



MIDDLE SCHOOL

student ministry at Olive

PARENT HANDBOOK

Hello from Olive Baptist Church Middle School Ministry!

We are so excited that you and your student are a part of our student ministry here at Olive Baptist Church! At Olive, we believe students are not the church of tomorrow but the church of today! I believe the Middle School Ministry is one of the most crucial ministries of the church. (Sidnote: they are all VITALLY important. Just a lot goes on in middle school years!)



Did you know studies show that most people come to Christ before the age of 14? AKA around 8th grade! So that means in Middle School Ministry, we are able to reach those who are, statistically, the most responsive and receptive to the Gospel!

When students enter middle school, they are beginning an EPIC journey! They are starting the journey of owning their faith. Young teens are in the process of going from a faith shared by you, their parents, to a faith that is their own. This is a faith that will carry with them into adulthood. They will wrestle with (and even question) Biblical truths which will be solidified during this season of life. And that is OKAY! Here in the Middle School Ministry, we want to answer those questions, teach God's Word, while we equip and reach this generation for King Jesus. We are reaching and teaching future employees, bosses, wives, husbands, moms and dads! And many will get to formulate and strengthen their faith during these crucial years.

Not only that, but middle schoolers are just awesome! They embrace life with enthusiasm. They are honest (painfully sometimes!). They are open to new ideas and people. They can be both goofy and serious. Most of all, they just want someone to take them seriously. All these are excellent characteristics, but this is why the home and the church are so important. Studies show that two in five teenagers admit they are easily swayed by other people's opinions. This is why it is vitally important that both in the home and at church, middle schoolers are guided, encouraged, and disciplined in the Truth of Jesus Christ.

In this packet, you'll get an overview of what we believe "successful" ministry to middle schoolers looks like here at Olive Baptist Church. We've also included some helpful advice on what your middle schooler will go through, some encouragement to you, and how we hope best to connect your student to God and His Word. Like every area of the church, our heart for Middle School Ministry is to develop fully devoted followers of Christ.

Thank you again for being a part of this ministry!

In Christ,
Chad Daugherty
Minister to Middle School



Our “Big Win”

We “win” when middle schoolers have an encounter with Jesus that causes them to:

- 1) find their identity in Him,
- 2) experience God’s love through community, and
- 3) grow deeper in their faith through applying God’s Word in their daily lives.

We believe this is true from the student who doesn’t know Jesus, to the one who has grown up in the church and everyone in between. So, let’s unpack what each of those might look like:

1) Finding their identity means *knowing whose they are*.

One of the primary struggles middle schoolers can face is their search for the answer to “Who am I?” At times, the answer to this question is formed by finding who will accept them, and their identity is built around that group. Along with “who am I,” they are also asking where they fit in and who will accept them. When they find the answer to where they fit in first, they begin to cultivate their identity around who accepts them instead of who they are.

We desire students to not only know who they are but whose they are. Galatians 2:20 (NLT) says, *“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* The true identity of every person is found in Christ, through His life, death, and resurrection. It is not formed or formulated in any affinity group, but rather through the One who created them and loves them! When students know whose they are, they can know who they truly are: a beloved child of the one true King.

2) Experiencing God’s love through community means *they need the church*.

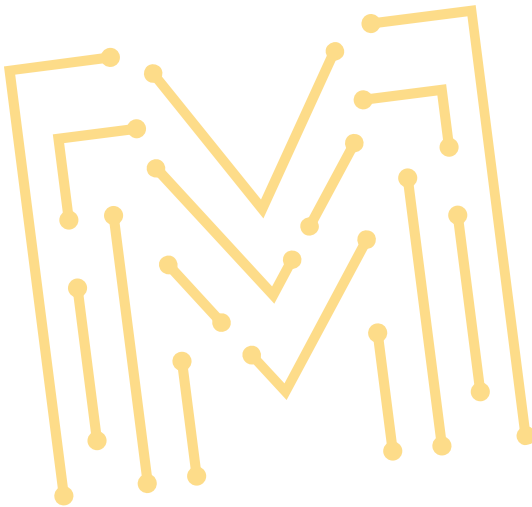
We all need the community of believers so that we can ask the tough questions, receive encouragement, pray for one another, and hear the Word of God preached (Hebrews 10:24-25). This is why we place a very high value and priority on our times of worship and small groups. We need the body of Christ to experience and receive the love of God and to grow as disciples. This is how middle schoolers will grow and deepen their faith, as they ask questions in a safe and welcoming environment where they know they can be honest and authentic. And receive honest, authentic, and Christ-centered answers.

Students need the church and the Biblical community that God has provided through His bride. However, God has also placed the church to be **secondary** when it comes to the discipleship of children. Parents are the **primary** disciple-makers of their students (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). But it is the promise of the church to train, equip, and come alongside parents to help assist in this calling God has placed on the family.

3) Growing deeper means students own their faith and join God on mission.

We believe most middle schoolers are moving from an inherited faith to a faith that is their own. So, in partnership with you, the parents, we will walk alongside them and help them know what they believe and why. We will create a space where questions are allowed, wrestling with Biblical truth is safe, and critical thinking is encouraged. We will teach students to discover for themselves what God's Word says and how to live it out.

Teenagers want to be challenged. We believe middle schoolers can and want to take part in God's mission of restoring the world through Jesus Christ. So, we will challenge them to serve others, share Christ, and use their gifts to build one another up and the church.

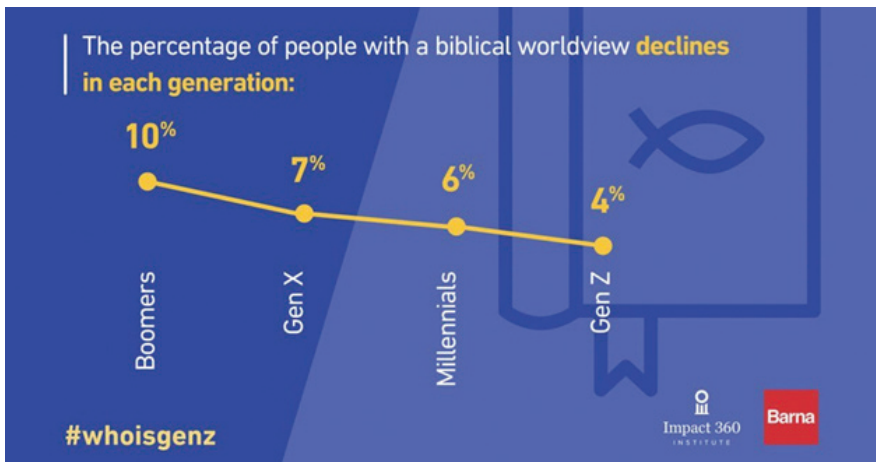


An Environment to Grow

We can all agree that middle school is a unique season. It can, in all honesty, even be a difficult season. It can often be a season of just merely surviving as opposed to thriving. Because of that, we know middle schoolers need a unique environment to help navigate this season and help them grow in their faith in Jesus. We want to see that “Big Win” previously discussed. To accomplish this, we desire to create the right “environment” which can help middle schoolers thrive, not just survive. We focus on two key components or “cultures” in our middle school ministry to create this environment: a culture built on God’s Word and a Biblical community.

Building a Biblical Culture

We are committed (and commanded by God) to building our foundation on the very Word of Jesus (Matthew 7:24-27). Barna put out a report in 2018 which states that out of 69 million children and teens in Gen Z (those born 1997 to 2012), just 4 percent have a Biblical worldview. This means that only 4% of Gen Z view the world around them with the truths and the authority of Scripture in mind. And if you look at the trends of generations, it is only getting worse.



What this statistic is saying is that there are fewer and fewer students who, not only do not know the Bible, but who do not believe it. When you don’t know it or believe it, you will not be changed by it. Instead the world around you will change you. When you believe the Bible is entirely accurate and corrects us (2 Timothy 3:16), you allow it to be the foundation of everything you say and do. This is what we want for our students.

How we will do this is by **teaching the Bible**. We desire to stay true to God's Word through our worship times together and through small group times. Our only desire is to make much of our Savior and glorify Him (Galatians 6:14). During student worship, we will teach and preach the whole Word of God, believing that it has all authority and is without error (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We want our students to know the Bible and know it well. But we don't merely want them to know it in their heads but in their hearts. We desire students to be changed by it, to live it out, and to share it. We want students to see the world around them through the lens of the Bible. Not be changed by the world, but change the world through the Word.

Building a Welcoming Culture

As we build our environment based on God's Word, we also want to build our environment where students want to be and feel welcomed. To accomplish this, we want to focus on three key components that are the mark of any effective ministry to middle schoolers. We want to create an environment where students are: loved, known, and cared for.

Loved

Jesus said, 'others will know you are my disciples if you love one another' (John 13:35).

The church must be the place where students can find out what true love is. And ultimately, **Who** it is. Jesus is the personification of God's love, and the church is where that love is on display. We want students to know that no matter what, they can understand they are loved not only by those in the church but by God!

Known

It is mind-blowing that the God of the universe knows us by name! We want every student who walks through our doors to experience that kind of acceptance. We hope each student in our ministry will have leaders who know their name, know the school they attend, and something personal about them.

Cared For

All these elements will mean nothing unless we are there for students when they are hurting. Middle schoolers face many problems and pressures. When we show genuine care for them, we display God's love in tangible ways. The church must be a safe place. It is a place where they can ask tough questions or express their struggles to someone who cares about them.

Fun

Believe it or not, fun belongs in church! This is not a key focal point. However, we believe that a relationship with God brings life and joy. Having fun makes middle schoolers feel safe, while breaking down walls for the Gospel to speak to them. When we create positive memories, we are spreading the joy of community. As the church, we want to create an environment for students to have fun and create relational bonds.



Young Teens Are Changing

If you were to look back at your middle school years (don't cringe too much!), one of the key aspects you might think about was how much you changed. Maybe you experienced a growth spurt, different friends, different schools, or different skin complexion. Whatever it might have been, you can acknowledge that changes are a regular and normal part of middle school.

To effectively minister to middle schoolers, we must acknowledge the changes they are facing and normalize and even celebrate them. These are formative years, and we can rejoice that what they are going through is God-ordained and designed! When we do this, this will help students walk through these changes with joy and understanding, as well as helping them feel comfortable and glad in who God has made them.

As a parent of a middle schooler, you probably are seeing or will see these changes in your student. So, let's talk about some of the changes your middle schooler is going through in hope that we can normalize and celebrate these God-designed changes.

Physical Development

These changes, also known as puberty, can be one of the more key and "embarrassing" changes that middle schoolers go through. This means the growth spurts, sexual maturation, voices changes, etc. And all the while these changes are happening, they are also highly self-conscious about the whole process. They are constantly worried about how they look and are perceived by others. To help them through this, we want to affirm that they are loved and uniquely created by God. We also want to affirm that the process, though awkward at times, is totally normal.

Mental Development

Young teens are moving from concrete to abstract thought. They are developing the ability to speculate about consequences and the future. They are learning how to make decisions. And they aren't that good at it yet. So, patience is a key practice when navigating this. Their brains are also developing thought patterns (neuron pathways . . . science-y!) which will stay with them for the rest of their lives. We want to help students learn how to think critically during this season of change, not just what to think.

Social Development

At this stage, middle schoolers are starting to become more independent from parents, which is normal and good. With ever-increasing independence, they are able to choose their own friends based on affinity (we like the same stuff) instead of proximity (who is around me). We want to help them navigate these relationships while also keeping Jesus as their identity.

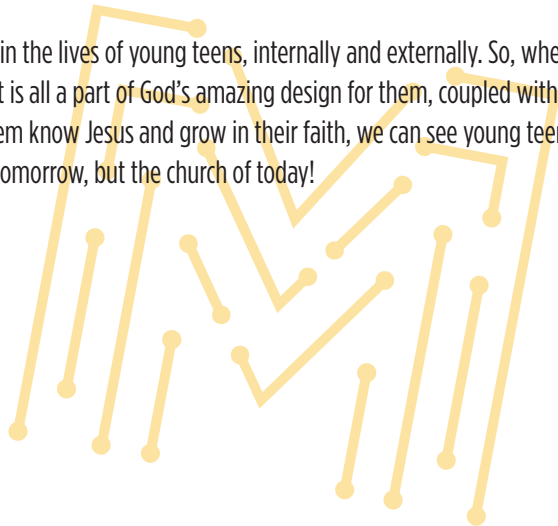
Emotional Development

As children, we experience a limited number of emotions (mad, sad, happy). In puberty, middle schoolers are experiencing a wider range of emotions than before. This can also be really confusing to them because these ranges of emotions can go up and down in an instant with no true apparent reason. They are subject to these emotional “ups and downs” and are confused about what they are experiencing. We want to help them name, understand, and respond to these emotions in a God-honoring way.

Spiritual Development

Young teens are moving from a faith inherited from you, their parents, to one that is their own. Once again, like the other developmental changes, this is not only good but healthy! They are asking, “Do I really believe this?” They desire to strengthen their faith. With this new development it can lead to a time of questioning and doubt. We want to help middle schoolers navigate their doubts by challenging them to know what they believe and why with you by our side.

There is so much going on in the lives of young teens, internally and externally. So, when we remind ourselves that it is all a part of God’s amazing design for them, coupled with an environment to help them know Jesus and grow in their faith, we can see young teens become not the church of tomorrow, but the church of today!



The Faith Journey

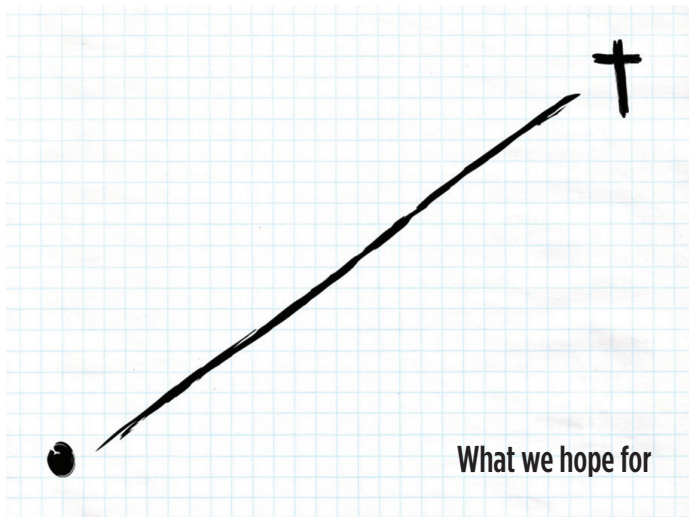
“Embrace the Squiggle”

Each student in our ministry will be at different stages in their walk with Jesus. And each journey will look different for each student. They will take steps forward, and they will take steps back. Our job as a middle school ministry is to meet them where they are in that faith journey, to help them to the next point, while encouraging them to move forward when they take those steps back.

This can often be frustrating for leaders and parents of young teens. However, our frustration can be traced to a simple misunderstanding of early adolescent development and the discipleship process of a young teen. We know it isn't clean cut and easy. Discipleship is messy—especially the discipleship of young teens. So, we want to help parents and youth volunteers alike to embrace the squiggle.

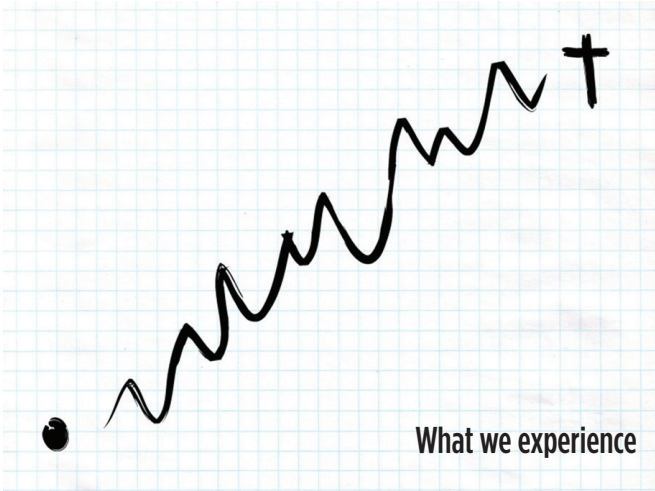
What we hope for:

Many youth leaders and parents of middle schoolers assume that if they are good enough at their job, and if teenagers are taking Jesus seriously, their spiritual journey will look something like this:



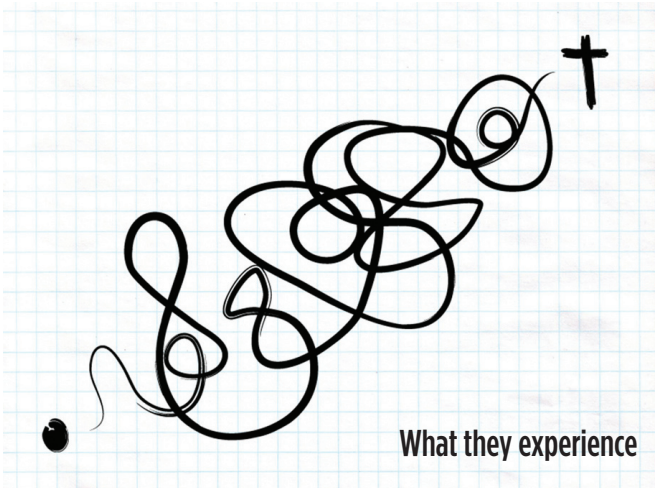
What We Experience:


But we all instinctively know that picture doesn't reflect what actually happens as teenagers' journey through their faith. The spiritual journey of a Christ-follower isn't that clean — we have highs and lows, peaks and valleys, good days and bad. In some way, we've been taught it looks like the stock market ticker: a long-term investment that yields results over time. Thinking it may look something like this:



What They Experience

What I have personally seen and experienced over the years is the spiritual journey of a middle schooler looks just a bit different — maybe more like this:

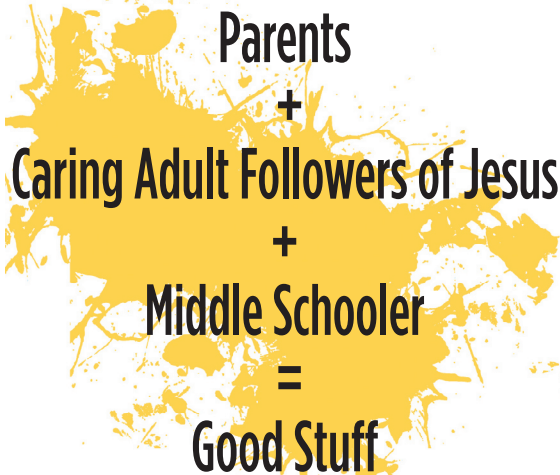




Today's middle schoolers don't need other adults whose only intent is to "straighten them out." Instead, they need to be surrounded by adults who love Jesus, want to "embrace the squiggle," and are willing to walk alongside them to help them navigate three of the most challenging years of their lives, all for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Parents and the church can see middle schoolers become disciples and disciple-makers when we begin to "embrace the squiggle" and have a willingness to understand the middle schoolers' spiritual journey. This is also a good reminder that even when we don't feel like we aren't making an impact on the lives of our teenagers because to us, it looks like they are all over the place and can't possibly be paying attention to what we are teaching. But when we understand that their journey is a squiggly line, we can stop beating ourselves up and doubting our impact and actually embrace the beautiful mess of middle school life.

One way to think about the journey of a middle schooler as they grow in Christ is this ...



Parents
+
Caring Adult Followers of Jesus
+
Middle Schooler
=
Good Stuff

When we add it all up, we'll see the good stuff! And that good stuff is to see middle schoolers become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, serving Him and making an impact in this world for the glory of King Jesus.

Middle Schoolers as Disciples & Disciple Makers

We want to take the long view of discipleship with each student. That means we see our middle schoolers not just as they are now but where they are headed in life. The young people in our ministry will one day be working adults, husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers. They will be the future generation to impact the world, and we hope their impact is for the glory of King Jesus.

To see this carried out, discipleship in middle school ministry is best put as “helping middle schoolers live for Jesus today so that they will live for Him tomorrow.” Below are a few critical aspects of what we desire to focus on regarding discipleship in middle school ministry.

Discipleship starts with the heart.

Jesus wants us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40). Instead of acting the part, we want their hearts to be turned to God. They need to know that everything we do is a RESPONSE to God’s grace and love for us, not a way to earn God’s favor. In discipleship, we also want to help our students find their identity in Christ rather than in achievements, relationships, looks, or activities. In other words, it is our relationship with Jesus that defines us, nothing else.

Discipleship happens outside the church, too.

We believe some of the best discipleship happens between Sundays, when “real life” happens. The joy of discipleship is that we get to help middle schoolers see Jesus and live for Him every day. We think the best discipleship relationships take advantage of this. This means meeting for breakfast with your small group, going to basketball games, or just hanging out. We believe that if discipleship takes place best in the context of small groups (Connection Groups), this must happen both during church time and outside of regular meeting times.

Discipleship is more about skills than knowledge.

Yes, we want to teach our students Biblical truth, but the reality is we cannot teach a middle schooler all they need to know for the Christian life in just a few short years. One of the key aspects of discipleship is to teach them the skills they need to be a mature Christian after they leave our ministry. Mature disciples know how to read the Bible, pray, respond to sin, resist temptation, serve others, and share the Good News of Jesus. These are skills we want our middle schoolers to have as they move into high school ministry.



Discipleship involves a challenge.

Following Jesus is simple, but it is not easy. We want to be clear that God is asking every disciple, even middle schoolers, to give up EVERYTHING for Him. Anything less is shortchanging our students. As we spend time with our middle schoolers, we want to challenge them to live for God in tangible ways. The bigger the challenge, the more they will need to rely on God to accomplish it. We believe they are up for the challenge.



Partnering with You, the Parent

As a church, we believe God has given you, the parents, the primary role of discipleship with your kids. Pastors and small group leaders may be an important influence in your middle schooler's life, but you will always be THE influence that shapes them the most. As a result, we see ourselves as partners with parents, not replacements for parents. We need you, and you need us! Teamwork makes the dream work!

We want to provide you with information.

Get to know your student's Connect Group leaders – It is critical that you get to know your students' Connection Group leaders. This builds trust and opens up the line of communication. We encourage our leaders to make it a habit to follow up with you regularly to hear how your student is doing.

Dates and Times – If our leaders plan on spending time with a student outside of Connection Groups, they should let you know ahead of time. You should be informed when they are meeting, what they are doing, what the student needs to bring, and when they will be done.

Celebrations and Concerns – We know you love it when you hear about your kids from other adults! We encourage our leaders to share when a student says something insightful, does something Godly or shows an area of spiritual growth. Likewise, if a leader is concerned about a student, you and Pastor Chad will be the first person for contact.

We Are In This TOGETHER!

We strive to show honor and respect you, the parent – It is our duty never to undermine your authority or openly question your decisions. You know your kids best. From time to time, a student may describe parents in a less than favorable light. We want to bless parents by helping your student see from your perspective.

We strive to reinforce the family by not competing for your time, attention, and affection – We know you often have a lot on your plate as parents. There is a lot more on your mind than your student's small group, so we want to make it easy on you. We will try our best not to plan events that end too late, cost too much, or undermine family rules. For example, if you don't allow your child to watch PG-13 movies, we will find another activity. Going to laser tag every weekend can add up quickly. We want to keep parents' calendars and budgets in mind as we spend time with your child.

What a joy it is to serve you and your middle schooler! I pray these years for your students are times they look back on with fondness and joy. I pray these are some of the best times of their life. It is full of fun, great memories, and fruitful relationships, but most of all, milestones in their walk with Jesus.



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