

# FOCUS ON FAITH

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## WHEN I WAS A CHILD

They say (and I've always wondered who the 'they' are!) that as you get older you begin to regress to your childhood. Mind you there are some (and I'm sure you know who they are) that never seem to make it out of infancy. But then again, according to the Clarks Shoes adverts, you should act your shoe size not your age!

However, thankfully most of us not only grow up physically but also begin to mature in our thinking and our behaviours. Actions that were once acceptable as a child are not tolerated when we 'come of age' so to speak.

In most civilised societies children are afforded special treatment and protection. Of course I am well aware that this doesn't happen all the time and all too often we hear about mistreatment, abuse and violent acts perpetrated against some of our society's most vulnerable young people. The recent police investigations on Jersey appear to be revealing abuse on an institutional scale that must have been going on for some years and yet somehow it was kept secret and out of the public eye. We protect children because they are inexperienced and don't have the physical or rational capacity that adults supposedly should have.

But as we get older more is expected of us – it is assumed that we should behave more responsibly. I reckon most of us have had parents who've said something like "at your age you really should know better". Or perhaps we've heard that other well used phrase, "When will you ever grow up?"

Is that fair? Just because you've clocked up another birthday it doesn't necessarily mean that you've suddenly acquired all the wisdom you need to behave acceptably or sensibly. Whilst there may be a link between age and understanding, I'm convinced that good judgment, insight and perception are much closer aligned with the examples of wisdom that we are shown by those around us who are more mature – and that doesn't necessarily mean mature in age.

Of course longevity means we benefit from more of life's experiences which should help us grow in our understanding and how to respond to situations. So in one sense age should be synonymous with increased discernment on the basis that we've had more time to become educated in the ways of the world. As the adage goes, "the older you are the wiser you become" – although I'm sure that it's not automatic!

The Apostle Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth said, "**When I was a child, I talked like a child, I**

**thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.**"

The context of the passage is that of how we distinguish what real love is all about. In fact Paul had just written one of the most quoted sections of the Bible – the words of which are often used at marriage ceremonies.

He describes how love never fails because along with many other qualities love is patient and kind and it always protects, trusts, never giving up despite the difficulties that may come along.

And I believe that's the essence of maturity – the outworking of love in action. When the tough times come – and they do for all of us – how do we react? How often do we see tit-for-tat retaliation and revenge when someone is physically or emotionally hurt? Or what about adults who metaphorically 'take their bat and ball home' when they are ignored or argued with? Ever witnessed a situation when someone you know becomes unduly angry or sarcastic or petulant when they aren't able to get their own way?

Jesus said that we are to have the simple trust that children have in order to receive God's kingdom. The core of the Christian faith has child-like qualities but it is never childish. Jesus

wasn't saying that we should be infantile or juvenile in our beliefs, nor should we be naïve. The kind of faith Jesus advocates is down-to-earth, straightforward and uncomplicated.

Both adults and children can often be self-centred and selfish but I believe real faith has at its heart the desire to be generous and self-sacrificing. That's exactly the way Jesus lived His life and its how He calls us to live too.

Regretfully maturity doesn't always equate to age! Life's daily tests enable us to demonstrate whether we respond prudently and wisely or immaturely. The choice is ours – every day.

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If you would like to find out more about what Christians believe, log on to [www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk](http://www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk) where you'll find information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other resources.