

**DECONSTRUCTING  
DECONSTRUCTION**

A Presentation for the  
 CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
 PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES  
 2026 International Conference

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 Professor of Psychology  
 Southwest Baptist University

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**ABOUT ME**

- Psychology professor since 2015
- Dean - College of Arts & Sciences
- Executive Director - Blair Center for Training and Pastoral Health
- Married to Julie for 29 years
- 3 kids: Elijah (Grace), Aidan (Madeline - not pictured), & Abbey



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**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Participants will:

- Identify and comprehend the stages of faith identity formation and recognize their role in the lives of adherents.
- Analyze deconstruction and contrast current views of deconstruction with healthy faith identity formation in the stage of arrested faith with special consideration given to faith transforming events and their role in moving from one stage to the next.
- Identify and understand assessment skills aimed at determining a client's faith identity stage to be able to discuss deconstruction with them. These skills will include specific questions to ask as well as use of the Faith Identity Test.

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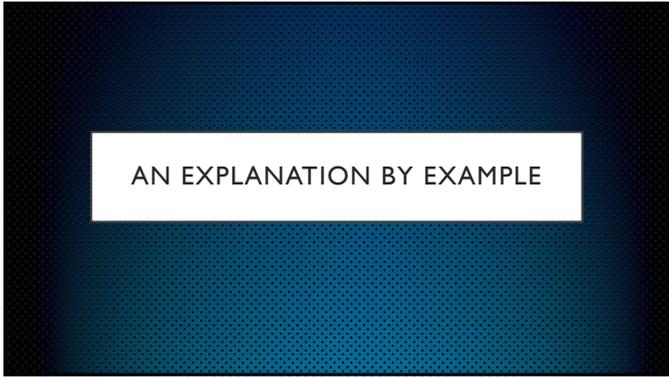
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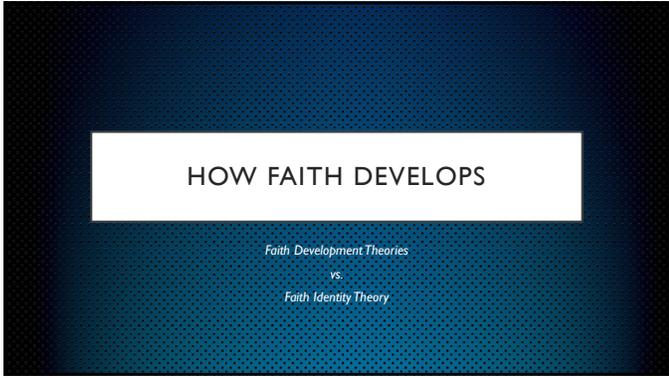
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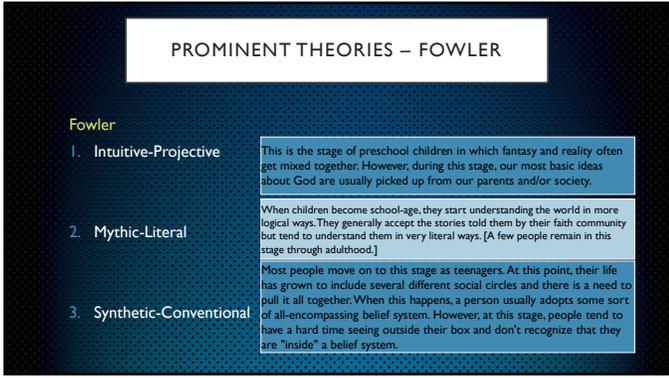
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**PROMINENT THEORIES - FOWLER**

4. Individuative-Reflective	This is the tough stage, often begun in young adulthood, when people start seeing outside the box and realizing that there are other "boxes". They begin to critically examine their beliefs on their own and often become disillusioned with their former faith.
5. Conjunctive	It is rare for people to reach this stage before mid-life. This is the point when people begin to realize the limits of logic and start to accept the paradoxes in life. They begin to see life as a mystery and often return to sacred stories and symbols but this time without being stuck in a theological box.
6. Universalizing	Few people reach this stage. Those who do live their lives to the full in service of others without any real worries or doubts.

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**PROMINENT THEORIES - PECK**

I. Chaotic-Antisocial	People stuck at this stage are usually self-centered and often find themselves in trouble due to their unprincipled living. If they do end up converting to the next stage, it often occurs in a very dramatic way.
II. Formal-Institutional	At this stage people rely on some sort of institution (such as a church) to give them stability. They become attached to the forms of their religion and become extremely upset when these are called into question.
III. Sceptic-Individual	Those who break out of the previous stage usually do so when they start seriously questioning things on their own. A lot of the time, this stage ends up being very non-religious and some people stay in it permanently.
IV. Mystic-Communal	People who reach this stage start to realize that there is truth to be found in both the previous two stages and that life can be paradoxical and full of mystery. Emphasis is placed more on community than on individual concerns.

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**CRITIQUE**

- **Simple Linear Design**
  - Belief yields actions with no other factors
- **Unilateral Direction**
  - Only moving forward or stagnation
- **Age-Graded Development**
  - A purely developmental model does not leave sufficient room for spiritual development

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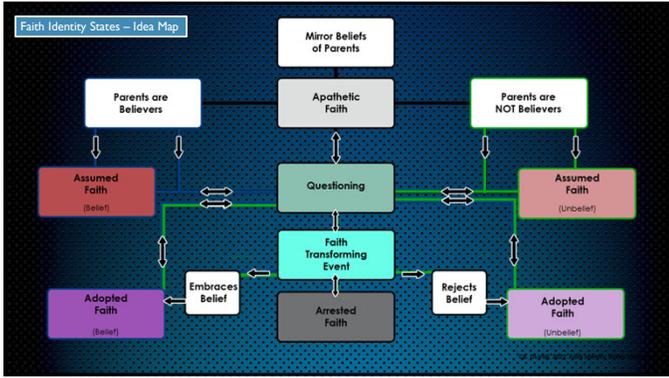
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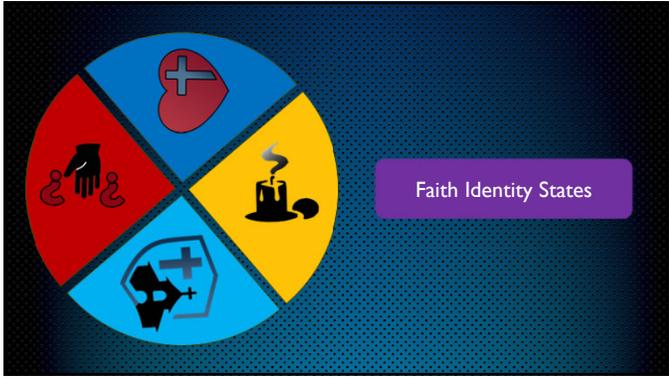
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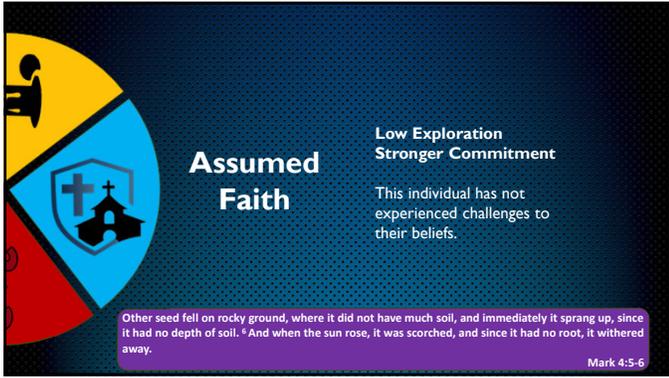
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**Assumed Faith**

**Low Exploration  
Stronger Commitment**

This individual has not experienced challenges to their beliefs.

Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. \* And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.

Mark 4:5-6

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**Arrested Faith**

**High Exploration  
Reduced Commitment**

This individual is struggling with prior held beliefs. They are actively exploring alternatives.

Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.

Mark 4:7

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**Adopted Faith**

**Completed Exploration  
Strong Commitment**

This individual has worked through their questions and holds strongly to their beliefs.

And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

Mark 4:8

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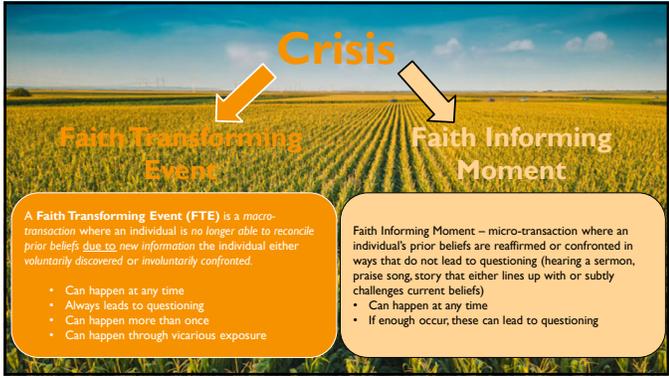
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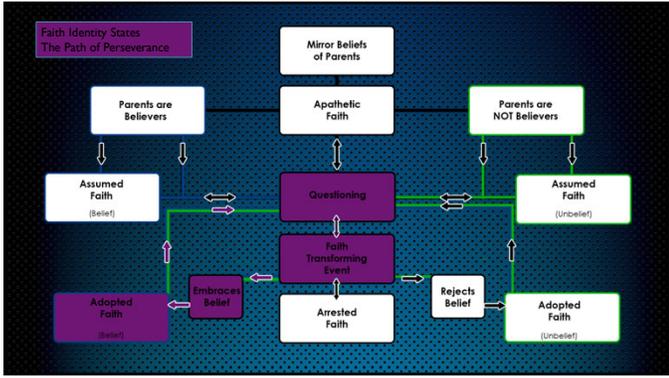
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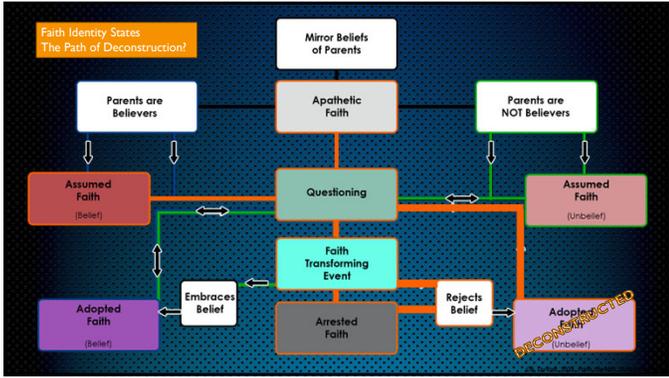
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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION**

Three Views

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION - DERRIDA**

- Ideas first came to the US in the 1970s and taken more seriously in the 1980s
- What Deconstruction is not - an ideological entity unto itself
- What Deconstruction is - the argument that ideological entities should not exist

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION - DERRIDA**

- If one is honest about a core ideology and its boundaries, as well as the influences of other ideologies on any particular chosen ideology, then one must conclude that no chosen ideology is pure enough in its construction to stand alone.
- Therefore, the best pathway forward is to stop looking at black & white constructions and live in the shades of gray.
- **This chaotic avoidance of ideological entity is at the heart of deconstruction.**

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION - DERRIDA**

- The problem of the ideal
- Within Faith Identity, One can imagine faith identity as it should be and recognize a comparison to one's own faith identity as it is - at its core, separate from the ideal.
  - For Derrida, this separation demands deconstruction
- The significant underpinning here is that there exists a separate other, perfect ideal in the person of Jesus Christ and the authority of His Word. This objective ideal is a standard, THE standard, by which faith identity must be measured, and thus grants Him authority over construction as the "author and perfecter of our faith."

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION –  
McDOWELL AND MARRIOTT**

- They start by addressing three definitions
  - Derrida
  - #evangelicalism (idea of toxic religiosity leading to "Toss Everything")
  - Their core definition
    - "A process of analysis that Christians who want to follow Jesus engage in because they "doubt the faith they've received is the fully refined good that God intends and are seeking to sift out the dross and keep what is most precious."



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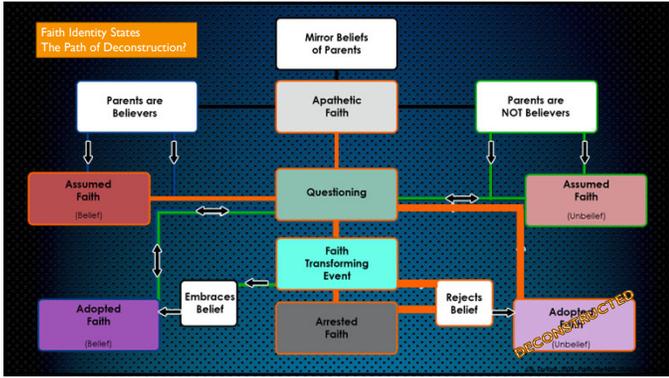
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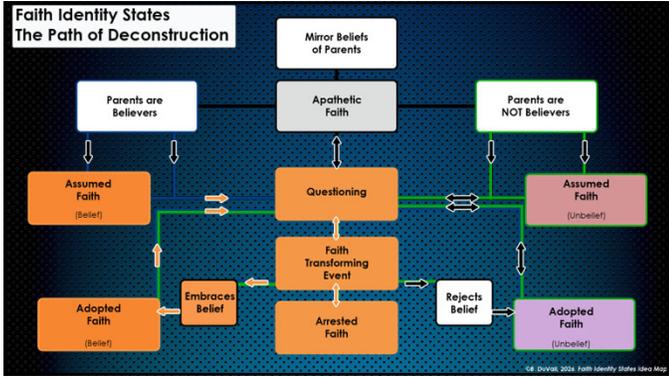
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DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION –  
McDOWELL AND MARRIOTT

• In other words,

**Deconstruction ≠ Deconversion**

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION –  
McDOWELL AND MARRIOTT**

- Deconstruction involves a “re-forming” of faith
- Benefits
  - A Healthier Faith
  - A Genuine Faith
  - A Truthful Faith

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION –  
McDOWELL AND MARRIOTT**

- Deconstruction involves a “re-forming” of faith
- Risks
  - Apostasy
  - Heresy
  - Demolition

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION –  
McDOWELL AND MARRIOTT**

- Deconstruction involves a “re-forming” of faith
- This involves a couple key variables
  - Cognitive Dissonance
  - Emotional Unrest
- This begins the move toward Paradigm Shift

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION – PARADIGM SHIFT**

**Stages of Paradigm Shift**

1. Ignorant Unconcern
2. Curiosity (Initial FTE)
3. Heightened Curiosity (Crisis expands)
4. Cognitive Dissonance
5. Emotional Unrest
6. Questioning (Exploration increases)
7. Choice Selection
8. Cognitive/Emotional Consonance
9. Sated Curiosity
10. Informed Unconcern

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION – McDOWELL AND MARRIOTT**

- The authors emphasize the importance of rightly understanding Jesus's identity.
- p.35 - "Your conclusions about the identity of Jesus are the most important thing about you."
- The main argument here is that any deconstruction or reconstruction of Christianity must retain two basic components - A right understanding of Jesus as Son of God, and a right understanding of Jesus as Lord. Getting either of these wrong moves one outside the bounds of Christianity.

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**DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION – McDOWELL AND MARRIOTT**

- **Dogma and Doctrine** play a necessary role in Deconstruction
- **Dogma** is a needed (outer) fence. Outside this fence, one is no longer truly a Christian because what they believe, no matter how sincerely they believe it, is beyond reasonable historical orthodoxy
- **Doctrine** is the Christian pasture. People can disagree on doctrine and both still be Christians.

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**ASSESSMENT: DETERMINING  
WHO IS AT RISK?**

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### DETERMINING WHO IS AT RISK

- Faith Identity Test score – Identifies State
- Ask about Faith Transforming Events
- Explore Current State (where they are)
- Explore prior experiences w/ questions (how they got there)

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### FAITH IDENTITY TEST

- Developed ~80 questions dealing with commitment, exploration, and faith transforming events
- Divided questions into groups based on type of commitment vs. exploration (Emotional, Spiritual, Cognitive, Volitional)
- Narrowed down to 16 questions for initial study
- As result of study, dropped to 10 questions

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### FAITH IDENTITY TEST

- For initial test
- N = 165 Participants (M=57; F=108)
- 150 Freshmen, 12 Sophomores, 3 Juniors
- Completion time: < 5 minutes

RELIGION				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Mainline	13	7.9	7.9	7.9
Evangelical	116	70.3	70.3	78.2
Catholic	8	4.8	4.8	83.0
None	4	2.4	2.4	85.5
Other	24	14.5	14.5	100.0
Total	165	100.0	100.0	

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### FAITH IDENTITY TEST - SCORING

Scoring and Results

Faith Identity State		Exploration	
		HIGH	LOW
Commitment	HIGH	Adopted Faith	Assumed Faith
	LOW	Arrested Faith	Apathetic Faith

- Each Subscale has a minimum score of 5 and a maximum score of 35
- Scores from **5-20** equate to **LOW**
- Scores from **21-35** equate to **HIGH**

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### FAITH TRANSFORMING EVENTS

- Explore what prior FTE's have been experienced
- Be sure to inquire about the process of exploration
  - Who did they talk to?
  - How did they respond?
- This comes back to exploring their current location
- It also comes back to understanding their previous experience

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### BABIES AND BATHWATER

- **Lowercase "evangelicalism" (the baby)** - represents the best of Foster's evangelical stream - a people who are in love with Jesus and deeply desire to tell others about Him and do good works in His name because of Him
- **Uppercase "Evangelicalism" (the bathwater)** - the American church's infatuation with the Republican Party and with Donald Trump. More concerned about gaining and maintaining power than being the church that's described in the New Testament. Full of hypocrisy in judging the character of the Clintons and ignoring the character of Trump.
- Summary - Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater!
- Also know that it's completely OK to throw out this bathwater. Just don't grab the other side's nasty bathwater to refill your tub!

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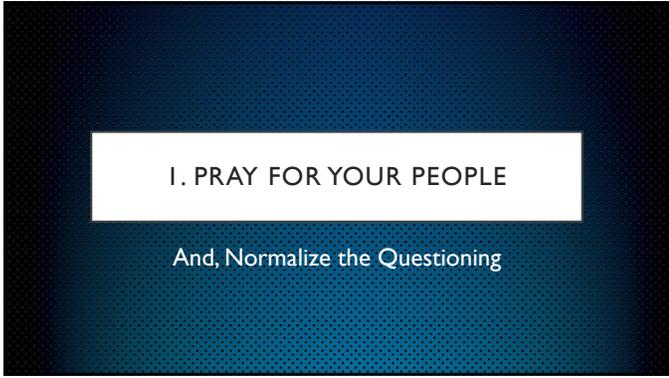
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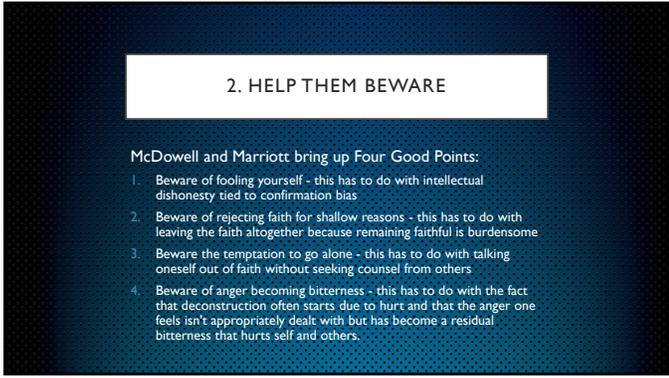
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**3. GUIDE SAFE EXPLORATION**

Providing a non-judgmental space to entertain deep questions.

How did you react a moment ago when I talked through babies and bathwater?

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**FAITH IDENTITY TEST - APPLICATIONS**

**CCCU University**

- Could be given to all incoming freshmen
- Useful in identifying best fit for Introductory Spiritual Formation class

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**FAITH IDENTITY TEST - APPLICATIONS**

**Academic Research**

- Short instrument to divide faith members into groups
- Useful in difference research (groups)
- Subscale scores could be used in Correlation research

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**FAITH IDENTITY TEST - APPLICATIONS**

**Therapy Practice**

- Could be given to as part of intake
- Useful in informing client's spiritual "location"
- Especially beneficial if client is struggling with spiritual matters (vocabulary to talk through FTEs; normalize questioning)

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**FAITH IDENTITY TEST - APPLICATIONS**

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**4. RECOGNIZE RETREAT MODE**

If emotional unrest gets too big, it can short circuit the process.

This anxiety-ridden pause might be someone's location when they show up in your office.



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