

Model healthy priorities and time management



Last month, our back-to-school issue addressed stress and anxiety that teenagers face. Stress often results from out-of-whack priorities and poor time management—two areas many adults struggle with also. To gauge the priorities of Christian teenagers, *Group Magazine* surveyed 20,000 kids who represent a cross-section of youth group members. Although kids listed “praying and developing a relationship with God” as their top priority, youth leaders say kids’ actions don’t seem to back that up. “They’re so busy with school, work, sports, and so on—and their parents encourage it—that it seems the first things to get dropped are the items listed as priorities,” said a Pennsylvania youth leader.

Kids’ crazy schedules get a lot of blame for their stress and upside-down priorities. But now some research says hyper-busyness isn’t necessarily a bad thing—as long as teenagers’ goals and activities are clear and harmonious. Psychology professor Robert Emmons found that health and quality of life suffer when young people have what he calls “conflicting strivings.” Teenagers whose activities revolve like spokes around a “hub” (such as faith in Christ) are likely to thrive. Emmons’ team discovered that kids who pursue many strivings that are all connected somehow to their spiritual commitments generally have less conflict among them. Because their day-to-day goals center around their faith in God, these young people experience more harmony in their life, less stress, and less illness. This issue of “The Parent Link” explores ways you can help kids—and yourself—keep priorities in line and wisely use God’s gift of time.

Tenelle Porter and Justin L. Barrett, two former youth pastors now partnering with Robert Emmons (see above), suggest leading your teens through this exercise:

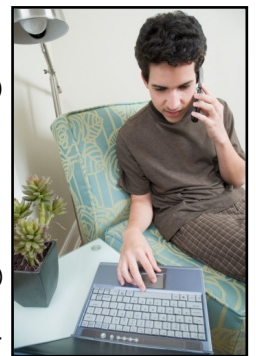
1. Ask your kids to think: “What do I typically try to do on most days?”
2. Have them come up with 10 “strivings” that characterize their day-to-day goals.
3. Ask them to rate their strivings on a scale of 1 to 10, from “least meaningful” to “most meaningful.”
4. Help your teenagers identify and cut out activities that don’t align with their most important strivings.

Young people may not be consciously aware when their strivings conflict. But whether or not they can articulate it, they crave meaning and coherence. They hate being conflicted, fragmented, and stressed. And they don’t want days chock-full of classes, sports commitments, and youth group meetings that all seem in conflict with each other. They’d like to know that the stuff packing their schedule is worth doing. And they need help—your help—figuring that out.



These statistics offer a peek into kids’ lives:

- Ninety percent of preteens feel stressed because they’re too busy. (KidsHealth.org)
- Nearly two-thirds of teenagers think “stress due to homework and activities” is a serious health problem. (Gallup Youth Survey)
- Only 20% of teenagers get the recommended amount of sleep (nine hours) each night.



(National Sleep Foundation)

- Kids spend an estimated 8 hours a day on digital media. (various sources)
- Teenagers’ top aspirations for when they’re 25: finish a college degree (93%), have a great-paying job (81%), make a difference via my job (80%), have a close relationship with God (72%), travel to other countries (71%), be active in a church (29%), be married (12%). (Barna Group)

Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Dive deeper into kids' thoughts about priorities and schedules by asking:

1. What are the three most important things in your life? Are they evident by how you spend your time? Explain.
2. How are your priorities similar to or different from those of your friends?
3. How well do you manage time? What would you do with more hours in each day?
4. What are our family's priorities, and how might they need to be rearranged?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. A relationship with God will always be your teenagers' top priority—and that it shows by how they live.
2. Your teenagers spend their time on meaningful activities that don't conflict with each other or with their beliefs.
3. You can set a positive example of managing your priorities and time.

Verse of the Month

"My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42)

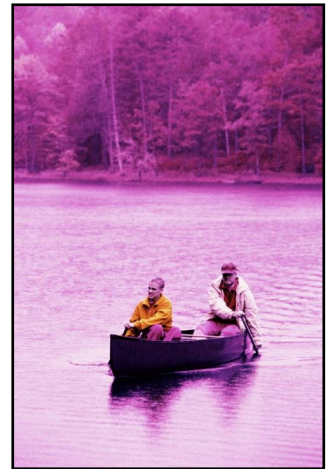
The "one thing" Jesus calls us to pursue is an intimate relationship with him. When we focus on him first, everything else will fall into place.

Going Deeper

At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, youth ministry veteran Jim Burns offers tips for helping busy people reprioritize their lives:

Time is short, life is precious, and money can't buy happiness. All we have is *right now*, and how we use that time is a tithe, of sorts, to the Lord. Of the 24 hours—the 1,440 minutes—available to us each day, parents actually spend very little time with their kids. In fact, the average father spends only *3 minutes a day* with his kids! If your priorities are out of whack, try these things:

- 1. Ruthlessly eliminate stress.** No one can get their priorities straight if they're constantly living "under the gun." If you feel so overwhelmed that you can't keep your priorities in order, first lighten your load.
- 2. Make daily solitude a priority.** Don't feel guilty or like you're "avoiding your family" for making time for yourself each day. It's a must, even if it's 15 minutes in the morning for quiet time with the Lord. No one will miss you if you "take 5" for yourself every now and then.
- 3. Develop a "blank slate" approach.** Begin and end each day with no agenda. Come before the Lord with open hands, mind, and heart. Let him set your day in motion and then give everything back to him at night—all your worries, cares, successes, and failures (see Psalm 91:1).
- 4. Give your family your best, not your "emotional leftovers."** It's very noble to "give your all" at work. But your family deserves the best you have to offer. They need you healthy, rested, happy, or, more importantly, *content*. No "table scraps" from your heart for them. Give them the main course. Then watch how your priorities change by themselves.
- 5. Don't wait for someone else to do this for you.** This is your life; these should be your priorities. Reprioritizing your life doesn't have to be difficult. But if you're like most of us, it does need to be done every now and then. And, with God's help, you can do it!



MUSICSPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: This metal-core band takes their name from the account of Cain and Abel. They recorded their debut album in 1999, when the band members were just 18. They've won numerous awards, and many of their albums have been chart-toppers. Last year, the band's drummer died of a drug overdose.

Albums: *Nightmare* (2010), *Waking The Fallen* (2003), *Sounding the Seventh Trumpet* (2001)

What Parents Should Know: Although Avenged Sevenfold's album and song titles often sound religious, they're *not* a religious band. The songs speak directly to teenagers and are filled with darkness, death, crude language, and a dismissal of God. One song on the new album is called "God Hates Us."

What Avenged Sevenfold Says: "We never really shove any kind of...political or religious beliefs on people."

Discussion Questions: How open are you to telling people about Jesus and the Bible? Is that the same as "shoving" a belief on someone? Why or why not? Read aloud 1 Peter 3:15-16. How do you feel when your evangelism attempts are rebuffed? What are some "non-shoving" ways you can tell people about Jesus?



Christian Artist

Background: Worship leader and songwriter Israel Houghton mixes rock, jazz, and gospel influences. He's often mentioned with his band, New Breed. Houghton, currently a worship leader at Lakewood Church in Houston, has won numerous Dove, Stellar, and Grammy Awards.

Albums: *Love God, Love People* (2010), *The Power of One* (2009), *New Season* (2001)

What Parents Should Know: Houghton is a big part of America's modern worship movement. His genre-bending songs cross cultural boundaries and bring diverse tastes to a place of worship.

What Houghton Says: About God's favor, Israel says, "I don't spend too much time dwelling on why God chose me. Many are called but few are chosen. I think the real hinge to that statement is acceptance by the one who's called. ... A lot of people are being called who are not answering."

Discussion Questions: What does it mean to have a calling on your life? Do you think God calls everyone? How does he do that? Why would people ignore God when he speaks? Read Exodus 3:4-14. Why was Moses hesitant to act on God's commands? How can you tell when God wants you to do something? Is obeying God hard or easy, and why? What might be your life calling? Explain.

Movie: *The Social Network* (releases Oct. 1)

Genre: Drama

Rating: PG-13 (for sexual content, drug and alcohol use, and language)

Synopsis: The story of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's Harvard years, the birth of the behemoth Web site, and the problems associated with its launch—including the accusation that Zuckerberg, now the youngest billionaire in history, stole the idea.

Discussion Questions: How much do you use sites such as Facebook, and why? What's the appeal of social networks? Are the connections people make on those sites meaningful? Why or why not? Read aloud Proverbs 18:24. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having many friendships? How do you decide which people to keep as mere acquaintances and which to truly befriend?

FILMWATCH

