredness
 - 1) Yielding at a much deeper level
 - 2) A deeper awareness of our sin and weakness
 - a. “We are more aware than ever of our creatureliness and faults *but less vulnerable to being crippled by those faults.*” (107 – emphasis mine)
 - b. We acknowledge our sin and weakness in the presence of his mercy and love. We find not condemnation, but acceptance.
 - b. Moving toward healing and wholeness
 - 1) “Now letting go is a daily, even hourly, event rather than a one-shot deal. Our personal pilgrimage to a love-centered life begins in earnest, but, most likely, it does not come according to our timing.” (108)

- c. Accepting God's purpose for our lives
 - 1) His plans may be other than we anticipated
- d. A willingness to sacrifice at whatever level God requires of us
 - 1) The basis for our willingness is the knowledge of how much we are loved by God
 - 2) In this transition, however, we are being asked to be selfless and to let go of the search for self, except as it is continually revealed to us by God in the stuff of our lives. (108)
 - 3) We must lean into our fears

B. The Wall

1. "The Wall represents our will meeting God's will face to face. We decide anew whether we are willing to surrender and let God direct our lives. Once we enter this part of stage 4, either through crisis, spiritual boredom, or deep longing, we can easily become perplexed. Although we deeply desire to give our will over to God, and even in doing so, in truth, we are trying to deal with the Wall in the same way we have gotten through life- on the strength of our own will or gifts. We try everything we can to scale it, circumvent it, burrow under it, leap over it, or simply ignore it. But the Wall remains." (114)
2. "Our experience of God at the Wall takes on different nuances based on our personal needs for healing and renewal. ***Thus the wall differs for everyone*** (emphasis mine). Fundamentally, it has to do with slowly breaking through the barriers we have built between our will and newer awareness of God in our lives. We have spent our own energy; we have come to the end of our ropes. We are ready to learn about freedom-the liberty of living without grasping. In a more profound sense than ever before, we have to 'let God be God', and let God direct our lives. At the same time that we surrender our wills to be healed spiritually, we simultaneously begin to be healed psychologically. The Wall experience is the place where the two, psychology and spirituality, converge. Up to this point, one can be religious, spiritual, or fruitful and not be healed psychologically, or vice versa. The healing itself is mysterious and profound, for it is the soul that is healed. Experiencing the Wall is both frightening and unpredictable. For some it requires a lengthy time. We have to take the thick Wall apart piece by piece. Others move through it rather quickly. Others will encounter the Wall repeatedly at different levels at different times." (115)

3. “Not everyone goes through the Wall. Some stop or get stuck at earlier stages in the journey and never get to the Wall. Others decide at the Wall to return to an earlier stage. Still others get stuck in front of the Wall, not wanting to submit to God.” (115)
4. Types of resistance at the Wall
 - a. Strong Egos
 - 1) Those seeking to retain control of their lives. Self-sufficiency has been our main strength up to this point.
 - b. Self-deprecators
 - 1) Those who consistently put themselves down and do not accept free, unconditional, and unqualified gift of God’s love. They cannot accept themselves for who they are weaknesses and all.
 - c. Those imprisoned by guilt and shame
 - 1) They refuse to let go of their feelings of guilt and shame and do not allow God to heal the guilt/shame inducing memories that drive their pain. They feel they deserve them.
 - d. Intellectuals
 - 1) They insist on understanding what is going on. Going through the Wall requires an acceptance of and comfort with the mystery of God and his ways.
 - e. High Achievers
 - 1) They think they can work their way through the Wall. Their answer is always to work harder. They view getting through the Wall as a goal. Going through the Wall is something we let happen, not make happen. The lack of control can be maddening.
 - f. These are some, but not all of the ways, people resist at the Wall
5. Going through the wall
 - a. “We must go through it brick by brick, feeling and healing each element of our wills as we surrender to God’s will.” (119)
 - b. Going through the Wall is a process, not an event. It is a process whose main characteristic is the healing of our hearts. It is not about attaining perfection, but rather wholeness. A person who is whole accepts their weaknesses and faults and

allows God's love to overshadow them. The work is done in spite of our weaknesses. It is the work of God, not our work.

- c. God leads us through the Wall
 - d. God gives us others who walk with us as we go through the Wall. That is generally someone who has been through the Wall themselves. They help us keep our view oriented toward God and his work, not toward us and our failings. We must, however, be open to their companionship.
 - e. "The experience of going through the Wall has led to some general lines of agreement about it. Not everyone experiences all of them. Some may have additional experiences. Mystery lies at the core of the Wall, a mystery that ultimately defies explanation but includes discomfort, surrender, healing, awareness, forgiveness, acceptance, love, closeness to God, discernment, melting, molding, and solitude and reflection." (120)
 - f. "We simply cannot go through the Wall while working sixty hours a week, whether at home, or in an office, or on the road. We must set aside time for solitude-time to walk, to listen to God's voice, to think, to feel, and to reflect." (123)
 - 1) You must give attention to the Wall if you are facing it. You will not simply pass through it in the course of your life. It is something to be faced and dealt with. To ignore it is to remain stuck or retreat to a previous stage where things are more emotionally comfortable.
 - g. We learn not to be afraid of being afraid
6. Emerging from the Wall
- a. "The Wall experience is a necessary prerequisite to stage 5, the Journey Outward. Different ways of being will be asked of us at stage 5. We have to be able to distinguish spiritual truths from our own needs. We may be asked to give up important things, ideas, people, work, or parts of self for God's sake. Before the Wall experience, we would have interpreted these things as suffering. At stage 5 these sacrifices are no longer losses because we are aware of and more capable of understanding the non-sacrificial part of our selves...It ceases to be a sacrifice...This paradox is difficult to explain simply because it is indeed a paradox." (128)
 - b. "So the mystery of the Wall remains a mystery. We sit in awe of the process of surrendering and going through the Wall. But, as we emerge, we are able to move

along on our journeys with much less clarity about direction and much more assurance of not having to be in charge of our lives.” (128)

C. Stage 5: The Journey Outward

1. “Our primary motivation in life becomes the desire to love honestly and live according to God’s purposes.” (133)
2. Characteristics
 - a. A renewed sense of God’s acceptance in our lives
 - 1) “At stage 5 we grow into full awareness that God truly loves us even though we are never fully whole.” (134)
 - 2) “Wholeness looks a lot like weakness at this stage. Wholeness does not make us stronger; it allows God to work through our weakness. Wholeness means being very aware of our faults but not letting them trip us.” (135)
 - b. A new sense of the horizontal life
 - 1) “At stage 5 the ponderous work of the most intense healing lies behind us. We continue to be healed and come more alive in various ways throughout life, but the concentrated darkness is over for now. The movement at stage 5 is on the horizontal, the outward, the reaching out to other people from a sense of fullness, of being loved by God, and being asked to love others in return. It is such a natural process that we hardly recognize it happening. Our hearts are different, and our lives evolve from change. As we said before, people at this stage may even be surprised by the talents, skills, or qualities they have been given in order to be horizontal people-qualities they did not know they had. Led to move horizontally, they discover that they are equipped to do so.” (136)
 - c. A sense of calling, vocation, or ministry
 - 1) “The calling comes from God at this stage, not from another person who interprets God for us.” (138)
 - d. A concern for other’s benefit
 - 1) “Our major concern is not ourselves. We are aware of our maintaining a healthy self-image and not excluding self, but the subtle shift in focus is from ourselves to others and then to the world. This focus does not arise out of a

need to take care of others, to change others, to fix others, to live through others, or even to negate ourselves or be martyrs. Rather, it comes out of a fullness of God's love for us and for them." (139)

- 2) "We do not burn out at this stage....We are given insight and grace by God to keep ourselves continually aware of our emotional and physical limits....For instance, without bearing a grudge, we can work with or serve people who in the past have hurt or cheated us." (140)

e. A deep calm or stillness

- 1) "It is a miracle to be able to let ourselves be used fully by God despite our shortcomings. In fact, God even fully uses our shortcomings. All are gifts to us." (140)
- 2) "We can be direct and honest and, at the same time, loving and caring." (141)

3. Caged at Stage 5

- a. "The description of the cage at stage 5 differs considerably from the previous stages. In fact, we do not really become caged or stuck at stages five and six. We have become healed (willing to love all of ourselves, the shadow and the light) and are living in the fullness of God's purpose for our lives. We can certainly regress and become stuck at an earlier stage. But it is virtually impossible to become stuck at stage 5. This does not mean that we do not appear to be stuck to others. We most certainly do. Our behavior can be very frustrating to those at other stages – especially to those at stages 2 and 3. Just being at stage 5 looks very stuck to them." (144)

- 1) We appear seemingly out of touch with practical concerns
 - a. Stage 5 can appear very countercultural to others
 - b. Appear "weak" to many
- 2) Appear careless about "important" things
 - a. Things that are important to people in the earlier stages (creeds, rules, doctrinal controversies, education, raising money, programs, etc...) cease to be important to us.

4. Moving from Stage 5 to 6
 - a. "...the less we know about or care about this transition, the more likely it is to happen." (146)
 - b. There is no striving, just evolving
 - c. "The issue is how and when we can sacrifice our entire lives to God. The opportunity is just out of reach, but it will be there, and it will be compelling. And it seems so right and emerges out of such a healed heart that there is no longer any doubt in our minds. We are beginning to experience what it means to be sons and daughters of God." (146)
 - d. Seeing God in all of life
 - 1) "Any grasping, even spiritual grasping, ceases and the life of love begins to evolve. We provide no direction or control. (146)
 - e. Being God's person
 - 1) "I own my weakness and let them become an occasion for my strengths...I discover that God uses all of me as a whole, healed person to touch other people, even when I am unaware of the connection." (147)
5. Catalysts for moving from stage 5 to 6
 - a. Vocation is satisfying (147)
 - b. Being whole seems enough (147)
 - c. "For many of us the struggle of pain and of the journey through stage 4 and the Wall, along with the subsequent revisiting of the Wall, has been a monumental venture, one that we imagined would take us all of our lives. Now we can see that, by constantly being open to God's healing, we can slowly evolve to more wholeness." (147)
 - d. "Viewed from another perspective, we move from fear to sureness, to confusion, and then to peace." (16)

D. Stage 6: The Life of Love

1. "The Life of Love is easily summarized. At this stage we reflect God to others in the world more clearly and consistently than we ever thought possible. We let our lights shine in such a way that God is given credit and the thanks. Yet the characteristics of Stage 5 are more complete just as stage 3 represents a more confident, fuller version of stage 2." (152)

2. “When we are at stage 6, we have lost ourselves in the equation, and at the same time we have truly found ourselves. We are selfless. This factor allows us to do the most extraordinary things. We may figuratively wash other people’s feet or give away our very lives in the service of God (at times that means we die to self; at times it has meant and can mean that we die literally). We are at peace with ourselves, fully conscious of being the person God has created us to be. Obedience comes very naturally without deliberation because we are so immersed in God’s work, wherever that may be such as in the field, the school, the home, the corporation, the prison, or the neighborhood. We give our all without feeling that it means surrender or sacrifice. We are at one in the Spirit with God, who is our head and heart. *Sometimes people at stage 3 are confused with those at stage 6. Both are eager to expand themselves and be obedient to God. The people at stage 3, however, give to God what they can afford to give of time, talents, possessions, and money. People at stage 6 give more than they can afford; in fact, they give all they have without any sense that giving is in any way a sacrifice.*” (152-153 emphasis mine)
3. “Even though it may be difficult for others to understand us at this stage, people can be uplifted in spirit just by being with us, whether in joys or hardships. We can live openly and vulnerably with others, because we do not need self-protection. Consequently, at this stage we are involved intimately in the lives of others to whom God calls us. In constant dialogue with God, our lives are permeated with unconditional love.” (153)
4. Wisdom gained from life’s struggles
 - a. “When at stage 6 we still experience pain or shock, it tires or angers us, but we can also simultaneously experience God’s grace, humor, and comfort in the midst of it all. We do not fear pain, trauma, disappointments, or even death, because God is there to provide and to lead us on. For us life’s struggles provide a source of wisdom, a source for further learning, and a means to new discovery. We are aware that miracles can occur more frequently through pain than through joy. We experience life itself as both a gift and a miracle.” (154)
5. Compassionate living for others
 - a. “Compassion does not mean to be lacking convictions or the absence of anger. It means that, in the midst of anger, we are still willing to love, help, and be there for others...We do this out of God’s overflowing love in us, rather than as a challenge.” (155)

6. Detaching from things
 - a. “We do not renounce material possessions. We simply learn to need them less; we become detached from things and people as props or bolstering devices.” (155)
7. Life as God chooses it
 - a. “We choose to do anything God asks, whether the most menial or the most prestigious things....Or we can, against our own common sense, become a central figure in a cause or mission.” (156)
 - b. “So who we are does not matter. What matters is who God is and who God makes us.” (157)
8. Caged at Stage 6
 - a. “As with stage 5, we are not really caged at stage 6, but appear so to others. At stage 6 we look totally out of touch with the real world.” (157)
 - 1) e. g. – Jesus, Paul
 - b. Our value system has completely changed. What is so important to so many is not important to us.
 - c. We can appear to others as neglecting ourselves
 - 1) “I have food to eat you don’t know anything about.” John 4:32
 - d. We can appear to be wasting our life

E. Conclusion

1. Summary of the stages
 - a. Stage 1 humbles us
 - b. Stage 2 grounds us
 - c. Stage 3 rewards and exalts us
 - d. Stage 4 unsettles us
 - e. The Wall unmask us
 - f. Stage 5 transforms us
 - g. Stage 6 transcends us
2. “There are four major movements in the overall journey. They are moving from forgiveness to acceptance, from taking in to giving away, from fear to inner peace, and from responsibility to simple response. They generally follow naturally as faith and trust deepen, as we can relinquish that which we cling to and release ourselves into God’s arms.” (254)

3. Don't mistake the model for the process. They are not the same thing.
4. "In the long run it is perhaps the best to know about the stages and then not fret about them. Rather just let God be God in your lives. That is the stuff of the critical journey." (266)