

A walk with Mr O (42)

Widowed!

Mr O, I don't want to upset you in any way, but what's it like to be widowed?

That's alright. It's now almost eight years since Doll died and I don't mind talking about it.

The first thing I would say is that losing your spouse is not like any other sort of bereavement. Over the years I have lost my parents, two of my brothers, a son, and a granddaughter.

Each bereavement carries its own sort of grief. Some are worse than others, particularly if the loved-one concerned is an unbeliever. But losing your spouse is in a different category altogether.

You're talking about something completely beyond my experience. It's obviously painful to you. Do you feel free to talk about it in a little more detail?

Of course. When you lose any loved-one you lose someone who is precious to you. Your grief is heartfelt and your tears are real. But you don't lose part of yourself.

When Doll died I lost part of me. There's not only a wonderful presence missing in my life, but part of me has gone as well. I am no longer what I used to be and I know it. I wake up every morning feeling incomplete. In marriage, as the Lord intended, Doll and I were one. When she died, part of me died too.

That is why widowed people never get over their bereavement. And they don't want to, because they are still in love. Their sense of loss never goes away, although the event of bereavement does seem increasingly distant.

Mr O, thank you for being so open with me. Without pushing you too far, can you tell me a bit more about the day-to-day life of someone who is widowed?

It's lonely. Even if you have a large and caring family, as I do, it is lonely. All my life I have enjoyed solitude, but solitude and loneliness are not the same thing. As a pastor I know what it is to spend long hours alone, studying, meditating and praying.

But in the past, when I came out of the secret place, I knew that Doll would be there. But now she isn't. Like all widowed people, I have times every day when I just yearn for some human company.

Are some times worse than others?

For me, the worst time of the week is Sunday, after the evening service. In the old days Doll and I would use that time to talk about the sermons, the people we had spoken to, and the news we had picked up. Now I just come home – and that home is empty. Very empty.

What are some other challenges of widowhood?

In a normal marriage there is a division of labour. When you are widowed you have to do everything yourself. And when you are weak and ill you always feel's very much worse than you did before.

Does widowhood have any positive points?

Yes, it does. For example, I feel a constant sense of relief that Doll is safely with Christ, which is far better, and that she will never have to be a widow herself.

Being a widower is the last service that I can give her. In addition, I have always believed that the main business of every day is to enjoy the company of our Risen Saviour. That is very much easier when there is no one else at home.

What can people like me do to help and encourage the widows and widowers in our churches?

You can remember that not all widows and widowers are elderly. Those who are still bringing up very young or school-age children have enormous challenges, especially if they are also working for a living. Sit down for half an hour and put yourself in their shoes.

It will soon be obvious that there are countless ways in which you can help them. Nike! Just do it! As for older widows and widowers, start by ringing them up once a week.

Organise a definite slot, so that they've got something to look forward to. Once you've got into a regular rhythm of calls you will know how to help them. Do what you can. And, best of all, pray for them.