

Worth It

Don't all mothers and fathers want success and prosperity for their children? The big question is this: How do you define these things? For us, we knew that no matter how wealthy our children were in material terms, there would not be true success and prosperity for them – either in this life or the next – apart from fulfilling God's purpose for their lives.

Like all parents, we had big dreams for our kids. We wanted the very best for them. We know that the best meant lives of devotion and service to Jesus Christ. And we knew that the best way to achieve these dreams was to enroll them in Christian schools. We haven't regretted that commitment for a moment. In short, what most Christian parents want for their children is for them to be committed, fully prepared disciples of Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? In its simplest form, it means being a follower of Jesus – to grow to be like Him and to do as He did. That's what it meant when Jesus walked the earth, approached men and women, and gave this invitation: "Come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21).

I believe there are three primary institutions God uses to reach and disciple children: the home, the church, and the school. Each one of these institutions plays an essential role, and when all three work together, they support each other and help children grow up the same way Jesus did: "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52)

Like many Christian educators, I describe these primary institutions as a three-legged stool. When I sit on a stool, I am thankful that its three legs work together to hold me up. I am also grateful when I see a child who is being upheld by the three primary institutions of home, church, and school. These institutions provide the foundation that children need for the rest of their lives. Ideally, the combined influence of home, church, and school will work together to influence children for Christ. Hopefully, all three will teach the same biblical principles and values so that young people will develop a uniquely Christian worldview.

The apostle Paul describes the Christian life as a battle against powerful evil forces, and I believe that this very real battle is why children need the three institutions of the home, the church, and the school to work together to support those children's growth and development. We are engaged today in a great spiritual battle for the hearts and minds of our children. Unfortunately, many young people enter it without the necessary preparation and protection.

Parents can't expect young people to succeed as adults in our complex world if their children have received only a Sunday school-level preparation for the challenges and spiritual battles that will confront them. Young people need to see godly values embraced and lived out in their families. They need to be active members in their churches, part of the Body of Christ, in order

both to grow their faith and to serve others. And they also need the kind of daily training they could receive at a Christian school – training that would help them apply the values of their faith to everything in life. In Christian schools, Christian teachers integrate faith and learning so that graduates will integrate faith and life.

I believe that one of the reasons so many young people sever their ties to the church once they graduate from high school and enter “adulthood,” whether that entrance be at college or in a career, is the disconnect between the secular worldview that students learn in secular schools and the religious training that they receive at home and at church. We – their parents – have neglected to properly prepare them for the challenges and conflicts they will face once they are on their own. As a result, many are mowed down on the battlefield before they even realize that a war is on.

The best solution to these challenges is to provide our sons and daughters with a solid and stable foundation for life. And that foundation is strongest when the three institutions of home, church and Christian school function together to instill in our children a solid biblical worldview and a strong faith in Jesus Christ.

Parents benefit from pastors and teachers at church and school, people who help moms and dads disciple their children. Churches (including youth groups and other youth ministries) benefit from parents and schoolteachers, both of whom help young people understand and apply biblical principles throughout the week. And schools benefit from families and churches, God-ordained institutions that help introduce children to Christ in their earliest years and who model Christ-like living.

I tell parents that the decision about where they send their children to school is a fifteen-thousand-hour question. That’s about how many hours young people are going to spend with their various teachers between kindergarten and graduation from high school.

I have seen many cases in which teachers at Christian schools seek out teachable moments with young people that affect those young people for a lifetime. There come times in the life of every young person when he or she asks questions about the meaning and purpose of life. This is an opportunity that is of limited duration. I always wanted my children to be around caring Christian teachers when these questions were being discussed. The impact of Christian education varies for each student, but parents who desire to see their children follow God should consider the positive and long-term impact it could have in the lives of their own children.

By Dr. Derek Keenan, VP for Academic Affairs for ACSI (Association of Christian Schools Int’l)

Worth It. Author/Editor: Brian Simmons, President, ACSI