

10 Important Things to Know About Stages of Human Cognitive Development

Hi! My name is Jess and I am excited to be sharing this with you! The information on the videos recorded for each developmental stage within the Human Development & Me facebook group come from tens of thousands of hours of research on the patterns and awareness levels of thousands of individuals. The Stages of Development and the Spectrums of Parenting were uncovered by world-renowned Terri O'Fallon, and Kim Barta, MA. In this paper, I also included some perspectives that Functional Neurology has to offer. I have the experience of both helping with the creation of the build-a-brain program, so that patients could understand better where they were at in their therapies and brain development, the creation of our website on the information side, as well as working as an assistant to a Functional Neurologist, my dad, in helping patients with a protocol that treats brain issues, namely brain injuries (favorite) Movement disorders, Autoimmune Disorders and Autism by developing the undeveloped, damaged and dysfunctional areas of the brain. We call this protocol The Build-A-Brain Program.

One of my jobs was to do Primitive Reflex Therapies on each of the patients according to what their brain needed. Primitive Reflexes are the reflexes we build in utero that help us survive birth. Our body then after birth overrides these reflexes and is able to use them as the foundational building block to a more complex and sophisticated brain. It is impossible for this or any other future sophistication to happen if these reflexes are not overridden. For example, the Moro reflex which ignites a massive dump of adrenaline throughout the body to make the baby take its first breath will mature into what we know as the fight or flight response.

So, we always start by testing each patient at earliest level of neural development to see which primitive reflexes are developed and which ones are not. This way we can create a very customized protocol for each individual that becomes a patient. **We meet them where they are at developmentally within each area of their brain** and work on stimulating those weakened, damaged or dysfunctional areas so that we can build something notch by notch for a specific amount of time that will allow the Nervous System to write the new way of functioning. Essentially, what we do at the office is we take a dirt bike path and build it into a 6 lane highway. Once this foundation is built, we can move on to the next stage of development, so that they can continue developing a more balanced, functional brain so they can have the ability to live and connect with others in ways they couldn't before.

The way this is accomplished, it's not because we are doing anything magical or defying the laws of physiology. Rather, it's because the doctor understands physiology and it's functionality **so well** that he is able to bring about such remarkable results. I have found this to be equally true and effective when learning about stages of development systems like Fowler stages of faith as well the STAGES program and research that Teri O'Brien and Kim Barta have done at Pacific Integral. When I worked at the office, it was so cool to see people transform as different areas of their brain came online and gained functionality and witnessing what this meant to their families in how they could also connect with them.

I couldn't through the lens of functional neurology is what QUALITY OF LIFE MEANS within each individual stage of development and the purpose for the strengths, challenges and

functionality that are SO UNIQUE and specific to each stage of development. The more I know about them, the more I have been able to honor, validate and give space for others to exist within the spectrum of capacity, as I crave to be granted that as well. It's something I stumble through and still get mad and frustration about. I also give myself space to feel those things, because what I am feeling is my own development. It's ok that my navigation is messy.

I wrote these 10 points to hopefully share the lens that the combination of these two worlds has gifted me with repairing, navigate, and embracing each stage of development in a healthier way.

There are 10 important things to know before we go into the details of each stage:

#1 Our understanding of how development works influences the way we treat others.

When we are born, if everything goes well, the functional geometry of our brain presupposes the functional geometry of our body. The two are just not that connected to each other as of yet.

Imagine you have a computer and a sound system. The computer has bare minimum software for the sound system, this would be a newborn's brain. They can breath, the heart beats and they have primitive reflexes that help keep us alive, such as the rooting and sucking reflex. The sound system is the Newborn's body. It already has all the capabilities of a functioning sound system that won't become operational until the two become more connected and upgrades to the software are downloaded into the computer. With a newborn, this downloading happens when mom and dad are making eye contact, when the baby is held or they experience taste.

Building this wiring and experiencing new areas of the brain turning on is like connecting the cables that go from the computer to the sound system. They are now able to perform little experiments working these two systems together. For example, If I think about waving my hand, my hand magically waves!

As we gain experience, we are able to work out the kinks of the newly developed software, which will bring on more updates or development! (ex. 1.0, 2.0, 3.0) We will keep evolving our skillset as we age and are encouraged to explore and learn more efficient ways of being from outside sources, such as our parents, community or google. Eventually, we will know the programming so well, be become a creator in advancing the machinery we have and even a help for others who struggle with the navigation of their own system. I'd like you to think of the individual developmental stages such as The Fowler Stages of Faith or STAGES by Stages International as software. My four year old has 1.5 software. That's what he has to process his world with. I am not better than him because I am further along in development. In many ways, he helps me recapture the beauty and fun that I probably wouldn't revisit without his presence, like dancing to Disney music every morning and seeing the world through a very trusting and magical lens. I know how important it is for his development to process life in this way and it also helps me develop those areas within myself. Because he is aware that there is development beyond his own stage, he looks forward to it with excitement. Right now, all he wants is to be able to shave his beard like his daddy.

It's easier to see and appreciate this kind of relationship between adult/child dynamics. It can get tricky applying this same appreciation when we are intermingling as adults in all of the different stages and spectrums of adult cognitive development.

Our potential for level of maturity and capacity of behavior is dictated by the development of our brain's circuitry. I have noticed that when we talk down to or view others who are in earlier developmental stages as less than just because the format in which they process their world looks different than our own, it has a negative impact that sends them the message that they are flawed to the core, broken or even unloveable. Much like how people with autism feel and are treated when they are not understood.

Humans are born having Autistic tendencies and overtime develop out of them, but some people don't. It can be very damaging for an autistic person to come in contact with an individual or culture that doesn't understand the inner workings of their brain. Much heartache is felt by those who receive misjudgment and harsh treatment simply for not having the capacity to function at the expected level. How beautiful it is when the gift of understanding is given that allows us to take a step back and give that autistic child compassionate space to "be" and operate within the spectrum of his capacity. Only then can we see the gifts and unique perspective he adds to the world and truly love him for who he is.

Similarly, when individuals progress past the culture's "center of gravity" developmentally, historically, they have been ostracized and even killed. These same people would later be seen as responsible for scientific breakthroughs that dismantle dogmas and equality movements that would free the oppressed. Galileo's Scientific belief that the earth revolves around the sun was deemed heretical by the Catholic Church. He was ordered to turn himself in to the Holy Office to begin trial for refusing to accept the orthodox belief found in scripture that the earth was center of the universe. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed for his controversial and beautiful dream because the culture, people, and many religions struggled with his message of unity and equality. Examples like these are just a couple of countless repeated patterns that have taken place from even the earliest recordings we have to date. Knowing this, I can not help but wonder what will yet unfold. Where will the "center of gravity" be in the future for our people, culture, and religions that we currently view as unacceptable and even heretical?

I am so grateful for the study of human cognitive development because it helps us to give ourselves and others space, grace and understanding. Knowing the stages of child and adult development helps us see others as they are and reevaluate with that understanding. This is why they are also called the Stages and Spectrums of Compassion.

#2 We keep all stages with us as we progress.

It is important to know that as we pass through each developmental stage, the previous one does not disappear. Imagine Russian stacking dolls. We take each with us and we go through each stage frequently with the exception of the stages of development we do not yet have the neural pathways for. It's a living breathing thing. The point of this is to grow down as well as up, like a tree deepens its roots as it grows taller. The earlier stages are like foundational stones for the later developmental stages to stack on top. If there are gaps or traumas in the

earlier stages of development, the later developmental stages will manifest as rickety and will continuously relapse back to earlier stages. This is a good thing. It helps the individual know what areas of development they need to build up within their foundations so the rest can be sturdy as well.

#3 Our minds naturally create an aversion to previous stages to help us better drop into the new developmental stage.

Some examples of this include a toddler saying to a baby, “Ewww! Poopy baby!” or a teenager saying to a kid, “You’re a brat.” It is an adult saying to a teenager, “Why are you so immature and emotional?! If all of your friends jumped off a cliff, would you do it too?” and the former smoker saying to a person smoking, “That is so filthy!” When we are not aware of why we feel this annoyance towards others, we are at the mercy of what our emotions tell us to think and feel. The developmental map helps to counter and liberate us of this natural occurrence to make room for compassion while keeping us in the stage we are developing into.

Each stage has its own package of healthy and unhealthy ways of being. The interesting thing is that- it’s the unhealthy aspects that are the very things that will cause us to become uncomfortable within our own stage. This is when we begin to look around and say “Am I the only one who feels this way? This seems wrong or unhealthy.” Relief will only come from rolling into the next level of development that comes from addressing and **doing** something about those specific unhealthy things. Awareness is huge.

And that’s when they can tumble into the next stage that causes us to question everything else we have been taught with this new bigger awareness bubble as our lens to see it through, and this changes us dramatically. Those unhealthy things won’t even be on our radar until we are very well established within that stage and our awareness bubble gets a little bigger and we’re all like- where didn’t this problem come from?! Even though it was there the whole time, we were just so fulfilled and enriched with where we were at.

Thomas McConkie’s book Navigating a Mormon faith crisis does a beautiful job with bringing awareness to the specific challenges and strengths within each stage. I find it very helpful to know these things because much like I can come to expect a 2 year old to have tantrums when they are over stimulated and navigate this in a healthier way as , I can also come to expect specific behaviors and worldviews within the adult spectrum and be firm when they are but also have sensitivity to where the spectrum of their capacity so that I can be firm where understanding begins and ends as well.

#4 We do not have the neurological wiring in our brain to process developmental stages beyond our own.

Because of this, and because there are child stages that follow similar patterns to their adult versions, the adult versions are often misdiagnosed as the juvenile stage if someone in an earlier stage is trying to diagnose someone more developed than himself. Progress will look like a step backward to the rest of the community and good intentioned attempts will be made to correct and bring the developing person to where they were before. This is extremely damaging. This can cause a lot of frustration for the developing person when trying to plead their case to

someone who only sees their new developmental stage as a flawed step backwards instead of a healthy step forward. Einstein was thought to be stupid and slow when in reality he was a genius.

The movie *The Greatest Showman* captures many situations that caused cognitive dissonance and outrage from the community when they are presented with an idea that surpassed their ability to process such as Interracial relationships, racial equality, marrying for love instead of status, putting human beings on stage who were previously considered freaks and presenting them as equals. Since this time period our “center of gravity” and awareness level has shifted. We can see while watching this movie just how wrong humans can be as a collective. We see the pain and casualties of certitude brought on by good intentioned people, as well as the richness and diversity brought on by those who dare see beyond and shake the status quo.

#5 Trying to make someone digress to a previous developmental stage can be damaging to that person and your relationship with them.

In other words, you cannot undo neurological wiring (unless you have a Neurodegenerative Disorder or brain injury). You can not make someone go from 4.0 to 3.5 and have them never return to the 4.0 again. If they do feel enough outside pressure to come back to a stage such as 3.5 after transitioning to 4.0, they will only become a hollowed, depressed, shriveled up version of what they once were, because despite all efforts and through no fault of the individual, living in 3.5 ceases to be spiritually, intellectually and emotionally nourishing.

A person can only progress to the next stage when they have the neurological wiring to operate within the capacity of the next developmental stage. Just like a healthy child naturally transitions from crawling to walking, we naturally crave progression and developing within the stage we are in. Could you imagine trying to stop a baby from walking for the rest of their life? It would affect everything within their world and not for the better. Experiencing this developmental suppression and repression within the subtle world of a human being can be just as devastating.

To clarify a previous statement about how we can not undo neurological wiring. There are however times when it can temporarily shut off and we digress into earlier stages when overwhelmed, which causes us to manage situations in less sophisticated ways. One example from my own life is that as a parent, there are times when it seems like everything is going wrong. When my kids are rebelling repeatedly and freaking out, I become overstimulated, can't take anymore and I snapped Afterwards, when I am able to recuperate, I feel mom guilt, because the way I reacted was not how I normally act or address certain issues. That was the maxed out version of me. This is called Neural Fatigue. *This happens when outside stressors are bigger than our coping skills* . When you're stressed, your brain burns through the food it eats called dopamine WAY faster than normal. When your brain runs out of that food, guess what? It cannibalizes itself. Which means: YOU ARE EATING YOUR BRAIN! No wonder you had a freak-out., It is helpful feeling overstimulated to have a bunch of almonds or other forms of protein ready to help in recuperating your brain's Dopamine and brain functionality while taking breather.

These moments of temporarily dropping into earlier stages can help us remember what it was like to operate at earlier stages to help us understand and be better equipped when viewing and talking with people who don't have the wiring to handle certain situations. In the example I gave about me being in neuro-fatigue mom mode. That was me dropping down and operating at stage 1.5. That is the exact same stage and feelings my toddlers have when they feel overstimulated, freak out and have a tantrum. So now when I see them freaking out, I have compassion on them. I know what that overstimulation feels like and how I act when I'm there. How can I expect a two-year-old to hold themselves together? I now can help them through what they are experiencing and encourage coping skills.

Your neural pathways are not like muscles. With muscles, the harder I push, the stronger they get after breaking down. With the nervous system, the moment fatigue happens, a complete shut off and a free fall occurs. If there was damage done at an earlier stage emotionally or physically, those will also be causes for free falls. When you push yourself without any recuperation to get you back to where you were, you are training for failure. So when you can feel yourself hitting impatience, snapping, nausea, like your brain is fried or you are just "done", it is so important to take a step back, grab some protein (in any form) take a breather and move away from what is overstimulating you.

#6 The complete map helps us to pan out our awareness of each other AND helps us zoom in to each individual stage to see that there is something much more going on beneath the surface with the reasons why.

Let's say I'm from Las Vegas trying to give someone advice on how to reach a destination within the Las Vegas Valley. The person I'm talking to keeps saying, "I'm following your instructions, but there is nothing here. I can't get what I need." I then reply, "You probably made a wrong turn somewhere. Let's look at what you did wrong." If I then were to discover the person I'm talking to is actually in Florida, I'm not going to be as helpful as I want to be if I am only holding my Vegas map. If I refuse to see that there is anything outside of Vegas, my Vegas map will be like a pre-Columbus map. To a person who doesn't have the entire developmental map, a loved one who has progressed to a different stage will look like they are living life where there are no sanctioned territories, like the the monsters and dragons you can find drawn on pre-columbus maps that dwell near the edges of the world. Assumptions and accusations will be thrown at the developing person for not (If you don't feel at home the way I do at this destination, you obviously didn't take a turn at the right street.) Do you see how the disconnect can happen when we are talking to each other at different stages as well as how our ignorance hurts and blames others?

But if I become aware that my map is incomplete and learn about Florida and educate myself on its inner workings, I can then say, "You know, I've never experienced Florida, but I hear it's beautiful! There's lots of greenery and the ocean is great." I can also still see that the red rocks in Las Vegas valley are breathtaking, They both add depth and diversity to this world. They also both have their setbacks. With Vegas it's the heat, and in Florida it's the humidity. However, I have also come to love those things about each place, because of the atmosphere

they create. This is just like each developmental journey. By introducing the back story and future story of that person's stage of development, we come to see the gifts, the challenges, the unique perspectives and the optimal way to navigate each and every stage with open arms. When we learn these things about each stage, we also can understand that without any singular one of them, the world would be crippled.

#7 What's with the .0 and .5?

There are 6 Stages of awareness total. In the videos, we will only be talking about stages 1-4 because that is where the majority of human beings are. Each stage is broken into two categories: .0's and .5's. (Ex. 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5) The .0 stages represent coming into a new developmental stage of awareness. When your awareness bubble expands, it allows you to repressed everything within the scope of your world through this new lens. This includes how we view our belief system, politics, policies, our perception of obedience vs. morality, right vs wrong, etc. Each stage comes with its own set of strengths and challenges. Moving into a stage that ends in .0 can feel like starting a new job. We aren't quite sure how to navigate the system, lots of mistakes are made in trying to figure things out, and it feels a little unstable. Over time and as we gain experience, we can progress and become a manager. This is where we cross over into .5's stages. In .0's we can feel swept up in the system. In .5, we feel in control and work the system. After a while of being in .5 as a manager, if there is a desire to keep progressing, we start to think, "Is this all there is?" There can be some confusion, because this job (stage of development) used to be so fulfilling and now we feel stagnant and it no longer feels spiritually or cognitively nourishing to us despite all our efforts to stay engaged. If an adult develops beyond a community of rigid traditions, it can be a scary thing for both the individual and the community who sees them going through this without knowing the developmental map. . It is so beautiful and helpful when we can put an arm around the shoulder of the person developing and say, "This is good! It's development! Let's look into college!" (metaphorically speaking) In an environment like this, where growth is encouraged, it will be a smooth transition from that .5 spectrum into the next .0 (for example, 2.5 to 3.0)

#8 To be older than another person, does not necessarily mean we are in a more developed stage.

It's easy to see a child grow up and develop both physically and cognitively. Adults can go through just as many developmental stages as children do, but our bodies tend to stay the same size. Each developmental stage happens around specific ages. However, that does not mean we are going to transfer over just because we have turned that age. An adult can be at 2.5 their entire adult life and die having lived a perfectly happy and fulfilled life at that stage. A 30 year old can go from 3.5 to 4.0. This is why there are so many different leadership styles in religion, politics, teaching, and most importantly, parenting that range across the spectrum developmentally. Each stage is vital for society to function optimally, *as long as we do not suppress or shame the development of others by holding our way of processing as the only true and highest way.*

#9 It causes harm to try to rip someone completely out of an earlier stage to bring them over to your later stage.

If I'm experiencing being shamed for transitioning into another stage by someone that doesn't have the developmental map, it can be very hard to not try to rip that person out of their stage to make them see what I see so that they will stop that negative behavior towards me. But when I do this, the opposite effect intended occurs.

For example: We have seen what happens when a country goes into another and tries to build up a system that is way beyond that country's developmental level. If the country that is in an earlier developmental level is still in the process of exploring the stage they are currently in, that stage will become unhinged. Since they are not yet grounded in it, as soon as the developed country pulls out, the system collapses. They go back to the previous stage they were in before someone else stepped in. because that is the stage they completed and have been grounded in. The same thing can happen on a more subtle level in our interactions.

This also occurs physiologically. For example: Braces take 2 years of gradual change before the teeth reach their final destination. Moving the teeth too fast can result in the soft tissue in between each tooth ripping causing nerve damage and teeth may even fall out. On a more subtle level regarding belief systems, the content in which we believe may change dramatically when being exposed to a large amount of data that contradicts what we have been taught, but when done too quickly, our entire developmental stage in which we process this information may collapse entirely into an earlier stage. Instead of moving into a healthier nuance, a person can process the new information in a black and white lens of their earlier stages.

While going through my own faith crisis, it was like a reflex for me to inform my family members about controversial topics that had brought me to where I was. I thought that they should know every detail, so that they would stop judging and severing their relationship with me. I had no idea just how damaging that could be for them. My motivation was pure. I was desperate to be loved and feel the joys of a close family/church bond that seemed to be slipping out of my grasp when I was transitioning into another stage. Because I did not have an understanding of the full developmental map, my attempts were not very helpful to them, which drove the wedge between us even further apart. Understanding the map helps me understand the language and lens in which they see the world so I can approach them in constructive conversation instead of one that causes them to shut down and view my world-view as even more dangerous and troublesome. Comfortable discomfort is the space where growth and change dwell. Everyone has the right to their own development. What is done within that space of comfortable discomfort is a key indicator of what we currently want to be.

#10 It's ok to set boundaries with those who don't see the beauty of the stage of development you are in.

Everyone has the right to their own development, but this does not give anyone the right to hurt, ostracize or suppress others with it. I have so much gratitude for those who dedicate their lives speaking out against such unhealthy behaviors so that others can have a safe space to exist and thrive.

Once you've learned about each of the developmental stages, it becomes easier to understand the reasons why someone in a different developmental stage is treating you poorly. This doesn't mean you have to put up with the unhealthy behavior. The purpose of learning about each stage of development is to have compassion on others and for yourself. You will learn that your stage is beautiful in its own right and requires respect and the space to flourish and grow. Even if that means limiting time with or speaking your truth to those who won't allow you that developmental right.

I admire Christ's way of addressing unhealthy behavior while helping others develop in the process. He spoke truth to bullshit. He also planted seeds that would allow these people to question their current paradigms and dogmas.

When each person, no matter where they are on the developmental map, understands and respects, and allows others a healthy space and rights to their developmental stage, only then can we fully embrace, learn from, uplift and find fulfillment in each other - like how we fully embrace and allow little children to have the developmental right of their magical stage that brings so much joy to us that no other stage can capture in the same way. We dwell together and honor each other and we also push each other towards growth and call out unhealthy behaviors. Just because my 18 month old doesn't have the neurological wiring in his right frontal lobe yet to understand gratitude, doesn't mean I'm not going to have him say "Thank you." each time I do something nice for him or correct inappropriate behavior. If I don't do those things, I will rob him of the opportunity to build that wiring, within each appropriate correction I give him, that will one day link to the areas of the brain that have to do with gratitude and self control. The result of not helping this child see outside of his own behaviors is the creation of a narcissist. I see adult dogmas and ways of processing the world in the same way. Just because they can not comprehend a more developed stage, doesn't mean I'm going to put up with ignorant comments that affect those around them in negative ways.

IN CLOSING

At the end of the day, I think we all crave to be seen. I mean, truly, deeply **seen** and embraced for the good within us. We want an environment and community that will allow for this and inspire thriving. However, even when the best intentions are at heart to achieve this, a small awareness bubble mixed with false beliefs can render us incapable of doing these things for ourselves and others.

The best example I can offer you that portrays a remedy to this and shows the transformation it has on all involved can be found in the Disney film, Moana. I want you to imagine that Teka, the Volcanic Monster, represents anyone in severe emotional, spiritual, and mental pain or like when experiencing faith crisis are ostracized because they no longer fit within the mold of their community. And that Moana is, a good hearted member who wants to do what is right and be of service to those she loves and has also accepted false teachings and doctrines taught in her tribe about this volcanic creature.

At the beginning of the film, We witness a happy and content mother island, who contributes greatly to those within her proximity, turn into the Volcanic Monster when

experiencing something traumatic. We see the painful anguish and torment it causes Te Ka to experience a sense of betrayal by those she had spent her life loving and serving. There's a very accurate portrayal of what it **looks** like internally as a result of one being stripped of the life force or heart that once fueled their ability to thrive and then is given no clear or helpful path or direction on how to navigate from that point.

When Moana finally faces the Volcanic Monster, she was so certain she already knew everything she needed to know about the enemy that she had perceived and labeled as a threat to her way of life. Could you imagine what would have happened if she refused to let go of the teachings of her tribe about this being? She would have kept fighting to the very end with self righteous certitude only to the peril of both involved.

We also see how powerful it is when a person is willing to take a closer look at those intense outbursts of pain and anger and see that there is something much deeper happening than what was previously supposed. When Moana allowed herself to question her current paradigm and look at Te Fiti through a different lens, she INSTANTLY became more equipped to know what needed to be done to help. In a moment's time Te Ka went from being Moana's enemy, to the answer that would help heal her island, but ONLY when Moana had the complete information of WHO Te Ka really was. When she realized all of the big misjudgements that were based off of incomplete understanding, she was able to say "This is NOT who you are. YOU know who you are. and you are not that monster I was taught." Moana's open mindedness allowed her to freely and enthusiastically give Te Ka the tool that was mandatory for her transformation and flourishing into what we know as Te Fiti. This tool of transformation was something that was always her right to have and was previously denied as a result of certitude and dogmas brought on by good intentioned people.

In this story, the other islands, including Moana's tribe, were severely suffering, because there was a lack of Te Fiti's presence. Despite all effort on their part to remedy this, the laws in which they were bound had rendered them incapable of finding the solution to their dying island. When there became space for Te Ka to transform, thrive and be present among the tribe as the Mother Island, it was her presence that healed their island as they internalized the richness of the gifts that only she could offer.

What made Moana remarkable is that she was able to embrace the rumblings of ancient wisdom within her own heritage as well as deep wisdom found outside of her tribe. She was brave and bold enough to challenge believe systems that were hurting others or had ceased to allow for thriving. It was Moana's unorthodox approach to the dogmas of her leaders that gave way to the shedding of unhealthy, destructive and broken systems. In its place were more inclusive and healthier functioning systems that would benefit all it touched.

In my life, I was gifted with a dear friend in whom I consider my own version of Moana. She is still very much in the church, because that is where she thrives.

She is the reason why this part of the movie leaves me in tears every time. Because before I met you, Bill, or anyone else like us that would show me that that this, dark night of the soul, was actually a healthy developmental awakening, There was Chrissy.

She was willing to sit with me in the pain and see beyond grossly inaccurate stories told at church and general conference of why people like me experience faith crisis or leave the church. These stories distort the lens of those who absorb this information -and it greatly affects how they will think of and treat people going through faith crisis, even if the information completely contradicts everything they know about the character and integrity of that person. This was my experience. I was all in and desperately fought to stay in the church for several years, even at the cost of my own health. Chrissy was willing to see where wisdom ended and dogma began as she took in the damaging and traumatic things people were saying to me and about me. She was able to look at me and say about all those things, "This is NOT who you are."

It was scary for me to experience the consequences when a tribe or certain members within it held protecting the image of an institution as more important than the individuals it serves. It felt like members were kicking me while I was already down in order to preserve their world-view. This poor management of priorities and false information were what rendered those specific people incapable of doing what Chrissy would so freely gift me. That is the gift of mourning with those that mourn and comforting those who stand in need of comfort, what each had promised to do in their baptismal covenants. Every week Chrissy and I would go to the park with our kids. She would just love, validate and cry with me without shaming or policing the expression of my experience, while still allowing me to validate and honor her beautiful and nuanced journey that looked so very different mine.

All that we have touched on in this interview about loving and embracing and finding joy in each other, regardless of developmental stage- I learned from her example. It's funny, because I taught her about the stages of development, but she taught me the impact it has and what it feels like to have someone reach across their own developmental borders to embrace another. In doing this, we were both transformed. This communion with each other is what made being in each other's presence deeply sacred. I think in essence this is what being at church is supposed to feel and be like. But it won't truly happen in this wholehearted way until all people are our people. That's the vision I see for all of us.

Our ability to cherish and help each other hangs on 1) the accuracy of our information, 2) our desire for understanding 3) and willingness to shed beliefs that bear unhealthy and destructive fruits.

A rising tide lifts all boats. Unfortunately, right now the system is sinking the boats of those who are labeled as LGBT, intellectuals, feminists and other minorities. These are the people who are in severe pain because they were labeled as monsters by the leaders and community they have loved and spent their lives serving. They are refused the tools, space, and expression within the community along with the ability to share their gifts and flourish.

We need to do better. We must do better.

So let's learn how to speak each other's languages and see the beauty that each stage of development contributes to our lives. Only then can we uplift, fully embrace and love each other. When that happens, every person will be allowed to authentically show up and be as one.

I hope you have fun discovering which stage resonates with you and learning things that will help in understanding and having compassion towards your loved ones in the videos! Feel free to add anyone to the group who would benefit from this information.