

Bored with Church and God

When your kid was 9, he loved going to church, loved his Sunday school class, and seemed to have a real relationship with God.

But now, as a young teen, he seems bored. Maybe he's even expressed this: "Church is boring; I don't want to go."

This is a natural occurrence in the lives of young teens. But the reasoning behind this boredom isn't the same for every child. Here are a few possibilities:

Not Connected

Children (prior to the teen years) need fewer reasons to find church or Christianity engaging. A few fun moments in Sunday school or the reality of Christ in their parents' lives can be enough. But young teens start to perceive a disconnect (if one exists) between real life and "church-world." If they don't sense a relational connection with people in the church (youth group leaders, other kids, adults in the church), it's easy for them to make the small leap to boredom.

Young teens have a passionate need to be valued and noticed. Any place that doesn't validate who they are as individuals, any place where they don't feel known, can quickly feel awkward or boring to them.

Churchianity

Unless your family happens to attend a church with worship and sermons that happen to connect with your young teen (this isn't common, and isn't normally the aim of most churches), attending church can begin to feel like a monumental waste of time to young teens – even if they still have an active faith in God.

The forms most churches use (in song, spoken word and format) are pretty foreign to the world of a teenager. Frankly, they're often pretty foreign to the world of adults too! But the variance from "church-world" to the world of adults is almost always less than to the world of teens.

Faith System Disconnect

Probably the most common, and most healthy reason for young teens to feel boredom is their developmental need to grow up in faith. Pre-teens and children approach faith issues, obviously, with the mind of a child. But a young teen's new ability to grasp (or at least entertain) abstract ideas begs all their concrete spiritual conclusions and understandings into question.

This shift in thinking ability has enormous spiritual implications for young teens, because pretty much everything we talk about at church, or in relation to faith in God, is abstract. Its like kids have a backpack of faith system "bits." And during their young teen years, situations arise that call these bits to the forefront. When it becomes obvious to a teen that their childhood spiritual answer to a given situation or question doesn't offer a strong enough answer anymore, they are forced to ignore this issue or struggle to allow their beliefs to evolve into a more adult form.

Don't be freaked out by this process. Don't be thrown by your teen's expression of boredom. Instead, find constructive ways to come alongside her during this transition time of life.

Processing Boredom with Your Young Teen

Here are some ideas for coming alongside your young teen and her spiritual boredom:

- *Live it out.* If your teen sees a vibrant and real faith being lived out day-to-day in your life (and being verbally expressed also), it will go a long ways toward helping him consider what an adult faith system should look like.
- *Talk about it.* Our natural tendency is to lecture our kids about why they're bored ("you need to do this"). Instead, work to create open lines of communication about faith and church. Process your child's questions and reservations without jumping to easy answers.
- *Look for relational connections.* Help your teen be (or stay) connected to the people of the church, not just the program. Look for creative ways to foster these relationships – with their peers and with other adults who will care about them.
- *Debrief.* After a church service or youth group meeting, talk about what went on. Be careful that this doesn't come across as a test. Helping your teen see the life-connection between what's talked about at church and their world is a wonderful way to encourage the growth of their faith.