

A walk with Mr O (19)

The prayer meeting is getting me down

Mr O, since the summer I've been going regularly to our church's weekly prayer meeting, but, to be honest, it's beginning to get me down.

You know what I'm going to say next! Tell me more.

Well, first of all, there aren't many people there. Those that are there don't seem very fired up. The same people pray every week and pretty much in the same order. The meeting is made up of long prayers and long silences and, frankly, I usually go home quite discouraged. It doesn't have to be like that, does it?

No, it doesn't. But please get hold of this: the problem is not the prayer meeting. A poor prayer meeting is a symptom of spiritual disease, but it is not the disease itself. Don't soothe the spots and leave the underlying condition untreated!

I've never thought of it like that. So, what is the underlying condition?

It's a simple fact that praying people like to be with other praying people. 'Birds of a feather flock together', as the proverb says. Praying people seek out other praying people, and pray with them.

There obviously aren't many praying people in your church. If there were, the prayer meeting would be full – and a spirit of prayer would run through it all, even through the silences.

Yes, Mr O, but surely only God can make men and women into praying people. We can't do much about it, can we?

Yes, we can. First of all, we can make sure that we are praying people ourselves. Every morning, we can ask the Lord to breathe a breeze of prayer through everything we are and everything we do. Every evening, we can repent of our prayerless moments and have our consciences freshly cleansed at the cross.

Those who are married can ensure that they are praying every day with their spouses. Those who have children can start daily moments, enjoyable moments, when the family gathers around the Bible for worship.

Christian friends can develop the habit of never separating without praying together.

All of us can arrive early for church and have a time of quiet prayer before the service begins. In these simple ways a spirit of prayer can little by little become a noticeable characteristic of our congregations.

That's quite a list and it's very challenging. Could you add to it?

We can all add to it. We just need to see that a spirit of prayerful love for Christ and for other people is our greatest need. It's easy for a church to set up a WhatsApp group where people can post personal news and prayer requests.

It's easy to meet up with a Christian friend so that the two of you can pray together. It's easy for Mums in the church to meet up and pray for their children and for the schools they attend. To quote another proverb: 'Where there's a will there's a way.'

And what about the pastor and the church officers? Surely they have a particular responsibility in this area.

Yes, they do. They are the people who set the spiritual tone of the church, and if they are not nurturing each other's spiritual life and praying together regularly, their church is doomed. If you remember, we talked about this last time.

But there is something else I need to say. Through the years I have noticed that wherever pastors practise the three cardinal rules of preaching – and do so in every sermon - the prayer life of their church is lively, believing and blessed.

The three cardinal rules of preaching? I have never heard of them. What are they?

Maybe that explains why your church's prayer life is at it is. The three rules are simple. Here they are:

- (1) Tell them about Jesus.
- (2) Tell them about Jesus from the Bible.
- (3) Love them as you do it.

I've got it. Thanks Mr O!
