

A User-Friendly Summary of James Fowler's Stages of Faith

Stage 1: The "I Believe What I'm Told" Stage (Intuitive-Projective Faith)

- **Feels like:** A sense of trust.
 - **What it looks like:** At this stage, faith is often about what feels right or what's told to us by trusted adults or authorities. It's very much based on feelings, images, and stories. There isn't a lot of deep questioning yet. It's more about absorbing what's around you.
 - **For someone new to church:** They might be drawn by the sense of community, the music, or stories that resonate with them. They might not be thinking deeply about theology, but they feel a sense of wonder or comfort.
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Stage 2: The "Rules and Stories" Stage (Mythic-Literal Faith)

- **Feels like:** Things are straightforward and tangible
 - **What it looks like:** Here, faith often becomes more about understanding the rules, the stories, and the traditions literally. There's a strong sense of right and wrong, and often a belief in a very clear, tangible God. Stories from the Bible are taken as straightforward facts.
 - **For someone new to church:** They might be learning about the Bible stories for the first time, appreciating the clear guidelines, and finding comfort in the structure and traditions of the church. They might ask "what does the Bible say I should do?"
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Stage 3: The "Belonging and Identity" Stage (Synthetic-Conventional Faith)

- **Feels like:** Comfortable with the answers provided by your community, and ready to mind the boundary between communities.
- **What it looks like:** At this stage, faith is often very shaped by the groups and people you associate with. It's about finding your place, your identity, and belonging within a community of faith. You might adopt the beliefs of your church or social group without a lot of independent questioning. You're comfortable with the answers provided by your community, and you are ready to explain who is in the community and who is not.
- **For someone new to church:** They might be finding their place within the church community, making friends, and embracing the shared beliefs and values of the group.

This stage is very much about "we" and "us."

Stage 4: The "Why?" Stage (Individuative-Reflective Faith)

- **Feels like:** Questioning assumptions, and may even lead to a temporary loss of faith as you search for your own answers, and could be someone who went through a major crisis, existential or otherwise.
 - **What it looks like:** This is often a time of questioning and critical thinking. You start to step back from the beliefs you've simply adopted and ask "Why do I believe this? Is this truly what I think?" You might challenge old assumptions, explore different perspectives, and develop a more personal understanding of faith. This can sometimes feel uncomfortable or even lead to a temporary loss of faith as you search for your own answers.
 - **For someone new to church:** They might start to ask deeper questions about what's being taught, explore doubts, or seek out more personal meaning beyond what's presented. They might wonder if this church is the right fit for *them* personally.
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Stage 5: The "Beyond the Box" Stage (Conjunctive Faith)

- **Feels like:** Seeing the bigger picture and understanding complexity.
 - **What it looks like:** At this stage, you begin to embrace paradox and mystery. You understand that faith isn't always about clear-cut answers, but about holding different truths and perspectives at the same time. You appreciate the value of different traditions and don't feel the need to have all the answers. There's a deeper compassion and understanding for others' journeys, even if they're different from yours.
 - **For someone new to church:** This stage is less likely for someone brand new, but if they are here, they might appreciate the church's openness, its engagement with complex issues, and its ability to hold diverse viewpoints.
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Stage 6: The "Unconditional Love" Stage (Universalizing Faith)

- **Feels like:** A wise person who lives out profound love and justice for all.
 - **What it looks like:** This is a very rare and profound stage, characterized by a radical commitment to justice, unconditional love, and a sense of oneness with all of humanity. People at this stage often dedicate their lives to serving others, embodying what they believe is the essence of their faith in a transformative way.
 - **For someone new to church:** While they might be inspired by someone at this stage, it's not a common entry point.
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Key Takeaways for Everyone:

- **No "Right" Stage:** There's no right or wrong stage to be in. Every stage is a natural part

of the journey.

- **Growth, Not Perfection:** Faith is about growing and evolving, not about being perfect or having all the answers.
- **It's Personal:** Your faith journey is unique to you. Don't compare yourself to others.
- **Questions are Good:** Asking questions and even having doubts is a healthy part of growing in faith.
- **Community Matters:** A supportive community can be a wonderful place to explore and grow in your faith, no matter where you are on the journey.