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.