

True Parenting Success

by Edwin Crozier

I admit it. I've been a parent for more than 18 years now and I recently realized I have had the completely wrong idea about successful parenting. That means I've preached the wrong idea, taught the wrong idea, exemplified the wrong idea, and worst of all, let my parenting be governed by the wrong idea. What is even more sad is I didn't come up with this wrong idea on my own. I believe it is the tacit idea most Christian parents, and therefore most preachers, teachers, and shepherds, have and pass on whether consciously or subconsciously. I'm guessing you have been influenced by this wrong idea as well.

I'm going to warn you. When I share with you what the wrong idea of successful parenting is you will be shocked. In fact, your first reaction will be that I've lost my mind. But bear with me.

Wrong: Successful parenting means producing children faithful to God.

Come on, admit it. You have thought people failed as parents when their children never turned to the Lord or fell away. You've also thought parents were successful when their kids were baptized and grew to be active in sound local churches. You may have thought yourself automatically successful because your children are faithful. Or, sadly, you may have thought yourself a failure simply because one or more of your children left the Lord.

"This can't be the wrong idea!" you exclaim. "Can it?"

Not only is it wrong, it will produce all kinds of incorrect approaches to parenting. When success equals producing faithful children, your parenting style becomes manipulative and controlling. You may not become manipulative and controlling of your kids (though it is very likely you will). Rather, you become manipulative and controlling of circumstance and, in the end, God. This idea of successful parenting actually removes God from the driver's seat and places you there. With this idea of success, you never ask, "What is the right thing to do in this situation?" Instead, you ask, "What can I do in this situation to produce the results I want?" You don't say, "I'll seek first God's kingdom and righteousness in this parenting situation and let Him provide the rest." Instead, you say, "This is the best way to produce the result I want." Of course, it is good that the result you want is faithful children. But we all have different theories about the best way to accomplish that. To be honest, after watching parents of all kinds for 42 years, I've seen every parenting style produce both faithful and unfaithful kids. There is no foolproof parenting model that produces faithful children 100% of the time.

Right: Successful parenting means planting and watering the seed of God's Word in my child's heart.

Why would producing saved children be different than producing saved people in any situation? Remember what Paul said in **I Corinthians 3:5-6**: "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (ESV). Who are we as parents? We are merely servants given opportunities to share the gospel. Our job is to plant and water. God's job is to give the growth.

Granted, there is more to this than a Bible study when you believe your child has reached the age of accountability and it is more than taking them to church regularly. This includes submitting to the gospel yourself, demonstrating the gospel throughout life, and teaching the gospel verbally as you have opportunity. Successful parenting means doing what is right based on God's Word, not doing what you are convinced will "work." Successful parenting means words and actions aligned with the gospel, pointing our children to God. They may submit. They may not. That is between them and God. We have only failed as parents when we have neglected to show the gospel to our kids. The question then is this: how will you show the gospel to your children this week?