

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

For the week of March 22, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 12

INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 3: Learning to Ask Your Father / Chapter 14

HOW PERSONAL IS GOD? (Ch. 14 – part 1)

Do you pray for parking spaces, or does that seem too trivial, or even selfish? Miller suggests that praying for the details of life—the parking spaces—is part of our relationship with our Heavenly Father, which is both physical and spiritual.

A View Disconnected from Real Life...Some theologians think we shouldn’t pray for parking places because it means that someone else doesn’t get one....When Jesus prays at Gethsemane “take this cup from me,” he is being real; Christians rush to “not my will, but yours be done” without first expressing their heart (Luke 22:42). They submit so quickly that they disappear....When we are not being ourselves with God, we are no longer in real conversation with God.

{This} thinking has its roots in Neoplatonism, the ancient Greek philosophy that de-emphasized the physical world. Greek Stoics prided themselves on their ability to be unruffled by life....Neoplatonism seeped into the church, equating spirituality with a suppression of desire and emotion.

Imagine a husband who really loves his wife. He is attentive to her needs. He listens to her heart. He is her best earthly gift. How would she react if he said to her, “Don’t ask me for anything. I’m your best gift.”...The husband’s love for his wife is not disengaged from responding thoughtfully and generously to her requests. If we separate our mundane needs (doing) from God’s best gift, his loving presence (being), then we are overspiritualizing prayer.

By disconnecting the spiritual and physical worlds, Neoplatonism did exactly what the Enlightenment did [see the previous two Touch Points]. The only difference was Neoplatonism valued the spiritual while the

Enlightenment valued the physical. So the church is influenced by Neoplatonism (the physical isn’t important), and the world is shaped by the Enlightenment (the spiritual isn’t important). Both perspectives stifled honest, person-to-person praying in the church.

The church’s tendency toward unnatural spirituality has been further influenced in recent years by our culture’s embrace of Buddhist spirituality. In Buddhism you become enlightened and reach nirvana when you stop desiring....

Jesus could not be more different. Read the Gospels and you’ll discover a passionate, feeling man. Thank God we have a Savior who is in touch with the real world, who prays that he will not drink the cup of his Father’s wrath, who cries out on a rough wooden cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus neither suppresses his feelings nor lets them master him. He is real.

Pajamas and Milk...*Miller relates a childhood story of his family being in such need that he had no pajamas. His mother suggested he pray. Within a week, a pair of bright red pajamas came in a care package from friends. Within two weeks, a second pair arrived. I am not kidding. I don’t recall before or since getting a gift of pajamas. The answer to my prayer was so clear, so quick. I couldn’t miss it. God is concerned about pajamas.*

He is also concerned about milk. Every day at breakfast, I pray quietly as Kim [*his autistic daughter*] pours milk for her cereal. Her monocular vision leaves her without depth perception, so aiming is tough. Her weakness in motor planning makes it hard for her to stop pouring once she has started, and her dislike of advice means she doesn’t listen when I tell her to stop....

Does that mean we should all pray when we pour milk? Of course not. I hope you’ve learned to pour milk by now! It is not a need in your life. But it is for Kim. So we pray. It doesn’t make us more spiritual; it is just one of the little prayer journeys Kim and I are on.

From *A Praying Life*, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 119-124 (chapter 14)

PRAYER PROMPTS

- As Paul Miller suggests, “Thank God we have a Savior who is in touch with the real world.”
- Reflect on this week’s worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Pastor Dave’s sermon,* “Let My People Go: I Will Provide” (Exodus 16:1-15). 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 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 sermon and other materials will be 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. 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.”