

FOCUS ON FAITH

DESIGNER LIVING

We live in a world that appears to be obsessed by image and brand. Everywhere you look how to market what you are – your qualities, values and reputation – is a critical success factor. Companies and individuals spend thousands of pounds on image consultants in order to make an impression and of course there's nothing wrong in that.

But I sometimes begin to despair when it seems reputation and credibility often have a higher value placed on them than is really necessary or appropriate. For instance, when someone who has been libelled or slandered gets a huge court award and then someone else who has been physically injured or abused gets a much lower amount.

Advertisements all tempt us with the latest "must have" products that will make our lives more efficient, effective and easier and which will impress our friends, neighbours and colleagues. Again there's nothing inherently wrong in us enjoying designer label clothes and accessories or having a dream home with all the latest gizmos and gadgets or the hottest model car on our driveways. But I guess it's a matter of perspective and I sometimes wonder if we're in danger of being conned that having material possessions and looking good is what life is all about.

Christians have often been portrayed as "killjoys" with a poverty mentality but I believe there are plenty of reasons to believe that's not what God, our designer, intended. Have a look in the Bible – God enabled many of his followers to be successful – Abraham, Job, King Solomon are just three examples of extremely rich individuals. And I don't believe the reason Jesus was born in a stable was because Joseph and Mary were poor. After all Joseph wouldn't have gone to the Bethlehem's version of the local Holiday Inn to ask for a room if he didn't have the money to pay for it. Jesus was born in a stable because that was the only place available not because Joseph was destitute.

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian church, "You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." (2 Corinthians 9: 11). Those of us who have financial riches are encouraged to share our wealth, not hoard it away for our own benefit. But the key is as always in our attitude. One of the most misquoted verses in the Bible is that money is the root of all evil. What the Bible actually says is

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that "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." (1 Timothy 6: 10). When we make our priority amassing and maintaining our grip on material assets rather than on loving God and serving others, we can get into all kinds of problems.

So what is a Christian's brand value? The recent Prayers for the Week have been concentrating on the famous chapter that is always read at weddings which explains what real love is all about. Love, not the rules and regulations of religion, is what is at the heart of the Christian faith. It's our brand value and should be our motivation and reason for living. And it's always a choice we make. Most of us are honest and realistic enough to admit that we often get it wrong and that our attitudes and intentions don't always match up to our actions. It isn't always easy to be patient and kind; often we are envious of others and we can be guilty of becoming proud. We may find it difficult to forgive people who have wronged us and sometimes we do give up too easily. But if we really want to live as our designer intended us to, the standard is love because as the Bible tells us, "God **IS** love."

All across the Bridgnorth area this Sunday the Christian churches will be sharing the message of God's love for us – His creations. He designed and made us and I believe He has a plan and purpose for each one of our lives – that we should love Him and love each other as much as we love ourselves. Why not drop in and find out more about the real reason for living?

If you'd like to find out more about the real, radical Christian faith, log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk which has details of local Christian Churches and contact details.



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