

FOCUS ON FAITH

Stephen G. Derges, Pastor of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



LITTLE BY LITTLE

It's really amazing isn't it how we expect immediate results in our lives?

- Many of us want to be successful in our careers but forget that it takes hard graft and dedication and that normally we start at the bottom rather than become Chief Executive on day one
- We decide to lose some of those additional pounds (or should I say kilograms) so we'll look good in our swimsuits on the beach but forget that it's probably too late to start in July when we're going away in August
- Some of us would like the sporting prowess of a top athlete or sports person but don't want to put in the hours of practice required to hone and develop the skills necessary to become a winner

Every aspect of life involves commitment, hard work and usually a few sacrifices! Whether it's losing those excess inches (sorry, centimetres), learning the necessary expertise and competence to do something to the best of our ability or building a career, it takes endurance. And just like the weight goes on (and hopefully comes off) little by little so we improve one step at a time.

God uses life's experiences – the good, the bad and the ugly – to develop our characters

And that's so important to recognise when it comes to building our character. The "school of hard knocks" is such that life has a habit of putting us in situations where we sink or swim.

No matter how long we have lived all of us have experienced disappointment, heartache or anxiety. That might range from the simple: a goal or desire that's been thwarted to the tragic loss or injury of a loved one plus everything in between. None of us is immune to difficulty, danger or of being disillusioned by what happens to us.

I am always so impressed by the courage of people who have fought off adversity or tragedy and inspired by those who, facing seemingly insurmountable odds, have won through. Some of those who have been severely injured in conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Falklands spring to mind but there are so many heroes and heroines out there who have also managed to bring meaning to their lives. By overcoming illness, random violent attacks, mental, verbal or physical abuse, a

dysfunctional upbringing and a host of other setbacks they have proved that life can be worth living.

And for me this is where faith comes in. I'm not necessarily talking about religious faith either because we all have faith. It may be in ourselves, other people or, in my case, a God who really does care about us and who longs to have a relationship with us.

Many of us can get by on our own in many situations maybe with the help of family members and close friends or the dedication of skilled professionals who can bring comfort. But ultimately the Bible says we will face a situation where only we alone have to account for how we have lived.

Character is vital and so is intention. Our motivations and motives plus the way we live are the key. The Bible tells us that we are constantly being changed (even transformed) by degrees. I believe God uses life's experiences – the good, the bad and the ugly – to develop our characters so we can become more mature in the way we handle our circumstances. I know there are times now when I am more likely to respond to a situation rather than react to it – although I'm equally aware that a reaction can still happen on occasions and that's when I have to put into practice what I've previously learned.

So whether it's a physical aspect of life, marriage, family or other relationships, the disappointments and difficulties we face, they can either develop or defeat us. Circumstance by circumstance, decision by decision, moment by moment we are being changed – little by little.

Faith for me isn't just about what will happen when we die but about how we live – here and now. And I believe that with God's help we can make appropriate and beneficial choices about how we live.

The Bible promises that God is with those who love Him and are living in line with His purposes for them and that "**everything works out for their benefit**" – even the bad stuff.

The choice is ours – let God in or work it out by ourselves.

For me the choice is obvious.

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