

## Discover Ways to Renew the 'Spark' of Kids' Faith



"Apathy is a sort of living oblivion," wrote 19th-century editor Horace Greeley. A common refrain from many parents is that their teenagers are lackluster, or hard to "fire up" - especially when it comes to God and the church. Ironically, the apathy epidemic today just may have its roots in overactivity.

"With so much going on for school and traveling teams, [kids] have no time for church, youth groups, and even family time," says one youth minister in Group Magazine's "State of Youth Ministry" report. "Kids are getting pulled in so many directions." Other respondents said their biggest struggles are kids whose lives are compartmentalized and who don't make Christ a priority for daily living.

Youth ministers said they're dying for teenagers who are engaged and passionate about their faith, ready and willing to commit their lives to Jesus. On the positive side, they said they've noticed a hunger among today's teenagers for "deeper" things, as well as a move from "flash" to substance.

So how can you fan the flames of your kids' faith and convince them to invest in it 100 percent? First, lift up your teenagers in prayer often. The Holy Spirit is the one with the power to change hearts and lives. Next, make faith applicable to everyday life. Don't limit talk of God to Sundays. Tie in Scripture to issues that kids face at home, at school, and in their activities and jobs. Make Christ a priority in your own life, and show kids by example what a committed Christian walk looks like. If necessary, cut back your busy schedule to focus more on God. Finally, harness kids' hunger to go deeper by asking them tough questions and issuing spiritual challenges. Teenagers seeking a cause won't find a better one than Christ.

### ***Veteran youth pastor Jason Ostrander offers these tips for breaking through with kids who are jaded, bored, or apathetic:***

1. Be yourself. When you are who you say you are, unengaged kids are likely to crack open their windows wider. Doing an honest assessment of yourself will turn into a priceless gift to yourself and your kids.
2. Be a passionate, engaged observer. Spend time studying your teenagers and work hard to understand what makes them tick. If we're not fully awake to our kids, we're just as dead as they are. Jesus always paid remarkable attention to the details people unconsciously revealed to him.
3. Don't treat kids or spending time with them like just another box on your to-do list. The last thing kids want to be is your latest project.
4. Take a risk. Engage teenagers through their (sometimes) hidden passions by providing a niche for them to succeed or grow. Often they need something beyond the "status quo" to get them going.

## **Pulse**

### **Check out these interesting statistics about how brightly people's fires are burning for God:**

\* Sixty percent of Christian teenagers lose interest in church activities and organized religion, despite their previous participation.

(Barna Group)

\* Researcher George Barna uses the term "casual Christians" to describe the two-of-out-three adults who are spiritually middle-of-the-road or even ambivalent about their faith.

\* On the positive side, in a survey of almost 30,000 Christian teenagers from last summer, the majority of kids were passionate about their faith. Seventy-seven percent of Christian teenagers disagreed with this statement: "I've met a lot of people who seem more interesting to me than Jesus does."

(Group Magazine)



## Great Questions to ask your kids

Attack indifference by using these discussion starters with your teenagers:

1. What things or people are you most excited about right now? Do God and your faith excite you? Why or why not?
2. Which of your beliefs are you the most and the least passionate about, and why? What inspires you to stand up for something or someone?
3. In what ways is living a Christian life an adventure? What "equipment" is needed to embark on this trip?
4. What would you say to a friend who had lost his or her "spark" for God?



## Focus on Prayer

1. Your teenagers will be touched by God's love and become passionate about him - and passionate about living for him.
2. God will open a window for you to penetrate through any apathy that your teenagers experience.
3. Your teenagers will feel like their faith in God has been set on fire.
4. God will use you as an example to show that following Christ is the most worthwhile pursuit a young person can undertake.

### Verse of the month

"Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of [the believers]. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:3-4)

On Pentecost, known as the church's birthday, the early Christians were literally set aflame for God. Thanks to the Holy Spirit's power and presence, more than 3,000 people were added to the church that day. The same Holy Spirit can work miracles in hearts and lives even now.



### Going Deeper

Want to help your teenagers "blaze with passion" for God? Read this insightful essay by youth minister Mike Kupferer, posted on [SimplyYouthMinistry.com](http://SimplyYouthMinistry.com).

After cleaning up debris in my yard for three days, I had two large piles of brush to burn. The first pile ignited after I added an outside source (dry paper), and the fire never went out. I had to keep watch over the flames to keep them controlled, but I never had to relight it. No matter what I threw on top of the fire, it just kept burning. I couldn't extinguish it. Finally, it grew smaller and smaller once I ran out of items to burn. Even once I thought it was dying, all I had to do was add something flammable and it would immediately catch on fire.

The second pile was a little more frustrating. I added dry paper and sticks to get it going. It would catch on fire for a minute, and then the flame would go out. I kept adding more and more pieces of paper, sticks, and anything else I thought would catch on fire. Each time it burned for only a little bit. I had to constantly watch it if I wanted it to keep burning, because if I walked away for long, it would go out.

Then I remembered this principle: I know God is the One who ultimately molds and shapes young people, but the reality is that we have a responsibility to encourage and challenge them, too. And because of that, you cannot handle two fires the same way.

Some kids need a constant flow of outside resources to help their fires for God to burn. Without outside help, they will quickly become apathetic toward God. Then there are the kids who consume whatever is given to them and burn more intensely for God. When you challenge and stretch them, they aren't overwhelmed - they excel. One thing is true about both types of kids, though. Without something in their lives to help them burn, they'll lose their passion for God. Care enough to not give up. Fuel the fire, and never stop.

