

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

For the week of March 29, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 13

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 2)

Last week, in excerpts from the first part of this chapter, we looked at Miller’s observation that God is indeed personal and concerned with the details of our lives.

A Moment of Incarnation...the wonder of the infinite-personal God is displayed, more than anywhere else, in the Incarnation. Nothing can prepare us for the birth of God [as a baby] in a shepherd’s cave on the side of a hill in the city of Bethlehem in the Roman province of Judea in western Asia. It is so particular it staggers the imagination. God found a parking spot, a specific place and time where his love would touch our world.

Prayer is a moment of incarnation—God with us. God involved in the details of my life....It is striking how many spiritual writers react to the specificity of real prayer. It runs deeper than Greek Neoplatonism and the influence of Buddhist spirituality. Frankly, God makes us nervous when he gets too close. We don’t want a physical dependence of him. It feels hokey, like we are controlling God. Deep down we don’t like grace. We don’t want to risk our prayer not being answered. We prefer the safety of isolation to engaging the living God....

Our dislike of asking is rooted in our desire for independence....What do I lose when I have a praying life? Control. Independence. What do I gain? Friendship with God. A quiet heart. The living work of God in the heart of those I love. The ability to roll back the tide of evil. Essentially, I lose my kingdom and get his. I move from being an independent player to a dependent lover. I move from being an orphan to a child of God.

The Mystery of Prayer...Something mysterious happens in the hidden contours of life when we pray. If we try to figure out the mystery, it will elude us. The mystery is real.

Like an autistic child, we can only look sideways at how prayer works. When Kim greets people, she does not look at them directly but out of the corner of her eye. Some experts theorize that it is too overwhelming for those with autism to look directly at others.

Many things in life can’t be observed directly. In quantum physics, you can’t observe a particle’s speed and mass at the same time. Sexual love in marriage is beautiful; sexual love observed is pornography. The act of observing changes sexual intimacy. Some things just disappear when we try to capture or observe them.

Studies that try to prove that prayer works don’t understand the nature of prayer....The assumption that we can figure out how everything works comes from the Enlightenment mind-set that says everything is just matter and energy. This definition of “everything” leaves out all the important things of life, such as love, beauty, and people. The most precious things in life can’t be proved or observed directly, but we know them as surely as we know that the sun and moon exist.

The inability to see the connection between cause and effect is intrinsic to the nature of prayer because it is the direct activity of God. Trying to dissect how prayer works is like using a magnifying glass to try to figure out why a woman is beautiful....

If you are going to enter into this divine dance we call prayer, you have to surrender your desire to be in control, to figure out how prayer works. You’ve got to let God take the lead. You have to trust. Then God will delight you, not only with the gift of himself but also with parking places, pajamas, poured milk [references to last week], and Pathfinders [the speech computer that was an answer to prayer for Kim]. No one works like him!.

From *A Praying Life*, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 124-128 (chapter 14)

PRAYER PROMPTS

- If you have not experienced the “moment of incarnation” in your prayer that Miller talks about, ask God to provide it as you deepen your prayer life. If you have experienced it, pray that the Lord will allow you to lead others to experience that depth of prayer.
- Reflect on this week’s Palm Sunday worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Pastor Dave’s sermon,* “Prelude to Palm Sunday: Lazarus Raised” (John 11:1-16). Pray that the Lord will lead you to ways to apply the lessons learned in your own walk with Christ, as you connect with different people this week, and as you focus on the events of Holy Week with our own Maundy Thursday service and then Easter Sunday.
- Continue to pray for opportunities to invite people to our services, particularly Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday, and 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.”