

Cross-cultural prayer

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I prayed with a young man today for healing - specifically healing from the bondage of evil spirits - which doesn't happen a lot in my ministry.

He is from Congo - more fluent in French than English - which also took some careful listening. As he told his story, it became clear that his concerns are real and deep and have wounded him for a long time. He also wanted to grow in faith and prayer. Two thoughts kept coming to me after our meeting:

First, in affluent Western culture I rarely am asked to pray for healing. When I was doing urban ministry in Cleveland - particularly with Puerto Rican gang kids - we prayed a LOT for healing. And for protection from evil spirits, too. I also was asked to do an exorcism from a house the family was certain was "possessed" (however you understand that term.) So I did - I felt the chilling coldness of evil in that house - and experienced the fear that seemed to be alive within its walls. And while I don't even pretend to understand the totality of it all, I also know that evil is real and palpable and I respect it profoundly.

I was grateful that this young man felt safe enough to come to me for these prayers because there is so much that divides us: race, culture, language and history. But he knows that in Christ we worship a God of grace and healing and that God is bigger than all our differences. After prayer, I gave him a very basic daily prayer guide and told him to meet with me again next week after he had started to pray each morning and evening.

And second I am very humbled by all of this - and also out of my element. That is one of the very real challenges of multi-cultural ministry, yes? Not only do I sense a pastoral responsibility to my young friend,

but a need to learn ways to both help and better understand him. Any one know of something good to read about the Christian culture of the Congo? (Your ideas and prayers are valued!)

And so it

goes: like my old buddy Ray Swartzback - my urban ministry mentor - used to say: this ministry is an emotional roller coaster that takes you from extreme highs to profound lows all in the same day. He also used to tell me that there was a place for middle class white guys who were willing to be God's servants even in places that are foreign to us because ours is a God who builds bridges in love. Lord, I believe... and help my disbelief.

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