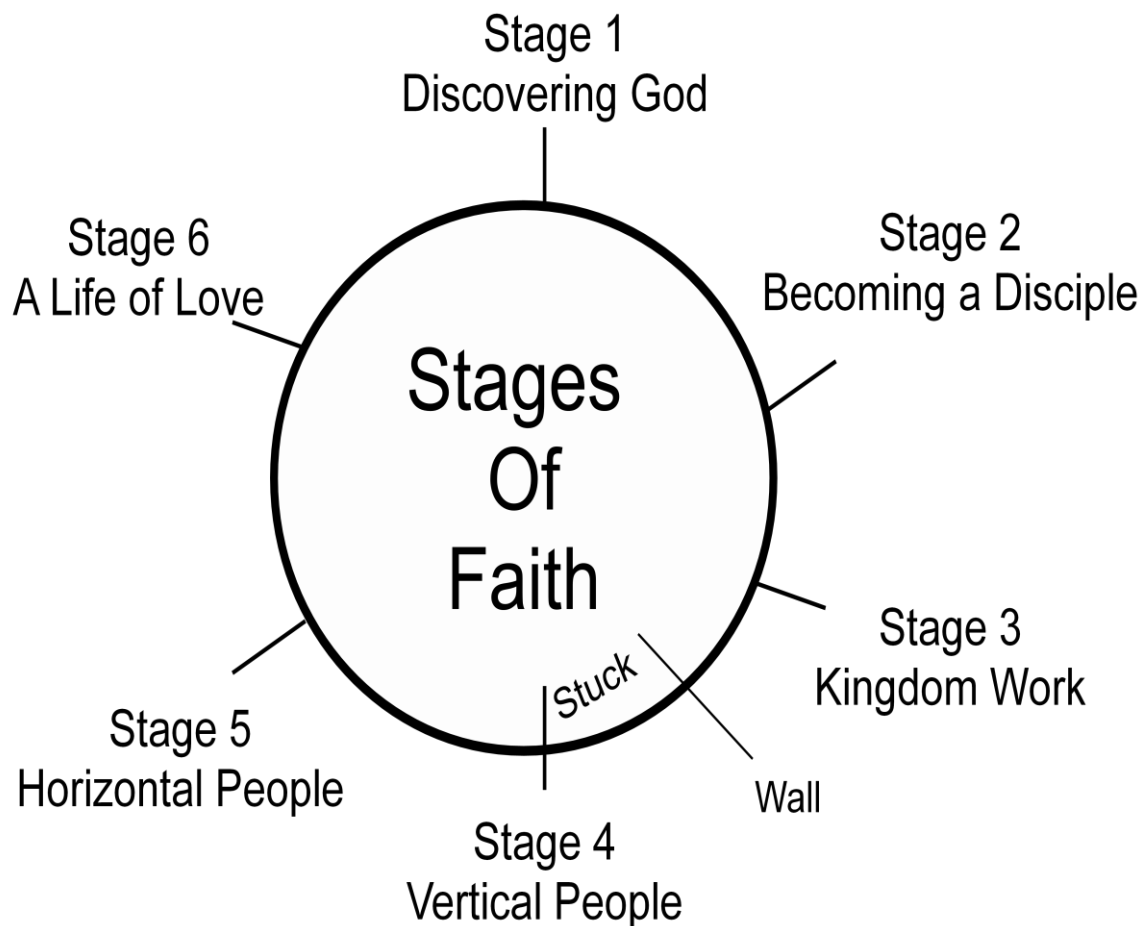


# “A Critical Journey”-Study Guide

## Stages on the Journey of Faith



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The information contained in this Study Guide has been adapted from The Critical Journey; Stages in the Life of Faith, Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, and is used with the publishers permission.

## **“Discovering God”—Stage 1 in the Critical Journey**

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The stages of the Critical Journey are progressive. There is a pattern to them but they are unique to everyone. When you get stuck at a particular stage you may resist spiritual growth and maturity.

### **What you will experience in Stage 1: “Discovering God”**

1. A sense of awe
2. A sense of need
3. A natural awareness
4. A greater meaning in life
5. A sense of innocence

Your faith becomes a miracle. You are aware of God and you are aware of yourself and your condition. You move from dark into light. Healthy spirituality brings repentance and salvation!

### **What you will experience if you are stuck in stage 1:**

1. Feelings of worthlessness (not connected in community)
2. Feelings of emptiness (addiction)
3. Ignorance (you think this is it... Discovering God is the only stage)
4. Sense of always being punished for sin. (you go back to it)

### **Steps to take that will help you move from stage 1 to stage 2:**

1. Become a part of a community
2. Find significance
3. Find mentor(s) to follow
4. Discover God’s ways

### **Signs that you are moving from stage 1 to stage 2:**

1. You reduce your isolation
2. You accept your self-worth

### **Questions to journal:**

1. How and when did you first recognize God in your life?
2. How and when have you recognized Him since that first time?

### **Verses to meditate on:**

Psalm 23

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## **“Becoming A Disciple”—Stage 2 in the Critical Journey**

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**Life is a series of stages and decisions that shape us. Becoming a disciple takes action. How will you know you’re becoming a disciple?**

### **What you will experience in Stage 2:**

1. You find answers and examples through leaders, a cause, or belief system
2. You experience a sense of rightness
3. You find meaning from belonging
4. You feel secure in your faith

### **What you will experience if you are stuck in stage 2:**

1. You are rigid in righteousness (you close the door to others that aren’t where you’re at)
2. You form a “we against them” attitude
3. Become a Switcher (you join, belong, criticize, lack security, feel betrayed, leave, move around and stunt spiritual growth)
4. Become a Searcher (avoid memories, church or real help—you’re on a journey but can’t admit fault or weakness—you’re strong and right)

### **Steps to take that will help you move from stage 2 to stage 3:**

1. Start taking risks
2. Accept and serve others with your gifts

### **Signs that you are moving from stage 2 to stage 3:**

1. Recognize your uniqueness
2. Identify your gifts (Eph. 1:11)
3. See yourself as a contributor
4. Become a contributor and seek responsibility

### **Questions to journal:**

When have you felt a part of a faith or spiritual community?

### **Verses to meditate on:**

John 1:12-13 and Mark 2:13-17

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## **“Kingdom Work”—Stage 3 in the Critical Journey**

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### **What you will experience in Stage 3:**

1. Uniqueness in the community
2. Responsibility
3. Value of symbols (spiritual fruit, spiritual gifts, titles)
4. Reaching your spiritual goals

### **What you will experience if you are stuck in stage 3:**

1. Overly-Zealous
2. Self-Centered
3. Performance-Oriented
4. You get weary in well doing (you become a *human-doing* more than a *human-being*)

### **Steps to take that will help you move from stage 3 to stage 4:**

1. Let go of success and accept your vulnerability
2. Consider your reputation-what kinds of words describe you? One action in your life can leave a legacy. What words will describe you as you walk through life on your critical journey?
3. Embrace discomfort

### **TO MOVE FORWARD YOU WILL USUALLY FACE A CRISIS, A DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL OR WHAT IS ALSO KNOWN AS “THE WALL”**

### **Signs that you are moving from stage 3 to stage 4:**

1. You have lost your sense of certainty (motion without direction)
2. You experience a faith or personal crisis
3. Feelings of being abandoned (God and people seem distant)
4. You are looking for direction and searching for answers

### **Questions to journal:**

1. Do you know what your gifts and talents are? Please list them!
2. Which of your talents or gifts do you feel good about and are willing to share?
3. If you’ve never shared your gifts or talents, please write the reasons why.

### **Verses to meditate on:**

1 Cor. 12:12-31, James 2: 14-26

Listen to this message online at [www.lakesareavineyard.com/sermons](http://www.lakesareavineyard.com/sermons) -- Message dated 12.5.10

## **“The Wall-A Time of Crisis and Choice”**

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**The wall is where the mystery of our will meets God’s will...face to face! The wall is unique for everyone. This is where God deals with stuff. Here you must face deep seated inner postures, false identities and learn to embrace your pain and fears. This is where we listen to what God has to say.**

**What is the purpose of the wall? You will be transformed and make life adjustments as a result.**

**Hebrews 5 says that Christ learned obedience through his suffering. We want to avoid all suffering.**

### **1 Peter 4:1-19 (NLT) 1 Peter 4:1-19**

So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you are willing to suffer for Christ, you have decided to stop sinning. [2] And you won't spend the rest of your life chasing after evil desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God. [3] You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy—their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols.

[4] Of course, your former friends are very surprised when you no longer join them in the wicked things they do, and they say evil things about you. [5] But just remember that they will have to face God, who will judge everyone, both the living and the dead. [6] That is why the Good News was preached even to those who have died—so that although their bodies were punished with death, they could still live in the spirit as God does.

[7] The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. [8] Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. [9] Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.

[10] God has given gifts to each of you from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you. [11] Are you called to be a speaker? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then God will be given glory in everything through Jesus Christ. All glory and power belong to him forever and ever. Amen.

[12] Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. [13] Instead, be very glad—because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world.

[14] Be happy if you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God will come upon you. [15] If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. [16] But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his wonderful name! [17] For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin first among God's own children. And if even we Christians must be judged, what terrible fate awaits those who have never believed God's Good News? [18] And "If the righteous are barely saved, what chance will the godless and sinners have?" [19] So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you.

**What you will experience going through the wall:**

1. Discomfort (life is unraveling)
2. Surrender (you come to an end of yourself)
3. Healing
4. Awareness (your abilities and limitations)
5. Forgiveness (yourself and others)
6. Acceptance
7. Love
8. Closeness to God
9. Discernment
10. Melting and Molding
11. Solitude and Reflection

**What kind of person avoids or resists the wall?**

1. Strong egos
2. Self-deprecators
3. Guilt and shame ridden (they struggle with intimacy with God)
4. Intellectuals (secular and religious)
5. High achievers (always on the move)

**Questions:**

1. Which is your best way to avoid the wall?
2. How have you experienced the wall?
3. How would your life be different if you could be healed from your deepest pains?

Extras: "Where do you go, my lovely" by La Bouche; "Remember When" by Alan Jackson

Listen to this message online at [lakesareavineyard.com](http://lakesareavineyard.com). Message dated 12.12.10

For more information read [Emotionally Healthy Spirituality](#), Chapter 6, "Journey Through The Wall", Pete Scazzaro.

## **“Joseph’s Wall” His Time of Crisis and Choice**

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### **How to Move through your wall...**

1. Face the facts and reality of the wall.
2. Make some wise decisions.
3. Embrace God’s plans.

### **Questions to journal:**

1. Describe 3 facts about your wall.
2. What’s one good decision you made?
3. In what way do you need to embrace God’s will over yours?

### **Verses to meditate on:**

Matthew 1:18-19, 20-21, and 22-24

### **Something to consider:**

Most people do not move from stage 4 to stage 5 without having a wall experience.

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### **You may have some questions about your journey through The Wall.**

How long is the wall experience?

Why can this experience also be called the “dark night of the soul”?

Do you need professional help or is this all spiritual?

How can you take a holistic approach to this?

Does your age matter?

What physical symptoms could you experience?

**FIND ANSWERS IN APPENDIX 5**

## **“Vertical People”—Stage 4 in the Critical Journey**

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### **What you will experience in Stage 4:**

1. Loss of certainties in life and faith
2. A search for direction, not answers
3. Pursuit of personal integrity in relation to God
4. God is released from your box
5. Apparent loss of faith

### **What you will experience if you are stuck in stage 4:**

1. Always questioning
2. Consumed by self-assessment
3. Immobilized

### **Steps that you can take to move from stage 4 to stage 5:**

1. Find peace
2. Give up searching for self
3. Allow for new certainty in God
4. Open yourself to the cost of obedience

### **Signs that you are moving from stage 4 to stage 5:**

1. You let go of your spiritual ego (Self-Centeredness)
2. Accepting God’s purpose for your life
3. Seeking wholeness through personal healing and pilgrimage
4. Willing to commit to whatever it takes

### **Questions to journal:**

1. What is your image of God?
2. Has your faith fallen apart? When? How?

### **Verses to meditate on:**

1 Kings 18:30 – 19:3

Listen to this message online at [www.lakesareavineyard.com/sermons](http://www.lakesareavineyard.com/sermons) -- Message dated 1.16.11

Also listen to the Message “Being Stuck” dated 1.23.11. The video clip shown is found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRBchZLkQR0&playnext=1&list=PLAC4C737E8C69DB70>. You can also type in “Guy and Gal Stuck on Escalator”

## **“Horizontal People”—Stage 5 in the Critical Journey**

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**Exercise:** Use Appendix #3 “Resource & Relationship Wheel” and Appendix #4 “Moving Forward”

### **What you will experience in Stage 5:**

1. A renewed sense of God’s acceptance
2. A new sense of the horizontal life
3. A sense of calling in vocation or ministry
4. Concern for others
5. A deep calm or stillness

### **You can’t get stuck at stage 5, but you may seem...**

1. Out of touch with practical concerns
2. Careless about “important” things

### **Steps that you can take to move from stage 5 to stage 6:**

1. Find a vocation that is satisfying
2. Become whole and discover that’s enough

### **Signs that you are moving from stage 5 to stage 6:**

1. No striving
2. Seeing God in all of life
3. Fully God’s person

### **Questions to journal:**

1. Do you have a glimpse of God’s purpose for your life?

### **Verses to meditate on:**

Genesis 45:3-5 and 12-15

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## **“A Life of Love”—Stage 6 in the Critical Journey**

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### **What you will experience in Stage 6:**

1. Living like Jesus
2. Wisdom gained from life’s struggles
3. Compassion for others
4. Detachment from things and stress
5. Life underneath or on top
6. Life abandoned

### **You can’t get stuck at stage 6, but you may seem...**

1. Separated from the world
2. Neglectful of self
3. Like you’re apparently wasting your life

### **Questions to journal:**

1. How is God everything to you?
2. How do you feel called to sacrifice yourself for others with no attachments?
3. How are you detached from self and the world and attached to God?

### **Verses to meditate on:**

John 13:4-10

### **Exercise:**

Read the life of Christ in one of the Gospels and ask God to lead you into that kind of surrender.

Listen to this message online at [www.lakesareavineyard.com/sermons](http://www.lakesareavineyard.com/sermons) -- Message dated 2.06.11.

## “Living in the Outer Limits”

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### The importance of Sabbath...no matter what Stage you are in on The Critical Journey

*“If you can dream it, you can do it. Now there’s no limit to your ability.” Prudential*

*“Your world should know no boundaries.” Merrill Lynch*

*“Life, liberty and the pursuit of just about anything you please. Volvo...a car that can not only save your life but help save your soul.” Volvo*

SABBATH = Rest, renew, recreate, pause, pray and play.

What does God say about the principle of keeping a Sabbath?

- An enforced rest-we need to sleep every night
- Rest after work-God did this
- Law of the Sabbath-One of the Ten Commandments
- Rest of faith-*“In quiet and confidence is your strength”*
- Neglect of the Sabbath-consequences
- Observers of the Sabbath-rest of the soul, rest without
- Sabbath was made for man-Jesus said it is for you-God knows you need it

If you are living in the outer limits it will harm you. At some point your life will unravel.

### Questions to journal:

1. Are you pausing to rest, renew, play, and pray for a 24 hour Sabbath each week?
2. What does your Sabbath look like now?
3. What would you like your Sabbath to look like?
4. What will you do to change

### Verses to meditate on:

Psalm 119:105, Psalm 46:10, Exodus 20:8-11 (See how the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment is described in detail)

Listen to this message online at [www.lakesareavineyard.com/sermons](http://www.lakesareavineyard.com/sermons) -- Message dated 2.13.11

For more information read Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, Chapter 8, “Discover the Rhythms of the Daily Office and Sabbath”, Pete Scazzaro.

## APPENDIX 1

### How Do You Write Your Story?

#### Do it With...

**Goodness...** is revealing your growth in morality and generosity.

**Righteousness...** is giving all; including God what they are due.

**And truth...** is being genuine and honest as you write your story.

Write your story with love... and as you listen... listen in love. (When you listen to another person's story show your love by being **confidential, caring, and non-judgmental** and remember to pray for the individual who shared their story.)

Try to keep it around **20 to 30** minutes in length. As you tell your story, talk about the **significant events** and **clear memories** you have... both the **positive** and the **negative**. Start at the **beginning** of your life with a little **background** information such as the type of family you were born into and the circumstances surrounding your arrival.

For **older** people, piece it out in segments... Like age 0 to 20, 20 to 40 etc. Or you can piece it out in phases in life. Like growing up at home, young adult years, married life, etc. If you're **younger...** your story is important even though you may feel that you don't have a lot to share... what you do have to share is important. Everyone has a valuable story.

#### TO WHOM DO YOU TELL YOUR STORY?

Your spouse, your family, a friend, your small group, someone you trust.

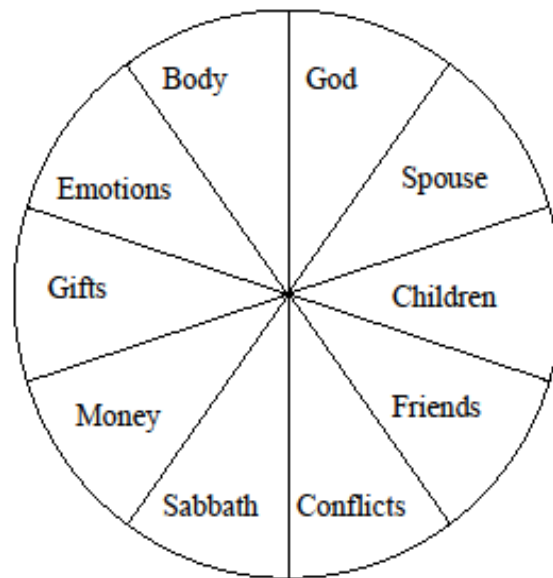
#### WHY TELL YOUR STORY?

- It deepens relationships
- Builds bridges of understanding
- Creates community
- Identifies areas of brokenness
- Releases people from guilt and shame
- Identifies what gives you life and joy
- It's the beginning point to your critical journey

## Resource & Relationship Wheel--A Helpful Tool for the Critical Journey

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Ten Inter-Related Areas that require our attention: Place a mark in each section that would currently measure how full or empty each one is.



### A. Resources

- a. Our Bodies- Good diet, exercise, & sleep patterns?
- b. Our Emotions- How are you processing your transitions, losses, stress and motivation?
- c. Our Gifts, Strengths, & Passions-Are you serving from your "Sweet Spot"
- d. Our Money- Is it helping sustain your balance?
- e. Our Sabbath- Do you have a time for rest, renewal and recreation?

### B. Relationships

- a. With our spouse- How much do you like your spouse?
- b. With our children- How severe are their growth pains for you?
- c. With friends- Do you have sufficient amount of two-way relationships?
- d. Conflict with others-How are you handling them?
- e. With God-How is the conversation?

### Questions to journal:

Measure each section of the wheel...

1. How full is each section?
2. Which sections drain you?
3. Which sections sustain you?

APPENDIX 3

## Moving Forward Using the Relationship & Resource Wheel

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Choose 3 of the MOST vital areas from the Resource and Relationship Wheel that you feel God wants you to focus on now. Prioritize them according to importance:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Given these three areas, establish ONE goal that capitalizes on your “full” resources and relationships and will help to replenish one of the more “depleted” resources or relationships. This goal is a particular practice or discipline that God can use to replenish you for the journey ahead. A S.M.A.R.T. goal is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-specific. So, what one regular practice could make the biggest difference in your life within the next three months? What one discipline if regularly practiced over the next three months would help refill your most depleted resources and relationships?

**Example of a S.M.A.R.T. Goal:** *I will take every Monday for my 24 hr. Sabbath practice May-July. (Janice)*

List steps, people and timelines that will help you accomplish your goal:

1. *Talk with Bryan and Mike about my work schedule change*
2. *I will clear my calendar so Mondays are free*
3. *I will block out 4 hours on Sunday for pre-Sabbath prep*
4. *I will discuss w/ Bryan & decide on how we will begin & end the Sabbath time*
5. *I will write a list of potential fun activities we can do on our Sabbath*

Write out your Goal and Action Steps for the next three months. After you have written it out, share it with someone (not your spouse) who can ask you the following questions: (1) How will doing this practice for the next three months help replenish one or more of your depleted resources or relationships? (2) Is the goal specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-specific? (3) Are there any other steps that will ensure that you accomplish this goal?

Your S.M.A.R.T. Goal:

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List steps, people and timelines that will help you accomplish your goal:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 4

### **“The Examen – A daily exam of consolations and desolations”**

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*“That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him.” Rom. 8:28-28*

#### **What are Characteristics of Consolations?**

- Encouraging, strengthening
- Delightful, deep joy
- Satisfying
- Sense of freedom, gratitude
- Energy, vitality
- Life giving and affirming

#### **What are Characteristics of Desolations?**

- Discouragement
- Sadness, anxiety
- Feeling of being trapped, imprisoned
- Sense of being overburdened
- Life- draining

#### **What are the 3 Steps of Doing “The Examen”?**

1. Locate and Identify the Consolation or Desolation
2. Re-visit the emotion of the Consolation or Desolation
3. Ask Questions and listen to God

#### **What are Benefits of doing “The Examen”?**

- Better life decisions
- Constant thanksgiving and gratitude
- Honest feelings and truthful living
- Play and rest that restores the soul
- Healthy relationships
- Insight and strength in crisis

**Questions to journal for The Examen:** Do this for 30 days to see patterns in your life.

1. What was the moment yesterday for which you were most grateful? (you felt energized, strengthened and alive)
2. What was the moment yesterday for which you were least grateful? (you felt sad, angry, discouraged, drained)

**Further Resources:** [Prayer As A Place](#), Chapter 8, Charles Bello, [Sleeping With Bread](#) (Holding What Gives You Life), Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn.

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## APPENDIX 5

### Answers to the questions you may have about the wall experience.

1. How long is the wall experience?

However long it takes for God to accomplish His purposes in your heart. What He's looking for is a surrendering of your will to His will. It's much deeper than just saying "I surrender" The outcome God's looking for is a willingness to undergo a permanent life change.

2. Why can this experience also be called "The dark night of the soul?"

Because most of us have to go thru a great amount of pain and suffering before we're ready to actually surrender to God and make a life change. Our lifestyle, physical and emotional conditions can also compound the intensity of the wall experience. We can come to a point where we're at the end of our ability to cope and loose hope.

3. Do you need professional help or is this all spiritual?

We are one person but have three parts. Our body, soul and spirit are intricately connected to each other. One can affect the other two, but not always. With that said, an individual may need professional help or not. Again, different factors can affect this, for instance, age, stress levels, physical health, emotional health, trauma, abuse, exercise, addictions, etc. The individual should talk this thru with someone they trust and are comfortable sharing with.

4. How can you take a holistic approach to this?

Include your most trusted family member, your Doctor (preferably an internist or specialist) your Pastor or spiritual mentor and a Christian psychologist.

5. Does your age matter?

Yes, it can and no, not necessarily. But it would be wise to take it into consideration as you process what to do.

6. What physical and emotional symptoms could you experience?

Increasing isolation, feelings of information overload, recurring mild to severe headaches, light headedness, upset stomach, roaming body aches, appetite change, meal patterns change, sleep patterns change, insomnia, short energy bursts followed by a crash and need to sleep, lack of motivation, feeling trapped in life, a strong desire to run away (flight) or becoming angry (fight), uncontrollable emotions (crying), feeling depressed, having no sense of hope, feeling like nobody cares, extreme regret about your life, lack of spiritual passion and others. Most likely a person will experience more than one of these symptoms to a varying degree of intensity while at the wall although each person's experience is unique to their own situation.