

# JOURNEY *of the* SOUL

**A Practical Guide to  
Emotional and Spiritual Growth**



**BILL AND KRISTI GAULTIERE**

  
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For everyone who has participated  
in our Soul Shepherding Institute.

Thank you for sharing  
the journey of your soul with us.

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After Kristi and I started Soul Shepherding as a nonprofit ministry in 2009, our board kept affirming that God was having the greatest impact when people experienced not just one of us but *our relationship*. That’s why Kristi joined me in writing this book. Thank you, John, Margaret, Betty, Ed, Jim, Joe, Steve, Joan, and Lance.

The content in this book was honed through many years of counseling ministry and by teaching it to pastors, church leaders, and others in our Soul Shepherding Institute and spiritual direction certificate training. Thank you to all the women and men who have shared their stories, hearts, and questions with us.

As you can see from the endnotes, numerous books have influenced us. There are four we'd like to make special mention of: *The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Ávila, *Stages of Faith* by James Fowler, *Mansions of the Heart* by our friend Tom Ashbrook, and *The Critical Journey* by Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich. Thank you to these great writers.

When we started writing this manuscript, we kept hitting The Wall. Publishers said no, agents said no, manuscripts got thrown out, and we got more and more discouraged. Then we talked with our longtime mentors and friends, Dave and Jan Stoop (doctors of psychology like us), who encouraged us and connected us with our editor and publisher. Thank you, Dave and Jan.

A crucial part of the story was putting together our Soul Shepherding staff. After nearly ten years of trying *not* to grow an organization, we finally accepted it was God's call for us to lead a larger operation and minister on a larger stage. Our team helped us to manage and grow our ministry while writing this book. Thank you, Rob, Gina, Sue, Colleen, Shane, Miriam, Briana, and Historic Agency. Special thanks to Briana Gaultiere for creating the diagrams and illustrations in this book.

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## **CHRIST Stages**

- **Confidence in Christ (the C Stage)**  
Following Jesus Christ begins with receiving his forgiveness and new life.
- **Help in Discipleship (the H Stage)**  
We grow in community with Christ-followers and by practicing spiritual disciplines.
- **Responsibilities in Ministry (the R Stage)**  
We grow when we use our gifts to serve God and bless people.
- **The Wall (Transition)**  
Spiritual dryness or getting stuck is a hidden opportunity for deeper growth and joy.
- **Inner Journey (the I Stage)**  
We experience spiritual renewal through empathy, emotional growth, and longing for God.
- **Spirit-Led Ministry (the S Stage)**  
Our greatest joy and impact is to act with the presence and power of the Spirit to serve others.
- **Transforming Union (the T Stage)**  
Our journey of the soul culminates with being united in the generous love of Jesus Christ.

# Introduction

A few years ago, I (Bill) hiked the Tunnel Trail in Santa Barbara, California, with my son David. It's a super-steep and strenuous trail up and down a quick succession of three 4,000-foot mountain peaks. At times the trail disappeared. In fact, we were warned that people had gotten lost there—even *the search and rescue team*. But those challenges made it a more exciting adventure!

We had been enjoying the hike, the sights, and our conversation when suddenly David stopped in his tracks. I bumped into him as he yelled, "Rattlesnake!" Right beside the trail ahead and hiding under a bush was a big rattler. It rattled its tail loudly, and its head was poised to strike. We bushwhacked on the other side of the trail to get around it.

Later we were hiking along and again David stopped. "This isn't the right trail," he announced. "We need to go back. You sure have to keep your wits about you on this trail." I replied, "Actually, I need to have *your* wits about me!" (He's an Eagle Scout.) The path of life is like that—we need a guide to know where we're going and to stay encouraged.

We all want to thrive in our life with Jesus, the Good Shepherd, but sometimes we can miss his path or get stuck in a dark valley.

God seems far away, Bible reading feels dry, prayer feels like going through lists, church becomes boring, or the activities that used to nourish us have stopped working. To make matters worse, typical approaches to spiritual growth that focus only on beliefs and behavior don't lead to lasting change. You're more than a "brain on a stick"<sup>1</sup> or a human-doing—you're a *soul on a journey with Jesus*. Your whole person needs to be shepherded with empathy and wisdom that's tailored for you.

Drawing from decades of study and over seventy thousand hours of providing therapy and spiritual direction, my wife, Kristi, and I have developed the CHRIST stages of faith. This model offers you a map of your soul that says, "You are here!" We help you identify which of the six stages you're currently experiencing or whether you're at The Wall. Then we guide you along a proven path of following Jesus to grow in emotional and spiritual health. We do this through our unique mapping tool, examples of people on the journey, insights on each stage, and suggested steps to grow within your stage.

Growing in the lessons and opportunities of your current stage prepares you for the next stage. It's an adventure of discovery in which you gain language for your struggles, needs, and opportunities. Since a community of believers often has people in each phase of the journey, it's vital to understand these stages of faith to enhance our empathy and acceptance of one another. Best of all, we provide customized recommendations to guide you in each stage with Scriptures, soul care practices, and spiritual disciplines. Furthermore, our small group leader guide and free videos help you and your friends apply the book material together.<sup>2</sup>

The CHRIST stages model is the lighted path of life for following Jesus that you and your friends have always needed. We've been teaching it since 2013 in our Soul Shepherding Institute. All kinds of Christ-followers and leaders have found these stages of faith to provide the framework for a powerfully transforming program of emotional and spiritual growth in the image of Christ.

“Bill, it’s pouring rain and the weather report shows no signs of the storm letting up,” Dallas Willard said to me on the phone one January day. “Jane is afraid for you to drive on the freeways.”

“I’ll be careful,” I replied. “I’d still like to come talk with you—unless you need to reschedule.”

“I’ll be here in my office, and I’d much rather talk with you than keep digging through my stack of papers.”

After two hours of dog-paddling on congested freeways, I was running and splashing through puddles on the University of Southern California campus. I had my Psalms prayer book carefully pressed against my chest, underneath my raincoat. In those days, I was carrying it everywhere in imitation of the Anonymous Pilgrim of the nineteenth century who walked barefoot through the Russian countryside praying the Jesus Prayer and blessing everyone he met.<sup>3</sup> I looked up into the rain and smiled at the statue of Dallas’ mentor, John Wesley, offering a blessing.

Just ahead was the nearly one-hundred-year-old Mudd Hall of Philosophy building, modeled after an Italian monastery. It has a tall clock tower that chimes, statues of philosophers, gargoyles, and a cloistered walkway to a courtyard with a fountain. Ducking inside and out of the rain, I felt cozy. The hard tile floors in the hallway echoed with my footsteps, reminding me of the many times I’d waited outside Dallas’ office, surrounded by thousands of books, and heard his footsteps approaching and keeping time as he cheerfully hummed a hymn.

But on this stormy evening he was waiting for me, relaxing in his side chair. As I sat down, he noticed my prayer book and asked to look at it. It was worn out from use, marked up on every page, stuffed full of little papers with my meditations and prayers, and held together by binder rings. He held it gently and slowly thumbed through it. “I see you’ve been nourishing yourself. The Psalms are the Bible’s soul book. Wherever you turn, the passages

leap off the page and get hold of your heart to help you ascend to God.”

Dallas’ spirit seemed to soar with the first verse of Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd, I have life without lack.” *Life without lack?* You might question that. *My life is full of lack—lack of resources, lack of health, lack of justice, lack of opportunity, lack of harmony in my relationships, lack of peace. Is the psalmist living in the real world? Is this life without lack just a fantasy?*

Dallas wrote, “[The Psalmist] is living in *the most real world*, a world where Yahweh is present and available and actively involved in the lives of those who know and trust him.”<sup>4</sup> We talked about how the Twenty-third Psalm is a model for our journey of growing in God’s grace. He encouraged me, “Psalm 23 covers the whole of the spiritual life in God’s kingdom.” Best of all, he smiled and said, “When you pray Psalm 23 you find that *Someone* is there waiting for you, to greet you and guide you.”

That’s why Dallas soaked his soul in this prayer song most every morning before he arose from bed. He wrote that it provides an “intensive internalization of the kingdom” and establishes “good epidermal responses of thought, feeling, and action” to integrate us “into the flow of God’s eternal reign.”<sup>5</sup>

We became quiet as we listened to the pouring rain. I felt as if we were huddled by a fire with Jesus on this cold, stormy night. I felt the warmth of our Shepherd’s glowing face of love.

In those moments all the blessings God had brought me from praying the Shepherd Psalm over my lifetime seemed to come flooding back: calming my anxiety, discerning God’s will, comforting a woman with terminal cancer, ministering healing to a woman with a migraine headache, teaching it to our children and watching how it helped them in their daily lives, and sharing its phases of growth with therapy clients and students.

In the journey ahead we’ll draw on Psalm 23’s progression of renewing metaphors and insights to highlight the CHRIST stages of emotional and spiritual growth. You’ll enjoy green pastures

of grace and be guided in the Shepherd's good path. You'll find comfort and encouragement in the dark valley. You'll receive a new anointing of the Spirit for how you can serve God. In the end your soul will sing with David, "My cup overflows. . . . I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (vv. 5–6).

As we travel, we'll enjoy growing intimacy with Jesus, and through him, the Trinity. Our soul comes *fully alive* as we love God, one another, and all people within our reach. Like Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb, we meet Christ risen when we hear him speak our name tenderly (John 20:11–18). Like Brother Lawrence, we learn to practice God's presence in all that we do.



*Dear Jesus, our Good Shepherd, as we read, we pray that you personalize your path of life for each of us. Guide us in the stages of faith so we learn to grow in God's love, joy, peace, and power. Amen.*



# 1

## Shepherding Your Soul

*To thrive in your life with Jesus  
you need soul care and guidance.*

Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd;  
I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”

John 10:14

“**Y**ou might as well divorce me and hire someone to cook and clean!” I (Kristi) screamed at Bill.

“Don’t you ever use that word again!” he yelled back, and then he picked up his keys and drove away. In the hours he was gone, my rage melted into fear that he wouldn’t come back and I’d be on my own with two little children.

I felt horrible for using the D word, but I was fed up with Bill’s workaholism as a psychologist, pastor, and author. God had gifted and anointed him, but I needed more of his time and energy at home. I felt overwhelmed caring for our children and longed for more intimacy in our marriage. As long as I kept my desires buried,

we got along great, but eventually my hurt and anger would erupt. Then he'd get defensive or angry, and I'd feel more hurt. Later he'd always apologize, empathize, and try to be more emotionally engaged for me and the kids. But the cycle kept repeating.

A few weeks later I (Bill) was in my home office writing a proposal to publish my fourth book, but my screen was blank. There was no tapping on the keys. But there was tapping on the door. "Daddy, can you play?" I saw my three-year-old son's big brown eyes peering at me through the glass doors. He smiled as he held up two Hot Wheels cars.

"I'm sorry, David. Daddy has to work today."

"But I wanna play cars, Daddy."

"I can't now, but we can play tonight." I put my head down, hiding behind my computer screen. I heard him start to cry and peeked over the top of my screen to see tears rolling down his chubby cheeks. Suddenly, Kristi swooped in with our one-year-old daughter, Jennie, in her arm and took hold of David's hand. She glared at me. I ducked back behind my screen. I didn't write any good words that day.

Not long after this, Kristi and I had a date night, and she tried a different tack to get my attention. Wooing, pleading, crying, and getting angry hadn't pulled me out of my workaholicism. This time she gave me a handwritten card that asked, "Will you coauthor with me the lives of our *three* children?"

I exclaimed, "You're pregnant!" and gave her a big hug. That was a happy evening.

But her request to *coauthor* the lives of our children kept convicting my heart. Then a few days later I heard God's still, small voice whisper, "Will you take your dream of being a bestselling Christian author and lay it down on the altar? Will you do this out of love for me, Kristi, and your children?" I knew this heavenly voice, so I promised, "Yes, Lord, I will never write another book unless you tell me to."

Although I believed God's purpose was good, in the months to come I became confused and depressed. I kept asking, "Lord, why

don't you want me to serve you with my writing? You gave me this gift—why are you taking it away? Why can't you help me love my family well *and* write books?"

I wanted to write books that cultivated intimacy with Jesus and wholeness of life for readers in the way that A. W. Tozer's *The Pursuit of God* had done for me as a young adult. Year after year I waited. I wished my situation was like Richard Foster's. When he obeyed the call of the Lord to give up his dream of writing *Celebration of Discipline*, God gave it back to him three days later.<sup>1</sup> As it turned out, my sacrifice lasted *fourteen years*. I felt like God didn't trust me. I felt lost and stuck because I didn't know about the stages of faith.

Have you ever felt like God didn't support your dream? Have you ever been confused or discouraged about your spiritual journey?

## Downward Mobility

During my long season in a spiritual desert, the Lord provided Henri Nouwen as a wounded healer for me. I had heard the famous author and professor of Christian spirituality and psychology preach and had read some of his books. I was shocked that he chose to move from Harvard to L'Arche, from teaching the world's best and brightest students ready to rule the world to serving in a community for the mentally handicapped who had few words and seemingly no influence. Why would he trade his podium and microphone for a sponge and a bucket of soapy water? He decided to go *down* in his career. I had been trying to go *up*.

In his little book *In the Name of Jesus*, Nouwen confesses that *his success was endangering his soul*. Even though everyone was telling him he was doing good, inside he was lonely and his prayer life was empty. At first the spiritual death of leaving his prominent ministry post left him feeling depressed, worthless, and naked, with nothing to offer but his vulnerable self. But then he found community with the mentally handicapped and the freedom to be his true self.

He relished the fact that these people didn't read his books or care about his theological acumen. Instead of leading, he was being led. He explains, "They teach me about joy and peace, love and care and prayer—what I could never have learned in any academy. . . . They give me a glimpse of God's first love."<sup>2</sup> He met Jesus anew on the path of hiddenness and "downward mobility."<sup>3</sup> He became a caregiver offering meals, baths, and walks in the garden. He preached simple messages that children could understand. He discovered the power of smiling, remembering someone's name, and giving a hug.

Nouwen gave me words for my own emotional distress. (Years later, I realized he was describing what we call the Inner Journey or the I Stage of the CHRIST stages of faith and growth.) I had obeyed the Lord by no longer writing books, doing media appearances, or speaking in front of crowds of people. I was "just" a therapist and pastor of a counseling ministry. I felt like I was a nobody, going nowhere, and falling into nothingness. I shared my feelings with a counselor, with Kristi, and with soul friends. I received empathy, prayer, and affirmation for my true self, apart from my performances. I came to appreciate that the Lord was shepherding my personality and faith. I discovered the value of practicing the Little Way of Jesus by loving my family, clients, students, and other neighbors with simple kindnesses, openhearted listening, secret prayers, and life-on-life discipleship.<sup>4</sup> Over some years, I came to value this as more beneficial than public works for God with fanfare.

My sacrifice at the altar no longer felt like a loss. More than ever before, I was enjoying a new closeness with Christ, date nights and soul talks with Kristi, playing with my kids, and life as an *ordinary human being in God's world* that I wouldn't trade for anything. Furthermore, out of the blue one day I sensed the Spirit whisper, "Your pen will be your pulpit." Then I heard, "Take your pen off the altar and write. Look, your words are on fire!"

What a surprise! I was so happy the Lord called me to write again. That's when email was just becoming widely used, so I began

sending out soul care messages to people. Instead of being a guru writing books for masses of people who needed my wisdom, I was a shepherd of souls writing devotionals for people who needed *Jesus*. Our Lord said, “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matt. 10:8). In just a few years, that turned into one million page views a year at SoulShepherding.org, with Kristi and me leading a growing ministry to pastors and others.

## **Your Journey of the Soul**

Healthy faith engages our soul on a path of following Christ Jesus through six stages of emotional and spiritual development. To explore these stages, we’ll draw on many Scripture passages and teachers of psychology and spirituality, including Teresa of Jesus. This sixteenth-century spiritual mother and classic devotional author from Ávila, Spain, pictures our soul as a beautiful and expansive interior castle. We follow “His Majesty” on an adventure through different “mansions” or stages of prayer and reflection. Little by little our Lord makes us “pure and full of all that is good,” and our soul becomes increasingly “spacious, ample, and lofty.”<sup>5</sup>

Notice that your soul isn’t a wispy little ghost inside you that floats up to heaven when you die, like it’s portrayed in movies. It’s actually your whole person. Flowing out from deep inside you, it encompasses your body and expands out into your social world. In other words, your soul is so large that your body is actually inside your soul. That’s why people in the same room can feel each other’s energy and mood, even without talking.

Jesus our Shepherd leads us to drink from waters that nourish and strengthen our soul (Ps. 23:2–3). The still waters of Psalm 23 are “Eden spring water” (Ps. 36:8 MSG), the streams that make us glad (Ps. 46:4), the life-giving waters of Jesus’ Spirit flowing into us and out from our belly to bless other people (John 7:37–39 KJV). Your soul, well cared for by God, invigorates and integrates all the functions of your being—emotions, thoughts, intentions,

body, and relationships—into a flow of joyful, abundant, powerful, divine, and eternal life expressed in your unique personality.<sup>6</sup>

The story of the Anonymous Pilgrim of nineteenth-century Russia illustrates the journey of the soul. He was crippled, orphaned, homeless, and had nothing except his father's old Bible and a dream that he could learn to pray continually (1 Thess. 5:17). He found a *staretz* (spiritual director) who taught him to breathe a prayer thousands of times every day, just like the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the third and fourth centuries: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner* (Luke 18:13, 38). The Jesus Prayer was sweet on his lips and in his heart as he walked barefoot from village to village, begging for bread in exchange for whatever work he could do. On his pilgrimage the Lord transformed him from being a depressed recluse to a joyful disciple of Christ who brought salvation to the lost, healing to the sick, love to his enemies, and intimacy with God to untold millions of people.<sup>7</sup>

## A Map for Your Journey

A backpacker told me (Bill) that when he was weary on a remote stretch of the Pacific Crest Trail he encountered “trail angels” who showed up out of nowhere with water, food, medicine, encouragement, and a map. This reminded me of when our son David was eleven years old and I took him on a twelve-mile hike up Saddleback Mountain near our home in Orange County, California. It was a wonderful father-and-son adventure—till we headed down and got lost on the backside of the mountain. We were alone, with no map and no cell service. We'd eaten all our food and it was getting dark and cold. We were scared and I was beating myself up about not being better prepared. But I kept praying to God for help. About an hour later, we heard the voices of two hikers who had a map and guided us down the mountain!

At times we all need a map with a big red star that says “You are here!” In this book Kristi and I offer you a map of your journey

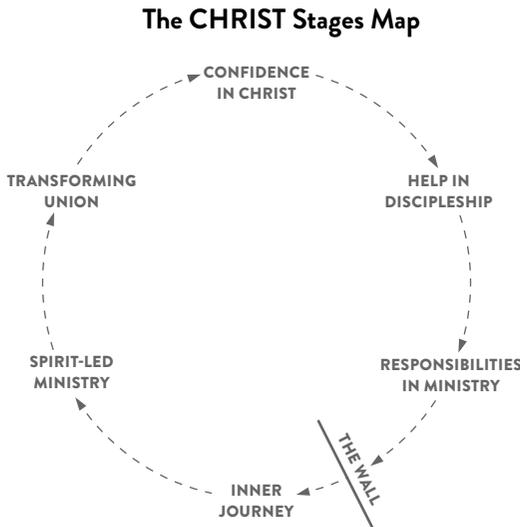
with personalized guidance on the way of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> We expand on the Bible's brief outline of three stages of faith: "dear children," "young people," and spiritual "fathers and mothers" (1 John 2:12–14 TPT).<sup>9</sup> Based on extensive research<sup>10</sup> and field-testing, our model for the CHRIST stages of faith emphasizes following Jesus in a journey of increasing emotional and spiritual health:

- **Confidence in Christ (the C Stage)**  
By receiving God's Spirit we are born from above to begin the great adventure of following Jesus Christ!
- **Help in Discipleship (the H Stage)**  
We grow in God's grace through community with other Christians and practicing spiritual disciplines like participating in church services and Bible studies.
- **Responsibilities in Ministry (the R Stage)**  
It's an honor to use our gifts to serve God and others in our church, family, community, or job, but we're prone to get in trouble from being overly ambitious or relying on ourselves rather than the Spirit of God.
- **Through The Wall (Transition)**  
Due to overworking, spiritual dryness, a faith crisis, or suffering, we may find ourselves at The Wall. Usually this happens in the R Stage and is worked through in the I Stage, but at each stage we face a roadblock that may become The Wall.
- **Inner Journey (the I Stage)**  
Getting stopped at The Wall evokes emotional distress. If we take courage to share our emotions, struggles, and sins with safe people and in prayer, then we come into a new intimacy with Jesus and Abba.
- **Spirit-Led Ministry (the S Stage)**  
Now we learn a new way of serving—not by working *for* God in our own strength, but by working *with* God in

Jesus' easy yoke. We enjoy overflowing with God's grace to others.

- **Transforming Union (the T Stage)**

Our life and work become increasingly about practicing the presence of the Trinity in all we do. Joyfully united with Christ, we are more able to love all people, even our enemies.



Your progression through the CHRIST stages (or phases) of faith is not linear but circular. Try picturing this map like a 3D spiral, because emotional and spiritual growth in God's grace is an up-and-down journey in which we go back and forth between developmental phases. At any time we may revisit a previous phase for deeper learning or remain in one phase for many years. As we'll discuss later, many Christ-followers become stuck and do not grow beyond the early stages. Our opportunity is to grow in God's grace at each stage. Even if we experience the T Stage, that is not a destination but a doorway to return to the C Stage and

the other stages, whether for personal needs or to offer empathy and encouragement for others. The CHRIST stages map shows the general path in our journey of increasing union with our Lord.

## **Your Map Key**

I (Kristi) wish I had this map twenty years ago when I was an insecure and overwhelmed young woman who secretly judged and hated her emotional self. I was preoccupied trying to prove my worthiness through good works and service. The map shows me that I had come to The Wall in the stage of Responsibilities in Ministry and was unwittingly resisting the Inner Journey. It helps me to realize that through accepting and expressing my emotions to God and my friends and setting my heart's desire on the Lord, I could eventually get through The Wall. This model has provided great insight on how I can experience more intimacy, meaning, and power in my life with Christ.

In Bill's case, this CHRIST stages map would've helped him to understand that, when he got depressed after surrendering his dream, he wasn't being judged by God—it was the father of lies attacking him (John 8:44; Rev. 12:10). The map shines a light on Bill's dark season of spiritual dryness and discouragement at The Wall and helps him see the Spirit of Jesus drawing him into the Inner Journey. This opens him to the blessing of the Lord befriending his emotions and inflaming his heart with love.

Chapter by chapter we'll unveil your personal map to help you locate yourself on the journey through the CHRIST stages. Identifying your current stage will help you to receive God's grace at your point of need and take the next steps that will most help you to grow. At each stage we suggest particular Scriptures, prayers, and devotional activities that will further your growth in emotional and spiritual health. We've also suggested contemporary Christian worship songs to fit each stage and created small group curriculum and other resources to go with this book.<sup>11</sup>

To help you understand your journey ahead you'll want to remember these key terms:

- **Soul** refers to your whole, embodied person. When healthy, your soul integrates all the dynamics of your personality (thoughts, emotions, will, body, and relationships) to flow with divine life and love.
- **CHRIST stages of faith** are six developmental phases<sup>12</sup> of emotional and spiritual growth. Each stage builds on the one before and prepares you for the one after. Often we revisit earlier stages.
- **Home stage** refers to your primary CHRIST stage of faith. Since growth is a spiral, you may relate to more than one stage. But it's hard to understand people two stages beyond you, and you may have conflict with them.
- **Roadblocks to grace** are trials at each stage that may become The Wall and tempt us to turn back to the previous stage. The major roadblock is The Wall in the middle.
- **First Half** and **Second Half** refer to the three CHRIST stages on either side of The Wall. The two halves present different faith orientations and spiritualities that are in tension.
- **Grace** is God's favor and power offered to you through Christ to help you grow in emotional and spiritual health at each stage of faith. Grace is unhurried, so it's important to take the time you need in each stage.
- **Faith** is responding to God's grace with trust and confidence so that you love God, others, and yourself more and more.
- **Spiritual disciplines** are bodily activities to develop habits to rely on Jesus, care for your soul, and love God and people well. Certain disciplines work best at each stage, but often you can benefit from the ones in previous stages.

## **Becoming Like Jesus**

Throughout this book we'll be looking at people in the Bible, church history, and contemporary life growing in emotional and spiritual health through the stages of faith. Most of all, we'll look at Jesus Christ as our model. That's why we call them *CHRIST* stages. Henri Nouwen put it well: "There is no journey to God outside of the journey that Jesus made."<sup>13</sup> Our Lord has gone before us on the path of life, and he shows us the way to love God and neighbor. To trace the steps of our Master, let's turn to the Gospel of Luke, which puts special emphasis on the Son of God's personal development as a human being who is our Living Blueprint.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus showed **Confidence in God** (C Stage) at an early age. He developed a loving relationship with his Father in heaven through people who cared for him, especially his mother, who treasured him and pondered his significance (2:19, 51). As a boy in **Help in Discipleship** (H Stage), our Lord grew in strength, wisdom, and favor with God and people. His parents and others (like the synagogue leaders in Nazareth) helped him learn to worship God, read the Scriptures, pray, and serve others (2:40–52). As a young adult Jesus grew in **Responsibilities in Ministry** (R Stage) through teaching the Scriptures (2:42–47) and loving people in his job as a carpenter (4:22). During these hidden years he may have encountered **The Wall**, doing manual labor for many years (3:23; 4:22), being rejected by his hometown (4:28–30), and being pressured by unfair expectations from his family (8:19–21). Yet through these trials he loved others with joy.

At the start of his public ministry when Jesus was thirty years old, he was renewed in the **Inner Journey** (I Stage). First he was baptized by John in the Jordan River and had a special experience of grace in which he heard his Father's voice from heaven proclaim, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (3:22). Then the Spirit drew him into the desert wilderness for forty days, and this included testing from Satan at **The Wall** and more **Inner**

**Journey** growth through solitude, fasting, Scripture meditation, and prayer to foster intimacy with his Father, clarify his ministry calling, and resist Satan by resolving to do God's will (4:1-13). Even during his busy ministry Jesus often withdrew to be alone with his Abba, which was the source of his compassion, wisdom, and power (5:16; 6:12).

In much of Luke's Gospel, we see Jesus in **Spirit-Led Ministry** (S Stage). He teaches people from God's Word with the confident authority of having personally lived it out (4:32). He listens for and follows his Father's directions for ministry (4:42-44; 6:12-13). He heals the sick (4:31-5:26; 8:26-56), feeds the hungry (9:10-17), and drives out demons by the finger of God (11:20). He delegates ministry to his disciples so that they can carry on his work (10:1). Out of the overflow of his prayer life he teaches them to pray (11:1-13).

In the second half of his Gospel, Luke shows our Master in **Transforming Union** (T Stage). Jesus is revealed as the Messiah of God (9:18-27). He shows how completely he is united with God when he glows with light and glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:28-36). He embodies God's love for the disadvantaged: ethnic minorities (10:25-37), women (10:38-42), lepers (17:11-19), widows (18:1-8), little children (18:15-17), beggars (18:35-43), and tax collectors (19:1-10). For all people he unveils the beauty of his Father's world (12:22-34). Then on the journey of the cross he re-encounters **The Wall** and moves through it into the full flower of **Transforming Union** by forgiving those who abused him and blessing everyone in his reach (23:32-43). With his last breath he submits himself completely into his Father's hands to reconcile us to God (23:46). Then, by the power of the Spirit, Jesus rises from the dead and ascends into the heavens (24:1-53).

That's a human being *fully alive*! Jesus is full of God's fatherly love and exuberant with joy (10:21). Jesus is so radiantly winsome with divine life that thirty-two times Luke says crowds of people gathered around him to be close to him. Again and again people press through the throngs to touch *the Heavenly Man*. Four men

cut a hole in a roof to drop their sick friend at Jesus' feet (5:17–20). A rejected woman forced into sex slavery breaks into a house full of religious men, falls at Jesus' feet weeping, and pours out her alabaster jar of expensive ointment on his feet (7:36–50). A sick woman crawls in the dirt between people's legs to touch the hem of his garment (8:42–48). Zacchaeus climbs a tree to get above the parade of people so he can see Jesus, and then he jumps down to have dinner with him (19:1–10).

*Jesus Christ is captivating!* To follow him in a journey of increasing grace is the best life we could hope for.



## Soul Care Practice

### *Praying Psalm 23*

I (Kristi) remember when our son David was about eighteen months old. He watched Bill go to work with his lunch box and decided he wanted one too. He put some special things in a little box: a package of raisins, his favorite Matchbox car, a piece of his blankie, and his pacifier. He was trying to be like his daddy! We smiled as our little boy carried his Special Things Box around the house with such pride and happiness. He was ready to face the world.

His box contained more than nice little play things—as psychologists we call them “transitional objects” because they help children *transition* from feeling secure with Mommy to feeling secure even when she’s not in sight.<sup>15</sup> For instance, David associated his pacifier and blankie with the comfort of being nursed by his mommy. His little treasures gave him inner strength and contentment when he played alone or went to bed at night.

It’s good to put Psalm 23 in your Soul Kit. When the COVID-19 pandemic brought anxiety, fear, and grief, we pulled it out to rest in our Shepherd’s love. For decades we’ve used it in our teaching and small groups as a resource for God’s peace and

guidance. Neurological research shows how transformational a spiritual discipline like this can be. The brain scans of people who practiced attentive and focused prayer twelve minutes a day for eight weeks showed significant improvement in the areas of their brains that support social interaction, compassion, stress reduction, low blood pressure, resistance to irrational urges, and peace.<sup>16</sup>

## **Psalm 23 Meditation**

Let's saturate our souls in Psalm 23 now. As you'll discover, it's a developmental journey that parallels the CHRIST stages. It's helpful to find a quiet place and get comfortable. Pray with me:

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

Jesus proclaims, "I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11). At the beginning of our journey we come to know Jesus as our Savior and Life-Giver. We put our confidence in the Lord who meets our needs.

*He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

Imagine yourself with the sheep in a lush, green pasture. Keep grazing on God's grace till you're full! Then let yourself lie down in that green grass. Feel its softness; feel your body relax and lighten.

Jesus is our Bread of Life. He fills our hungry souls, so we can rest in him, find our contentment in him, and grow in trust and peace.

*He leads me beside the still waters.*

Why still waters? Because sheep are afraid of the rushing waters and can't get a drink. Jesus says, "Are you thirsty? Come to me . . . A spring of living water will gush up into a flowing stream . . . You will never be thirsty again! I offer *living waters*. I will give you fresh, pure water that satisfies your thirst."<sup>17</sup> Drink in the Spirit and be refreshed.

*He restores my soul.*

In the still waters we can also be baptized, immersed in God's love. Imagine it's a hot day and you wade into the cool water to be cleansed and revitalized . . . When you get out of the water, the ripples fade, and the pool is like smooth glass . . . Now look into the water and see Good Shepherd with you, his reflection and yours together. See his smile? You're totally forgiven, loved, and made new!

*He leads me down the path of righteousness for his name's sake.*

Sheep are prone to wander and get lost. They follow other sheep and may get stuck in prickly bushes. But Jesus knows the best way and he leads us. Maybe you're at a fork in the road with a decision to make. Maybe you're struggling to love someone well. Ask Christ to guide you.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*

There are seasons when Good Shepherd needs to lead us through the dark valley, past snakes and cougars. Of course, we don't want to go this way, but it's the route to the high country where the temperatures are cool and the grass is green during the hot summer months.

Jesus promises, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you . . . I am with you always, even to the end of the age . . . So fear not, little flock of sheep, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you his kingdom."<sup>8</sup>

*Your rod and your staff comfort me.*

Our Savior uses his rod to fight off our enemies. If we wander from the fold, he flings it out just beyond us to startle us and call us back into safe boundaries. He uses his staff to guide his sheep and to free us when we slip into a ravine. At night he uses his staff to have his sheep pass under it, so he can separate our wool to see if any parasites or prickles need to be taken out.

Let's thank Jesus for how he shepherds us through our trials and troubling emotions and gives us courage.

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

Our Shepherd provides an abundant feast for us! We sit at the table and eat because the Lord is with us; it's a place of community and celebration—even with enemies around us. It's at the table that Jesus Christ breaks bread and pours wine, gives his body and blood to forgive us and heal our sins, to reconcile us to God. As the Lord forgives us, then we can forgive those who mistreat us and be at peace (Col. 3:13).

*You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.*

Shepherd Jesus heals our wounds with his special oil. He anoints us for ministry as wounded healers who understand and have compassion for others who are hurting or struggling.

Jesus is so good to us! God's unconditional love is spilling out and splashing onto us! Pray for it to *overflow* from you to others.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

At the beginning of this journey we were like children and Good Shepherd was like a directive parent: he *made* us to lie down in his green pastures and he *led* us to walk his path of righteousness. Then, in the middle of our journey, we found ourselves in a dark valley trial. We felt as if the Lord had left us alone. But then we realized that he was *with* us, right beside us all along in our hard times.

Now, as we near the end of our journey, goodness and mercy *follow* us. The Spirit of Jesus is letting us be a step ahead because we're growing up and we've learned the path in our heart. Still, at times we need our Shepherd to whisper from behind, "This is the way; walk in it" (Isa. 30:21).

*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

With the psalmist we pray, "Blessed are those who dwell in your house, O Lord. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my

God than dwell in the tents of the wicked” (Ps. 84:4, 10). We’re learning to appreciate our intimacy and union with the Father and Son as we go about our life. In every part of the journey the loving Spirit is before us, beside us, and behind us. Amen.<sup>19</sup>

## **Soul Talk**

1. What are your thoughts about life being a journey with Jesus that goes through stages of emotional and spiritual growth?
2. How do you relate to Bill’s or Kristi’s story? Or to Henri Nouwen’s downward mobility?
3. What especially interests you about the journey of emotional and spiritual growth in the CHRIST stages of faith?
4. What is something you appreciated about Jesus’ own journey through the CHRIST stages?
5. What did you appreciate about the meditation on Psalm 23?