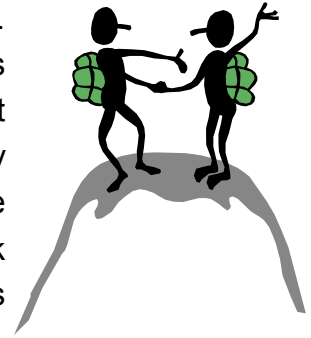




Growing Kids of Character

It's one of those events which come around every year without fail. For some parents it is a time of excitement and pride, for others it is a time of disappointment and hoping perhaps that our children might 'do better' next year. Having just attended my 17th Presentation Day as a parent of school-age children, I will admit to having felt a wide range of emotions in response to my sons' achievements, or lack thereof. This year left me pondering anew something which I think is fundamental to parenting.



Don't we love to see our children or grandchildren succeed? Whether it is winning the race at the athletics carnival, scoring the winning goal in the sporting match, or coming first in the class at school. Our chests puff with pride, as we say inwardly, "that's my child". Eager and ambitious parents line the sideline of every children's sporting event each weekend throughout the year. You could be forgiven for thinking that it was the Olympic Games, given the intensity of emotion oozing from the adult spectators! I've often wondered what it is that drives parents to want their children to succeed so much? Perhaps the children are achieving what the parents, themselves, never could, and so there is a sense of reflected glory?

I have wondered too if we are any different as Christian parents? I know that I have often fallen into the trap of wanting my child to achieve, to succeed, to win. The drive for success has, at times, clouded my perspective. I can notice when my son does not do as well as usual in an exam, but fail to notice his helpfulness and support at home. As Christian parents, we may pay lip service to the fact that 'who they are' is more important than 'what they do', but do we really live out this principle. Do we follow the ABC (Achievement before Character) principle of parenting, or are we working towards the CWA principle (Character with Achievement)? It seems to me that it is not wrong to want to see our children achieve their potential, and to encourage them to this end. However, it must be kept in perspective, and we need to remember that 'Character' is what God looks for. Character can be seen in qualities like honesty, responsibility, reliability, morality, godliness. How well do we, as Christian parents, work towards fostering these qualities in our children?

Cloud and Townsend, well-known authors and founders of the concept of 'boundaries' have written a terrific book called "Raising Great Kids", in which they talk about character development in our children. It's a good and challenging read. If you, like me, sometimes have a distorted and worldly perspective in childrearing, let me encourage you to read this book. We have an enormous influence in the lives of our children (and grandchildren). May our input inspire in them the qualities that God values.

(Sharon Kirk, MU Diocesan President & Community Education Coordinator, Anglican Counselling Service - Diocese of Armidale. May 2009)