

A walk with Mr O (4)

I'm struggling in my prayer life.

Thank you, Mr O, for the three walks we've had so far. I've really benefitted from them, but I've especially looked forward to this one.

Why is that?

It's because we agreed that today we would talk about prayer and, to be frank, right now I'm really struggling in my prayer life.

People often use that expression, but they don't all mean the same thing. So, when you use the word 'struggling', what are you actually telling me?

Let me put it like this. As a Christian I know that I ought to pray. Deep down inside me I know that I want to pray. But I don't seem able to actually get going, and it's really upsetting me. I feel such a failure!

Thank you for being so open with me, but you are talking to the wrong person.

I don't know what you mean. I've come on this walk because I thought that you were the one person who could help me!

Well, what I suggest is this. In a few minutes time, go home. Find a room where you can be alone and shut the door. Sit quietly until your whole being is still. Don't hurry. And then, when you are ready, tell the Lord what you have just told me: 'Lord, as a Christian, I know that I ought to pray. Deep down inside me I know that I want to pray. But I don't seem able to actually get going. Lord, it's really upsetting me. I feel such a failure...'

Okay, I see what you mean now about talking to the wrong person. It's the Lord I should be talking to, not you.

Yes, tell Him what a failure you are. And then go further than that. Tell Him that your prayerlessness is shameful and sinful. Tell Him that you have not been meditating on His Word properly, because, if you had, you would have been talking regularly to Him about everything that He has been showing you from the Scriptures. And then tell Him about every other sin of yours, and tell Him that there must be thousands more that you have not spotted.

But Mr. O, if I do all that I will be doing the very thing that I'm struggling to do – praying!

Precisely! We talk about 'struggling in prayer', but what is actually going on is that we are too proud to tell the Lord what sinners we are, what failures, what spiritual wrecks. We are stubbornly refusing to admit that we have been giving in to the world, the flesh and the devil. We are not owning up to the fact that our resulting spiritual silence – our walking away from God – put nails through the hands and feet of the Son of God and caused His blood to flow. Our prayerlessness crucified Him, for it was the punishment for our sins that He suffered there. All that the Saviour went through was what we non-praying rebels deserve. But every sanction that should fall on us fell on Him. And why did He die in this way for us? Because He loves us so much.

Just to hear you talking about the cross like that makes me want to go home straight away, so that I can pray.

People who are sorry for their sins always pray. There are no exceptions. Instead of hiding *from* the Lord, they hide *in* Him. And He never turns them away. He welcomes them, weeps over them, fully forgives them, and enjoys having them back.

Mr O, I really must leave you now, to get alone with the Lord. But I'm afraid. What do I do if prayerlessness sweeps over me again?

I won't keep you a moment longer. But if some time in the future you find your heart reluctant to pray, here is an old chorus to sing:

There's a way back to God
from the dark paths of sin;
there's a door that is open
and you may go in:
at Calvary's cross is where you begin,
when you come as a sinner to Jesus.

(Eric Swinstead, 1882-1950).

Because when you really see that you are a sinner, and see what the Saviour did for sinners at the cross, you will soon find yourself talking to Him again.