

The Stages of Faith Development

by Jean Zietlow

Recall the question asked in the Gospel according to St. Luke: “When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8). Surely [God] will find religion (institutions, creeds, documents, artifacts, and the life), but [God] may not find faith. Faith is deeply personal, dynamic, ultimate. Religion, however, is faith’s expression. ...Religion is important, but not ultimately important. Educationally, religion is a means not an end; faith is the only end. Faith, therefore, and not religion, must become the concern of Christian education.^[1]

This quote from John H. Westerhoff’s classic book of 1970’s, “Will Our Children Have Faith?”, was meant to shake the very foundations of Christian education. Westerhoff stated that “there is a difference between learning about the Bible and living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We are not saved by our knowledge, our beliefs, or our worship in the church; just as we are not saved by our actions or our religion. **We are saved by the anguish and love of God, and to live according to that truth is to have faith.**”^[2]

The question is not, “Will our Children Believe?” because “faith” is more than the totality of our beliefs. Sara Little says, “Faith is a trust, loyalty, confidence, but it is more than a ‘feeling.’ It is a trust qualified by the One who is trusted. It is, in fact, a gift from that One who reveals himself.”^[3] Faith development is the process of growing and changing physically, cognitively, and emotionally in the understanding of our faith. As we grow in faith we experience it and live it differently. The “who” responsible for enabling, nurturing, guiding, teaching, encouraging this process of faith development is outlined by Martin Luther:

[Luther] calls upon a coalition of three groups—government officials, pastors, and parents—to take responsibility for the teaching and training of the young in the faith. . . .Of these three groups, Luther placed the greatest emphasis on the family. From the very beginning of the evangelical movements, parents were enlisted as valued allies in the formation of holy households.^[4]

The themes of faith, our Lutheran theology, lie at the heart of the why, what, and how we teach children, youth, young adults, adults, seniors. Margaret A. Krych, in the introduction to *The Ministry of Children’s Education: Foundations, Contexts, and Practices*, posits our theology as the why, what, and how we teach in the church:

1. It gives a reason for teaching. It answers the question, “Why is it necessary for the church to teach children [youth, young adults, adults, seniors]?”
2. It gives the content that we teach, acting as an anchor and corrective to our own whims and fancies, and keeping the teaching of all age levels, including children, grounded in Scripture. It guides the curriculum and deals with the question, “What does the church teach children [youth, young adults, adults, seniors]?”
3. Theology is the norm for our methods. It gives a criterion in the gospel for how we operate in the classroom, what we do, the objectives we set, and the way we relate to children. It also serves to warn us about procedures we need to avoid if our actions are

to be consistent with our spoken message. . . .theology deals also with the question, “How does the church teach children [youth, young adults, adults, seniors]?” [\[5\]](#)

The five parts of Luther’s Catechism gives us a lesson plan no matter the age: The Ten Commandments, The Apostles’ Creed, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism, The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s Prayer. Out of those basics we delve into theological themes of the Trinity, of God the Creator, humanity and sin, the person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, ministry and service to others, the Last Things (eschatology), justification, Two Kingdoms, the Word of God. Do we incorporate these theological themes at the same depth with the same teaching technique? Of course not! That brings us back to the “journey of faith development.”

John Westerhoff III, James Fowler, Mary Wilcox and others have done outstanding work in the field of faith development. In this study we will be using Westerhoff’s four stages of faith as the outline for our growth in the faith: *experienced, affiliative, searching and owned*. 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:

EXPERIENCED FAITH (pre-school & early childhood)—“This is what ‘we’ do. This is how ‘we’ act.” It is a time of imitation...a child prays the Lord’s Prayer without understanding the meaning of all the words.

AFFILIATIVE FAITH (childhood & early adolescent years)—“This is what ‘we’ believe and do. This is ‘our’ group/church. It is a time of belonging to a group...still a time which centers around the imitation of what the group does.

SEARCHING FAITH (late adolescence)—“Is this what ‘I’ believe?” This is a time of asking questions...not blindly accepting what others have said. This stage of faith is adding the ‘head’ to the ‘heart’ of the earlier states.

OWNED FAITH (early adulthood)—“This is what ‘I’ believe.” This stage only comes through the searching stage. This is the strong, personal faith that one witnesses to and one is willing to die for. [\[6\]](#)

Whatever stages we give this “journey of faith development” it is evident that is it at the very core of our lives as Christians. The journey begins in baptism and ends with entrance into the promised eternal life...we are always in process. In 2003 a vision for Christian Education was outlined by the Christian Education Team of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

Christian educators participate in a God-initiated (Matthew 28:19-20), Spirit-empowered activity (John 14:25-26). The living Word of God works in and through educators as they engage learners in intentional learning activities that fit each learner and are designed to pass on the faith. In the educational process the Spirit of God encounters the people of God of all ages so that they are nurtured in the faith, grow in knowledge, and are inspired and empowered to live as disciples of Jesus Christ,

proclaiming the Good News, serving God and others faithfully, and working for peace and justice in God's world.[\[7\]](#)

Christian Education is at the very heart of the Church. The people of God, gathered in community, grow in faith and in the ability to live out their faith in daily life. This faith development is a life-long process by which every Christian, young or old, answers their baptismal call to follow Jesus. Reflecting on our call to the journey and our calling as parents, teachers, pastors, children of God, let us consider this journey of faith, using Westerhoff's stages of faith development as our guide.

EXPERIENCED FAITH

The story goes...

A Sunday School teacher, teaching her four-year-old class on Good Shepherd Sunday, reads the twenty-third Psalm. Noting that many people know this passage by heart, the teacher then asks, "Do any of you know Psalm 23 by heart?" "I do," proudly states a girl in the front row as she stands to prove to the class her vast knowledge. "The Lord is my shepherd...that's all I want."

"Now 'Art' is really in heaven," states a professional woman following her father's funeral. She continues with the explanation as to how long it took [if ever] that she understood that the "who art in heaven" in the Lord's Prayer was not talking about her father, Art!

The Pastor, filling in for the director of the Early Learning Center operated at the Church, is introduced to a parent by a three-year-old as the "one who works for God...you know, Mom...this is God's house."

Theologically sound...probably not. Profound...absolutely! In the early years of life, we often state that faith is more 'caught' than 'taught.' Westerhoff names it as "experienced faith." This "experienced faith" occurs during a critical child developmental period of a person's life. Erik Eriksson[\[8\]](#) and Jean Piaget[\[9\]](#), two major thinkers in child development form the psychological foundation of Westerhoff's faith development theories. Experienced faith, the beginning of our faith journey of life, is rooted in our experiences of the world around us. Erikson's first stage of development, *Trust versus Mistrust*, begins at birth. James Fowler names this early, infancy state of being as "primal faith."[\[10\]](#) Primal faith is the infancy or pre-language disposition, a total emotional orientation of trust offsetting mistrust. It takes the form in the mutuality of one's relationships with parents and others. It involves the basic rituals of care and interchange and mutuality. As infants, we are totally dependent creatures. We are totally dependent upon others for our basic needs: food, clothing, shelter, nurturing love.

Likewise, Westerhoff's first stage of faith begins at birth. It does not necessary determine the course of our later faith, but it does lay the foundation on which later faith will build or that will have to be rebuilt in later faith. Isn't that exactly what we must learn (or re-learn) on our faith journey: to have faith in God is to trust that God will do what God has promised? We find this

stage grounded in that which comes through feelings or sensory experiences in the form of interactions with others and our world.

It is critical during this infancy stage that a baby is able to develop a basic sense of trust in him/her self, in other people and in the world in general. Infants need emotional support that includes attention, warmth and touch, interest in what they are doing and empathy. When these basic emotional needs are not met, a child is not able to sense the world as trustworthy, and the possibility of healthy future development—emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual—is compromised.^[11] The failure to develop trust and to attach strongly to a caring adult has implications for the child's life of faith. A child who has not learned to trust other people may find it difficult to trust God and God's care for him/her. The lack of empathy will limit the child's ability to love others as Jesus has loved us. The child's ability to trust and respond to those who have primary responsibility for their care is foundational for future development and critical in the way they hold their faith. Basic trust makes it possible for the child to have hope^[12]

The call of the Church during the infancy years of a child's life is critical on all levels. This call comes in the form of parenting classes in child development studies, basic care and nurture and faith development. This can extend to community outreach as quality daycare and early childhood centers is offered to members and the community. The Sunday morning nursery and the weekday child care ministries must be staffed by qualified adults who will offer loving, consistent care. Safety and love are the two critical components during this critical stage of development. It is the Church's call to provide both.

Erikson's second stage, *autonomy versus shame and doubt*, ages of 18 months and 3 years, also occurs during the "experienced faith" stage. During this time, a child begins to see themselves as a separate being interacting with people and objects around him/her. A child has also gained more control over their physical movements. This stage has been described as a delicate balancing act: setting limits and experiencing newness of self-regulation. Eriksson states, "This stage. . . becomes decisive for the ratio of love and hate, cooperation and willfulness, freedom of self-expression and its suppression. From the sense of self-control without loss of self-esteem comes a lasting sense of good will and pride."^[13]

The call of the Church continues to be directed to the child, parent and community. The Lutheran Church has over two thousands Early Childhood Centers located within congregations. Developmentally appropriate centers can focus on basic life skills and biblical concepts. The child's vocabulary is growing at a rapid pace during this time. This makes it a prime time to introduce Christian vocabulary...God, Jesus, Spirit, love, prayer, Church, peace...through singing, finger plays, stories, children's chapel. As a toddler comes to terms with the contradictory feelings about their parents and teachers, they are able to develop realistic expectations about others, and about God who does not always seem to do what we want God to do for us.^[14] Parenting classes and support groups are more important than ever. Opportunities for families to learn, sing and play together are also critical at this point. Worship can be paced so that the Children's message is at an age-appropriate time. If it is early enough in the service, the toddler can experience the first part of the service, the children's message followed by the availability of a quality, consistent, loving nursery for the remainder of the service. For a sense of security, parents are invited to bring their children forward for the Children's Message.

The preschool years, ages three to five, are absolutely amazing. The three year olds are on the border between the Eriksson's stages of *autonomy versus shame and doubt* and *initiative versus guilt*. Usually by age four, children have fully arrived into Eriksson's third stage. Eriksson states that "according to the wisdom of the ground plan the child is at no time more ready to learn quickly and avidly, to become bigger in the sense of sharing obligation and performance than during this period of his/her development." [15] Our role as parents, teachers, and pastors during this time is to offer experiences and resources appropriate to their level of ability so that they can act on their own initiative wherever appropriate. This is a highly imaginative time...they have mental pictures and ideas in their heads. Their thinking is highly intuitive...based on their own observations of the world around them and then drawing their own conclusions about what they see. This plays greatly in their faith development.

God takes on a magical quality during this time which is a natural place for them to be in their thinking. They also feel they have magical powers which can lead to guilt/shame in some extreme cases. This kind of thinking represents *transductive thinking*. This reasoning moves from one concrete example to another, usually focusing on only one aspect of each, and drawing conclusions based on intuition. When two things happen in succession, the first one caused the second. Knowledge of this kind of thinking is important for the parents, teachers and pastors as it relates to life-death issues and many Bible stories. The child at this age needs to find something in the story that relates to their concrete experience of life. It may not be necessary to go deeper into the meaning of the story at this age.

Pretend play or sometimes called *symbolic play* gives the child an opportunity to practice the roles and behaviors of their culture. As a mother cleans at the altar after worship services, her young daughter, four years old, blesses the congregation in words and movements. It is "as if" she were the pastor. This is important play! Children's Chapel and learning centers revolving around biblical stories are prime at this age. Music, art, stories, role-playing, eating are prime-time! Classes with parents and for parents are so welcomed at this age.

The call of the Church is to provide opportunities of involvement for the pre-school child. The blessing of favorite stuffed animals/dolls or pets is extremely meaningful at this age. Dressing in costume, re-enacting the stories of Jesus and the disciples, is a significant learning time. Children's message is most significant at this age. An acceptance into the worship setting is important at this time. Familiar songs help them relate to worship. Table talks with the child can be the most enlightening times as you witness their talk about their favorite things and important things to them.

During these early years 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. 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. 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. The foundation or pivotal point at this stage of faith is our Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Timothy Wengert states that baptism, for Luther, is the sacrament of justification by faith along par excellence:

Luther. . .realized that children came to Christ in Baptism. . . .In Baptism God links our destiny to that of Jesus Christ. In Baptism Christ himself baptizes and joins us to his death and resurrection, not just allegorically but, to use modern parlance, “for real.” In Baptism God ordains all to the royal priesthood we share in Christ.[\[16\]](#)

As Lutherans the practice of infant baptism is central to our welcome and initiation into the Christian community, we are challenged to consider more deeply the nature of that welcome and initiation. Wengert states: “Baptism is no longer the stepping stone in the child’s life, easily lost in the struggle against sin. Instead it had become the place where a child entered the realm of God’s favor. . . .Baptism now remained a valid, irrevocable promise of God.”[\[17\]](#)

Whether the baptism be of an infant or later as an old person, it is the call of the Church, the parents, the sponsors to provide education so that he or she will grow up or continue in the faith and learn about the God who loves us so much and has done so much for us. When we hear and respond to the promise made at the baptismal service, it is our call as the Church to assist the family and to provide the support for faith development:

. . .to faithfully bring *them* to the services of God’s house, and teach *them* the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. . . .place in *their* hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for *their* instruction in the Christian faith, that, living in the covenant of *their* Baptism and in communion with the Church, *they* may lead *godly lives* until the day of Jesus Christ.[\[18\]](#)

AFFILIATED FAITH

These are busy, active years for the child and the family. The primary social context is school followed quickly by sport teams, music lessons and groups, scouting, and the church. A book and study for families, *Little House on the Freeway*, written several years ago by Tim Kimmel, title alone is indicative of these years in a family.[\[19\]](#) American families are lured into the “hurried home” by a culture that values it, businesses that reward it, the media exploits it and our egos demand it.[\[20\]](#) Because of the rapid pace of our lives and the social call to busy-ness, it is more important than ever that the Church bring the family together rather than to become part of the problem.

Eriksson identifies this stage as that of industry versus inferiority. A child’s job or task is to learn basic skills of life and how to function. Eriksson put it this way:

One might say that personality at the first stage crystallizes around the conviction “I am what I am given,” and that of the second, “I am what I will.” The third can be characterized by “I am what I can imagine I will be.” We must now approach the fourth: “I am what I learn.” The child now wants to be shown how to get busy with something and how to be busy with others.[\[21\]](#)

As a child moves into what we call the primary and elementary school years (6-11), the style of their faith takes on a different quality. Another ring is added...the qualities of experienced faith are not left behind completely rather they are added to and the quality changes. This doesn’t

necessarily correlate in chronological stage only...the journey of faith assumes these qualities and stages at any age.

During these years children grow physically, mentally, socially, emotionally.

Physically:

- Growth usually slows as children enter this age range.
- Girls may grow rapidly for a year around ages 10-13. Boys' growth spurt usually comes about 2 years later.
- Children begin to mature sexually (reach puberty) at the same time as their growth spurt.

Mentally:

- Children begin developing reading, writing and arithmetic skills.
- They begin to understand more complicated concepts and values.
- Children also begin to understand more than one viewpoint, and may question adults' explanations

Socially:

- Friends become very important. Children may want to spend more time with friends than with family.
- Children may be especially conscious of "fitting in" with their friends. They may worry about their appearance.
- As they grow, boy-girl relationships may become very important.
- As they near puberty, children may feel pressure to try alcohol or other drugs, or to experiment sexually.

Emotionally:

- Children may develop a concern for others, and an appreciation of how their actions affect others.
- They may be very emotional, with swings from "high" to "low."
- Children generally become more honest and responsible, and develop a sharper view of right and wrong.[\[22\]](#)

The above summary of this development period is from a tract, titled *About Faith and Your Child*. Piaget's research is foundational as we seek to understand children's cognitive development in particular. Piaget would posit this stage as *concrete operations*. Howard Gardner proposes that all human beings really possess eight different kinds of intelligence: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist.[\[23\]](#) Gardner believes that we all possess the potential for all eight intelligences in an undeveloped state. This is why this developmental stage is so critical: the combination of these intelligences that we develop is dependent upon the ones valued by the culture, our personal environment, and the opportunities we are given to develop. Hymans states, "Each of the

children with whom we are engaged in educational ministry brings to the community his own blend of intelligences. . . .In our planning for educational ministry, the multiple intelligences with which God has gifted children—and all of us—open up a variety of possibilities for engaging them in teaching/learning experiences.” [24]

This is the faith community stage of development as the child gradually begins to display the beliefs, values, and practices of one’s family, group, or church. 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 of 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 the adolescent years.

Endnotes

[1] John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury, 1976), pp. 21-22.

[2] Westerhoff, pp. 22-23.

[3] Sara Little, *To Set One’s Heart: Belief and Teaching in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), p. 17.

[4] Charles P. Arand, *That I May be His Own: An Overview of Luther’s Catechisms* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000), p. 95.

[5] Margaret A. Krych, “Theology of Christian Education for Children,” in *The Ministry of Children’s Education*, Margaret A. Krych, introduction. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 5.

[6] Westerhoff, pp. 89-99.

[7] Ted Shroeder and the Christian Education Team, *Toward a Vision for Christian Education*. (Chicago: ELCA Publication), p. 3

[8] Erik Eriksson, a German-born Dane, 1902-1994, focused his career on the changing dynamics of the emotional lives of individuals. The roots of his theory come out of the psychoanalytic tradition and focus on the relationship between our psychological lives and the social and

cultural environments where we live. The eight stages that emerge naturally during our lives, each present a unique “crisis” that must be satisfactorily resolved for the individual to grow into a healthy person:

Trust vs. mistrust	0-1 year
Autonomy vs. shame and doubt	2-3 years
Initiative vs. guilt	4-5 years
Industry vs. inferiority	6-12 years
Identity vs. role confusion	Adolescence
Intimacy vs. isolation	Young adulthood
Generativity vs. stagnation	Middle adulthood
Integrity vs. despair	Old Age

A complete discussion of Eriksson’s theory appears in Erik Eriksson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950, 1963).

[9] Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a Swiss scientist, focused his attention on the intellectual growth of children. Although his theory does not provide the complete picture of the developmental journey, his work is foundational to any discussion of child development. Through careful observation of children and interviews with them, Piaget concluded that the thinking of children is qualitatively different than that of older youth and adults. Children pass through four stages of development at their own rate: *sensorimotor intelligence, preoperational thought, concrete operations, and formal operations*. As children grow, they are actively engaged in a process of attempting to make sense of the world, to interpret what it means, and they do so in a way appropriate to their age and level of development. An overview of Piaget’s theory appears in Jean Piaget and Barbel Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

[10] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981). Fowler has done extensive research into the process of faith development from infancy to adulthood. Particularly helpful are his insights into human development (part II) and faith development (part IV). His book, *The Bible: A Child’s Playground* is a helpful summary of his theory on the faith development of children.

[11] Stanley N. Graven, “Things That Matter in the Lives of Children,” in *Exploring Children’s Spiritual Formation: Foundational Issues*, Shirley K. Margenthaler, ed. (River Forest, Ill.: Pillars, 1999), pp. 50-52.

[12] Diane J. Hymans, “The Child Grew: Understanding Children’s Development,” in *The Ministry of Children’s Education*, Margaret A. Krych, introduction. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 36

[13] Eriksson, p. 254.

[14] Alice S. Honig, “The Roots of Faith: The Crucial Role of Infant/Toddler Caregivers” in *Faith Development in Early Childhood*, Doris A. Blazer, ed. (Kansas City, MO.: Sheed and Ward, 1989), p. 41.

[15] Carol Garhard Mooney, *Theories of Childhood: An Introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Eriksson, Piaget, and Vygotsky* (St. Paul: Redleaf, 2000), p. 40.

[16] Timothy J. Wengert, "Luther on Children: Baptism and the Fourth Commandment," *Dialog* 37:3 (Summer 1998), p. 187.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[18] Holy Baptism, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), p. 121. *Italics in original.*

[19] Tim Kimmel, *Little House on the Freeway* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1987).

[20] Kimmel, pp. 29-31.

[21] Erik Eriksson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: International Universities, 1959), p. 82.

[22] A SCRIPTOGRAPHIC BOOKLET by CHANNING L. BETE CO., INC. *About Faith and your Child (from 6 to 12 years)* (South Deerfield, MA, 1989, 1994 edition), pp. 4-5. This "support" tract can be made readily available to parents and grandparents as a way the Church can support the family on an easily understandable way. The tract offers a "doable" guide to their role in faith sharing: daily prayers and devotions, regular Bible study and Bible stories, Church worship and other ministries and services to the community, celebrations of Church Holy days, Christian education classes and Sunday School.

[23] Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligence for the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 33-34.

The eight intelligences that Gardner has identified:

- *LINGUISTIC INTELLIGENCE: The ability to use written and spoken language. Writers, public speakers, and lawyers excel in this form of intelligence.
- *LOGICAL-MATHEMATICAL INTELLIGENCE: The ability to analyze problems, do mathematical operations, and engage in scientific investigations.
- *MUSICAL INTELLIGENCE: The ability to perform, appreciate, and compose works of music.
- *BODILY-KINESTHETIC INTELLIGENCE: The ability to use one's body, or parts of the body, to solve problems or create products. Athletes and dancers rely greatly on this intelligence, as do craftspeople and surgeons.
- **SPATIAL INTELLIGENCE: The ability to recognize and manipulate spatial areas, both large and confined. People with high spatial intelligence include pilots, navigators, chess players, visual artists, and architects.

****INTERPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE:** The ability to understand the intentions and motivations of other people and work well with others. Teachers, salespeople, ministers, and counselors need a high level of this intelligence.

****INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE:** The ability to understand oneself and to use that knowledge effectively in living one's life.

****NATURALIST INTELLIGENCE:** The ability to recognize and classify the various species—both flora and fauna—in one's environment.

Gardner originally proposed the first seven categories of intelligence. Naturalist Intelligence was later added by meeting his proposed criteria. He also explored the possibility of the existence of two more intelligences—spiritual intelligence and an existential intelligence but these have not been added yet.

[\[24\]](#) Hymans, p. 58.

Assessment | Biopsychology | Comparative | Cognitive | Developmental | Language | Individual differences | Personality | Philosophy | Social | Methods | Statistics | Clinical | Educational | Industrial | Professional items | World psychology |. Developmental Psychology: Cognitive development · Development of the self · Emotional development · Language development · Moral development · Perceptual development · Personality development · Psychosocial development · Social development · Developmental measures. Stages of Faith helps us to understand our own pilgrimage of faith, the passages of our own quest for meaning and value. ...more. Get A Copy. Amazon. How they talk about spiritual matters reveals the stage of development of their faith; and faith, broadly speaking, affects everything. Faith changes and matures, just like everything else. If your understanding of God is the same now as you had in Sunday school, when He may have been presented in a cartoonish, oversimplified way, then you're arrested in your development, whether you believe in that cartoonish, oversimplified god, or not. The old, bearded man in a cloud, strictly enforcing rules, and punishing your enemies may be a meaningful image for first graders, but it's a problematic one Faith Development in adults was researched, beginning with Stages of Faith by James Fowler, but considering the developmental mechanism to be the progressive appropriation of self and other. Faith was defined as the search for an integrating center of value and meaning. Development was defined as levels of mental organization, involving differentiation and integration. Faith development theory (FDT) stands at the convergence of developmental psychologies and a tradition of liberal theology deriving from Christian origins. It took form through empirical research based on in-depth interviews with children and adults, initially conducted primarily in North America.