

The PARENT Link

April 2011

For parents of teens – United Methodist Edition



Bible Focus

“Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.”

Proverbs 22:6

[Add Church or Youth Group Name]

Parents Play Key Role in Teenagers' Faith Growth

Recently, my oldest child asked why people “give stuff up” for Lent. I told him sacrificing treats is one way to remember Jesus’ sacrifice. “I don’t think that’s as good as giving up your son,” Tanner responded. He’s right. Too often, Lent is an excuse to give up a vice or luxury we shouldn’t be indulging in anyway. Instead, we should practice meaningful self-denial or put aside something that gets in the way of our relationship with God.

Many young people wonder if God matters and if the church is relevant. This is due, in part, to adults’ low expectations of teenagers. They’re crying out for a challenging faith; we offer giving up cupcakes. Is that a faith worth living or dying for? Here’s an action plan:

- Give up something individually or as a family that hinders your relationship with God—or add something that boosts faith growth.
- Tell your kids about sacrifices you make for them and that you choose to give these up because you love them.
- Go to Easter service together and discuss how Lent prepared you to experience the joy of the celebration.

—Hank Hilliard, Young People’s Ministries, hhilliard@GBOD.org



Practical Help

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Tips, statistics, and discussion questions to help you connect with your teenagers

Going Deeper

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Insight for parents about adolescent spirituality.

Media Spotlight

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Musicians Avril Lavigne and Kirk Franklin, the movie *Soul Surfer*, and the video game *Bulletstorm*.



TIPS

In his groundbreaking book *Soul Searching*, researcher Christian Smith offers parents this advice:

Challenge your teenagers in their faith walk. Don't be afraid of them—or afraid of teaching or relating to them.

Don't worry about not seeming “cool” when you relate important truths to your teenagers.

Nurture your overall relationship. Teenagers benefit the most from significant bonds with mature, loving adults. Kids want to have respected grown-ups spend time with them “through the stuff of their ordinary lives,” Smith says.

Get involved with your church's youth ministry. For better or worse, you're the most important “pastor” your teenagers will ever have.

Look for ways to get involved with faith-formation efforts in the community, school, and church.

Give kids opportunities to practice, practice, practice articulating their faith. Walk through scenarios where kids can talk about their beliefs.

THE VIEW

- Half of teenagers surveyed said faith is “very important” or “extremely important” in their lives.

(National Study of Youth and Religion)

- 65% of Christian teenagers agreed with this statement: “I'm more interested in experiencing God than in gaining knowledge about him.”

(*Group Magazine*)

- 38% of teenagers list parents as their top spiritual-growth influencers. (Only 7% of kids cited youth leaders and pastors.)

(Barna Research Group)



For Discussion

How important is your faith to you? How relevant does it seem to your everyday life, and why?

What kinds of spiritual examples do you experience, and how do they affect you?

How has your faith grown and changed recently? How has your faith been challenged?

How can I better support your relationship with God?



By Steve Merritt

GOING DEEPER

Expert Insights for Parents of Teenagers

At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, youth-culture expert Walt Mueller discusses teenage spirituality:

Generally speaking, today's teens are a consciously spiritual bunch. They're on a deliberate quest to understand and embrace faith. While this is good news, it comes with distinctive issues related to our unique culture. Because swimming in the soup of our post-modern times is pushing more kids away from a belief in absolute truth, orthodox biblical Christianity is often looked down on with scorn. Christians believe they alone have spiritual truth, so more kids are struggling with that exclusivity.

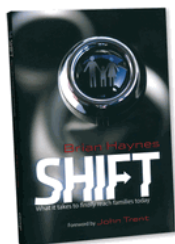
In addition, the postmodern emphasis on feelings above rationality leads teenager to look for a faith system that's emotional. Globalization and immigration have opened the door for a variety of previously foreign and unfamiliar faith systems, especially eastern spirituality and mysticism, to find a new home in American youth culture.

All this has combined to create an environment where kids step up to the spiritual buffet table to load their plates with a personally created faith system that combines a variety of elements into a personal mix put

together to satisfy their spiritual palate and hunger. Varied day-to-day tastes allow them to change from day to day.

Parents must consistently discuss and live out the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. We were made to follow him—and him alone. Young people won't be able to experience a full relationship with God until they leave the "buffet table" behind.

Resource



In *Shift* (Group), Pastor Brian Haynes offers practical ways that parents can guide their kids through important faith milestones.

MAINSTREAM MUSIC



AVRIL LAVI-

Background: This Canadian artist began her career at 16. Her pop-punk style plugs into teenage angst, relationships, and the skater/punk culture. Lavigne's new single "What the Hell" showcases her use of bad language to convey her point. Lavigne's charity has partnered with Easter Seals and Make-A-Wish.

Albums: *Goodbye Lullaby* (2011), *The Best Damn Thing* (2007), *Let Go* (2002)

What Lavigne Says: "I try to remember that even doing one small thing each day to help others really can make a huge difference."

Discussion Questions: Why do people give to charities? Do Christians have more of a responsibility to help people in need? Why or why not? Read aloud Deuteronomy 15:7-11. What are some reasons people give for not being more charitable? How can you become more charitable?

CHRISTIAN MUSIC



KIRK FRANKLIN

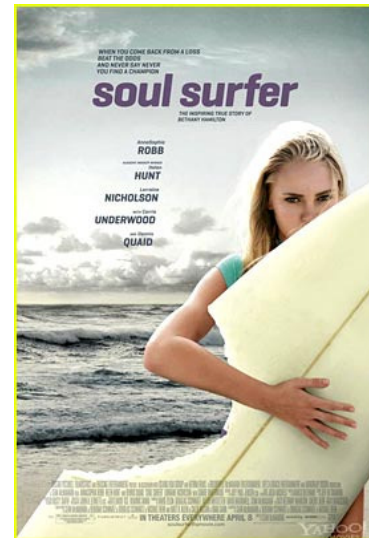
Background: Franklin directed church choirs at a young age, but a rebellious streak in high school led to a pregnant girlfriend. He's led popular groups such as One Nation Crew but also had great solo success. Recently, Franklin admitted a porn addiction that nearly cost him his marriage.

Albums: *Hello Fear* (2011), *The Fight of My Life* (2007), *The Nu Nation Project* (1988)

What Franklin Says: "Let's say that you're healed from your past, but [you're] associated with someone else that's not healed. So when you run into that person ... it can maybe strike up something."

Discussion Questions: Describe someone who's positively influenced you. Should we stay clear of people who aren't Christians? Why or why not? Read aloud Matthew 16:5-12. What "yeast" is Jesus talking about? How can we guard against the bad yeast we encounter?

MOVIE



Movie: *Soul Surfer*

Genre: Drama

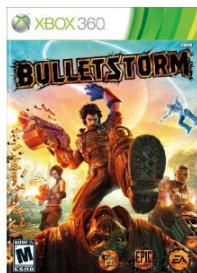
Rating: PG

Synopsis: This film is based on the true story of surfer Bethany Hamilton, who lost her arm in a 2003 shark attack. The story shows how Bethany's faith kept her strong amid loss.

Discussion Questions: If you were in Bethany's situation, would you give up doing what you loved? Why or why not? What are some things you trust in? How would you change if you lost those things? Read aloud Matthew 7:24-27. Why doesn't belief in God keep life's storms from happening to us? What are some storms you've experienced? How has your faith helped you weather them?

For more media discussions and ideas, check out www.MinistryandMedia.com.

VIDEO GAME



Bulletstorm —This game for Xbox 360, PS3, and PCs is more than your usual first-person shooter. While some games rated M could arguably be okay for older teenagers (*Halo: Reach*, for instance), *Bulletstorm* should be kept far, far away. In addition to the intense violence, the game is hypersexualized, with achievements that have sexual slang terms, such as "gang bang" and "three-way." With these phrases being uttered every few seconds on the screen, impressionable teenagers can't help but be desensitized.

April 2011

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Regular Youth Activities		Orbit Outreach: 3:15—5:15				
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Regular Youth Activities						
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Regular Youth Activities		Orbit Outreach: 3:15 - 5:15				
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Easter Sunday - No Youth Activities						