



## December 2010

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 Children's Ministry  
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### Reduce Possession-Obsession

For many families, it's a necessary pre-Christmas ritual: weeding through the old toys just to make room for new ones. Children typically have so much "stuff" they can't keep track of or play with it all. When possessions become a priority, it's time to re-evaluate your family's stance on stuff.

Many of us keep materialism in check most of the year but then slip at Christmas. Although presents aren't bad, you can ease the focus on materialism this season. For example:

**Remind your children that Jesus is our best gift.** Make sure they know that Christmas is Jesus' birthday and that God sent Jesus because he loves us. When you decorate for Christmas, leave a nativity scene manger empty. Wrap the baby Jesus figurine in a special box and open it on Christmas Eve. Then read Romans 6:23b: "The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

**Discuss the gifts we can give to God.** Talk about how you respond when someone gives you a nice gift. Ask children what they can do that God would really like, such as pray or tell a friend about him. As a family, fill out gift cards listing what you can each give to God. Then hang the cards from your Christmas tree or wrap them and place them under your tree as gifts to God.

**Encourage children to be generous.** Emphasize the importance of giving, not receiving. As a family, participate in a service project for people in need. Help children experience the joy of giving by donating some time and money to others. Talk about how it feels to give, and discuss some ways you can continue doing so in the year ahead.



#### Buy Buy!

- Each year, 8 to 12 year olds spend \$30 billion of their own money and influence another \$150 billion of parental spending. (cbsnews.com)
- The negative effects of rampant materialism can be tempered by teaching kids to appreciate what they have. Preteens and teens who are both highly materialistic and highly thankful say they like to spend time helping others. (Harris Interactive)

#### PowerSource

#### Ask God:

1. To help your family focus on Jesus' birth this Christmas.
2. To reduce your emphasis on buying and receiving.
3. To help your children treasure God, not earthly things.

#### Parenting Insights

Despite tough economic times, you can still have a special Christmas. Child-development expert Wanda Draper says, "Celebrating a more modest Christmas materially can be a blessing in disguise." She offers these tips for easing materialism:

1. **Don't apologize for a reduced number of gifts.** Just "say it will be a new kind of Christmas," Draper says.
2. **Discuss how everyone wants to celebrate.** Recall previous holidays and what was special to each person.
3. **Create homemade gifts for family members and friends.** Making the gifts together can lead to even more great memories.
4. **Give children an active role.** Let them take part in Advent devotions, decorating, baking, caroling, and more.

## OpenTheBook

**"Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own."**

**Luke 12:15**

Our earthly possessions won't matter or be of any use when our lives end. As Luke 12:21 says, the only thing that matters is having "a rich relationship with God."

### Teachable Moments

1. **It's a Boy!**—Create a birth announcement for Jesus, complete with a baby footprint, if you have or know a newborn. Read Luke 1:35-38 and discuss how Mary reacted when she found out she was going to be Jesus' mother.



2. **12 Days of Christmas**—As a family, come up with 12 acts of service you can perform together during December. For example, shovel snow for a neighbor, donate extra blankets to a homeless shelter, and deliver cookies and cocoa to homebound seniors.
3. **Shine On**—Read Matthew 2:2, about the Christmas star. Cut out poster board stars and paint your names on them with glow-in-the-dark paint. Tape the stars to the ceiling above your Christmas tree. Turn off the lights and share ways you can guide others to Jesus, the best gift of all.



**"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**

### **Take inventory of your children's thoughts about "stuff" by asking these discussion-starter questions:**

1. How can a person tell when he or she has too much stuff? How should you decide what to keep and what to give away?
2. How important are presents to you at Christmas time? How would the holiday be different if we didn't exchange gifts?
3. What does it feel like to give someone a special gift? How do you expect a person to respond when you offer them a present?
4. What are some of the best gifts you've ever received? How is Jesus a gift from God?

### **Family Experience: Reason for the Season**

#### **Take a break from shopping to focus on what happened on that "Silent Night" in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago.**

- **Celebrate Stillness**—Gather several CD or music players and some Christmas music. Give everyone an index card and a pencil. Ask family members to write or draw what they'd like for Christmas. As they begin, play different Christmas music on all the players at the same time, at a loud volume. After one minute, stop the music. Say: "Now let's focus on something else, without the distraction." Place a figure of baby Jesus in front of family members and say, "For one minute, pray silently and ask God to show you what's important about Christmas." When time is up, ask: "What answers did you come up with? How was the noisy music like what often happens at Christmas?" Close in prayer, asking God to help your family find time to be quiet and thankful this season.
- **Bring the Story to Life**—Have family members choose different characters in the Christmas account. Together, write and present a short drama based on each character's experiences. Discuss the different people's perspectives and why Christmas was important to each of them. Make simple costumes. Videotape the play and watch it while enjoying Christmas cookies. You may also want to post the video on a video-sharing site and send the link to family and friends as part of your annual Christmas greeting.





## What's Playing at the Movies

**Movie:** *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (releases Dec. 10)

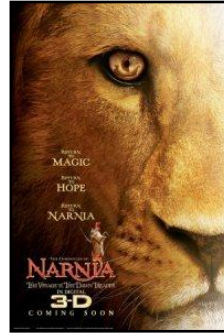
**Genre:** Adventure, fantasy

**Rating:** PG (for some frightening images and sequences of fantasy action)

**Cast:** Tilda Swinton, Skandar Keynes, Georgie Henley

**Synopsis:** When Edmond and Lucy return to Narnia with their cousin, they meet Caspian and take a magical trip in the royal ship. Aslan protects the children during encounters with kidnappers, dragons, dwarves, "merpeople," and more.

**Discussion Questions:** How can you tell that Jesus is with you when life is "smooth sailing"—and when waves toss you around? What storms have you faced, and how has Jesus helped you through them? Read aloud Mark 4:35-41. What are some things you're afraid of or some things that seem overwhelming to you? How can Jesus provide calm?



## What Music Is Releasing

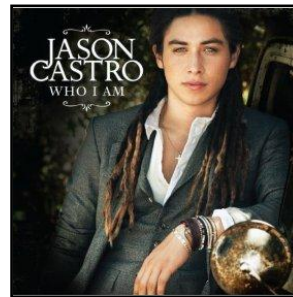
**Artist:** Jason Castro

**Album:** *Who I Am*

**Artist Info:** The guitar-playing, dreadlock-wearing Castro, 23, won the hearts of *American Idol* fans with his renditions of "Hallelujah" and "Over the Rainbow." His new album is a crossover to Christian music.

**Summary:** "I'm a Christian in whatever I do," Castro says. "Every song in some way is led by what I believe." In "You Are," the first single from *Who I Am*, Castro sings to God, "You are life more beautiful. You are love more powerful. You are the light that always shines. You are the one."

**Discussion Questions:** How would you describe who God is, especially to someone who doesn't yet know him? In what ways does God make your life "beautiful"? Read aloud Isaiah 52:7-10. How can you share the good news of God's "victory" with other people?



## What Games Are Out

Title	Content	Rating & Platform
<i>Kinectimals</i>	On a mysterious island, players meet adorable cubs and teach them tricks using the new Xbox Kinect technology.	E; Xbox 360
<i>Beyblade: Metal Fusion</i>	Based on a popular toy (and anime TV series), this game involves stadium battles with spinning tops.	E; Nintendo DS
<i>Battle of Giants: Dinosaurs Strike</i>	Players fight to become the top predator. Includes animal combat and natural disasters.	E10+; Wii

**GAME RATINGS KEY:** EC=Early Childhood, E=Everyone (ages 6+), E10+ (ages 10+), T=Teen (ages 13+)



## Culture & Trends

**What's happening right now that may affect your children and family:**

- According to an annual report that tracks the Christmas wishes of children ages 5 to 16, Apple products such as the iPhone, iPod, and iPad have replaced toys as the hottest requests. (Duracell Toy Report)
- Diagnoses of ADHD continue to rise, with one in 10 U.S. children affected at some point. (cdc.gov)

## Quick Stats

- Couples rank marital "stress-causers" in this order:
  - Finances
  - Intimacy
  - Children
  - In-laws
 (American Express)
- Children younger than 4 are four times more likely than older children to sustain a head injury while sledding. Experts recommend helmets and close adult supervision. (emaxhealth.com)



