

# Parenting Teens®

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OCTOBER 2017

**8** things to teach your teen about church

THE 3 REASONS YOUNG PEOPLE are leaving

What it really means TO BE A CHURCH MEMBER

What if your teen wants to go TO A DIFFERENT CHURCH?

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## things to teach your teen **ABOUT CHURCH**

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**When it comes to getting your teen to go to church, “Because I said so” just isn’t good enough. If you want your son or daughter to stay plugged in, you have to show them why. Here are a few ways to get started.**

**By Dr. Abby Hill**

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Developmentally, teenagers are at a place where they want to establish their identity as an autonomous person. They want to make their own decisions and are inclined to resist whenever they believe they are “being told” what to do.

One area where they are particularly prone to have an opinion is whether or not they want to attend church with their family.

While family rules may certainly require church attendance, in the long run it may be more beneficial to help your teen understand *why* church attendance matters. Here are eight things to teach them now while they’re still under your roof.

## **1. God’s Word matters.**

“You don’t have to attend church to be a Christian” is a well-worn argument for many teens (and adults) who don’t want to attend church regularly. Hebrews 10:25 directs us differently, toward “not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

This verse tells us to attend church with spiritual purpose and fervor. This Scripture also refers negatively to those who are not in the “habit” of attending. God’s Word matters, and it directs us to church attendance. Gathering with other believers is clearly a way to obey God. Church is where we learn and grow spiritually, and where we can participate in and experience the power of corporate worship and prayer.

## **2. Service matters.**

“Church is so old-school, boring, and not relevant to my life,” said many a Christian teenager. Egocentrism is a well-known state of adolescence, as teens approach most situations (including church) from an “all about me” perspective. Yet, teens are also quite capable of and sensitive to altruistic thinking, which can compel the reluctant teen to find relevance for attending church in the goal of caring for others.

The Scripture in Hebrews (10:25) specifically mentions the service—the gift—of encouragement as a purpose in Christians gathering together. When we attend church, our presence serves and encourages fellow believers, including the pastors and church staff devoted to our care and leadership. Just by showing up, without even realizing it, we may encourage someone else to stay the course.



### 3. "Being there" matters.

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Social interaction and group affiliation are extremely important to adolescents. There is a social element to church, and that's OK. God designed us to be social beings because He knew we were going to need a team in this life.

We need "moments" in life, those visceral experiences shared in real-time with other people, to fully and completely create meaning at a level that could never be reached through a DM, RT, or emoji. Sometimes you just "have to be there" to get it, and church is one of those places.

### 4. Community matters.

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Spending time at church, not just with peers but with caring adults, establishes church as a family for the teen. Having a church family helps to remind us that we are not alone in our beliefs in a world where we all, and Christian teens especially, often feel like an island.

Life can get hard. Having a church family is an investment of sorts, for the whole family, in having people to turn to when a tough time comes. Adults in your teen's church family can help reinforce the Christian ideals and principles you are teaching at home and affirm your parent-teen relationship.

### 5. Sacrifice matters.

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People are busy. We have an overwhelming number of options for experience, opportunity, and entertainment, every minute of every day. Different desires compete constantly for our time, requiring relentless prioritization in determining what makes it onto our schedule. When church is a "repeat" on our calendar, we are faithfully surrendering our time to God as an offering, as an act of sacrifice of something we cannot afford to give up.



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## 6. Discipleship matters.

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As Jesus was nearing the end of His time on earth, He directed the disciples to continue His work here until He returns. These same directions apply to us today, to “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19).

Church can serve as a vehicle for your adolescent to witness to their peers. Often, Christian teens feel unsure in how to share Jesus with unchurched friends. They worry about what to say, when to say it, and how it will be received. Inviting a friend to a youth group event at church may be a more socially comfortable way for your teen to start sharing his or her faith with a peer.

## 7. Freedom matters.

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We may forget that being able to attend church is a privilege, a freedom in our nation that is not available everywhere. When we are active in our church, it is not only an expression of gratitude to God, but also an outward appreciation for our status as citizens in a free society. As members in our local church, we can contribute to the fiber and heartbeat of the entire community.

## 8. You don't just go to church—you are the Church.

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We are the Church, and that's why we go to church. Active and authentic participation in our local church reflects our devotion to God and our commitment to Jesus' mission. Church attendance is not only vital to an individual's spiritual growth; it contributes to the soul-care of others. You are integral in leading and guiding your teen in conceptualizing the spiritual relevance of church as a place, as well as a responsibility.

Consider your teen's questions—and even their reluctance about attending church—as an opportunity for their growth and development as a person and as a Christian. Acknowledge their thoughts as real and relatable. Attend church together and continue to discover together the incredible reasons church still matters more than ever.

***To get the conversation started at home, see our conversation starters on p. 43.***

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