



DEVELOPMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

A developmental spirituality views the journey of life through the perspective of spiritual beings having a human experience. Following the pattern of Jesus as a mythic narrative, a variety of stages must be navigated with different foci, achievements, and vulnerabilities to the crippling judgements of self and others. Through this pattern, each stage is revealed as sacred, worthy of awe, respect, and embrace. The integration of these qualities into a person’s interior life of thoughts and feelings is one of the best indications that they have successfully navigated a particular stage.

In contrast, a profane perspective on these stages is characterized by boredom, apathy, and emotional detachment from an authentic connection to self and others. This is the ultimate profanity. When we find ourselves immersed in self-criticism, or judgement of others who are in a particular developmental stage, it generally means that (a) we have not yet begun the work of that stage, (b) we have not successfully navigated that stage, or (c) we have capitulated to a polarizing, static perspective rather than a developmental one.

Jesus clearly was engaged in a development process. The simple affirmation that “he was born of the Virgin Mary,” is a profound acknowledgement of this reality. Human infants are among the most helpless of species at birth requiring years to reach a sustainable interdependence. The ability of Jesus to move from one stage to another is essential to the mythic narrative through which the sacredness of the human journey is revealed. As we internalize this pattern, the sacredness of our own journey illumines all of life.

I. CRYSTALLIZING STAGE

	Focused on...	Achieves...	Judged by other stages as...
Birth to independence	Surviving.	Navigation of trauma	Self-centered.
0 – 25 (Modern)	Physical growth.	and powerlessness.	Rebellious.
0 – 14 (Ancient)	Impulse control.	Identity formation.	Temperamental.
	Wisdom as transmissible skills.	Differentiation (parents).	Vascillating between
	Principles of success.	Readiness for marriage,	responsible adulthood and
	(Prov 1:1-4)	childbearing, vocation.	childish immaturity.

In this stage, the seed of our soul begins to collect qualities and experiences into a personality structure, much like a crystal. A person is focused on survival, on understanding who they are, how they fit into the world, and how to prepare themselves for a productive life. Spiritually, they may go from one belief system to another, join one community after another, or temporarily abandon a spiritual perspective altogether. Persons who get stuck in this stage may never learn how to control basic impulses, keep commitments, or function successfully in the world.

II. ORDINARY STAGE

	Focused on...	Achieves...	Judged by other stages as...
Independence to midlife	Generativity.	Positive regard.	Legalistic.
25 – 45 (Modern)	Community standards.	Stable relationships.	Conformist.
14 – 30 (Ancient)	Compliance.	Vocational clarity.	Authoritarian.
	Reputation.	Financial viability.	Fundamentalist.
	(Luke 2:52)	Moral/ethical/religious	Traditionalist.
		codes of conduct.	Groupee or group think.

In this stage, a person is focused on fitting in as a functional member of their community with a lifestyle that is respectable, sustainable, and making a positive contribution. While they may have left their family’s perspectives behind, liberal or conservative, they still tend to look to an external authority for their spiritual moorings, Scripture, faith community, leaders, teachers, role models, mentors, coaches, etc.



III. TRANSITION STAGE

Midlife	Focused on...	Achieves...	Judged by other stages as...
45 – 60 (Modern)	Spiritually transformative experience, mystical, meditative, near-death. Shattering experience, a death, divorce, addiction, job loss, illness, accident, sexual experience, nature encounter. (Luke 3:21-22)	Freedom. Authenticity. Agency. Finding one’s own voice. Serenity in the face of necessary losses.	Unstable. Lost. Confused and confusing. Misguided. Fallen. Disappointing.
30 – 40 (Ancient)			

In this stage, a person generally has an experience that brings their previous life perspectives into question. While this may be perceived positively or negatively by the person, the effect is the same. Life cannot go forward in the same way as before. An inner voice begins to take precedence over external authorities. If they get stuck in this stage, they can end up stranded in an interior conversation with little to show for it. Alternatively, they can decide that the price of reinventing their lives is too high or the losses too great, and return to the Ordinary Stage.

IV. AWAKENED STAGE

Midlife thru Final Third	Focused on...	Achieves...	Judged by other stages as...
50 – 80 (Modern)	Mission. Positive impact. Sharing gifts and insights. Significance. (Luke 4:14)	Outward focus. Inner compass. Universal perspective. Strength of convictions. Transmutes past traumas into compassion and healing.	Arrogant. Self-important. Threatening to the status quo. Heretical. Mentally ill or otherwise defective.
30 – 50 (Ancient)			

In this stage, persons find ways of bringing the discoveries they have made on their inner journey to others in the world. This can take many forms ranging from practical services to spiritual leadership. The risk of this stage is a lack of boundaries which can lead to exhaustion or failing unrealistic self-expectations.

V. FINALIST STAGE

End of Life Consciousness	Focused on...	Achieves...	Judged by other stages as...
Individual (Modern)	Closure. Ending well. Integrity. Saying goodbye. (John 17:4)	Leaving nothing unsaid. Clarifying legacy. Expressing affection and appreciation. Forgiving.	Resigned. Giving in/not fighting hard enough. Negative, morbid. Lacking faith.
Individual (Ancient)			

In this stage, a person begins to feel that their earthly assignment is nearly complete. They begin letting go. The letting go has many dimensions: letting go of their work, letting go of the opinions of others, letting go of efforts to explain themselves to others, letting go of ill-will toward those who may have hurt them. It also includes letting go of role for the sake of spiritual connection.

VI. ADC STAGE

After Death Communication	Focused on...	Achieves...	Judged by other stages as...
	Dying a transcendent death. Communicating after-death realities to the living. (John 14:19)	Finding peace. Transcending pain. Reassuring loved ones.	Woo-woo. Occult. Wish fulfillment.

In this stage, a person sets an intention of dying a transcendent death. Transcendence during the encounter with death is a transformation of perception; the problems that the prospect of death presents—meaninglessness, fear of non-being, separation anxiety—are overcome. The positive impact is not only experienced by the person dying but by loved ones temporarily left behind.

The entire life of Jesus is the proclamation of the Gospel, not just his preaching. Every stage of his life proclaims the sacredness of that stage, in his life and in ours. We are invited to internalize that sacredness by cultivating awe, respect, and by embracing our journey rather than distancing ourselves due to guilt, shame, fear, or sadness. We are assisted in this internalization by realizing several things:

- Every stage has its own season, guiding values, and purposes. What is appropriate in one season is inappropriate in another. The values that guide a thirty-year-old woman in the ordinary stage of her life will be quite different from those that guide that same woman in a midlife awakening.
- Every stage is encountered as a fresh experience that is dominated by naivete and immaturity. We are rookies at the onset of every stage. Since the lessons of previous stages have limited application to successive ones, we will be on a steep learning curve and subject to inevitable mistakes. Preoccupation with mistakes arrests our journey.
- Every stage is important. No stage of spiritual development is superior to another. The measure of our development is not calculated in comparison to another but the degree to which we engage our assignments with intentionality, openness, and love.
- Every stage must unfold on the foundation of a previous stage as it is embraced with all its growth and missteps.
- Every stage is vulnerable to corruption when it becomes attached to human egotism, and the spiritual journey becomes an expression of self-importance. Our protection from this vulnerability does not lie in our purity but in our self-awareness, confidence in grace, and release of defensiveness.

Experiencing the sacredness of our patterned journey requires the cultivation of awe, respect, and the embrace of each stage. A degree of romancing your soul will be necessary. You are, in the words of Joseph Campbell, one of the heroes “with a thousand faces.” You are, in the words of Jesus, “the light of the world.” You are, in the words of Paul, “a treasure in an earthen vessel.” You are, in the words of Zechariah, “a brand plucked from the fire.” Romancing your soul means loving your soul and your soul’s journey, singing to it, painting it, dancing with it, dramatizing it, lionizing it, and, above all, standing with it when under assault. No one can do this for you, not even God.

At the same time, it requires romancing the souls of others, especially those in other stages of their sacred journey. This generally requires a shift from trying to change the journey of others to look like ours toward helping them move into their own stage as deeply as possible.

