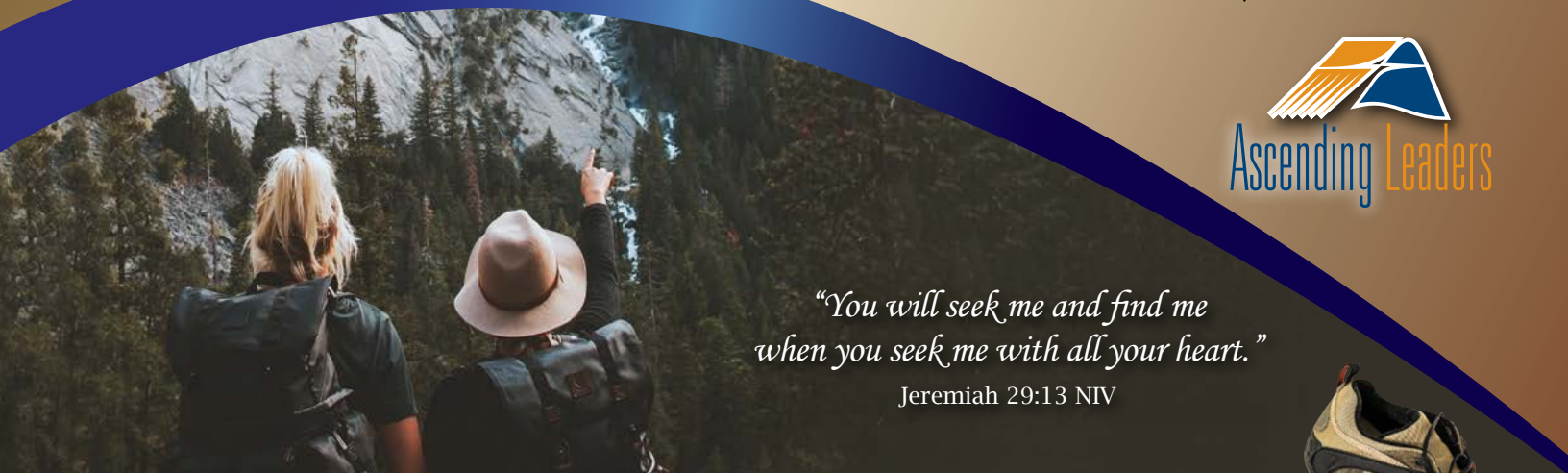


HIGH POINT

Helping Churches, Disciples and Leaders

Flourish



*“You will seek me and find me
when you seek me with all your heart.”*

Jeremiah 29:13 NIV

CLOSER to CHRIST: Overcoming the Wall



During your walk with God, you almost certainly have or will hit a wall. The wall could come from a disappointment or crisis, or it could have no discernible cause at all. **But one way or another, most disciples come to a season of feeling stuck and stagnant in their walks with Christ.**

There's good news, though. These walls are actually a positive development, because they signal new growth and maturity. Ultimately, the challenge of overcoming your wall brings you to greater intimacy with Jesus.

When you encounter a wall, the first step to overcoming it is to surrender—not to defeat, but to God. Walls remind us that we are powerless on our own. We cannot summon feelings of God's presence or love by performing the right ritual. We cannot even achieve our own spiritual growth. We depend on God as a branch depends on its vine.

Often activity and excitement characterize the early stages of a disciple's walk with Christ. Perhaps an inspirational worship night or an impactful mission trip lit a fire in you. You became active in a church and began to do things for God, whether by serving in a ministry or joining a Bible study. The sudden halt at

the wall, then, feels like a slide backward. It's tempting to think you were “more spiritual” before, when you felt excitement and closeness to God, and that now you are distant from Him.

But in many ways, intimacy with God is just like intimacy with another person you love. It can involve frustration and hard conversations. You experience times of joy and closeness, but even when you don't, you remain faithful and self-sacrificing no matter what. The beauty of intimacy is that it can always deepen, and challenges can deepen your love and trust.

So when you encounter a wall, do not believe the lie that Jesus is on the other side of it. He is right there with you. And He is inviting you to abide in him. To begin abiding, you need to release activity—the need to do things for God to earn his approval. By resting in Christ, you partner with what He is doing instead of trying to impress Him with what you are doing. Abiding is harder than activity, because you realize you can't control the relationship. Your spiritual walk happens at God's pace, not yours. Sometimes when you feel like you are not moving at all, God is doing His deepest work in you.

Stage 1 – Come and See Stage 2 – Come and Follow **The Wall** Stage 3 – Come and Be with Me Stage 4 – Remain in Me

Unfamiliar with the four stages? Learn about them on our blog or podcast!

ascendingleaders.org/the-four-stages-of-faith • ascendingleaders.org/podcast

We Help Churches Move People Closer to Christ

1 Check out our **podcasts, blog** and/or watch our **YouTube videos** for help and inspiration from experienced church leaders.



2 Get trained in the stages of discipleship through our **DiscipleForward Seminar** in Houston on Oct. 10-11—or host one in your community. ascendingleaders.org/dfh

3 Take our **workshop** on writing your own faith story through the stages of discipleship. ascendingleaders.org/faith-stories-by-the-stages

4 Learn the basics of discipleship and get support through an online **DiscipleOn community**. ascendingleaders.org/discipleon

5 Take the **REVEAL for Church survey** to see the current state of discipleship in your church. Get follow-up **coaching** to interpret the results and take action. ascendingleaders.org/reveal



Here are some simple ways to practice stillness and surrender. Try them today and consider making one a habit.

- At the end of today, ask yourself, “What were my best moments? What were my worst moments?” Then reflect on how God was there in *all* of those moments. Surrender them to God, asking Him how you might better cooperate with Him in similar future situations.
- For one hour, accomplish nothing—not even entertainment. Refrain from phone and internet use. Read 1-3 psalms and use a pen and paper to write God a letter about what you read.
- If you feel stuck in your spiritual growth, ask, “What do I think it will take to fix this problem? What is my goal for where I want to be?” Then surrender even that to God. End with a prayer telling God that you trust Him to bring you to deeper intimacy with Him in the timing and way He sees fit.

Download free journal pages with these exercises ascendingleaders.org/hp-freebie

The next step toward overcoming the wall is to surrender *even your motives* for surrender. Obedience does not always equal self-sacrifice, because sometimes we obey God for what we think we will get out of it—feeling good, receiving blessing or getting our lives fixed up. These motives do not make your obedience *bad*; rather, they mean you could go further still in your surrender to God.

Sometimes you may encounter a wall of feeling cut off from any sense of God’s blessing or closeness, *while* you are faithfully obeying Him. Perhaps you’ve given a personal struggle to Him, but it’s *still* a struggle, or you’ve done everything you can to please Him, only to have an illness or tragedy strike. In your mind, you try to figure out a connection between your actions and the wall, just as Job’s friends tried to fault him for his calamities. But don’t feel guilty or wonder what you are doing wrong. In the midst of the confusion, God is bringing you to an even deeper intimacy with Him. Reject the lie that feeling stuck or distant in your walk with God means He is punishing you for not doing enough. Instead, rejoice that God has decided you are ready for greater growth and submit yourself to His work and timing. *He who began a good work in you will also bring it to completion!* (Phil. 1:6)

For Church Leaders:

How to Help Move People Closer to Christ

1. Normalize “the wall.” Emphasize that it’s an opportunity for deeper intimacy.
2. Create programs for people in the second stage of growing, providing activities to help them experience intimacy with God.
3. Provide opportunities for people at the wall to work through it.
4. Provide opportunities quarterly or monthly for people who have faced past walls to gather together for prayer, worship, sharing and reflection. They need this support to keep their fires burning.
5. Encourage people in stages 3 and 4 to meet regularly in groups of 3-4 to talk transparently about their walks with Christ.
6. Read and work through the steps in *10 STEPS toward a Clear DISCIPLEPATH*.

Stage 1 – Come and See

Stage 2 – Come and Follow

www.ascendingleaders.org

CLOSER to CHRIST: Laurie's Story



Laurie Vonk
Hudsonville, Michigan.
AL donor since 2005

I can see four key stages in my life when I got stuck in spiritual stagnation. In each stage, something held me back from intimacy with God. But each time, God brought me past it in a way that deepened my relationship with him even more.

1 Busy I had three young kids with a fourth on the way, and we had just moved. I joined a Navigators 2:7 study group, which galvanized me into making Jesus Lord of my life. I had grown up in the Christian faith but had felt too busy to prioritize discipleship. As I went through the study, my faith moved from my life's background to its forefront. In the midst of this busy stage, I became more aware of God than ever before.

2 Unfulfilled The next stage came years later. I felt stuck and unfulfilled both at church and in my personal relationship with God. Upon request, I hesitantly agreed to lead a small group through Ascending Leaders' Bible study curriculum. Though I only expected a few women to join, so many people signed up that we had to break the program into two women's groups and a couples' group. Leading the groups required commitment to the studies, and that daily time with God accelerated my personal growth. Through all those studies, I learned one big thing: it's not about me, it's about God.

3 Ungrateful Eventually I found myself caring for my mother and mother-in-law while working nearly full-time. Busy and complaining, I slipped out of the habit of spending daily time with God. Unexpected news grabbed my attention: I had cancer. When I came home from the hospital with the diagnosis, I was beside myself. The first thing I did was grab my Bible. I opened randomly to the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and asked, "God, what does this possibly have to do

with me having cancer?" Then it came to me—in my busyness, I had become blind to seeing God in my life, and now, in my fear and confusion, God was opening my eyes just as He opened those two disciples' eyes. He was always there, right beside me. What assurance!

While going through multiple surgeries and misdiagnoses, I wanted to ask, "God, why?" He led me to Proverbs 3:5, which says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." God also blessed me with a friend who gave me the devotional *Streams in the Desert*, which spoke to me on a daily basis. I felt tired and useless after treatments, but in those moments, I felt God telling me, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) That was the closest to God I've ever been.

4 Complaining The problems come when a trial ends, and then you stray again. It's easier to neglect daily time with God. So after my recovery, I started complaining about things at my church and making negative comments about people around me. Then one day I heard God say, "You need to start a prayer group, and you need to meet early on Wednesday mornings." When I obeyed, my attitude began to change, because I was now praying for people instead of criticizing them.

Through all of these stages, I learned that the most important thing you can do for your spiritual life is devote time to Scripture and prayer every day, even when you are busy or feeling stagnant. If you spend time with God, He will speak to you. But you have to draw near to listen.

You can find the curriculum Laurie used at www.ascendingleaders.org under "Resources"



Our mission is
to help people
draw closer to Christ.

You can help.

Laurie and her husband became donors to Ascending Leaders to help continue the impact they experienced. You can join them by going to ascendingleaders.org/donate

We Succeed When...

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- Church leaders know what healthy discipleship looks like for their church and the steps to take.
- Unfocused and overwhelming church programs synergize to move people closer to Christ.
- The church leaders see Ascending Leaders as a dependable friend and mentor.

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Email rhonda@ascendingleaders.org
Or call us at 832-655-4935

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Disciples Leaders



- Mike Johnson, Senior Editor
- Natalie LaValley, Editor, Writer
- Sunny Hyun, Graphics Designer
- Rhonda Spriggs, Project Manager
- Victoria Hornsby, Design Consultant

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