

Stages of Faith Development

Alfred North Whitehead wrote, "Religion is the transition from God the Void to God the Enemy, and from God the Enemy to God the Companion." Only with death of our previous image can a new and more adequate one arise." Each stage of faith is necessary and beautiful. Each takes courage to abide in and to leave behind - the very faith created in each stage is the faith needed to progress out of it. As we honor our own stage and the stage of others we can experience oneness or wholeness within all of them.

Stage 1

Commonly called the preschool stage. This is where fantasy and reality intermix. Our most basic ideas about God and our faith story are picked up from parents and/or society through one-word ideas and simple explanations.

Stage 2

We begin understanding the world more logically. We relate to the stories told by our belief system literally. We may view faith as magical or God as a kind of genie granting wishes only to the obedient. Good and bad are very polarized.

Some adults stay here.

Stage 3

We usually adopt the beliefs we are taught through spiritual experiences. We accept our belief system as the only truth; often inside a box - "us vs them". At this stage authority or power is placed heavily in leaders and mentors.

Many people remain here.

HEARTACHE

Heartache can come in many forms. It is a life challenge or wound that seems to arrive perpendicular to what was or is expected. Heartache is a catalyst to move forward if we choose or, if we identify as our heartache, it can halt us from moving forward. Courage and compassion are equally critical here.

Stage 4

We see the boxes we have created. We start to think more critically as we examine our beliefs and contrast them to others'. Feelings of disillusion may arise and cause us to get stuck here. Stage 3s may judge us as "fallen" when in reality we have progressed our faith forward.

Stage 5

The fight for certainty ends and we see and accept life's paradoxes. We often return to our original stories, symbols, and practices combining all the previous stages, but we have become our own authority getting personal answers for our own life.

Often at midlife.

Stage 6

Few people reach this stage. Those who do live their lives in peace and in the service of others without any real worries or doubts. They accept their own divinity and the divinity in everyone else and within every thing. Enlightenment Conversion Grace

