



# Stages of Faith

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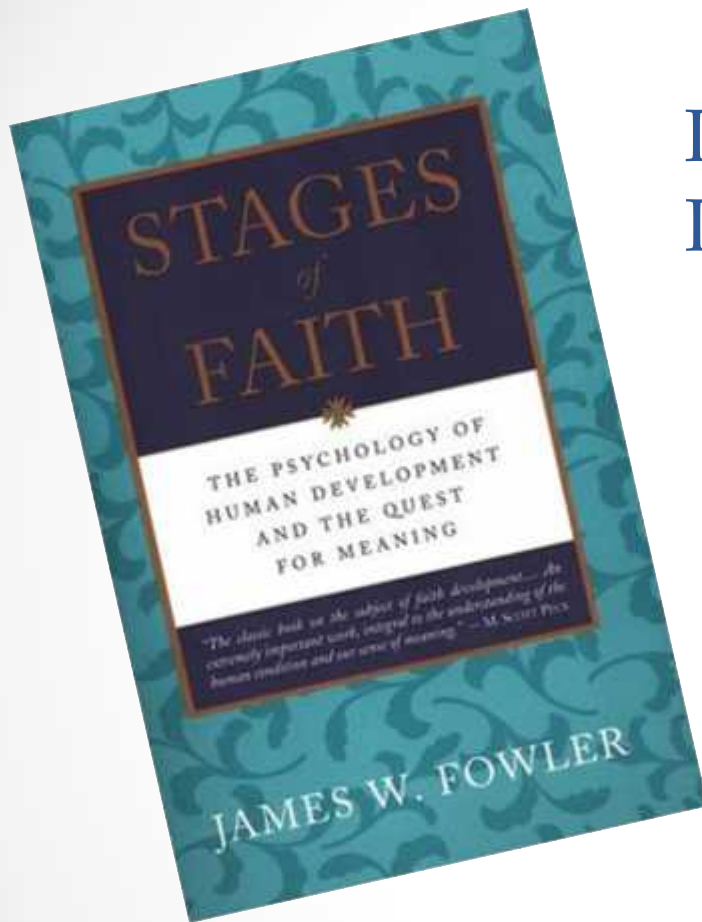


# “Faith”

- A verb rather than a noun
- To set our heart upon
- Not only a religious concept
- What gets us up in the morning
- What we serve
- What gets us through hard times

**In what do you place your own faith?**





Rev. Dr. James W. Fowler  
Professor/Methodist Minister

- Published in 1981
- Still assigned today
- Spiritual developmental stages
- Like Piaget's Cognitive stages
- Like Kohlberg's Moral stages
- Simplified by M. Scott Peck

# Not a ladder, LAYERS!





Grüß vom Nikola

Faith Begins  
When We  
Tell A Story  
Over & Over  
Again...

...Or Why There is  
No Such Thing As  
A Children's Story.

# Pre-stage 0

## Primal or Undifferentiated

...

Birth to 2 years

(Ages are very approximate)

Santa: Bad! Momma: Good!



# Trust is the Foundation

- Warm, safe vs. harmful, scary environment
- Pre-thought and pre-language
- Establishes receptivity
- Trust of family extends to the Universe

**Is our nursery as nurturing as possible?  
Are parents of babies comfortable here?**





# Stage 1

## Intuitive-Projective

...

2 to 7 years



# You're Happy/I'm Happy



# Experience Guides

- “Little sponges” that soak up impressions
- Stories, activities, sights, sounds
- Guided by attitudes of others

**Are all the senses used at story time?  
Is the teacher enthusiastic & appreciative?**

# Stage 2

## Mythical-Literal

...

Elementary school ages



# Details, Please!



# Absorbed in the Story

- Cannot tell myth from reality
- Explore through asking about details
- Deeply internalize stories
- Seeking justice for themselves & others
- Anthropomorphize deities

**Is this a story to live by?**

**Can I patiently answer questions...again?**



# Stage 3

## Synthetic-Conventional

...

12 years through adulthood



# One of the Santa Tribe





# Story as Identity

- Strong sense of belonging to “those who believe”
- Doubt is threatening
- Inconsistencies are ignored
- Personal identity is emerging

**What traditions do we want to pass on?**



# Stage 4

## Individuative-Reflective

...

Twenties & Thirties



# Santa Unmasked!!!



# The De-mythologizers

- Differentiated from family & background
- Developing personal beliefs
- Struggle with complexity
- May accept new understanding
- May feel sense of betrayal

**How do adults explore their doubts & fears?**



# Stage 5 Conjunctive

...

Mid-life



# So Much to Explore



# The Spiritual Explorer

- Reclaim “true” meaning of story
- Seeking spiritual growth
- Expanded comfort with other cultures
- Comfort with paradox & mystery
- Enjoy telling the story to younger folk

**How richly & deeply can I explore?  
Are paradoxes explored or denied here?**



# Stage 6

# Universalizing

...

Sages of all Ages





# Incarnating Generosity



# Very Special Individuals

- Able to manifest values & divinity to others
- Inspirational leaders & martyrs
- Universal love expressed
- Universal justice as goal

**Is this a place for mystics & prophets?**



# Repetition as a Spiritual Discipline

...

**Not Novelty but Familiarity  
Teaches Faith**



The Story is the same...



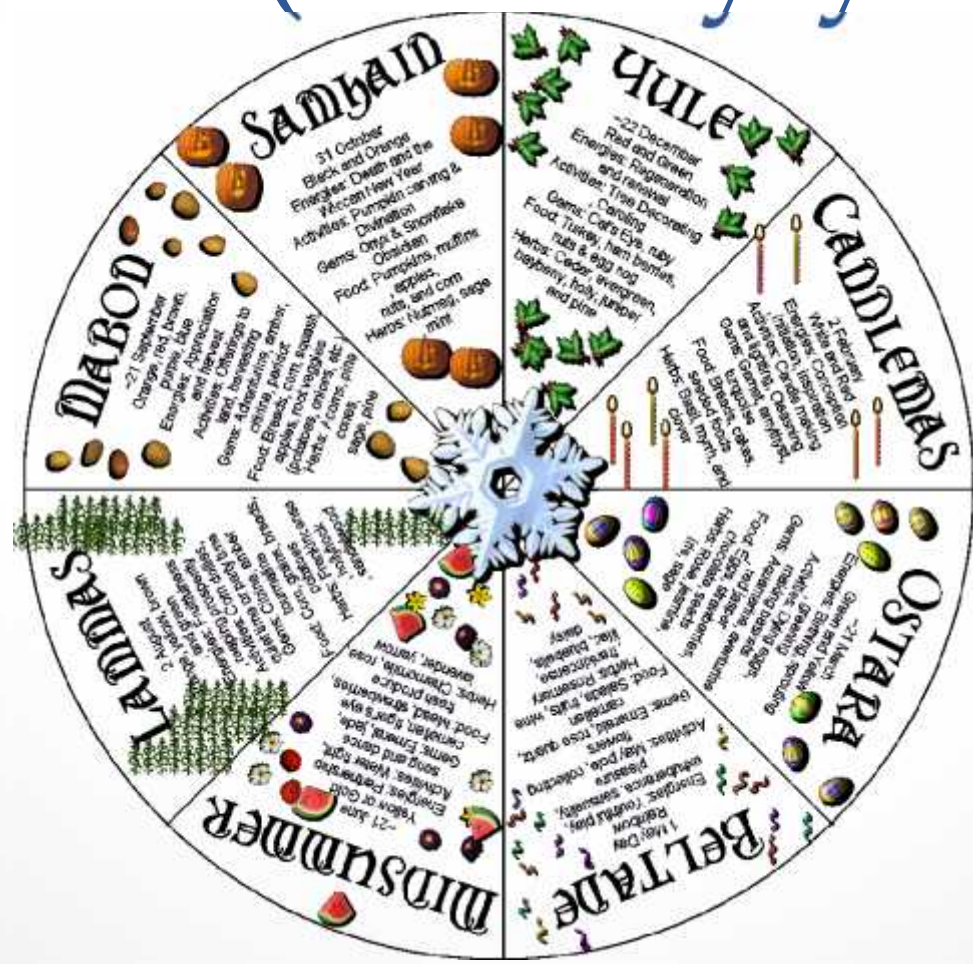
...the Listener changes.

In worship, faith stories are always expressed in their mythical-literal form...



...because everyone is listening!

# Religions are expressed in cycles (usually yearly)



# But UUUs Do Not Inherit Such a Cycle



Dr. Fowler said to me,  
“I know your people. Your  
Stage 4 De-mythologizers  
teach Stage 2 Mythic-Literal  
learners...”





...They read a story & tell them, 'It's not true.'"



# He said, “You must...

- Decide on the values you want to teach,
- Pick the stories to teach those values and
- Stick to your stories!!!”

This then is our challenge, our  
privilege and our joy!



What are our shared values?

What stories, holidays, songs & rituals will teach them to all of us?

How can we tell the same story in a new way this time around?

