

A walk with Mr O (34)

I want to be a better Christian BUT

I'm really glad to talk to you today, Mr O, because I'm not doing very well.

In what way?

The thing is, I'm not a great Christian and I want to be a better one. I know that there are all sorts of things that would help me, but I just can't manage to do them.

Can you give me some examples?

Well, for a start, my faith is a very up and down affair. Some days I believe everything very strongly, but the next day I find that I can hardly believe anything at all. Yes, I know that regularly drinking in the Word of God would sort this out, but I'm often thinking about other things during the sermons, and daily Bible reading just seems like a chore. I'm always putting it off.

Go on.

Deep down I know that I ought to pray more. But I don't. I need to get my act together and really lay hold on God, but I just can't get round to it. If I did, I know that the Lord would help me with church, with my Bible reading, and with all the other things like witnessing, giving, and serving the church. But I'm stuck. There are blessings waiting for me at the top of the mountain, but I just can't get up there.

It's very true that there are very many wonderful blessings waiting for you, but they are not at the top of the mountain.

They're not? Well, where are they then?

They're at the bottom of the valley.

I don't know what you mean.

Your mistake is a common one, sadly. You seem to think that the Lord will meet with you if you do this, and this, and this. But communion with God is not a matter of do, do, do. As I once read in a book, 'When Jesus comes to us it is not on the peak of attainment, but in the valley of need'. You have to go down to meet the Lord, not up. He specialises in failures, not successes. His love is like water; it flows down to the lowest place.

What does this mean in practice?

There you go again – looking for something to do, do, do! Christianity is not ticking off items on a to-do list. It is fixing your eyes on Somebody who went to the lowest place of all. Continuing to be the eternal Son of God, He took on our nature. That was a step down. Every following step was also down, until He was made sin for us, crucified, dead and buried. He went to the lowest place because that is our place, and it is the only place where you will meet Him. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, not successes.

So, Mr O, what counsel will you give me?

Stop pretending! You are never going to be a success, so get that idea out of your head. Even after many years as a Christian the apostle Paul said, 'I am (present tense!) the chief of sinners.' Own up to being a sinner. Admit it in every prayer. You will find that the Saviour will never turn you away. Every day talk to Him in detail about your mess – and, to your delight and surprise, you will find not only His pardon, but that little-by-little He is 'unmessing' you! The fact is that the scribes and Pharisees got one thing right: 'This man receives sinners and eats with them' (Luke 15:2).

Does this mean that we are to stop making any effort in our Christian life?

Of course not! But think of it like this. When you are so cold that you are going into hypothermia, there's not much you can do for yourself. You certainly can't do all the exercises that would warm you up. So

stop trying! Use the little strength you've got left to go and sit by the fire. Better still, go outside and get a bit of sunshine. Warming up may take a little time, but you'll soon be active again. Sinners who sit in the Sun get health, but never sunstroke.

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