



THE PATH

fellowship bible church

Part II — Walking The Path



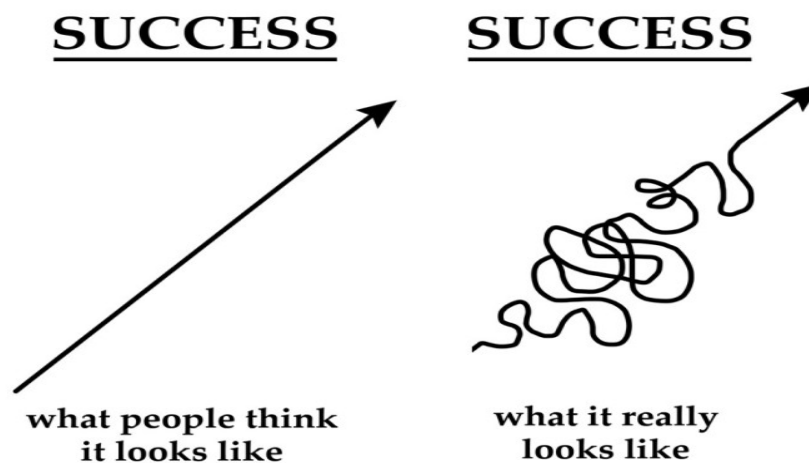
The Path At Fellowship

In Part One we pictured the Christian life as a train ride — Jesus the conductor, the Spirit the power, two rails of Spiritual Formation and Discipleship held in gauge by the ties of Christian community. Take up that picture again, because the part of it we set aside is what Part Two is about: the terrain.

Our journey from lowland South Carolina to the Pacific Northwest crosses ground that changes completely along the way — southern forests give way to plains, then desert, then snow-capped passes, then the evergreen country of the coast. The rails do not change. The ties do not change. The conductor does not change. What changes is the terrain you are moving through, and what that terrain requires of you.

The seven stages are that terrain. They describe where you are on the journey, not how far along you are or how well you are doing. A person crossing the mountains is not further along than a person crossing the plains; they are in different terrain, and each requires something different. Part Two is about learning to recognize which terrain you are in.

While our train illustration is helpful to see each part of Christian Formation, we know our journey as disciples of Jesus Christ is never up and to the right. Take for example the following popular meme. Is this not what walking with Jesus feels like?



Neither discipleship nor spiritual formation are linear. Both involve a range of movement in all directions — progression and regression — not simply forward and higher. These stages along The Path are no different. This is not a linear path nor is it to be understood as such. Our spiritual journey is just that: a journey. For each of us our journey includes ups and downs, starts and stops, highs and lows, progression and regression, lefts, rights, and everywhere in between. We can be caught up in transcendence and also feel stuck. **It is important to understand The Path as descriptive rather than prescriptive. This is not a prescribed method of spiritual growth and health. It is a description of our spiritual journey that offers helpful wayfinding for followers of Jesus in their journey with Jesus.**

Each of us will have a Home Stage, a Growth Edge, and a Regression Tendency. Our Home Stage is the stage where we are currently spending most of our spiritual lives. Our Growth Edge is the stage we sense God inviting us toward — not simply where we are praying we will grow to, but where our formation is already pulling us, and which we may even experience for a short time. Our Regression Tendency is the stage we return to under strain — in seasons of crisis, exhaustion, or cooler affections for God. It is not a record of what we have lost. Nothing God has formed in us is undone by a hard year. It names the more familiar way of living that we reach for when the deeper one asks more than we currently have to give. We may place a toe in a stage ahead of us or fall back to a previous one, yet there is one stage where we are currently spending most of our spiritual time. The journey of a follower of Jesus traverses seven distinct stages of Christian formation.¹

- **Stage 1: Awareness of God** - Awakening to the existence of a higher power that leads to faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Stage 2: The Life of Discipleship** - Learning what it means to be a follower of Jesus that results in a distinct life.
- **Stage 3: The Productive Life** - Working for God from love within the local church for the sake of others.
- **Stage 4: The Inward Journey** - Courageous introspection within community that leads to internal transformation.
- **Stage 5: The Wall** - An existential crisis that produces conflict between the will of God and our own life plans. The other side leads to either greater trust or lowered trust in God.
- **Stage 6: The Life of Love** - The abundant life that reflects Jesus to others clearly and consistently.
- **Stage 7: Legacy Living** - Setting a life in order and leaving behind blessing.

A note on Stages 5 and 7. Though they are numbered alongside the others for ease of reference, The Wall (Stage 5) and Legacy Living (Stage 7) work differently from the rest. They are seasonal overlays — seasons that can come upon a person at any point on The Path, alongside any Home Stage — rather than rungs climbed in order. Stages 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 describe the progression of formation.

¹Much of what follows is adapted from two primary resources that have shaped and informed how we've built The Path. *The Critical Journey: Stages In The Life Of Faith* by Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich has provided the general framework for the stages of the path. This work has been seminal to developing a spiritual formation pathway for Fellowship. Nancy Kane's *Stages of The Soul: God's Invitation To Greater Love* has also been helpful in developing the following ideas.

Stages 5 and 7 describe seasons that can accompany any of them. You will see this reflected in The Path Inventory, which reports a Home Stage from among the scored stages and surfaces The Wall and Legacy Living separately.

Ready To Trust God?

The Path reveals your next step toward Jesus. It is our answer to the very earnest question of “is there more to the Christian life?” We believe there is. Knowing God is so easy and available. Yet knowing God also requires effort on our behalf. The Path acknowledges free grace and costly salvation in Christ Jesus by faith AND the difficult work of learning to entrust our whole lives to him. This holistic approach to discipleship empowers each of us to have a clear next step in our Christian Formation but also invites all of us to go farther out and deeper into relationship with God.

Now, here’s the caveat. The Path is deceptive in its simplicity. It may seem as if the path is an “up and to the right” approach. It is not. Remember the meme earlier? The same is true in the life of a disciple of Jesus. Our faith journey is never up and to the right. We are never on a steady incline toward the promised land – though I wish that were true! Instead, we experience progression and regression, fits and starts, growth and setbacks.

The Path acknowledges this by assuming we will move back and forth between stages. We will have a Home Stage, where we spend most of our spiritual time. We will also have a Regression Tendency – the stage we return to when we are depleted, grieving, or spiritually unwell. We might live in a stage for a time, progress for a time, then fall back for a while. We might touch Stage 4 for a season before returning to Stage 3. We can even remain at Stage 5 for an extended season. This journey is complex, and moving backward for a season is not the same as losing ground permanently.

Consider this your pep talk to trust God into the unknown. An invitation to dance with Jesus in the flames of your life, and an “all aboard” on your journey with the Holy Spirit as he leads you farther out and deeper into God’s grace. There is so much more of God to know and so much about him still to be discovered!

Would you be willing to trust him and dive into knowing him?

Discussion Questions

1. What has been a catalyst for your spiritual growth?

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2. What have been setbacks to your spiritual growth?

3. What areas do you sense you need to grow in?

4. If it is true that insanity is doing the same things and expecting different results, then what should you change in your spiritual life to experience spiritual growth?

Before we dive into the Seven Stages of Christian Formation, have someone who knows you well answer the following questions for you.

1. How have you recognized my faith and commitment to Jesus Christ?
2. How have you witnessed me positively impacting the lives of others?
3. How do you see me spiritually serving or impacting others?
4. What spiritual gifts do you think God has given me? Why?
5. Which stage of Christian Formation would you honestly assess I am in?

CHAPTER 5

Knowing Where You Are

You have reached the point in Part Two where the Inventory belongs. Take it now, before you read the accounts of the seven stages that follow. You will find it at fellowshipproswell.org/pathway/ — the same page you downloaded this book from — and it takes about fifteen minutes.

What comes back is not a single number. It is a profile: a reading across five domains, a balance between your being, feeling, and doing, and an interpretation that holds all of it together.

Why Take an Inventory at All

Self-examination is not a modern invention or a personality exercise. Scripture asks for it repeatedly — examine yourselves, search me and know me, let a person examine himself. The posture it assumes is humility: a willingness to find out something about yourself you did not already believe.

That posture matters more than your answers. An inventory answered as you wish you were returns a portrait of someone who does not exist, and no one can be discipled in the abstract. Answer as the last six months actually went.

What the Inventory Returns

Five things, and they are meant to be read together rather than separately.

1. Your Stage Profile

Your Home Stage, your Growth Edge, and your Regression Tendency — the three markers defined earlier in this Part. This is the part most people came for, and it is the part that means least on its own.

2. Doing · Being · Feeling Balance

Christian formation is the alignment of our being, feeling, and doing. The Inventory measures all three separately and then reports the gap between them, because the gap is usually where the real story is. A person whose doing runs far ahead of their being is in a different situation from a person whose being runs ahead of their doing, even when both land on the same Home Stage. The Inventory names the pattern it sees.

3. Your Domain Profile

The five domains — Spiritual, Relational, Emotional, Intellectual, and Physical — each reported on a five-point range: Dormant, Tender, Emerging, Growing, Flourishing.

Read these as descriptions, not grades. Dormant does not mean failing; it means an area of your life that formation has not reached yet, which is true of everyone somewhere. Most people find their Spiritual domain well ahead of the others, because that is the only one most of us were ever taught to

work on. The gap between your strongest and weakest domain is often more useful than either number by itself.

4. What Your Profile Means

An integrated reading that holds the stage, the balance, and the domains together. If you only read one card, read this one.

5. Your Next Step Toward Jesus

Specific next steps drawn from your Home Stage. This is where the Inventory stops describing and starts asking something of you.

What a Result Is Not

- It is not a score. There is no passing stage and no one is behind.
- It is not permanent. People move, and they move in both directions.
- It is not a ranking. A Stage 5 believer is not further along than a Stage 3 believer; The Wall is a season, not an achievement.
- It is not a verdict on your salvation. The Inventory measures formation, and formation is not the same thing as standing before God.

Why The Wall and Legacy Living Never Come Back as Your Home Stage

If you are in a season of crisis, or a season of setting your life in order, you may notice that neither Stage 5 nor Stage 7 appears as your Home Stage. This is deliberate.

Both are seasonal overlays rather than sequential rungs — seasons that can come upon a person at any point on The Path, alongside any Home Stage. Scoring them as destinations would suggest a person arrives at The Wall by progressing through Stage 4, and that is not how walls work. The Inventory surfaces them separately, as overlays, when your answers indicate you are in that season.

What the Inventory Cannot See

Every inventory is a self-report, which means it can only see what you can see. That is a real limitation and it is worth naming before you read your result rather than after.

A person who has spent thirty years assuming that showing up and keeping the rules is what faith is may sincerely answer that their faith is personally their own — because they sincerely believe it. The instrument has no way to catch that. The person who most needs a question asked is often the least equipped to ask it of themselves.

This is not a flaw to be engineered around. It is the reason The Path is walked with someone rather than alone. An assessment can raise a question. Only a relationship can answer it.

When the Result Surprises You

If it reads lower than you expected

This is the most common surprise, and the most important one not to argue with immediately. Long-time churchgoers sometimes come back at Stage 1. That result is not an error in the tool, and it is not a verdict on whether you are a Christian. It is pointing at something worth understanding, and the Stage 1 chapter takes it up directly. Read that chapter before you decide the Inventory is wrong.

If it reads higher than you expected

Less common, and usually a sign of answering aspirationally rather than honestly. Retake it with the last six months in view rather than your intentions for the next six.

If it simply seems wrong

Sometimes it is. The Inventory is directional, not diagnostic, and it can miss. But hold the disagreement rather than resolving it — read the seven stages first. A description of a stage usually settles the question faster than a result can.

A Second Set of Eyes

Because the Inventory can only see what you can see, it helps to have someone else answer for you. Ask a spouse, a close friend, or someone who has known you a long time — someone whose honesty you trust more than their kindness.

Take the inventory again and ask them to answer based on their experience of you. Where the two readings agree, you can hold the result with more confidence. Where they disagree, you have found the conversation worth having — and disagreement is not a problem to fix. It is information neither of you had before.

Hold It Loosely For Now

Do not write anything down yet.

You now have a result. The next chapter gives a short account of each of the seven stages so you can weigh what you were told against your own sense of where you are. The chapter after that explains something the result cannot show you on its own — that the stages are not rooms you pass through and close behind you. Read both. Some of it will land uncomfortably and some will not sound like you at all, and both reactions are useful.

At the end of Part Two there is a place to record your Home Stage, your Growth Edge, and your Regression Tendency. You will name them there with far better information than you have right now, and you will do it alongside the person walking with you. The Inventory gives you a starting place. What follows tells you whether it was right.

FOR THE DISCIPLE-MAKER

Receiving Someone Else's Result

How you respond in the first two minutes will teach the person more than anything you say afterward. Do not celebrate a high stage or console a low one — both communicate that the stages are a ranking, and once someone believes that, every conversation afterward is about their standing rather than their next step.

Do not argue them into a stage. If their result and your read of them disagree, say so plainly and then let it sit. You will usually be right and it will usually not matter — a person who has been talked into a diagnosis does not own it, and ownership is the whole point. Give the stage guides time to do the work.

Ask about the balance card and the domain profile before you ask about the stage. Those two produce better conversation, because they are harder to be defensive about. “Your Emotional domain came back well behind the others — does that match how the last year has felt?” opens something. “You came back Stage 2” usually closes it.

And watch the gap between the profile and the person in front of you. If someone reads Stage 3 or Stage 4 but there is almost nothing in their life to point at — no appetite, no fruit, no evidence any of it reaches Monday — do not let the number settle the matter. That gap is what the Inventory cannot see, and closing it is your work, not the tool's. It takes proximity and time, and it cannot be rushed without costing you the relationship that makes it possible.

CHAPTER 6

The Seven Stages in Brief

What follows is a short account of each stage that you can use to evaluate your results against. Which one most resonates with where you believe you are on the journey? Over the next weeks, you and your disciple-maker will go much deeper into your Home Stage, your Growth Edge, and your Regression Tendency. Each stage has its own material, and your disciple-maker will put the right ones in your hands once the two of you have named those three together. For now the question is simpler than that. Does the result you were given describe you?

Stage 1 — Awareness of God

Stage 1 covers more ground than its name suggests. It begins the moment a person senses there is something larger than themselves — awe at something beautiful, a crisis that outruns their own resources, a question they cannot answer — and it ends when they place their trust in the finished work of Jesus. Everything between those two points is Stage 1: curiosity, investigation, resistance, honest wrestling.

Landing here does not mean you have never been religious. Some people who read Stage 1 have been in church for decades. What this stage measures is whether faith has become something you personally needed, and that question can go unfaced for a very long time inside a life that looks Christian from the outside. If this result surprises you, do not argue with it yet. The Stage 1 material takes up exactly this, and it is more common than you would guess.

Stage 2 — The Life of Discipleship

Stage 2 is where a genuine faith learns what to do with itself — Scripture, prayer, gathering with the church consistently, beginning to put sin to death. There is often real zeal here and very little structure. People at Stage 2 frequently know they want more and have no idea what the next thing is.

The most common reason someone sits at Stage 2 for years is not resistance. It is that no one ever walked with them. A person can hold a faith that is entirely their own, believe it sincerely, and never once have been discipled by another human being. If you landed here, the question is not what you should read next. It is who is going to walk with you.

Stage 3 — The Productive Life

Stage 3 has a recognizable shape: you worship, you gather, you give, and you go. You have moved from receiving to contributing — serving, giving, membership, and the beginning of making disciples yourself. From the outside this looks like arrival, and in most churches it is treated that way.

That is the risk. Stage 3 is the easiest stage to remain in for a decade without noticing, because everything about it reads as health. If you landed here, the useful question is not what else you could be doing. It is whether anyone has asked you lately how you actually are — and whether your answer was about anything other than your schedule.

Stage 4 — The Inward Journey

Stage 4 turns inward. Not away from God and not away from community, but toward the parts of yourself that activity has allowed you to avoid: your history, your motives, the things you have never said out loud. It is courageous introspection within community, and the community half is not optional. This stage goes wrong when it is attempted alone.

From the outside, Stage 4 often looks like decline. People pull back from serving, go quiet, sometimes say church feels hollow. It is not backsliding. It is that what worked at Stage 3 has stopped working and they are honest enough to ask why. If you landed here you probably already knew, and you may have wondered whether something was wrong with you. Something isn't.

Stage 5 — The Wall

The Wall is not a rung on a ladder. It is a season that can come upon anyone at any point — an existential crisis in which what you wanted and what God allowed will not reconcile. A death. A diagnosis. A marriage ending. A prayer left unanswered long enough that it changes what you believe about prayer.

Because it is a season rather than a stage, the inventory never reports it as your Home Stage. It surfaces separately when your answers indicate you are in one. If that is you, the far side of a wall leads somewhere — to deeper trust or to lowered trust — and which one has a great deal to do with whether you walk it alone.

Stage 6 — The Life of Love

Stage 6 is the abundant life, reflecting Jesus clearly and consistently. What marks it is not more activity; a Stage 3 believer may well be busier. It is that the interior and the exterior have come into alignment. Conviction held with humility. Love that does not require anything in return. The capacity to stay close to someone in distress without absorbing it or losing yourself in it.

No one arrives here by trying harder. It is the fruit of having gone through Stage 4, and usually Stage 5, honestly. If you landed here, the danger is quiet: people at Stage 6 tend to be widely admired, and admiration has a way of silencing the voices that would still tell you the truth about yourself.

Stage 7 — Legacy Living

Legacy Living is setting a life in order and leaving behind blessing. Like The Wall, it is a season rather than a rung, and the inventory surfaces it separately. It often arrives with age, but not

only — a diagnosis, a transition, or a clear-eyed look at your own mortality can bring it much earlier.

The work is more practical than sentimental: making arrangements clear, repairing what can still be repaired, saying what has been left unsaid, and handing on what you have been given to people who will actually receive it. If this season is yours, the question is not how much time is left. It is whether the people who need to hear something from you have heard it.

CHAPTER 7

What You Carry Forward

A question comes up almost every time The Path is taught, and it is worth answering plainly: do you leave a stage behind when you move to the next one?

No. And the picture that suggests you do is the most common way to misread this whole framework.

The Wrong Picture

Seven boxes in a row. You occupy one, graduate, and step into the next, closing the door behind you. Read that way, Stage 6 would mean a person had finished with the wonder of Stage 1, moved past the disciplines of Stage 2, outgrown the serving and giving of Stage 3, and completed the interior work of Stage 4. That person would not be mature. They would be hollow.

What Actually Happens

You carry forward what God has formed in you. The stages are not rooms you pass through; they are the places where particular things get worked into a person. Once worked in, they come with you.

The wonder that marked Stage 1 — the awe of realizing there is a God and he is not you — is meant to be present at Stage 6. A person who has lost their capacity to be astonished by God has not advanced. They have calcified. Some of the most mature believers you will ever meet are the easiest to move to tears by something they have known for forty years.

The practices that took root in Stage 2 do not get outgrown. Scripture and prayer are not a beginner's course. They are how anyone at any stage stays near to God.

The shape of Stage 3 — worship, gather, give, go — should still be visible in a Stage 6 life. But the motive is transformed. At Stage 3 these things are often carried by duty, by the desire to be useful, or by a sense of what a serious Christian ought to do. None of that is dishonorable; it is how most of us begin. By Stage 6 the same practices are carried by love. The behavior may look identical from across the room. The engine underneath it is different, and that difference is most of what formation means.

The inward journey of Stage 4 does not end when it has been made once. Self-examination becomes a rhythm rather than a crisis. A person cannot sustain the life of love without continuing to tend their own interior — the moment they stop, the old distortions return quietly and start driving again.

So What Does Get Left Behind?

Not the practices. The immaturity in them. The performing. The fear. The need to be seen doing it. The version of obedience that was really about earning something. Those fall away, and what remains is the same activity with nothing false underneath it.

What This Means for Your Result

Your Home Stage does not name the last thing you stopped doing. It names where the frontier of your formation currently sits — where God is presently at work in you. Everything behind that frontier should still be alive, and if it is not, that is worth attending to more urgently than moving forward.

This also explains the Regression Tendency. Under strain, the things carried forward are what we reach for last. A person whose Home Stage is 6 does not fall back to Stage 3 by forgetting how to love. They fall back by returning to duty as the engine, because duty is more familiar and asks less of the heart. That is what regression looks like in practice — not that a stage is undone, but that what matured within it goes unused. Nothing God has formed in you is lost. But under strain we reach for what is familiar rather than what is deepest, and love asks more of the heart than duty does.

Whether that happens by choice or by circumstance varies, and the difference matters. Sometimes a person quietly settles for the easier engine. Sometimes grief or exhaustion or a season of suffering consumes the capacity that used to go to love. The first calls for an honest question. The second calls for company and patience. Confusing them does harm in both directions — so before you name a Regression Tendency as a failure, find out which one you are looking at.

FOR THE DISCIPLE-MAKER

When Someone Asks Whether They Have Left a Stage Behind

They are usually asking one of two things, and it is worth finding out which. Some are asking permission to stop doing something — serving, giving, gathering — because they believe they have advanced past it. The answer is no, and the reason is that the practice was never the point; what it was forming in them was.

Others are asking whether something that has faded was supposed to fade. Someone who says they used to feel wonder and now feel very little is not describing maturity. They are describing something that has gone quiet and should be tended. Ask what changed, and when.

CHAPTER 8

Naming Where You Are

You have a result and you have read the stages. Now name them.

This is the page the rest of the book has been moving toward. Not because writing something down changes anything by itself, but because a next step you have not named is a next step you will not take. Formation stays theoretical until someone says out loud where they actually are.

When the Inventory and the Chapters Disagree

Some of you read a stage chapter and recognized yourself somewhere other than where the Inventory placed you. Take that seriously — it happens, and it is usually worth more than the result.

The Inventory asked you thirty-odd questions about the last six months. The chapters gave you a portrait of a whole way of living. A portrait is a slower and better mirror. If a chapter described you and the Inventory did not, trust the chapter — but say why out loud to someone before you commit to it, because the direction people revise in tells you something. Most of us revise upward when we are protecting ourselves and downward when we are being honest.

If they agree, you can hold the result with real confidence. That is not a small thing.

Your Three Markers

Write these in pencil. They will change, and that is not a failure of the exercise.

MY HOME STAGE IS

The stage where you currently spend most of your spiritual life. Not where you have been, and not where you are headed. Where you actually live right now.

MY GROWTH EDGE IS

The stage you sense God inviting you toward — where your formation is already pulling you, which you may already touch for short seasons.

MY REGRESSION TENDENCY IS

The stage you return to when you are tired, hurt, or depleted. Naming this one is the most uncomfortable and the most useful. It is not a confession of failure — nothing God has formed in you is undone by a hard season. It is simply the more familiar way of living you reach for when the deeper one asks more than you have. You cannot watch for something you have not named.

Your Domains

Your Inventory returned a reading across all five. Record the two that matter most for the next season — the one carrying you and the one that needs attention.

MY STRONGEST DOMAIN IS

THE DOMAIN I MOST NEED TO ATTEND TO IS

Most people find their Spiritual domain well ahead of the others. If that is you, the interesting question is not how to grow it further. It is what the distance between it and your weakest domain has been costing you.

Your Balance

MY DOING, BEING, AND FEELING ARE OUT OF BALANCE IN THIS DIRECTION

Christian formation is the alignment of our being, feeling, and doing. Where they run at different speeds, the gap is usually where the next real work is — and it is almost always more uncomfortable than adding another practice.

If You Are in a Season of The Wall or Legacy Living

Neither of these will appear as your Home Stage, because neither is a rung. If your Inventory flagged one, or if reading those chapters named something you are living through right now, write it here alongside your Home Stage rather than instead of it.

I AM CURRENTLY IN A SEASON OF

A person can be at Home in Stage 3 and at The Wall in the same month. Both are true. Naming the season does not replace your Home Stage; it explains why the last year has felt the way it has.

What Your Home Stage Asks of You

Every stage has one thing a person at that stage needs most. Not the only thing, but the thing without which the others do not take. Find yours.

IF YOUR HOME STAGE IS	YOUR GREAT NEED IS
Stage 1 — Awareness of God	The gospel spoken by someone who cares enough to say it. A person who tells the truth out of compassion and stays for the answer.
Stage 2 — The Life of Discipleship	A discipleship relationship. Not a curriculum. A person.
Stage 3 — The Productive Life	Someone who asks how you are, not what you are doing. A question your activity cannot answer.
Stage 4 — The Inward Journey	A safe place to be honest about what you find. Not solitude. Company that does not flinch.
Stage 5 — The Wall (overlay)	A forerunner — someone who has been through a wall of their own and came out still believing. Presence from someone who knows the terrain.
Stage 6 — The Life of Love	People to give your life to, and at least one person who still tells you the truth about you.
Stage 7 — Legacy Living (overlay)	Someone who will help you finish on purpose, and who will receive what you are passing on.

Notice what is in every row: a person. Not a book, not a class, not a practice. That is not an oversight in the design — it is the design. The Path is walked with someone, and every stage needs a different kind of someone.

Choosing What Comes Next

Each stage chapter ends with resources, and none of them is prescribed. There is no single book that fits every person at a stage, and the one that changed your disciple-maker's life may do nothing for you.

So choose together. Someone who knows your history, your capacity, and what you are actually carrying this year is in a position to choose well; a list printed in a book is not. Start with the great need, then pick something that serves it.

THE PERSON I AM WALKING THIS NEXT SEASON WITH IS

WHAT WE HAVE CHOSEN TO WORK THROUGH TOGETHER IS

Your Next Step

One step. Not a plan, not a list, not a year of intentions. The Path asks the same question at every stage, and it never asks for more than the next one.

MY NEXT STEP TOWARD JESUS IS

I WILL TAKE IT BY

There is no schedule you are behind on. There is no stage you should have reached by now. There is only the next step, and it is available to you today — wherever this book found you.

FOR THE DISCIPLE-MAKER

Running This Conversation

This is the conversation the whole book exists to make possible, and the most common way to ruin it is to run it efficiently. Do not walk someone through these fields in twenty minutes. Give it a whole sitting, and expect to leave at least one blank.

Start with the Regression Tendency, not the Home Stage. It is the marker people are least defensive about naming — everyone knows where they go when things fall apart — and naming it first establishes that this conversation is honest rather than flattering. Say plainly that it is not a failure and that nothing formed in them has been lost; they have simply been reaching for what is familiar. Then ask whether this season has been one of choosing the easier engine or one of being flattened by circumstance. Those need opposite responses from you.

When they name a stage you would not have named, ask what in the chapter made them say that. You are listening for whether they recognized themselves or argued themselves into a position. Recognition sounds like relief, often with a specific memory attached. Argument sounds like a case being made. Do not correct the second one in the moment — ask them to sit with it a week.

Resist finishing the last two fields for them. You will be tempted, because you can see the next step more clearly than they can and they are working slowly. But a next step you named for someone is a next step they will abandon quietly. Let the pause be long.

Then set a time to come back to it. A named next step with no return date is a good intention, and this book is full of arguments against those. Put something on a calendar before you leave the table.