

Tending Ancient Paths

The Paradigms, Posture, and Practices of Jesus

Won or One...

Matthew records one of the most incredible encounters between Jesus and Peter in chapter 16:21-22. Here is how verse 21 reads in the Message translation *Then Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was now necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised up alive.* This is when it becomes remarkable in verse 21 (from the NASV **emphasis mine**) *And yet Peter took Him aside and **began to rebuke Him** (Jesus), saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You!”* Wait, did we read that correctly? Peter took Jesus to the side and rebuked Him for what He said? Yes, that is correct and a bit breath taking! Peter, have you forgotten that this is the Man whom you said was *‘the Christ the Son of the Living God’*? Have you forgotten that demons trembled in His presence and the dead were raised? Peter, who was just commended by Jesus as having revelation given by God (vs 17), now has Jesus address him as Satan! Why? Because Peter *“...you have no idea how God works.”* (Matt. 16:23b the Message translation)

The goal of God was not to **Win** by exceptionalism, strength and power but in humility, self giving love and forgiveness to make man **One** with Him again. Peter, victory will look like death on a cross not a sword.

As a boy growing up in the shadow of the Jesus’ movement I can recall seeing bumper stickers that said **‘Prayer Changes Things’**. As a teenager I experienced Prayer in the charismatic movement as the place of confession and proclamation to secure blessing. As a young man in ministry I read how Prayer was intimately linked to revival. **Prayer was the necessary piece- the price that had to be paid to Win the blessing and favor of God on our lives** and if you really had something important that you were facing add some fasting to the mix. Whether stated this bluntly or not, Prayer as an obligation to please an otherwise reluctant God or as the tool to secure God’s blessing is not too far from how many of us in the West have come to understand Prayer. I cannot tell you the number of times I have been contacted to support an event, as the prayer piece, **so that** it would be a success. I am not speaking poorly of anyone who has asked for prayer support as it is good to pray- I am, however, inviting us to consider our actual view of Prayer. Is Prayer the place I am ‘getting a hold of God’ to secure what He is otherwise unwilling to give? Is Prayer the price I pay to ‘Win’ His blessing and favor? If we are gut level honest this is all too often exactly how we have viewed Prayer. Honestly, it is precisely how I looked at it many years ago. **What would it take to secure a move of God in a region?** Beloved that was the question that sparked my imagination and fueled my passion - to see the blessing and favor of God on a region! Its what burned in my heart to begin building a life and practice of Prayer - its what stirred us to begin our ministry of Prayer (IHOPFW) 19 years ago.

Some time ago Denise came across a statement from 12th Century Christian mystic Julian of Norwich that says this **“Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance it is laying hold of His willingness”**. You see if there is anything we have come to recognize in these many years of Prayer ministry it is that Prayer is not about working so we can say we have ‘Won’ over God’s favor or secure His blessing - it is about becoming ‘One’ with what has always been true of God’s heart. Prayer is NOT primarily about transforming the world ‘around’ me, it is about me being transformed by the transcendent truth of God’s beauty, goodness, and truth. Written outside of the little cell where Sister Julian spent much of her life is a simple yet profound proclamation **‘Prayer oneth the soul to God’**. Prayer, beloved, is not about the idea that I have ‘Won’ over God but that I become ‘One’ with Him. Sister Julian said it so well in the following statement **“...the goodness of God is the highest object of our prayer and it reaches down to our lowest need.”**

And so it has been in my own life and ministry, I absolutely signed on to the work of Prayer as the ‘means’ to attain the blessing and favor of God in a region. In some ways you may say I signed on as tool of conquest. Yet in my life of Prayer, I have discovered a journey - yes, I can talk about many tangible touch points of the favor and blessing of God over the years, but the deeper work...The deeper work of almost 35 years of Prayer ministry (19 of which have been leading IHOPFW) cannot be reduced to statistics of reduced crime or the upswing of a region’s marketplace (even though we could point to those).

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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

The deeper work is not about a transformed ‘region’ but something far more personal—the Father’s conquest of my heart. I sat with one of my oldest and dearest friends as we rehearsed 20+ years of pastors coming together to pray under the umbrella of Fort Wayne Renewal and the Prayer Summit. What we seemed to conclude agreed with something I had read from theologian John Caputo and loosely paraphrased reads: ‘...we did not initiate a visitation we did not see coming...’. For over 20+ years we gathered with pastors from around the region to ask this question ‘**what would it take to attract a sustained move of God in a region?**’ We came with a commitment to ‘Win’ the favor and secure the blessing of God but what we experienced was profoundly life changing. As one pastor put it “*I came here to pray about my church and God talked to me about my marriage*”. **What we discovered was God’s goal: making us One with Him!** As we reflected my friend said this: “***It (The Prayer Summit) was deeply theological, deeply relational, and deeply transformative.***”

Beloved here is what I have discovered in prayer: I have come to see the path of performance I often want to walk is futile. In prayer I have come to see the kind of god I had created was a god of transaction not the God of measureless mercy, kindness, and grace revealed in Jesus. Prayer is not the price I pay for a blessing or the means to remove obstacles to secure His blessing. It is about allowing my heart to become One with the transcendent beauty, goodness, and truth of the heart of Jesus Christ.

I started down a path that I thought would surely lead to blessing and the transformation of a region but in the process have discovered another path. It is not a new path instead, an ancient path. Jeremiah 6:16 says it so well: ***Stand at the crossing, and consider the ancient path, for it is good and it leads to Me. Walk on this path, and you will find rest for your souls.*** (The Voice - **emphasis mine**). This verse gives expression to our reason for making a change in our ministry name to more accurately reflect who we are and what we are about: ‘**Tending Ancient Paths: the Paradigms, Posture, and Practices of Jesus.**’ To be clear, we are absolutely committed to continuing our ministry of Prayer. Prayer is and has always been about relationship with our good Father but as one of the earliest desert fathers Abba Agathon said, “*...laboring in prayer is a war that will continue until we die*”. Our labor will continue as we cooperate with the body of Christ in the region to teach, mentor, lead, and write about the Paradigms, Posture, and Practices of Jesus **with the goodness of God as our highest object and our hearts as His target.**

I’m no longer driven by the question ‘*What would it take to attract a sustained work of God in a region?*’ My near daily prayer includes this 200 year old **Prayer of Thanksgiving: Common Book of Prayer** ‘*Almighty God, Father of all Mercies, we your humble servants give you thanks for all your goodness and lovingkindness to us and everything you have made. We bless you for your creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; and we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips but with our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service and walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages Amen*’

‘Prayer oneth the soul to God’ Julian of Norwich

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Ben and Denise, Please agree with us over these prayer needs for the next month...

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