

Stages of Faith Toolkit

Based on *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* by Janet Hagberg and Robert Geulich



Introduction

Over the centuries, many people – from famous contemplatives like Teresa of Avila to psychologists such as M. Scott Peck - have envisioned spiritual change and growth as a journey. Some have pictured this journey in stages. Others have seen this journey as a story. Perhaps the persistence of this metaphor has even become a cliché to some! Nonetheless, the metaphor endures and has been so helpful to us in navigating times of spiritual change that we are keen to share it with others. Rather than providing a perfectly programmed GPS in order to direct every person's spiritual journey, these writers describe what they have seen in their own lives and the lives of others to try and provide a hopeful picture of what might lie ahead.

The Critical Journey is just one of many of these stage theories or journeys. Depending on the context of your group, you may find that some parts of the journeys resonate closely and others fit less well. Hagberg and Geulich themselves acknowledge that the progression and numbering of the stages is a difficulty for which they have no perfect solution. We have found it is not helpful to get too hung up on the numbers or the progression but suggest rather focusing on what God seems to be saying to you about your own journey and growth as you watch these videos.

Dave's story

"What became an abiding love of stage theories of spiritual and emotional development came after, as an atheist, I had an unexpected spiritual experience that profoundly shaped my future. However, it didn't explain why I still didn't connect with some of my religious friends, much less tell me how to actually get whatever *benefits* the experience might offer me. So I got a graduate degree in theology. For a time I led a church near Harvard and became a leader amongst folks asking similar questions. I got book deals and lectured a bit on the college circuit.

I learned that I could explore these questions from a psychological perspective (M. Scott Peck was super helpful) or from a modern spiritual perspective (three cheers for *The Critical Journey*!) or from an ancient spiritual perspective (whoop whoop for *The Interior Castle* or the desert tradition's three stages!) or from a social and philosophical point of view (props to *Integral Theory*!) or by learning from great myths (let's hear it for *The Hero's Journey*!). And there were more still.

What each of these helped map out for me in their differing ways was that our lives seem to work best when seen as a surprising journey with unexpected setbacks (that maybe aren't actual setbacks) and opportunities we can't see coming (but which might change everything). Not all of our friends or family members will take this journey with us, but these views of the world offer us compassionate ways of understanding their stories as well. And for those of us who crave encouragement that there's an ongoing path to spiritual and emotional growth that might extend throughout our whole lives, these journeys offer very good news indeed."

The Critical Journey, Part 1

- **Before the video:** You might want to introduce the video by talking about what you find to be your own point of connection to the journey metaphor. Or perhaps you want to give some of the background to these videos provided in the introduction.
- Watch the [video](#) together
- **After the video:** Some questions you might want to discuss together...
 - Do the first three stages discussed here connect to any parts of your own story? If so, how? If not, can you tell us a bit about your journey?
 - Does one of these stages feel like a happy “home base” for you right now? What is it about this stage that resonates with you?
 - Have you ever felt like your journey isn’t the same as that of some of your family members or friends? What’s that been like for you?
 - The video ends with the suggestion that a “dark night of the soul” is a part of many spiritual journeys and might not be the worst thing. What do you think about that?
- Pray together

The Critical Journey, Part 2

- **Before the video:** Ask your group what has stuck with them from the last video. What are they eager to explore further? What do they feel hesitant about?
- Watch the [video](#) together
- **Reflection:** [Visuals](#) from the videos of the different stages are available for reflection
- **After the video:** Some questions you might want to discuss together...
 - *The Journey Inward*, is described as being a lonely one, with few guides, where we might feel we encounter a “wall”. Can you think of any “walls” you’ve faced in the past (or right now)?
 - They suggest that, in that fourth stage, we realize we’re no longer looking for “an answer.” Do you relate to that or do you feel a longing for a clearer sense of direction?
 - Do one of *these* stages feel like a home base to you?
 - Have you tried to figure out your calling--or your life purpose--over the years? Is that process still the same for you as it’s always been?
 - Are you motivated by the hope of their stage six--The Life of Love? Or does it seem too distant to be helpful?
- Pray together

The Critical Journey, Part 3 (Optional)

- **Before the group:** During the week, each person in the group takes some time to reflect on their own spiritual journeys by writing down or drawing some turning points, challenges or moments of change that spring to mind. There are a number of [journey templates](#) available for this exercise.
- **During the group:** Members of the group take turns sharing some of their journey with the rest of the group (or in smaller breakout groups) using what they have drawn or written during the week.
- **Pray together**

Feedback: As this is a “beta” version of this toolkit, it would really help us to hear your feedback. We’d love it if you had a moment to fill in this [2 minute survey](#).

Further connection: If you'd enjoy more resources along these lines, check out www.journey-on.net or [The Pocket Contemplative](#) podcast



This toolkit was created by a team of journey enthusiasts, podcasters and writers from Journey On. Dave Schmelzer, based in Los Angeles, is the voice of most of the videos and the key contributor, having researched, written and podcasted on many of these journeys in the context of his own faith journey. Kirsty Paxton, an instructional designer, based in Cape Town, South Africa, produced the videos and co-authored the group facilitator’s guides. Steven Yeh provided valuable insights into the visualization of the journey metaphor and our transition from podcasting to a larger digital presence. Grace Schmelzer, a partner thinker to Dave in his investigation of these journey metaphors over the years, provided perspectives from spiritual direction and her own studies of the Christian contemplatives.

