



The Language & Metaphors of Faith Development

In what way does faith grow? What might a mature faith look like?

“we will grow to become in every respect the mature Body of Christ” *Ephesians 4:15*



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Questions



In Rilke's poem the swan's ungainly gait on land reminds us of our awkward walk in life and the nervous letting down into waters of belonging, but also then of the possibility of unforced natural rhythms. The unseen or partially seen presence alongside, in *Flower boat* Odilon Redon sagely reminds us that we are not alone and our seasoned Guide has been here before with countless pilgrims.

You might like to ask if you see Jesus in the boat with you? Or sit with him and see where that takes you? Or think of a previous stage of faith and visualize him there with you.

There is somewhere to go, and it has to be God who takes us there

One benefit of looking at faith development is the increased sense that my journey means something, if fits into universal, ancient observable patterns, albeit my journey is also totally unique. And that it can and does go somewhere. There is development and movement, the scenery of faith is likely to change. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child. I understood like a child.” (1 Cor. 13:11). Expressions, posture and perceptions change, sometimes uncomfortably, with theologies and community playing a significant role. Writers have expressed the heart of adult faith development as ...

an invitation to move beyond pre-critical or conventional expressions of Christian faith, through an experience of transition involving conflict, and into a post-critical or post-conventional faith.

They observe that at each stage of life comes a task - a challenge to grow in some particular way. Its attendant faith development does not follow a straight line. We may become stuck due to hurts and disappointments. We may even retreat. Writers frequently stress that faith development language such as ‘stages of faith’ do not suggest hierarchy and should not attract value judgments - their value outweighs such understandable reticence. They describe rather than prescribe and have nuance and subtlety.

Such movements are a struggle and are often resisted or misunderstood. Having language that names and describes the faith journey is reassuring and leads to cooperation and not uncommonly awe. These transitions may be described in metaphorical terms, as ‘a shipwreck’ (Parks), ‘walking through desert’ (Ricoeur), a ‘pit’ (Brueggemann), ‘wall’ (Guelich). They are often raw and jarring experiences. Phases and stages are reinterpreted by some as ‘styles’ (Streib), ‘dimensions’ (Keen), ‘zones’ (Thompson) or as rings of a tree.

Such faith phases can go hand in hand with life transitions and the Spirit of God who indwells and guides the soul's journey. It's not all up to us. It's not all about effort, and pass or fail

Reading material

Rainer Maria Rilke poem *The swan*

Choose from the references list

The Coracle Trust - Helping transition in faith through the life stages

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Analogies of faith phases and transitions: Book and image references plus further reading

Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*

John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*

Joann Wolski Conn (ed.) *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian development*, pages 226-232 and <http://faculty.plts.edu/gpence/html/fowler.htm> from

James Fowler, *Stages of Faith*

Gerard Hughes, *God of Surprises*, chapter 2: *Clearing the Approaches*

Alan Jamieson, *Chrysalis*

Alan Jamieson, <http://www.spiritedexchanges.org.nz/page/106/Offroadfaith.boss>

Briege O'Hare, 'Opening to Love: A Paradigm for Growth in Relationship with God', in *Spiritual Direction*, vol 10, no.2, June 2004, 27-36

Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years*

M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum*, chapter ix.

Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, page 349

Richard Rohr, *Stages of Consciousness*, a sheet distributed when he spoke in Edinburgh in 2007.

Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*

David Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*, chapter 4: *Longing to Grow*

Images:

Shady cloister, Winston Churchill (wikiart.org); *Pieta*, Giovanni Bellini (wikiart.org); *Bridge on the Seone river at Macon*, Camille Corot (wikiart.org); *Road*, Jakob Owens (unsplash.com); *Blue Morpho butterfly*, Martin Johnson Heade (wikiart.org); *Study of the terrain near Vesuvius*, Joseph Wright (wikiart.org); *Christ in the wilderness*, Ivan Kramskoy (wikiart.org); *Journey of the Magi*, wikiart.org (James Tissot) (wikiart.org); *Cloisters*, *untraced*; *Shipwreck*, Alexey Bogolyubov (wikiart.org); *Untraced*; *Desiree Fabian*, unsplash.com

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Analogies for faith phases and transitions

STAGES

James Fowler



Conventional faith – faith dislocation + self-focused exploration – paradoxical & mystical understanding of faith

Innocent, Literalist, Loyalist, Critic, Seer, Saint

ORIENTATIONS

Walter Brueggemann



Orientation—Dis-orientation—
New orientation

Seasons of satisfied wellbeing, of anguished dismantling, then of joy.

SPARRED BRIDGE

Von Hugel (G. Hughes)

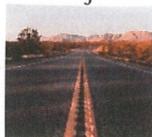


Institutional/Child—Critical/Adolescent—
Mystical/Adult faiths.

Each stage contains elements of the others...faith as a 3-spar bridge

OPEN ROAD, OFF-ROAD DRIVING

Alan Jamieson



Off-road driving/post-conventional faith expressions, on-road/conventional faith expressions.

CHRYSLIS

Alan Jamieson



Pupa—caterpillar—chrysalis—
butterfly

One organism, with identical DNA existing in quite different forms, transforming throughout its life.

TERRAINS

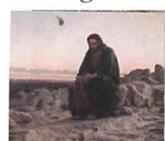
John Bunyan



Adventurous pilgrim travel through varying terrains. Includes risk and security.

IMAGES OF GOD

Briege O'Hare



Certainty—searching—intimacy

Relational development in the context of faith.

DESERT

Paul Ricoeur



Naivete of faith - desert of criticism – second naivete

Desert wanderings of Israel

STAGES

M. Scott Peck/D. Tomlinson



Selfobsessed– Conformist—Individualist—
Integrated

Faith as conformity, faith as fully independent choice

SHIPWRECK

Sharon Parks



Shipwreck is the coming apart of what has served as shelter and protection and has held and carried one. At the level of faith, we feel threatened at our very core.

STAGES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Richard Rohr



Information – Knowledge –
Analytical intelligence – Intuitive
intelligence – Understanding –
Wisdom - Transformation

ROOMS IN A CASTLE

Teresa of Avila



Journey through rooms of increasing intimacy with relational shifts

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