Spiritual Formation in Early Childhood
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How to Use This Tool
This Conference Classics process tool is designed to accompany an audio recording of a Willow Creek Association conference session. You can refer to the tool while listening to the session and use it afterward to dig deeper into the content, or you can use the tool to get the highlights without even listening to the session.

This tool consists of three parts:
- The PREVIEW section lists the problem that the session addresses and the recommendation that the speaker makes.
- The KEY CONCEPTS section breaks the session down into the core ideas most important for you to understand.
- The REFLECT section includes questions to help you practice, apply, and implement what you’ve learned. Although the questions are geared primarily to individuals, groups can use them as a discussion guide.
Key Concepts

**The Significance of Young Children's Spiritual Lives**

- Dwight Moody once told his wife that there were two and a half converts that day — two children and one adult — the children had their whole lives ahead of them to follow God, while the adult’s life was already half over.
- In recent church history, we’ve been moving away from seeing the children’s ministry as a mere babysitting service.
- Even evangelical churches have typically valued adult and youth evangelism more than children, so the majority of resources and staff have gone toward those ages, but the trend is shifting.
- Our young children are not second-rate — they’re the most vulnerable of the human race, and they need us to speak up for them.
- The budget decisions that are made reflect what church leaders believe about the spiritual lives of children.
- A spiritual life begins at conception.
- Much research has been done on the spiritual development of children.
- The book *The Simple Faith of Mr. Rogers* (by Amy Hollingsworth) talks about how Fred Rogers went from being a Presbyterian minister to a minister of children around the world using puppets instead of a pulpit.
  - Mr. Rogers modeled many spiritual practices we’re encouraged to do as adults (slowing down, silence), but he did so without mentioning God.
  - When he communicated and listened to young children, he believed that he was on holy ground.
  - He believed that the Holy Spirit was able to translate what each child needed to hear and see.
  - He modeled what Jesus did — calling the little ones to himself.
- In *Too Small to Ignore*, Wess Stafford describes how heaven and hell both have intentions for every child from the moment of birth — spiritual formation begins immediately.
- You are not just someone who works with young children — you are part of God’s strategic plan in the spiritual formation of a child.
- The parents need the church community to come alongside them and supplement what they’re doing.
- If we really believe that the battle between heaven and hell has begun from the day of birth, it’s confusing why children’s ministries aren’t always resourced.
- It may be because we don’t have the right belief system about the spiritual formation of a newborn.
- Every child is on a journey, and they matter to God.
- What happens inside of you when you see children?
  - Do you pray for them, make eye contact, or say hi when appropriate?
  - How do we bless the young kids in our lives and around us?