

Character Education is that small, bright light....

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I am happily reading a book under the bright light of my living room lamp when suddenly I find myself shrouded in darkness. A fuse has blown. Again. No worries. I am in my own house which I know very well, and I feel pretty confident I can make it without any difficulty to the fusebox on the far side of the house. I cautiously take a few steps toward the hallway. Ouch! My husband's toolbox lies inconveniently abandoned in the middle of the floor. Grumbling, I nurse my wounded toe. Then the thought hits me: my cell phone is in my pocket...and my cell phone has a light! It's not a huge light, but it is bright and will definitely show me any future landmines potentially scattered across my path. Now, with light in hand, I tread cautiously, but much more securely, to the fuse box with my toes intact. Upon arrival I am finally able to bring light and normalcy back into my house.

For me, this scenario is an apt depiction of the years between 11 and 14, otherwise known as middle school. At the end of childhood, kids often feel like they have a good grip on how life works and how things should be. Then all of a sudden those "absolutes" start to change. These can include the expectations of others (school, family, friends, society), rapid physical growth (or no growth which has its own set of problems!), confusing and complicated life scenarios where things are no longer black and white, and often, very adult-like decisions that must be made which were never even on their radars in childhood. These can all pose as potential life landmines and kids who do not have a strong sense of right and wrong can easily become casualties-and unfortunately, many do. Character education is that small bright light in what can be a very dark world where right and wrong is not always clear. The positive character traits of vision, obtaining knowledge, maintaining high ethics, demonstrating humility and

self-control, graciously accepting counsel and seeking to understand others do not just happen: they must be both taught and caught.

It is a known fact in education circles that kids can very often engage and teach each other much more effectively than adults. All of the reasons why this is true may not be clear, but we know that kids know kids and they understand how they think, feel, act and speak. In this book, our students share their insights and wisdom on each of the character traits laid out in Dr. Jan Harris' book, *Leadership, According to Solomon*. We are confident that kids will listen because what they say is relevant, real and it connects. Although given some guidance at the start, the students wrote from their hearts advice they would share with a good friend. Each of their unique personalities comes through: from the sage adviser to the philosopher to the comedian. I have great hope that this book written by kids for kids will help other middle schoolers navigate the murky darkness of these uncertain years with greater confidence as they hold onto the light of tried and proven truths written by a very wise King and passed down through the ages.