

James Fowler – Stages of Faith Development

Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development

Level	Approx. Ages	Name	Characteristics
Stage 1	3-7	Intuitive-predictive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First awareness of self – egocentric; hard to see other perspectives • Birth of Imagination, unrestrained by logical thought • Highly imitative stage where children can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions and stories of the visible faith of primarily related adults (parents, etc.) • Programs that use wonder & imagination (like Godly Play or Catechesis of the Good Shepherd) are very successful with this age
Stage 2	6-12	Mythical-literal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to this stage happens as the child becomes more capable of concrete operational thinking • Can use logic to justify thoughts, but not yet able to think abstractly • Fascination with private worlds of fantasy and wonder (ie – Narnia, Harry Potter, etc.) although in the perception of this stage, symbols are one-dimensional and must refer to something specific • Story, drama & myth help give coherence to experience – telling their “story” helps discover sense of self and place in the community • World based on reciprocal fairness and immanent justice
Stage 3	12+	Synthetic-conventional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition often comes when children notice contradictions in stories (ie – Genesis creation vs. evolution) leading to questions/reflection • Experience of the world extends beyond family • Many things compete for attention: family, peers, school, media, etc. • Faith must help them synthesize values and conventions – to provide a coherent orientation in the midst of competing ideals • Faith as a vehicle for creating a sense of identity and values • Many adults get stuck here
Stage 4	Late Teen- Early Adult	Individual-reflective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition often comes with “leaving home” – emotionally, physically or both – causing us to examine self, background & values • Understand and accept a higher level of commitment to ideals and responsibilities – Intrinsic responsibility (not enforced by others) • High degree of self consciousness • Sense of self develops outside of specific roles • Conceptual meanings transcend Symbols – “demythologizing stage” • Capacity for critical reflection on identity
Stage 5	Adult 30+	Conjunctive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truth is discovered from a variety of viewpoints • Second naïveté – symbols regain their power; can appreciate myth, story, ritual (own and others) because they have grasped, in some measure, the depth of reality to which they refer • Reclaiming & Reworking one’s past • Commitment to justice; oriented towards others
Stage 6	Adult	Universalizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This stage is rarely achieved • Person becomes totally altruistic – incarnation of the principles of love and justice (like Ghandi, Jesus, Mother Teresa, etc.) • Feel an integral part of an all-inclusive sense of being. • Often more honored or revered after their death