

The Sentence from C.S. Lewis (That Could Change Your Life)
Russell Moore, Christianity Today, April 2024 Issue

Passing around the corner from the dining room table, I heard one of my sons reading aloud from C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I stopped and listened, knowing how much those Narnia books have meant to me. My son was in the middle of a line, speaking fast and about to move on to the next paragraph. I stepped out into his view and said, "Stop there; read it again. It's the most important sentence in the book."

I don't know that I would always say it's the most important sentence in the book; I could make the case for at least a dozen options. But I would say it's the most important sentence for us right now.

In the book, the character Edmund had betrayed his siblings — goaded on by the White Witch and a taste for Turkish delight — and after an entire narrative leading the reader to despise the treasonous brat, Aslan, the lion and rightful ruler of Narnia, appeared and walked a sheepish and defeated Edmund back to the others.

"Here is your brother," he said, "and there is no need to talk to him about what is past."

When a struggling young Christian comes to see me, it's rarely because he or she wants to flout the holiness of a biblical ethic, as might have happened at the start of my ministry. Now, these people are actually trying to do their best in walking with Christ — confessing their sin, struggling with temptation, and seeking to live the life Jesus would have them live.

These young Christians often assume that "real" disciples can track their progress in holiness as one does calories on a weight loss app. Instead, they find that (as is the case for everybody) the deeper they go in faith, the more they realize how much worse their ongoing sin is than what they thought. Many think God is angry with them, ready to say when they approach the throne of grace, "Well, well, look who's slinking in ..."

The heart can believe and the mouth can confess things the nervous system doesn't yet feel. Sometimes that part of us panics and wants to perform well enough to deserve the love of God. This can make John 3:16 feel like an advertisement narrator booming, "God so loved the world" while in a low voice speedily saying, "Void where prohibited, some restrictions apply."

These Christians then withdraw from prayer, and sometimes even worship, until they can "get their lives together." And, like an addiction to drink or drugs or Turkish delight, the perceived solution only makes their problem worse (i.e. withdrawing from prayer and worship). Many of them are downcast, not only by their present stumbles but with guilt from their past — things they've done, people they've hurt, or words they have said.

The picture CS Lewis presents in Edmund's encounter strikes at the heart of that problem. Aslan talks to Edmund quietly, away from the crowd. Lewis writes, "There is no need to tell you what Aslan was saying, but it was a conversation which Edmund never forgot."

The wording here echoes the post-resurrection words of Jesus in the garden outside the tomb. When Peter was still in anguish over his denial and abandonment of Jesus, the Lord said to Mary Magdalene,

"Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17, ESV).

Even after their weakest, most failing moment, Jesus was not ashamed to call them brothers — to remind them that God was their Father too, and that he was still their God (Heb. 2:11).

"Here is your brother, and there is no need to talk to him about what is past."

If we could feel the weight of that glory — of who is saying it and why he's saying it — we would see an entire world lit up with the Good News.

Aslan is fictional, of course, but there is a real Lion of Judah, and maybe he wants to remind us of a truth we've forgotten, perhaps just when we need it most.