

Help Kids Celebrate the Season by Serving



With some guidance and encouragement, your teenagers can transform Christmas from a time of receiving into a time of giving and serving. Winter break is an ideal opportunity for young people to donate some time and talents to other people.

Many high school students now have to perform community service to meet graduation requirements. But that shouldn't be the only reason kids step out of their comfort zone to help others. Instead, serving is our response to God's love and the great gifts he gives us.

Youth-group service projects and summer mission trips are tremendous times of growth and giving. Kids can reap the same benefits all year, however, by stepping out in faith to be Jesus' hands and feet to others.

You can help kids get started by finding one day of their break to set aside for service. Brainstorm some volunteer opportunities that meet kids' particular interests. Musical teenagers can perform Christmas music at nursing homes. Kids who like to be outside and work with their hands can help elderly neighbors with snow removal and other chores. Young people who are comfortable sharing their faith can assist with your church's Christmas program or evangelism efforts.

Even better, look for ways you can volunteer together as a family. Start a new Christmas tradition this year by putting your faith into action through serving.

Teenagers become more like Christ when they shift their focus to other people's needs. Youth pastor Eric Bryant, writing in *Group Magazine*, offers these insights into raising kids with servant hearts:

- 1. Expect more from your kids.** Stop praying only for minor behavioral changes; instead, share with teenagers the urgency of Jesus' call to go and make disciples.
- 2. Encourage kids to commit to a cause.** Having a cause creates community, life-transformation, and Christlikeness. After teenagers overcome any initial reluctance, their lives will never be the same.
- 3. Be a role model.** Serving and faith-sharing should be "do as I do" activities.
- 4. Help willing faith-sharers find receptive hearers.** Some of your kids' friends are likely experiencing brokenness and pain. Encourage your teenagers to invite those people to church events.
- 5. Recognize your young evangelists.** Service brings its own rewards, but kids also are encouraged when they hear that what they're doing matters.

Pulse

Today's teenagers are more eager than ever to reach out and help others. By doing so, they're obeying Christ and reaping other benefits, too:

- Each week, teenage volunteers (ages 12 to 17) donate about 3.5 hours of their time. (Independent Sector)
- More teenagers (59%) than adults (49%) volunteer. (Boys & Girls Clubs)
- Young people who learn about a volunteer opportunity directly from someone they know are three times as likely as other young people to volunteer. (Do Something)
- Teenagers who volunteer do better in school, have increased self-esteem, feel valued, meet new people, and acquire important life skills and memories.



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Take time out from your holiday preparations to discuss kids' attitudes toward giving and serving:

1. When you hear the word "Christmas," what comes to mind first? Do you tend to think about yourself or others right away, and why?
2. How would Christmas be different this year if we exchanged no gifts? Do you enjoy giving as much as (or more than) you enjoy receiving? Explain.
3. Are you excited or intimidated by the idea of volunteering? What would be your ideal service project, and why?
4. What are some ways you would like us to start serving together as a family?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. Your teenagers will experience joy and peace this Christmas, knowing that Jesus came to earth to die for their sins.
2. Your teenagers will place less emphasis on receiving gifts and more emphasis on giving of themselves.
3. God will open doors for your teenagers to serve other people in meaningful ways.
4. Your teenagers lives' will be changed as they volunteer and share their Christian faith with people who need Jesus.

Verse of the month

"And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'" (Matthew 25:40)

Our relationship with Jesus is directly connected to our treatment of his children. Everything we do to show concern for our fellow humans is done to him as well. So it's impossible to truly love Christ if we ignore our neighbors and their needs. We can't stand back and hope someone else will feed the hungry and visit the sick. Instead, we should pray for compassionate hearts and opportunities to reach out. By serving, we follow Jesus' ultimate example of sacrificing himself for our sins.

What's Up With Kids

Jesus commands his followers to "go" and serve others. At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, youth minister Tim Kurth writes about the amazing things that happen when young Christians leave their comfort zones to impact others with God's love:

- Volunteering encourages young people to be "salt and light" in practical, tangible ways.
- When teenagers are outside their comfort zones, they rely more directly on God.
- By serving others, teenagers gain a greater sense of value for every life. The "poor" and "less fortunate" become real and human.
- Teenagers' hearts are melted when they encounter people in need. They realize they're not just serving others but serving God. And they're growing closer to him in the process.
- Outreach offers opportunities to build relationships, which help kids' own relationship with God grow.
- Serving helps build other life skills, such as responsibility, compassion, acceptance, determination, endurance, and dependability.
- Volunteering helps establish a lifestyle of service in teenagers that often carries into adulthood.
- Many kids who are engaged in outreach experience a new hunger for God.
- In addition, young volunteers learn to appreciate how fortunate and blessed they really are.



MUSICSPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Pink, born Alecia Moore, is a 29-year-old Grammy-winning singer-songwriter. From an early age, she aspired to be a rock star. As a teenager, she began writing introspective lyrics. At 16, Pink joined a trio called Choice. When it disbanded, she went solo. "So What," the first single from *Funhouse*, has been Pink's biggest success.

Albums: *Funhouse* (2008), *I'm Not Dead* (2006), *Try This* (2003), *M!ssundaztood* (2001), *Can't Take Me Home* (2000)

What Parents Should Know: Pink's music is notoriously edgy and full of attitude. Many lyrics are about drinking, drugs, and partying. Pink also refers to her recent divorce. "Sober" deals with Pink wanting to feel as good sober as she does when she's high.

What Pink Says: About writing love songs, she says: "It's like letting down the armor and admitting I'm human. I'm a girl. We all want to be loved and love.... Love is supposed to be fun, but it can sometimes be really scary."

Discussion Questions: Why did God make us to love and be loved? Do you agree that love is scary? Why or why not? When do you have a hard time letting down your "armor"?

Christian Artist

Background: Three sisters comprise this Christian rock band. They became interested in music when their father worked at the Willow Creek megachurch. The girls sang backup for him and began writing songs. In 2002, they reached the finals of a Gospel Music Association vocal contest. BarlowGirl's first album received four GMA award nominations.

Albums: *Home for Christmas* (2008), *How Can We Be Silent* (2007), *Another Journal Entry* (2005), *BarlowGirl* (2004)

What Parents Should Know: BarlowGirl's songs range from ballads to guitar rock. The band advocates purity and waiting on God's timing. Following the message of Romans 12:2, BarlowGirl has chosen not to "conform" to the standards of the secular music industry.

What BarlowGirl Says: "What the world really needs now is Christians who aren't afraid to be bold, to speak up for the truth. And you don't need a microphone...to do that. You can start speaking out to the world around you right now."

Discussion Questions: How bold do you feel about sharing your faith? Is it sufficient to just witness by how you live, or must Christians take a stand by speaking up publicly for Jesus? Explain.

FILMWATCH

Movie: *Yes, Man* (releases Dec. 19)

Genre: Action/Drama

Rating: PG-13 for crude sexual humor, language and brief nudity

Synopsis: Carl Allen (Jim Carrey) is going nowhere. Then he signs up for a self-help program that emphasizes saying yes to everything. That word begins to transform Carl's life, as he receives a job promotion and begins a new romance. But Carl soon realizes that saying yes to everything might not be the best option for his life.

Discussion Questions: Would you describe yourself as cautious or uninhibited? Do you have a hard time saying no to people's requests? Why or why not? How important is it to try to please everyone in your life? When you sense that God is calling you to do something, is your first instinct to say yes or no to him? Explain. How might saying yes to God more often affect your life?

