

ZION'S CHRISTIAN YOUTH & FAMILY MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER

theParentLinkSM

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Rely on God During Uncertainties

Family life has its fair share of challenges, and unexpected crises can knock us flat. Sometimes, these things can threaten the unity of our family. Illness, a broken marriage, job loss, and financial problems all bring uncertainty and anxiety. Even positive changes such as a new baby or a planned move can disrupt schedules and affect our relationships with each other and with God.

Although you can't control everything that comes your family's way, you can minimize the impact of stress and change. During uncertain times, children have three primary needs:

Consistent Relationships—When life gets tough, your children need reassurance and familiarity. Model the positive qualities of God, who's consistently present, unconditionally accepting, attentive, affirming, and reliable.

Lots of Boundaries and Structure—Keeping the same rules and schedules, as much as possible, helps children feel safe. When new or different situations arise, let kids know ahead of time what to expect. Then provide extra attention during transitions.

A Safe Place—Children need an accepting place where they can talk about what's happening in their lives. Be real and encourage kids to open up about their thoughts and emotions.

This issue of Zion's newsletter offers ideas for surviving and growing through life's challenges. Talking to a trusted professional or friend can provide other ideas for resources. Group Publishing suggests *Group's Emergency Response Handbook for Parents*. It's available at www.GroupPublishing.com and in bookstores.



Challenges Children Face

- In America, a divorce occurs every 30 seconds.
- Every day 1,300 stepfamilies are formed.
- 31% of children ages 9 to 12 say they "worry a lot."
- 47% of children ages 9 to 12 suffer from insomnia.



It's Summer!!

This issue of Zion's newsletter focuses on parenting insights, prayer, Scripture and issues children and teens face. Please see the Horizon for information about Habitat at Zion—our big summer Christian Youth and Family Ministries project! Next month our newsletter will highlight ministries that will begin in the fall.

Parenting Insights

In *Children's Ministry Magazine*, Greg Baird, founder of Kids in Focus ministries, offers five simple principles to give stressed-out children a **B.R.E.A.K.**

Be an example. Minimize any unnecessary stresses and learn to handle stress in a God-pleasing manner (see Philippians 4:6).

Relate. Spend time with children, share an interest, listen, and cheer them on.

Educate yourself. Learn what stressors your children face each day. What goes on at school and with their friends?

Ask questions. Concerned questions help you understand what children need and show that you really care.

Keep praying. Jesus works in children's lives. Pray fervently and without ceasing for your kids as they face life's challenges.

OpenTheBook

"For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble.... The Lord says, 'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.'"

Psalm 32:7-8

Troubles come to everyone, even Christians. But God promises shelter during all of life's storms.

Teachable Moments

Play Hide and Seek—With younger children, unwind by playing a fun game of Hide and Seek as a family. Then talk about how God always comes looking for us and always watches over us

Lick Life's Problems—When life gets messy, it's more important than ever to spend one-on-one time with your children. If possible, take each child on a simple outing (for example, to an ice cream shop). Let your child air what's on his or her mind. Then share ways you can stick together and work out problems.

Create a Smile File—Stress is exhausting and removes our focus from life's many joys. Make a file box, or journal where family members can put pictures or notes about God's blessings. Then look through it together when your family gets overwhelmed or discouraged.



"So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are **ON THE ROAD, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up." Deuteronomy 11:18-19, NLT**

God calls on us to bear one another's burdens and lift each other up. Have a heart-to-heart chat with your children so they can hand over their worries to God. Start with these questions:

- ✠ What is your biggest worry, and how does it make you feel?
- ✠ Why does God let us all face tough times? What are some positive things that have come out of your struggles?
- ✠ What are some ways God helps us when we're hurting?
- ✠ How can we know and trust that God will always take care of us?

Family Experience: **God Protects and Saves**

Here's an excerpt from Group's "Crocodile Dock" Vacation Bible School. You may want to use all or part of it to remind your family of God's power amid life's struggles.

Say, "The Israelites, God's special people, were slaves in Egypt. Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, had been working God's people so hard, and they were so tired. God told Moses to go tell Pharaoh, 'Let my people go!' Moses went 10 times! Each time Pharaoh wouldn't let God's people go, God sent a plague on Egypt. A plague is a horrible thing that happens to a whole land. But God kept the Israelites safe from all these plagues."



Re-enact the first nine plagues, using these simple props and actions:

1. Blood to water—Drop red food coloring into water.
2. Frogs—Hop around the room.
3. Gnats—Make high-pitched buzzing sounds.
4. Flies—Make a lower-pitched sound and zoom around the room.
5. Diseased livestock—Moo and moan, then lie on the floor with your arms and legs sticking up in the air.
6. Boils—Use a washable red marker to put dots on your skin.
7. Hail—Throw paper wads at each other.
8. Locusts—Nibble on some snacks, pretending to be hungry insects.
9. Darkness—Turn off the lights or wear blindfolds.

After each plague, have everyone shout, "Let my people go!" Close by saying, "God is powerful. Only God could send those plagues and protect his people like that." Have family members each share a time they saw God's power in action. End in prayer, thanking God for using his power to protect and save your family.

Help Teenagers Put the Future in God's Hands



As another school year wraps up, graduating seniors are contemplating the next stage in their lives. Whether kids are heading to college, the military, or full-time employment, this important milestone brings a mixture of excitement and uncertainty.

Those feelings aren't reserved for high school seniors. Whether they're 13 or 19, most young people question what the future holds for them. "What does God want me to do with my life? Should I go to college? If so, which one? What should I study? What do I want to be? Should I get married? If so, to whom?" Such questions can feel overwhelming, especially when they're combined with all the other emotions and pressures today's teenagers face.

Teenagers who know that God has their lives all planned out still might not know which particular direction God wants them to take. When big choices loom, Christians can bring their questions to God in prayer and can rely on the loving support of family members and friends.

As parents, your presence and guidance during times of decision-making is crucial. Although you can't make choices for your teenagers, you can help them recognize their talents and interests, research their options, set short and long-term goals, and then get settled in the next stage of their lives. Use the information in this newsletter to help your teenagers rely on God as they contemplate the future.

Assistance in Aisle Three

Share with your teenagers this insightful excerpt from Group's *Live Bible*:

Yesterday I saw something new—a huge dog right in the middle of Wal-Mart. He was a seeing-eye dog, and he was leading his master through the perilous twists and bends of the personal-hygiene department. The man still had a mind of his own. He had an idea of the general direction to head toward and of the things he wanted. But he needed a good set of eyes to guide him.

That's a pretty clear picture of Jeremiah 29:4-14. God creatively weaves the Israelites through the hidden roadblocks they are oblivious to. He knows where to take them and how to make it safely through. We can fully expect God to do the same for us. God has a plan for each of us and a good set of eyes. God can easily create a path for us, even when we can't see the way.

Try closing your eyes tight and feeling your way around the house in the dark. As you do, imagine the things in your future you feel uncertain about: college, relationships, career path. Then pray. Thank God for his creative plans for you and for his gentle leadership guiding you safely through.



Decisions, decisions. Teenagers seem to face one big choice after another. Check out these stats about teenagers and the future:

- 44% of teenagers say their top worry is getting good grades, and 32% say their top worry is getting into a good college. *(The Parent Institute)*
- When teenagers were asked whether they wanted to follow the career path of their father or mother, 79% responded "neither." *(USA Today)*
- 32% of teenagers expect to be famous someday. *(Psychology Today)*
- According to various sources, about 80% of teenagers say they expect to get married someday.

Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Use these discussion starters as you help your teenagers ponder and prepare for the future.

- ✝ When you think about your future, how do you feel? What are you most excited about and most scared about?
- ✝ How certain are you about what you want to do with your life? Do you think your goals match up with God's plans? Why or why not?
- ✝ If God already knows how our lives will turn out, why do you think God often lets us struggle with decisions?
- ✝ What one question about your future would you most like God to answer, and why?



PRAY THAT:

- ✝ God will guide your kids as they contemplate God's will for their lives.
- ✝ Your teenagers will be receptive to your support and guidance as they make big decisions.
- ✝ Your teenagers will make choices that are pleasing to God and that glorify God.
- ✝ God will protect and bless your teenagers as they grow and prepare to leave your "nest."

What's Up With Kids

At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, author Katie Brazelton writes about helping your teenagers discover and fulfill their life purpose. To read the entire article, visit SimplyYouthMinistry.com and enter "The ABC's of Parenting on Purpose" in the search box.

I am the first to admit that I didn't know how to go about planning my life for God. My mama never told me how. I wish she had. She did teach me a few things, like "Floss. Don't let your roots show. And wear clean underwear in case of an accident." But none of those things helped me figure out what God expected me to be and do. For me, discerning my purpose in life was a grueling process of hit and miss, of pouring my heart out to strangers, and of shedding buckets of tears. I wouldn't wish my method on anyone. By sharing these 26 lessons with your teenagers, you'll save them some frustration and legwork.

Acknowledge your abilities. **B**e willing to forgive yourself and others. **C**oncentrate on your character. **D**evelop a servant's heart. **E**mbrace God's dream for your life. **F**ace your fears. **G**ive God the glory. **H**old onto hope. **I**nvite humility into your life. **J**ust offer your weaknesses to God. **K**eep going back to your Bible as the ultimate, unchanging truth. **L**ove God and your neighbor. **M**otivate toward your life mission. **N**ot about you. **O**be. **P**ray all day long. **Q**uit being so serious. **R**each out for healthy relationships. **S**erve where you are called today. **T**ell others about the numerous, gracious miracles God has done for you! **U**nderstand your uniqueness. **V**ision. **W**alk with an accountability partner. **E**xpect an extraordinary purpose. **Y**earn to please an audience of one: Jesus Christ. **U**nzip your zeal.



Verse of the Month

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me." (Jeremiah 29: 11-13)

God, the architect of the universe, has drafted detailed "life plans" for each of God's children. Although the Bible may not tell your kids what classes to take or which job to accept, it assures them that God holds each of their futures. God promises to provide good, hope-filled lives for teenagers—and for you. Praise the Lord!!