

Thought for the Day - Success

My wife makes me watch a TV programme called “Property Ladder”, in which the untalented and the greedy buy houses and do them up. Perhaps Paula thinks it will spark some interest in D.I.Y, but she’s got a better chance of winning the Olympic 400 meters – with a piano strapped to her back. I’m sure I could sometimes pass for a builder on a rear-view I.D. parade (with more flesh hanging out than good taste or decency would permit) but there, the similarity ends. I don’t do D.I.Y. for the same reasons I don’t drive: prodigious incompetence, and concern for public safety (I *used* to drive in my youth, but I wouldn’t like to try it sober).

In Property Ladder, there’ll be this couple (we’ll call them Janet and John) whose Uncle Norm has passed away and left them a fortune, and they feel that qualifies them to become developers. The problems usually start with John. He buys a house at auction, but doesn’t bother having the searches done. So now, he finds that the new M25 slip-road will be going through the garden, or he’s not allowed to stop the vultures roosting in the loft...or there’s a supporting wall which is actually made of cardboard and sticky-back plastic – there’s always some unforeseen difficulty.

John spends a lot of money putting these things right – just in time for Janet to make matters worse. The trouble with Janet is that she fancies herself as a designer. What’s talent and experience when you’ve got ideas? She’ll put a jacuzzi in the lounge, because that’s where *she’s* always wanted one. She’ll have a mirror-ball in the living room, gnomes in the garden - and the walls will be puce and lime green.... because that’s what *she’d* like in *her* dream home. She’s really building a nest, but -in the process - she’s making the house virtually unsaleable.

All the time, the presenter will be trying to curb Janet’s nesting instincts: She’ll say things like “If you turn the kitchen into a shrine to Elvis, you may limit your market”, or “Open plan is *usually* popular, but not when it includes the loo”.

But they get it finished in the end, and the presenter returns to check things out. Janet and John say “we’ve decided to keep the place and move in ourselves” (Translation: we couldn’t find anyone insane enough to buy it/the estate agent collapsed laughing/the council are coming round with a bulldozer).

Occasionally, though, the show features people who know what they are doing. I’m always disappointed when that happens – it’s dull enough on a *good* day. But they’ll refurbish the house in line with local demand – sell it at a profit – and reinvest in a bigger property. They succeed... regrettably.

For many people (not just those on Property Ladder) life is merely a series of self-appointed tasks – the object of which is to make their leisure time more comfortable. They may do them well or badly – they may prosper...or not. The joy of being absorbed in trying to ‘succeed’ in life is that it precludes any thought about the ultimate and profound futility of the exercise – it narrows the field of vision down to the task in hand. But in the end, it will not matter if they triumphed in their endeavour; if they failed like Janet and John, or even if they were terminally inept at just about everything (like me). What *will* matter, is that they chose to waste their lives on self-appointed tasks *in the first place*.

From the eternal perspective, success is always a function of doing the works that God prepared for us in advance. There are rewards, too - many in the here and now. But the bible also speaks of a ‘heavenly dwelling’. If – on arrival - I find there’s a jacuzzi in the lounge, a mirror-ball and a plethora of gnomes – I’ll assume I’ve gone to the other place.