

MIDDLE SCHOOL



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for young teenagers.

Equipping Middle Schoolers for Their Race

By Mrs. Iva Nell Rhea



Several years ago my young daughter joined a local youth track and field organization. As I attended my first track meet, I was astounded by the sheer number of participants and the variety of events. From ages 6 to 18, the boys and girls ran, race-walked, hurdled, jumped, and threw with skill and perseverance. As my knowledge as a spectator increased, I noted several keys to success on the track or field: the right pair of shoes was mandatory, proper planning was critical to success, and encouragement from coaches and friends seemed to give an athlete a huge advantage, especially in the last lap or final attempt of an event.

Middle school is a pivotal time for young teenagers. The values, beliefs, habits, and skills honed between the ages of eleven and fourteen follow the young man or woman into high school and beyond. Middle school students are fragile. They are full of expectations, yet they face many risks. What difference should it make that young teens are part of an educational community that strives to follow the biblical model and promote a Christian worldview? The team of middle school teachers at CCS is committed to making a difference in the lives of these precious students. We want to help them answer the question “What does it mean to live for Jesus?”

Hebrews 12:1 admonishes Christians to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (Today’s New International Version). Just as the young runners mentioned above needed the perfect-fitting pair of shoes for their particular event, so middle school students need the right preparation for their race. Culture pushes its values onto teens

in countless ways: the latest technology, music, movies, fashion, and sports icons. What is the task of the Christian school in light of this? Along with parents and church, we must stand strong in the gap for our children and equip them for the race that is theirs. In their immaturity, middle school students are likely to rationalize decisions about participation in activities that are “wrong shoes” by using phrases such as “that ___ is funny,” “everybody has ___,” or “there’s nothing really wrong with ___.” You fill in the blanks. As teachers, we have to be clear and direct as we demonstrate the application of scriptural principles in relevant ways. Christian teachers orchestrate discussions that cause students to consider the consequences of choices that lead away from God’s plan. Perhaps these discussions can come from a question posed in Bible class, a current event mentioned in history class, a scientific breakthrough discussed in science, even a lunch detention for a classroom disruption, or an after-school meeting with a teacher.

Hebrews 12:1 goes on to exhort believers “to run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (TNIV). Planning for a race or athletic event is crucial to successful completion. Every teacher knows that the routines and rules that are enforced in the first few weeks of the year are more likely to be kept throughout the long months of the second semester. Most middle school students are short-sighted and egotistical. They simply don’t see very far down the road. It is the job of those who love them to keep our eye on the long race. We must confidently instruct students who do not see the purpose in the lesson. We must boldly ask questions

that bring analysis of cause and effect. We must firmly stand up to students who need the safety of adults who love unconditionally. Part of planning for the race means holding students accountable for their actions and decisions. Middle school is the time to learn meaningful lessons without harsh, long-term consequences.

The writer of Hebrews describes the believer as one surrounded by “. . . a great cloud of witnesses” (TNIV). Middle school students need cheerleaders! They need parents, family members, youth pastors, and teachers who are on their side. At CCS, the middle school teachers know what makes a thirteen year old tick. They work to create an environment that stretches and challenges a student to think, create, laugh, move, and exist in community as God has created him/her to do. Our agenda, as middle school teachers, is to partner with the parent to help the child succeed in every way. Young teens are frequently overly critical of themselves; we desire to find a way to inspire each child so that he or she sees himself as God does. That is true reality—to see the world and each individual as God does.

Middle school students, like adults, are athletes in a race which is not identical to anyone else’s. Helping students determine their uniqueness, identity, skills, and gifts is part of the wonder of the early teen years. To dry tears, to look firmly in the eye, to raise the bar for assessing and evaluating every area of life, to share one another’s joys and burdens—these are the tasks of those who are called by God to teach those wonderful individuals called middle school students.

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