

Is It Really Worth It?

About this time every year, Bonnie and I consider our family budget for the upcoming year. We have four children, and keeping our expenses less than our revenue has often been a real challenge. We have long discussions about priorities. Giving is important to us. Our family is important. We try to take a vacation together every year. We have a mortgage and a car payment, and we need to keep food on the table. It seems that the older our children get, the more their “needs” cost. For example, one college textbook can cost \$185 or more. Now that three of our kids are in college, textbook expenses every semester can really add up.

Like most of you, Bonnie and I have learned to budget for “big-ticket items” first. Through the years, an expense right up there with our mortgage has been tuition for Christian schooling, kindergarten through college. As we plan yearly for this huge expense, we have often asked (as you have), “Is this expense really worth it?”

When we pay tuition, room, and board every month, we are buying many “tangible” goods and services for our children, such as heat in the winter and air conditioning in the spring and the fall. We are paying personnel, maintenance, and upkeep costs for the school. And we often pay extra for “extracurricular” opportunities.

We are also purchasing many “intangibles,” such as a warm smile or a kind word. We are supporting role models for our children—people who cherish biblical values and live the Christian life with our kids day in and day out. How can we put a price tag on that? Our children will spend *much* more time with school staff than they’ll spend with us during the school year.

Roy Lowrie Jr., past president of ACSI, wrote often of Christian teachers’ vital role in children’s lives. He called faculty “the gold in the bank” of every Christian school (1978, x).

As ACSI president, I have the wonderful opportunity to travel around the world, experiencing firsthand what God is doing for children through Christian schooling. Luke 6:40 is true in every country: “Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (NIV).

I recently read a truly powerful autobiography, *Finding Home: An Imperfect Path to Faith and Family* by Jim Daly, Focus on the Family president. Daly

describes his very dysfunctional childhood—a stepfather named Hank the Tank; his mother’s death, which left him a homeless orphan at age 10; and life with foster parents in Death Valley. Daly writes, “It would be difficult to top the craziness that characterized the first fifteen years of my home life. By the time I started my senior year in high school, I’d experienced just about every imaginable variation of home life as a child.... I’d lived in almost two dozen different houses or apartments along the way” (2007, 187).

So what made the difference for Daly? In high school, he encountered Coach Mo: “Coach Mo and I immediately clicked. He became my first true mentor and got involved in the details of my life.... Coach Mo and his wife, Joyce, reached out to me, inviting me to their house for dinner from time to time. They were so ... *normal*” (2007, 178; italics in original).

Coach Mo took Daly and a few other football players to a Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp, where Daly prayed to accept Jesus.

By God’s grace, Jim Daly met a Christian coach in a secular high school. The school contained a nugget of gold—but, comparatively, the Christian high school I attended was Fort Knox, because *every teacher and every coach* followed Jesus! Some children, like Daly, are literally without parents. Others may have one or two loving Christian parents. All, however, need the discipleship offered by loving Christ-followers.

So, is the cost of Christian school tuition really worth it? Ask Jim Daly about the importance of a Christian coach in his life! Bonnie and I have decided that we need all the help we can get to accomplish our primary life goal: that all our children will be thoroughly prepared, sold-out, full-throttle disciples of Christ. Is the cost worth it? Ask us in 1,000 years.

References

- Daly, Jim. 2007. *Finding home: An Imperfect path to faith and family*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook.
- Lowrie, Roy W., Jr. 1978. *To those who teach in Christian schools*. Rev. ed. Janet L. Nason. Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 1998.



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