

THE LIFE CHALLENGE

CONNECT

What are things in the future that inform or shape how you live? An event or a goal? Is it a season about family (kids or grandchildren), retirement, travel, etc? What about eternity? Does it shape your thinking?

IDENTITY

Read Col 3:4 and Revelation 21:1-7 How has this shaped you in your life? Do you want it to shape you more or does it bring any anxiety for you? What do you notice about these passages?

THE EXAMEN

The journey Garth talked about doing life with grace and humility (see Rom 12:14-16). Do you put pressure on yourself or others to be at a certain point in your Christian faith? As we learn to have our hearts and minds (Col 3: 1-3) set on things of Christ, where are you at in this walk? If it's helpful, read over the "*Stages of the Journey*" document to help identify your journey.

PRACTICE

Do you feel hidden or known by Christ? What is a conversation you want to have with Jesus about your security in him? Sometimes it's helpful to have a time of silence when you picture yourself having an actual conversation with Jesus. Picture yourself meeting with Jesus in your favorite setting and just talk to him about your joy and struggles of being hidden in him.

PRAY TOGETHER

If you did the prayer exercise above share what he said to you (if you wish). Pray for others in your group or other people (be specific) to encounter more of Jesus.

Stages of the Journey

*adapted from *The Critical Journey* by Janet Hagberg & Robert Guelich

STAGES OF FAITH	CHARACTERISTICS	HOW WE GET CAGED	HOW WE MOVE TO THE NEXT STAGE
STAGE ONE: recognition of God “we believe”	a sense of awe & need for a savior and greater meaning in life. a sense of innocence & openness	if we stick to a sense of worthlessness or ignorance and don't believe we are really worth “more”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • become part of a strong group • take on more significance • follow a charismatic leader that provides some direction
STAGE TWO: life of discipleship “we are learning about God”	meaning comes from belonging. answers found in a leader, cause or belief system. sense of rightness & security in our faith	if we become rigid in righteousness and following the rules, develop a “we against them” attitude, keep switching churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize our uniqueness • identify giftedness • recognize what we can contribute to our group, church, system, etc.
STAGE THREE: the productive life “we are about doing things FOR God”	uniqueness in community, sense of belonging to a church and being part of the Body, greater responsibility in some areas of our lives (work, home, church)	if we become overly zealous in “our way” or become weary in well-doing. if we are self-centered or view our lives as performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lose sense of certainty (things we thought worked don't anymore) • experience faith or personal crisis • feel abandoned by God, others • looking for direction & seek guides
THE WALL “things just aren't working anymore...there's got to be more”		RESISTANCE AT THE WALL: strong egos, self-deprecators, guilt/shame-ridden, intellectuals, high achievers, doctrine-focused, people-pleasers	GOING THROUGH THE WALL INVOLVES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discomfort, surrender, healing, awareness, forgiveness, risk, acceptance, love, closeness to God, discernment, melting, molding, solitude & reflection
STAGE FOUR: the journey inward “we need to figure out a new way to do this relationship with God & others”	life or faith crisis, loss of certainties. the things that worked aren't working anymore. search for direction, not answers. pursuit of personal integrity in relationship to God, being “doing” to “being”, God is released from the box, sometimes looks & feels like losing faith	if we always question everything and are consumed by self-assessment, become immobilized, don't keep moving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • let go of self-centeredness • accept God's purposes for our lives • seek wholeness through personal healing & pilgrimage • be willing to commit to whatever it takes
STAGE FIVE: the journey outward “learning to live out of a totally different place”	surrendered to God, a renewed sense of God's acceptance, a sense of deepening relationships, sense of calling, vocation or ministry. concern and focus on others' best interests. a deep calm or stillness	not really caged at this stage but others can view you as: seemingly out of touch with practical concerns, careless about “important” things, and not diligent in certain areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not striving, just evolving • growing deeper • seeing God in all of life • being God's person • letting go
STAGE SIX: the life of love “it's all about God”	living in obedience to God, wisdom gained from life's struggles, compassionate living for others, detachment from things and stress, life abandoned	not really caged at this stage but others can view you as: separate from the world, that you neglect yourself and that maybe you're “wasting your life”	