

Discover Ways to Renew the 'Spark' of Kids' Faith

March 2010



"Apathy is a sort of living oblivion," wrote 19th-century editor Horace Greeley. A common refrain from many parents is that their teenagers are lackluster, or hard to "fire up" - especially when it comes to God and the church. Ironically, the apathy epidemic today just may have its roots in overactivity.

"With so much going on for school and traveling teams, [kids] have no time for church, youth groups, and even family time," says one youth minister in Group Magazine's "State of Youth Ministry" report. "Kids are getting pulled in so many directions." Other respondents said their biggest struggles are kids whose lives are compartmentalized and who don't make Christ a priority for daily living.

Youth ministers said they're dying for teenagers who are engaged and passionate about their faith, ready and willing to commit their lives to Jesus. On the positive side, they said they've noticed a hunger among today's teenagers for "deeper" things, as well as a move from "flash" to substance.

So how can you fan the flames of your kids' faith and convince them to invest in it 100 percent? First, lift up your teenagers in prayer often. The Holy Spirit is the one with the power to change hearts and lives. Next, make faith applicable to everyday life. Don't limit talk of God to Sundays. Tie in Scripture to issues that kids face at home, at school, and in their activities and jobs. Make Christ a priority in your own life, and show kids by example what a committed Christian walk looks like. If necessary, cut back your busy schedule to focus more on God. Finally, harness kids' hunger to go deeper by asking them tough questions and issuing spiritual challenges. Teenagers seeking a cause won't find a better one than Christ.

Veteran youth pastor Jason Ostrander offers these tips for breaking through with kids who are jaded, bored, or apathetic:

1. Be yourself. When you are who you say you are, unengaged kid are likely to crack open their windows wider. Doing an honest assessment of yourself will turn into a priceless gift to yourself and your kids.
2. Be a passionate, engaged observer. Spend time studying your teenagers and work hard to understand what makes them tick. If we're not fully awake to our kids, we're just as dead as they are. Jesus always paid remarkable attention to the details people unconsciously revealed to him.
3. Don't treat kids or spending time with them like just another box on your to-do list. The last thing kids want to be is your latest project.
4. Take a risk. Engage teenagers through their (sometimes) hidden passions by providing a niche for them to succeed or grow. Often they need something beyond the "status quo" to get them going.

Pulse

Check out these interesting statistics about how brightly people's fires are burning for God:



* Sixty percent of Christian teenagers lose interest in church activities and organized religion, despite their previous participation.

(Barna Group)

* Researcher George Barna uses the term "casual Christians" to describe the two-of-out-three adults who are spiritually middle-of-the-road or even ambivalent about their faith.

* On the positive side, in a survey of almost 30,000 Christian teenagers from last summer, the majority of kids were passionate about their faith. Seventy-seven percent of Christian teenagers disagreed with this statement: "I've met a lot of people who seem more interesting to me than Jesus does."

(Group Magazine)

Great Questions to ask your kids

Attack indifference by using these discussion starters with your teenagers:

1. What things or people are you most excited about right now? Do God and your faith excite you? Why or why not?
2. Which of your beliefs are you the most and the least passionate about, and why? What inspires you to stand up for something or someone?
3. In what ways is living a Christian life an adventure? What "equipment" is needed to embark on this trip?
4. What would you say to a friend who had lost his or her "spark" for God?



Focus on Prayer

1. Your teenagers will be touched by God's love and become passionate about him - and passionate about living for him.
2. God will open a window for you to penetrate through any apathy that your teenagers experience.
3. Your teenagers will feel like their faith in God has been set on fire.
4. God will use you as an example to show that following Christ is the most worthwhile pursuit a young person can undertake.

Verse of the month

"Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of [the believers]. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:3-4)

On Pentecost, known as the church's birthday, the early Christians were literally set aflame for God. Thanks to the Holy Spirit's power and presence, more than 3,000 people were added to the church that day. The same Holy Spirit can work miracles in hearts and lives even now.



Going Deeper

Want to help your teenagers "blaze with passion" for God? Read this insightful essay by youth minister Mike Kupferer, posted on SimplyYouthMinistry.com.

After cleaning up debris in my yard for three days, I had two large piles of brush to burn. The first pile ignited after I added an outside source (dry paper), and the fire never went out. I had to keep watch over the flames to keep them controlled, but I never had to relight it. No matter what I threw on top of the fire, it just kept burning. I couldn't extinguish it. Finally, it grew smaller and smaller once I ran out of items to burn. Even once I thought it was dying, all I had to do was add something flammable and it would immediately catch on fire.

The second pile was a little more frustrating. I added dry paper and sticks to get it going. It would catch on fire for a minute, and then the flame would go out. I kept adding more and more pieces of paper, sticks, and anything else I thought would catch on fire. Each time it burned for only a little bit. I had to constantly watch it if I wanted it to keep burning, because if I walked away for long, it would go out.

Then I remembered this principle: I know God is the One who ultimately molds and shapes young people, but the reality is that we have a responsibility to encourage and challenge them, too. And because of that, you cannot handle two fires the same way.

Some kids need a constant flow of outside resources to help their fires for God to burn. Without outside help, they will quickly become apathetic toward God. Then there are the kids who consume whatever is given to them and burn more intensely for God. When you challenge and stretch them, they aren't overwhelmed - they excel. One thing is true about both types of kids, though. Without something in their lives to help them burn, they'll lose their passion for God. Care enough to not give up. Fuel the fire, and never stop.



Music alternative

Background: These award-winning Canadian rockers rose from anonymity to become one of the biggest names in modern worship. They are staples of ministry conferences around the world.

Albums: The Saving One (2010), Beauty in the Broken (2006), Starfield (2004)

What Parents Should Know: This band has a heart for teenagers; they've led worship at the teen-centered Dare2Share events, as well as numerous youth ministry conferences. Their worship music is a mix of hard and soft but is always heartfelt and powerful.

What Starfield Says: Singer Tim Neufeld says the song "Rediscover You" is a spot-on description of his own journey with Christ. "I desperately find myself needing to rediscover the things of God - I want real, and I want passionate. I want to relearn 'walking by faith.'"

Discussion Questions: How often do you think about God? Why is it so easy to be distracted from your relationship with God? Read aloud Psalm 37:1-9. What promises and encouragement do these verses offer? How should we respond to God? What does it mean to walk by faith? How can you grow closer to God and trust him more?

musicspotlight



Albums:
Need You Now (2010), Lady Antebellum (2008)

Background: This country band formed in 2006 and got their big break singing backup on a Jim Brickman song. Lady Antebellum's debut album went platinum, and their recent follow-up debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard charts. They were named 2009's best new country music group.

What Parents Should Know: "Hello World" talks about seeing God's miracles in life. But the group sometimes sings of being drunk and having one-night stands, too.

What Lady Antebellum Says: Singer Hillary Scott says the hit single "Need You Now" is about the ups and downs of relationships. "[We] know what it's like to get to that point where you feel lonely enough that you make a late-night phone call that you...could regret the next day," she says.

Discussion Questions: When do you feel lonely? Why is loneliness so devastating? What are some different ways people deal with loneliness? Read aloud Isaiah 41:9-10. How does God make his presence known in our lives? What are some productive ways to combat feelings of loneliness? How can you seek out people who are lonely?



filmwatch

Clash of the Titans (releases April 2)

Rating: Not yet rated

Genre: Action, Fantasy

Synopsis: Born of a god but raised as a man, Perseus (Sam Worthington) loses his family to Hades (Ralph Fiennes), vengeful god of the underworld. With nothing left to lose, Perseus volunteers to lead a dangerous mission to defeat Hades before he can seize power from Zeus (Liam Neeson) and unleash hell on earth.

Discussion Questions: How powerful is Satan, compared to God? How would it affect your faith if God were vulnerable and could be defeated? Read aloud Mark 10:27. What do these verses say about God's power? Is God in control of everything that happens in our lives - even the bad stuff? Explain.