

Work as a family to conquer materialism and greed

'Tis the season to be bombarded by advertising and make wish lists of "must have" items. For many teenagers, providing relatives with Christmas ideas can be a challenge because they already own so much stuff. In a culture glutted with images of the "good life," many kids have a collective case of luxury gout. According to the Pew Research Center, 81% of young adults say getting rich is their first or second most-important life goal.

C.S. Lewis knew the dangers of money and wealth when he warned, "Prosperity knits a man to the world. He feels that he is finding his place in it, while really it is finding its place in him." Youth-culture expert Walt Mueller says the nonstop marketing barrage teenagers face is actually shaping their lives. They define themselves by their possessions, are vulnerable to impulse buying, work more in order to have more, understand life primarily in economic terms, are competitive rather than compassionate, get locked into consumer debt at earlier ages than ever before, and have become more and more spiritually hungry. Materialism steers us away from the one true God and toward worldly idols, leaving us empty.



The good news, Mueller says, is that when emptiness grows, kids' hunger longs to be fed even more. The Christmas season is the ideal time to show teenagers that God's gift of Jesus, not material things, gives them purpose, meaning, and hope. Read on for ways you can share this important message with your kids this holiday season.

Has Christmas become too commercial in your family? If so, try celebrating an old-fashioned holiday. These ideas, adapted from *A Simple Christmas* by Lori Salkin and Rob Sperry (Andrews McMeel Publishing), can help your family keep Jesus' birth festive, fun, and meaningful.

- Lavish your kids with time, not money. During Christmas break, take each of them on a surprise adventure.
- Celebrate the 12 days of Christmas with a fun, free family activity or outing each day.
- Devote a day to making or baking gifts for one another.
- Simplify your Christmas decorations to stay focused on Jesus.
- Make a cookbook of favorite recipes for family members and friends.
- Make a CD or tape of your family's favorite Christmas music.
- Give relatives "family gifts" instead of individual gifts.
- Collect prayers from family and friends for a Christmas prayer book.
- Recycle gifts or, for maximum laughter, exchange low-cost white elephant gifts.
- Volunteer together, donating your time to help people in need.

Pulse

Many of today's young people have dollar signs in their eyes:

- When senior highers were asked what makes them happy, 74% said money. (Harris Interactive)
- 61% of all teenagers say they love to shop at pricey stores. That's up 10 percentage points in just four years. (Harrison Group/VNU Teen Trend Report)
- Researchers found that teenagers who have supportive, accepting parents and peers in their lives are less materialistic. (physorg.com)
- Some research suggests that the negative effects of rampant materialism can be tempered by teaching kids to appreciate what they have. Teens who are both highly materialistic and highly thankful tend to say they like to spend their time helping other people. (Harris Interactive)



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Begin a conversation about materialism by asking these questions:

1. What's on your wish list this Christmas, and why? Which items are "needs," and which are "wants"? Explain.
2. What do your possessions say about you? How would you life—or status—change if you suddenly lost them all?
3. How does materialism affect your relationship with God? How does it affect your celebration of Christmas?
4. How can our family have a meaningful "nonmaterialistic" Christmas this year?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. Your teenagers will realize that their spiritual blessings from God are more valuable than any earthly possessions they could acquire.
2. Your teenagers are protected from the influence of advertisements and peer pressure to relentlessly buy and consume.
3. Your family can stay focused on God's precious gift of his Son, Jesus, this Christmas.

Verse of the Month

"Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." (Luke 12:15)

Almost half of Jesus' parables are about money and wealth. In Luke 12, Jesus describes a rich fool who planned to build bigger barns for all he owned. But the man died that night, and everything he'd worked for went to other people. Verse 21 says, "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

Going Deeper

On SimplyYouthMinistry.com, Walt Mueller, founder of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, offers these insights to help parents evaluate their attitudes about materialism:

The fact that we often define ourselves by our work and worldly possessions hasn't been lost on our kids. Our job as parents is to help our teenagers redefine their idea of success by equipping them to understand and live out God's definition of success. Of course, this requires that we understand and live out his definition ourselves. Here are some questions to ponder as you examine your life and lifestyle. Take the time to answer them seriously. You might even want to ask your children for their impression of what you're teaching.



- What do you want to pass on to your children?
- How much does your lifestyle reflect and conform to the values prevalent in our consumer society?
- If your kids were to write out a definition of success based on how you define it through your lifestyle, what would they write?
- How competitive are you, financially? Are you jealous when someone acquires something you don't have?
- Do you mope about what you *don't* have rather than express joy about those things you *do* have?
- When will you know you've "made it"?
- Do you possess your possessions, or do they possess you?
- Are you a cheerful, generous, and joyful giver?
- Do your faith and security rest in God or in your things?

One of the most important lessons to teach teenagers is that God owns everything that we have and are. As a result, every spending or lifestyle decision we make is a spiritual decision. My parents taught me that everything is God's and should be used according to his rules of stewardship and for his glory. They modeled thrifty living and generous giving, without becoming boastful about either. And they taught me that living hand-to-mouth isn't such a bad way to live when the hand feeding my mouth belongs to God.

MUSICSPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Dwayne Michael Carter Jr., or Lil Wayne, has been writing songs and singing since grade school. He was an honor student until dropping out of school at age 14 to pursue a music career. Lil Wayne, 28, has been very prolific, and his albums consistently reach the top of the charts.

Albums: *I Am Not a Human Being* (2010), *Rebirth* (2010), *Tha Carter III* (2008)

What Parents Should Know: Lil Wayne's albums contain parental advisories for vulgar lyrics. The rapper has been arrested for possessing drugs, including cocaine. He recently served a prison sentence for weapons charges. Lil Wayne, who's fathered children with four different women, was just hit with a new paternity suit.

What Lil Wayne Says: "I'm not an example for how people should live their lives. Never in my life would I ever set out to be an example for people."

Discussion Questions: Are celebrities obligated to live a certain way? If so, explain. Read aloud Titus 2:1-8. As a Christian, do you feel like people are watching how you live extra closely? Why or why not? Do you ever get the feeling they hope you'll mess up? Explain. How can we encourage one another to live Christlike lives?



Christian Artist

Background: The hip-hop band GRITS, which stands for Grammatical Revolution in the Spirit, consists of Stacy "Coffee" Jones and Teron "Bonafide" Carter. Both were dancers for Christian hip-hop pioneers dcTalk. During the past 15 years, GRITS' songs have been used in movies, TV shows, and video games.

Albums: *Quarantine* (2010), *Redemption* (2006), *The Art of Translation* (2002)

What Parents Should Know: These talented singers go out of their way to stay true to their Christian faith. They also reach out to people they disagree with. GRITS is involved in community-building programs, including efforts to raise awareness about racism.

What GRITS Says: "Our goal was to be 'special ops' to go into the world of hip-hop and seek and save. It was a push to tell our genre to step it up... never for money but to really be beacons of light."

Discussion Questions: What types of people have influenced you, and what made them so influential? Read aloud Matthew 16:5-12. Why did Jesus describe dangerous teachings as yeast? How can you guard against worldly influences? In what ways can you positively influence others for God?

Movie: *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (releases Dec. 10)

Genre: Adventure, fantasy

Rating: PG (for some frightening images and sequences of fantasy action)

Synopsis: Edmund and Lucy Pevensie, as well as their annoying cousin Eustace, are sucked into a painting and back to Narnia. They embark on a voyage across the seas to save Narnia and the magical beasts.

Discussion Questions: How do you cope with people when they start to annoy you? How did Jesus deal with difficult people? Read aloud Ephesians 1:3-6. What do these verses say to you about interpersonal relationships? How can we show love to others in God's "adopted" family? How might that change them—and you?

FILMWATCH

