

Advice for freshmen: don't get distracted

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When I was entering freshman year as a student at St. Joseph High School in Conway three years ago, many thoughts were swimming through my head: What do I need to do to better fit in with my friends? Is becoming friends with students in other grades a good idea? How should I improve my physical appearance? Should I date people this early?

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, all of my thoughts were never really centered around my academic abilities or my relationship with Christ. They were all centered around my friends and trying to "fit in."

St. Joseph High School houses not only grades nine through 12, but seventh and eighth as well, so the environment was still just as familiar as it was the previous two years. The only thing that was different was that, in those early years of seventh and eighth grades, my focus was on my grades, my family and God. How well I did in school was higher up on my list than, say, if my music tastes could blend in with my friends' tastes.

I will always need to focus on my relationship with God and work just as hard on building that one as I do the ones with my classmates.

When I entered ninth grade, my priorities shifted, which is a problem because freshman year was the most demanding year I had experienced to that point. I didn't place the importance on school that I should have. I was more concerned about the way I looked and what others thought of me than I was with my relationship with God and my Christ-like habits and behavior.

Because of this, added with the ever-present pressure to fit in, I became more insecure and lost sight of what is really important.

The stress of relationships also contributes largely to some of the challenges that can occur during freshman year. Freshmen are the youngest students allowed to attend high school dances and events, so naturally, to feel "mature," the talk in the hallways was "who was going with whom" and other gossip like that. This distracted all of us at times from the attention that we should have been placing on our schoolwork because dating suddenly had become a priority for the majority of our class.

Another part of freshman year that I wish I could have prepared myself for was the realization that my time was going to be filled with so much work. I had to learn that, in spite of the surprising amount of classwork, projects and reading assignments that were expected of me, I had to continue to prioritize my time that I spent with God.

As a freshman, I wish I had known that my grades were more important than any party that I would attend. As a freshman, I wish I had understood that all of my actions would have ramifications the next day or years to come if I did not seriously consider what I was doing or saying.

Most importantly, I wish I had remembered that my relationship with Christ is the most important relationship in my life.

I learned so much about the way I should live from freshmen year. I learned the importance of making good choices and being a true friend. I learned that I have to make the hard decisions in life, such as getting home a little earlier so I can make it to 8 a.m. Mass the next day or work on a class assignment.

I'm grateful for my classmates, who are some of my best friends. They have helped me through so many challenges, and they are a huge part of my experience at St. Joseph.

While I'm grateful to God for putting each of them in my life, I realize I will always need to focus on my relationship with God and work just as hard on building that one as I do the ones with my classmates.

Freshmen year can be challenging to say the least. It's a time of growth, change and new experiences. My advice to freshmen is to enjoy the experience as much as you can, but don't forget about what is truly important. Make the time to study for your classes, and, more importantly, make time for God.

Continue to use your time, talent and treasure for the purpose they were given, which will allow you to help yourself and those around you to live a happier life with Christ at the center.

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