

## ***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

Contact Dr. Frantz on the web at [www.mlchurch.com](http://www.mlchurch.com)

**Are you measuring up?** When you reflect on your life, do you have a sense that you’ve *measured up* as a person? As you think back, have you achieved or underachieved? Have you surpassed or fallen short of personal and parental expectations?

Having a strong sense of *self* is not unrelated to how we feel we’ve *measured up* as a person over the years. Rising up to the expectations of an overly zealous father or a stern-spirited mother can be more than a little daunting.

Who among us does not want to please mom and dad? Certainly, as children, we thrive on parental affirmation and love. We want to make mom and dad proud. We want to achieve their expectations of us and more. We want to hold our head high as we work our way through the labyrinth of our life journey.

On the one hand, it’s hard not to have expectations, as a parent as well as a spouse or child. Certainly, some level of expectations is a good thing. Expectations can inspire us to use our gifts and to aim high in the goals we set for our lives.

Still, how many adults spend countless years of their lives wrestling with and trying to sort out parental expectations? For some, unrealized expectations remain a life-long burden.

**Sorting it out.** An elderly woman suffered a stroke and, during her long convalescence, she lived with her daughter and her family. While the daughter loved her mother, she was always a little afraid of her. She never felt like she quite lived up to her mother’s expectations.

Consequently, she was determined to make this a happy experience for both of them. However, no matter how hard she tried, they were soon back to their familiar pattern: the daughter obsessed with making everything perfect; the mother making no secret of what did not *measure up* to her standards.

The daughter, of course, was devastated by the criticism; while the mother was stunned at what she saw as her daughter’s over-reaction.

Finally, it all came to a head one day over the preparation of a hard-boiled egg. The tension, the frustration, the anger all came pouring out.

*Why are you doing all this for me anyway, the mother blurted out? I don’t need all this attention.*

By now the daughter had totally had it.

*Because I want you to get well, she intoned. And I want to show you that I'm a strong, capable woman. And I want to make sure that you're ready to return home alone. And not only that, but I'm sick and tired of being afraid of you. All I ever wanted, my whole life, was for you to praise me ... just once ... for something, anything.*

By now, the daughter, who was normally non-confrontational, was amazed at how she had stood up to her mom. Even the mother was impressed.

*Okay, okay, she stammered. You don't have to have all those reasons. It's okay. We love each other; and that's all that matters.*

And just like that, it was over, like the calming after the storm or the stillness after a downpour.

**Guided by grace.** At the end of the day, *measuring up* is elusive and hard to calculate. There are so many variables that influence our motivations and the decisions we make to achieve our goals. Still, the residual feelings in our spirit have a story to tell.

Certainly, along the way, we all need to be sensitive to the gifts and spirit of our children and spouses. While we rejoice in seeing them soar with the eagles, at the same time we don't want to weight them down with stuff that's more about us than it is about them.

There's always a fine line between *affirmation* and *expectation*. While having expectations has its place, it needs to be softened by grace and superceded by love. However we *measure up* in life, knowing that we are loved and valued by family and friends is what makes life special.