

THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

The approaching holidays usually bring a mixed bag of emotions. Younger children are preparing their wish lists, while teenagers are often stressing about classwork and final exams. Meanwhile, many adults feel overwhelmed by their growing to-do lists. Amid the chaos, it's easy to lose sight of the real meaning of the Christmas season: Jesus coming to earth to save us from our sins.

Despite the stress, the holidays offer the most focused family time that kids will experience all year. Although teenagers may feel as if they've outgrown some of your family's traditions, realize that traditions can grow and change. Make Christmas merry and meaningful in these ways:

- Put less emphasis on materialism and receiving, and more emphasis on servanthood and giving.
- Schedule quiet times together and share your favorite holiday memories.
- Spend time with older or younger relatives.
- Take turns pairing up with different family members to complete holiday preparations such as decorating and baking.
- Start new traditions; for example, fill stockings with notes of affirmation or hold a white-elephant gift exchange. Most importantly, show teenagers that Christmas is all about Jesus, and help them experience joy in him.

Keep reading for more ideas—and have a blessed Christmas!

THE VIEW

- American parents say they spend an average of \$271 per child on Christmas gifts. One in 10 parents say they spend more than \$500 per child.
- In a recent study, *Generation Me* author Jean Twenge found that today's teenagers are more likely to want lots of money and nice things but less willing to work for them.
- Some research suggests the negative effects of rampant materialism can be tempered. Highly materialistic *and* highly thankful teens tend to say they like helping other people.

TIPS >>>

Here are even more memorable Christmas traditions you can try with your family:

- Watch favorite holiday films together, or go to the movies on Christmas afternoon.
- Bake one new kind of Christmas cookie every December.
- Prepare a meal or look into a tradition that honors your family's ethnic heritage.
- Live out an annual family version of "The 12 Days of Christmas," giving someone unique variations of the items. For example, five golden rings could be five glazed doughnuts.
- Go caroling, ice skating, sledding, or tubing.

- Start a new meal tradition; for example, eat chili or tamales before attending worship on Christmas Eve.
- Attend a Christmas pageant or concert at a church you don't normally attend.
- Drive around to look at lights and decorations in completely different neighborhoods.
- Volunteer together at a food bank, toy drive, or nursing home.
- Keep a holiday memory journal or scrapbook, with each family member contributing thoughts, drawings, or photos. Review it together every year.
- Film an annual family Christmas greeting, and post it online.

PONDER THIS

- How have your feelings about Christmas changed throughout the years?
- What traditions would you like your family to keep, and what new traditions would you like to start?
- How can you help your kids honor the true meaning of Christmas this year?





WHAT I TREASURE

Expert Insights for Parents of Teenagers

By Brian Berry

Youth minister Brian Berry offers some insights he recently learned about materialism. Use them to help you and your kids maintain perspective this Christmas:

Earlier this year, our family of seven was packed to the gills for a 16-day, 1,900-mile round trip from San Diego to the redwoods, rivers, and lakes of Northern California.

On this annual pilgrimage, we camped, swam, fished, cooked, laughed, and took lots of pictures. God answered our prayers for safety and memory-making, and we chalked up another family vacation as a win.

While I power-drove the state on

the 16-hour return trip, I thanked God for the escape and for all the blessings we enjoyed. And then I slowly began to feel the weight of work and normal life return.

As we pulled into the driveway at 10:30 p.m., though, I quickly discovered that life was anything but normal. The first tip was a car missing from our driveway. The next was seeing two busted doors. After taking a quick tour of the house, we realized that was just the beginning. Jewelry, money, tools, computers, and even my daughter's new school shoes were gone. With the stuff, the thieves took our family's "normal."

That wasn't exactly the type of

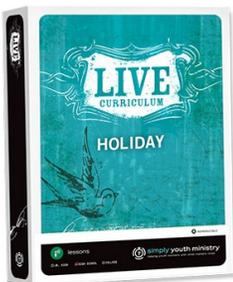
homecoming we'd anticipated. My kids asked "Why?" and I just wondered "Who?" Over dinner a few nights later, we talked about how broken our world is and why whoever robbed us needs Jesus more than we need our stuff back.

I told my kids how much I loved them and said that, while I don't have all the answers, I do know this one thing with greater certainty than ever before: Jesus was right. This world is filled with stuff that moth and rust can destroy and that thieves can break in and steal.

But there's no comparison. I'm storing my treasures in another world.

—Group magazine

RESOURCE



This Holiday edition of the *Live* curriculum series offers six weeks of powerful studies about various people from the Christmas story. Families can learn more about the Christmas narrative and how it relates to their lives today.

BIBLE FOCUS

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6, NIV

MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

MAINSTREAM MUSIC



ONE DIRECTION

Background: This English-Irish pop band exploded onto the charts after getting their start on the British version of *The X Factor*. “What Makes You Beautiful” is one of the best-selling singles ever. Their sound is a mix of dance pop and electropop, and they’re especially popular with girls. The band’s new album, described as “edgier,” broke Amazon’s record for the fastest-selling preorder—a record previously held by 1D.

Albums: *Midnight Memories* (2013), *Take Me Home* (2012), *Up All Night* (2011)

What One Direction Says: Band member Niall Horan says, “We’re trying to do something different from what people would think is the typical kind of boy band. We’re trying to do different kinds of music, and we’re just trying to be ourselves, not squeaky clean.”

Explore: You can watch the video for “Best Song Ever,” a hit single from their new album, here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_v9MY_FMcw.

CHRISTIAN MUSIC



MANDISA

Background: Mandisa got her start in the fifth season of *American Idol*, where judge Simon Cowell made disparaging remarks about her weight. Since then, she’s lost more than 100 pounds. Mandisa’s new album, about overcoming obstacles, debuted at #1 on the Christian charts.

Albums: *Overcomer* (2013), *What If We Were Real* (2011), *Freedom* (2009), *True Beauty* (2007)

What Mandisa Says: “Those who believe that Jesus is Lord are overcomers because *Jesus* is an overcomer. In 1 John 4:4, it says that the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. So it really isn’t about circumstances; it’s not about feeling like we’re an overcomer. We’re an overcomer because God says we are.”

Explore: Hear Mandisa talk about her new album, *Overcomer*, here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=htIA7IE5dXI.

MOVIES

The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug

Genre: Adventure, Fantasy

Rating: Not yet rated; likely PG-13

Synopsis: Burglar Bilbo Baggins and the band of dwarves continue their journey toward the Lonely Mountain, where they hope to take back their treasure from terrible dragon Smaug.

Our Take: Director Peter Jackson has stretched this simple story into three movies—a clear money grab. But teenagers and kids love the film, and Martin Freeman is charming as Bilbo.

47 Ronin

Genre: Adventure, Fantasy

Rating: PG-13

Synopsis: 47 masterless samurai seek one man’s help to get revenge on the warlord who threatens their land.

Our Take: The trailers feature a mix of martial arts, supernatural creatures, and Buddhist imagery. So you might want to debrief afterward.



VIDEO GAMES



Ratchet & Clank: Into the Nexus—This platformer is perfect for families. The game is fun. The writing is clever. And there’s nothing that you’ll worry about your kids seeing. (Rated E10; PS3)

Gran Turismo 6—This popular driving series pays an incredible amount of attention to detail. The game comes with 1,200 cars, and each one drives differently and realistically. (Rating pending, but probably E; PS3)