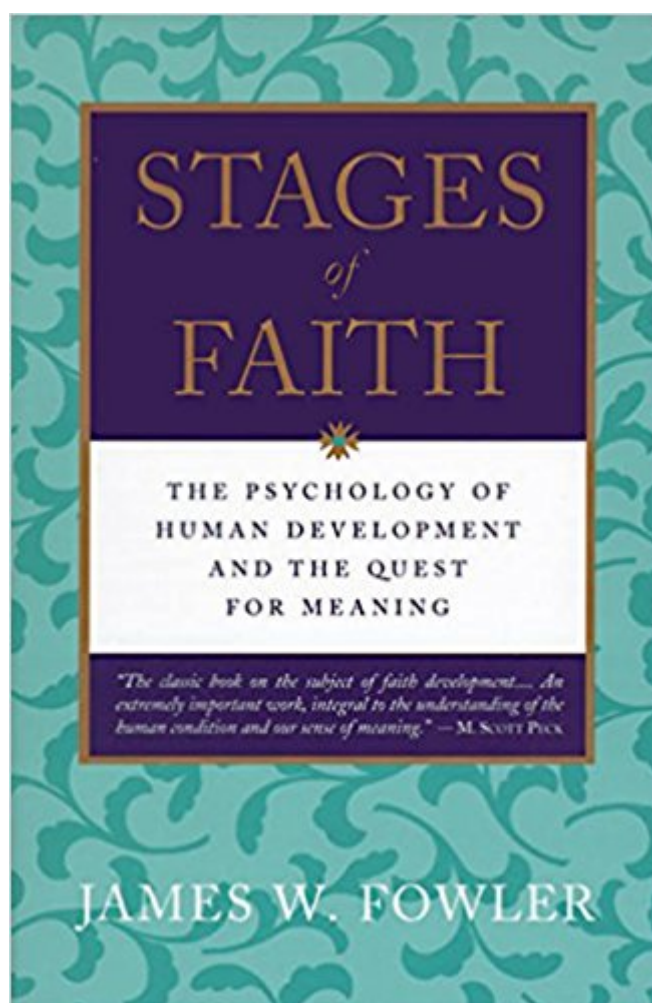


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Stages Of Faith: The Psychology Of Human Development And The Quest For Meaning



Synopsis

Dr. James Fowler has asked these questions, and others like them, of nearly six hundred people. He has talked with men, women, and children of all ages, from four to eighty-eight, including Jews, Catholics, Protestants, agnostics, and atheists. In many cases, the interviews became in-depth conversations that provided rare, intimate glimpses into the various ways our lives have meaning and purpose, windows into what this books calls faith. Faith, as approached here, is not necessarily religious, nor is it to be equated with belief. Rather, faith is a person's way of leaning into and making sense of life. More verb than noun, faith is the dynamic system of images, values, and commitments that guide one's life. It is thus universal: everyone who chooses to go on living operated by some basic faith. Building on the contributions of such key thinkers as Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg, Fowler draws on a wide range of scholarship, literature, and firsthand research to present expertly and engagingly the six stages that emerge in working out the meaning of our lives--from the intuitive, imitative faith of childhood through conventional and then more independent faith to the universalizing, self-transcending faith of full maturity. Stages of Faith helps us to understand our own pilgrimage of faith, the passages of our own quest for meaning and value.

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Customer Reviews

"The classic book on the subject of faith development....An extremely important work, integral to the understanding of the human condition and our sense of meaning."--M. Scott Peck

Groundbreaking study shows how human life is progressively centered around a basic set of

meanings and values that shape the faith people live by.

This is a must read for people interested in a developmental approach to understanding faith development. Fowler described faith as "the dynamic, patterned process by which we find life meaningful. . . it is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives" (pp. 3, 4). In a fictional conversation with Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget - Fowler discusses their ideas including their influences on his conception of faith development. He provides a useful comparative from Infancy through maturity highlight each theorists' ideas. As Fowler indicated about developmental theories, "[they] allow us to speak of the dynamics of change and transformation" (p. 89). He then described his VI faith stages.

This was a little more dense than I thought it would be, but that's substantiated by the complexity of the subject being discussed. I first downloaded an E-Book, then purchased the hard copy. There's so much powerful information I want to read again and again in this great work.

Fowler is an icon. This is his signature book. Although some prefer the shorter, less academic version of this book, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*. A good book for understanding self, whether or not you have a religious bent.

This book has helped me to profoundly re-examine my own faith and to further ground the Christianity that has been a life source for me in basic human experience. This is a book for religious people as well as for atheists and agnostics, because it distinguishes "faith" from "belief" and "religion" and recognizes that everyone (not only religious people) who has the will to live has faith.

Shortly after this work was published in 1981 I was engaged in a summer school graduate course on human development at Rollins College. The adjunct professor, an elementary school principal, was highly conversant with the schools and theories discussed by James Fowler in this work at hand. During a break in the ungodly four-hour night class, a student asked the professor if, given the chance to do it over, she would have focused her doctoral efforts in another direction. Without batting an eye, the professor shot back: "Oh yes. Pharmacology." To say that a few somnolent students snapped to attention would be a profound understatement. Her message was clear enough: when studying human development, psychological theory is only one leg of the

stool. "Stages of Faith" is the first and perhaps best known work of James Fowler, who is particularly remembered in Roman Catholic circles for his influence upon the structure and content of religious education programs and study books for the young. Fowler himself appears to have been profoundly influenced by the study of Paul Tillich and particularly Richard Niebuhr, about whom the author would produce another book years later. Fowler credits both theologians for their seminal systematic work on the distinction between personal spiritual experience and cultic religious belief. [I did find Fowler's omission of Rudolf Otto's groundbreaking work on religious experience from his primary sources as curious.] The scholarly quest for systematic recognition of personal religious experience was a new venture for mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic academics. The established theories of human development-notably Piaget and Erikson-provided theologians with something of a language for further theorizing. But I suspect that Lawrence Kohlberg's appearance on the scene was perhaps the flash point for scholars like Fowler. Kohlberg's stages of moral development looked for all the world like psychological theology and practically begged theologians of all faiths to recouch their thinking on religious experience and faith in a new developmental and epistemological framework. This essentially is what "Stages of Faith" tries to do, ponderously at times. Fowler attempts to integrate the thinking of Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg and apply this synthesis to the religious journeys of adults, one of whom is chronicled extensively toward the end of this work. I wish he had used several more actual biographies. Despite the fact that subject Mary's roller-coaster life brings spice to an otherwise admittedly dry read, it becomes clear immediately that Mary is not "typical," so that she becomes a poster child for abnormality. She does not integrate or learn from experience [Piaget], she is dreadfully deficient in meeting age appropriate challenges [Erikson], and her moral reasoning is little more than sensory [Kohlberg]. By the end of the interview Tillich and Niebuhr are at best distant memories. Presumably the merits of a marriage between psychology and theology are in its formative possibilities [hence the great interest in Fowler by Catholic educators and catechists, for example], but Mary regrettably is an indicator of what happens when those opportunities are lost. Our biography here has diagnostic value at best. There is another issue at hand as well, the one raised by my former professor. As I read Mary's case study, I wondered to myself: how would this scattered woman's life be different were she taking Strattera, the new ADD medication for adults? I am not arguing that pills are a panacea, but rather that biology-along with sociology, environment, family structure, economic opportunity, physical or psychological trauma-are critical formative factors in the development of children and adults. In an interdisciplinary study of faith, one must ask just how many disciplines are necessary for a valid synthesis. I was pleased to discover that Fowler published what is described as a revised edition of

"Stages of Faith" under a different title in 1999. I will be curious to see where his thinking and research have taken him over two decades.

This is a great book that will help guide my research in graduate school.

A little more in-depth psychology than I'd anticipated, but the topic is fascinating and the case-study interview transcripts clearly show the stages of emerging as spiritually true to oneself and the god of one's understanding.

This book is also helpful but very difficult to read. In my opinion, it takes much concentration to get to the substance of the various chapters.

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