

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

For the week of February 15, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 7

INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 2: Learning to Trust Again / Chapter 9

UNDERSTANDING CYNICISM (Ch. 9)

To understand the potential of the praying life, we need to understand the spirit of the age in which we live.

The opposite of a childlike spirit is a cynical spirit. Cynicism is, increasingly, the dominant spirit of our age....Many Christians stand on the edge of cynicism, struggling with a defeated weariness. Their spirits have become deadened, but unlike the cynic, they’ve not lost hope....Cynicism and defeated weariness have this in common: They both question the active goodness of God on our behalf. Left unchallenged, their low-level doubt opens the door for bigger doubt. They’ve lost their childlike spirit and thus are unable to move toward their heavenly Father.

The Feel of Cynicism....Satan sees evil everywhere, even in God himself....Since the Fall, evil feels omnipresent, making cynicism easy to sell. Because cynicism sees what is “really going on,” it feels real, authentic. That gives cynicism an elite status since authenticity is one of the last remaining public virtues in our culture.

Cynicism begins with the wry assurance that everyone has an angle. Behind every silver lining is a cloud. The cynic is always observing, critiquing, but never engaged, loving, and hoping....To be cynical is to be distant...it leads to a creeping bitterness that can deaden and even destroy the spirit....

A praying life is just the opposite. It engages evil. It doesn’t take no for an answer. The psalmist was in God’s face, hoping, dreaming, asking. Prayer is feisty....

A Journey into Cynicism...Cynicism begins, oddly enough, with too much of the wrong kind of faith, with *naïve optimism* or foolish confidence....No culture is more optimistic than ours. America’s can-do spirit came from the Judeo-Christian confidence in the goodness of God acting on our behalf....

In the nineteenth century that optimism shifted its foundation from the goodness of God to the goodness of humanity. Faith became an end in itself. President Roosevelt rallied the nation during the Depression by calling people to have faith in faith....Disneyland, the icon of naïve optimism, promises that we’ll find Prince Charming and live happily ever after.

The movement from naïve optimism to cynicism is the new American journey. In naïve optimism we don’t need to pray because everything is under control, everything is possible. In cynicism we can’t pray because everything is out of control, little is possible.

At some point, each of us comes face-to-face with the valley of the shadow of death. We can’t ignore it. We can’t remain neutral with evil. We either give up and distance ourselves, or we learn to walk with the Shepherd. There is no middle ground.

The Age of Cynicism...Our personal struggles with cynicism and defeated weariness are reinforced by an increasing tendency toward perfectionism in American culture. Believing you have to have the perfect relationship, the perfect children, or a perfect body sets you up for a critical spirit, the breeding ground of cynicism.* In the absence of perfection, we resort to spin—trying to make ourselves look good, unwittingly dividing ourselves into a public and private self. We cease to be real...

The media’s constant Monday-morning quarterbacking (“this shouldn’t have happened”) shapes our responses to the world, and we find ourselves demanding a pain-free, problem-free life. Our can-do attitude is turning into relentless self-centeredness.

Psychology’s tendency to hunt for hidden motives adds a new layer to our ability to judge and thus be cynical about what others are doing...

Cynicism is the air we breathe, and it is suffocating our hearts. Unless we become disciples of Jesus, this present evil age will first deaden and then destroy our prayer lives, not to mention our souls. Our only hope is to follow Jesus as he leads us out of cynicism [which, we’ll come to next week].

From [A Praying Life](#), Paul E. Miller, [NavPress](#) (2009), pages 77-82 (chapters 9)

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Pray for those around you (including yourself, perhaps) who may be caught up in cynicism and/or hypocrisy—that they (you) will discover the alternative of following Jesus into the praying life. Pray that the Lord will help us as a faith community to respond with love and grace, not being cynical or hypocritical ourselves, but recognizing the importance of encouraging each other to be the people that Christ would have us be.
- 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 2).” 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.

* 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.