

Session 4: Journey Through the Wall

Introduction

Be open to yourself, to God, and to the people in your group. It is ok if you feel a little bit uncomfortable. Just know you are invited to be as vulnerable as you would like to be.

As a group let's remind ourselves of these guidelines:

1. Speak only for yourself, use "I" statements
2. Keep your sharing to 2-3 minutes, give room for others to share
3. No fixing, saving, or setting other people straight
4. Trust and learn from silence, there is no pressure to share
5. Observe confidentiality

Emotionally healthy spirituality requires that you go through the pain of the Wall, or as the ancients called it, "the dark night of the soul." Just as a physical wall stops us from moving ahead, God sometimes stops us in our spiritual journey through a spiritual Wall in order to radically transform our character. Often, we are brought to the Wall by circumstances and crises beyond our control.

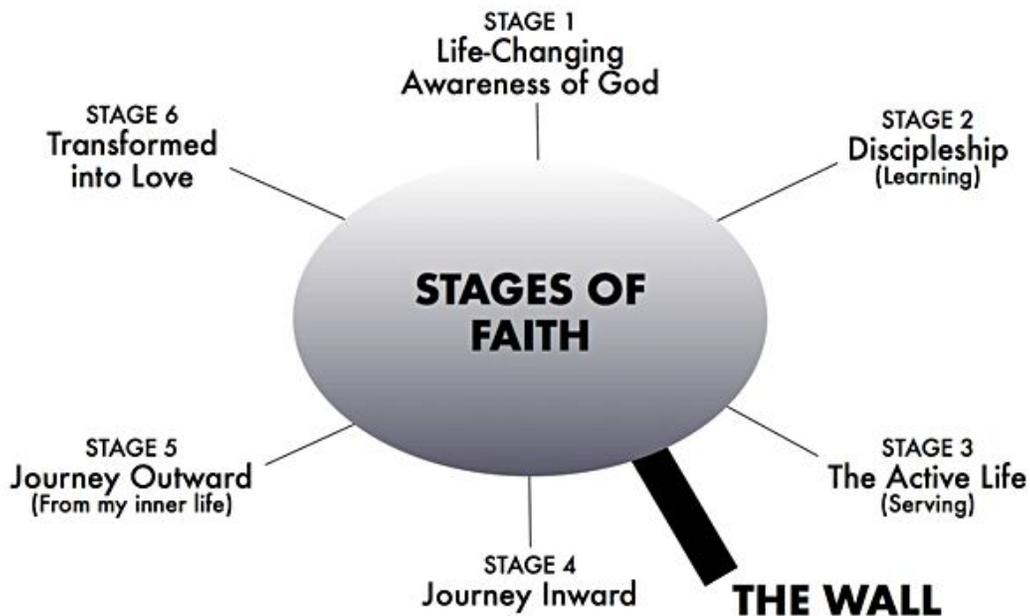
Regardless of how we get there, every follower of Jesus at some point will confront the Wall. Failure to understand and surrender to God's working in us at the Wall often results in great long-term pain, ongoing immaturity, and confusion. Receiving the gift of God in the Wall, however, transforms our lives forever.

For starters

What is the Wall? It is a crisis of faith. It is a scary moment of real doubt and uncertainty.

According to Pete Scazzero, "the Wall appears through a crisis that turns our world upside down. It comes, perhaps, through a divorce, a job loss, the death of a close friend or family member, a cancer diagnosis, a disillusioning church experience....We question ourselves, God, and the church. We discover for the first time that our faith does not appear to 'work.' We have more questions than answers as the very foundation of our faith feels like it is on the line. We don't know where God is, what he is doing, where he is going, how he is getting us there, or when this will be over.... It (the Wall) is not simply a one-time event that we pass through and get beyond. It appears to be something we return to as part of our ongoing relationship with God." *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 101-102

Consider the following diagram.



- 1) According to Pete, 85% of Evangelicals who encounter the Wall do not get through it. If you have been through a Wall, briefly share one way it impacted you and your view of God.

Scripture: Genesis 22:1-14

Abraham, in his earthly journey with God, appeared to go through a number of Walls. His greatest one, however, came when God asked him to do the unthinkable, to kill his only son Isaac. As you listen to this story, don't overthink the implications of this passage. Simply allow the story to be the story.

1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." 13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

1. How would you hear the words in verse 2: "Take your son, your only son, whom you love...sacrifice him"?

2. What aspects of "the Wall" might have been tormenting Abraham's soul as he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar? (For example: *weariness, sense of failure, defeat, emptiness, unbelief, guilt, confusion, disillusionment.*)

3. In light of this story, how is your image (or idea) of God challenged?

4. What are some possible reasons you have a hard time accepting and moving through the Wall?

Take 5 minutes to complete question 5 on your own.

5. When God takes us through a Wall, we are changed. The following are four primary characteristics of life found on the other side of the Wall.
 - a. A greater level of brokenness
 - b. A greater appreciation for holy unknowing (mystery)
 - c. A deeper ability to wait on God
 - d. A greater detachment from the world

Choose one of these characteristics where you sense God is seeking to work in you now. Jot down some thoughts and feelings regarding how God is birthing something new in you and/or helping you shed incomplete or immature ideas about him. Be prepared to share this with the group.