# James Fowler – Stages of Faith Development

*Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Approx. Ages</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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| Stage 1       | 3-7          | Intuitive-predictive | • 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 primally 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    | • 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 | • 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 | • 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         | • 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      | • 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 |