

# The Seven Stages of Healing

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Have you ever considered why individuals exhibit markedly different responses to the same or similar situation? Why does one individual respond with anger while another responds with shame or anxiety? In addition to the impact our unique subconscious files have on our behavior, we also experience life through a series of seven distinctly different emotional and spiritual stages.

In Kübler-Ross' model on healing from grief we are presented with five different stages individuals pass through on their healing journey. These stages include Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Upon examination of these stages, we can see that individuals also cycle through them throughout their life in an attempt to cope with the challenges life offers. In addition to the five stages offered by Kübler-Ross, I include two more stages; "Love Entering In" and "Love Consuming". Combining Kübler-Ross' five stages with my two additional stages we arrive at what I call *The Seven Stages of Healing*. I invite you to use *The Seven Stages of Healing* as a guide to assess where you are on your life journey as you seek greater health, happiness, and wholeness.

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1. Denial
  2. Anger
  3. Bargain
  4. Depression
  5. Acceptance
  6. Love Entering In
  7. Love Consuming

*"Knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*  
- Romans 5:3-5

Regardless of what stage you are in at this time of your life, it is important to honor the fact that not only do you exist where you are in an attempt to best cope with the struggles you have faced up until now, you are not alone. You have never been alone. God is always with you, holding you, supporting you, and encouraging you find solace in him. The road map to happiness and peace will be found through your life struggles and your divine guide, Jesus Christ, knows the way. He dwells within you and there is nothing you can do to stop him from loving you – no human being is that powerful.

*“I saw my soul as vast as if it were a boundless realm, a blessed kingdom, and a prosperous, vibrant city. Our beloved Jesus - truly human, truly Divine - sat in the middle of that place... We are his home of homes, his eternal dwelling place.”*

*– Julian of Norwich<sup>1</sup>*

## **Stage 1: Denial**

In the stage of Denial you are not aware there is a problem, you have buried the trauma, you have buried the pain. Pain such as anger, rage, unforgiveness, grief, resentment, and/or fear gets stuck deep within your subconscious mind. Often this is the result of painful childhood experiences or traumatic adult experiences. Denial is a coping mechanism used when pain occurs beyond your ability to process it. Unable to fight or flight during the painful moment you freeze, unable escape.

Think of these wounds as a growing elephant in the room that you don't want to talk about. He's huge, after all, he's an elephant. The more wounds you sustain the bigger he becomes. He makes it hard to communicate and have a meaningful conversation with others in the room – the people in your life. Even if you have gotten use to talking around him he is impacting your relationships. If you somehow manage to talk about him you have to discuss how enormous he is. Then you will likely want to talk about how to remove him from the room so you can enjoy better communication and relationships. Even though it would be nice if he was removed, the prospect of removing him can feel overwhelming. You need help removing the elephant, God is that eternal and perpetual help.

*Lord, you have probed me, you know me: you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar. You sift through my travels and my rest; with all my ways you are familiar. Even before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you know it all.*

*Behind and before you encircle me and rest your hand upon me.*

*- Psalm 139:1-5 (NABRE)*

## **Stage 2: Anger**

In the stage of Anger you are aware there is a problem. You feel the pain, the anger, the rage, the resentment, the fear. Finger pointing ensures and someone or something else is to blame. During

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<sup>1</sup> Julian. *The Showings of Julian of Norwich: A New Translation*, ed. trans. by Mirabai Starr. (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2013) Ch. 67, p. 184.

this stage trauma buried in the stage of Denial often resurfaces to be healed. Anger is not a primary emotion, rather, it is a secondary emotion that covers up woundedness. When distilled down, your wounds are a result of a lack of love. You wanted love; however, you experienced hurt instead. Anger then becomes a false armor of protection, presumably protecting you from being hurt again. However; anger can never protect you and it can never offer real healing, only love heals. Remember, you were created in the image of God, who is perfect love. You were created to love and be loved in return. When anger is in your heart love cannot flourish there.

Instead of turning to God as your armor, you direct your fury towards the one(s) who have harmed you when anger grips. Justice must be done. Yet, when you are angry no amount of justice will heal your pain, only forgiveness born out of love can bring relief. Sadly, forgiveness can be seem impossible when your pain is profound. And, yes, it is impossible to forgive on your own. You need help forgiving – we all do.

Surrender your pain at the foot of the cross and unite it with Jesus’ passion. Give your pain to him, ask for his mercy and grace. Ask Jesus to bring forgiveness into your heart so you can experience freedom. Pain can overwhelm, it can appear bigger than you. However, Jesus is always bigger than your pain and his passion is the remedy that heals your wounds.

*“I realized that what Christ meant to show me is that we are hanging on the cross with him right now – in our pain, in our suffering, even in our dying – and that if we willingly stay with him there, he will, by his grace, convert all our distress into delight... Everything will be reconciled in joy.” – Julian of Norwich <sup>2</sup>*

### **Stage 3: Bargain**

In the stage of Bargain you falsely believe you can experience happiness, wholeness and peace when someone, or something else changes first. You are spiritually and emotionally “stuck”. This is akin to holding your breath! Maybe you believe a loved one needs to change and treat you differently before you can be happy, maybe society needs to change, or maybe the church needs to change. The truth is you could wait your entire life for this to happen. At some point you have to exhale and begin breathing again. The wounds others carry, wounds that limit their ability to love you as you desire, are really between them and God. No amount of bargaining on your end will heal these wounds and give you what your heart desires. Sadly, when the change you desire doesn’t happen you risk falling back into the stage of Anger.

When trapped in the stage of Bargain you do not enjoy the lived experience of God’s freely given mercy. He gives it to all people who ask for it. When you ask God for mercy with a sincere heart he immerses you in it and you can breath again. His mercy then heals the wounds that hold you back from seeking him as your source of happiness and wholeness. Mercy frees you to accept

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<sup>2</sup> Julian. *The Showings of Julian of Norwich: A New Translation*, ed. trans. by Mirabai Starr. (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2013) Ch. 21, p. 51.

your life and others as they are. I invite you to pray for God's mercy for yourself and others when you recognize that you are in the stage of Bargain.

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. - The Serenity Prayer*

#### **Stage 4: Depression**

In the stage of Depression you have given up on your "bargain". You either realize that the other person will never change or whatever you thought you needed for happiness is not going to happen. Remember, humankind can never be perfect – we are all fallen and given this we can *never* make a deal that would guarantee our happiness. Yet, God is close to the brokenhearted. You are now being offered an opportunity to break free of the attachment you held onto in the stage of Bargain and cling to God as your source of happiness. Unfortunately, many of God's children do not turn to him when they are depressed. Instead they turn to poor substitutes such as addictions, prescription drugs or even natural remedies. While I do believe that the proper natural remedy can offer *some* respite, its healing properties are limited. When you surrender to the true healer, God, perfect respite is offered.

*"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."*  
- Matthew 11:28-30 (NABRE)

#### **Stage 5: Acceptance**

Once you are in the stage of Acceptance you can see more clearly. The elephant is gone, you are breathing easily, and you are getting ready to run the good race. You no longer live in denial, you have released the anger you once held, you no longer require some change outside of yourself for inner happiness, and depression has lifted. You now find yourself inviting God's mercy into your heart and healing is happening. Now it is time to invite God's grace in. God's mercy heals your wounds and God's grace builds you up so you can become a faithful worker in his vineyard. You grow in acceptance for the world and humanity as it is and your trust in God's plan continually increases. After all, if God wanted the world to look different it would look different. He has the power. Your pain has a purpose that only God understands. You are allowing him to carry your pain.

Accepting others and the world as is sounds like a tall order, and it is. You can only reach true acceptance with the help of Jesus. Consider Jesus your human gateway into Acceptance. Jesus' help calls you into friendship with him and, like all friendships, a friendship with Jesus requires you spend time together in prayer and conversation on a regular basis. I invite you to continue to ask Jesus for God's healing mercy as you also ask that God's grace build you up. Like a good

friend, Jesus enjoys both small and large conversations. He wants to share in your life. Jesus Christ is the one true blue friend you can always count on.

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. – John 14:6 (NABRE)*

## **Stage 6: Love Entering In**

In the stage of Love Entering In the love God has for you begins to enter deep into your heart. Your heart increases in beauty. This love is the Holy Spirit. Your heart continues to become free of past hurts through the healing power of the Holy Trinity through the guidance of Jesus Christ. In return, you share God's love with your brothers and sisters. Your trials, and the wounds you experienced through them, now serve as a catalyst that enables you to love more. No longer do you have the innocence of childhood that you held before your wounds, yet, you radiate beautiful childlike love. You have surrendered to Jesus Christ and allowed him to be your guide.

*"While keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God." – Hebrews 12:2 (NABRE)*

You continue to say yes to God. Your heart is becoming a wondrous dwelling place for Christ to live. The Holy Spirit is very active in your life, making your heart lovely, and God the Father becomes increasingly pleased as he witnesses your increased happiness. The world appears more hopeful and joyful – even in the midst of troubles because deep within you experience the blossoming of Christ's peace. With peace blossoming in your heart your desire to do good in the world increases. Sin becomes increasingly unattractive and you gravitate towards bringing forth greater and greater goodness in the world.

## **Stage 7: Love Consuming**

In the stage of Love Consuming you become so consumed with God's love that you can withstand any trial. This stage begins with an all-consuming love for others which allows you to carry of the pain they cannot carry – the wounds holding them in bondage. You carry pain of the victim as well as the pain of the perpetrator by revealing God's love to them. Deep within your heart you desire to love humanity as God loves humanity – he loves both sinners and saints. You live for one thing – you live to love as God loves.

You continually empty yourself so that the Holy Trinity can work through you. Your trials and heartaches serve to make you an instrument of love for the world. You are equipped to carry the burdens of others because God's mercy and grace continually flow through you. Countless holy saints have reached this stage and many more are to come. We are all invited to become God's holy saints. When you love each and every person in the world 24/7 you know you have arrived at Love Consuming. I know this may sound impossible, yet, with God all things are possible.

*Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.*  
- Galatians 2:20 (NABRE)

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*And so when the final judgement comes and we (lovers of God) are all brought up to the heavenly realms, we shall clearly see in God all the secrets that are hidden from us now. Then none of us will be moved in any way to say, Lord, if only things had been different, all would have been well. Instead, we shall all proclaim in one voice, Beloved One, may you be blessed, because it is so: all is well. We see now that everything happened in accordance with your divine will, ordained before the beginning of time. – Julian of Norwich.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Julian. *The Showings of Julian of Norwich: A New Translation*, ed. trans. by Mirabai Starr. (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2013) Ch. 85, p. 223.