



JOURNEYING [LUKE 2:1–5]

This week's Advent focus centers on *journeying*, drawing a connection between Mary and Joseph's physical journey to Bethlehem and our own spiritual journeys of faith. In Luke 2:1–5, we read about Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem for the census. Their trip would have been marked by physical exhaustion, fear, limited resources, and profound uncertainty—yet also by trust, humility, and quiet faithfulness. The Savior of the world entered human history not through comfort or control, but through hardship and surrender.

This external journey becomes a metaphor for the *internal journey* of faith described in *The Critical Journey* by Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich (and echoed in Pete Scazzero's *Stages of Faith*). Both of these journeys highlight six stages of spiritual formation, from the initial recognition of God, through discipleship and productivity, and into the deeply unsettling *Journey Inward*. At the center of this inward journey stands "The Wall"—a moment when our will collides with God's, often experienced as doubt, crisis, or disorientation. Rather than being a failure of faith, the Wall is presented as an inevitable—and even necessary—part of authentic spiritual growth.

A deeper exploration of "The Wall" challenges the common assumption that faith crises are signs of weakness or spiritual failure. The Wall (or faith crises, in general) can be seen as invitations for transformation, intimacy, and surrender. Life crises—such as loss, disappointment, injustice, or personal failure—often give rise to faith crises, and Scripture is filled with examples of faithful people who encountered profound walls: Moses, Abraham, David, Samson, Peter, Paul, and many others.

This week, you are encouraged to participate in honest self-reflection and intentional movement during the Advent season. Just as Mary and Joseph journeyed in obedience without fully understanding what lay ahead, all believers are invited to consider where they are on their own faith journey and what one step God may be calling them to take. Advent becomes more than going through religious motions—it becomes an opportunity to reengage the journey, face the Wall with courage, and pursue a life ultimately transformed by love.

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem was physically demanding and filled with uncertainty. How does their story help you understand the nature of obedience in your own faith journey?
2. Which stage of *The Critical Journey* do you most identify with right now, and why? (The Recognition of God, Life of Discipleship, Productive Life, The "Wall" & Journey Inward, Journey Outward, Life of Love). What action(s) might be required to continue progressing in your faith journey?
3. How has your understanding of doubt or faith crisis been shaped by your church or cultural experiences? Has anything from the sermon this past week challenged or reframed that understanding? How?
4. If you have encountered "The Wall" in your life, what did it reveal about your relationship with God, yourself, or others? If you haven't, how does the idea of the Wall make you feel?
5. As we move through Advent, what is *one intentional step* you can take to move toward deeper surrender, trust, or love in your walk with Jesus?