



Coming to Jesus

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*Just a closer walk with Thee
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea
Daily walking close to Thee
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be*

This traditional gospel song is a favorite for many. Its authorship is disputed, but there is strong circumstantial evidence suggesting the song dates back to southern African-American churches of the nineteenth century, possibly even prior to the Civil War.

What a lovely sentiment! Set to music that keeps us open to Jesus' presence, we are asked to reflect on our wrong ways and the need for Jesus:

*I am weak but Thou art strong
Jesus keep me from all wrong
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee*

If the prospect of being close to Jesus is so wonderful, satisfying, and pleasing, then why do we use the phrase "come to Jesus" in such a negative vein? I laughed as I heard my colleagues use the phrase to describe an upcoming church meeting, "We're going to need to have a 'come to Jesus' talk." Shouldn't all church meetings involve "coming to Jesus"?

Somehow, the idea of "coming to Jesus" is one that has taken on negative connotations. Likely it involves scolding. It will necessitate correction, for sure. No one wants to be the subject of a "come to Jesus" conversation. We can feel uncomfortable even delivering the Jesus message to the wayward.

When did accountability as Christians get to be such a terrible thing? Maybe in the Middle Ages. Maybe in the Gospels themselves. Jesus had harsh words for those who were off track. Today, we have some tolerance for instruction in the form of the sermon, so long as it doesn't get too personal. "Pastor, were you talking to me?"

If we want to be close to Jesus -- to walk with Jesus -- then, I suspect, we'll need to be prepared to be corrected, perhaps even scolded a time or two. That is one role of the church because in community, we have the ability to recognize our individual faults and, hopefully, be held accountable in love. In our prayer life, too, we should be ready to hear that we've gone astray. Whenever God has spoken to me clearly in prayer, it's been to tell me I've messed up.

As we sing this song and wish for the lovely opportunity to be in close relationship with Jesus, we'll need to exercise caution. We will be better off for having walked with Jesus, but it might not be the pleasant stroll we're imaging.