

# Understanding Adult Development

By Sean P. Reynolds

## □ **We're All On A Journey**

If we want to be about the mission of Jesus, passing on the ministry to adult volunteers, then we need to understand how they learn and grow. We need to know what turns them off, what stimulates and excites them, what bores them to tears, what they find demeaning or discouragingly difficult, what turns them on to learning and growing.

We need to start with our own assumptions which, for most of us, were formed in the classrooms of our youth. If we were taught primarily through lectures, reading, classroom discussion and tests, then most of us generally assume that's how learning happens. If we're going to be working with adult volunteers, we need to replace these assumptions with others that apply to adults in a non-academic setting.

In what ways does adult learning differ from that of children? Here are a few of the ways<sup>5</sup>:

## • **Control of the Learning**

**Process.** As a natural by-product of maturation, adults become increasingly self-directed and generally prefer to be independent (or interdependent). If the learning is controlled constantly and exclusively by a teacher or trainer, resistance and negative reactions will be the guaranteed results. Although adults may need to be dependent in certain situations (e.g. in a new job, unfamiliar environment), they prefer to be self-directed.

• **Affirming Life Experience.** By virtue of their longer life they have more experience, which can become a rich resource for learning. Furthermore, adults learn best through experiences, and associate new learning with past experiences. Active approaches to learning work best: simulations, case studies, field experience and demonstrations, to name a few.

There are many ways that we can communicate respect and esteem for the life experience of adults -- or convey lack of respect. For

instance, the learning environment can either be friendly, comfortable and well-lit -- or cold, dark and uncomfortable. Leaders can sincerely communicate respect and appreciation for the present knowledge and experience of participants -- or dismiss or ignore it. The social atmosphere can be cordial and friendly -- or cold and distant. All of these are powerful communicators of our regard for those adults who come to us.

- **Usefulness of Learning.** Adults are generally more interested in learning that will directly impact their ability to do something. Abstract learning that isn't in some way useful -- contributing to performance, productivity or enhanced competence -- will not be retained and doesn't hold interest.

- **Motivation for Learning.** Adults will be motivated to learn when the learning will help meet a felt need or want. Thus, one of our first tasks is to understand their needs -- and to assist them in identifying and understanding their own needs and wants. One can't go wrong in starting with the problems and concerns that adults bring with them. Coercive or negative approaches are doomed to fail,

especially with volunteers who can simply leave whenever they wish.

- **Authority of Teacher/Trainer.** Adults look for and appreciate those leaders and trainers who can speak with integrity from their own experience. They are less apt to give over authority and credibility to a person with academic degrees than they are to one who has had direct experiences of the topic in question, and who can speak practically and directly from those experiences.

- **Role of Teacher/Trainer.** The teacher of children is viewed as the source of knowledge and wisdom, the person with the answers. In an adult learning environment, this role changes dramatically: the teacher/trainer becomes *a facilitator of the learning process* -- an acknowledgment that the focus of learning has changed.

- **Focus of Learning Activities.** Childhood classroom education is typically teacher-centered: the teacher establishes the focus of learning activities. In adult learning, the focus shifts as learning activities are chosen that reflect the needs and wants of the adults. Woe to the adult educator

who ignores this fact, for adults will *vote with their feet!*

• **Human Development.**

Developmental theorists have contributed enormously to our understanding of the stages and issues of adult life. Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Fowler, Levinson, Sheehy, family stage theorists -- or the recent studies of Boomers, Tweeners and Gen X -- all contribute to our understanding of adult. Quite simply, the better students we are of this social science research, the more "on target" our efforts are likely to be.

For the purposes of this manual, we'll limit our exploration of these to the work of Levinson, Sheehy, Erikson and Fowler. This research can help us to understand the unique needs and experiences of adults of various ages and family/social/cultural backgrounds.

• **Pedagogy vs. Andragogy.**

Malcolm Knowles, a renowned pioneer in adult education, coined the term "andragogy" to describe the uniquely different learning undertaken by adults.<sup>6</sup> Some of the differences are concisely conveyed in the following table:

**Table 2-a. Learning Differences: Adults (Andragogy) and Children (Pedagogy)<sup>7</sup>**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Adults</b>
<b>Control</b>	Dependent	Moving toward independence and self-direction
<b>Experience</b>	Limited	Wealth of experience available as a resource
<b>Usefulness of Learning</b>	Delayed usefulness	Immediate usefulness a strong motivator
<b>Motivation for Learning</b>	External; teacher sets goals	Internal; motivated by needs and wants

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Adults</b>
<b>Authority</b>	Teacher is the assumed authority	Authority and credibility must be earned
<b>Role of Teacher</b>	Source of knowledge and wisdom	Facilitator of learning process
<b>Focus of Learning Activities</b>	Instructor-centered	Learner-centered
<b>Human Development</b>	Childhood development: early, middle, late, adolescence	Adult development: psycho-social (Erikson), life structures (Levinson, Sheehy), faith (Fowler), moral (Kohlberg, Gilligan), family stage theory, generational differences, etc.

Here are a few other important considerations in working with adults:

- **Time Constraints:** Adults are barraged with pushes and pulls competing for their valuable time. Approaches and activities that are perceived as honoring their time are more likely to succeed. Adults want to get to the point, get on with it, get practical!

- “Crystallized” v. “Fluid”

Intelligence:

Crystallized intelligence involves using and building on knowledge stored in long-term memory. Most adults are good at this, provided they have significant educational background and experience upon which to build. “Fluid” intelligence involves the use of short-term memory in a process of exploring concepts and relationships through reasoning. This form of intelligence generally peaks in adolescence and may

decline in adulthood. Thus, adults are generally better at learning *that connects with their store of memories*. Adults who have not used their “fluid” intelligence in some time may well be rusty at it, preferring receiving answers to analyzing information or a reasoning process.<sup>8</sup>

- Rewards and payoffs: Adults are more likely to learn if they are able to anticipate a reward or payoff. This can be challenging with volunteers because there are no financial rewards. However, volunteers can be motivated by “rewards” that impact the core reasons they volunteered in the first place, e.g. to make a difference, get something done, make a contribution, to change things, to serve God, etc.

Please turn to “Exercise 2-A. Your “Bests” and “Worst.” You are invited to reflect on your own best and worst learning experiences so as to uncover there information about your own assumptions and predispositions about adult learning.

When you're finished, turn to “Exercise 2-B. Understanding the Adult Learner.” You'll find there

descriptions of some of the unique characteristics of adult learners with the task of correlating them with various learning methods.

## □ The Tasks of Adult Development

Now that we have looked at how adults learn, let’s take up the broader perspective of adult *development*. What are the growth tasks of adults as they move through the various ages and stages of their maturing?

A middle-aged woman with grown children will obviously have very different life tasks and issues than will a young single woman in her twenties. A retired businessman will come to the ministry with a very different agenda, needs and concerns than will the thirty-two year old man with a new wife, a young family, a mortgage and a new job to support them all. Similarly, members of the Boomer generation are reported to have very different assumptions and motivations than those of Generation X. Size of one's family of origin and even birth order have their effects. The better we understand the many different people who play roles in our

ministry and their unique developmental tasks, the better able we will be to meet them there and help them grow.

For insights into adult development we will tap Daniel Levinson's and Gail Sheehy's work on "life structures," the predictable eras and crises of adult life; Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development; and James Fowler's work on faith development. (See Figure 2-b. The Developmental Theorists: Levinson, Sheehy, Erikson and Figure 2-c. James Fowler's Stages of Faith.)

**• Levinson & Sheehy: The Predictable Eras & Crises of Adult Life**

Daniel Levinson's work on "life structures," although based on studies of male development<sup>9</sup>, can give us clues about the usual phases, or "eras" of adult development. Gail Sheehy built upon Levinson's work in her very popular books on the "passages," or "predictable crises" of adult life<sup>10</sup> -- information that is clearly relevant to both genders.

According to Levinson, there are four primary eras of human life,

which are separated by periods of transition, as follows:

- 0-3            *Early Childhood Transition*
- 3-17 1st Era: Childhood and Adolescence
- 17-22        *Early Adult Transition*
- 22-40 2nd Era: Early Adulthood
- 40-45        *Mid-Life Transition*
- 45-60 3rd Era: Middle Adulthood
- 60-65        *Late Adult Transition*
- 65+ 4th Era: Late Adulthood

Although the designated years may vary, there is a normal progression of life development: longer periods of relative stability interspersed by shorter periods of intense change. During the transitional times a person is caught up in assessing what has gone before and reconfiguring what will follow.

For instance, during the "early adult transition," a person's primary developmental task is to come up with an initial "dream" for his adult life -- a life structure with certain established patterns of personal identity, values, work and relationships -- that *fits* and will carry the person through early adulthood.

During the "mid-life transition" a person goes through a radical

reassessment of the decisions made in the early twenties. In a sense, the early adulthood era is a grand life experiment that is grist for the mill of the mid-life transition. A fresh “dream” -- or a refined one -- may emerge resulting in altered goals, priorities, job, relationships - - or all of the above. After this transition, there is the more stable, and hopefully more integral and satisfying, era of middle adulthood. Similarly, the late adult transition involves another review and reassessment that leads into late adulthood.

Gail Sheehy further elaborates on the challenges of each of these periods in her two books, *Passages* (1974) and *New Passages* (1995). Her first book detailed the “predictable crises of adult life;” her second book explored these crises twenty years later from the perspective of generational differences (e.g. WW II generation; “Silent” generation; “Vietnam” generation; “Me” generation; “Endangered” generation). Sheehy concludes that not only are there clear and extreme differences in the life-tasks of people of different ages, each generation has its own unique take on those tasks. Here’s

a summary of Sheehy’s stages (see Figure 2-b):

*Provisional Adulthood, Ages 18-30:* This has for many become a period of “prolonged adolescence,” during which people may continue to live at home, go to school and/or hold a series of temporary jobs. The necessary life-task of pulling up roots and establishing an independent identity may actually be postponed to the late twenties or early thirties.

Sheehy calls this stage the “Tryout 20’s.” The crisis of this stage is to shape a dream for one’s life, “...that vision of ourselves which will generate energy, aliveness, and hope.”<sup>11</sup> This may involve experimenting with different kinds of work; finding a mentor; exploring intimacy in a variety of adult relationships; or investing time and energy in worthy causes. This experimentation leads eventually to establishing a life course that will consolidate in the thirties.

Two conflicting impulses are often at work: to become stable, to “settle down” v. keeping one’s options open. People can err by prematurely getting too defined, too stable, too fixed -- or by over-

experimenting, never making a commitment, floating from one work or relationship to the next.

*First Adulthood, Ages 30-45.*

People enter the “Turbulent 30's” re-evaluating the choices and relationships of their experimental twenties. The approach of age thirty seems to provoke in most people an increased urgency to live one’s own adult life in earnest. The life decisions of the twenties are either confirmed and deepened, or altered. Experimentation may give way to commitment(s); stifling commitments may be changed or abandoned and new commitments made.

The thirties usually bring with them greater stability. These are typically the child-rearing years when people put down roots, buy houses, settle into long-term jobs and stabilize their commitments. For many, trying to manage marriage, child-rearing and work throughout their thirties and forties creates a relentless treadmill of non-stop activity. At this stage people are largely preoccupied with externals: they have little time for introspection as they simply struggle for survival at work and at home.

According to Sheehy, as people approach or enter their forties they typically begin the transition into “second adulthood.” This transition is marked by a reassessment of the decisions, priorities and commitments -- a “first mid-life crisis.” At forty, the aging process is an unavoidable reality, as physiological changes begin to take their toll. This can trigger a kind of second adolescence, or “Middlescence” as Sheehy calls it: a flight from encroaching age into youthful activities and pursuits.

*Second Adulthood.* At some point in the early to mid-forties, people move into what Sheehy calls their “second adulthood.” They may linger in their “middlescence” but can only temporarily avoid dealing with deeper questions of identity. After playing out externally scripted roles through their thirties, they begin to look inward for answers to questions like “Who is the real me, anyway?” or “What do I really want out of my life?” or “Have I abandoned important parts of me along the way?” or “Is this how I want to spend the rest of my (limited) years?”

For women, their full-blown mid-life crisis usually comes earlier than for men and they work through it more directly. Men often try to ignore the warning signs, dig more deeply into their work, only to emerge later with the same questions, only felt more keenly or traumatically.

*The Age of Mastery.* In the mid- to late-forties two different kinds of adults may emerge. The first has ignored the mid-life crisis and has retreated into a stale existence of resignation and stagnation. This person may either stay there indefinitely, or will hopefully eventually do the inner work necessary to move into renewal.

The second has worked through the crisis and come through into a period of renewal, marked by a heightened sense of personal integrity, investment in chosen, committed relationships, and focused attention on truly important priorities. This is the shift from a preoccupation with proving oneself, to that of *being oneself*. This is the so-called “Age of Mastery” when people reconcile themselves with the end of their youth and come into their fullness of maturity as adults.

In the sixties, this renewed sense of selfhood only deepens, as people grow even less concerned with externals and more occupied with personal authenticity and integrity. Practical issues surrounding retirement, sustaining health and managing one’s latter years become important. In late adulthood, well-being is linked to the comfort of mature loving relationships and maintaining one’s excitement about life.

Why is this information important to ministry coordinators who work with volunteers? Levinson’s and Sheehy’s stages, although secular in origin, reflect a universal spiritual reality: that adult life is an evolving process of moving from the external to the internal, from the unimportant to the important, from the false to the true. Each adult transition calls for a process of reassessment and reclarification of life’s meaning and purposes. Each stage has its unique tasks and challenges. If they are negotiated properly, the tasks lead to a fuller, more integrated life. If the tasks are not handled well, the person’s development may become partially or fully arrested.

Ministry coordinators are uniquely situated to support and assist volunteers as they work through these tasks. Equipped with an understanding of how adults develop, we can provide them opportunities to nurture their interiority; to reflect on and evaluate their life decisions; and to put them in touch with resources to help them negotiate their life transitions. Minimally, we can make wise and informed responses to emerging volunteer situations.

For example: A stalwart long-term volunteer may need to pull back from the ministry in order to do the inner work that his burgeoning mid-life crisis calls for. A ministry coordinator who understands this vital developmental task will support him in taking a sabbatical from the ministry. A fuller response could include connecting him with a spiritual director, counselor or support group. Simply lending a listening ear, offering personal support and encouragement can make a powerful difference in the life of a struggling volunteer.

**Questions for ongoing consideration:**

- *What age and stage of development are my volunteers?*
- *What unique life tasks and challenges are they confronting right now? In the near future?*
- *In what ways is their involvement in the ministry a healthy manifestation of their developmental stage and tasks? In what ways is their involvement in ministry an unhealthy manifestation of unresolved or poorly-resolved developmental tasks?*
- *How can I best support them in their developmental tasks?*

**• Erik Erikson: Adult Psychosocial Development**

Erik Erikson identified specific “psychosocial”<sup>12</sup> developmental tasks from infancy through late adulthood. His theory suggests that if one worked successfully through a given task at a given age, that task was fundamentally resolved. If tasks were not successfully negotiated, a person’s social and emotional development would be slowed or disrupted. For this reason it is helpful to review all of

his stages, even those of childhood, because they may well have ramifications for persons later in life. Erikson's stages:

**Average Age**

**Psychosocial Stage**

0-2	Trust v. Mistrust
2-3	Autonomy v.
Shame	& Doubt
3-6	Initiative v. Guilt
6-12	Industry v.
Inferiority	
13-20	Identity v. Role Confusion
21,,,	Intimacy v.
Isolation	
35...	Generativity v. Stagnation
60...	Integrity v.
Despair	

*Trust v. Mistrust.* At issue here is whether or not the infant perceives the world to be trustworthy, or not. If a little one receives consistent, dependable care, he will grow up to be fundamentally trusting. If not, his basic orientation to the world and relationships will be one of mistrust.

*Autonomy v. Shame & Doubt.* Children who are encouraged, within appropriate limits, to exert their own will can develop a

healthy sense of autonomy that will stand them in good stead throughout life. Shaming and overcontrolling a toddler can thwart the development of healthy autonomy and independence.

*Initiative v. Guilt.* Equipped with a healthy sense of autonomy, young children proceed to develop individual initiative -- stepping out, taking reasonable risks and exploring their boundaries. If this impulse is stifled, a sense of guilt predominates.

*Industry v. Inferiority.* At issue in this stage is one's sense of being capable. If a youngster is encouraged to create, build, draw, manipulate tools and materials, that person will develop a healthy sense of confidence and the capability to affect his environment. If not, the person develops a sense of prevailing inferiority.

*Identity v. Role Confusion.* In this stage, a person experiments with a variety of possible identities, trying on different values, personality traits, interests, beliefs, etc. If the experimentation leads to clarifying the person's unique identity, this stage has been managed successfully. If, on the other hand,

the person's identity remains fluid and undefined, role confusion prevails.

*Intimacy v. Isolation.* At issue here is the ability to successfully establish a genuinely intimate relationship with another person. Without this capability, isolation results.

*Generativity v. Stagnation.* If a person develops in this stage a desire and willingness to contribute to the benefit of others, that person has become generative. If, on the other hand, a person remains fixed primarily on his own well-being, this inordinate self-centeredness will, according to Erikson, lead eventually to stagnation.

*Integrity v. Despair.* In late adulthood, as people come face to face with the inevitable end of their own lives, they may either develop a sense of completion, wholeness and integrity, based on a satisfying assessment of their lives -- or, if their lives lacked integrity, a sense of despair.

Ministry coordinators with a practiced eye will watch the drama of these stages worked out before them, in the service of their

volunteers. Middle-aged adults are typically motivated to volunteer out of their desire for generativity -- needing, by their very nature, to make a contribution, to pass something on. On the other hand, young adults may be looking for opportunities for experimentation and self-reflection (identity issues) or to be in meaningful relationships with other volunteers, or with those served (intimacy issues). Volunteers may play out unresolved issues of trust, autonomy, initiative or industry in the ministry.

It is the task of the ministry coordinator to pay attention to these needs -- not in inappropriately personal or intrusive ways, but in ways that are pastorally sensitive and caring. In doing so, a ministry coordinator may appeal to the fundamental motivations that move an adult to volunteer; respond appropriately to developmental needs as they emerge; and provide the right opportunities for further growth.

**Questions for ongoing reflection:**

- *What ages and stages of development are reflected in your volunteers?*

• *What, if any, unresolved developmental issues seem present in your volunteers? (e.g. mistrust, unhealthy dependency, shame, guilt, etc.)*

• *How can you best support your adult volunteers in their various developmental tasks (e.g. developing healthy identity, intimacy, generativity, integrity)?*



**Figure 2-b. The Developmental Theorists: Levinson, Sheehy, Erikson**

**Daniel Levinson's *Seasons of a Man's Life*: Structure in Male Development**

0-3	3-17	17-22	22-40	40-45	45-60	60-65	65-on
Early Childhood Transition	Childhood and Adolescence	Early Adult Transition: <i>Leaving the Family</i>	Early Adulthood: <i>Forming A Life Structure &amp; Getting into the Adult World</i>	Mid-Life Transition: <i>Assessing and Redirecting</i>	Middle Adulthood: <i>Establishing a Culminating Life Structure</i>	Late Adult Transition: <i>Assessing One's Life</i>	Late Adulthood

**Gail Sheehy's *New Passages: Mapping Your Life Across Time***

<u>Provisional Adulthood</u> 18-30	<u>First Adulthood</u> 30-45	=====	<u>Second Adulthood</u> 45-85+	~~~~~
<p><u>Tryout 20's</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged adolescence</li> <li>• Staying at home, staying in school</li> <li>• Choosing a life course</li> <li>• Pulling up roots (eventually)</li> </ul> <p><i>Also:</i> <i>Shaping a dream; preparing for a lifework; finding a mentor; forming the capacity for intimacy; beginning to find one's place in the adult world</i></p>	<p><u>Turbulent Thirties</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passage to "First adulthood"</li> <li>• Putting down roots: increased self-confidence, stabilized identity, life becomes less provisional, more rational and orderly; reduced social life and focus on child-rearing</li> <li>• Overextended, multiple commitments, driven for image of success</li> </ul> <p><i>Also:</i> <i>Impatience with the ramifications of decisions made in the twenties; feeling too narrow or restricted; commitments are altered or deepened</i></p>	<p><u>Flourishing Forties</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity crises: Who is the real me, anyway? What do I want?</li> <li>• Dealing with (or avoiding) being physically past one's prime</li> <li>• "Middlescence": a second adolescence - postponing the inevitable aging process</li> </ul> <p><i>Also:</i> <i>Reworking of the narrow identity of earlier adult life; re-examination of purposes; re-evaluation of use of personal resources</i></p>	<p><u>Flaming Fifties</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift from survival to mastery; from proving oneself, to being oneself</li> <li>• Construct a new second adult identity</li> <li>• Dealing with the death of one's youth; celebrating the birth of a new kind of adulthood</li> <li>• Emphasis shifts from external assessments of worth to internal assessments of worth</li> </ul> <p><i>Also:</i> <i>Women generally accomplish their mid-life transition before men; men may temporarily avoid and postpone it, making it more traumatic at a later age</i></p>	<p><u>Serene Sixties, Sage Seventies, and Beyond...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrity and authenticity become core concerns</li> <li>• Assessment of one's life: what has been accomplished? What is yet to be completed?</li> <li>• Managing retirement; planning for late adulthood</li> </ul> <p><i>Also:</i> <i>Well-being at this age is most closely associated with involvement in a meaningful, mature love relationship, as well as continued excitement about life</i></p>

**Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development**

0-18 mos.	18 mos.-3 years	3-5	5-12	12-20	20-30	25-65	Latter years
Trust vs. Mistrust	Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt	Initiative vs. Guilt	Industry vs. Inferiority	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Ego Integrity vs. Despair

• **James Fowler: Stages of Faith**

In his book *Stages of Faith*, James Fowler describes developmental stages of faith that roughly correlate with those of Levinson, Sheehy and Erikson<sup>13</sup> (see table). As is the case with psychosocial development, a person's development through the stages is not a sure thing: faith development may be only partially resolved or even totally arrested at any stage. Although certain age ranges are usually associated with normal faith development, there are no guarantees:

<u>Average Age</u>	<u>Faith</u>
<u>Stage</u> Infancy	Undifferentiated
Early Childhood	Intuitive-Projective
Elem. School	Mythic-Literal
Adolescence	Synthetic-Conventional
Young Adulthood	Individuative-Reflective
Mid-life & Beyond	Conjunctive
Late Adulthood	Universalizing

*Undifferentiated Faith.* Fowler actually calls this a “pre-stage” because there is no way to empirically research or define it.

He surmises, however, that in this stage “...the seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are fused in an undifferentiated way...the quality of mutuality and the strength of trust, autonomy, hope and courage (or their opposites) developed in this phase underlie (or threaten to undermine) all that comes later in faith development.”<sup>14</sup>

*Stage 1. Intuitive-Projective Faith.* Typical of children of three to seven years in age, this stage is one of imagination and fantasy. Children are about the task of sorting out what is real and what is not; in their faith they can be “powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions and stories of the visible faith of primally related adults.”<sup>15</sup>

*Stage 2. Mythic-Literal Faith.* Typically the one related most closely with the experience of elementary school children, this stage is occasionally reflected in adolescent and even adult faith. During this stage a child unquestioningly adopts the stories, rituals, beliefs and moral tenets of the faith community. Stories are the essential carriers of the faith, and they are understood literally: “*The new capacity of strength in this stage is the rise of narrative and the emergence of story, drama*

*and myth as ways of finding and giving coherence to experience.”<sup>16</sup>*

The sense of justice, of moral rightness or wrongness, is based on reciprocal fairness, equal treatment.

The transition to the next stage may be triggered by a breakdown in the coherence of the stories. They may clash or contradict one another, demanding reflection in an attempt to resolve the conflicts.

*Stage 3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith.* As adolescents move out into the larger world beyond their families, their literal faith is challenged by the diversity they encounter there. They need a faith that provides a way to “synthesize” this diversity into a worldview that makes sense. Adolescents lack the confidence and experience to stand on their own, however, and tend to “conform” their faith with that of their peer group or a trusted authority. The result is an ideological faith that is relatively unreflective and may be closely linked to authority or tradition.

When life events challenge this ideology, forcing the person to reconsider and reflect on previously unquestioned assumptions, the person may begin the transition to stage four: “...*readiness for transition may include: serious*

*clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources; marked changes, by officially sanctioned leaders, or policies or practices previously deemed sacred and unbreachable (for example, in the Catholic church changing the mass from Latin to the vernacular, or no longer requiring abstinence from meat on Friday); the encounter with experiences of perspectives that lead to critical reflection on how one’s beliefs and values have formed and changed, and on how “relative” they are to one’s particular group or background.”<sup>17</sup>*

*Stage 4. Individuative-Reflective Faith.* This stage is normally ascribed to late adolescence or young adulthood; however, Fowler points out that a significant number of adults transition into this faith in their 30's or 40's, or perhaps later or never. In this stage, faith is internalized, individualized, or “owned.” The person in this stage pulls away from the “groupthink” of the previous stage and puts together a set of beliefs and a worldview that are uniquely his or her own. The strength of this stage lies in the ability to do critical self-reflection. However, this capacity may lead to what Fowler refers to as “demythologizing” one’s faith -- trusting too much in rational thought processes so as to remove

the mystery from faith. Typically the non-rational, inexplicable, mysterious elements of faith are reduced to rational conceptualizations, explained or explained away.

This over dependence on the rational eventually may begin to give way to deeper stirrings: *“...the person ready for transition finds him- or herself attending to what may feel like anarchic and disturbing inner voices. Elements from a childish past, images and energies from a deeper self, a gnawing sense of the sterility and flatness of the meanings one serves--any or all of these may signal readiness for something new. Stories, symbols, myths and paradoxes from one’s own or other traditions may insist on breaking in upon the neatness of the previous faith.”*<sup>18</sup>

*Stage 5. Conjunctive Faith.* In this stage, a person opens up to the mysterious and non-rational; these are re-united with stage four’s conceptual faith. There is a deepening awareness of one’s inner, spiritual life, complete with its mystery and joys as well as its darker side of incongruities, self-limiting assumptions, and unhealed emotional wounds. The self-righteousness and logical certainty

of the previous stage gives way to a new vulnerability and openness to new experiences, different people and opposing viewpoints. People in this stage are comfortable with paradox; they can, however, be paralyzed into inaction because they can see and appreciate the many sides of a situation that demands some concrete response.

The person in this stage undergoes a kind of personal transformation in which humility replaces righteousness, inclusivity replaces bigotry and a stance of acceptance replaces one of judgment. Ironically, it is this inner transformation that may challenge them into stage six: *“Stage 5...also sees the divisions of the human family vividly because it has been apprehended by the possibility (and imperative) of an inclusive community of being. But this stage remains divided. It lives and acts between an untransformed world and a transforming vision and loyalties. In some few cases this division yield to the call of radical actualization that we call Stage 6.”*

*Stage 6. Universalizing Faith.* Those in Stage 5 are caught in a paradox: they can perceive deeply the need for a better, more just, redeemed world, yet are held back by their concerns for self-

preservation. In Stage 6, such concerns are set aside in the interest of pursuing an outer world that is congruent with one's inner vision of the way things should be. Persons in Stage 6 live out universal principles with an impassioned integrity: "...Stage 6 becomes a disciplined, activist incarnation--a making real and tangible--of the imperatives of absolute love and justice of which Stage 5 has partial apprehensions. The self at Stage 6 engages in spending and being spent for the transformation of a present reality

*in the direction of a transcendent actuality.*"<sup>19</sup>

**Questions for ongoing reflection:**

- *As you prayerfully consider your volunteers, what do you think are their stage(s) of faith?*
- *How can you nurture their faith and encourage their growth?*
- *What obstacles to faith development are present in your faith community?*
- *What can you do to build a ministry environment that encourages growth in faith?*

**Figure 2-b. James Fowler’s Stages of Faith**

Infancy and Undifferentiated Faith	Stage One. Intuitive-Projective Faith	Stage Two. Mythic-Literal Faith	Stage Three. Synthetic-Conventional Faith	Stage Four. Individuative-Reflective Faith	Stage Five. Conjunctive Faith	Stage Six. Universalizing Faith
<p><i>The seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are fused in an undifferentiated way. The trust, autonomy, hope and courage (or their opposites) underlie all that comes later.</i></p>	<p><i>Typical of children age 3-7, faith is the fantasy-filled, imitative phase in which the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions and stories of the visible faith of adults.</i></p>	<p><i>The stage in which the person begins to take on for him- or herself the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to his or her community. Beliefs are appropriated with literal interpretations.</i></p>	<p><i>Typically emerges in adolescence, but for many adults becomes a permanent state. Faith must synthesize values and information and provide a basis for identity and outlook. It is a “conformist” stage in that it is acutely tuned to the expectations and judgments of others.</i></p>	<p><i>Typically a “demythologizing” stage which may take form in early adulthood; for some much later or never. The individual takes responsibility for her/his own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes, through critical reflection.</i></p>	<p><i>Involves a “second naivete” in which symbolic power is reunited with conceptual meanings--opening to the voices of one’s “deeper self.” Unusual before mid-life...this stage is ready to spend and be spent for the cause of conserving and cultivating the possibility of others’ generating identity and meaning.</i></p>	<p><i>Engages in the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent reality--with little regard for personal survival or security. These rare persons have reconciled the tension between universal values and their own personal safety by integrally living the values to their logical conclusion: often prophets and martyrs.</i></p>



Fowler's stages point the way for ministry coordinators and their faith communities to become sponsors of adult faith development. That is not to suggest that these stages represent a kind of pre-determined menu for spiritual growth, or a way to spiritually pigeon-hole our volunteers. They are intended as a descriptive model to help us articulate and better understand how faith grows. There is no one technique or method for magically lifting people to the next level. Rather, our task is to build ministry environments where adults come to grow -- where the ingredients of growth are available, where the atmosphere encourages growth, where it is clear that *we are all on a journey of growth in faith.*

Ministry coordinators can accomplish this by becoming masters at discipleship by developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes of a ministry "sponsor," as Fowler describes it:

*"By sponsorship in this context I mean the way a person or community provides affirmation, encouragement, guidance and models for a person's ongoing growth and development. The sponsor is one who walks with you; one who knows the path and provides some guidance. The sponsor is one who engenders trust and proves trustworthy in supporting you in difficult passages or turns. The sponsor may, as needed, confront you, insisting that difficult issues be faced and that self-deceptions or sloth be avoided. The sponsor or sponsoring community should be able to provide both models and experiences in education and spiritual direction that deepen and expand one's initial commitments and provide the nurture for strong and continuing growth."*<sup>20</sup>

This manual has been developed for precisely this purpose: to engender such capabilities in ministry coordinators that they might serve as sponsors of adult growth in faith and ministry through their ministry partnerships with volunteers.

If you would like to take these words more deeply to heart, turn to Exercise 2-C to assess your role as a "sponsor of adult growth." Then turn to the next chapter to begin to explore in detail the critical knowledge and skills required to become a "master of discipleship."

## Exercise 2-A. Your “Bests” & “Worst”:

### Exploring Your Own Assumptions About Adult Learning

*Before writing anything down, take some time to reflect on your experiences as a learner -- as a child and as an adult. Try to recall experiences that were very positive -- and some that were negative. Try to call to mind why they were so. Use the spaces in the grid below to record your recollections; then go on to the questions below.*

<b>BESTS (as a child)</b>	<b>BESTS (as an adult)</b>
<b>WORSTS (as a child)</b>	<b>WORSTS (as an adult)</b>

#### FOR YOUR REFLECTION

1. As you review your own “bests” and “worsts” what patterns or trends emerge?
2. What differences can you identify between your childhood and adult preferences?
3. What do you conclude about your own learning preferences? How do you learn best?

4. How might other adults' preferences differ from your own? What will you need to keep in mind as you facilitate the learning of other adults? (Suggestion: interview other adults to learn of their "bests" and "worsts" prior to beginning any adult education process.

## Exercise 2-B. Understanding The Adult Learner

How do we better understand the adult learner, to ensure that our learning experiences are "user friendly" to them? Below are descriptions of typical characteristics of adult learners. Please match the "training elements" listed below with the descriptions, placing the number of each element next to the characteristic related to it. Hint: there may be more than one "element" for every characteristic.

### ADULT LEARNERS...

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ ...appreciate having their **wealth of knowledge and experience** acknowledged and utilized.
- B. \_\_\_\_\_ ...experience a **decline in short-term memory and "fluid" intelligence**.
- C. \_\_\_\_\_ ...are motivated by **solving immediate problems and making immediate applications**.
- D. \_\_\_\_\_ ...enjoy **stable "crystallized" intelligence and improved long-term memory**.
- E. \_\_\_\_\_ ...need to see a **connection between learning and some reward or payoff**.
- F. \_\_\_\_\_ ...need to experience a **satisfying level of self-direction** to stay motivated.
- G. \_\_\_\_\_ ...are **motivated by an internal readiness to learn, linked to their needs**.
- H. \_\_\_\_\_ ...generally **have less energy, slower reaction speed and poorer eyesight** than children.
- I. \_\_\_\_\_ ...learn best in an **environment that respects their adulthood, with its experience, wisdom and years**.
- J. \_\_\_\_\_ ...appreciate it when their **busy schedules and multiple priorities are respected**.

### TRAINING ELEMENTS:

- 1. Participative methods that tap experience
- 2. A comfortable, well-lit, adult environment
- 3. Frequent and immediate feedback
- 4. Emphasize self-diagnosis of learning needs
- 5. Ask questions and engage in discussion
- 6. Tie theory to practical examples
- 7. Learners assess their own progress
- 8. Learning tied to current abilities and skills
- 9. Frequent review and summary
- 10. Learners self-select areas of interest
- 11. Case studies, role plays, simulations
- 12. A variety of formats and times
- 13. Skills-development with repetition, feedback and immediate applications
- 14. Helpful, practical resources available
- 15. Learning as a problem-solving process
- 16. Initial needs and interests assessment

[Answers to be embedded on another page: A-1,5,15; B-3,9; C-6,11,15; D-1,8; E-6,15,15; F-4,7,10,16; G-4,7,10; H-3,13; I-2,4,5,7,16; J-12,14]

## Exercise 2-C.

# A Personal Reflectionnaire

*Please take some time to reflect on your relationships with adult volunteers. In what ways are you a sponsor of adult learning and growth? How might you develop in this area?*

As a ministry coordinator, I take time on a regular basis to:

- | <i>yes</i>               | <i>no</i>                |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Pray for each of my volunteers: for their struggles and concerns, that their faith will be strengthened, that their ministry knowledge and skills will grow. If no, I will...  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Keep an up-to-date record of my volunteers in a journal or card file, detailing my assessment of their needs, learning style, growth edges, stage of faith. If no, I will...   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Prayerfully consider how I might interact with each volunteer so as to encourage their gifts and nurture their faith. If no, I will...   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Attend to both direct ministry <i>and</i> my ministry of discipleship -- taking time to plan for ongoing training, coaching, support and affirmation of adult volunteers. If no, I will...   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Work to build an environment and atmosphere where learning and growth are encouraged and nurtured (e.g. by providing volunteers with: an adult resource library and reading room; in service education/training opportunities; information on available retreats, seminars, workshops; etc.). If no, I will... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Model adult development for volunteers (e.g. taking time for retreats, spiritual direction, continuing education, enriching reading, etc.). If no, I will...   |

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5. Knowles, Malcolm, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education (Revised Ed.)*. New York: Association Press, 1980. For a concise handbook on the topic, see also *Solving the Puzzle - Teaching and Learning with Adults* by Ellen Elms Notar, Rivercross Publishing, NY: 1994.

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6. Ibid. pp \_\_\_\_

7. Notar, Ellen Elms, *Solving the Puzzle - Teaching and Learning with Adults*, Rivercross Publishing, NY: 1994. This grid was adapted from Notar's, p. 24.

8. Ibid., p. 27

9. Levinson, Daniel, *Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York, NY: Knopf, 1978.

10. Sheehy, Gail, *Passages - Predictable Crises of Adult Life*, New York, NY: Bantam, 1976.

11. Ibid. p. 39

12. "Psychosocial" describes psychological tasks that are worked out in and through social circumstances.

13. Fowler, James, *Stages of Faith*, HarperCollins: San Francisco, CA, 1981.

14. Ibid, p. 121

15. Ibid, p. 123

16. Ibid, p. 149

17. Ibid, p. 173

18. Ibid, p. 182

19. Ibid, p. 200

20. Ibid, p. 287