

December 2009

Make Christmas merry and meaningful for teenagers



The Christmas season probably means different things to different members of your family. As parents, you likely feel overwhelmed by your growing to-do list. Younger children feel like December can't go by quickly enough, as they keep adding to their wish lists. Teenagers, meanwhile, may feel like they've outgrown some of your family's Christmas traditions. The good news is that the holidays offer the most focused family time that kids will experience all year—and that traditions can change along with your family.

With a little intentional planning, you can make Christmas both fun and meaningful for your teenagers. Most importantly, you can emphasize that the holiday is about Jesus coming to earth to save us. Next, you can move the focus from "self" and receiving gifts to other people, serving, and giving. Instead of packing the Christmas season with constant activities, step back and enjoy some quiet times together. Talk about your favorite Christmas memories as a child. Spend some time with older or younger relatives. Complete holiday preparations such as shopping and baking together.

You can also start new traditions as your kids grow up. For example, decorate and hang stockings, and then fill them with affirmations, notes, and small goodies. Or do a "white elephant" gift exchange and then talk about the gifts we offer to God and what might be on God's Christmas wish list. When kids learn that Christmas isn't all about "me," they're ready to go deeper and experience true Christmas joy.

Reflect on these Advent meditations, adapted from "In Joyful Hope," a collection of Henri Nouwen's writings:

- 1. Waiting with patience**—Waiting patiently isn't like waiting for the bus to come, the rain to stop, or the sun to rise. It's an active waiting in which we live the present moment to the full in order to find there the signs of the One we await.
- 2. Waiting with discipline**—It requires discipline to let God and not the world be the Lord of our minds. Each day, society bombards us with images and words that demand our attention. Through prayer, we open ourselves to the power of God's grace.
- 3. Waiting with faith**—Faith is the deep trust that God's love is stronger than all the world's anonymous powers and can transform us from victims of darkness into servants of life.
- 4. Waiting with a promise**—Waiting is essential to the spiritual life. But waiting as a disciple of Jesus isn't empty waiting. We have a promise in our hearts that makes what we're waiting for already present.

(Creative Communications for the Parish)

Pulse

Check out these insights into what teenagers really want this Christmas.

- Last year, a poll asking teenagers what they wanted for Christmas had some surprising results. Although money and electronics topped the list, kids also said they wanted "something homemade just for me" and "something I will cherish for all my life."
(associatedcontent.com)
- In *Group Magazine's* annual survey of almost 30,000 Christian teenagers, 52% of kids said "Spending time with my parents is one of my favorite things to do." But almost 40% said "I'm around my parents a lot, but we rarely have long, enjoyable conversations." Ellen Galinsky of the Families and Work Institute says, "Not only is the amount of time the parents spend with their kids important, but what happens in that time is also important.... Particularly important to young people is that there's time to hang around together."



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

As you get ready for Christmas, chat with your kids about their holiday attitudes and wishes.

1. What are your favorite memories of Christmas as a child? How have your feelings about Christmas changed as you've grown up?
2. What old traditions would you like our family to keep, and what new traditions would you like us to start?
3. What does Christmas mean to you? How would you explain the meaning of Christmas to someone who doesn't know Jesus?
4. What are some ways we can honor the true meaning of Christmas this year?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. Your teenagers will focus on the true meaning of Christmas, rather than on the holiday's materialistic trappings.
2. Your teenagers will find joy in "family time" during the Christmas season—and all year long.
3. God will give your kids an abundance of peace, calmness, and rest as they celebrate Jesus' birth.
4. The meaning of Christmas will encourage your teenagers to serve other people and to share the good news of Jesus' love with them.

Verse of the Month

"I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!" (Luke 2:10-11)

On that first Christmas night, the angels announced a message of joy and "peace on earth" to the terrified shepherds. Our modern Christmas celebrations can be terrifying in their own right, with more chaos than peace. But because of our newborn Savior, we can step back from the "busyness" of Christmas and thank Jesus for his gift of eternal peace.

Insights from SimplyYouthMinistry.com

Youth ministry expert Jim Burns offers memorable family Christmas traditions you can try:

- Watch favorite Christmas movies together, or go to the movies on Christmas Day.
- Start traditions with meals; for example, eat chili or tamales before you go to Christmas Eve worship.
- Drive around and look at Christmas lights, possibly on your way home from church.
- Bake and decorate homemade cookies, allowing everyone to request their favorite kind.
- Read the Christmas story from Luke 2 before your family opens presents.
- Celebrate your family's ethnic heritage(s). Prepare a meal or try a tradition that honors your roots.
- Go caroling or, if weather permits, ice skating, sledding, or tubing.
- Keep a holiday memory journal or scrapbook. Have each family member contribute thoughts, drawings, or photos.
- Volunteer together. Serve at a food bank or visit a nursing home.
- Live out an annual family version of "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Designate a recipient, and then give him or her unique variations of all the "gifts." For example, five golden rings could be five glazed doughnuts.



MUSIC SPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: This popular metal band has been around since 1996. So far they've sold more than 11 million albums. They're one of only seven bands to have three consecutive studio albums debut at number one on the Billboard charts.

Albums: *Indestructible* (2008), *Ten Thousand Fists* (2005), *The Sickness* (2000)

What Parents Should Know: Disturbed tackles dark subjects such as domestic abuse, war, suicide, demons, and murder. The song "Inside the Fire" from their latest album is about the singer standing over the body of his girlfriend, who's just killed herself. The devil whispers in his ear that he should do the same. Dark.

What Disturbed Says: Singer David Draiman says the song "Divide" is meant to "detract from the idea 'oh, let's all be one, let's all be united!' ... [Expletive] that. Be yourself, be an individual, stand out, make your mark, make an impact."

Discussion Questions: Is unity a good or bad thing, and why? Is it possible to be united and still maintain your individuality? If so, explain. Read Ephesians 4:3-6. Why is unity so important in the church? What obstacles stand in the way of unity in families? of unity among Christians?

Christian Artist

Background: These alternative rockers have been together since 2000, but it wasn't until 2003 that they released their platinum-selling self-titled debut. They've toured with Disturbed on the Family Values Tour, as well as with the band Korn.

Albums: *Memento Mori* (2009), *Flyleaf* (2003)

What Parents Should Know: The band dislikes the label "Christian band" because people don't refer to other occupations that way. But they also don't hide the fact that they're a band of Christians. The title of their latest album means "remember you will die," and many of their lyrics speak to their faith.

What Flyleaf Says: Regarding their decision to tour with secular bands, singer Lacey Mosley asks people to pray for the bands they're touring with and those bands' fans. "You can pray that we have strength and enjoy all the fruits of the Holy Spirit. [Pray] that we would love each other and that people would know us by our love."

Discussion Questions: Is it wrong for Flyleaf to tour with bands that oppose Christianity? Why or why not? What challenges and opportunities does that present? Read John 17:9-18. Should Christians fear the world? If so, explain. How can we know when we're aligning too much with the world?

FILMWATCH

Movie: *Avatar* (releases Dec. 16)

Genre: Action-Adventure

Rating: Not Yet Rated

Synopsis: Humans have found a mineral-rich planet, and in order to plunder it, they must use "avatars." These genetically bred human-alien hybrids allow people to breathe the air and interact with the planet and its inhabitants.

Discussion Questions: Do you ever wish you could be someone else? If so, explain. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be, and why? Why do people try so hard to change how they look? Can altering your appearance ever change you on the inside? Explain. Read Psalm 139:14. What's your reaction to this verse? Does it change how you view yourself? If so, explain.



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