

FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

[Bruce Powers](#) / [John Westerhoff](#) / [Temp Sparkman](#) / [Mary Wilcox](#) / [James Fowler](#)
[Larry Stephens](#) / [Von Hugel](#) / [Steve Venable](#) / [M. Scott Peck](#) / [Paula Rienhart](#)
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1. BRUCE POWERS

Faith is an *interpretation* of the way persons have experienced life. This interpretation, drawn from all of the influences on our lives, is the essence of our beliefs, actions, and emotions. Faith, rather than being something we believe that can be compiled, taught, and tested, is more a way of knowing the unknowable. By definition, faith is an expression of trust in the unknown. Where there is certainty--when everything can be explained and understood in human terms--there is no need for faith. Faith is a way of knowing that God exists, that Jesus is Lord as well as my personal redeemer, and that the Holy Spirit is the direct presence of God which infuses my life, empowers the church, and calls all humankind to a redemptive relationship. Faith has degrees of understanding and conviction. I used to think a person either had faith or did not. But then I realized that *everyone* has beliefs, and that these beliefs guide actions. It is not whether one has faith or not, but the *content* and the *quality* of the faith that ultimately is a part of every individual. Powers presents "five rather distinct yet interwoven phases" as follows:

1. Nurture (ages 0-6)

This was the primary exposure to and awareness of the meaning of life which I received from my family and church during early childhood. I came to feel love and security, and to understand that these persons wanted me to be like they were . . . My parents and my Sunday School teachers had the greatest influence on my life. I cannot remember too much about *what* they taught me, but I do remember how much they cared for and loved me.

2. Indoctrination (ages 7-18)

During these years, I recall seeking avidly to master the content of my faith. This content came from the Bible, curriculum materials, and what my parents, teachers, ministers, and other significant persons told me was true . . . At the age of twelve, I made a public profession of faith. I remember three distinct impressions during that time: (1) I knew it was the right time for me to confess my sins and give my life to Jesus; (2) I was concerned about how the preacher would baptize me so as to keep water from getting in my nose; and (3) I wanted to be able to take part in the Lord's Supper. These may be unusual things to recall, but as I know now, they are very typical of children who grow up in Christian homes. My conversion experience was a response to what was *right* and *expected* in my faith community . . . this gave me the foundation on which I could begin my personal journey into knowing God. What was given were the best answers they had, and I learned them well . . . Gradually, I began to recognize that much of my faith--my way of knowing God--was secondhand, and that their answers would not always work for me as I faced new people, places, and experiences . . . Thus, at about nineteen, I began to compare my perceptions of life with the faith system I had acquired from a congregation whose nurture,

beliefs, ministry, and ongoing love I cherished and respected.

3. Reality Testing (ages 19-27)

During these years I ventured out into the larger world of places, ideas, and experiences. Rather than being located primarily in the familiar environment of my childhood--dependent on home, family, friends, and the authority-support of my faith community--I established my own home in another state. I took a new job, went to college, joined a church, and, in general, began a new phase in life. But I began this new phase with a set of values and beliefs with which my previous community had equipped me. It did not take me long to discover that many things that had worked well for me previously no longer applied. Without thinking, I had begun a process of testing. As I recall, this began during high school years as I sought to establish an identity separate from that of my parents--making some of my own decisions, getting a part-time job so I could earn and spend my own money, dressing and behaving my way, and so on. Most of this early testing was not directly related to faith . . . I found that every dimension of my life came under scrutiny. So much of my religion, work habits, patterns of living, and even personal life-style previously had been community-oriented . . . In this phase, I moved from high idealism--feeling that my newfound answers were the answers for all time and all places--to a realistic appraisal of life in which what one knows, feels, and does must be consistent with life experiences.

4. Making Choices (ages 28-35)

This period of life came into focus as I gradually acknowledged that whatever choices were made to direct my life must be mine, and that every choice would have consequences with which I would have to live.

5. Active Devotion (ages 36 and up)

Growing out of the pressures experienced during earlier phases, my concerns began to shift during my later thirties to the ways in which I could most effectively live my convictions. Not that all of the struggles and searching done in earlier stages was left behind, but rather there seemed to be a sense of satisfaction coming from having worked through many issues, along with a heightened need to express this faith in everyday life. The urgency shifted from making choices to living and propagating my faith . . . I no longer feel as defensive about my beliefs as I did in earlier phases. I guess this comes from having consciously made my own through examining options, looking at consequences, and testing it out in the day-to-day realities of life.

Source: Powers, Bruce. *Growing Faith*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982.

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2. JOHN WESTERHOFF

Westerhoff presented two separate theories of faith development in his writings. The first, a four-stage theory, was printed in his exceptional volume entitled *Will our Children Have Faith?* (1976) and was later reduced to three stages in *A Faithful Church* (1981). The following is his original four-stage theory. According to Westerhoff: Faith grows like the rings of a tree, with each ring adding to and changing the tree somewhat, yet building on that which has grown before. Therefore Westerhoff offers a tree analogy and proposes four rings which are involved in the growth process.

1. Experienced Faith

At the core is the faith which we experience from our earliest years either in life or, if one has a major reorientation in his or her beliefs, in a new faith system. We receive the faith that is important to those who nurture us. The way it molds and influences their lives makes an indelible impression on us, creating the core of our faith . . . This level of faith is usually associated with the impressionable periods of life when a person is dependent on others, such as during early childhood.

2. Affiliative Faith

As one person gradually displays the beliefs, values, and practices of one's family, group, or church, there is another ring formed. The individual takes on the characteristics of the nurturing persons and becomes identified as an accepted partner, one who is part of the faith tradition. Such participation may be formalized as in membership, a rite of baptism or confirmation, or may simply be understood, as might be the case with regular participants who do not join a church. This phase of a person's growth is recognized as a time of testing. It is a matching of the person with peer expectations. Where traditions, values, and practices are similar, there usually is a good match and the individual merges his or her identity with that of the body. There is little room for personal differences due to a strong emphasis on unity and conformity in belief and practice . . . The concerns for belonging, for security, and for a sense of power (and identity) that come from group membership are the key drives in forming one's faith concept during this period. This level of faith is expressed, at the earliest, during adolescent years.

3. Searching Faith

Faith development reaches a crucial junction when one becomes aware that personal beliefs or experience may no longer be exactly the same as those of the group, or when a person begins to question some of the commonly held beliefs or practices. This occurs as one naturally recognizes that his or her faith is formed more by others (parents, peers, congregation, etc.) than by personal conviction. The decision must be faced whether or not to develop, express, and accept responsibility for a personal interpretation of one's religion as over against accepting that which may be viewed as a group's interpretation. Often there is experimentation in which persons try out alternatives or commit themselves to persons or causes which promise help in establishing personal conviction and active practice of one's faith.

4. Owned Faith

The culmination of the faith development process finds expression in a personal, owned faith. This best could be described as a conversion experience, in which a person has reoriented his or her life and now claims personal ownership of and responsibility for beliefs and practices . . . Characteristics of this phase include close attention to practicing one's faith as well as believing it . . . This level of faith, according to Westerhoff, is God's intention for everyone; we all are called to reach our highest potential.

Source: Westerhoff, John H. III. *Will our Children Have Faith?* New York: Seabury Press, 1976.

JOHN WESTERHOFF (REVISED)

Our lives as people of faith can best be understood as a pilgrimage that moves slowly and gradually through ever-expanding expressions.

1. Affiliative Faith

The beginning, typical of children through the high-school years, I have characterized as *affiliative faith* . . .it comes through feelings or sensory experiences in the form of interactions with others and our world. The foundations of faith are found in experiences in which we learn to trust other people, ourselves, and our world, not because we are told we are of worth and the world is trustworthy, but because we experience it as such . . .our actions with our children influence their perceptions and hence their faith much more than the words we speak. Our actions frame what our children will experience . . .Affiliative faith looks to the community and its tradition as its source for authority. We depend on significant others for the stories that explain our lives and how our people live. Belonging to a community is very important in order to fulfill our need to be wanted and accepted.

2. Searching Faith

Begins during high-school years and extends through early adulthood. It is characterized by questioning, critical judgement, and experimentation. It comes in the form of doubt and the struggle to frame philosophical formulations. Through a personal search for truth, we move from dependence on others' understandings to autonomy and independence. To find a faith of our own, we need to doubt, question, and test what has been handed down to us.

3. Mature Faith

. . .which integrates the seeming contradiction of affiliative and searching faith. Possible for adults who have passed through the earlier stages, mature faith begins in middle adulthood and develops until death. In this final stage we are governed by neither the authority of the community nor our own intellectual authority, but by personal union with God through free acts of the will. Interdependence integrates the dependence of affiliative faith and the independence of searching faith. Belonging is still important, but people with mature faith are secure enough in their convictions to challenge the community when conscience dictates . . .We all grow by being with others, who affirm where we are and share with us lives of more expanded faith. So it is that we adults need to be concerned first of all about our own growth, and we need always to remember that even mature faith has at its core a childlike faith.

Source: The chapter entitled "A Journey Together in Faith" in John H. Westerhoff's *Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith*. Minneapolis: Winston Press, Inc., 1980.

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3. TEMP SPARKMAN

A Congregational pastor, Temp Sparkman's offered the following developmentally-based "realities" or stages of Christian faith:

Reality 1: Child of God--Sonship/Daughtership (infancy and early childhood)

Children are sons and daughters of God, a status which is a gift of God. Being a child of God is not a status of salvation, for all are children of God, but not all partake of God's salvation . . .the hope is that the children will emerge from the kindergarten age, both knowing and feeling that they are already sons and daughters of God. . .This positive awareness forms the basis for the other realities in the faith pilgrimage, and unless it is achieved in these years, the full dimensions of belonging, affirmation, and trusteeship cannot be experienced.

Reality 2: Child of Promise--Belonging (middle childhood through early adolescence)

Children belong to the congregation where parents participate, a status conferred by the congregation. Our task with the elementary children is to bless them as Jesus did, to let them know that they are within the community of faith until they decide for themselves whether to embrace the church's faith. It is to tell them that they are not aliens whose belongingness waits upon conversion of confirmation or any other acts of joining. It is to tell them, within the context of their emotional, intellectual, and social-moral progress, about their heritage of faith . . . Upon a basis sense of "who-ness" (children of God) is built the sense of place, that is to say, of having a place. The children have an identity--it is children of God. The children have a place--it is a part of the faith community . . . The congregation confers the belonging; the people say, "You belong here; you do not have to earn your place. We give it to you."

Reality 3: Affirmed Believer (middle adolescence--age 16 or later)

Adolescents affirm the faith for themselves, confirming their heritage in the church and declaring faith in Jesus Christ . . . The task of reality 3 is to show the necessity of and to guide the adolescent in appraising the heritage and in making a personal declaration of faith.

Reality 4: Creative Trusteeship (adulthood)

Adults commit themselves to being creative trustees for a creating God who is finishing creation. The task for the education of the adult is to help the adult to join fully with God in the work of creation. God is at work in both the natural and social orders and in the development of individuals. In these arenas God is supplying the essential possibilities for individual fulfillment and social completion . . . Being adult means seeing the immensity of the issues involved in being a trustee for God, and in realizing responsibility for dealing with those issues. Such is the life stance of the trustee.

Sources: Temp Sparkman, "Youth and Faith Development," *Search* (Spring 1985): 22-33; and Temp Sparkman, *The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1983), 32-6.

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4. MARY WILCOX

While serving as adjunct lecturer in teaching ministries at Iliff School of Theology in Colorado, Mary M. Wilcox wrote a book entitled the *Developmental Journey*. In it, Wilcox proposed "levels or stages of social perspective." Though she never uses the following phrase in her book, G. Temp Sparkman refers to her theory as stages of "social faith." Based on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, her stage-dependent theory follows:

Stage 0

Egocentrism: Self is the center of the young child's world; inability to put oneself in the place of another person. Other people are interesting objects which may give pleasure or pain.

Preconventional Level (Center: Self)

Stage 1: "Big people are the goodest, the little are the baddest." The social world is composed of little powerless persons and big authorities who are in control; little ability to put oneself in the

place of others. Still strongly egocentric. Concept of society: The President is the government.

Stage 2--Dyadic instrumental: Others seen as egocentric like self, but one knows others have differing points of view; very limited ability to put self in others position, however. Relationships based on useful exchange. Concept of society: instrumental, prevents bad and harmful acts.

Conventional Level (Center: Significant others and society)

Stage 3--Dyadic empathetic: Stable continuing, and meaningful relationships based on affection; small groups (family, friends) seen as the structure of society. Societal roles seen in terms of approved intentions and behavior; some ability to see self and others through other's eyes--empathy.

Stage 4--Triadic: Exclusion of those who don't accept the values of self's society; development of an ordering structure for interpersonal relationships: a societal structure composed of laws/rules/standards/sanctions.

Postconventional Level (Center: Internalized universal principles)

Stage 5: Can stand outside of own society and look at it, along with other societies, critically; distinguishes between political, civic, and judicial systems; laws seen in terms of protecting human rights rather than the maintenance of society; awareness of principles "above the law"; recognition of universality of individual rights apart from societal affiliation.

Stage 6: Integrated reappropriation of past and present, community and self; societies seen in terms of universally valid basic principles; individuals seen as ends in themselves, and not as means to other ends.

Source: Mary M. Wilcox, *Developmental Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), fold-out chart.

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5. JAMES FOWLER

1. Primal Faith (infancy)

This first stage is a prelanguage disposition (a total emotional orientation of trust offsetting mistrust) and take form in the mutuality of one's relationships with parents and others. This rudimentary faith enables us to overcome or offset the anxiety resulting from the separations that occur during infant development . . .It forms the basic rituals of care and interchange and mutuality. And, although it does not determine the course of our later faith, it lays the foundation on which later faith will build or that will have to be rebuilt in later faith.

2. Intuitive-Projective Faith (early childhood)

Here imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures, and symbols and not yet controlled by logical thinking, combines with perception and feelings to create long-lasting faith images. These images represent both the protective and the threatening powers surrounding one's life. This stage corresponds with the awakening of moral emotions and standards in the second year of life. It corresponds as well with the awareness of taboos and the sacred and with the struggle for a

balance of autonomy and will with shame and construction in the child's forming self. Representations of God take conscious form in this period and draw, for good or will, on children's experiences of their parents or other adults to whom they are emotionally attached in the first years of life.

3. Mythic-Literal Faith (elementary-school years through early adolescence)

Here concrete operational thinking--the developing ability to think logically--emerges to help us order the world with categories of causality, space, time, and number. We can now sort out the real from the make-believe, the actual from fantasy. We can enter into the perspectives of others, and we become capable of capturing life and meanings in narrative and stories.

4. Synthetic-Conventional Faith (middle adolescence)

The emergence of formal operational thinking opens the way for reliance upon abstract ideas and concepts for making sense of one's world. The person can now reflect upon past experiences and search them for meaning and pattern. At the same time, concerns about one's personal future--one's identity, one's work, career, or vocation--and one's personal relationships become important. These new cognitive abilities make possible mutual interpersonal perspective taking. Here in friendship or the first intimacy of "puppy love" young persons begin to be aware of the mirroring of self provided by the responses of persons whose feelings about them matter . . . These newly personal relations with significant others correlate with a hunger for a personal relation to God in which we feel ourselves to be known and loved in deep and comprehensive ways.

5. Individuative-Reflective Faith (presumably, young adulthood)

On the one hand, to move into the Individuative-Reflective stage, we have to question, examine, and reclaim the values and beliefs that we have formed to that point in our lives. They become explicit [consciously chosen] commitments rather than tacit [unexamined] commitments . . . now one maintains that commitment and identity by choice and explicit assent rather than by unconscious formation and tacit commitment . . . By the time we are adolescents, we have a number of different characters we play in the drama of our lives. The task of the Individuative stage is to put in place an "executive ego"--the "I" who manages and "has" all these roles and relations yet is not fully expressed in any one of them. It means taking charge of one's life in a new way. It means claiming a new quality of reflective autonomy and responsibility.

6. Conjunctive Faith (mid-life or beyond)

This stage involves the embrace and integration of opposites or polarities in one's life. . . Here symbol and story, metaphor and myth, both from our own traditions and from others, seem to be newly appreciated . . . Having looked critically at traditions and translated their meanings into conceptual understandings, one experiences a hunger for a deeper relationship to the reality that symbols mediate . . . In this stage it becomes important to let biblical narrative draw us into it and let it read our lives, reforming and shaping them, rather than our reading and forming the meanings of the text.

7. Universalizing Faith

Beyond paradox and polarities, persons in the Universalizing stage are grounded in a oneness with the power of being or God. Their visions and commitments seem to free them for a passionate yet detached spending of the self in love. Such persons are devoted to overcoming division, oppression, and violence, and live in effective anticipatory response to an inbreaking

commonwealth of love and justice, the reality of an inbreaking kingdom of God.

Source: James Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 102-15.

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6. LARRY STEPHENS

Dr. Larry Stephens presents the following stages:

1. **Initial Faith** (Infancy: 0-2) *Failure: Anaemic Faith*

The goal is to *develop initial faith*. The task is to develop the capacity to internalise God as an object of security and trust. Parents represent God to the child. At this stage a spiritual foundation is being laid. Erikson's social development that corresponds is: Trust vs Mistrust.

2. **Unconditional Love** (Toddler: 2-3) *Failure: Conditional Love*

The goal is to *internalise God's unconditional love*. The tasks are to experience God's forgiveness, unconditional love and acceptance through parents and become an autonomous, separate individual. Children need to experience this to feel affirmed as a separate individual. Parents create the child's perception of God by how they act. The child will either view God as warm, sensitive, caring and loving; or as cold, non-caring and judgmental. Erikson's social development stage that corresponds is: Autonomy vs Shame/Self-Doubt.

3. **Grace** (Preschool: 3-5) *Failure: Self-Condemnation*

The goal is to *internalise God's grace*. The tasks are to continue to believe and trust God's unconditional love and acceptance, learn to trust God for forgiveness, begin to see God's world as good and develop positive early spiritual concepts. The child begins to apply truths about God to his life. They are ready to learn basic truths about God, forgiveness, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, church, people, heaven, hell, the devil and sin. The child is in a fantasy stage where they are unable to separate fantasy from reality. They learn through repetition. They need consistent discipline and forgiveness. Erikson's social development stage that corresponds is: Initiative vs Guilt.

4. **Healthy Image of God** (Latency: 6-11) *Failure: Distorted Image*

The goal is to *develop a healthy image of God*. The tasks are to see self as a positive spiritual being, develop self-motivation to understand God and learn about spiritual concepts, learn to trust God for guidance and support, learn to enjoy spiritual experiences such as worship, prayer and devotions, begin to love and serve others voluntarily and begin an individual personal relationship with God. The child must view God as a patient, loving, accepting Father, full of grace and truth, not as a demanding perfectionist. At this stage the child just needs to believe - to accept Jesus as Saviour. Erikson's social development stage that corresponds is: industry vs inferiority.

5. **Spiritual Identity** (Adolescence: 12-19) *Failure: Spiritual Confusion*

The goal is to *search vertically for meaning and purpose in life, through Christ*. The tasks are to come to the point of salvation (if not achieved before), accept self as valued and worthwhile to God, develop hope and faith for the future and for facing unknowns, develop close dependence on God and control self constructively through a Holy Spirit led conscience. During adolescence,

teenagers search for individual spiritual identity, spiritual meaning and purpose in life. They only believe what they can validate by their experience or by the example of their parents, past or present. Erikson's social development stage that corresponds is: intimacy with others vs role diffusion.

6. Intimacy with God (Early Adulthood: 20-35) *Failure: Isolation from God*

The tasks are to *know a close, satisfying relationship with God, to experience his love and strength daily, to know God as a Father and as a faithful friend*. Erikson's social development stage that corresponds is: intimacy with others vs isolation.

7. Christian Ministry (Middle Adulthood: 35-55) *Failure: Fruitless Search for Meaning*

The task is to *share faith and love of God with others through ministry activities such as missions work, leading Bible studies, working with charities, involvement in local church, etc.* Some people look for a sense of purpose in all the wrong places. Erikson's social development stage that corresponds is: generativity vs stagnation.

8. Spiritual Wholeness (Late Adulthood: 55+) *Failure: Feeling Lost Without God*

The tasks are to *celebrate the spirit-filled life and experience joy and strength in their walk with Christ*. They are looking forward to spending eternity with God. Erikson's social development stage that corresponds is: integrity vs despair.

Source: Dr. Larry Stephens, in *Building a Foundation For Your Child's Faith*, Zondervan, 1996.

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7. VON HUGEL

Von Hugel, in *The Mystical Element in Religion*, takes three main stages in human development - infancy, adolescence and adulthood - describing the predominant needs and activities which characterise each stage. He shows that religion must take into account the predominant needs and activities of each stage, and so concludes that religion must include three essential elements, an *institutional* element corresponding to the needs and activities of infancy, a *critical* element corresponding to the needs and activities of adolescence, and a *mystical* element corresponding to the needs and activities of adulthood.

The needs and activities of infancy do not disappear in adolescence, nor do the needs and activities of adolescence disappear in adulthood. But they should cease to be predominant as we grow up. Religion must include all three elements: the institutional, the critical and the mystical.

1. Infancy - Institutional

Here we are concerned with physical movement and sense impressions and our needs are for food, warmth, protection and affection. A child's memory becomes filled with stories, with family history as it grows and experiences life. They normally accept what they are told by their parents as true, uncritically. They also need guidance on what they may and may not do. Their greatest emotional needs are for protection and affection, for without these they cannot learn to trust either itself or anyone else. The church must help to pass on to the child its history, its doctrinal and moral teachings.

2. Adolescence - Critical

This is a time when the mind begins to question. We try to discover some unity and meaning in the multiplicity of sense impressions, facts, teachings, beliefs and experiences presented to us. We develop plans for the future - based on a theory about our lives. Adolescents do not accept obedience that is unquestioning acceptance of whatever is presented by the teaching authority - they want to criticise, read, and listen to opposing theories. True Christianity is always critical, questioning and continually developing in its understanding of God and of human life.

3. Adulthood - Mystical

The characteristic of adulthood is a growing awareness of inner consciousness, of the complexity of feeling and emotion within us, revealed to us through our activity, our encounters and relationships with others, our work, what we read, hear and see, and of the internal activity which results from this, our hopes and despairs, sadness and joy, fears and expectations, certainties and doubts. As we become more conscious of this inner world, we are both attracted and frightened by it. In adulthood we become increasingly conscious of the complexity of our inner life, of its mystery and incommunicability. Religion must answer this stage of growth with encouragement and guidance, fostering our imaginations and allaying our fears. Here God is encountered rather than thought about - experienced from within, rather than from without. This is the mystical element of faith.

Source: *God of Surprises*, by Gerard Hughes (Chapter 2).

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8. STEVE VENABLE & RICK LAWRENCE

We label the time trap between the onset of sexual maturity and the beginning of economic and social independence as adolescence. But often our teenagers don't know when they've entered it, and they're hard-pressed to find their way out. They're caught...stuck in a confusing, barren limbo with no real compass.

Author Ronald Kotesky writes, "Two thousand years ago under Roman law, women could marry at 12 and men at 14. A thousand years ago under English law, it was the same. And 200 years ago under common law in the United States, it was still the same-women could marry at 12 and men at 14. For 3,000 years, the minimum legal age for marriage did not change...Then, just as the age of puberty was decreasing, laws increasing the minimum legal age for marriage were passed in the United States and Europe...Although they were adults and had been treated as adults for thousands of years, teenagers were redefined as 'children'...This was the creation of adolescence."

Rites of Passage

Most non-western cultures direct their young people through rites of passage that point them into adulthood. At the Jewish bar mitzvah service, 13-year-old boys are "recognized as adult Jews." And through the kisungu rite, Basanga girls of Zaire are initiated into the adult world through the symbolic death of their childhood. But in Western society, we generally ignore rites of passage. In fact, just when teenagers need adult influence and stability the most, our culture leaves them empty-handed, with cries of "I just don't understand you!" echoing in their ears.

And what do adults communicate to kids when they shrug their shoulders and give up on them? Douglas Coupland, author of *Generation X*, the seminal book on teenage and young adult culture, writes: "Xers [are] labelled as monsters [by adults]. Their protestations become 'whining'; being mellow becomes 'slacking'; and the struggle to find themselves becomes apathy."

Young people desperately need adults with enough love and courage to believe in their future. To take them by the hand and lead them into faith maturity and adulthood. But before we can direct our teenagers through faith passages that endure as they grow older, we must know what we intend. Rites of passage must include:

1. Separation

Taking teenagers away from the familiar and separating them from the props (music, friends, family, television, and so on) that define them. This could mean a retreat, a trip, or an unusual environment for an activity.

2. Transition

Crafting activities, even liturgies, that place kids in limbo between their old faith status and their new one. They're not really "in" one or the other yet. Expect kids to feel uncomfortable in this phase. Teenagers have a strong internal need to leave childhood behind and move into adulthood. But if the church doesn't provide them opportunities to do this, they'll find other, often more destructive, rites of passage (for example, gang initiation, drugs and drinking, sex, and so on).

3. Rebirth

Returning teenagers, through ritual, into the church and society, but now as more mature believers--adult Christians. Confirmation rituals that involve the church body are good examples of the "rebirth" phase. Effective faith passages are embraced and honoured by everyone in the church, including older teenagers who've moved through them already. A legitimate rite of passage will spur younger kids to eagerly look forward to "their" day and older church members to treat "new initiates" more like peers than children

Parents play a key role in all this, but not through active participation. For young people to move into faith maturity and adulthood, they must move away from their parents (with the hope that they'll move back into relationship with their parents as adults, not children). This means that adult volunteers and mentors will play a key role in your group members' faith passages

A Place to Start

So, when you set about crafting faith passages for your young people, remember to:

1. Target teenagers who are nearing sexual maturity

This may mean (including guys who are older than participating girls.

2. Involve parents peripherally, not as principal players

A rite of separation should include a significant separation from parents. Years of experience proves that senior highers who move through a rite of passage without their parents have a more powerful long-term experience than those who do it with their parents. Parents can support their kids best by giving them freedom to grow.

3. Involve as much of the worshipping community as possible

You need caring, committed adults to help your young people navigate through the separation phase and into the rebirth phase.

4. Prepare the church body to support each faith passage

Make sure adults in the church are eagerly anticipating each rite, then celebrating with those who completed the rite. The more the church embraces and supports faith passages in kids' lives, the more kids themselves will feel embraced and supported by the church. They'll have something solid and memorable to point to when the hurricane of life gets fierce. And it will get fierce for them. We can't save them from that. But we can help them weather the storm.

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9. M. SCOTT PECK

We are not all at the same place spiritually - there are different stages. We must look at the stages with caution and flexibility, however, because God has this rather peculiar way of interfering with my categories and people do not always fall quite as neatly into my psycho-spiritual pigeon-holes as I might like them to do.

1. Chaotic/Antisocial (Ages 1-5)

This is a stage of lawlessness - an absence of spirituality.

Absent spirituality - people who are unprincipled.

Antisocial - while people pretend to be loving their relationships are self-serving and manipulative.

Chaotic - being unprincipled they have no mechanism that governs them other than their own will.

2. Formal/Institutional (Age 5-12)

Institutional - they are dependant on an institution for their governance.

Formal - they are attached to the forms of the religion.

God for people at this stage is an external being - up there, out there - with punitive power.

They show rigorous adherence to the letter of the law and attachment to the forms of religion.

3. Skeptic/Individual (Adolescence and Early Adulthood)

They fall away from church - they have become principled, self-governing human beings who don't need to depend on an institution for governance. They have a scientific orientation that is based on rationality. This is a stage of principled behaviour, but is characterised by religious doubt or disinterest although accompanied by inquisitiveness about other areas of life.

4. Mystic/Communal (Adulthood)

Mystics are people who have a kind of cohesion beneath the surface of things. They see the connectedness between things and speak in terms of unity, community and paradox. They love mystery - they love to solve and keep encountering spirituality. They obey the spirit of the law.

Implications:

* These stages refer to human development as well (see ages that correspond).

* It is possible to move quickly through the stages and possible to get stuck along the way.

- * No matter how far we develop, we retain vestiges of earlier stages.
- * Some people enter a stage and then slip back (we call it backsliding).

Source: *Further Along The Road Less Travelled*, M. Scott Peck, Simon & Schuster, 1993.

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10. PAULA RIENHART

The passage of adulthood is marked by particular crises or turning points that hold the potential for new growth. Could spiritual growth be patterned in passages or phases? Paula Rienhart suggests the outline of a basic cycle of spiritual passages that move in ever-deepening spirals from illusion through disappointment to real hope.

Stage 1 - Predictability (Illusion)

God moves in our lives in predictable ways. Here we have a demand for certainty.

Stage 2 - Disillusionment (Disappointment)

The crisis of disillusionment occurs when God bursts the narrow categories we have defined and overwhelms our finitude. Possible reactions include: confusion and doubt; cynicism and apathy; or movement to the next stage of faith development...real hope.

Stage 3 - Hope (Deepening of Faith)

This stage is relational - a faith that is full of ebb and flow, a desert and a garden.

Source: *Discipleship Journal*, Issue 75, 1993.

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11. R. BEN MARSHALL

Working off the base of Fowler's stage three (Synthetic/Conventional Faith), R. Ben Marshall has suggested sub-stages of faith characteristic of seventh to twelfth graders. He has focussed on a structural perspective by attempting to locate and describe the characteristics of faith during the period from seventh to twelfth grades.

Position One teens (seventh-ninth grades) are still concrete in their perceptions and egocentric in their relationships. God is perceived as an old man with white hair who is distant and not directly involved with their affairs, their primary concern is for acceptance by the group. They can state their own beliefs but are not sure what others may believe.

Position Two teens (ninth-eleventh grades) develop a deep concern for other's viewpoints. Truth becomes what is right for the individual, and relationships with peers becomes increasingly important. A new sense of self-confidence emerges that influences their relationship with God; God is now seen as a cooperating friend.

Position Three teens (eleventh-twelfth grades) relate to God as a source of value and principle. An increased concern for others develops, along with an interest in fulfilling life potential. Characterised by a greater realism, these youth have a more responsive love for God than those

in the earlier positions.

Source: *The Complete Book of Youth Ministry*, Page 53, Edited by Warren Benson, Moody Press.

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12. GORDON ALLPORT

Gordon Allport is credited as the first modern psychologist to examine the development of religious maturity. He proposed a three-stage model of religious maturity, based on his idea of the development of religious sentiments. These sentiments are religious beliefs, energised by emotions, leading to religious and secular behaviour that, to one degree or another, are consonant.

In the *first stage*, of raw credulity, the child basically accepts and believes what he is told regarding God and religion without question.

In the *second stage*, usually during adolescence, one wrestles with doubts and begins to test the indoctrinated beliefs.

In the *final stage*, usually in adulthood, doubts and faith alter back and forth, and the person lives with ambiguity. Some develop mature faith that is characterised by finding more strength in the affirmations of faith than in the doubts, Others develop disbelief, or atheism, in which the strengths of doubts predominates over the strengths of affirmations of faith. The remainder, the agnostics, are those whose doubts develop to a point of about equal strength with faith affirmations.

Source: *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 1997, Vol 25, no 1, Page 53.

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13. DAVID ELKIND

David Elkind has applied Piaget's theory of cognitive development to a theory of the origin of religion in the child. Assuming that cognitive abilities develop in order to meet needs that emerge at different periods in the life span, Elkind theorised that faith in God originates in the infant's need for object permanence. The discovery that objects are conserved despite their sensory absence prepares the toddler for the idea that God might be present even though not observed; and it prepares the school-age child for the belief in life after death, a belief which meets the cognitive need for conservation. (In Piaget's theory, conservation refers to the invariance of a substance's quality when transformed in some way). Language and symbolic representation enable the child to seek to determine how God can be represented in myths, icons, words of Scripture, etc. The development of logical thinking, in late childhood, marks the time that the child works towards understanding the relationship between self and God and begins relating to God upon that understanding through personal prayer and worship. In adolescent years, when the capacity to reason and conceptualise in the abstract begins, questions regarding the meaning of life and God's nature emerge, the adolescent develops a basic theological system in order to meet the need for answers to these questions. As formal operations develop, the

adolescent moves beyond conventional standards of morality towards the construction of his or her own moral principles. This theological framework is confronted throughout the rest of the life span, as the meaning of life persists throughout adulthood.

Source: *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 1997, Vol 25, no 1, Page 53.

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14. IRIS M. YOB

1. The Preschooler (0-5)

In the early years of life the seeds of faith are sown.

- * The first images of God are influenced by the child's experience of mom and dad.
- * They learn best through their imagination.
- * They think best in concrete images and symbols.
- * Their image of good and evil can reflect faith.
- * Their first steps in faith will be by imitation.

2. The Child (6-12)

The child goes to school and their world enlarges; so they begin to develop straightforward beliefs and assume a wider perspective.

- * They appreciate stories, beliefs and observances of their faith group.
- * They are better able to take the perspective of other people.
- * They understand God in human terms - God is personal and real.
- * Their belief is literal.

3. The Young Adolescent (13-15)

Their world keeps expanding and they can think abstractly. They are beginning to make life long decisions.

- * They form a number of important relationships outside of the family.
- * Their close friendships are very important - they are 'mirrors' who reflect who they are.
- * They are in a period of conformity and convention - they conform to the conventions within their group: ie. dress, behaviour, activities, hobbies, etc.

Just as physical development has growth spurts, so spiritual development has a series of turning points (crises of faith). Some are internal (physical growth and intellectual development) while others are external (social groups; memorable experiences such as illness, loss, trips and camps). These crisis points are steps towards maturity.

Source: *Keys to Teaching Children About God*, by Iris M. Yob, Barrington's Educational Series, 1996.

