**Lessons in Prayer from a Youth Worker…Darren McClatchey, Portadown Elim**

After years and years of growing up in church, one thing I always struggled with was prayer. Not because I didn’t want to talk to God, but I just found it difficult. I had assumed that there was only one way to engage with God, and unless I was sat upright, or standing in a cold room, in silence, then I wasn’t really praying, because those are the only sort of environments that God listens in. This all began to change for me when I really started to encounter God in other places, at different times, in other ways.

One day it clicked with me…my earthly father doesn't want it to be difficult or feel like a chore speaking with him, so how much more must my Heavenly Father want my conversations with Him to be easy?

I began to realise, that there is no set way for us to experience God. There is no set way for us to communicate with Him, or for Him to communicate with us. We are all different, and so it makes sense that the way that I connect with God will be different to the way that you do.

This realisation made me want to try and facilitate that for as many people as I can. Providing a place for as many people to effectively encounter God in whatever way works best for them is important, and that is why we started prayer rooms in our church.

The response has been overwhelming, and find that with a little thought, we can create spaces where people young and old, people who have been Christians a couple of years or Christians a couple of decades, they can all connect with God.

Whether it is the first time you have ever thought about doing a prayer room, or whether it’s something you regularly do, there a couple of things I have learned over the years that may help you on your journey.

**Atmosphere**

Creating an atmosphere may seem like a bad thing to do, but I promise you, it is key. I have a few simple ideas that may help you.

1- Keep the lighting low. Lower lighting helps people open up more, and feel more relaxed. It also subliminally makes people feel like standing and having a full blown conversation about the football is perhaps a little inappropriate. Dimmed lighting, lamps and fairy lights are ideal for this.

2 - Quiet music. The volume you set your music at, will set the volume for the room. Nobody praying on their own walking around a room wants to be the loudest thing in the room. This helps keep things feeling relaxed.

3 - Comfortable. Create spaces where people could happily sit for hours and not feel sore and uncomfortable.

4 - Have good detailed signs. Make sure that each station is explained well enough using signage. This stops people feeling uncomfortable, or that they cannot engage.

5 - Give out tea and coffee. Let’s be honest, who isn't relaxed when they have a cuppa?

**Prepare well**

The first time I ever did a prayer room, I kind of just made it up as I went along. This meant that it took me like 3 days to set up. Running to and from shops to get all I needed.

Next time we did one, we sat down, made a plan, drew a picture of the room layout, made a shopping list, got all the stuff together, then began to put the room together. This taking time to prepare not only saved us a lot of time, but helped to create a better, more thought through experience for everyone.

**Create a Journey**

People are creatures of habit and structure. We love it. Something we found really helpful was to not just leave people to run around aimlessly in the prayer room (although they could if they wished), but we created a “Prayer Journey”. This meant that if they followed the plan, they could quite easily pray for 1 hour. An example of points on the prayer journey may be:

5 mins at “Prayer for Salvation”

5 mins at “Prayer for Healing”

5 mins at “Prayer for the Church”

You obviously adapt these to your stations, and you’ll find that little bit of structure can really help people in the process.