

## **On Wisdom and School Options**

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At Mosaic Church, there are many families with young kids. In the last three years, I have heard parents ask many questions, but a persistent question in recent days has been: What schooling option should I choose for my children

I appreciate the question. I am always humbled when the members of Mosaic reach out to our pastors for prayerful wisdom. One of the ways our pastors and staff want to bless our people is through prayerful listening, helping our people weigh the questions and issues of their lives with holiness, humility, and wisdom.

We felt that the volume of these questions merited a thoughtful response that we hope will bless Mosaic families as they consider these questions.

It should be noted that we believe these questions and issues are best dealt with at the local church level, and our response is not intended to be applied to all people, in all churches, everywhere. Instead, what we offer is an approach to this question that takes into account where God has placed us and the unique time in which we live.

This is a work of pastoral theology. We prayerfully look to God's word and then ask how it can help us shepherd the people of Mosaic in the city of Richardson in this time.

With that in mind, let me begin with three things.

The Bible doesn't tell us what school option is right for our children.

The Bible does tell us who is primarily responsible for forming our children.

The Bible does shape how we have emotionally charged conversations like these.

Now let's dive into some of the broader questions, thoughts and points around this topic.

### **1. Where should I send my kids to school?**

Should I send them to public school? Should I send them to private school? Should I homeschool them? These are sincere questions and they should be approached with humility and wisdom because, as frustrating as it might be, there is not one right answer to these questions.

Not only must they be answered in light of each individual family's capacity, they must be answered in light of each individual child's need. Some (but not all) examples:

There may be a family who would prefer their children attend public school but have developmental needs that may require more focused attention than would be available there.

There may be a family who would prefer a homeschool environment but has a work situation that renders it unable to provide that type of education.

There may be a family who would prefer their children receive a classical education in a private school environment but finds the cost of it prohibitive.

And for many others, this may be something they have never questioned. They are happy and without hesitation on the schooling option they have chosen for their children based on key criteria that matter to them and their family.

There are countless examples I could provide, but here is a basic way of us beginning to “feel” through the unique contours of this question: Not every family and child is the same. They don’t all have the same callings, needs, opportunities, resources, constraints, strengths, weaknesses, or luxuries.

Additionally, all of us should hold any decision we have made (not just about schooling options) with open hands of trust and wisdom. Being willing to lay our decisions before the Lord regularly to ask: Is this what the Lord would have us do? This means that families who choose one particular course of action over another may at some point in the future feel led to change course. This is the life of trusting the Lord with the future while cultivating sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit as we seek to walk with Him.

We are one body with many members, and each member is different (1 Corinthians 12). This reality should bend our hearts to a compassionate and open-handed posture when it comes to the question of schooling options, both for ourselves and for others.

## 2. The Bible does not prescribe one school option

Truly, the story of the Bible doesn’t address this because universal public/private education (or even every child receiving a formal education in any manner) was not a norm in the ancient near east. Subsequently, we shouldn’t expect God’s word to offer a one-track approach to this question. While the Bible speaks authoritatively and sufficiently, it isn’t exhaustive, addressing every question we might have.

Instead, the Bible invites us with this question (as it often does) into the arena of wisdom. We have to ask questions of intention, motivation, fear, and hope.

How do we believe we can best honor God with this decision?

Who is my child?

What resources do I have?

What is the value, opportunity, and cost of public/private/homeschool for my family and/or our community?

We will not all answer these questions the same way. And that is fine.

### 3. Parents have a unique responsibility to form their children within a covenant community

While the Bible doesn't prescribe a schooling option for our children, it does speak with startling clarity about the fundamental formational environment for raising our children.

The Bible paints a picture that children should be raised by parents who fear the Lord and seek His presence within the context of a covenant community. We could look to any number of places in scripture, but let me point to a few ways we see this play out in the Bible.

The story of scripture is this: God is determined to have his people live their whole lives in His presence, in His place, to reflect His purposes.

Across the Bible we see that God is inviting his image-bearers to live lives shaped by dwelling in His presence as a people marked by His purposes. Throughout the Bible, there are specific passages that draw our attention to the role of parents and a covenant community surrounding individual households.

In Deuteronomy 6, we hear Moses instruct Israel that they are to be diligent in teaching their children about the mighty acts, character, and words of God. The picture that we get in Deuteronomy 6 is that the words of God are to shape the ordinary lives of God's people as they live together as a covenant community of families of faith.

In Proverbs 22:6 we hear the writer say, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Family language remains in the New Testament, although it is safe to say that it often doesn't conform to precisely how we talk about family. Take for instance Jesus' words in Matthew 12:46-50:

"While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, 'Who is my mother and who are my brothers?' And stretching out his hand towards his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother

and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Here, it is clear that Jesus is expanding our concept of family to include those who are in Christ Jesus. This corresponds to the general arc of the story of scripture and the principles we find throughout the Old Testament.

When it comes to raising children, God has placed the fundamental responsibility and calling to raise children within faith-filled families who are embedded in a faithful community.

What does this mean?

It means that we can confidently say that each individual household is meant to bear responsibility to form their children in accordance with what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful. But they are not called to do that alone, they are called to do that within the wider context of a community of faith that looks to be faithful to the Lord Jesus together.

So while scripture doesn't prescribe where to send your kids to school, it lays a foundation for thinking through their formation that places emphasis on the role of God-fearing mothers and fathers who are rooted in a gospel-centered community of faith.

#### 4. Couldn't public school be dangerous for my child?

I understand this concern. As I look to the future of public education in the global west, I too share a concern about what influences will exist within our public institutions, including the public school ecosystem. And yet, this is not uniquely true of our cultural moment, though we may find it uniquely pressing.

Our public school system has, like most things that exist this side of heaven, always been a mixture of beauty and brokenness. Reflecting the winds of the culture at any given moment. Take segregation, for example. It was not that long ago that the very schools that all children now have access to in Richardson would not have been accessible to many of the children who currently live within the district.

Praise God that all children now — regardless of race, class, ethnicity or citizenship — have access to our public schools. And yet, the winds of culture continue to blow.

Let me speak to the unique tensions of our city in this current moment: In Richardson ISD, we have seen the Department of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion work diligently to provide meaningful resources for our students when it comes to the issues of race, ethnicity, and culture. We are grateful for the work they have done and are doing to make sure our district is characterized by equity and justice for children of every race, class, ethnicity, or citizenship.

At the same time, I share concerns about situations where books and curriculum accessible to our students may begin to present confusion on matters of fundamental importance, namely the reality of biological differentiation and the fundamental anatomical differences between men/boys and women/girls.

The district, at present, has been clear that while some books have become available in the libraries of our schools, they will not be read from the front of the classroom and their purposes are not “indoctrination,” but rather a diverse option for all students in the district who will attend these schools. As a public institution that provides services to an entire community made up of neighbors who have myriad worldviews, the district is trying to delicately and honorably walk this line, but I understand why parents of students in our district are concerned about this step.

At the very same time, private school and homeschool options do not provide the assurance of protection that some might believe. We are living in a world where our children are going to be exposed to worldviews, ethical systems, and choices that do not accord with Christian convictions.

## 5. Who Mosaic Church should be

So what does all of this mean for Christians? At the very least, it means the members of Mosaic Church should ...

- Labor diligently for their home to be the primary place of spiritual formation in the true, the good, and the beautiful for their children.
- Sacrifice in order to have their families deeply rooted and deeply connected into the life of the church to aid in the formation of their children and their own resourcing as they look to steward their families.
- Amid our wrestling on the question of school for our households, in no way gossip about, slander, or mock image-bearers (regardless of their beliefs concerning sexuality, gender identity, race, etc.). There is no such thing as conditional dignity for the Christian. We believe that everyone, regardless of their beliefs and convictions, is worthy of dignity, respect, and love.
- In no way gossip about, mock, or slander our school districts (including teachers, administrators, and faculty). We love this city, and our love for this city is not conditional on whether they agree with our convictions or not. This means we should avoid direct or indirect involvement in all forms of gossip, slander, or petty attacks.
- In no way gossip about, mock, or slander those who choose public school, private school, or homeschool as a viable schooling option for their child. We will be a church that is made up of various approaches to the question of schooling, and that is good.

- In no way disregard, diminish, or deny that as Christians we have core convictions and that some of these convictions concern matters of sex, sexuality, and gender. We unashamedly and unequivocally believe that God has designed men and women, created marriage to be between one man and one woman, and intended for sexual intimacy to only be enjoyed within that marital union. At the same time, we are committed to being people of compassionate conviction.

A good rule of thumb for us as Christians -- as image-bearers committed to truth -- is to assume the best about others and, when in a place of disagreement, to work doubly hard in order to grasp, digest, and respond to the best form of whatever opinion or conviction is different from ours. In other words, to display uncommon humility.

Disagreement and frustration is often exacerbated by the social media forums in which many choose to have these conversations. For that reason, it is our strong suggestion that the people of Mosaic should exercise sober-minded discernment, wisdom, and self-control in how they engage, initiate, or contribute to these conversations online and in public forums of any kind.

This is love, not tolerance. To listen to someone, to understand each other well enough, so that if and when we disagree, we do so with honor, dignity, reason, and care. We won't have our convictions dampened through disagreement, but we will be people who speak the "truth in love." (Eph. 4:15)

## 6. Looking ahead to the future

Truth and love. Neither are negotiable.

As a diverse church family, we should expect that our body will be composed of people who attend public school, homeschool, and private school. And we will not be divided over these preferences, nor will we be antagonistic or bitter in how we hold them in the eyes of our neighbors.

Where scripture is clear, we should walk in charitable certainty. But where scripture invites us into the realm of wisdom, we should walk in convictional charity. This is the harder way. It is far easier for us to make our preferences law than to be people of grace, generosity, and humility as we walk faithfully with our preferences.

It's reasonable to ask: When would a disagreement move us from the collaboration and participation of convictional charity to the more distinct charitable certainty? Or, more specifically, How would we know when as Christians we should no longer participate in a particular system or structure?

This is a good question. In many ways, the church has been seeking to faithfully answer and live this out since its inception. Without making this letter longer than it already is, a good rule of

thumb for Christians has been rooted in the distinction between what I might call the freedom of conscience and the coercion of conscience.

As Christians who live in a country filled with diverse image-bearers, we should expect that the impact of sin will make life together challenging sometimes. Living in a democratic republic as we do means that our public institutions will always be subject to the winds of change in ways that convictional Christians will not be able to affirm.

For Christians, who live in a land of religious liberty (something we are not entitled to in any place at any time, but are grateful for in this place at this time), it is our hope and expectation that we can live with freedom of conscience as active participants in the public institutions of our day. This means that we hope that we can live with charity in light of the convictions we have without having our consciences bound by convictions that do not accord with our own.

Where it becomes necessary to withdraw from public institutions is when there is a coercion of conscience. Where Christians are expected to deny their convictions or embrace divergent convictions or claims in a way that is antithetical to their conscience before the Lord. When that occurs, Christians have to say gently, but firmly, "I will render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar. But my heart, soul, and conscience is not included in that."

At present, at least in our community, there is not a coercion of conscience. We have freedom of conscience to live out our faith publicly in our public institutions. We should be grateful and eager to guard this freedom of conscience for our community and our neighbors. This value isn't just for Christians, we have to be people who believe in a freedom of conscience for all of our neighbors, regardless of their convictional or cultural differences.

In Philippians 2, Paul exhorts the church into a countercultural way of living. He says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil. 2:3-4)

Let us be mindful and careful as a church family that we don't begin to show preference or partiality to those whose views on schooling options accord with our own views. Let's be a family so united in the essentials of the gospel that we live with generosity toward those who differ from us in any regard in the non-essentials. When we discuss these matters with each other, let's move past acceptance to affirmation. Let's embrace a culture that hears about differences in non-essentials and seeks to listen, learn, and build up our brothers and sisters in Christ as they seek to pursue faithfulness when it comes to issues of faith, life, and wisdom.

May the Lord bless our homes, our children, and our city. May He give us all wisdom in how to make discerning decisions. And may He grant us grace to hold these decisions with holiness, humility, and hope.