



# STAGES *of* FAITH

*Spiritual Guidance. Lifelong Transformation.*

*The apostle John was uniquely and eminently qualified to help believers—then and now—to better understand authentic spiritual growth, to experience that growth more fully, and then to skillfully guide others. God sovereignly provided John a remarkable platform and unparalleled opportunity to make such a difference.*



**What follows are four of John's significant contributions to spiritual growth that, if acted upon, will make a major difference in our own transformation and growth today.**

1

The apostle John – observing and leading followers of Christ for almost seven decades – wrote 1 John as a robust and practical epistle that could be titled *An Apostle's Guide to Authentic Spiritual Growth*. He essentially came to grips with the question, “How will I further the spiritual progress of believers, and deepen the life of faith?” In his first epistle, he advanced five key “Aspects of Authentic Spiritual Growth,” and each is a critical factor in catalyzing or delaying our spiritual progress.<sup>1</sup>

Notably, John identified Childhood, Young Adulthood, and Parenthood as three Stages of spiritual development that believers can expect to experience, and he noted specific features – “Milestone” markers – that distinguish each Stage (1 John 2:12-14). This far-reaching contribution enables believers to locate how far you have traveled and determine how far you have yet to go, then – partnering with God – chart steps to become more transformed and whole.

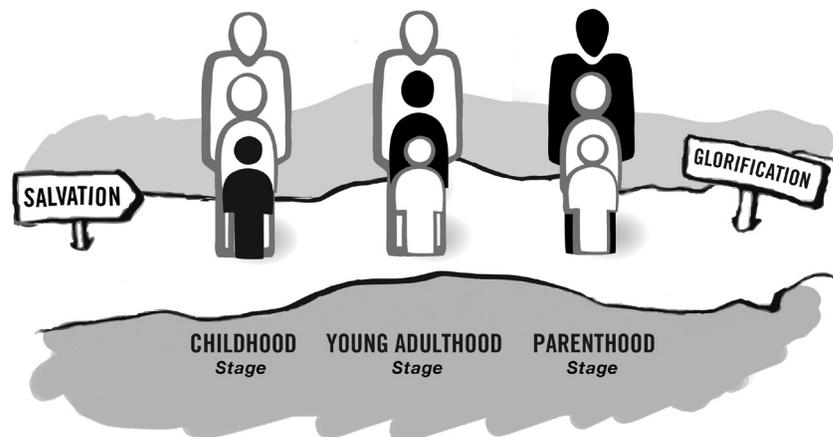
2

John's **Stages of faith** served as a **framework for telling the story** of his transformation from a brash and impulsive “Son of Thunder” to the wise and compassionate “Apostle of Love.”

John was careful that his readers and listeners were not left to speculate about how he was changed. Instead, this respected leader could now speak with courage and candor about how he responded to the challenges of each Stage and, as a result, matured in Christ. In his nineties, this seasoned veteran humbly and unabashedly could share where he still had room to grow.

Due to his transparency and brokenness, believers were riveted as they heard the last living apostle tell his story. They would also have been encouraged by the healing and transformative presence of Jesus that John had experienced, a presence that they, too, could know.

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3

**John counted on the framework of three Stages of spiritual growth to understand and guide those in his care.** John's life mission was to "bear much fruit" (John 15:16), to bring people to Jesus with the gospel message of *salvation*, and then to disciple those believers toward an ongoing *transformation* from Childhood, to Young Adulthood, to Parenthood.

As he ministered one-on-one, and to groups, large and small, John passionately explained the five essential aspects of spiritual growth that he laid out in 1 John. He highlighted the truth that three Stages provide clear direction for every believer. John understood, too, that each follower of Christ progresses through the same Stages, but not in the same way: every believer has a one-of-a-kind story.

If we are to walk with Jesus until He calls us home—as John did—we need more than a map. The people John disciplined also needed a loving and skilled guide. It is striking that the revered apostle himself provided the support, challenge, and vision that would empower them in their spiritual development.

4

**Developing mature Parents in the faith was key to John fulfilling his life mission.** During his own sixty-five years of following Christ—thirty of which he spent in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) ministering to multiple churches—John noticed the tragic shortage of mature Parents in the faith. *He was motivated to change this unacceptable situation!* John was resolute that without Parents in the faith to nurture spiritual growth, too many believers would languish in the Childhood and Young Adulthood Stages, not knowing *why* their relationship with Jesus seemed to stall or *what to do* to revitalize it.

It was John's top priority to equip more men and women to become mature Parents in the faith. As John disciplined these believers, they stepped up to help others to better understand authentic spiritual growth, to experience that growth more fully, and, in turn, to influence others to also make a difference.

**John made four noteworthy contributions to spiritual growth that, if acted upon, will make a clear difference in our own transformation and growth today.**

**Until Jesus returns, *you* have a mission to fulfill.  
As a Parent in the faith, you have a crucial role to play. You are urgently needed!**

*Don Willett*

1. For a full explanation of the model, see "The 5 Aspects of Authentic Spiritual Growth" in the first lesson of *Stages of Faith: 8 Milestones That Mark Your Journey* workbook, and *The Path: How to Understand and Experience Authentic Spiritual Growth* textbook, both by Don Willett. These can be purchased at [www.stagesoffaith.com](http://www.stagesoffaith.com).

***"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.**