

# CHRISTIAN *School* COMMENT

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## THE BACK-TO-SCHOOL TREE

You've made a fantastic, eternity-impacting decision by enrolling your kids in a Christian school. But how do you maximize your investment? I've invited Jay Ferguson, headmaster of Grace Community School (Tyler, Texas) to outline a few deliberate actions you can take to do so this school year. —Dan

I have a crepe myrtle tree on my patio that holds a special place in my heart. It's not the prettiest tree in my yard, or the biggest. The original tree blew down in a storm and was replaced by scrawny sprigs that defied nature to grow into a strong, flowering tree. Each year, as my three girls headed off to their first day of school, their mama would stand them in front of that tree and take their picture. At first, eager to be going to school, they wore shiny new patent leather shoes reflecting excited, snaggle-toothed smiles. Later they wore uncertain grins as they tentatively embraced a new year of emerging adolescence. Finally, they wore hastily applied makeup and rolled their eyes as they sprinted out the door, on to early morning activity and out of our everyday lives forever.

I love that tree—it's a faithful backdrop to beautiful childhoods well lived. It's also a pretty good metaphor.

As we settle in to the new school year, we are all in different places in our children's school-age careers. Whether you're a first-timer or a grizzled veteran, you've already made one of the most important decisions you can make as a parent by enrolling your children in a Christian school. But choosing well is only part of the work. I want to encourage you to maximize your family's experience in your Christian school, as my wife and I have been blessed to do, by becoming involved in everything the school has to offer.

First, please pray for your children, their teachers, and the school community. Every morning when that car door slams and your kids run off to school, rather than turning up SiriusXM immediately, would you take a minute to pray for your school community: for safety, grace, mercy, patience, and unity? Wouldn't it be incredible to see God take your ordinary prayers and transform your school in extraordinary ways?

Second, please reach out to other parents within your kids' classes. In the day of digital communication and lots of mobility, we are

not as good at building relationships as we were when we had fewer distractions. Much of the power of your school is the strength of its community. But your ability to enjoy that community, to fully take advantage of it and allow your kids to thrive in it, depends on you. Some of my deepest relationships were forged in doing life together: doing home repairs with other dads for a single mom, going on daddy-daughter canoe trips, and watching our kids' ball games. Almost everything I now know as a parent I learned from these wise people as we did life side by side. But I had to reach out first.

Third, be involved in the school. Your school is not as strong as it could be without your engagement. Help make it stronger by using your gifts. Are you a builder? Do you have a great testimony? Do you love to bake? When you have the chance to give from what God has given you—and you will have many chances at your school—please take advantage.

Finally, be what you hope for. Model what you want to see in your children. Christian Smith, a researcher at Notre Dame and the director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society, says the great likelihood is that your kids will become what you are. If that worries you at all, one of the best ways to change their future reality is to change your present one.

When a school community together models what's pure and noble and good for its children, forgiving each other and seeking forgiveness, engaged in the life of the school, characterized by enduring relationships, going to the Lord daily on behalf of each other, that community tends to produce learners with a strong, enduring, resilient faith. Kind of like my tree. —Jay

