

“First Watch” Touch Points for Evangel’s Prayer Vigil team

For the week of February 1, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 5

INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller

from Part 1: Learning to Pray Like a Child / Chapter 6: Learning to be Helpless

In this chapter, Miller begins and ends with a story of dealing with the ongoing early morning pacing of their autistic daughter Kim—something called perseverating—and how it helped shape his views on a praying life. He quotes a participant in one of his prayer seminars:

I am starting to see there is a difference between “saying prayers” and honest praying. Both can sound the same on the outside, but the former is too often motivated by a sense of obligation and guilt; whereas the latter is motivated by a conviction that I am completely helpless to “do life” on my own. Or in the case of praying for others, that I am completely helpless to help others without the grace and power of God.

After citing various examples of helpless people in John 4-11, Miller says: We received Jesus because we were weak, and that’s how we follow him. Paul told the Colossians, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him” (2:6). We forget that helplessness is how the Christian life works.

The gospel, God’s free gift of grace in Jesus, only works when we realize we don’t have it all together. The same is true of prayer. The very thing we are allergic to—our helplessness—is what makes prayer work. It works because we *are* helpless. We can’t do life on our own.

A wrong view of maturity...We tell ourselves, “Strong Christians pray a lot. If I were a stronger Christian, I’d pray more.” Strong Christians do pray more, but they pray more because they realize how weak they are. They don’t try to hide it from themselves. Weakness is the channel that allows them to access grace.

...Surprisingly, mature Christians feel less mature on the inside. When they hear Jesus say, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5), they nod in agreement. They reflect on all the things they’ve done without Jesus, which have become nothing....That’s why strong Christians pray more.... Paradoxically, you get holier while you are feeling less holy. The very thing you were trying to escape—your inability—opens the door to prayer and then to grace.

...It took me seventeen years to realize I couldn’t parent on my own. It was not a great spiritual insight, just a realistic observation. If I didn’t pray deliberately and reflectively for members of my family by name every morning, they’d kill one another. I was incapable of getting inside their hearts. I was desperate. But even more, I couldn’t change my self-confident heart....That’s why I need grace even to pray. [Miller then relates how God answered his prayers for his children over the following months.]

...It didn’t take me long to realize that I did my best parenting by prayer.

...If we can do life on our own, we will not take prayer seriously. Our failure to pray will always feel like something else—a lack of discipline or too many obligations. But when something is important to us, we make room for it. Prayer is simply not important to many Christians because Jesus is already an add-on. That is why, as we’ll see later, suffering is so important to the process of learning how to pray. It is God’s gift to us to show us what life is really like.

When you open the door... I had underestimated Kim’s ability to pray on her own, to connect with God. My view of her had been too narrow....I’d looked at her as a disabled person and not as a young woman made in the image of God, able to communicate with her heavenly Father....When you open a door to God, you find some amazing treasures inside.

From [A Praying Life](#), Paul E. Miller, [NavPress](#) (2009), pages 55-61 (chapter 6)

PRAYER PROMPTS

- If you are allergic to helplessness, pray that God will give you the courage to admit it and depend on him.
- Reflect on this week’s worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Pastor Dave’s sermon* from Exodus 14, “Let My People Go—For My Glory (Part 1).” Pray that the Lord will lead you to ways to apply the lessons learned in your own walk with Christ and as you connect with different people this week.
- Continue to remember one family from your circle of influence for intercession. They could be a neighbor, coworker or relative. Pray for their struggles to be resolved, their health improved and their relationships strengthened. Ask the Lord to bring them to a fuller, closer relationship with Himself in faith and obedience.
- Continue to pray for opportunities to invite people to our services or become engaged in spiritual discovery with the people of Evangel in other ways as well. Ask the Lord to open doors of conversation, connection or compassion with others to enable that engagement this week.

* A podcast of the sermon and other materials are normally posted on the website by Monday.

Touch Points is e-mailed every Friday, posted on the website (www.evbapt.org), with printed copies available in the lobby.