

I'm OK!

How often do we say those words, 'I'm OK', in response to an enquiry about our health or wellbeing? I know I've answered 'I'm OK, thank you' many times knowing that was the answer expected of me and, on one level, I probably was OK, at least on the surface.

However, there is a deeper level of being 'OK' which I had not experienced until recently, that deep security and inner peace of knowing that I am actually OK, that I am alright as a person and don't need to hide or apologise for who I am. God created me as I am – he gave me my unique combination of temperaments and attributes and gifts and, whilst there is still work to do, God didn't make a mistake when he made me! Alongside the knowledge that I'm OK, the ability to receive love and acceptance from others is slowly growing.

To some, what I've written may sound strange, and for most of my life I did not need to, nor would have been able, to recognise or face up to how I really felt about myself deep down. I have a fairly strong extrovert temperament and I lived quite successfully as a capable and productive Choleric. I knew that I was good at my job and could run a home and I was very determined and well organised – I still am! However I also have the Melancholic temperament, the more sensitive introvert temperament which has the capacity to feel negatively about itself – and I felt very negative about myself! Deep down I felt that I was never good enough and was a complete failure; I really disliked myself and had great difficulty believing that anyone else could like or love me and, even worse, that God could love me. In my head I knew that God loved me and had died for me and I had been a Christian and a leader for many years yet I had carried that deep sense of inadequacy and failure into my relationship with God and somehow believed that he'd made a mistake when he created me!

I would not have been able to recognise or articulate those feelings, they just sat below the surface affecting who I was and how I lived my life until I became ill and they came to the surface and overwhelmed me. It was only by working through the online course run by this church and attending the 'Understanding Yourself' weekends that I started to look at how I really felt deep down. It was very painful. I had to look at my temperament and also at the factors in my life and upbringing that had influenced me and shaped me into the person I am. John uses the illustration of blueprints being drawn up for a bungalow but if the builders try to build a two-story house it will go horribly wrong. The mould I had tried to force myself into, driven by the expectations of others and my own insecurities, was not the blueprint God had for my life and I suffered as a result of that.

I had to learn to trust and to listen to a different perspective and to believe that perspective, even though it was contrary to how I felt about myself. I've had to learn to accept love and believe that I am accepted unconditionally even though that contradicts how I feel inside – often that has had to be a conscious choice not to listen to my feelings, strong as they are, but to choose to believe the truth being offered to me by people who love me and want the best for me.

It hasn't happened overnight – it has been a process and still is and at times I get really frustrated with myself and feel like I'm going round in circles when the negatives inside overwhelm me again – yet each time my understanding grows and goes deeper and my acceptance of myself goes that bit deeper. Every so often I get really encouraged when I realise that I am different, that I understand the roots of the negatives within and can dismiss them and replace them with the truth of who I am

in God and, as a result, feel OK about myself. I had one such encouragement recently which is what has prompted me to write this. I attended a reunion party and met up with friends I hadn't seen for 10 years, a situation I would previously have felt quite anxious about and doubted whether I should go and whether anyone would want to see me or talk to me! I felt completely different and it was lovely! I was thrilled to be going, looked forward to meeting everyone again and catching up and I thoroughly enjoyed the evening and felt comfortable and free to be myself – I really did feel that I was OK!!

It would be lovely to live in that place of freedom and confidence that I experienced that evening all the time but the negatives are still there and do raise their head from time to time when challenges arise. The difference now is that I know I don't have to listen to the negatives and live under their influence – I can replace them with the truth of God's love and acceptance for me and when I struggle to do that in my own strength I can talk to people who know and love me and trust their perspective.

It's not the easy option to seek to understand yourself at such depth but it is definitely the most rewarding and I'm sure it is what the Lord would want for each of us and it is so wonderful, after years of so disliking who I was, to feel comfortable and at peace with myself!

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