

~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:

A real prayer meeting is the business meeting of the Board of Directors of the “House of God.” It is the one period in the week when the spiritual members of the church come together, face to face with God. In all the other meetings of the church they deal mostly with people and earthly affairs. The prayer meeting is God’s hour.

It is almost trite to call it the “Powerhouse of the Church,” but that is exactly what it is. You could not say that the pulpit, the Sunday school, the sewing room, could be in any sense called the source of supernatural power. These are merely the outlets of power — when there is any power! If there be no prayer meeting there will be no divine power to let out. It is very strange that the less of prayer and power a church has, the more machinery it will add, the more outlets it will provide. Conversely, the more power there is the less of machinery there will be. Then men and women themselves become the implement — the outlet — of the power of the Spirit. The prayer meeting is the link between the church and Heaven, the base of supply.

Passing Of The Church Prayer Meeting

Why have so many church prayer meetings been given up? The world, the flesh, and the devil come in for a good share of the blame, of course. But very many prayer meetings have died from inside causes. They have been killed by well-intentioned “friends.” Both the leadership and the membership are to blame in many instances, for a prayer meeting is not foolproof.

Many prayer meetings die for want of good leadership. Not for lack of good men but good leaders. One could more easily find fifty men who can give a good talk on the subject of prayer than one man who possesses the skill to guide a body of believers in an hour of prayer. It is safe to say that there are churches whose memberships run into the thousands but do not include one skilled prayer leader. The churches train men for the ministry of preaching, the ministry of music, the ministry of education, etc., but who ever heard of a church training men for leadership in prayer?

When a prayer meeting has a leader who will open the meeting with a long prayer, then give a forty-minute “prayer meeting talk” or a Bible lecture, and then close with another long, aimless prayer by himself—only by the long-suffering of those faithful ones who attend can such a prayer meeting be kept going. It is enough that the people sit at the feet of a man on Sunday morning and evening, without having to sit at the feet of a man on Wednesday night.

Then there is the prayer meeting leader who will come into the meeting with no preparation of mind or heart for the most important business in the world. He will give a rambling talk and then he will say, “Now let us go to prayer.”

Many prayer meetings are killed by some of those who faithfully attend and who would not for the world have the prayer meetings cease. There are the ones who lag behind, and those who unwittingly run away with the meeting—especially if the leadership is weak. Those who are too slow in taking part act as a brake on the meeting. They grieve the Spirit and vex the leader. They claim to be retiring and shy.

If these are too slow, others are too fast. Instead of waiting a moment for the slow ones, they are always first to lead out in prayer. Some pray so glibly and extensively that the timid ones will not even try to pray. They make mention of everything under the sun and use every word in their vocabulary to do it. There is nothing left for the slow ones to pray about.

How To Restore the Prayer Meeting To Life

First we must have a small company of believers who can pray or are willing to learn how to pray. To make sure that they will take the prayer meeting seriously, let them be told that prayer is the most important function of the church—even more so than preaching. The minister will not feel offended at this if he be a true man of God. “We will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). No matter who the minister may be, his church can be no better in God’s sight than its prayer meeting.

Secondly, we must have for a leader a man who will take his office seriously enough to prepare his heart and mind for the high and holy ministry of leading his brethren out to meet God. A prayerless leader will kill the meeting. He must wait on the Lord to prepare his heart and to get his mind filled with the items of God’s

business which need to be prayed about. He who puts nothing into the meeting will bring nothing out of it. Prayer is the one thing we approach without preparation.

As to how to proceed: cut the preliminaries to the bone. Let there be three or four requests for prayer, definitely stated in a few words; no speeches about details. Give the people plenty of opportunity to present their prayer needs. If they do not respond quickly, let the leader introduce some prayer requests. As each request is presented, ask someone to volunteer to present it to the Father. When enough volunteers have been secured to take care of three or four requests, then go to prayer.

Repeat this process. Never ask for a lot of requests and then say: “Now, let us go to prayer. Who will lead us?” The result of such a course is that most of the requests receive no attention. If the people should be slow to volunteer in accepting a request to pray for, ask them to take one or another of the requests.

In a short time a prayer meeting that was once dull will become so blessed that everyone will be sorry that the meeting cannot go on longer. And no one will look at the clock—unless some inconsiderate person prays too long.

The people must be brought back to simplicity. The common practice of making use of many words in prayer by those who are fertile-minded and fluent of speech should be discouraged. The prayer meeting—of all places—is not the place for such a practice. It has the effect of brow-beating the timid, slow ones into silence. We cannot impress the Lord with words, and we should not try to impress our brethren with long prayers.

It is good to begin with the petition, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). The Lord’s method of prayer is efficient, time-saving. In a public prayer meeting, where there are many who are eager to participate, time is a very important consideration. Let us learn from the Lord how to compress a lot of meaning into a few words.

Take the prayer of the “publican”: “God—be merciful—to me—a sinner” (Luke 18:13). With seven words the publican addresses God; makes his petition; tells the Lord who and what kind of a person it is that is seeking His favor. Time: about three seconds.

Take the petition of the disciples (Luke 11:1). With eleven words they addressed the Lord, made a great request, indicated for whom the request was made, and pointed to John and his disciples as an example. Time: about five seconds.

Now look at the “model prayer” (Matt. 6:9-13). There are only sixty-seven words in this prayer, but with these few words the Lord makes a majestic approach to the Father, makes seven major petitions, and closes with a mighty note of praise. Time: about forty seconds.

“After this manner pray ye!” Long prayers, supplications and intercessions should, as a rule, be made in the closet or when praying with “two or three” others. If one has a heart full of prayer, let him pray briefly several times about several different things, instead of making one lengthy prayer.

We should never go into a prayer meeting without something to pray about. And a prayer leader should have a reserve of requests either in his mind or notebook. Be it remembered that in real prayer meetings, the church is doing business with God. Therefore let there be a full agenda. Let the “Order Department” of Heaven be swamped with requisitions!

Pray first for the prayer life of all Christians. Pray for revival. Pray for every member of every family in the church. Pray for the convicting, converting power of the Holy Spirit. Pray for the sick, the tempted, the backslidden. Pray for the whole Body of Christ. Pray for our nation and for all nations. Pray for all in authority. Pray for the ministers and the missionaries by name.

It is a helpful plan for each member to have a notebook in which each request for prayer is entered with the date. Each request should be kept before the Lord until it is answered. Then mark it “answered”.

The problem of the prayer meeting is prayer—not numbers. Prayer is scarce. Men of prayer are scarcer yet; but the knowledge of what to pray for and how to pray—is the scarcest of all.