

Help your teenagers stay connected to God

A close relationship with God is both the core of our Christian life and our highest end as human beings. As we learn about God and develop intimacy with him, our faith morphs from a "practice" to a lifestyle. Worship and Bible study not only help us experience God, they strengthen us for life's daily challenges.



When *Group Magazine* recently surveyed 20,000 Christian teenagers about their priorities, the top vote-getter was "praying and developing a relationship with God." But many youth ministers were surprised by those survey results. "Kids' actions communicate something different," noted one youth minister. "They're so busy...that it seems the first things to get dropped are the items listed as priorities." Another wrote, "My teens struggle with prayer, and many tell me a relationship with God is hard, confusing, and at times not relevant."

Taking time to "Be still, and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10) is challenging in our always-on-the-go culture. Kids are surrounded by noise—and have a lot of noise in their hearts. Distractions, worries, fears, and hurts often make a relationship with God more difficult, but they also make it more important.

Kids look to their parents as examples of how to stay connected to God. If you've kept this relationship private, let your teenagers in on ways you stay in touch with God. Also share ways it has sustained you through life's ups and downs, and assure your kids that the same will be true for them, too.

Dare 2 Share Ministries president Greg Stier discusses staying connected through prayer:

Prayer is emptied of its power when it's for public show or word-count dependent. How fancy our prayers sound doesn't matter to God; it's whether or not we actually believe he will answer our prayers. In James 1:6, God tells us how a Christian should approach God in prayer: "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (NIV).

We must teach our teenagers to pray in faith. How? By showing them how to pray! Every time you pray with your kids, you have an opportunity to exemplify authentic, faith-filled conversations with God. Remind teenagers of the awesome encouragement prayer brings. When you feel the odds are stacked against you, just imagine the scene in heaven as the Holy Spirit and Jesus himself are praying for you in that very moment.

Prayer is an unbelievable honor. The way is open through the sacrifice of Christ for us to have direct access to the supreme power in the universe.

Take time to pray. Make time to pray. Run to Jesus! Kneel by his side and the Spirit's side at heaven's prayer bench, and watch what happens.



Search Institute researchers surveyed more than 7,000 kids in eight countries (including America) to gauge how teenagers around the world view their relationship with God. Some responses:

- 55% of teens surveyed say their "spirituality" has grown stronger over the last few years, and 43% of U.S. kids say they're both spiritual and religious.
- What nourishes teenagers' spiritual lives?
 - Nature—87%
 - Listening to or playing music—82%
 - The influence of parents—76%
 - Spending time helping others—76%
 - Being alone in a quiet place—74%
 - The influence of friends—71%
- What activities feed kids' spiritual growth?
 - Reading books—47%
 - Praying—44%
 - Helping others—44%
 - Attending religious worship or prayer services—40%



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Use these discussion starters to connect with your teenagers about connecting with God:

1. How close do you usually feel to God, and why? How do you view him: as a friend? a Savior? a judge? other?
2. What does it mean to “be still” before God? What makes that challenging?
3. What happens in your life when you don’t keep in touch with God? What times and places are best for you to pray, and why?
4. How does reading the Bible make you feel about God? about yourself? What are your favorite verses?
5. How can we encourage others as we walk with God?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. Your teenagers will keep their relationship with God as a top priority.
2. Your teenagers develop a strong prayer life and dig into God’s Word to grow closer to him.
3. The relationship your kids develop with God will help them persevere during difficulties and will encourage them to reach out to others.
4. Your own connection with God stays strong and that you set a positive example for your teenagers in this area.

Verse of the Month

“The Lord is close to all who call on him, yes, to all who call on him in truth. He grants the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cries for help and rescues them. The Lord protects all those who love him.” (Psalm 145:18-20)

We aren’t the only participants in maintaining a relationship with God. Thankfully, he’s in charge of that, too. God gives us a desire to know him. He reaches out by answering our prayers, meeting our needs, and providing fellow Christians to build up our faith. Jesus, who has endured human struggles, intercedes to God on our behalf. And the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, guiding us to truth and true life.

Going Deeper

On SimplyYouthMinistry.com, Andy Blanks, Student Life’s resource development director, writes about lessons he learned by setting aside time for teenagers to connect with God



When I led my youth group in a “spiritual disciplines” retreat awhile back, I was overwhelmed at the number of teenagers who, when given an opportunity, chose to spend meaningful time cultivating their relationship with Christ.

Most teenagers took the time seriously, practicing a mix of some guided Scripture meditation and some in-depth study based on a study guide I had created for them. All in all, it was a great event, a time of spiritual recharging for kids and adults alike. Throughout the weekend, kids came up to me saying how much fun they had praying and listening.

The main thing I learned is that the Holy Spirit is capable of moving in the lives of all Christians, even the most noncommitted, spiritually distracted teenager. The key is that the Holy Spirit must be given room to move! That was the point of our weekend, to provide intentional room for an encounter. We made the time, and the Holy Spirit came through. I watched life-change happen before my eyes.

I also learned that even though I talk the good talk about guiding teenagers deeper into their relationship with God, I had some significant-if-secret hesitations about how a weekend centered on “disciplines” would go over. Well, the kids proved me wrong at every turn. And this is one time I was glad to be proven wrong.

MUSICSPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: The 23-year-old dance-pop singer has made a huge splash on the music scene in a very short time. In 2009, she sang on Flo Rida's hit "Right Round." Her lone album came out in January 2010 and debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard charts. She's already played on *Saturday Night Live*.

Album: *Animal* (2010)

What Parents Should Know: Keshha has said she's all about having fun—that if it feels good, you should do it. Lyrics from her hit "Tik Tok" refer to drinking and partying. She sees herself as working to empower women, but that's probably not the type of power parents want for their girls.

What Keshha Says: "I wrote every song on this album so it's a really accurate description of my life over the last four years. I'll write about a guy, I'll write about a girl, I'll write about a bar, I'll write about an old guy hitting on me..."

Discussion Questions: Does Keshha's life appeal to you? Why or why not? What are the dangers in living for only fun things? How would living that way make you happier, or not? Explain. Read aloud Matthew 5:1-10. How does Jesus' idea of happiness compare with the world's idea? Is happiness a choice? What can you do to be happier?

Christian Artist

Background: This pop-punk band got its start playing in youth group and went on to play youth camps, where they got their name. "Me and Jesus" was a No. 1 song on Christian charts and won a Dove Award. The band tours frequently, opening for bands such as Kutless and Newsboys.

Albums: *Everything Is Different Now* (2010), *Expect the Impossible* (2008), *All Gas. No Brake.* (2005)

What Parents Should Know: Stellar Kart is one of many pop-punk bands in Christian music. Their positive message is a wonderful antidote to the disillusionment of many secular bands in that genre.

What Stellar Kart Says: "The album certainly has a positive outlook on life and [is] full of hope. It's a realization that we can't make it though this life on our own...but we can do it with God's help by allowing him to step in and take control."

Discussion Questions: Do you feel you have control of your life? Why or why not? How do you deal with feeling out of control? Read aloud Deuteronomy 4:39. What does trying to control our lives say about our faith? How much responsibility do we have for our own lives? How much control of your life are you willing to hand over to God, and why?

FILMWATCH

Movie: *The A-Team* (releases June 11)

Genre: Action-Adventure

Rating: Not yet rated

Synopsis: In this remake of the 1980s hit TV show, a group of former soldiers are arrested for a crime they didn't commit. They escape from prison and become soldiers of fortune, fighting on the side of justice.

Discussion Questions: Have you ever been blamed for something you didn't do? How did you react to that? Have you ever wrongly accused someone else? How did it make you feel when you discovered the truth? Read aloud Genesis 39:6-23. How did Joseph react to being falsely imprisoned? What were the consequences of his actions? When and how should we fight against false accusations?



