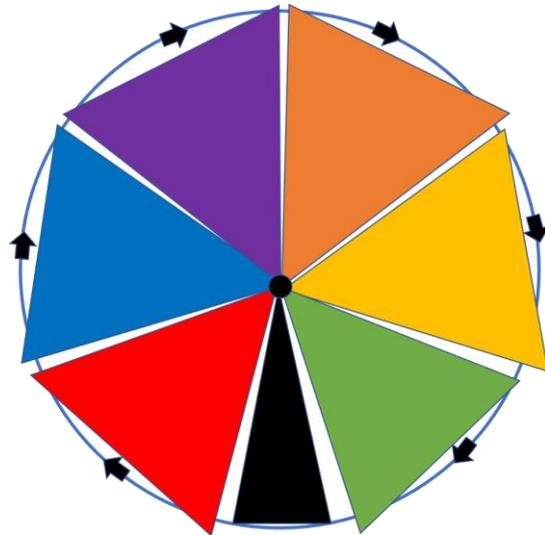


Stages of Faith Development



Patrick Johnson | Ministerial Association Secretary, Discipleship Coordinator
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists | Trans-European Division





Photo by Francesco Gallarotti on Unsplash

Change is natural in living things
that grow





The Bible and Spiritual Growth

- Lk 2:52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.
- Eph 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ.
- Heb 6:1-2 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity...





The Bible and Spiritual Growth

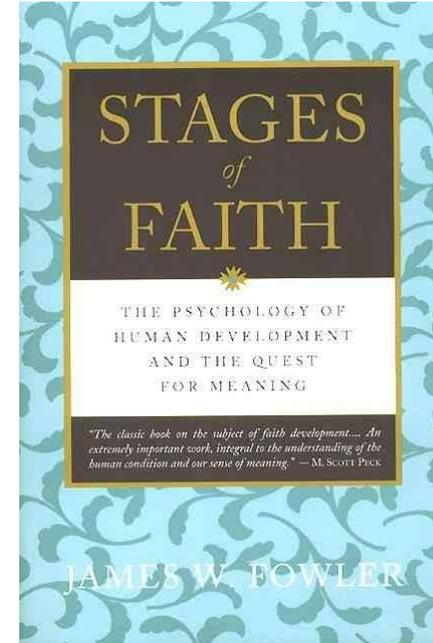
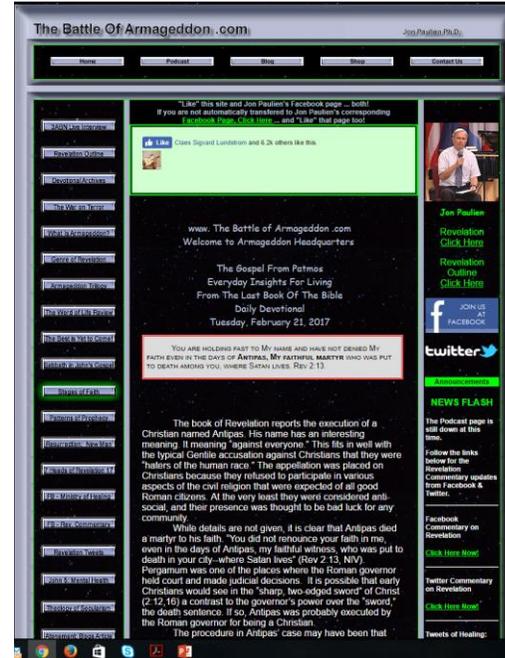
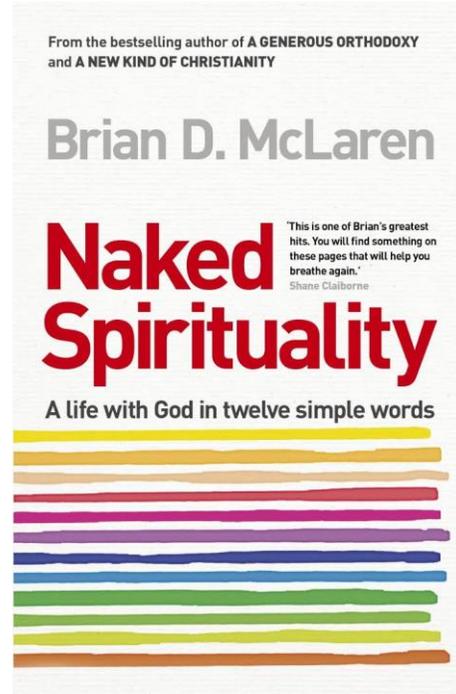
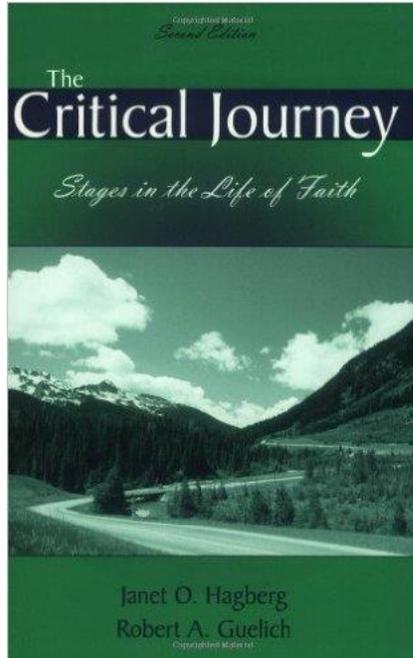
- 1Pet 2:2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.
- 2Pet 1:5-8 Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control...
- 2Pet 3:18 But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ



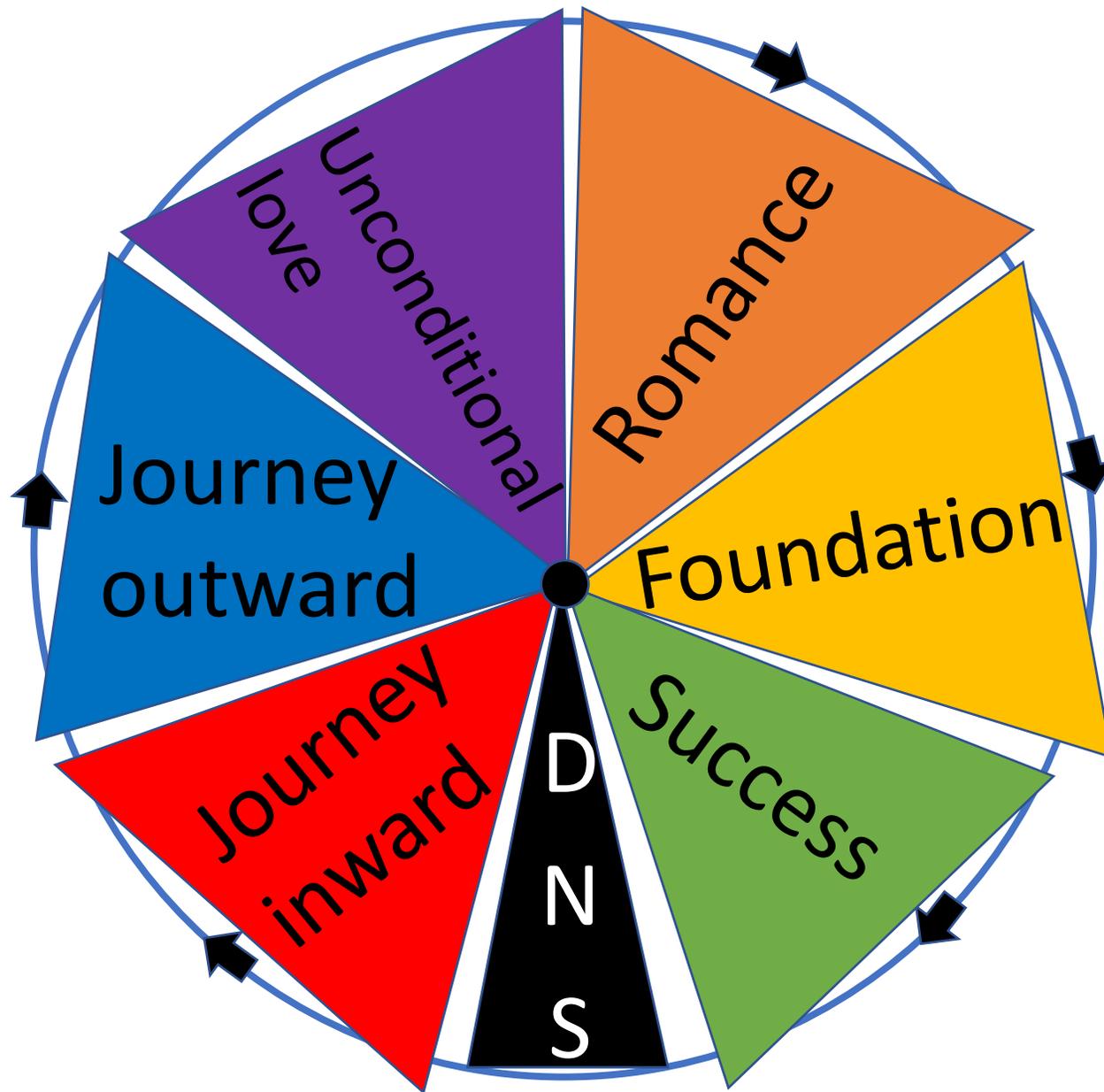
Outline the stages of
spiritual growth



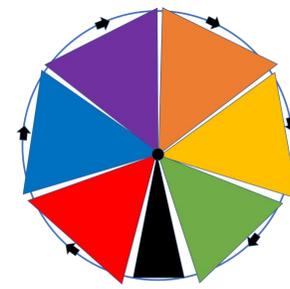
Resources



The cycle of growth



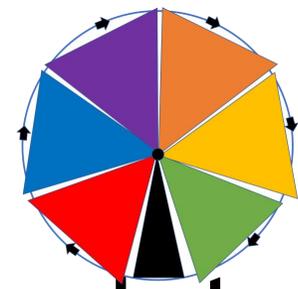
Observations



- There are no shortcuts
- No stage is better or worse than another
- It's possible to live in more than one stage at a time
- We take the best of each stage with us to the next
- We can get stuck at any stage
- Cycle or cycles?



Observations



- This needs to be a natural program - let God grow you rather than trying hard yourself
- As you mature the number of mentors decrease
- As you mature the number of opportunities to mentor increase
- The Bible speaks to all stages, and those that speak most to us are for our stage





1. Romance

“we believe”

- first love
- child-like trust in God
- a sense of innocence & openness
- not particularly rational about their faith
- a sense of awe & need for a saviour and greater meaning in life





1. Romance

Biblical examples:

- Woman at the well (Jn 4:1-42)
- Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10)
- Mary (washed Jesus feet...)
- Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21)
- Hidden treasure (Mt 13:44)
- Pearl of great price (Mt 13:45-46)





1. Romance

Stuck:

- feelings of unworthiness
- lack of knowledge
- prisoner of superstitions
- isolation
- martyrdom





1. Romance

Mentoring:

- help them feel accepted
- help them discover support of community
- get connected to mentors





2. Foundation

“we are learning about God”

- a time of learning & belonging
- strong sense of being right
- spiritual growth stimulated by strong leaders, teachers & mentors
- strong desire to follow
- can suffer from spiritual inflexibility
- tendency to like easy answers





2. Foundation

Biblical examples:

James & John (Boanerges Lk 9:51-56)





2. Foundation

Stuck:

- being very legalistic & judgmental
- rigid in approach to faith
- unable to see their own rigidity
- black and white thinking





2. Foundation

Mentoring:

- identify giftedness
- help them nurture relationships
- to put heart before head
- gain self-awareness and renew broken relationships





Photo by Ian Stauffer on Unsplash



3. Success

“we are about doing things FOR God”

- take up active ministry
- senses call to leadership
- productive and changing lives of followers
- feel as if you’ve “arrived”
- high degree of confidence





3. Success

Biblical examples:

- Saul (Phil 3:4-6)
- The 70 (Lk 10:17-20)
- Rich Young Ruler (Lk 18:18-30)
- Parable of the talents





3. Success

Stuck:

- resistant to mentoring
- love achievement and recognition
- hooked on perfection
- love feeling busy
- can get weary, burned out, resentful





3. Success

Mentoring:

- need to surrender to God's full control
- practice personal spirituality
- need to swallow pride & seek out mentor at level 4 or higher





Dark night of the soul

“things just aren’t working anymore... there’s got to be more”

- aka ‘mid-faith crisis’
- Life or faith crisis, feel like a failure, feel alone and abandoned by God, nothing makes sense
- Church feels meaningless, “Is that all there is?”
- we realise that all the good things we’ve done to some degree were motivated by ambition and selfishness, or desire to please others
- it’s God’s call to greater depth with Him





Dark night of the soul

Biblical examples:

- Job
- Jacob





Dark night of the soul

Remedy:

- lots of solitude to listen to God's voice, to think & reflect
 - a good senior mentor needed.
- NB temptation for regression to stage 3 when they were successful





Dark night of the soul

Mentoring:

- by patiently listening and empathizing
- accept them & encourage them to accept God's forgiveness & acceptance



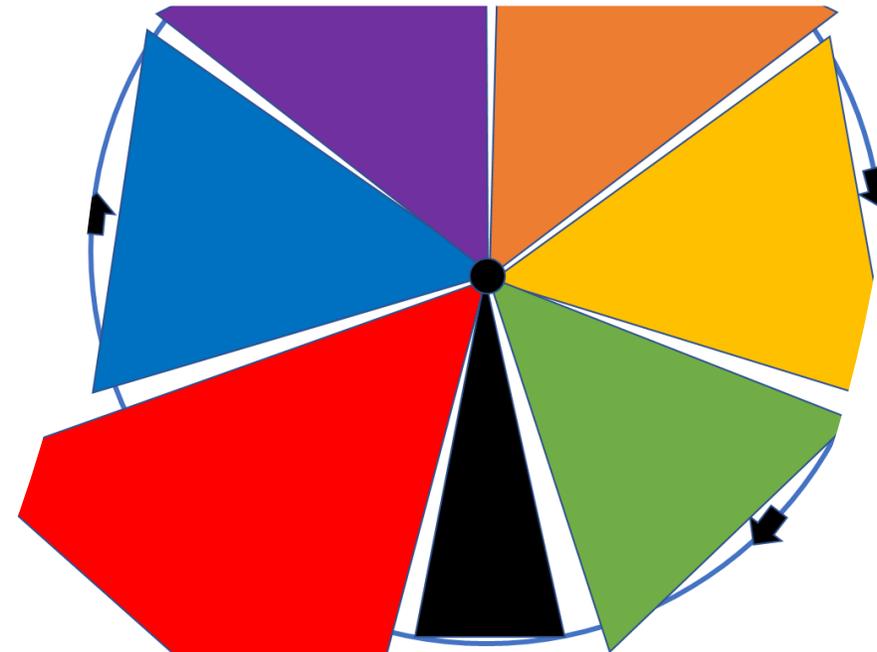
4. The journey inward

“we need to figure out a new way to do this relationship with God & others”

- love to study deeply and pray
- spend more time alone but eager for mentoring
- eager for deeper relationship with God and others



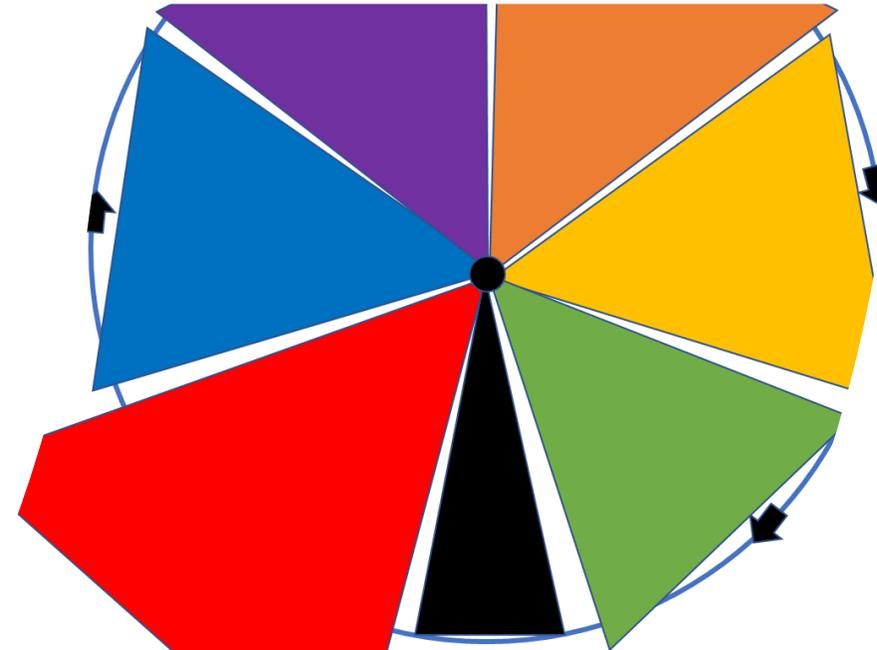
Photo by Patrick Fore on Unsplash



4. The journey inward

“we need to figure out a new way to do this relationship with God & others”

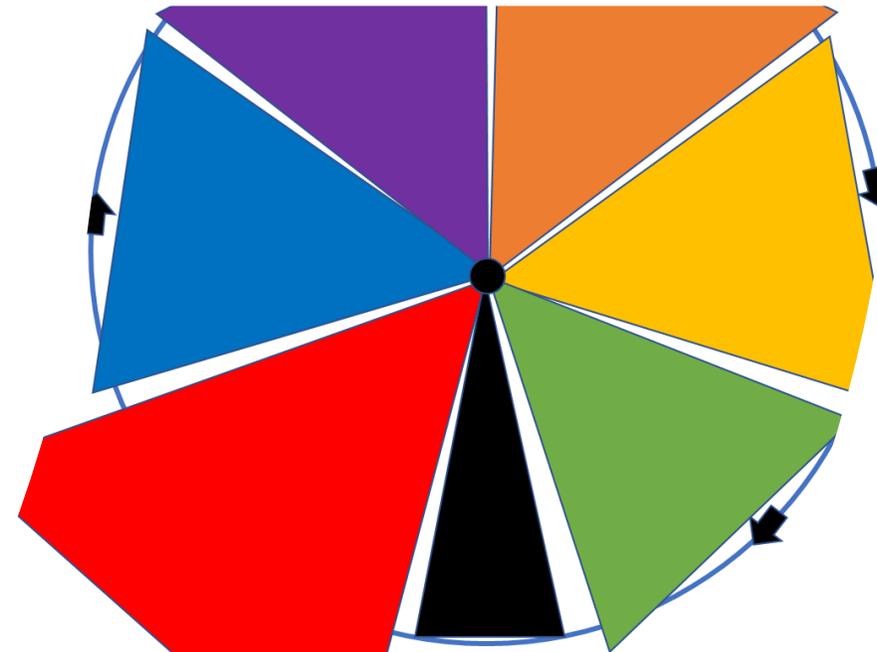
- discovery of unique purpose
- constantly asking challenging questions
- it's a move from 'doing' to 'being', from head to heart, like 2nd conversion



4. The journey inward

Stages of friendship:

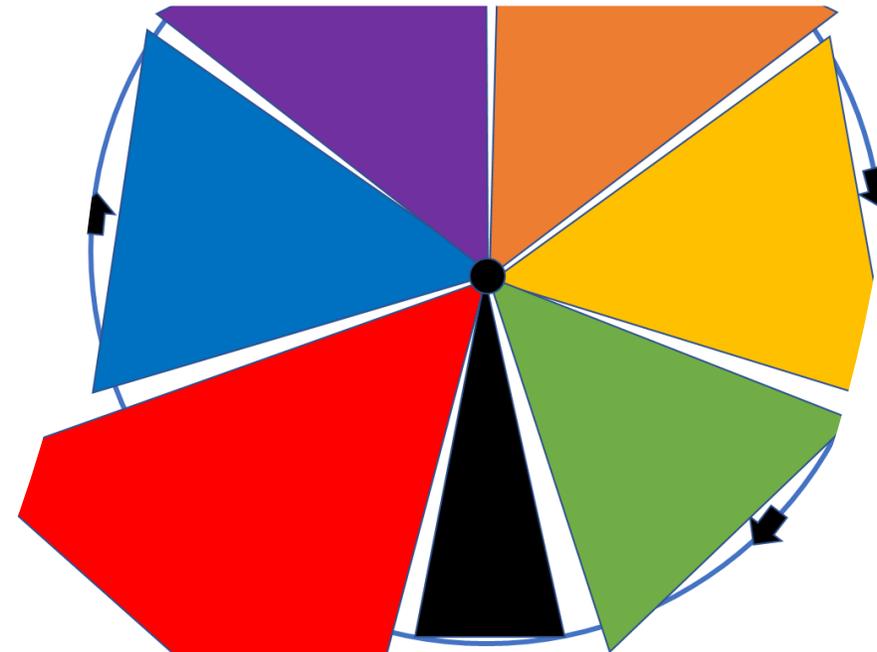
1. Greeting stage
2. Exchange of facts & reports
3. Exchange of opinions & judgments
4. Sharing feelings
5. Sharing our faults
6. Trust a person enough to allow them to confront our faults
7. Total intimacy, no secrets



4. The journey inward

Biblical example:

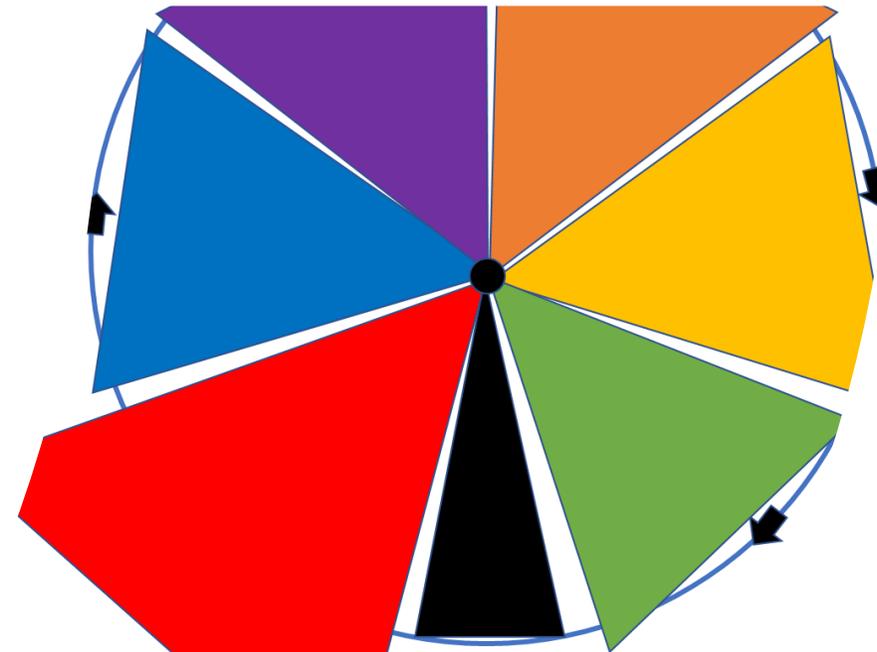
- Paul (Gal 1:13-18)



4. The journey inward

Stuck:

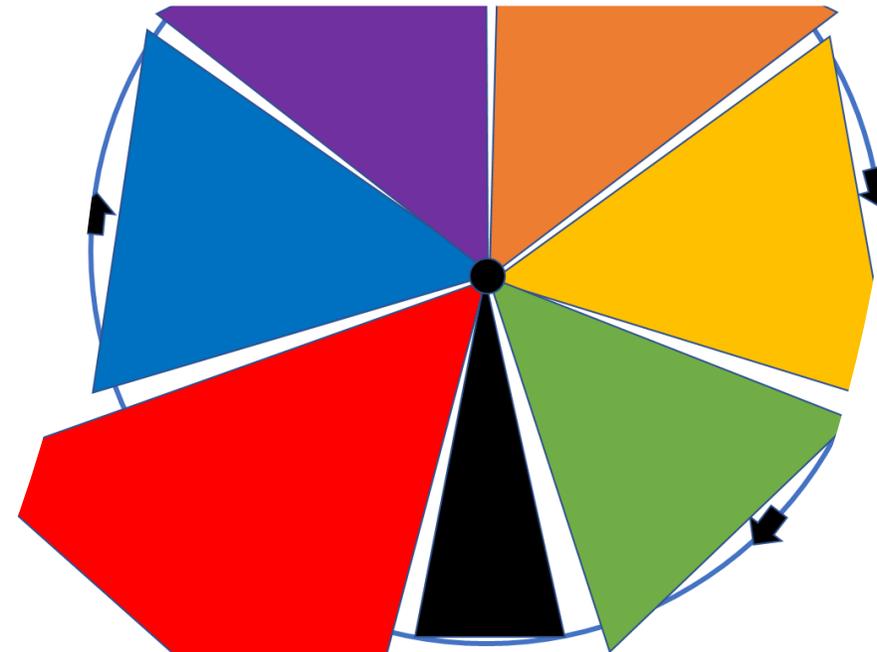
- wallowing in negative thinking or discouragement
- consumed with self assessment
- enjoy sense of spiritual ambiguity
- their doubt can lead to more doubt rather than faith



4. The journey inward

Mentoring:

- acceptance & affirmation
- encourage them to let God out of box, to open up to God's teaching & leading
- help them process past traumas honestly



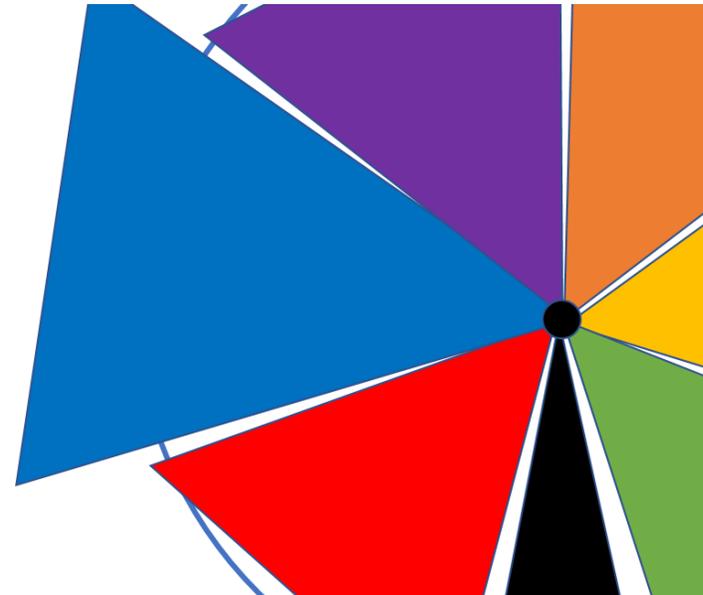
5. The journey outward

“learning to live out of a totally different place”

- bringing change to the rest of the world
- motivation is from call of God not from anyone else, seek to please God alone
- before you were motivated by sense of duty but now motivated by God-given love for others
- looks like stage 3 but motives are different - there's peace & patience rather than being stressed & driven



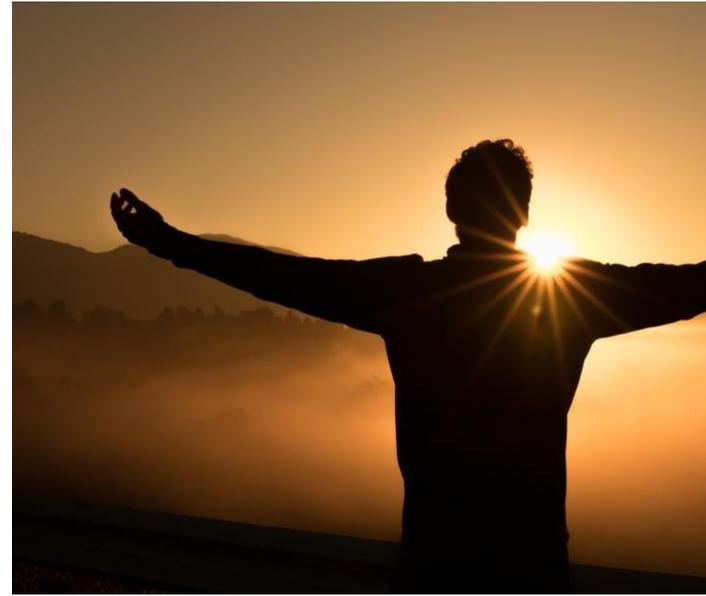
Photo by Zac Durant on Unsplash



5. The journey outward

Biblical examples:

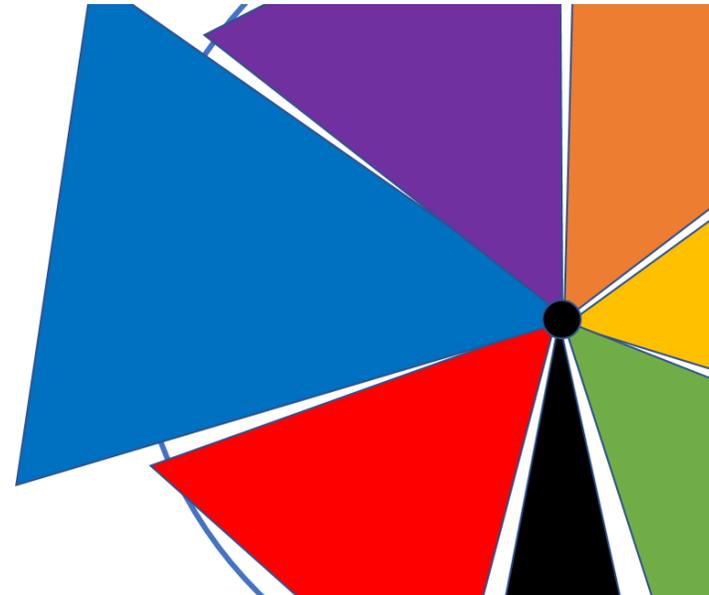
- Moses
- Daniel
- Peter
- Paul



5. The journey outward

Not really stuck but:

- may appear out of touch with everyone else
- may seem indifferent to some of practical concerns of everyday life



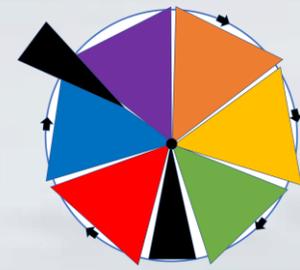
5. The journey outward

Mentoring:

- encourage them to look at everyone & everything through God's eyes
- encourage them to have a sanctified "no care" attitude



2nd Dark night of the soul



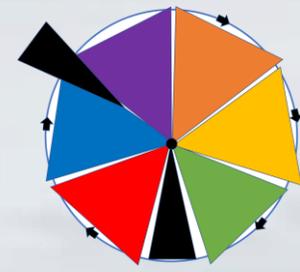
- the closer you walk with God the more you seem out of step with religious communities & institutions
- it's best to mentor someone one step behind you



2nd Dark night of the soul

Biblical example:

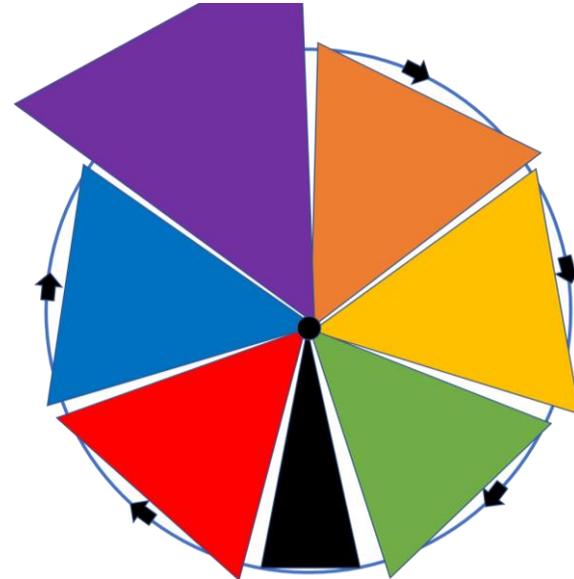
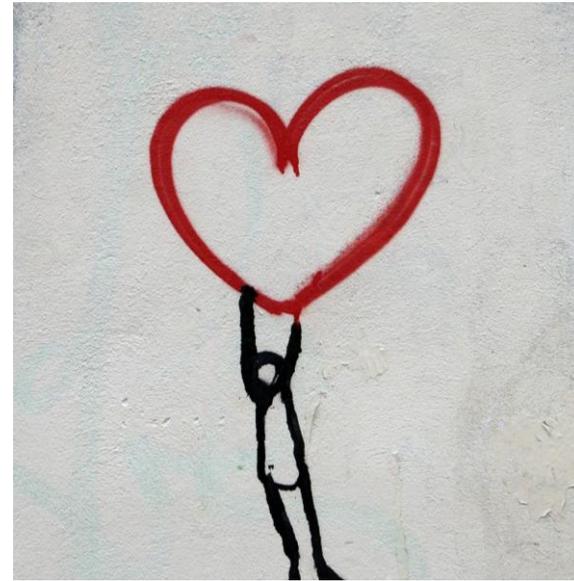
- Jesus in Gethsemane



6. Unconditional love

“it’s all about God”

- unconditional love becomes rule of life, treat others as if serving God himself
- material things unappealing
- they seem to be a threat to systems because they love enemies



Implications

- What stage most accurately describes me?
- Who mentors me?
- Who am I mentoring?



Implications

- Do religious institutions mirror these stages?
- Can religious institutions move beyond stage 3?

