

ZION'S FAITH AT HOME MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER theParentLinkSM



December 2011

Reduce Possession-Obsession

For many families, it's a necessary pre-Christmas ritual: weeding through the old toys just to make room for new ones. Children typically have so much "stuff" they can't keep track of or play with it all. When possessions become a priority, it's time to re-evaluate your family's stance on stuff.

Many of us keep materialism in check most of the year but then slip at Christmas. Although presents aren't bad, you can ease the focus on materialism this season. For example:

Remind your children that Jesus is our best gift. Make sure they know that Christmas is Jesus' birthday and that God sent Jesus because he loves us. When you decorate for Christmas, leave a nativity scene manger empty. Wrap the baby Jesus figurine in a special box and open it on Christmas Eve. Then read Romans 6: 23b: "The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

Discuss the gifts we can give to God. Talk about how you respond when someone gives you a nice gift. Ask children what they can do that God would really like, such as pray or tell a friend about him. As a family, fill out gift cards listing what you can each give to God. Then hang the cards from your Christmas tree or wrap them and place them under your tree as gifts to God.



Encourage children to be generous. Emphasize the importance of giving, not receiving. As a family, participate in a service project for people in need. Help children experience the joy of giving by donating some time and money to others. Talk about how it feels to give, and discuss some ways you can continue doing so in the year ahead.

Buy Buy!

Each year, 8 to 12 year olds spend \$30 billion of their own money and influence another \$150 billion of parental spending.
(cbsnews.com)

PowerSource



Ask God:

1. To help your family focus on Jesus' birth this Christmas.
2. To reduce your emphasis on buying and receiving.
3. To help your children treasure God, not earthly things.

The Children of
Zion Lutheran Church
invite you to join them



December 18th at 11:00 am
for

Away in the Manger

Concordia Publishing House has devotions available to correspond with the Away in the Manger service. To purchase one of these devotions please go to www.cph.org.

OpenTheBook

“Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.”

Luke 12:15

Our earthly possessions won't matter or be of any use when our lives end. As Luke 12:21 says, the only thing that matters is having “a rich relationship with God.”

Teachable Moments

1. **It's a Boy!**—Create a birth announcement for Jesus, complete with a baby footprint, if you have or know a newborn. Read Luke 1:35-38 and discuss how Mary reacted when she found out she was going to be Jesus' mother.



2. **12 Days of Christmas**—As a family, come up with 12 acts of service you can perform together during December. For example, shovel snow for a neighbor, donate extra blankets to a homeless shelter, and deliver cookies and cocoa to homebound seniors.
3. **Shine On**—Read Matthew 2:2, about the Christmas star. Cut out poster board stars and paint your names on them with glow-in-the-dark paint. Tape the stars to the ceiling above your Christmas tree. Turn off the lights and share ways you can guide others to Jesus, the best gift of all.

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?

Family Experience: Reason for the Season

Take a break from shopping to focus on what happened on that “Silent Night” in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago.

- **Celebrate Stillness**—Gather several CD or music players and some Christmas music. Give everyone an index card and a pencil. Ask family members to write or draw what they'd like for Christmas. As they begin, play different Christmas music on all the players at the same time, at a loud volume. After one minute, stop the music. Say: “Now let's focus on something else, without the distraction.” Place a figure of baby Jesus in front of family members and say, “For one minute, pray silently and ask God to show you what's important about Christmas.” When time is up, ask: “What answers did you come up with? How was the noisy music like what often happens at Christmas?” Close in prayer, asking God to help your family find time to be quiet and thankful this season.



Bring the Story to Life—Have family members choose different characters in the Christmas account. Together, write and present a short drama based on each character's experiences. Discuss the different people's perspectives and why Christmas was important to each of them. Make simple costumes. Videotape the play and watch it while enjoying Christmas cookies. You may also want to post the video on a video-sharing site and send the link to family and friends as part of your annual Christmas greeting.

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.



TOP TEN!! ***A Walk Thru The Ten*** ***Commandments***

January 20-22nd 2012

It's Camp Lutherhaven's epic junior high weekend, where you can count on a fabulous speaker from Concordia University, awesome Bible study, meaningful worship, winter games, plenty of great Lutherhaven food, and awesome new friends – one *pretty amazing* weekend!

Sign-up by **December 18th** for the early bird discount of \$80. Please contact Kelly Mullin for more information.

Sixth-Eighth Graders



This month our Living Word group will be studying and having fun in small group on December 4th and then they will all be part of the Christmas program rehearsals on December 11th and 18th.

Lutherhaven at Zion!

December 2nd

4PM-7PM

Lutherhaven is sending their staff to Zion for an evening full of Lutherhaven Fun! Come celebrate Christmas with us and the Lutherhaven staff. Please sign up on the Faith at Home bulletin board.

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?
- Do you mope about what you *don't* have rather than express joy about those things you *do* have?
- Are you a cheerful, generous, and joyful giver?
- Do your faith and security rest in God or in your things?

Senior High Youth

December 4th: How We Change. Do people go back and forth between God and sin? Party crowd? Wrong Crowd? How important is it to have a good group of friends around you?

December 11th: Some will be at the Christmas Program rehearsal. Let's make this fun! Bring your favorite Bible verse to share. What is your favorite memory from this year?

December 11th: Christmas Party, after second service!
Big competition looming: Ginger Bread House decoration!
12 to 2 pm, lunch provided.

Mission Trip Meeting DATE CHANGE!
JANUARY 22, 2012.

TIME OF REFLECTION



Fruit of the Spirit:

Love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Take a moment to assess which fruit you currently have in your life and/or family and which fruits you would like to see "increase" in the future? Could you use a little more of these attributes in your family?



December 2nd: Lutherhaven at Zion for Middle School 4:00 pm

December 4th: Chili Feed & Christmas Caroling 12:00 pm

December 11th: Christmas program rehearsal.
Senior High Christmas Party 12-2

December 18th: 11:00am Christmas program.

December 25th & January 3rd: No School for Faith

January 10th: School for Faith resumes

January 22th: Faith at Home Bowling at Kent Bowl