

CHRISTIAN *School* COMMENT

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PURSUING AN EXCELLENT EDUCATION

As the parent of a school-age child, what should you look for in a school? In this conclusion of a two-part series on world-class Christian education, Dr. Barrett Mosbacker, head of Briarwood Christian School (Birmingham, Alabama), presents some excellent ideas on what to expect from a quality Christian education.

—Dan Egeler

In seeking a more biblical definition of excellence for our children's schools, I use the term *kingdom-class*: a school that is among the best in the world because of the quality and impact of its programs. Why should you search for a kingdom-class education for your child? There are several reasons.

First, the apostle Paul tells us to glorify God in everything we do—even things as mundane as eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 10:31). We are also admonished to work at everything as if we were working for the Lord himself (Colossians 3:23). Excellent Christian education glorifies God, but a halfhearted, “good enough” approach to the spiritual and intellectual development of our children does not.

Second, as parents, we have been entrusted with the education and discipleship of eternal souls. It is self-evident that the education of eternal souls requires nothing less than our best—all the time.

Each of our children has been called to a specific vocation. Our responsibility is to help them identify their God-given talents and passions and to equip them for their vocations. Our schools must be kingdom-class to prepare children to fulfill God's call upon their lives.

Third, Jesus said the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31). Regardless of the vocations our children eventually pursue, they will serve others. The preparation they receive in school will dramatically affect their ability to love and serve their neighbors through their callings. The student who has been prepared both academically and spiritually to be a kingdom-class cardiologist will more effectively heal patients—an act of love. But shoddy education leads to shoddy work, which is not loving to anyone, whether the home buyer or the heart patient.

Fourth, we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ, agents of restoration in a wounded world. A kingdom-class education prepares children to lead lives of redemption and *shalom*. In *Culture Making* (2008), Andy Crouch says each of us has an “intersection of grace and cross [that] will take us to every nook and cranny of culture.” It could be at home, creating a family culture of forgiveness, play, and prayer; or it could be in Africa, connecting American wealth with African orphans.

I cannot think of a good reason to settle for anything less than seeking a kingdom-class education for our children. Our Christian schools are not perfect—there is room for improvement. But excellence is as much a journey as a destination. I challenge you to commit to helping your school become kingdom-class for the glory of God, the development of your children, and the health of our schools.

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Reference

Crouch, Andy. 2008. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press.



CHRISTIAN *School* COMMENT

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WORLD-CLASS: DESIRABLE OR DANGEROUS?

Good parents tend to be picky when it comes to their children's schooling—as well they should be. Our kids deserve a world-class education. But what does that look like in a Christian school? I've invited Dr. Barrett Mosbacker, head of Briarwood Christian School (Birmingham, AL), to write a two-part series on world-class Christian education. I think you'll find his ideas insightful. —Dan Egeler

I vividly remember looking into the eyes of my infant daughters after bringing them home from the hospital. Innocent, beautiful children—full of potential. I knew instantly that I would give my life for them, and I wanted the best for them: spiritually, physically, relationally, and even educationally. So deep was my commitment to my daughters' education that, in God's providence, I left my corporate career to start a Christian school.

But what is "the best" when it comes to the education of one's children? What does "the best" look like? Is seeking the best even a biblical value?

I encounter two recurring objections when I advocate for world-class excellence in Christian schools. One is the fear that excellence will lead to elitism. The second is that the term *world-class* really means "worldly."

Excellence and *elitism* are not synonymous, nor does the passionate pursuit of excellence automatically lead to elitism. And a Christian school can be world-class without compromising its commitment to God's Word and to Christ. Part of our struggle arises from imprecise definitions.

Elitism is snobbishness: being condescending, pretentious, and stuck-up. This is antithetical to biblical attitudes and behaviors: "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves*" (Philippians 2:3).

Excellence, on the other hand, is defined as a distinction in quality, caliber, and mastery; it means being the best in class. I may, for example, seek out a world-class cardiologist if I need heart surgery. No one I know would seek out a well-meaning but average heart surgeon! If I have to choose between a world-class atheist cardiologist and an average Christian cardiologist when I go under the knife, give me the atheist. If I survive, I'll witness to him or her!

Seeking a world-class cardiologist is not elitist or worldly; it is responsible and smart. A world-class cardiologist has worked hard to become proficient at saving lives—an important responsibility! This is a noble goal, something to be commended and encouraged.

I can think of no more important responsibility than educating the hearts and minds of our children. In such a crucial calling, mediocrity simply will not do; it is unworthy of the task and unworthy of Christ.

However, while defining excellence in terms of being world-class is not inherently wrong or inaccurate, it is too narrow. In seeking a more biblical and descriptive definition of excellence for our children's school, I use the term *kingdom-class*: a school that is among the best in the world because of the quality and impact of its programs. It sets a standard of educational quality and innovation worth emulating—by non-Christian and Christian educators alike.

The students of a kingdom-class school are equipped for college and a career in a competitive world. They are prepared to use their God-given gifts in fulfilling both the Creation Mandate and the Great Commission. A kingdom-class school transforms the lives of its students and glorifies God through its commitment to excellence.

A kingdom-class education includes the quality measures that constitute a world-class program, but deepens them to include a biblical worldview. It educates both the mind and the soul and seeks to glorify God, not man, so that we obey Jesus' command to "Let your light shine before others" (Matthew 5:16).

So should we strive for our children's Christian school to be kingdom-class? The answer for some will be an obvious and emphatic "Yes," but it is not so clear-cut for everyone. Our response to this question strikes at the core of our responsibility as parents and the mission of Christian schools.

I believe we should strive to be kingdom-class, and in the second part of this series I will outline the distinguishing features of a kingdom-class school.

Dr. Barrett Mosbacker
Head of Briarwood Christian School

