



# HOW TO...

foster spiritual growth in young children

Watch the [recording](#) of the Practical Workshop hosted by Sikunye, discussing how to foster spiritual growth in young children – especially children in the First Thousand Days (FTD).

*“Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, **those nursing at the breast**. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber.”*

**Joel 2:16**

## When does spiritual development start?

We tend to focus on children from 4 years old to develop their faith, but if God knew us before we were formed in our mother's womb (Jerimiah 1:5) does that not mean a child's spiritual development starts from the very beginning of life – from conception?

Young children are valuable in God's eyes: He does not start caring for them when they can read the Bible or pray or comprehend the gospel message. Children's hearts are open, and they have a kind of eagerness to learn that is distinct to childhood. There are things that we can do to help children experience the love of God even when they are very young, even in the womb! As parents, our part is to nurture their hearts toward Christ through prayer, God's word, and patient love, while trusting the Spirit to minister to them as only he can.

*“God has been longing for you, longing to connect with you, since before your very beginning. Every child you know has been longed by God into existence. We also long for God. Just as we are hardwired to seek connection with God.”*

– Lacy Finn Borgo –

Studies have shown that the family has the biggest influence on the faith formation of children. The home environment is the primary space for nurturing and teaching “the interpretation of life.” The family is a social system of primary relationships where individuals are nurtured both psychologically and spiritually. And the church is also a social system with an influential role. Many people argue that passing on faith from one generation to another lies primarily with the family and not the church. However, many churches function as the primary faith nurturer of children rather than the family. The church has a duty to equip parents effectively for the process of the spiritually developing their children.

## Petra Institute

Petra Institute runs a course called “**God, my baby and me.**” This course is for parents to reflect on our child's spiritual life and the role we as adults have in seeing that children even in the womb have the capacity to know God and have faith.

Babies learn about God, faith, and spirituality through their interactions with their parents. This backwards and forwards between baby and mother or father is called 'serve and return'. Watch this **video on serve and return**: <https://youtu.be/KNrnZag17Ek> and notice how baby and parent interacts with one another, building a bond between them, that allows baby to learn. God also welcomes us to engage in serve and return with him, to bond and connect with Him, whilst we are learning about Him too. We can encourage anyone to do serve and return with a baby – it is not only for the primary caregiver but the whole family. This course helps parents to practice serve and return in the way they intentionally develop their child's spirituality.

Here are some **scriptures to read and reflect** on how God views and calls the children in the First Thousand Days:

- Genesis 1:26
- John 17:11
- Psalm 8:1
- Genesis 3:22
- Jeremiah 1:5
- John 14:23
- Luke 1:41
- Joel 2:16

## Superbook

Superbook is a tool that can be used to foster faith in children. Superbook is a TV series that explores the truths of the Bible for children. Superbook teaches children moral truths and life lessons through Bible-based adventures of time-traveling children and their robot friend. Superbook is helpful in engaging young children in the bible, stories, and songs. This can be used within the church, in community groups (The Superbook Academy for churches) and at home (The Superbook App and website for kids).

### **tips for parents to practice for growing faith and spirituality. Starting in pregnancy and in the first years of life.**

- **Parents love the Lord your God** (Deut 6:4-9). This is an instruction to parents, adults, church leaders, to first love God with all their heart. Children's faith will be nurtured by following how parents live out and pass on their love relationship with God.

- **Modelling** - Children learn about God through watching parents – how they pray, worship, read their Bible, and how they talk about God and live their daily lives. Model what you want your children to learn about God – as they copy everything you do.
- **Pray out loud over your children** during pregnancy - lay hands on the tummy – they can hear it and sense the spirit (Psalm 139 – God is in the womb forming the unborn child). Pray a blessing over your children - Numbers 6:24-26 / Ephesians 3:14-21 – and let your child pray with you (even if he/she gurgles). And teach children to pray from the beginning, when they are very young through routines like saying grace at mealtimes and bedtime prayers.
- **Read Bible verses** to your unborn child – and every day as they grow older.
- **Sing a song of praise** and worship out loud, repeatedly during pregnancy and once they are born – sing truth over your children, it will sink into them. There is also a familiarity with the song for children after birth and singing this song will calm them and they can sense Jesus' presence.
- **Speak truth** over babies and let them learn to repeat this as they learn to talk e.g., “Jesus loves me” and repeat it – it lays the neural pathways – and the more they say it the more they believe it too.
- **Hug your child** – to show the love God has for them – use a mirror asking, “who does God love?” and showing them in the mirror.
- **Watch this demonstration video** for some ideas of how to spiritually develop your child during FTD: <https://youtu.be/Gf39GsSPM-U>

## what churches can do to intentionally develop children spiritually in the First Thousand Days:

- **Pray for and with** pregnant mothers and expectant fathers.
- **Create a safe, welcoming space for young families** – in turn children can feel that church is a safe space and where they encounter God.
- **Pray faith-filled prayers for young families** – during at-risk pregnancies or at birth, miscarriages, infertility, brokenness in families, trauma and more. God can redeem and heal even the most difficult of situations.
- **Journey with parents** through the challenges and difficulties that they may be facing – so they can see God in their situation and grow in their faith.
- **Equip parents** about the role they play in nurturing the faith of their children and investing in their own walk with God.
- **Involve young children in the holistic life of the church** – allow children to be active participants for example: having the children in church during worship (we model to children what worship is), toddlers tend to have a freedom in worship to dance and use

their whole body to worship that some adults do not have – this can be instructive to adults.

- **Ask a 2-year-old to pray** – it will be simple and filled with faith and this will inspire the adults as well.
- **Have moments to commit children to God** – this includes the whole church and children.
- **Include the babies and toddlers** in nativity plays or other moments in church. Let them wonder around, allow for some messy moments - it does not need to be perfect – there is a lot of life that can come from having babies and toddlers in church.
- **Here an additional resource** on how to nurture faith or spiritual development: <https://sikunye.org.za/wp-content/uploads/How-to-nurture-faith-or-spiritual-development-in-FTD.pdf>

## contact details

For more information and how you can use their materials



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