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# STAGES *of* FAITH

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*Spiritual Guidance. Life-long Transformation.*

## SEARCH FOR A BETTER WAY

In April of 2003, scientists mapped the human genome—the most important organized scientific effort of mankind, and perhaps the greatest scientific discovery of our generation. This ground-breaking discovery gave us the foundation to understand how all the genetic material stored within our DNA strands work together to keep our heart pumping, brain thinking, and bones growing.

Of enormous import from the Genome Project is the anticipated possibility of improving our health. Our DNA—wound up and packaged in structures called chromosomes—contains each person’s blueprint of life, an “instructional manual” for the 100 trillion cells that make you, *you*. The cost of the Genome Project? A staggering 3 billion dollars.

With less fanfare, but as significant, *Stages of Faith* research has unlocked new information about authentic spiritual health, leading to three crucial Breakthrough Discoveries.

## BREAKTHROUGH Number One

***Biblically-based:*** *Stages of Faith* research has isolated the spiritual DNA code deep within each follower of Christ. This unprecedented Breakthrough Discovery has captured the essential markers of the process of spiritual growth. The seasoned apostle John in 1 John 2:12-14, describes three stages of genuine spiritual growth and eight milestone markers. John shows us how he was transformed from the Son of Thunder to the Apostle of Love.<sup>1</sup> Grounded in the authoritative Scriptures, *Stages of Faith* uncovers the “blueprint”—the “instructional manual” for God’s unique design that makes you, *you*.

When you look into these three stages and the eight milestone markers, you are peering into the very core—the DNA—of the spiritual life. We now have clear benchmarks by which we can reliably evaluate

our growth toward its fullest expression. At the core of each of the milestones are the underlying issues that determine the believer’s spiritual health.

A fundamental tenet of the *Stages of Faith* research is the identification of the primary issues that either catalyze or delay one’s wholeness.



Biblically-based, a pioneering contribution of *Stages of Faith* is it has mapped the essential components of the believer’s transformation. Christian educators, leaders, counselors, and faith-shapers will now have a better way to provide care and skilled guidance to others.

## BREAKTHROUGH Number Two

***Developmentally-informed:*** Having identified the essential stages and milestones that comprise the DNA of the believer’s spiritual life, the next important challenge is to answer *how* and *why* questions. “How does faith deepen and mature in each stage and milestone?” “How can believers be transformed rather than merely informed?” “Why do believers stall or get stuck?” And more personally, “What does the Story of my transformation look like through the lens of *Stages of Faith*?”

Two publications—*Stages of Faith: 8 Milestones That Mark Your Journey*<sup>2</sup>, and *The Path: How to Understand and Experience Authentic Spiritual Growth*<sup>3</sup>—explain the biblical model with a focus on the mechanics of change, and the patterns and rhythms of spiritual development. Developmentally-informed, this attention to the *process*, has been absent from church pulpits, discipleship materials, Christian classrooms and resources addressing Christian growth. The research makes an exclusive contribution to discipleship and spiritual formation materials by integrating *Twelve Conclusions* that will change the way you think about God’s work in your life. No other resource has done this so thoroughly and practically in a life-changing way.

For instance, we learn in the *Twelve Conclusions* that there is no one single milestone that explains the whole of spiritual growth. It is always about attending to all eight milestones. Tragically, believers often pay attention to only a few of the eight milestone markers, leaving them with ongoing injuries, and not optimally spiritually fit for the journey ahead.

Another Conclusion is that every believer will need to revisit and strengthen each of the dynamic milestones. Old issues will resurface. New life circumstances and events will call for a deeper or a fresh way of readdressing a particular milestone. In God's renewing process, none of us will ever completely grow beyond the challenges of the Childhood, Young Adulthood, and Parenthood stages.

Don't be surprised! If any milestone is neglected or avoided, spiritual progress is detained and growth stalls. Frankly, this explains why even a Christian leader can be publicly "successful" in a reputable ministry and yet live privately with unresolved issues, unhealthy habits, significant hurts—falling short of deep transformation—and operate out of the Childhood stage of faith.

### **BREAKTHROUGH** Number Three

**Reliably-measurable:** A third Breakthrough Discovery resulting from the *Stages of Faith* research is that we can now target the specific areas that fuel or hinder our spiritual health. A one-of-a-kind instrument—the *Spiritual Growth Profile*—has been developed to diagnose your spiritual "fitness" in each stage and milestone. God is at work in you and you will see exactly where He is working. You can now quickly and accurately identify the underlying issues that impact your spiritual DNA. You can intentionally partner with God to strengthen your spiritual fitness and get in optimal spiritual shape.

Take the free *Spiritual Growth Profile* online at [www.stagesoffaith.com](http://www.stagesoffaith.com) and see your results scored.

- Locate where you are strong
- Identify what obstacles delay your progress
- Tailor a plan to strengthen your spiritual fitness.

### **How NOT to Measure Spiritual Growth!**

We measure what we can see. Our metrics are often based solely on external behaviors. Other instruments look at approved and acceptable practices and beliefs. Sadly, it is not uncommon for leaders to prescribe that you attend more, study more, serve more, memorize more, pray more, witness more, give more, be more committed...

Despite good intentions, I am quite certain that you have experienced exhaustion, discouragement, disillusionment, and guilt if you relied on these simplistic formulas. These prescriptions simply don't provide reliable evidence of the believer's transformation toward full-grown maturity.

Like a driver's GPS or a hiker's map, the *Spiritual Growth Profile* provides clear direction and confidence to each Christ-follower.

### ***Stages of Faith* Provides a Better Way**

*Stages of Faith* offers a compelling vision of spiritual growth, as well as an innovative way to guide others higher and farther on their journey. Most importantly, may these three Breakthrough Discoveries challenge you to yield to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in your life—and glorify God.

*Don Willett, Ph.D.*

1. John Stott. *The Epistles of John*. Grand Rapids: Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. p. 101.

2. *Stages of Faith: 8 Milestones That Mark Your Journey*, by Don Willett, is a workbook for personal and small group study.

3. *The Path: How to Understand and Experience Authentic Spiritual Growth*, is a companion textbook to *Stages of Faith*.

***"It's time for a change in the way we think about spiritual growth and the way we guide others in the faith. Stages of Faith research has developed an unprecedented way to think about spiritual growth and an innovative way to guide others."***

**~ Don Willett, Ph.D.**