


Encountering prayer, encountering others

Marnie Klassen

Like many young adults in the church, I have a complex relationship with prayer, and with people who pray. At different times, prayer has been meditative, prophetic, comforting, oppressive, troubling, and liberating. My diverse experiences of praying with others open up the question of how our assumptions around prayer and spirituality shape our spiritual friendships.

While the evangelicalism that enveloped my adolescence silenced and tired me in many ways, it also gave me a deep appreciation for prayer and an admiration for people of faith who are unafraid in their attempts to



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care for peers through prayer, conversation, and encouragement. This appreciation was solidified by an experience at a pivotal point in my life. I was eighteen and about to move two thousand kilometres away from home for school. On a rainy December evening, I attended a silent retreat at a retreat center near my parents' home. At the end of the retreat was an opportunity to receive prophetic prayer. As two unfamiliar men prayed with me and shared the images they received, I simply trusted. I trusted that there was a true and meaningful movement of the Spirit in this odd interac-

tion. The room was warmly lit by candles and lamps, a haven from the drizzle outside. This event became a sacred moment in which I had the freedom to trust while maintaining a necessary skepticism.

After this experience, my first several months at Canadian Mennonite University were somewhat shocking. I was excited to be among peers with similar political and theological views. When life threw curve balls at me, however, I yearned to pray with someone but did not know where to

turn because I did not see my peers engaging in spiritual practices or even in conversations about faith.

A year ago, I worked with the writings of the late priest and social theorist Ivan Illich. In his dazzling and compelling articulation of the gospel, Illich says, “[Faith] makes me aim at facing people with a willingness to take them for what they reveal about themselves—to take them, therefore, at their word—and not for what I know about them.”¹

In the months since reading this text, I have worked hard to do just that—to take people at their word. This exercise has resulted in a most extraordinary finding: people *are* willing to pray. I spent last summer

working as the Bible instructor at a summer camp and regularly asked younger staff or campers if I could pray with them. I cannot recall anyone saying no. Throughout the summer, I saw these staff become comfortable praying with others, and I found myself surrounded by peers to whom I knew I could turn

for encouragement and prayer. I was surrounded by spiritual companionship. I am no longer unsure of whom to turn to for prayer.

I am increasingly convinced that prayer is an important and beautiful aspect of spiritual friendship. At the same time, I am seeking to heed the words of a preacher who said that part of what it means to be a person of faith is to be open to being surprised.² The people of faith I am surrounded by often have a different spiritual *modus operandi* than I do. And yet, if we take each other at our word, we can encounter Christ side by side.

About the author

Marnie Klassen grew up straddling denominational lines in British Columbia. She currently lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she studies social theology at Canadian Mennonite University and is a member at Home Street Mennonite Church.

1 Ivan Illich and David Cayley, “Gospel,” in *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David Cayley* (Toronto: Anansi, 2005), 57.

2 Ryan Dueck, “Lift Up Your Eyes,” January 3, 2016, Lethbridge Mennonite Church.