**Part One: A Dialogue with “The Wall”**

 As described in *The Critical Journey*

Janet Hagberg and Danielle Jones

Welcome to the Wall! The Wall is a deeply holy place on the faith journey. It is always individual, mysterious, God-shaped, and infused with Spirit-- inviting us to transformation. The Wall is one of the most difficult parts of the faith journey and it asks more surrender of us than we may think we are capable of. It is equally alluring and treacherous. Yet the Wall is ultimately a place of healing, of ourselves and our image of God. We need to have a lot of compassion for ourselves and for anyone else who is experiencing the Wall.

I, Janet, author of *The Critical Journey*, have been asked by my readers to delve a bit more deeply into the phases of the Wall. As a way to bring greater understanding to these phases, I have invited ***Danielle Jones***, a clergy friend of mine, to enter into a dialogue with me about real life experiences of the three phases of the Wall; ***approaching the Wall, embracing the Wall and releasing the Wall.*** We will only describe *a few characteristics of each phase* in hopes that the reader will be interested in reading more about the Wall or meeting with a spiritual director who is trained to listen to people’s spiritual journeys and guide them through the holy Wall. We will also include the Wall stories of Bobbie, Derek, Michael, and David in hopes that their stories will help explain this spiritual process. Links to summaries of *The Critical Journey* are listed at the end of this dialogue.

One of the teachers who utilizes the Wall, Ellen Duffield, thinks of the Wall as a crucible. A masterful image. She writes, **“*As I often use the language of a journey towards wisdom, I describe the Wall as a powerful crucible experience that enables us to let go of those things that would cause us to be less true to ourselves, less intimately connected to both the Divine and humanity at large, and more open to the calling of humility, creativity, wisdom, inspiration, and true leadership****.”* Look for more of her reflections on the Wall at the end of this dialogue, along with those of another colleague, Deb Turnow, a spiritual director and teacher of the Wall material who writes about how the Wall is easily misunderstood.

**Part One: Approaching the Wall**

Janet: “So Danielle, here we are approaching the Wall. There are numerous ways that we enter a Wall experience but there are a few that are pretty clear signs. Let’s list a few and then illustrate them with our own personal stories, shall we?”

*One of the surest signs of an invitation to the Wall is of repeated struggles with the same type of issue, repeated patterns over a long period that now seem to get worse or come to a head. Spiritual crises, chronic family issues, job loss or repeated stresses, addictions, mental illness, total loss of faith, chronic physical symptoms, leaving several churches or ministers who are not meeting our needs, or noticing the same types of people showing up in our lives. Would you like to tell the story of how you became aware that you were entering the Wall in your own life? These experiences may make us feel like we are a long way from home, as the song from Sweet Honey in the Rock depicts.*

Danielle: “For me, my body started giving me signs that I was nearing the Wall before my mind could articulate what my heart had been feeling. For a period of more than two years, I found that every cold I got turned in to a sinus infection. The sinus infections would go on for weeks and seemed to be less connected to an illness and more connected to my mental state. Upon processing and reflection, in time I became aware that these infections were deeply connected to my relationship with my mother and to working to manage her mental illness. When my mother’s mental illness would flare up, I would over function to try and “fix” things (in reality I was co-dependent with her) and then I would wear myself out, get a cold, resent that cold and my mother, and the cold would inevitably turn into a sinus infection.”

“In another season of my life, I was deeply frustrated with my work and co-workers. I began getting pink eye on a fairly regular basis and through prayer and wise counsel I came to realize that my pink eye was a sign that I was in a power struggle at work. The pink eye was a sure sign that I was working to control someone or something and that my efforts at control were not working.”

Janet: “I have been amazed at how clear your symptoms have been and how you have learned that when you see the patterns it is an invitation to do the hard work of releasing the fear and the potentially damaging influence these people have in your life. So hard to do and yet, so freeing.”

*Reaching the Wall comes through many different life experiences. The Wall is a deeply personal place. Some people are in jobs that they are struggling with or failing at (and this has been a pattern over the years) and yet, it is impossible for them to consider leaving for something else because their identity is so tied with this work. Others have totally lost their faith due to a breach of ethics or morality and are stuck because their traditions see it as the fault of the one who has lost faith, not the fault of the system that perpetrates abuse.*

Janet: “One of my most difficult personal examples is the addictive and shame–based pattern I have of staying in relationships that are toxic for me and using any number of excuses not to leave. This included marriages, jobs, and friendships. The shame was so great that *I thought I had to stay in these relationships in order to survive, while the opposite was true*. One of the ways I knew that I had to do some inner work was that while I was just beginning to work on a domestic abuse project in my city, I had a frightening dream. I was locked inside a burning boxcar of a train that was going around in circles like a figure 8, the symbol for infinity. On the outside of the boxcar was a plaque with my mother’s name on it. I knew then that I had to look at the connection between this dream and the career work I was doing. I was repeating my mother’s pattern of acquiescing to an abusive marriage. That was mind-boggling.”

Danielle: “What is extraordinary to me about this dream is that it was powerful and memorable. As you tell the story, you immediately knew this dream was trying to get your attention. As you sat with it and processed it, you came to realize it was a warning that you were traveling down a path that was a well- worn pattern. Understanding a key dream or a recurring scenario seemed to be a key to unlocking the pattern you felt stuck in.”

Janet: “So Danielle, when and how did you realize that you were facing directly into the Wall?”

Danielle: “For me, I had a few experiences of realizing I was facing the Wall. My mother had struggled with undiagnosed mental illness my whole life. Her illness manifested itself in my life through verbal abuse, outbursts, shaming, and projecting her own insecurities and pain on to me. I was caught in a cycle that looked like me walking on egg shells to please her and cover over the shame of our relationship, over functioning and performing in other areas of my life to gain love, and enduring mental and emotional abuse to maintain a “good” relationship with my mother.”

“The awareness that I was reaching the Wall came right after my second daughter was born. I was on maternity leave with a two-year-old and a newborn. My mom called and asked that I come over and help her clean her condo and organize her home for her. When requests like this would come I would often think to myself, “I should really go, this will likely be the thing that will finally make her happy.” It sounds crazy when I write that out, but it was true. I was exhausted as a new mom, but I asked my husband if he would watch our kids, so I could go over for a day and he said yes. Halfway through the cleaning process, my mom started berating me about being a horrible daughter and telling me I was sure to be a horrible mother too. That was the last straw. I left her condo and was crying, and I said out loud to God, “You have to tell me what to do.” This was a prayer I had prayed for years and in that moment as clear as day, I heard God say to me, “You can’t fix her.” *This was not what I wanted to hear but it was the moment that I began to realize that something had to change.”*

*Sometimes it just looks like it will be too hard to do the transforming work of the Wall, so we retreat to a safer and more familiar place for a time—or forever. This is, perhaps a recognition that the hurt, the wound, the pain is too great to embrace or that we are not ready yet to do that work.*

*For most of us finding the courage to face the Wall takes the assistance of a community. It is so helpful, even crucial, to find one or two trusted friends, a spiritual director, a small group, or a counselor to walk with us through this process. This is not a job that is to be done alone.*

**How wisdom figures describe approaching the Wall:**

Janet: “St. Ignatius uses a poignant visual metaphor for transformation at the Wall. It is a large ship going steadily in one direction at a fast clip. Then we find that we (on the ship) are really going at a fast clip in the wrong direction. What we thought was best for us is really the worst and what we thought was worst is now best. The whole ship needs to turn around in the water and go the other direction. That takes quite awhile and needs the effort of many people. So, it is with going through the Wall. What we gain is internal freedom and connection with our true self. Wise observers would say that so much changes that you may not even recognize yourself on the other side of the Wall.”

*Other wisdom figures would use these words to describe the Wall; the dark night of the soul (St John of the Cross), individuation and embracing our shadows and childhood wounds (Carl Jung, William Miller), traveling through the interior castle (Teresa of Avila), healing both spiritually and psychologically especially healing our image of God (implications of most spiritual writers).*

Danielle: “I believe we become aware of the Wall and then we want to move through it, and fast. In my own journey, I have found that the Wall takes time to move through. Brick by brick, I became aware of patterns and habits in my life that were no longer leading to growth. All the ways I had used to “work around” the challenges I faced no longer worked for me. That is literally where the phrase “I’ve hit the wall” comes from. When we come up against the Wall we are stopped dead in our tracks. We can retreat, sit down, bury our heads in the sand, but to continue growing with God and in healthy relationships with others we are called to tend to the Wall with the help of God.”

Janet: “I like that image of approaching the Wall brick by brick. Or maybe we encounter smaller walls over the years and start to get an idea of how we can survive and even encounter these walls with help in order to gain wisdom from them. So, when we encounter the Wall that calls for entire transformation, we are a bit more ready to engage with it.”

**A Biblical example**

The Biblical story that wonderfully illustrates an approach to the Wall is the story of Peter. Peter convinces himself he understands Jesus and all it will take to faithfully follow him. Peter’s ego gets in the way of his faith time and time again as he reaches out in his own strength instead of trusting in God. His confidence in himself leads him to almost drown when he walks on the water to meet Jesus (Matthew 14:22-23). When Jesus tells Peter he will deny that he knows him three times, Peter refuses to believe him and then denies Jesus three times that very night (Matthew 26:69-75). Peter goes as far as to tell Jesus that he can even prevent him from dying and Jesus responds, “*Get behind me Satan. You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns* (Matthew 16:23).” Peter finally wrestles with his Wall when he has to come to grips with the truth that Jesus was in fact, put to death and that the point of his own life was not to stop that from happening, but to trust in God’s larger perspective.

**A poem for this phase of the Wall**

**God Smiles**

I say hang on
God says let go
I say I’m afraid
God says I know

I say my way
He says fine
I say it doesn’t work
She smiles now mine

I say now your way
God says through pain
I say no painless
He says in vain

I say lead me on
God says through the night
I say I’m afraid
She says that’s all right

I say I let go
He says you got through
I smile I’m not afraid
God smiles too

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**A song link**: Sometimes I feel like a motherless child…a long way from home

Sweet Honey in the Rock <https://youtu.be/jFvDtzMpPM0>

Wade in the Water; Blind Boys of Alabama <https://youtu.be/8HT6DADgGI4>

**Icon image**: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

**A pocket prayer for approaching the Wall (small prayers that you can memorize or tuck in your pocket!)**

Loving and gracious God, *I know you love me*. Hold me close as I face into the truth of my life and help me to heal. Amen

**Reflection questions for approaching the Wall**

As you look back over the last few years of your life, do you notice any recurring patterns or stuck places that you may want to pay attention to?

What is the most distressing constant (person, behavior, addiction) in your life that you just don’t seem to be able to control after trying everything?

What physical symptoms keep repeating themselves and leave you frustrated or angry?

Where is God nudging you, directly or through others, to take a deeper look at your life? How is God “troubling the waters” in your world?

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**You have chosen to enter the Wall dialogue in part two, Embracing the Wall. If you would like to learn about phases one and three, please click on the links to those phases**.

One of the teachers who works with the Wall, Ellen Duffield, thinks of the Wall as a crucible. A masterful image. She writes: **“*As I often use the language of a journey towards wisdom I describe the Wall as a powerful crucible experience that enables us to let go of those things that would cause us to be less true to ourselves; less intimately connected to both the Divine and humanity at large; and more open to the calling of humility, creativity, wisdom, inspiration and true leadership****.”* Look for more of her reflections on the wall at the end of this dialogue, along with those of another colleague, Deb Turnow, who is a spiritual director and also teaches the Wall material, and writes about how the Wall is easily misunderstood.

**Part Two: Embracing the Wall**

***The CORE truth of the Wall is what will transform our lives: the struggle that gets you to the Wall is not the essence of the Wall*. *How you respond to the struggle and what you allow God and other wise guides to heal in you at deep levels is the essence of the Wall.***

***The Wall is a place of surrender to the healing work of God.***

Sometimes the Wall just seems too hard. And for some it is. We make no judgment on that. As we said in the first section, people may hit the Wall and then choose to go back to a more familiar place, or they stay in a pre-wall place and cope there. But for others, moving through the Wall requires a deeper personal understanding of Wall—and what it will take to address it.

For instance, we might be aware of how a child of ours is manipulating us in devious ways, yet don’t know how to face the fear of parenting in any other way. We become afraid of what it will mean for our relationship with our child if we embrace the Wall. Another example is that we’ve seen the pattern of alcohol abuse in our lives, yet we think of it as a way to soothe our loneliness instead of looking at the underlying cause of our loneliness. Maybe we notice the pattern of being intimidated by three abusive bosses, yet we can’t imagine how we could stand up to them, so we muddle through and wonder why we get one illness after another. In our faith life we are critical of one minister after another without noticing that they are decidedly similar to one of our dysfunctional parents. When we face these deeper truths, we embrace the Wall.

***When we gather the courage to face these deeper truths of what lies beneath the surface of our repeated patterns, we begin to embrace the Wall.***

**The Four-Part Process**

The four-part process of the Wall is awareness, forgiveness, acceptance, and love.

**AWARENESS** is the task that emerges first when facing the Wall. As we look at our lives, we become aware of the repeated pattern that is keeping us stuck and uncover the essence or core issue that we are grappling with. This is more than a job hurdle or a break up with a friend. It is a deeper pattern of wounding that cannot be covered up and has to heal (or else it will go underground and be a cause for illness, pain, or bitterness).

Essentially, we need to grapple with our shadow behavior and embrace it to learn our core issues. I (Danielle) had to realize that I had a deep pattern of trying to fix things that I thought were broken. In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with the angel and his own past transgressions to receive a blessing from God. As we become aware of the core issues that have repeatedly ensnared us, we begin to acknowledge that we are in need of healing both spiritually and psychologically. God is inviting us to heal and experience more divine intimacy, yet it will take real wrestling and letting go of our old ways of survival.

Janet: “My friend Bobbie has a daughter who estranged herself and her family from Bobbie for more than ten years. It took Bobbie several years to decipher the issues beneath the estrangement. Her daughter blamed her for all of her issues and told her that she never really had a family to speak of. They went to counseling and it got even worse. No one would hear Bobbie’s story. Nothing Bobbie did (and she tried several things) made any difference. Part of her issue was that she was trying too hard☺. She finally had to come to terms with losing her daughter and had to heal herself of the real issue—feeling that she was a bad mother and she had done something wrong. In addition, a core of this self-incrimination was being born in a culture (China-WWII) that she absorbed in which women were viewed as inferior to men, an attitude that hurt her relationship with God. To heal with her daughter took years of counseling in the Wall, including writing letters to her daughter that she didn’t send, burying a photo of her daughter at the cemetery near her husband’s grave, and working with spiritual directors to find the core issues and heal them. She also healed her self image as a woman by hearing from God that God had intentionally created her female and loved her for being a woman all her life. What a relief.”

**FORGIVENESS** is the next invitation at the Wall. There are often two parts to forgiveness: forgiving others and forgiving ourselves. For a deep dive on Forgiveness we would recommend Desmond Tutu’s book: *The Book of Forgiving.*

There is no formula for forgiving others. Forgiveness comes through time, prayer, and processing our pain with trusted listeners. Forgiveness is not often a face-to-face experience of telling someone they have hurt us, and many times we do not receive any vindication for the pain we have felt. Yet we are still called to forgive. Sometimes for forgiveness to take place we need to release people to their own lives and let them go. Other times we have to release our broken images of God, in order to gain intimacy with a healing and healthy image of God.

Many times we also need to forgive ourselves. Usually this involves forgiving ourselves for whatever role we had in the issue, even if that means we did nothing wrong except neglect our own stories. Sometimes we are complicit with the other person’s behavior without really knowing it fully. Forgiving ourselves means we admit that we played a role in where we are today and wrestled with the deeply ingrained patterns that are keeping us from new life with God and others.

Danielle: “Another key moment for me in facing the Wall was realizing that I was in a conflict with my boss that was immovable. I was serving the church I grew up in as a pastor and I had all sorts of ideas about how things should go. My boss and I grew to have an adversarial relationship when we did not see eye to eye on the direction of the church. He did and said some things that felt dishonoring and disrespectful of me and my leadership, and I snapped. What began as a justified frustration turned into deep anger within me. My anger began with good reason. I was wronged, I was disrespected, and I was hurt. But I could not move past the anger. For three months, I repeated my story of injustice to myself and close friends again and again. I was not interested in owning any part of the story for myself. I was interested in vindication. One night, I had a dream that I was in a wheel chair. It was clear in the dream that my job was to ring a bell, but as long as I was in the wheel chair, I could not ring the bell. With prayerful considering and bringing the dream before God, I realized that my anger toward my boss was what was keeping me in the wheelchair.”

“The dream made me aware that I had to begin working through my anger. It took months to unpack my anger, own my piece of the story, and move toward forgiveness. In many ways it was like peeling an onion. I worked through one layer of anger, only to realize there was another layer of anger waiting for me. Releasing the need for vindication was key to finding forgiveness. Realizing that no matter how “right” I thought I was, it didn’t matter and holding on to needing to be “right” was keeping me attached and stuck.  I spent significant time in prayer asking God to release me from my desire to*hold on to old patterns and stories and to see my old boss with compassion.”*

Janet: “In my Wall journey, *I had to consciously forgive myself, my abuser, and my childhood image of God*. I did the latter by way of creating a ritual with a clergy friend, to release my old image of God and find a new, kinder, and more intimate image of God. Part of my core issue at the Wall had to do with being addicted to charismatic, yet abusive people and then *allowing them to abuse me.* This happened in my marriage, at work, and also in my spiritual life. I had to find out where that tendency originated. On the one hand it came from my home, where my father and brother were both alcoholics.“

“But this tendency toward addiction to abusive behavior also came from my religious training in which God was holy, transcendent, faithful but also rigid, judgmental, and mean spirited. Santa Claus with a big stick! This image was also fairly close to my experience of my father. Alas, this image of God would not allow me to seek more intimacy with God since it did not feel safe. So, one morning I spent several hours with my clergy friend, listing all the people and events that had led me to this fearful image of God. I told her the stories and we cried (and also swore a few times). Then I accepted that this was just the way it was when I was young, and I found compassion for myself for believing what was told to me. I had done nothing to cause it, I was loved by God and I needed to release that pain. I prayed that I would be able to forgive and release this God image. God helped me to see my teachers’ well-meaning intentions and I forgave them. I needed more to heal though! I wanted to do something physical to signify my journey of letting go. After our story telling I put a list of those people’s names in a pill bottle and my friend and I drove to the Monongahela River bridge where I threw the bottle into the river. A few years later I created another ritual of forgiveness for my church by putting a bouquet of flowers and an anonymous thank you note in the hallway of the church.”

**ACCEPTANCE** is the next step in the healing process. It consists of accepting the truth that we need healing dealing with it (without judgment or shame) and even embracing it to see what else might come up that needs to be healed. We accept ourselves and we accept others without condoning what they have done to us or to others. It might be the hardest work of the Wall to just let things be what they are and surrender whatever needs to happen to God. We also surrender our identities that we thought we had to retain for our survival or respect or success, relinquishing them for something different and closer to who we’ve become.

Acceptance means we are surrendering to the work that God is doing in our struggle, while also releasing our own desires, wants, wills, and egos to God. We admit we can’t go on as before if we want to heal. We need to surrender. I used to sing a chorus as a teenager called, *I Surrender All*, yet I had no idea until the Wall what acceptance and surrender would entail.

Derek shares this story of his Wall acceptance: “Standing in my light-brown tiled kitchen, in the rear room of my condo in Denver, near the street; just a few miles from where I had just made a drug score. The crushed Budweiser can in my right hand with small poked holes pushed into it, to manufacture an unconventional pipe. Up for three days straight and all set to keep the sad party going, I pressed the opening of the can to my parched lips. But something happened. I saw it—a moment of light. You can call it a Wall, but really it was an opening, a gate, and I saw it peek through. It was my addiction, in a very authentic, genuine light. Surprising myself, in a haze, I picked up the phone and started calling friends, family whoever and said, “I have a problem”. The words actually popped right out of my mouth. Why had that been so hard to say? Accepting that I couldn’t do this on my own, acceptance of my addiction. The humiliation and the utter strangeness of the whole damn glassy eyed situation. Now I use acceptance to let go. When uncomfortable feelings rise within me, I meditate on the word acceptance. Not reacting, but letting go, allowing myself to feel uncomfortable feelings. Accepting what’s happening inside of me.”

Speaking of a moment of light appearing, Peter, a pastor friend of ours said this about the Wall: “One thing I have pondered and heard as I have sat with folks at their “Walls” over the years is how God provides the door, or at least a window, the way through—or at least the place where light shines in.”

The light shining in, even in a small sliver of light, gives us a path to freedom…

And the path to freedom is like building a whole new life. *It takes changing friendships at times, getting into communities that are stable, choosing to live differently and having boundaries that may cause distress. It means loving but not condoning, compassion but not complicity. It reeks of God’s goodness and presence, and the capacity eventually to leave the outcomes to God. A difficult prayer during times like these is “God bring me closer to you, no matter what the consequences.”*

**LOVE** is that last step within the Wall. There are multiple facets to love.  First, we become aware of the love God has offered us all throughout the Wall process.  Before we were ever aware of God’s love, it was there.  At Danielle’s church when they baptize babies, they hold them up and say, “God has always loved you and God will always love you and there is nothing you can do to mess up that love.”  Believing that this is the kind of love God offers us is part of moving through the Wall.  Second, as we realize God’s relentless love for us, we grow in love for ourselves—where we have been and how far we have come—and we desire to offer this sort of love to the world.  *One of the gifts at the wall is that we receive a deeper capacity to love: God, ourselves, others.*

An unusual way in which love emerges is that we begin to find new passion or unusual meaning right in the area of our wounded story. This redemptive threshing about with our healing stories helps us move forward to become whole. We relinquish our martyr or victim stances.

There are dramatic stories of people finding meaningful work in the area of their former pain. The Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa, led by Rev. Desmond Tutu offered healing and reconciliation after apartheid ended. There is another story about the family of the young woman who was murdered by a group of desperate boys she had taught baking skills for a workable wage. Her parents had to do a lot of healing and eventually they took up her cause and made it possible for the bakery to go forward and prosper. Or, the story of a homeless man who started mentoring younger homeless men after he found stable housing and was staying sober. Many people who have survived and healed from Wall experiences like natural disasters, death of children, or mental illness work in the area of their pain to serve others who are still suffering.

Janet: “My friend Michael is a young man who has an aggressive form of brain cancer. He has had surgery after surgery and his cancer journey has led him to do an immense amount of inner healing work on long hidden and tragic stories of his ancestral lineage and his current family members. He has worked alongside doctors and other healers to find his core of unconditional love and purpose. He has found out that telling his story of how the medical world can be loving partners with patients actually helps heal both partners. He also works with other survivors to invite their stories and thus find some inner graces. Michael has used his own cancer experience to confront his own wounding physically, spiritually, and emotionally to bring healing powers to many situations in his life. Whether he lives or dies, and he does have a strong desire to live, he is doing the healing work he was called to do. Michael has found that his cancer has given him an avenue for doing work he never knew was possible.

**A Biblical Example of healing at the Wall**

Tamar’s story (Genesis 38:6-30) is one of the most difficult stories of women in the Bible. She was a widow in the house of the patriarch Judah, whose son she married. Once her husband died, his father legally owed her his other sons as her partner in order to produce heirs. Women in that culture had very few legal rights. Yet Judah deceived her and she literally put her life on the line to secure her legal rights from him. She found the courage to stand up to him by concealing her identity and tricking him, her father-in-law, into conceiving a child with her. When he found out she was pregnant, he, as judge of this case, could have had her killed. Then she produced evidence that it was his deed that resulted in her pregnancy and not someone else’s. As the truth unfolded of what he has done to her, he stated publicly that she was more righteous than he. Tamar was one of only five women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus, a woman who helped keep the genealogy going despite the overwhelming odds against her.

**A Poem for this phase of the Wall**

**These are all just signs**

I sat down to talk with God one day

and asked where do I look for you?

How do I find you?

You already do look for me God said

How is that I asked

You look for me by shopping when you are low

and by taking that extra drink when you are stressed

You work long hours hoping to find your worth

and you eat to fill that empty place within

Your most creative way of looking for me is

expecting someone else to make you happy

These are all just signs you are looking for me

When you know this is true

You will find me

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**Song links**:

Break Every Chain, Kymberli Joye on The Voice <https://youtu.be/hfIog7RIgFE>

Precious Lord; Take my Hand, Arethea Franklin

<https://youtu.be/HVMeRULuUB4>

I Want Jesus to Walk with Me, Alex Boye and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir

<https://youtu.be/jrVTuskdCgo> copy and paste this link into search at youtube.com

**Icon image**: “Tears in a bottle.” In Psalm 56:8 it says that God stores all of our tears in a bottle and writes them in a ledger.

“You restore my soul” from Psalm 23. The image shows the soul in four stages of restoration, from unhealed, through numb and in the dark, to broken open, to feeling whole.

**A pocket prayer for embracing the Wall (small prayers that you can memorize or tuck in your pocket!)**

O Holy darkness, illumine *my* darkness and bring me anew, to you. Amen and amen.

**Reflection Questions for Embracing the Wall**

Tell the story of how you came to the core, the essence, of what the Wall is for you?

Who helped you to move courageously and healthily into and through the Wall?

How did your experience of God and image of God change in your journey with the Wall?

Which of the four areas; awareness, forgiveness, acceptance or love is the one that is the hardest for you to embrace? Most life-giving for you to embrace?

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Janet Hagberg and Danielle Jones

Welcome to the Wall! The Wall is a deeply holy place on the faith journey. It is always individual, mysterious, God-shaped, and infused with Spirit-- inviting us to transformation. The Wall is one of the most difficult parts of the faith journey and it asks more surrender of us than we may think we are capable of. It is equally alluring and treacherous. Yet the Wall is ultimately a place of healing, of ourselves and our image of God. We need to have a lot of compassion for ourselves and for anyone else who is experiencing the Wall.

I, Janet, author of *The Critical Journey*, have been asked by my readers to delve a bit more deeply into the phases of the Wall. As a way to bring greater understanding to these phases, I have invited ***Danielle Jones***, a clergy friend of mine, to enter into a dialogue with me about real life experiences of the three phases of the Wall; ***approaching the Wall, embracing the Wall and releasing the Wall.*** We will only describe *a few characteristics of each phase* in hopes that the reader will be interested in reading more about the Wall or meeting with a spiritual director who is trained to listen to people’s spiritual journeys and guide them through the holy Wall. We will also include the Wall stories of Bobbie, Derek, Michael, and David in hopes that their stories will help explain this spiritual process. Links to summaries of *The Critical Journey* are listed at the end of this dialogue.

**You have chosen to enter the Wall dialogue in part three, Releasing the Wall. If you would like to learn about phases one and two, please click on the links to those phases**.

One of the teachers who works with the Wall, Ellen Duffield, thinks of the Wall as a crucible. A masterful image. She writes: **“*As I often use the language of a journey towards wisdom I describe the Wall as a powerful crucible experience that enables us to let go of those things that would cause us to be less true to ourselves; less intimately connected to both the Divine and humanity at large; and more open to the calling of humility, creativity, wisdom, inspiration and true leadership****.”* Look for more of her reflections on the wall at the end of this dialogue, along with those of another colleague, Deb Turnow, who is a spiritual director and also teaches the Wall material, and writes about how the Wall is easily misunderstood.

**Part Three: Releasing the Wall**

At some point, and that point is different for all of us, we cease to be so intensely involved in the healing at the Wall. Sometimes we don’t even notice it until the intensity lessens over time. Other times, an event or a turning point reminds us that we are on the other side of the major decisions and soul wrenching experiences. What we notice most is that we seem called to articulate what happened or to acknowledge it somehow. And then it is time to move outward again, in whatever way God is inviting us to be more present in the world.

Many parts of the post-Wall life are very unique to the individual and may seem too mysterious to describe. So we won’t attempt that here. However, there are a few things that seem almost universal about life beyond the Wall. It is perhaps wise to end each of these examples with the words “on our good days”, lest we feel that there is yet another ideal to reach beyond the Wall in order to be perfect or whole! Here are a few examples of post-Wall life:

\*Staying intimate with God daily and listening for the guidance of the Spirit in all that we do. Examining our behavior gently and humorously to mend what needs mending and embracing what longs to be loved, in ourselves and others.

\*Being eternally vigilant about our areas of vulnerability, so as to bring God’s strength and compassion to face them. Being exceptionally kind to ourselves so as to be kind to others. Experiencing loving detachment (wise discernment) from shadow behavior in ourselves and in others.

\*Clearly articulating our transformed life and faith story to reflect the healing we received. Behaving differently—sometimes very differently—and usually counter to the culture. Perhaps changing our faith practices. Becoming a spiritual presence, a stable place.

\*Moving outward again, towards others with compassion and presence. Mentoring others with humility and generosity. Embracing our calling as an outgrowth of our experience of the Wall. Living with utter gratitude, courage and faithfulness. Experiencing naturally the gifts of the Spirit that we have read about or longed for all along.

\*Becoming a healing presence in the world no matter what our walk in life. We do whatever we do in a healing way.

\*Watching as our lives take on spontaneous acts of creativity, simplicity, beauty, joy, and love.

David’s story illustrates how he has found his sacred calling, serving as a chaplain for people living with dementia in a long-term-care facility. He looks them directly in the eyes and speaks to their souls and many times they respond, even if they seem far away or in another world. He just knows how to love them and they feel it. Their families feel it too. This presence comes partly from who he has become as a result of his own wounded story. Ten years ago he was a closeted gay man in a religious order and an alcoholic not yet ready for the work of recovery. A lot of leaving, healing, and honesty emerged within a few years’ time. Tumultuous. Difficult. Painstaking. The Wall became intimately real in recovery when he realized he had to leave his religious order so he could heal. When he offers Eucharist to his residents now he sees in their eyes the very presence of God and knows he is in the right place. Holy, holy, holy.

**Biblical Examples of healing at the Wall**

Job, through all of his suffering and the advice of his friends, even his opportunity to curse God and die, finally comes to a place in which he meets God and has an extraordinary conversation. A straightforward one with much love and insistence on intimacy. He concludes with the words, “I know that you can do all things and no purpose of yours can be thwarted…Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know…I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.” (The book of Job)

Mary Magdalene was a close follower of Jesus and was healed of deep pain as a result of their relationship. She stayed with him in his darkest hour and then encountered him intimately at the tomb. (John 19:25, 20:1-18) She was not afraid of pain any longer. She went on to be one of the core disciples, along with the eleven, moving forward after his ascension.

**A poem for this phase of the Wall**

**I Created You, Now Let Me Love You**

I created you

Now let me love you

That’s all I’ve got to say

Would you like me to repeat that?

Janet Hagberg, 2006.

**Song links:**

Hallelujah; K.D. Lang, at the homage to Leonard Cohen concert

<https://youtu.be/paXBGRntIdM>

It is Well with my Soul; Kristene DiMarco and Bethel Music,

<https://youtu.be/YNqo4Un2uZI>

Alleluia; Eric Whitacre choir https://youtu.be/Rak\_rJLG49k

Copy and paste this link into search at youtube.com

**Icon image:** “Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” from Psalm 23,

“The Burning Bush” where God appears to Moses through the bush, to assure him of divine presence.

**A pocket prayer for releasing the Wall (small prayers that you can memorize or tuck in your pocket!)**

My Beloved, thank you, thank you, thank you. Amen

**Reflection Questions on Releasing the Wall**

Who do you know who is living in a mostly post-Wall life? If it is you, what does your life represent?

What characteristics of this person (if not you) are most endearing to you, things you might like to emulate?

Which characteristics of this person are most challenging for you?

What part of the Wall are you most grateful for in your own life?

**Further thoughts on the Wall by two excellent teachers**

Janet: “I have included a few wonderful descriptions of the Wall and an explanation of confusion about the Wall from two fine teachers and spiritual directors who use this material.”

**Deb Turnow**, spiritual director and teacher writes about the misunderstanding of where the Wall is on the Critical Journey model.

**Explanation of Stage Four (The Journey Inward) and the Wall** – (intensely inward focused)

When others begin to use The Critical Journey in their work or organization, there is some confusion about the placement of The Wall.  My hope is that this explanation will help offer a clear understanding of each of these places on the journey and why there may be some confusion.

What tends to happen is that people and/or organizations shift the order of Stage Four (the Journey Inward) and the Wall, feeling that the Wall should come before Stage Four, primarily because we tend to use the language, “I hit a wall” when we are talking about places of struggle and difficulty.  When an organization comes from this perspective and then tries to use The Critical Journey model, they move the Wall to fit their own understanding of its meaning.

Here is how Stage Four (the Journey Inward) and The Wall are defined by Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich:

In The Critical Journey model, **Stage Four** is defined as the place of struggle or deconstruction.  It is this Stage where what worked before no longer works, where the formulas are no longer helpful, where there are times of desolation or desert-like experiences, or even a complete deconstruction of what has been.  Using Jesus’ life as an example, Jesus went through deep struggles, especially in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he began to move towards the end days of his life.  Even his disciples had difficulty staying with him and one even denied him.  This garden was the scene of the struggle that signified that a choice of surrender was coming…at the Wall. He asked that the cup of sorrow pass from him and then ended by saying, “Not my will but yours be done.”

***The Wall is embedded in (and usually at the end of) Stage Four but it is not so much the place of struggle as it is the place of surrender to the work that God is doing in the midst of the struggle.  The Wall is the place where one gives over control and allows God to carry them through.  It is not the struggle itself but the place of reckoning where one says, “Your will, not mine.”  It is a place of surrender****—****just like Jesus.  This very act of surrendering despite the struggles of Stage Four is the place of deep healing that allows us to become much more aware of God’s presence, allows us to forgive on a deeper level, allows us to accept things may not change, and deepens our capacity to love.***

Understanding that the meaning of The Wall is not the struggle itself, but how our *response to the struggle* helps us make more sense of why it is not the beginning of Stage Four but embedded within it, usually at the end.  We cannot surrender and can’t give up our own will without the struggle.

To faithfully use *The Critical Journey* model, you cannot move The Wall before Stage Four.

**Ellen Duffield,** a pastor and author from Canada, writes about how she views the Wall in her own life and in the lives of those she works with.

The Wall is definitely one of the more challenging pieces to wrap my head around or explain and, yet I find people are able to access and find solace in the concept.

Some challenges I observe:

1.While the wall represents a place/time/decision or series of decisions/letting go/realignment/reprioritizing/cosmic shift in the inner journey influenced by external circumstances, it is difficult to describe it without people attributing every external challenging event or season as them being “at the Wall”.

2. The Wall (and stages 5 and 6) share certain attributes and outcomes, yet are unique to each individual, and being less common and more internal, more difficult to describe.

***As I often use the language of a journey towards wisdom I describe the Wall as a powerful crucible experience that enables us to let go of those things that would cause us to be less true to ourselves****,* ***less intimately connected to both the Divine and humanity at large, and more open to the calling of humility, creativity, wisdom, inspiration, and true leadership***— a kind of eldership “role” (although role is an inadequate word as it is more about presence).

The Wall is deeply painful and private. Often including, “I can’t believe this has happened, why did God allow this, I am not sure I will survive intact”, a kind of earth-shaking sense of loss, emotion, fear, and loneliness. Yet there are glimpses that God is at work in the darkness and these glimpses of Glory give glimmers of hope.

The Wall offers the opportunity to let go of the artificial supports and self images that have seemed critical to our identity and that have protected us from the fears of being seen and/or unseen. It is the place for the reinstatement of a healthy community, mature ego, and calling.

The Wall is the pathway that invites us to reconsider everything while not stagnating in cycles of self-reflection. It is an enigma because as we encounter and even embrace more of our own “dark side” and appreciate our unique beauty and strength, we are set free from focusing on self and able to truly see others, and create places of belonging rather than seek places where we can fit in or change ourselves. What seemed big before is now small and vice versa.

**Learning more about the Wall and *The Critical Journey***

For further understanding and more stories of the healing process, see the Wall chapters in *The Critical Journey* (chapters 7 and 13). The whole book, which illustrates six stages of faith and the Wall, is described in more detail on my website under the books tab. Please use anything that is helpful.

My website is: www.janethagberg.com and my book, *Who Are You God? Suffering and Intimacy with God* (especially chapters 1,2,4,6,8,10,11) illustrate the healing process and ways to change ones image of God. This is available in print or as a download on Amazon.