

Faith Development

1. Faith is deeply personal and cannot be “taught” as religious facts can.
2. Faith is acquired through certain stages which are best nurtured in a faith community.
3. God’s intention for us is to express our faith through our lives.

Key Concepts



Students will:

1. Examine two Scripture passages on faith.
2. Explore their feelings about faith through ranking and option exercises.
3. Read about John Westerhoff’s theory of faith development.
4. Apply his theory to examples from personal and parish experience.

Objectives



Background for Teacher



Much of the text for this lesson is taken from John Westerhoff's landmark work, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* This book is available through the DRE or your local library. It is short, easy to read, and quite powerful. However, for the purposes of this class, the student text and the additional notes under *Procedure* will prepare you more than adequately.

Procedure



1. Open session with a prayer. Have students turn to *Luke 18:1-8*. Read it slowly and prayerfully. Then have students rewrite verses in their own words in their texts. Ask for volunteers to read their rendering.

Discuss.

Some commentary for your use: The Parable of the Unjust Judge is a featured theme of one of the Sundays of Lent. It focuses on the need for persistence in prayer. The judge was completely unscrupulous (*verse 2*). In those times, a widow was considered in great need of assistance as she was without a husband to protect her. Jesus' point is, if such an unworthy man responds, how much more God can be expected to. But even with this promise, the Lord is afraid he will find many without faith when he returns.

Ask students what they make of verse 8. Will he find faith? What does that word mean? Paraphrase the paragraph, **Faith vs. Religion** in the student text to point out that just because people are *learning* about Christianity, it doesn't mean they are necessarily *growing* in faith. (15 mins)

2. Have students do the **What is faith anyway?** exercise. Give them five minutes. Then pair them off and have them share their answers for another five. When time's up, go through each question and ask for a few answers. (If time is short, select one or two ranking and one or two pair exercises. There are no right or wrong answers. However, affirm the

importance of other people's examples (question 1), that doubts are indeed okay and in fact, important to faith development (as they shall soon discover in faith development theory) and that faith needs to be lived out. (15 mins)

3. Tell students that faith and its development in people is a great field of study in the world of Christian education. And that today, they will be taking a close-up view of one of the most important ones, the theory of *styles* of faith advanced by John Westerhoff.

This is as important for Christians to know as it is to know how we grow in other ways.

Spend ten minutes teaching the information in **How Does Faith Grow?** This will require you to know it well yourself. At times, refer students to particular sentences in the text for emphasis. Under each style of faith, you might want to add the following:

Experienced: This is the style of faith you witness in the nursery classroom, for example. The key word is "trust" which is, not coincidentally, one of the most important experiences we need to have if we are to be mentally and emotionally healthy as well. For example, a baby has to be convinced that when she cries, her mother will come to her aid.

Affiliative: This is the style where "religion of the heart" is so important. Key words are acceptance, belonging and authority. Many church members are in this style because the church is a place they are loved and missed (if they are absent) and where right and wrong are clearly defined.

Searching: This is the style where people wonder, is communion *really* the body and blood of Christ and what does that mean? In this style, other religions become appealing. The formal church is, sadly, not very tolerant nor supportive of this style. Why not? Probably because it makes those in earlier styles uncomfortable.

Owned: This is God's intention for all of us. Most of us never get here; but for Christians, this is the goal.

Conclude with . . . *where would you put?* (10 mins)

Procedure



4. Depending on the size of your class, form small groups to complete the **Assignment** (assign *one* style to each group). Have each group report to class on their program. (15 mins)
5. Conclude with **Question** as a means of ending with prayer. (5 mins)
6. **Optional:** If you wish to extend this session further or replace an earlier activity, ask students to complete the sections called **Spotlight** and/or **Focus on You!**