



how to nurture faith or spiritual development

from conception till 2 years

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a series of Lunchtime Conversations hosted by Sikunye, discussing how to support families in the different stages of FTD.

Listen to audio recording [here](#)

Watch the video recording [here](#)

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

In the 2017 research conducted by Common Good ([read here](#)), we found a gap in the literature as it relates to theology, church practices and the First Thousand Days. There is much written around the debated topics of infant baptism and abortion but very little written around the beliefs and practices of how churches nurture the spiritual part of children from conception.

There are many aspects to this topic, and this resource is one contribution to this discussion. We recognize that different denominations might hold different views on this little-spoken about opportunity. Rather than wanting to cause disagreement, we hope this resource will stir us all to care for families in ways that help them nurture spiritual growth in their young children.

key take aways from Brad Anderson’s interview:

The general understanding is that by the age of 14 most of the foundations of spirituality and faith are established – so people tend to focus on 4 years – 14 years as the critical foundation building time, but research shows that while in the womb babies are learning, and their brains are growing. There seems to be an awareness of emotion, of feeling loved, accepted, and secure. Baby can hear sounds, patterns, and recognises songs and voices of mom and dad after birth.

“Spirituality means the God-human relationship in terms of spiritual birth. It is easy to neglect spirituality in this sense when dealing with children's needs in our time. Children's spirituality challenges adults to explore and re-articulate what is forgotten, in terms of nurturing what it is to be human, of caring for what is important, and of cultivating hope.”

Sagberg, 2008



Some tips on what parents can do to grow the faith and spirituality in their children, from conception:

1. **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.
2. **Modeling** - Children learning 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 as parents.
3. **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)
4. **Pray a blessing over your children** - Numbers 6:24-26 / Ephesians 3:14-21
5. **Sing a song of praise and worship** out loud, repeatedly during pregnancy over your child – sing truth over children, it sinks into them. There is a familiarity for children after birth and singing this song will calm them and they can sense Jesus' presence.
6. **Teach children to pray** from the beginning, when they are very young through routines like saying grace at mealtimes and bedtime prayers.
7. **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.

Some tips on what the church can do to grow the faith and spirituality of children – and indirectly grow the faith of the adults:

- **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 participant 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 will inspire faith in the adults.
- **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 and let them wonder around, allow for some messy moments it do not need to be perfect – there is a lot of life that can come from having babies and toddlers in church.

Matthew 18:3

“...unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven ...”

Resources to support mom and dads in building their child’s faith and spirituality:

- **Sikunye’s Pregnancy and New Mom Devotionals** are available to be used in mom support groups:
 - [My Pregnancy Journal](#) for expecting moms
 - [Pregnancy Devotional Facilitators group guide](#) to use in a mom support groups
 - [My Parenting Journal](#) is available for new moms
 - [New Mom Devotional Facilitators group guide](#) to use in a mom support group
- [Baby Dedication Script](#) – sample to adapt in your church,
- [A Prayer for Baby](#)
- [Who I am in Christ](#)
- Book recommendation: [Praying for Your Unborn Child](#) by Francis & Judith MacNutt

If you have some good examples of how your church is developing the faith and spirituality of children under the age of 2 years, please do share it with us.