

HINTS FOR PRAYER MEETINGS.

These are practical, and their worth is easily tested.

Commence promptly on time, no matter how few there be present. It will take only a few times to lessen the number of tardy comers. A few will take the hint quickly, others will be longer about it, but will at last learn, and there will be left finally only those who are constitutionally late everywhere.

The topic should be known beforehand, and, if possible, the Scripture to be read. When only the leader knows the subject, it is like trying to light a fire with a single match. The wood may be all ready for it, and the match is all that is needed, but the probabilities are against it. Men's minds are rarely in a condition to give out light and heat on any given topic at a moment's notice. They must have time for preparation, and it is a dangerous thing to trust to mere spontaneity. In order that the subject may be known, each leader of a weekly prayer meeting should be appointed two weeks prior to his service, so that it can be announced the week before he takes charge.

Who shall lead in the meeting is in each case a local question. Sometimes it may be best for the minister always to do it. When practicable, however, it is oftenest best for the pastor to drill in his laymen, not of course to his own exclusion. Whenever the exercises become dull, change the leader, change the method—do anything almost, to get them out of a rut.

Take simple subjects. Let Election, and Predestination, and Sanctification, etc., etc., be expounded, if need be, by the minister. Let the subject, at times, be illustrated if possible by the freshest experiences of those who are present. At other times it may be well simply to find out what the Bible says about it. Some of the most interesting meetings we know of had for consideration such questions as: "What does the Bible say about love?" "What does the Bible say about the Fatherhood of God?" "What is the verse in the Bible that just now seems the most precious to you?" etc.

Keep a bell and ring it when one oversteps the time, which should not be more than five, and had usually better be three minutes. If with such an arrangement "it is impossible to hold a respectable meeting of an hour," then we should say it is far better to adjourn before the hour passes. Prayer meetings should know when they are through as well as other kind of gatherings. The singing should be hearty, and the hymns chosen on account of their adaptation to the occasion. Sing no weak, wishy-washy words to wishy-washy tunes. Do not cling too closely to old hymns and tunes, nor go capering with new ones. When a song becomes expressionless from too great familiarity, drop it for awhile. It will return to its former vigour again by resting. If possible, always have one man to "start" the tune, and have him supported by good singers conveniently near.

Get close together. There can be no warmth when the people are scarcely within recognisable distance of each other. As Mr. Beecher facetiously remarked: "You can't make a fire out of one stick—*though it's as dry as a minister.*"

Do not be in a hurry to get out when the meeting is over. Then is a good time to shake hands and be a little social. Most people hurry out as if they were glad to get away. Young folks are quick to observe this, and therefore instinctively shun it. Make it a place where special kindness and special friendliness are shown and felt, and they will as naturally come as they now stay away.

Somebody has been writing a letter to the New-York *Evening Post* on church architecture, in which, among other preposterous things, he says: "I believe that the prime calling of a minister is to preach the gospel; therefore the church or edifice should be so constructed that he can be heard." The idea!