

JAMES FOWLER'S STAGES OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT

PRE-STAGE

Infancy and Undifferentiated Faith.

The seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are planted and contend with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistency and deprivation. What develops in this pre-stage underlies or undermines all that comes later in faith development.

Strength: Basic trust and mutuality.

Transition to Stage 1: Development and convergence of thought and language.

STAGE 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith (The Faith of Imitation.)

Age: 3 - 7 or 8

Characteristics:

Fluidity of thought pattern

No logical thought

Unclear distinctions between fantasy and reality

Self-awareness/egocentricity

Strength: The birth of imagination.

Transition to Stage 2:

The emergence of concrete operational thinking. (The desire and ability to know how things are, and what is real and not real.)

STAGE 2: Mythic-Literal Faith. (The Faith of Joining.)

Age: 8 - 12

Characteristics:

Making sense of things. (Coherence)

Making a linear narrative of one's experience.

Taking on the stories, beliefs and observances of one's community.

Beliefs and symbols taken literally.

Reciprocity as the basis of justice.

Anthropomorphic image of God.

Strength: The capacity for narrative and story-making.

Transition to Stage 3:

Observing contradictions in stories which leads to reflection on what they mean.

STAGE 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith (The Faith of What They Say)

Age: 12/13 - 16

Characteristics:

Conformity; to a locus of authority outside oneself.

Beliefs and values deeply held, but not yet examined systematically.

Faith provides a secure lens through which to view the world.

Image of God derives from qualities experienced in interpersonal relationships.

Strength: The development of a personal myth of one's own becoming in identity and faith. (Who I am in relationship to others and to God.)

Transition to Stage 4:

Having experiences which lead to critical reflection one one's cherished beliefs and values. (e.g., a clash or contradiction between valued authority sources.)

STAGE 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith (Making Up My Own Mind Faith}

Age: 17

Characteristics:

Development of an identity independent of the group. (An executive ego)

Development of a personal world view. (Shaping of a lifestyle)

Facing of tensions between:

- 1. The self and the group*
- 2. The security of deeply held personal beliefs and the need for critical reflection*
- 3. Self-actualization vs. service to others*
- 4. The relative vs. the absolute.*

De-mythologizing and breaking symbols. ("But what does it mean?")

Development of abstract concepts to describe the ultimate environment (God)

Strength: The capacity for critical reflection.

Transition to Stage 5:

Disillusionment with the compromises required in constructing identity and outlook in Stage 4.

STAGE 5: Conjunctive Faith (Committed Faith)

Age: Varies

Characteristics:

*A "second naivete" which allows paradoxical realities to co-exist.
A dialogical form of knowing which allows the known the known (rather than the self) to have the initiative.
A listening to the voices from one's deeper self.
A critical recognition of the social class, religious traditions and ethnic group which nurtured me.
Commitment to values freed from the confines of my particular community or tradition.
A re-appropriation of the symbols, myths and rituals now fully examined.*

Strength: The rise of ironic imagination. (The ability to be in a group or be with an idea, and yet realize its relativity.)

Transition to Stage 6: The experience of living somewhere between an untransformed world and a transforming vision yields to a call to radical actualization.

STAGE 6: Universalizing Faith (When God Truly Enters Our Lives.)

Age: ???

Characteristics:

*Living as an incarnation of the values of love and justice apprehended at Stage 5.
Spending oneself and being superb for the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent reality.
Being comfortable with people at all other stages of faith and from all other faith traditions.
Living heedless to the threats to self or the security of one's support group.*