

Purposeful Things Youth Can Give Their Time To

The list below describes some of the things we have our older kids (tweens and teens) give their time to. Unfortunately, we only have so much time to work with, so we have to pick and choose between many good options. However, finding good options is not the hard part. We feel that time is too valuable to let it slip by being frittered away on TV and video games. Time scheduled and managed is typically time well spent, and our kids are used to staying busy. The truth is that they have very limited “free time” by the time they get done with everything we have scheduled for them. And that goes for the summer too. They are basically still swamped, just with different things. It’s extremely rare for us to hear the words, “I’m bored,” around here. What follows is not a list of everything we do all the time. It is a list of ideas and things we often pick from, as we help equip our kids for life. We are not going to spell out exactly what we have done in each area. We want to give room for the Lord to personally lead you as you seek Him in all of this.

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Memorization – “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4:8 NIV) Why does it seem normal to try to throw a sphere through a hoop for an hour, and abnormal to study God’s word for an hour? Does it seem odd that many children know what Eli Whitney invented, but don’t know who Eli in the Bible was? Why do we learn all the states and their capitals, but not the books of the Bible? Does it trouble you that the average kid watches over 27 minutes of [commercials](#) every day, which is about the same amount of time they would have to spend daily to read through the Bible in a year? Yet, most of them have not even read completely through the New Testament—not even once. I don’t mean to jump to conclusions, but could it be that many of our Christian kids are spiritually malnourished because we’ve over-emphasized their athletics, academics, and even entertainment?

[Memory Madness](#) is a simple memorization program designed to give people a framework for what they believe. The scheduled program is just 30 verses a year, and by the time a child becomes a teenager they have memorized 250 key Bible verses. You can do it at home, by yourself, and if that works, then great! Generally, we’ve found that doing it by yourself doesn’t provide the support and encouragement most of us need. So if that doesn’t work out so well, you might try to get some likeminded families together to spur one another on and do it together. We do it as a church.

If you really want to give your kids a spiritual booster shot, try [Bible Bee](#) for a summer. There’s nothing like memorizing for a few hours each day to really focus your thoughts on God! Again, it would sure be nice to do it with some other families!

Quiet Times – I guess I already gave my tirade in the memorization section, so I’ll spare you from it a second time. It would be great to have your kids in some kind of routine where they are reading the Bible daily. I think reading the Word should have at least as much attention as math or social studies, but that’s up to you. But please do something. Even ten minutes a day will add up to a valuable amount of time.

Prayer – This could be part of your quiet time, or you could have a separate time for prayer. We’ve enjoyed occasional prayer walks as a family, or with one parent and one kid. Your teens could also go on prayer walks by themselves.

Academic – We like to keep a little bit of academics going even during the summer. It keeps them from losing ground and keeps their brains a little sharper. We also try to have the kids keep working on any area that might need a little reinforcement or consistency. If your kids are college bound, you can have them prepare for the ACT or SAT and perhaps increase scholarship opportunities. Our oldest just finished his sophomore year in high school and is preparing daily to take the ACT this fall. He has already taken the relevant course work, so why wait until it all becomes a distant memory?

Language – Learning another language increases opportunities to interact with another culture, and also helps students understand the structure of their own language more thoroughly. Kids can work on reading, flash cards, computer programs, audio CDs, or online tutorials. You can choose whatever language you want, but I’d pick one where there is a likelihood of it actually being used. No one likes to learn things they won’t use.

Reading – Reading is incredibly valuable. I think it is the biggest bang for the buck academically. If your kid can’t read well, he won’t test well. Being a good reader also helps with Bible comprehension, and it helps teach truths, concepts, and lessons if you choose your books wisely. If you do not choose your books wisely, it exposes a whole new world to your kids including: new ideas on how to do evil, speak, think about others, and relationships with the opposite sex. The wrong books can paint a picture of the world as being a world without God. We particularly encourage the reading of Christian biographies. Our hope is that our kids will be inspired by some of the character and zeal we lack, by being exposed to godly people with different sets of strengths and gifts. Below is a list of books for teens. Click [here](#) for younger children.

- *Safely Home* by Randy Alcorn
- *More than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell
- *Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel (kids’ versions are available)
- *Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel (kids’ versions are available)
- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
- *Do Hard Things* by Alex and Brett Harris
- *Jesus Freaks* by D.C. Talk
- Biographies (The ones I like the most are listed first. These are the titles I have, but some of them may be hard to find. Others biographies are available for most of these individuals that may be as good or better.)
 - *The Navigator* (Dawson Trotman) by Robert D. Foster (Probably not considered a true biography)
 - *God’s Man in China* (Hudson Taylor) by Howard Taylor
 - *Bruchco* by Bruce Olson
 - *George Mueller* by Roger Steer
 - *Corrie Ten Boom – Her Life Her Faith* by Carole C. Carlson
 - *Shadow of the Almighty* (Jim Elliot) by Elisabeth Elliot
 - *Daws* (Dawson Trotman), Betty Skinner
 - *Jungle Pilot* (Jim Elliot’s pilot, Nate Saint) by Russell T. Hitt
 - *Tortured for Christ* by Richard Wurmbrand
 - *Adoniram Judson* by Janet and Geoff Benge
 - *C.T. Studd – Cricketer & Pioneer* by Norman Grubb
 - *Watchman Nee – Against the Tide* by Angus Kinnear

If you can't afford these books or find them, check out www.paperbackswap.com. I always have a bunch of books on my wish list, and although I can't get them all at once, I usually get them faster than I can read them.

Reading to a sibling – There is value for one child in reading aloud, and value for the other in being read to. Not only that, but it could be valuable relational time. It doesn't have to be simple books. Books like *The Hobbit* and *Elsie Dinsmore –A Life of Faith* (volumes 1&2) are fascinating to both the younger and older kids. This also helps the older kids grow in their teaching skills, which can help them in numerous areas of life.

Writing – Have them study out a topic and write about it. It doesn't have to be a complete paper, but it could be. You could think through the issues they will face over the next few years and help them develop convictions on those. Many teens do a lot of writing by pouring out their emotions in a diary. We would prefer to have them writing out truth to help cement it into their souls.

- What is your purpose in life?
- How do you know the Bible is true?
- Explain the difference between four different major religions.
- How do you know God is real?
- What does the Bible say about prayer?
- What are five things you want to teach your own children?
- What is your favorite family memory?
- What are some ways you can fight temptation?
- Write the story of Job (Adam, Noah, Jonah, etc...) in a way that a 5-year-old would enjoy it and get the main point.
- Write a poem about forgiveness (grace, wrath, heaven, Jonah, etc...)
- Write a family history
- Write a tract that explains forgiveness (and pass it out later)

Chores and projects – Of course, all kids should have basic chores like sweeping, washing dishes, mowing, and cleaning up after the dog. But as our kids get older, we try to expand their skill base even through chores and tasks around our own place. Kids can also do stuff that needs fixing around the house like replacing a doorknob. Anything that needs to be done is something that you should consider having them learn how to do.

“Hey, can you go out and fix _____?”

“I don't know how.”

“Well, go take a look and see if you can get any ideas, and then come and get me and we can look at it together.”

Evangelism – Take your kids to the mall or the park so they can talk to other teens about God. You can help them learn how to do this by going out with them. (I do it; you watch → You do it; I watch → You do it.) They should also know 10-20 basic evangelism verses (see [Memory Madness](#) Mission 1). After each time they go out, you should debrief them. Discuss some things they could have done or said differently, and praise them for all they did well.

2 Corinthians 5:11a Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. NIV

Music – Music is often a powerful force in the lives of young adults. We think it is important to direct that passion. Not only does learning an instrument help kids acquire a useful skill, but studies have shown that it can also help them academically. I think that an acoustic guitar is the most practical instrument, as it lends itself to more settings than other instruments. Whether it is for church, small group, a campout, or driving cattle, a guitar comes in handy. The piano is another great choice. In my limited musical knowledge, it seems like learning the piano would help a person the most with understanding music theory. Learning to sing well is also a skill that most of us could work on and that has value in a number of settings. Books, curricula, DVDs, lessons on YouTube, and of course real-life lessons are available to help you give your kids structured practice.

Service – Try to think of ways to teach your kids to serve. Although they are special, the world does not revolve around them, and that is an important lesson. It is important for them to have ways to contribute, and not simply ways to earn some spending money.

- Bake cookies for church or neighbors
- Work at a food kitchen
- Clean up trash at the park
- Help at Sunday school
- Setup or tear-down at church
- Church cleaning crew
- Help elderly or sick neighbors

Exercise – If your kids are not already involved in sports, there are some things you should consider. Some sports, like tennis, don't require much financial investment. Others, like track and field, can be practiced at your convenience. Swimming and ice hockey require a facility that you can't use whenever you want. Skateboarding can be a great way to meet other kids, especially when you are in the waiting room at the ER. Walking is nice, because you can pray or review memory verses while you do it. Some sports, like football, may be less valuable beyond their school years. If you have multiple kids in multiple sports you will end up running from event to event. All these considerations should play into how you direct your family. Remember, even if your kids are not involved in official sports, you can still make exercise a part of daily routine. We do! It is valuable to have them worn out at the end of the day.

Movies – Generally we tend to think of movies as a negative influence. However, there are some movies that I want my kids to watch. They may not be as thrilling and action-packed as what Hollywood gives us, but they can still influence us. Here are a few that are worth watching:

- Matthew – The Visual Bible
- Ken Ham creation DVDs
- St. John in Exile
- Joshua
- Chariots of Fire
- The Hiding Place
- Inn of the Sixth Happiness

Audio – I wish my kids could hear straight from some awesome men of God. Oh wait, they can! We like our kids to listen to messages from our church's annual conference ([Faithwalkers](#)) and High School conference ([HSLT](#)). [SermonAudio](#) has lots of teachings available, but of course not every one of them is good. If you search online, you can also find classics like Dawson Trotman's "[Born to Reproduce](#)." Most churches, probably including yours, have sermons online. Have you ever thought, "I wish my kid could hear this?" Write those down and keep a list you'd like your kids to listen to!

Practice driving – I wish we had a lot more time for this. A LOT! Even after your teen has a license, it might not hurt to practice some more—unless they do something that sets off the air bags. Then it will hurt. We all know that a driver’s education class doesn’t adequately equip young drivers. Time driving with your kids will also be great relationship time.

Skill building – We are trying to teach our kids some skills that will be useful to them in ministry, and even in their careers or families. We don’t have all these skills ourselves, so we try to ask questions of those who do and find free or cheap resources. We take this list seriously, and also try to consider their strengths and gifts as we choose from it. As you can see from the list, we are trying to get our kids well equipped in technology.

- Learn about photography
- Learn how to create a flyer for Sunday school or youth group (MS Word, MS Publisher, or [OpenOffice](#))
- Practice videotaping
- Develop their own website (Silas has a [preteen site](#), Hope has a [quote site](#), and Blaise has a [band site](#) he is working on.) ([Weebly](#) or [Google Sites](#))
- Learn how to edit pictures (Paint or [Gimp](#))
- Learn how to edit audio files ([Audacity](#))
- Create a family DVD or make a DVD of family video for grandma or someone special. (Windows Movie Maker)
- Learn how to create a Power Point
- Cooking
- Sewing / quilting
- Card making
- Develop a skit or play

Discipleship of their peers – Time with their peers is very limited and focused, and usually there is a parent on hand. “Hang out time with friends”, with no particular purpose, is unheard of in our house. They have never, not once, gone to the mall to hang out with their friends. Our plan is to keep them too busy to have time to do that. Their relationships also need to be clearly defined. We either want our kids to lock arms and run with their strong, believing peers, or if their peers who are wrestling with life, they need to be praying for them and reaching out to them. We want to start training our kids to disciple others. For example, we encourage them to go to church with a verse on a note card that they can give a friend. We also coach them in their conversations and try to train them to ask questions to direct conversations toward a spiritual focus. This helps them form an identity as an “ambassador for Christ” rather than just another peer.

Playing - After they get done with their scheduled commitments, the kids have a limited amount of free time that is truly free. The younger kids have more, and the older ones have less. Free time is not the majority of our kids’ time, but we do have free time. The kids enjoy playing board games, swimming, and capture the flag. Often times they will read during free time. The boys love to play old Nintendo 64 video games. We limit the game selection and don’t allow more than twenty minutes a day of video games.

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