

Lessons from the Heart

Why won't my teen attend church?

By Micah Hudson



Hudson

I chose this topic because this is the number one thing that I wish that parents would ask me about, but do not. I believe every parent wants to be the best that they can be especially about passing on beliefs and faith. So, I present these words to help you and to encourage you!

There are several parental philosophies when it comes to getting teens to attend church and/or youth group from week to week or even once in a while. One philosophy is to "push" them and make them attend whenever you attend as a parent. Teens are already "made" to attend school and usually do not like to be told what else they have to do. Another philosophy is to "hope" that they will want to go on their own and magically appear at church without any of your own advice, encouragement or input.

I know of a few teens who randomly choose to do what is right or good for them but most will choose not to when given the choice. A predominant philosophy is to "guilt" them to attend. In this philosophy teens realize that "attending church is not fun if they have to feel guilty to go" and then the teen begins to drag their feet until they finally win and do not have to attend any longer.

However, I would like to present another, better philosophy to consider and to try. It is not too late! If you as a parent believe that going to church is important, then it is important for you to demonstrate this through your own attendance, attitude, etc.

It is important for you to have a monthly conversation with your teen about "why church is important to you."

Monthly reminders are good because most teens will forget.

Yet you still think, "how do I get them to want to attend church or youth group then?" Well, I would suggest this.

First, decide together how many times per month that your teen needs to be at church and/or youth group activities. A little compromise is good on the parents' side.

Second, give your teen the option of which church services and/or youth group activities that they will attend each month based on your agreement. If your teen decides at the last minute not to attend a certain church/activity, then that is a choice that you are giving them to begin to make on their own. But, if they are at the end of their "misses" at the middle of the month, then you remind them of your agreement and expect them to attend without any "guilt" from you and without any "attitude" from them. I am sure this never happens to you.

Third, agree on consequences for when your teen might not meet their side of the agreement like loss of phone, internet or TV privileges. Most teens think these three activities are rights but they are only privileges that you pay to allow them to use. If your teen does not follow

their side of the agreement, then you can say, "Well I gave you the choice of when to attend because your attendance at church and/or youth group is important to me, so you have lost one of your privileges for a few days or a week." Whatever you decide on ahead of time with your teen.

When I share this philosophy to consider, I am generally thinking of high school age but this could be used with middle school age as well.

Most of all parents, it is up to you to encourage your teen through your own attendance and attitude when going to church and/or extra activities. Keep having conversations about church and your own faith and why it is important to you. If you do not have these conversations then your teen will assume that these things must not be that important to you, so why should it be important to them.

I realize that many parents will read this advice and dismiss it as not possible or too much work to actually follow through. I did not write this for these parents. I wrote it for the few of you parents out there who really want a new direction or a new strategy that will allow you to encourage your teen's church and/or youth group involvement in the days ahead.

I pray that this philosophy will not only "work" for your family but have a lasting spiritual impact in the days ahead!

Micah Hudson is the youth director at the Delphi United Methodist Church.

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

By Dr. James Dobson

Men must be brought out of their shells, encouraged to talk

QUESTION: You've often said that boys and men are usually not natural communicators. Boy, does that describe the "men" in my life! What can I do to keep everyone talking to one another?

DR. DOBSON: Every family needs at least one highly communicative person in the home, and it looks like you are the one. Many boys are inclined to bottle up whatever frustration they are carrying inside. Unless you take the initiative to pull them out, some of them may withdraw within themselves and stay there emotionally. I urge you to do whatever is required to get into your son's world. Keep talking and exploring and teaching. Communication is the goal. Everything depends on it.

In 1990 Saddam Hussein and his Iraqi army invaded the tiny, oil-rich country of Kuwait and subjected its people to terrible brutality. Their troops were poised to attack Saudi Arabia and thereby control half the world's oil supply. U.S. President George H.W. Bush demanded repeatedly that Hussein withdraw his forces, but he stubbornly refused. Thus, on January 17 of the following year, Operation Desert Storm was launched. Several hundred thousand allied troops attacked the Iraqi army from land, sea and air. What do you think was the first objective of the battle?

You might expect it to have been Saddam's tanks, or his planes or his frontline soldiers. Instead, the allies destroyed the Iraqis' communication network. Stealth bombers smashed it with smart bombs and other weapons. In so doing, our forces interfered with the ability of the Iraqi generals to talk to each other. They had no way to coordinate their effort or direct the movements of their army. The



Dr. Dobson

war ended a few weeks later.

What happened in Desert Storm has direct relevance for families. When the communicative link between members breaks down, they become disorganized and distant from each other. If husbands and wives stop talking to each other or if parents and children grow silent, they slip into misunderstanding and resentment. Steel-reinforced barriers are erected, and anger prevails. For many families, this is the beginning of the end.

Let me urge you mothers to talk regularly to your sons (and, of course, to every other member of the family). It is a skill that can be taught. Work hard at keeping the lines of communication open and clear. Explore what your children and your spouse are thinking and feeling. Target your boys, especially, because they may be concealing a cauldron of emotion. When you sense a closed spirit developing, don't let another day go by without bringing hidden feelings out in the open. It's the first principle of healthy family life.

QUESTION: Does the feeling of entrapment in marriage only happen late in life, or does it sometimes occur earlier?

DR. DOBSON: Trapped reactions can occur among teenagers during courtship or

any time within a marriage — from the first day of the honeymoon to fifty years thereafter. They happen any time one partner devalues the worth of the other and feels stuck in the relationship. They form the cornerstone of midlife crises among men, and are typical of women who feel their husbands are wimpy and lacking in confidence. I believe the majority of divorces can be traced to the twin reactions of disrespect and marital claustrophobia.

QUESTION: Are there times when good, loving parents don't like their own kids very much?

DR. DOBSON: Yes, just as there are times in a good marriage when husbands and wives don't like each other for a while. What you should do in both situations is hang tough. Look for ways to make the relationship better, but never give up your commitment to one another. That is especially true during the teen years, when the person we see will be very different in a few years. Wait patiently for him or her to grow up. You'll be glad you did.

Send your questions to Dr. Dobson, c/o Focus on the Family, PO Box 444, Colorado Springs, CO 80903; or to his Web site at www.focus.org. These questions and answers are excerpted from books authored by Dr. James Dobson and published by Tyndale House Publishers. Dr. Dobson is the founder and chairman of the board of Focus on the Family, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of the home and Judeo-Christian values. Copyright 1997 James Dobson, Inc. All rights reserved. International copy secured.

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BRINGHURST UNITED METHODIST: Rex Charles, pastor. SS: 9:30 a.m., SW: 10:30 a.m.	FLORA FIRST CHRISTIAN (Disciples of Christ) S. Center Street, Flora. Sam Davenport, interim pastor. SW: 9:30 a.m., SS: 10:30 a.m.
BROOKSTON CHURCH OF CHRIST: 206 N. Prairie Street, Brookston. Ron Guzman, minister. SS: 9 a.m., SW: 10 a.m. & 6 p.m.	FLORA GRACE BRETHERN: 103 S. Willow St., Flora. James Franklin, pastor. SS: 9:30 a.m., SW: 10:30 a.m., Wed. Prayer Service: 7 p.m.
BUCK CREEK UNITED METHODIST: 4915 Ferret St., Buck Creek. Dwight Monical, pastor. SS: 9 a.m., SW: 10:15 a.m.	FLORA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH: 211 S. Center St., Flora. Charles Compton, pastor. SW: 9:30 a.m.
BURLINGTON FIRST BRETHERN: 205 W. 8th St., Rev. Dr. Peter Roussakis, pastor. SW: 10:00 a.m., SS: 9:00 a.m.	FLORA UNITED METHODIST: 107 E. Main Street, Flora. Rex Charles, pastor. SW: 9 a.m., SS: 10:15 a.m.
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BURROWS PRESBYTERIAN: SS: 11:30 a.m., SW: 10:30 a.m.	JUBILEE FELLOWSHIP: CR 50 N, Flora. Scott Gamel, pastor. SS: 9:00 a.m., SW: 10:00 a.m.
CALVARY CHAPEL CARROLL COUNTY: Wabash & Erie Canal Interpretive Center, Delphi. Eric Haley, pastor. SW: 10 a.m.	LIVING FAITH CHURCH OF THE BRETHERN: 310N 250W, Jeff Tomson, pastor. SS: 9 a.m., SW: 10 a.m.
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