

James Fowler: Stages of Faith Development

1. *Intuitive-Projective*

- 2 to 6/7 years
- This faith development stage is based on the authority of one's family and/or primary caregivers. People in this stage imitate their authority figures and copy what they do.
- Reality is whatever the authority figures say is true. Children believe what their parents tell them to believe about God, Jesus, the Bible, heaven and so on.

2. *Mythic-Literal*

- 6/7 to 11/12 years
- Authority is based on a larger community of faith, usually one's own church and its teachers and pastors.
- The community helps define the content and object of faith. Ultimate reality is what one's church teaches.

3. *Synthetic-Conventional*

- 11/12 to 17/18 years
- The person identifies with a larger group of believers beyond his or her immediate church and accepts their explanation of ultimate reality.
- There is an acceptance of the doctrines and teachings of the church and of people in the denomination. The earliest this stage usually occurs is in the young adolescent years and it can continue throughout adulthood. Most adults are in this stage and will never become more mature.

4. *Individuating-Reflexive Faith*

- Young adulthood or later
- This is the stage when one clearly internalizes their faith. Ultimate truth is understood not just because it was taught by one's faith community and acceptable doctrines of the church, but because it has been critically examined and accepted as one's own.
- This stage usually begins in late adolescence or adulthood, but many adults never develop this far. People at this stage critically examine the issues of their faith.

5. *Paradoxical-Consolidative or Conjunctive*

- After age 30 or later
- People at this stage recognize the validity of others' beliefs yet clearly internalize their own. A person at this stage goes beyond theological formulas and continues to probe deeper, higher and broader to discover more of God's revelation.
- There is more to be known of God than the creeds and church can teach us. We are responsible to search and know the God of our own faith.

6. *Universalizing Faith*

- Rarely achieved
- The complexities of one's faith that have been wrestled with in the previous stages become less important.
- This stage is defined by feeling at one with God. People invest their lives in a larger cause without being concerned with the personal cost.