

FOCUS ON FAITH

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QUICK FIX

Over the past few weeks I've been conscious of how other people's expectations impact on our lives. For instance, whenever someone takes on a new role it's vital to know not just what they think their responsibilities and duties are but what those around them are expecting and hoping for. Someone once said, *"It's awful to work for a nervous boss, especially if you're the one who makes him or her nervous."*

In the film 'The Devil wears Prada' Meryl Streep plays the obnoxious Miranda – editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine. She bullies and coerces her long-suffering staff intimidating them into demonstrating their loyalty. Through numerous seemingly impossible tasks and demands she pressurises them into thinking achievement will gain her favour and patronage. Even though her personal life is a total mess – sacrificed on the altar of fame and success – in one telling moment she tells her innocent and slightly naïve personal assistant, Andrea, *"Of course people want to be just like us"* as she rushes off to manipulate and brow-beat someone else into submission. Andrea, in one of those seminal moments of clarity, recognises she doesn't want her life to pan out like Miranda's and leaves her in the midst of the fawning crowd. She throws her incessantly ringing mobile phone into a fountain as a final act of defiance to pull down the curtain on this episode of her life.

"Character is often forged in the furnace of failure and tragedy"

How many times have we tried to live up to the expectations of others only to see that our best efforts are not good enough? That no matter what we try to do to please or impress it seems our energies are wasted.

Here's the good and the bad news!

Good news first – God doesn't expect perfection. I have to admit that I'm a bit of a perfectionist but I've come to realise that I can't do everything 100% all of the time. I make mistakes either because of my personal limitations or because I don't always want to spend the requisite time learning what I should do. So now, whilst I strive (and that's not a bad word by the way) for excellence in what I do, I don't beat myself up (well not always!) when my attempts aren't totally flawless.

We don't immediately get to our destination the moment we start the engine in our car. We have to travel the route and for some of us that includes getting lost on occasions. We read the map

incorrectly, miss the signpost or take the wrong turn and possibly end up going round in circles for a while or on an unexpected detour.

The Bible tells us that in becoming a Christian we are 'a new creation'. However it also says that we are transformed in incremental steps as we work out in day to day living what it means to be a Christian.

So the bad news is – there is no quick fix!

Character is often forged in the furnace of failure and tragedy; it is honed and refined in both joys and sorrows and through overcoming of life's daily setbacks; shaped and moulded on the anvil of adversity. We go through 'stuff' not because a higher power demands unrelenting obedience and loyalty but because integrity, reputation and reliability have to be tested – they aren't 'givens'. Life's annoyances, frustrations and hindrances serve to bolster our resolve and resolution and to develop our personalities and temperaments.

Of course the temptation is always there to jack it in or to let off steam at anyone and everyone when the going gets tough. Relationships of all kinds break down through lack of trust when individuals promise much but can't or don't deliver. The easy way is often to leave even though that has consequences. Tenacity, patience and a willingness to hang on through the hard times are virtues that are hardened through facing up to, rather than avoiding, difficulties.

Fleeing from one crisis often leads to another crisis. Learning the lesson usually means pain initially but avoidance typically means it comes around again – maybe in a slightly difference guise – until we break through.

I'm so glad that God doesn't give up on us as easily as we can give up on Him. There's nothing longer than eternity – we're in it for the long haul. God's in the renovation business – He takes the old ways and transforms them through perseverance and persistence because He believes in us and wants the best for us.

Quick fix it ain't – but surely anything worth having is worth being tested.

If you'd like to find out more about what Christians believe, log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk for information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other resources.