

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

For the week of February 22, 2015

### Developing a Praying Life – part 8

**INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 2: Learning to Trust Again / Chapter 10**

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#### **FOLLOWING JESUS OUT OF CYNICISM (Ch. 10)**

Last week, Miller described cynicism as the spirit of the age. This week, we follow him through the first five of six cures for cynicism.

**1. Be Warm But Wary...**When he sends the disciples on their first missionary journey, [Jesus] says, “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt. 10:16). The overwhelming temptation when faced with evil is to become cynical...Jesus tells us instead to be warm but wary...The feel of a praying life is cautious optimism—caution because of the Fall, optimism because of redemption. Cautious optimism allows Jesus to boldly send his disciples into an evil world.

**2. Learn to Hope Again...**Cynicism kills hope....Risk becomes intolerable. Prayer feels pointless...But Jesus is all about hope....Many of us believe in the Christian hope of ultimate redemption, but we breathe the cynical spirit of the age and miss the heart of God....Because of the intrusion of a good God into an evil world, there are happy endings. Some of God’s last words in the Bible are, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). When you pray, you are touching the heart of God. When you know that, prayer becomes an adventure

**Cultivate Your Childlike Spirit...**What do I do with this old heart of mine? Exactly what we have been talking about. Cry out for grace like a hungry child. As soon as I begin simply asking for help, I have become like a little child again. I’ve stopped becoming cynical....To hear a good story, we need a simple, childlike wonder. Alan Jacobs, in his biography of C. S. Lewis, reflected that “those who will never be fooled can never be delighted, because without self-forgetfulness there can be no delight.” Lewis was able to write such captivating

children’s stories because he never lost his childlike spirit of wonder. The cynic is never fooled, so he is never delighted....

Years ago I went through a time when my life became so difficult I was unable to pray....[eventually] I did nothing but pray through Psalm 23 [and] began to reflect on the previous day and to look for the Shepherd’s presence. I began to notice him everywhere, setting a table before me in the presence of my enemies, pursuing me with his love. Both the child and the cynic walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The cynic focuses on the darkness, the child focuses on the Shepherd.

**4. Cultivating a Thankful Spirit...***In the spirit of reflecting on Psalm 23, Miller suggests a number of Scriptures that show Paul’s spirit of thanksgiving—these are just about people:* Romans 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:16; Philippians 1:3-; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:3; Philemon 4

Cynicism looks reality in the face, calls it phony, and prides itself on its insight as it pulls back. Thanksgiving looks reality in the face and rejoices at God’s care. It replaces a bitter spirit with a generous one.

**5. Cultivating Repentance...**Cynics imagine they are disinterested observers on a quest for authenticity...C. S. Lewis pointed out that if you see through everything, you eventually see nothing.

You cannot go on “explaining away” forever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away....

Lewis said that what was required was a restoration of the innocent eye, the eye that can see with wonder. That is the eye of a child.

All sin involves a splitting of the personality—what James calls being “double minded” (4:8)....If a husband watches porn online and then warmly greets his wife, he has created two people—one public and one hidden. If you talk about friends disparagingly behind their backs, you’ve create two personalities—the loving friend and the gossiping friend....Repentance brings the split personality together and thus restores integrity to life. The real self is made public.

Next week....cure Nr. 6: Developing an eye for Jesus.

From A Praying Life, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 77-94 (ch. 9)

#### **PRAYER PROMPTS**

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- Which of the five steps means the most to you? Pray that the Lord will help you work through the steps that will help you follow Jesus out of cynicism. Be ready to share these words with someone else who may need them.
- Reflect on this week’s Songs of the Cross service as a preparation for the Lenten season, running through Easter Sunday, April 5. Pray that the Lord will bring to mind throughout the week the words of Scripture, songs, choral praise, and the “Truth Endures” readings by Pastors Dave and Joel\*, to prepare your own heart and to share with others as the Lord gives opportunity.
- Continue to pray for opportunities to invite people to our services, particularly in the weeks leading up to Easter, or to 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 readings will be posted on the website Calendar under “Sermon Podcast” and a text of the readings will appear under “Sermon Outline.”

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Touch Points is e-mailed every Friday, posted on the website ([www.evbapt.org](http://www.evbapt.org)), with printed copies available in the lobby. To be included in the weekly e-mail, use the Contact Us form on the website and request “add me to the Prayer Vigil list.”