



## KidZ at Heart and Spiritual Formation for Children

### What is KidZ at Heart?

We are a global community that trains, partners with, and mobilizes networks of leaders to help kids fall deeply in love with Jesus. We do this by impacting all five key spheres of a child's life to create environments where the Holy Spirit nurtures the transformation of the child.

### What is “spiritual formation” for children?

Spiritual formation for children is the lifelong process by which the Holy Spirit serves as the child's teacher, deepening the child's relationship with God, transforming the child into Christlikeness from the inside out, and generating an overflow of love toward God, self and others (Rom 8:27-29, Mk 12:28-31).

### Why does KidZ at Heart focus on the spiritual formation of children?

- Spiritual formation is a lifelong process, and childhood is the most advantageous time of life to shape a person's relationship with a loving God.** Each person is created to connect with God and others, but the effects of the fall require new life and transformation. While spiritual formation will only end when we see Jesus face-to-face in heaven and the work of redemption is completed in us, it only makes sense that beginning a healthy formation process earlier in life provides more opportunities for growth. Starting this process of nurturing relationships while the child is in the most critical stages of human development provides greater opportunities for movement toward God and a reduction in the damage from moving away from God. Spiritual formation is particularly powerful in a child's life, because it allows for the early, healthy development of lifelong relational structures needed for life and a preparation for the child to be aware of God's presence in every aspect of life.
- Spiritual formation for children is a process that exists concurrently with, and not limited by, the developmental stages of the child.** Children begin their search to reconnect at birth (or before), and they have a special responsiveness to spiritual practices throughout childhood. This early period offers a unique window of opportunity to partner with the Holy Spirit in the spiritual formation of children. At a very young age, children already have a special capacity to notice and respond to God and a willingness to engage in prayer and other formational practices. These practices must be developmentally appropriate, continue evolving as children mature, and take into account the uniqueness of each child. While the process of spiritual formation is in essence the same at any age, it is in these youngest and most formative years of human life that both formation of Christian faith and the natural developmental stages are able to be impacted simultaneously, allowing for spiritual growth to enrich all of life.
- The Holy Spirit is the child's teacher, and the home and faith community have the privilege to cooperate with God.** God loves children and calls them to himself for relationship. While the Holy Spirit serves as the child's primary teacher for the child to know and respond to his love (Psalm 139:13-17), God has given the adults in a child's home and faith community the responsibility to impact the key spheres of a child's life: the child's home, spiritual practices, engagement with biblical truth, holistic health, and relationships (Psalm 78:5-7). Because adults control most of the child's environments, they have the responsibility to stay alert to the formative influence of the Holy Spirit while purposefully



setting a pace of life conducive to reflective processing and opportunities to pursue personal, intimate connections with God. Both the home and faith community are able to offer routines/rituals, symbols and story where the child may connect with the Holy Spirit as “teacher” (John 14:15-17).

4. **The child’s relationship with God is key, and the child’s view of God is being formed, for good or bad, from conception onward.** The essence of Deuteronomy 6 is for adults to first have a love commitment to God and confident faith in God, and then to take every opportunity in daily life to pass these on to their children through participation, modeling, instruction and encouragement. Since children look to adults for guidance, there is an increased responsibility to model lives that are being transformed (I Corinthians 11:1). Children are dependent upon adults for food and shelter, security and value, and loving relationships, and the trustworthiness of adults in providing these determines a child’s future ability to build trusting relationships with God, self, and others. Adults who provide environments which display love built on identity in Christ help the child understand unconditional love from God, love based on who the child is rather than any ability to please others. Impacting the sphere of the child’s home by modeling God’s love provides opportunities for children to learn to be *with* God and to develop an authentic relationship with him that results in real change, spiritual transformation.

5. **The fruit of spiritual formation for the child is Christlikeness, not obedience to a set of expectations dictated by adults.** Adults cultivate ways for children to be with God in deepening friendship, keeping the focus on God and leaving the results to the Holy Spirit. Spiritual formation for children is significantly different from traditional Christian education which focuses on knowledge of Scripture (intellectual assent) and obedient application (behavioral modification). Formation is relational and personal, as governed by the Holy Spirit as the child hears, reads, and engages with Scripture in age-appropriate ways. Scripture is central to the spiritual formation of children, but transactional cognitive and behavioral changes are not sufficient evidence of spiritual health. Spiritual formation is evidenced by a growing, lifelong love for God, self, and others (relational changes) within the child.

6. **An overflow of love (as per the Great Commandment) is the evidence of a child’s spiritual formation.** Rather than a set of behavioral objectives, the child’s love for God, self, and others will overflow in his daily living as Jesus himself noted in Mark 12:28-31, which is a picture of the abundant life Jesus came to give (John 10:10). Knowing God’s Word is vitally important, but Biblical knowledge is not sufficient by itself to bring transformation. Spiritual formation is best nurtured and flourishes when Scriptural truth is lived out in community. The most formative community for a child is within the child’s own home. While the church has a significant responsibility to resource and support families by presenting role models, relationships, rituals, symbols, stories and opportunities to respond to God in tangible ways, the primary place where formation for a young child is nurtured is in the home. The love of God and for God will overflow through the lives of children when intentional homes and equipped faith communities partner with the Holy Spirit to nurture the Christian spiritual formation of children.

**In summary,** while certain aspects of spiritual formation for children are the same as those for adults, this formative period of life provides the faith community and the home an incredible window of opportunity to partner with the Holy Spirit in nurturing the child to have life in abundance. Childhood allows for greater movement towards God and for reducing the damaging distance from him. The sooner a young child experiences a personal relationship with God, the better prepared the child will be for life and for navigating the effects of the fallen world into which the child was born.