

James Fowler, pastoral psychology scholar, dies at age 75

by [Sam Hodges](#) and Emory University Communications, with added sources in the [November 25, 2015](#) issue

James W. Fowler III, a scholar of practical theology and pastoral psychology, died October 16 in Atlanta, at age 75, from complications related to Alzheimer's disease.

Fowler, who was ordained in the United Methodist Church, taught theology and human development at Emory University's Candler School of Theology and was director of the Emory Center for Ethics until his retirement in 2005.

"Under Jim's leadership the Ethics Center grew to become a major force at Emory and across the nation," said James Laney, former president of Emory and former dean of Candler.

Fowler's 1981 book *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* has had 150,000 copies published and remains required reading in many college and seminary courses.

"Jim's work provided the central bridge between constructive developmental psychology, or life-span psychology, and the formation of faith," said Sharon Daloz Parks, a scholar of young adults and faith. "It has had significant influence in pastoral practice and has informed the work of spiritual directors."

Fowler, who grew up in North Carolina, earned degrees at Duke University, Drew University, and Harvard University. He received awards from the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association, which recognized his "enduring contributions to the dialogue between religion and psychiatry."

In a 1993 *Christian Century* article, "Shame," Fowler wrote about the topic's importance for theology and ministry.

"Shame is about the self—its adequacy and its worth," he wrote. To address shame in the church, he suggested that "in sermons, prayers of confession and pastoral prayers, we should follow Jesus' example of naming specific acts or patterns of

action for which we and our people need to repent, rather than emphasizing our general unworthiness.” —United Methodist News Service; Emory University Communications; added sources

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