

# FOCUS ON FAITH

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## GIVING IT OUR BEST SHOT

I'm never quite sure when I hear people talk about life as 'not being a rehearsal'. I understand that the phrase is used to imply that here on earth we usually have just one chance to get it right but actually I question whether that really is the case.

The eagle-eyed will have noticed the word 'usually' in that last sentence and yes it was put there deliberately. It is possible for us to have second (and sometimes even more) chances. It's happened to people who overcome serious illness or possibly are in remission from a life-threatening disease and then there are those who have 'officially died' and have come back to life again. Most of us have probably heard about or read stories of miraculous modern day 'near death' or even 'actual death' experiences. Just recently the news media reported the story of a little boy who was born dead after his heart stopped just before delivery. Thankfully through the skill and dedication of the maternity unit staff he was resuscitated after 8 minutes and seems to have made a full recovery without ill-effects. In the Bible we read about Jesus and indeed Old Testament prophets who 'raised people from the dead' and Christians all over the world testify to similar miracles happening even in our day and age.

The Bible also talks about ruling and reigning in eternity – i.e. after life as we know it here on earth. I'm not talking about reincarnation as I don't believe we come back to earth as lesser or greater beings in another life depending on how good or bad we've been first time round. But I do believe that heaven is not just about sitting on clouds playing harps for ever and ever. I believe there will be opportunities for us to continue to serve God. So in that sense too life on earth could be seen as preparation for something else.

**"For some life is more a test of endurance than enjoyment"**

However the real reason that I have a problem with the 'life is not a rehearsal' line is that we often have second chances to change the way we live when we discover important lessons the hard way. Learning from the difficulties we experience on earth is in my view one of life's greatest treasures. We probably often wish that everything could always go smoothly but when we face up to and overcome situations that test us we usually grow by improving our behaviour or character.

The Apostle Paul told his young protégé Timothy that, "If we endure, we will also reign". For me the word "reign" conjures up a whole host of thoughts and questions.

Reigning implies having authority over something or someone – having power or governing. Learning from our mistakes though involves taking control over ourselves rather than other people, especially our attitudes and motivations and therefore our actions.

One of the biggest criticisms heard about Christians goes something like, "You're no better than the rest of us" and to be honest that's absolutely right. Those of us who do believe in Jesus are no better than anyone else per se but what we do have is a Saviour who has forgiven us. However that places a great responsibility on us – to try and represent Him in an appropriate manner and lifestyle.

Life is often referred to as 'the school of hard knocks'. People let us down or even betray us; plans go awry and sometimes appear to conspire against us; accidents happen; tragedies occur. For some life is more a test of endurance than enjoyment.

But when the hopes and dreams are shattered how do we react?

Stepping back from situations to try and see the bigger picture will help us put into context that even difficulties can be beneficial. Perseverance is a word that's not often used in our 'me first', 'get it when you can – or at least before someone else does' culture. But often, just like the boxer who has been knocked down, we have to get back up and try again despite the pain and confusion.

So what is the big picture?

Firstly, that there is a God who loves us even if we don't appreciate or receive that love – but we can!

Secondly, that life as we know it now is not all there is – there is more (much more) to come.

Thirdly, that there is a way to experience joy even in the midst of pain, dark moments and grief – right here and now.

**Life does throw up second, third and sometimes even more chances and its here to be lived so let's give it our best shot!**

If you'd 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.