

Faith in Five – Adults Stages of Spiritual Life



1. The Catechism of the Catholic Church 1700 states that human beings contribute to their interior growth in some manner, yet “[w]ith the help of grace they grow in virtue...avoid sin, and if they sin, they entrust themselves as did the prodigal son to the mercy of our Father in heaven. In this way they attain to the perfection of charity.”
2. There are three stages in spiritual growth that describe one’s journey in their path towards a deeper relationship with our Trinitarian God. These ways or stages of the interior or spiritual life are **purgative, illuminative and unitive**. These three traditional levels of progress in holiness are not necessarily chronological, although in many ways, spiritual growth may mirror human development of child, adolescent and adult. They may be present, in greater or lesser degree, at any point during a person’s growth in holiness and sanctity.
3. **The Purgative Way:** the soul has an awareness and sorrow of sins. There is a longing to make right our relationship with God and correct the offenses.
4. **The Purgative Stage:** In this stage there is a focus to submit our will to the Will of God. We must purge ourselves of the desire to sin in order to appreciate the beauty and glory of God. This cannot be accomplished without true humility and dependance on God. We set aside attention to attractions of this world, wrongful or excessive pleasures.
5. **The Illuminative Way:** this is the intermediary stage between purification and union. “There is enlightenment of the mind in the ways of God and a clear understanding of His will in one’s own state of life” ([Source](#)).
6. **The Illuminative Stage:** There is still some attachment to worldly things that are not necessarily unlawful but get in the way of a closer relationship with God. God is doing the work, but the soul must work at allowing God to take over. Passions and desires are under better control and there is discipline keeping away from mortal sin. The soul continues the path to holiness, the mind is drawn to spiritual and virtuous things. There are moments of spiritual dryness, battles and trials.
7. **The Unitive Way:** this is the last stage of Christian perfection. There is continual awareness of God’s presence and conforming to God’s Will is second nature.
8. **The Unitive Stage:** the mind is largely purged and detached from temporal things, there is indifference to sinful passions. The mind is surely centered on God and there is a union with God by love and actual experience and exercise of that love. Prayer is more contemplative. The soul is permanently united to God interiorly, where there is a continual state of adoration, praise, thanksgiving and dependence on God. There is permanent joy!
9. In each and all of them is found the effort and care to preserve and guard the soul from sin, though this is said to belong (appropriately) to the purgative way; in each, virtue

must be practiced, and from its practice, a deeper awareness and progress result. Again, in each of them the soul gives itself to God to live in Him and for Him the supernatural life which He imparts to it.

On the path to spiritual perfection, it is important to understand that these stages are not entirely distinct, rather, there is a fluidity between them in a way that it may be difficult to ascertain what state the soul is in. The characteristic and distinctive feature of these states is determined by the form which is dominant in the soul. When strife and fear predominate, the soul is said to be still in the purgative way. If charity is dominant above all, the soul is in the unitive way. There will always be the labor and activity of purgation, illumination, and of union in the work towards supernatural perfection ([Source](#)). The recipient must be in a state of grace to attain the heights of holiness.

10. We have been given guidance by the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes and the Precepts of the Church for how to love God and treat others. This is only the beginning of how we establish a real relationship with God. We are healed, transformed and are conformed to the Son of God through the sacramental life where we become partakers of God's divine nature (CCC, 1129). Our quest for holiness and the imitation of Christ is deeply personal and is lived out of the individual dignity of each human being. We are all called towards perfect union with God through constancy in faith and sanctity in living. We come together as the Body of Christ, with our own personalities and spiritual gifts.

[As Pope Francis remarked](#), holiness is courage, hope, grace and daily conversion. "We cannot achieve holiness on our own. No, it is a grace. Being good, being saintly, going every day a little 'a step forward in the Christian life is a grace of God and we have to ask for it...The path to holiness is simple. Do not go back, but always moving forward, right? And with fortitude."

"... but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

1 Peter 1:15-16

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