

THE AUTHENTIC JOY JOURNEY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

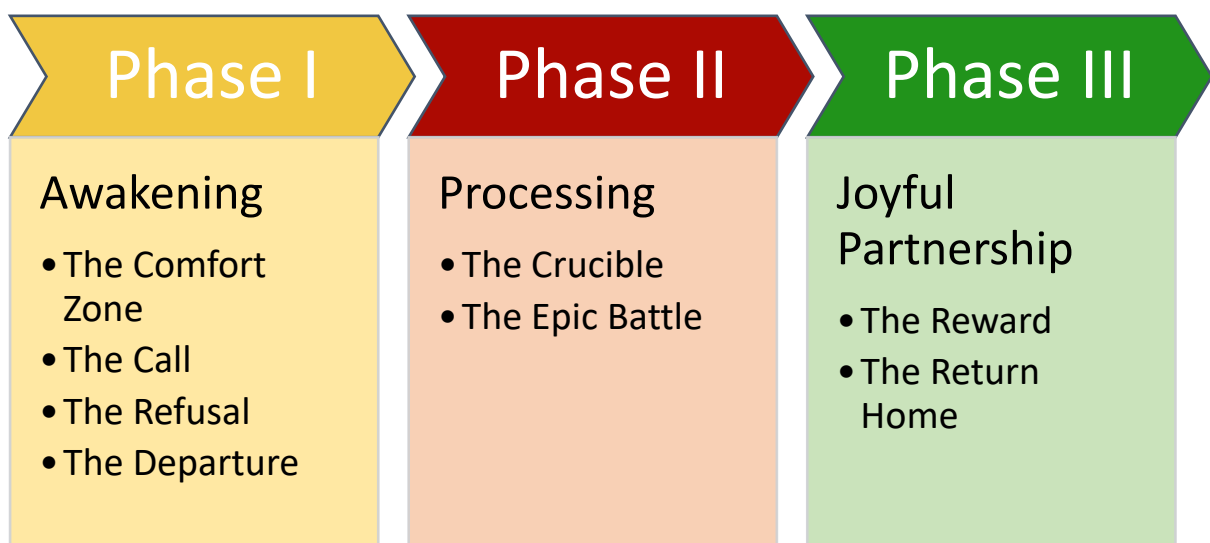
Here at Authentic Joy, our desire is to walk alongside you on your journey toward deeper intimacy with Christ. Authentic Joy, for us, describes that place of fullness of joy in the Presence of God. In that place we are also our most authentic selves. In His Presence, we are fully engaged in the core of kingdom pursuit – loving God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and loving our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). It is also the place of maturity where we have achieved the stature of the fullness of Christ that Paul describes in Ephesians 4.

All of us are somewhere along the journey toward maturity and eternal union with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Often, we believe that life's events are either good things sent by God or bad things sent by the enemy. While there is some truth to that, we offer another paradigm – that every single event and circumstance of your life is divinely designed to provoke your growth. The Journey Guide is a tool to help us assess where we are on our journey and therefore to understand the unique features and challenges of the particular stage that we find ourselves in. It is specifically designed to help us to partner with what God is doing in us through the circumstances of the season around us.

This guide is adapted from the 'Hero's Journey', which is a classic story structure developed from the work of Joseph Campbell.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We have defined three phases of the journey – Phase I (Awakening), Phase II (Processing) and Phase III (Joyful Partnership). These phases describe the typical journey of the believer starting from a place of simple belief in Jesus and ending in a place of joyful partnership with Jesus. Each phase is further sub-divided into segments as follows:



Read through the detailed descriptions for all of the segments below and pinpoint which segment of the journey you identify with the most. Having done that, we hope you will be motivated to dig deeper into the Basic level courses that we have specifically designed to help you to navigate each stage of your journey and move powerfully into a life of Authentic Joy!

PHASE I - AWAKENING

Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

James 4:8 (ESV)

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

The Comfort Zone – Numb to the present reality of God.

All journeys start somewhere. In the comfort zone, life is going well enough. At least well enough that we have no reason to think that anything could be wrong with the paradigms that frame our perceptions of life. We may even have our life well planned out and be very optimistic about successfully executing our plan.

Maybe, we are at a later stage in life, having achieved a certain measure of success. We have a good job, a good marriage, children that are well behaved, we serve in our church and we have enough money to live comfortably and faithfully pay our tithes and offerings. Yes, this is what we have been led to believe a ‘successful’ Christian life looks like... and so, there is nothing further to pursue. Maybe we have a vague notion that this can’t be all there is to being a Christian, but our discomfort is not severe enough to motivate us to do anything about it.

Whatever the specific circumstances, in The Comfort Zone, there is no experience of the present reality of God. Yes, the comfort zone can often be a deception that is disconcertingly exposed by The Call.

Biblical Examples

- Job – The greatest of all the people of the East. A righteous and wealthy man. Even satan said that Job had it pretty cushy and cited Job’s life of ease as the only reason that Job served God.
- Mary and Joseph – A young engaged Jewish couple happily planning their life together until an angel turns up and changes everything.

- The Pharisees – Steeped in religious tradition and enamoured of their status in Jewish society many of the Pharisees never left their comfort zone. They feared losing the life that they enjoyed.

Mood

Ease, Passiveness, Comfort, Pride, Invincibility.

The Call – Motivated to seek God.

Our faith journey begins with The Call. The Call disrupts our normal life. It can typically take one of (or a combination of) three forms:

1. A divine summons. God interrupts our normal life. This could be a significant prophetic word, a divine visitation or simply the discovery of a truth that disrupts our worldview.
2. A tragedy. The Call can also take the form of a tragic or at least an uncomfortable event. This could look like a serious health issue (physical or mental), loss of a family member, loss of income, a relational impasse or the moral failure of a significant leader/mentor in our life.
3. A wake-up call. This, in essence, is when our tragedy is of our own making. We reach a point of realization that whatever we have been doing or believing hasn't been working. Examples are a moral failure or a failed marriage. It could also resemble a tragedy like a health crisis or financial crisis when it is caused by our bad habits or false beliefs.

The Call awakens us to the sense that something is wrong with our current world or the status quo. This 'something wrong' has now become urgent and pressing enough for us to be motivated to do something about it. In short, The Call provides motivation for us to seek God. God uses The Call to move us closer to Him. It hopefully forces us to a decision point. We can choose to change (The Departure) or to remain with our status quo (The Refusal).

Biblical Examples

Divine Summons:

- Gideon – The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and called him a mighty man of valour. God chose him to lead his people from under the oppression of the Midianites
- Jeremiah – The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah appointing him a prophet to the nations.
- Paul – Paul is knocked off his horse as Jesus appears to him in a blinding light and with an audible voice.

Tragedy:

- Joseph – Joseph's path to his purpose began with his brothers selling him into slavery.

- Job – Job also began his journey with great tragedy, losing his children and all his possessions in one day.

Wake-up Call:

- The prodigal son – The prodigal came to his senses while hungering after the food that he was hired to feed the pigs. His dire circumstances brought him to his senses.
- The woman caught in adultery – Had she not been caught in her sin and dragged before the mob, she may never have exited her adulterous lifestyle.

Mood

Excitement, Uncertainty, Fear, Doubt.

The Refusal – The decision to stay where we are.

Sometimes we refuse God's initial summons. Mercifully, God may call us a few times before we answer (like Samuel) or escalate things to get our attention (like Jonah). Many of us can relate to a fear of the unknown or a feeling of unworthiness or inadequacy (like Gideon). These are some of the reasons why we may initially refuse The Call.

However, in many cases, we are just too comfortable where we are. Our refusal is simply the quiet acceptance of a mediocre life. Some of us have spent decades being groomed to fit the classic mould of society... job security, good family life, socialite etc. We are afraid of becoming a 'zealot' as people whose hearts are 'on fire' for the Lord are sometimes viewed. We have been pretending we are just like everyone else around us so that we can fit in, meanwhile, there is a fire burning in our heart that is becoming harder and harder to ignore. Some of us have even spent the better half of our lives proving to someone in authority that we can 'fit in' and 'make it' in their ministry. Why risk that promotion into greater ministry for something less tangible, or worse yet, risk being labelled a failure and a misfit?

In other cases, we may be initially confused as to if our summons is really from God or the enemy. Also, our Christian tradition or family history may bar us from believing that what we are experiencing can even be from God. We will never heed The Call unless we can surmount these deeply held beliefs.

Biblical Examples

- Moses – Moses could possibly be the most reluctant leader in the bible. He made excuse after excuse. First, he said the people wouldn't believe him then he said that he was not eloquent. When God did not accept any of these excuses, he flat out asked God to send someone else.
- Jonah – Probably the most iconic refusal figure, Job not only refused but ran in the opposite direction from God's assignment.

- Naaman the leprous Syrian – After Elisha sent a messenger to tell Naaman to dip in the Jordan seven times in order to be cured of his leprosy, Naaman went away indignant that a man of his stature had been treated with such scant courtesy.

Mood

Indifference, Doubt, Insecurity, Fear, Resistance, Pride.

The Departure – The decision to seek God.

Now we are ready to embrace The Call. We are fully committed to the journey to follow God wherever He would lead.

The Departure involves leaving behind the worldly paradigms of The Comfort Zone and those who were our companions there. This is one of the challenges of this stage. We may have been dependent on these people before. They may have been our parents, friends or even our priest/pastor. To leave, we must trust our own ability to hear God and to follow Him where He would lead us. Taking that first step feels extremely risky and we can feel very vulnerable and alone.

Hence, at this point a guide or friend to lead/accompany us along this path can certainly be helpful. Our guide can take many forms: parents, mentors, friends, priest/pastor a small group, a ministry we connect with online... The only criterion is that this person or group helps us to navigate out from our comfort zone and take the first few steps into the unknown with God. Usually, our guide has taken this journey before. A formal name for this process in some organizations is 'discernment of our calling or vocation' which is facilitated by a spiritual director.

Of course, our ultimate guide is Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus guides us along our new journey. All through the scriptures people have received guidance from God through dreams, visions, prophetic words, direct words from God, angelic visitations, God sent human beings and the scriptures themselves. God is well able to guide us into deeper relationship with Him in a way that is uniquely tailored to our personality and circumstances.

Biblical Examples

- Abram – God speaks and immediately Abram sets off leaving everything he knows behind.
- Samuel – Initially Samuel had no idea that God was calling him but thankfully Eli was able to help him to take his first steps in hearing and obeying God's voice. Under Eli's guidance Samuel grew in his calling and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

- Paul – After zealously persecuting Christians, Paul has a supernatural encounter with Jesus, makes a 180 degree turn and it is not long before he is proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues.

Mood

Surrender, Dependence on God, Trust, Excitement, Fear, Faith, Curiosity.

PHASE II - PROCESSING

James 1:2-4 (ESV)

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Ephesians 6:10-13

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

Matthew 5:43-48 (ESV)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The Crucible – The Refiner’s fire (trials and tests) that brings our flaws to the surface.

The road to God is not always an easy one and, in this stage, we confront the difficulties that make an adventure adventurous. Adventure means risk. This stage is filled with tests to pass and enemies to face. Thankfully, God has also provided for us allies along the journey.

While we are well on our way, we are still adjusting to the new world outside of our comfort zone. How we navigated our old world is not how we navigate this one. We will face many tests that will be difficult to navigate while our belief system is in flux. Tests are designed to reveal to us whether what we are learning has sunk into our heart or is still just in our head. What we really believe is only evident when we face adversity. In the desert, God tested the Israelites to see whether they would hold fast to His commandments.

We will face the big questions of life in this season. Do I really have faith in God? What does it mean to fight in the spirit not the flesh? What does it mean to love those who persecute us? Why does God allow us to suffer? Why is God allowing *me* to suffer? Why does God allow

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evil people to prosper? Is my church culture, kingdom culture? Does my values and lifestyle reflect the values and lifestyle of Jesus? The truth is we may have idols that need to be smashed and our flesh won't like it. How will we react when our possessions, finances, beauty, popularity, social status, friends, family, moral superiority, political majority are touched? If we yield to the process, this stage will cause us to take a long hard look at ourselves in the mirror and demand that we truly become more like Jesus.

We will learn how to persevere through trials and suffer well until Godly character is produced in us. Typically, this is one of the longest stages of the journey. This is the 40 years in the desert, or the decades Joseph spent serving in Egypt.

Biblical Examples

Tests:

- David had two opportunities to kill Saul. Each time he chose to honour Saul instead.
- Daniel and his friends were required to eat the king's food and bow down to his statue, and they chose to obey God instead of the king. Even in the face of death by lions and by fire they did not waiver.
- Joseph faced two tests: not sleeping with Potiphar's wife and not becoming bitter after being wrongly accused and incarcerated.

Allies:

- David's friendship with Jonathan.
- Daniel and his three friends.
- The cupbearer in prison with Joseph.

Enemies:

- King Saul opposed David bitterly.
- The Babylonian officials serving Nebuchadnezzar plotted against Daniel.
- Potiphar's wife tried to entice Joseph to betray his master.

Mood

Confusion, Pain, Longsuffering, Fatigue, Despair.

The Epic Battle – The inner struggle of character formation.

Finally, we reach a point where we can see clearly what was 'wrong' with our old way of being, thinking and acting. We can see the inferiority of where we were, and we have a taste or glimpse of where we are going. We have a greater sight of who God is and who He is calling us to be.

With this realization comes the real battle; the internal struggle to evolve. This is a battle for a new identity and a mature character. Will our pain be transformed or transmitted to others? We see this struggle when Joseph confronts his brothers for the first time after being sold into slavery. He struggles with himself through a series of interactions where he treats them roughly to their face and yet kindly when behind their backs. He is figuring out the kind of man he wants to be (is called to be) in light of the God he has come to know through many years of pain.

The scenario won't look much different for us. Can we be a generous person after being taken advantage of repeatedly? Can we remain humble and merciful when thrust into positions of great authority and influence? After being abused by leadership, what will we do when we have the upper hand over others or the same ones who hurt us? Can we love people in spite of their flaws and animosity toward us?

The Epic Battle has significant overlap with The Crucible. It is easy to see why The Epic Battle can only take place against the backdrop of The Crucible. The Crucible is the sum of events (persecutions, trials, failures) that challenge us. While the Epic Battle is whether or not we choose to let those challenges make us better or make us bitter.

Essentially, The Epic Battle is a battle for the values of Christ to be formed in our hearts. If we do not do this inner work faithfully, we will never advance in our journey.

Biblical Examples

- Joseph – After decades in Egypt Joseph has to face his brothers again and must decide whether he is going to be the type of man to hold a grudge and seek vengeance or to forgive and see things from God's viewpoint. In the end he wins the battle and says that what they (his brothers) meant for evil, God meant for good.
- David – After years of running from Saul, David learns of his death. David has the choice to rejoice in justice being done and finally having his way to the throne being made clear or to mourn the death of God's anointed. David tears his clothes (a sign of lament), executes the man that killed Saul and writes a song of lament over Saul and Jonathan.

Mood

Solitude, Inner Struggle, Pain, Desperation.

PHASE III: JOYFUL PARTNERSHIP

Matthew 25:23 (ESV)

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Acts 2:42-47 (ESV)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Ephesians 4:11-16 (ESV)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The Reward – Evident Christlikeness of the mature Christian.

The reward for winning The Epic Battle is five-fold:

1. Intimacy with God
2. Maturity
3. Purpose
4. Wisdom
5. Power and authority in Christ

We see God and therefore ourselves more clearly. David came away from his ordeals with an intimate relationship with God and a deep knowledge of who he was in God's eyes. Jacob

became Israel. Abram became Abraham. Like these heroes of the faith, at this stage our focus shifts to a generational and global view of God's plan and our role in it.

This is a wonderful leg of the journey where there is a sense of inner peace, accomplishment and where everything makes sense. We have a far greater ability to carry the presence and purpose of God. We have greater authority in the spirit and our words have greater weight. We now have the capacity to ably assist others and the maturity to be compassionate with others' weaknesses and immaturity.

Biblical Examples

- Abram becomes Abraham the father of many nations.
- Jacob becomes Israel the patriarch of the 12 tribes and namesake of the people of God.

Mood

Joy, Confidence, Peace, Gratitude.

The Return Home – Helping others along their journey.

We are now ready to go back home having secured the prize, but we are not the same person who first started the journey. The focus moves from ourselves to something much bigger - impacting generations in partnership with the Jesus' church.

Before we were pressing to get to God. Now we are working in partnership *with* God to help others along *their* journey. We become interested in building communities where people are loved and transformed. There should be an element of relational reconciliation at this stage. Compared to The Crucible and The Epic Battle, this stage is much more peaceful as God takes our spoil of victory and uses it to minister to others.

Please note that serving other people is not the only evidence that we are at The Return Home Stage. We must be serving people **in partnership with God**. The rewards gained from winning The Epic Battle (Our intimacy with Christ, mature character, purpose-driven life, wisdom gained through experience, and power and authority in the spirit) are key enablers of true kingdom service as opposed to dead good works. People who do not win The Epic Battle but try to prematurely enter The Return Home stage can have huge ministries in the natural but minimal impact in the spirit and are highly susceptible to burnout. Worse yet, we can do much damage to the people we are 'helping' if we are still immature and 'unprocessed'. Some say that those who do not win The Epic Battle are doomed to repeat the journey until they do.

The Return Home is not without its challenges and trials, but the experience is completely different to The Crucible. We are able to go through trials with a certain amount of detachment having learned to live from our relationship with God rather than being puppeted

by our circumstances and desires. From the place of intimacy and maturity, The Return Home becomes a fulfilling learning experience rather than a destabilizing one.

Note: This stage can eventually become another Comfort Zone if we stop seeking more of God and get stuck in the modus operandi of a particular season. The distinguishing question is: Is there a sense of the present reality of God? Our lives should be a continuous unfolding relational journey with God. I imagine that, with God, we will always be learning.

Biblical Examples

- Joseph provides for his father and brothers in Goshen.
- David prepares Solomon for the throne and puts things in place for him to build the house of God.
- Job turns and prays for his friends.

Mood

Fulfilment, Community, Belonging, Oneness, Wholeness, Growth.

Please note that these stages are simply a tool to help us to understand our season with God. It is not a hard and fast rule. Not everyone will experience every stage in the same way or in the order outlined here. We can also experience stages more than once or even skip stages. It is best not to approach the Journey Guide as a hard taskmaster that you must conform to but more of a friendly guide inviting you to explore where you might have similar experiences.