

International House of Prayer of Greater Fort Wayne

...a day and night , city-wide, multi-church prayer and worship ministry

'Being There'

Today we have the ability to connect over live streaming - what a help that was during the lock down wasn't it and even now it has become a normal expression of our fellowship. Yet, there are moments of our life when a phone call or a zoom call feel like just one more thing to deal with. After hearing the news of our full term son's eminent stillbirth I fielded a couple calls and by the time I talked to my Dad I jumbled out something like *'all we want is to just be left alone'* (I won't go into how this all got misconstrued for my family). We made arrangements for our boys and headed to the hospital. After the longest labor and delivery Denise had ever had we sat together trying to comfort one another while holding our lifeless boy when a nurse entered the room to inform me that people were waiting outside the door. I assured her we were not ready to see anyone but then she said *'I think its your parents'* Apparently after hanging up the phone my Father told my step mom what I had said and she replied *'I don't care what he said we are going - I want to hold my grandchild'*. Something happened in those moments when, after driving 9 hours straight, my Dad and Step Mom walked into the room with tears in their eyes and without hesitation embraced and rocked their lifeless grandson. For years she was my Step Mom but in that moment she became my Mom, not by her words or by her efforts, but by choosing to stand in our pain...without saying anything she said everything I needed to hear in that moment. **There really is nothing that takes the place of *being there*, often without words, just sitting in the messy...in relationship and presence.**

Prayer, we are told, will change things! Yet, in its most basic expression, we wrap a theology around prayer that puts it in the same place as a coke machine. Put in the correct change, make our selection, and get what we want - I mean I can quote scriptures that sound not too far off from that conclusion. *"For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."* So we offer the 'coins' of our wants and needs, our beliefs, and our good behavior. We tell God what we want and expect to get what we asked for. **All that works fine until it doesn't.** Coke machines are great until they take your money but give you nothing or give you a Sprite when you selected a Diet Coke. Look how we respond when that happens. We get mad. We push the button again and again. We hit or kick the machine. We tip it side to side. We did our part and expect it to work the way we want it to. It's not so different with prayer. Sometimes we get angry. Sometimes we may even feel hurt or betrayed, lose faith, even leave the church. God is not and never will be a Coke machine. Prayer, beloved, is not about a transaction or transmission of information to God. Prayer is the primary place I am reminded that God is the answer. His presence, life, love, beauty, generosity, compassion, forgiveness, wisdom, justice - His mercy. **The point of Prayer is that God gives God in relationship and presence and its all the answer we need! There really is nothing like someone being there and that is Good News.**

Seldom do we hear anyone complain when a prayer is answered. Its the ones that seem to fall into that category of 'unanswered' that can trouble us the most - forming all kinds of bad theology in our head. **I am not going to attempt to answer why some prayers seem to be answered and others seem to go unanswered in this writing.** I don't have any good answers or explanations but I have heard some really bad ones both in my head and from other people "You didn't pray hard enough." "You didn't have enough faith." "You were asking for the wrong thing." "It's all a mystery and someday we'll understand." "Everything happens for a reason." "Something better is coming." I am coming to the place, beloved, that I just don't buy those answers. Truth is those responses are nothing but an attempt to bolster a coke machine understanding of prayer. Maybe its time to let that go! It's actually bad theology and it hurts people and it really gives a messed up understanding of a Good Father. The scriptures tell us of another man who prayed with words, sweat, and blood. "Please, please, please Father." They crucified him the following afternoon. Ask. Search. Knock. How did that work when Jesus prayed? Still later, Apostle Paul pleaded that the Lord would remove an affliction and yet the 'thorn' remained.

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And the secret is simply this: **Christ in you!**

Yes, Christ in you bringing with him the hope of all glorious things to come. Col 1:27b, JB Phillips

Prayer changes things yes, but maybe its not about the coins, maybe its not a transaction or just the transmission of information to God. Beloved, Prayer changes things because Prayer changes us! Prayer is not about a transaction but about transformation. In the midst of our not knowing or understanding maybe the most and the best we can do is to echo that disciple's request, "**Lord, teach us to pray.**" (**Luke 11:1**) Please do remember that His friends had grown up in a culture of everyday prayer but they see something in Jesus' life in prayer that is different. Jesus' response is not an explanation of prayer or how it works. He does not offer a formula or magic words. He does not give us 'the correct change for the coke machine'. Instead Jesus teaches about who and how God is - that is very simple—Luke 11:2-4

*"When you pray, say:
 Father, hallowed be your name.
 Your kingdom come.
 Give us each day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our sins,
 for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
 And do not bring us to the time of trial."*

If we pray it as Matthew recorded it, it can be spoken in less than 60 seconds...this is not about an abundance of words...but, catch this- **Father. What was the assumption for Jesus as He Prayed? Prayer is about relationship and presence.** We're not telling God something that God does not know. **We are reminding ourselves of what already is, always has been, and always will be. Jesus concludes His instruction with this statement, 'if you then know how to respond to your children - how much more will your Heavenly Father give....the Holy Spirit.'** If prayer, as Jesus teaches it, really is all about relationship and presence then there is only one answer to every prayer, God Himself and all He brings.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty of prayer is that sometimes we just want to offer our coins and push the button. We don't want God. We want something from God. We want God to change our circumstances. While God can and sometimes does change circumstances, I am increasingly convinced that God, more often than not, changes us if we choose to submit to His heart. So what would it be like for us to walk away from the Coke machines of our lives? What would it be like to not spend so much energy, time, and prayer trying to control or determine our future and allow this revelation to slowly but radically change our personal prayer lives. My prayers are no longer a passionate rehearsal of my needs and the needs of others. My prayers are a predictable rehearsal of what is true about God and then me.

Now please know this - I still pray for the needs of others and the world around me. But its less and less from the posture of reaching for more 'change in my pocket' so I can push the right button...Its more about opening the door to discover a Father who is standing with me where I am. The Father who said '**I am not content with a phone call**'. **I want to come and be there with you - I want them to know the Love you have loved me with, Father.**"

*This message can be heard in full with notes on our website (IHOPFW.com) blog titled 'Being There'—
 July 24, 2022*

With gratitude and integrity we steward your gifts. Thank you for partnering with the mission the Lord has given us in this hour as we partner with Him for His kingdom to be established.

Please make your **tax deductible** contribution to:

**IHOP Fort Wayne
 5907 West Wallen Road,
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Ben and Denise, Please agree with us over these prayer needs for the next month...

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