

Daniel Stroup BRINGING THE BIBLE TO LIFE FOR HERITAGE MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

by Julie Costakis

Eighth grade Bible teacher Daniel Stroup is one of those outstanding teachers older siblings and upperclassmen promise younger students will be a highlight of their year.

Former students report Mr. Stroup helps them feel known as an individual and that they matter to God. “Intentionality in his ministry is what makes Mr. Stroup stand out,” shares 2013 graduate Rachel Bradley. “He is consistent and purposeful in everything he does, and that shows through the way he interacts with students and through his letter ministry. He has touched so many lives!”

Stroup sends a personalized birthday letter to every student he’s ever had. His focus on relationships and being involved in people’s lives is apparent, though Mr. Stroup avoids focusing on the current letter totals. (God’s faithfulness in supplying 3,000 postage stamps in 2017 is a clue.)

“After my first year teaching eighth grade Bible, I realized that God had drawn upon every experience in my life to prepare me for teaching middle school. Although I was unsure at the time, He was using my family, growing up years, school and friends to mold my character for his purposes,” says Stroup.

Eighth grade is a critical juncture for students who face increasing independence with social and physical changes. “The middle school years are a time when students are adapting in their learning and ways to interpret life,” says Stroup. “In elementary, they are concrete thinkers—everything is black and white. By eighth grade they are able to think in abstract terms. This opens up more possibilities in the classroom and as a teacher you are able to have different creative methods that would not work in the earlier years.”

Stroup aims to speak to the hearts of his students and help ground them biblically for the regular pressures life can offer. “One of my main objectives is to help them see that the Bible has answers for all areas of life. Some students come with a good foundational understanding, and I want them to realize there are always new applications to life situations. Stories learned in elementary can have deeper meaning in the eighth grade.”

Stroup’s teaching methods are beloved by students past and present. Each has a favorite recollection, whether his mystery numbers on the board, California raisin countdown, engaging Bible teaching, or his distinctive photography. “All Heritage teachers did a good job of



making students feel cared for and valued,” offers Katie Cosgrove (’09), “but Mr. Stroup had a way of making you feel important and loved on top of that. Whether it was greeting you with a warm smile and calling you by name in the hallway, or treating you to a Chupa Chups in Bible class, every student looked forward to seeing Mr. Stroup every day.”

Stroup’s intentional focus on relationships doesn’t end when a student leaves his class and continues long after middle school. “I ran into Mr. Stroup . . . he *actually* remembered the details of my life

after high school and college,” Cosgrove says. “He has touched so many lives by just caring. It’s an honor to say I was a student of his.”

The annual birthday letter becomes an opportunity for former students to reflect upon their faith journey. “As our lives change and challenges differ from our earlier years, we can look at some of the familiar stories of the Bible and see new light to help us make wise decisions,” offers Stroup. “My hope is that students will see the Bible as a guide for life and the resource to understand God’s will for their lives.”

Stroup surmises that spending almost 40 years in the classroom may not seem very glamorous by worldly standards. “But when you find something you love to do, you never have to work another day in your life. I do not go to work in the morning—I go to school. It has been fulfilling, satisfying, and enjoyable.”

Those within the Heritage community feel the same about their connections with Mr. Stroup, whose birthday, by the way, falls on May 27.