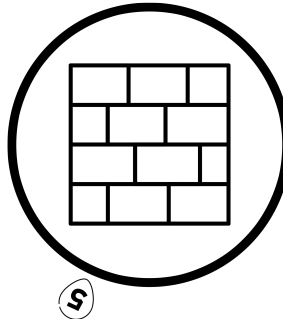




THE PATH

fellowship bible church

Stage 5 — The Wall



How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? - Psalm 13:1-2

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 or lowered trust in God.

Case Study

Tony, an engineer, was recently fired from his job of 21 years. He has never been let go from a job before and is reeling from the unexpected shock. Though he is a believer he is sinking into depression and is questioning God's goodness. "Haven't I done things the *right* way? This is not fair." Tony is at The Wall.

Raquel has attended church her entire life and loves God. Yet the death of her father, her hero, has induced a pain so deep she cannot fully process it all. A naturally private person, Raquel is dealing with the heartache as only a care-giver can: internally and alone. She doesn't want to burden others but she's beginning to isolate and pull away from people. Raquel is at The Wall.

Geno and Kim have prayed for a child for 14 years. After conceiving, waiting 18 weeks, and throwing a gender reveal party Kim miscarried. Devastating grief encircles them both. Such deep despair has disrupted both of their lives. They are hopeless for having a child and despair of life itself. How can they go back to church after inviting everyone to their gender reveal? Geno and Kim are at The Wall.

Miriam arrived at college with real zeal, determined not to become a statistic. In her second year her closest friend from home was killed by a drunk driver, and three months later her parents separated. She prayed through both and felt nothing come back. The faith she has believed her entire life has not failed her intellectually — she still thinks it is true. It has simply stopped working. She goes to church when she is home and finds she cannot sing. She is not angry at God, exactly. She cannot find him. Miriam is at The Wall.

Overview

This season, event, or series of events is The Wall. Like Stage 7, Stage 5 functions as a seasonal overlay rather than a sequential rung on The Path — it can occur at any point in our lives, alongside any Home Stage. The Wall can come to someone in Stage 1 as surely as to someone in Stage 6. For this reason The Path Inventory does not score The Wall as a Home Stage; it surfaces it as an overlay when a person indicates they are in a season of crisis, distance, or difficulty.

Stage 5 will most likely happen alongside Stage 4 and they both have similarities. Both have a self-centeredness, both can feel like dying, and both may be sprung upon us by external circumstances. Among the differences between them are we tend to choose to enter Stage 4 while Stage 5 *happens* to us. It is precisely this lack of control that tends to make The Wall so difficult. Yet here is the beauty of The Path: To make it through The Wall one must go on an Inward Journey. There we will find God, gain strength in the Romans 8:28-ness of Christ and, over time, come to the same conclusion that Job came to: The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord¹.

When facing The Wall, followers of Jesus need a healthy guide who has successfully summited the wall and found their faith to not only be intact but have come to a deeper trust in God. Similar to Stage 4, these guides are soul care workers who will be empathetic and point you to God's truth. If navigated alone or with an unhealthy guide, our faith and trust in God can regress. If navigated in community with a healthy guide then faith and trust in God can deepen.

What You Carry Into This Stage

The Wall is a season rather than a rung, and it can come upon a person carrying anything — wonder, practices, service, interior honesty. It tests all of it.

What is carried out the other side is not something new so much as something proven. Faith that has held when it stopped working is faith a person can lean on later, and it is very often what makes them able to sit with someone else at their own wall.

Biblical Examples

The Psalms give us several pictures of profound heartbreak and concern that God isn't hearing our prayers. The Psalms are not only examples of The Wall but give us language while we journey through it.

My heart is struck down like grass and has withered; I forget to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my flesh. I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places; I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop. All the day my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse. For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink, because of your indignation and anger; for you have taken me up and thrown me down. My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass. - Psalms 102:4-11

¹Job 1:21

Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. - Psalms 73:12-14

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. - Psalms 16:10-11



The Great Need of This Stage

The great need in Stage 5 is a forerunner — someone who has been through a wall of their own and came out still believing. Not answers. Not encouragement. Presence from someone who knows the terrain.

Stage Steps

- 5.1 - Acknowledge Crisis
- 5.2 - Grieve - Feel Your Feelings
- 5.3 - Process Grief with A Forerunner or Soul Care Worker
- 5.4 - Hope Again
- 5.5 - Become a Forerunner

5.1 - Acknowledge Crisis

You encounter a circumstance that challenges your perception of the world, brings pain to your heart, and/or causes confrontation with God. You must acknowledge what is happening. Should you ignore it, you will only prolong your suffering. With a guide and community alongside of you, acknowledge what has happened and look fully into the grief, offense, or heartbreak.

5.2 - Grieve - Feel Your Feelings

You feel all of your feelings. According to Chip Dodd there are eight core feelings²: Hurt, Shame, Lonely, Fear, Guilt, Glad, Sad, and Anger. Each of these feelings give us language to assess our hearts. While in The Wall, it is crucial to feel your feelings and avoid shutting them off or short circuiting the process. This may seem an excruciating process, yet it is the fastest way through to healing.

5.3 - Process Grief with A Forerunner or Soul Care Worker

You find a soul care worker or a forerunner³ to process your grief with. You regularly talk with them to process your feelings, explore what has happened to you, and listen as you wrestle to make sense of what has happened. This crucial relationship should point you to Jesus and give you a vantage point of “life on the other side” of your situation. Your strength in this stage will be found in not being alone as you wrestle with God’s goodness in what he has allowed to transpire.

5.4 - Hope Again

Arguably the most difficult step in this Stage, hope is the antidote to nearly all of life’s ailments. Hope is borrowing the joy of tomorrow, today. It will require you to ponder the hope of life with God in the new heavens and new earth and return to live in that imagined reality today. You may find this step impossible today. This is normal. Hope happens when we enlarge our perspective from ourselves and place it on God — fighting to see where we are as God sees it. Hope is your pathway to the top of The Wall. Trust in God’s wisdom is the vaulted step over it.

5.5 - Become a Forerunner

You are either at the top of The Wall or nearly to the other side. You now turn your attention to those who are just stepping entering this difficult season. You remember what it felt like to be with them. Now, you become a forerunner for that person. You cultivate empathy for them, you become a listener to listen to understand rather than respond, and you use wisdom on when to help them see their circumstance from God’s perspective. As you heal from your Wall experience, you lead others from your scars into hope and trust.

Guides

As mentioned before, a Forerunner is the ideal guide for you. When looking for a guide, be sure to find someone who:

- Has journeyed through the wall and still trusts God.

²“Feelings, ultimately, are tools we have been given to live fully in a tragic place, where wonder and tragedy, great loves and great losses, intermingle. Our lives cannot yield fully to the eternity we envision in this finite place. But feeling our feelings allows us to ‘keep heart’ in the struggle of living fully, loving deeply, and leading well a life worth living for ourselves and with others[...] These eight core feelings are the beginning of the expression of all human emotional experience. From these core feelings we can expand the expression to name conditions of the heart such as awe, grief, envy, anxiousness, depression, revenge, delight, and boredom.” The Voices of The Heart: A Call To Faithful Living, Chip Dodd. Sage Hill Resources, Nashville, TN, X-XI.

³A forerunner is someone who has experienced the wall and is working or has worked through the wall to reach the top. This person may be a professional or they may be a trusted friend. They could also be someone you have been introduced to who has endured similar pain to what you are experiencing. This person is more than just an ear to listen. Though they will be good listeners, they should also be pointing you to Jesus and to the steady assertion God doesn’t waste anything — including our suffering.

- Has a life worth imitating.
- Is a good listener.
- Is able to live in the tensions of your current wrestle without judgement or becoming overly prescriptive.

"Being" Milestones Of Stage 5

Stage 5: Domain Milestones

Spiritual - Living in tension between your desire and what God has allowed.

Relational - Connection with a guide and belonging in a healing community.

Emotional - Feeling and naming your feelings; courage to process feelings out loud.

Intellectual - Understanding God's nature and his seen and unseen will.

Physical - Being outside in the sun for at least 10 minutes every day doing something physical (walking, jogging, playing sports, hiking, bird watching, etc.).

Exercise: On A Scale of 1-10, what score would you give yourself for each of these domains? What lesson from the life and ministry of Jesus will help you take a step toward holistic health?

Spiritual -

Relational -

Emotional -

Intellectual -

Physical -

"Feeling" Milestones Inventory of Stage 5

1. Do you find yourself able to extend grace to others and preach the gospel to yourself while in Stage 5? Why or why not?

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2. If shalom is a primary marker of God's Kingdom, how do you find that in Stage 5?

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3. How does God use suffering to humble us? Have you experienced humility as a result of hardship?
-
4. In what ways will feeling your feelings help you be a better representation of God to those close to you?
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Taking Your Next Step

There are two critical relationships and one growth step for those in this stage.

Critical Relationships: A Forerunner and Healthy Community

While doing the work in Stage 5 it is critical to have a Forerunner a guide. You may be tempted to go it alone and in isolation. If you are introverted, bringing someone into your present hardship may seem insurmountable. Yet it is essential to reach the top of the Wall and be healthy. Just remember: people may appear and even at times prove to be unsafe. Yet even your own voice, outside of community, will lie to you. The two great assets in this Stage will be a Forerunner and healthy community.

Growth Step: Renew Faith and Become A Forerunner

Your journey to hope and trust will be an arduous one that will take time to reach. Each of us needs grace, space, and time in order for transformation to happen. Be kind to yourself through the process. Your growth step, when you are ready, is to renew your faith in Jesus Christ and choose to see your circumstance as God sees it. Once you are able to help someone out of your scars, as opposed to your woundedness, become a Forerunner for someone else whom God sends or connects you with.

Owning Your Growth

My Forerunner Is:_____.

My Community Is:_____.

A Prayer For Renewed Faith, Hope, and Trust

Heavenly Father,

I come before You today to renew my faith, rekindle my hope, and confess my trust in you and your good plans for me.

Help me to recall Your faithfulness throughout history and in my own life, that I might stand firm on the promises of Your Word. You tell us in Romans 8:28 that all things work together for the good of those who love you and are called to your purposes. I believe that today. And I need you, Father, to rebuild any broken places in my belief, so that my faith in the finished work of your Son may be unshakeable in the winds of uncertainty and doubt.

Father, breathe new life into my hope. Fill my hearts with an expectant joy for the future You hold. Help me to see beyond this current struggle and into the glorious tomorrow You have prepared, knowing that Your purposes for me are good.

And Lord, where my trust has wavered, where fear has taken root, or where past disappointments have left their mark, I ask for fresh confidence in You. Help me to surrender all anxieties, need for control, and limited understanding into Your capable hands. Teach me to lean not on my own understanding, but in all my ways to acknowledge You, knowing You will make this path straight.

So Father I renew my faith, hope, and trust in you and ask for your help as I walk in courage, love wisely, and serve others with a joyful heart. I pray these things in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen.

Questions For Stage 5 Analysis

1. Develop a plan below for how you will work through The Wall when it comes.

2. What type of person would make an ideal forerunner for you in this season of life?

3. Look up the following verses and write down one observation about God's nature.

4. Job 40:1-2

5. Isaiah 45:5-7

6. Psalms 30:11-12

7. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

FOR THE DISCIPLE-MAKER**Do Not Answer the Question**

Your instinct at The Wall will be to explain — to reach for a verse, a reason, or a reframe that makes the pain make sense. Resist it. Almost every wrong thing said to a suffering believer is said by someone who could not tolerate their own helplessness.

The person at The Wall is not asking a question you can answer. They are finding out whether anyone will stay. Say that you do not know why, that you are not going anywhere, and then stop talking. Silence you can sit in is worth more than anything you could say.

Do not rush the grief and do not put a schedule on it. A wall can last years. Encouragement offered too early lands as pressure to hurry up and be fine, and people learn quickly to perform recovery for whoever needs them to have it.

And be honest about whether you are the right guide. If you have never been through a wall, say so, keep showing up anyway, and help them find a forerunner who has. That is not passing them off. Someone who has come out the other side still believing can offer them something you cannot, and knowing that about yourself is its own kind of care.

Resources

- Dark Night Of The Soul - Gerald G. May
- Where Is God When It Hurts - Phillip Yancey
- A Grace Disguised - Jerry Sitter
- When Narcissism Comes To Church - Chuck DeGroat
- A Grief Observed - C.S. Lewis
- Problem of Pain - C.S. Lewis
- Til We Have Faces - C.S. Lewis
- Embodied - Preston Sprinkle
- People To Be Loved - Preston Sprinkle
- When Children Come Out - Dr. Mark Yarhouse