

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

For the week of April 5, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 14

NSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 3: Learning to Ask Your Father / Chapter 15

WHAT DO WE DO WITH JESUS’ EXTRAVAGANT PROMISES ABOUT PRAYER? (chapter 15)

Six different times [during the evening before his crucifixion] Jesus says, “Ask and I will give it to you.” [See John 14:13-14; 15:7, 15:16, and 16:23-24]...What do we do with Jesus’ extravagant promises about prayer?

James to the Rescue...James describes two dangers in asking. The first danger...is Not Asking. The second danger is Asking Selfishly: “...you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” (James 4:2-3)

This is illustrated with a chart that shows a narrow road with steep cliffs on either side. To the left is Not Asking—separated from God—to the right is Asking Selfishly—demanding of God—and the road itself is marked Good Asking.

We can fall off either cliff....Sometimes we try so hard to be good that we aren’t real. The result is functional deism, where we are separated from God. The real you doesn’t encounter the real God....Jesus avoids the Asking Selfishly cliff by surrendering completely: “Yet not what I will, but what you will” (John 14:36). Jesus is real about his feelings, but they don’t control him, nor does he try to control God with them. He doesn’t use his ability to communicate with his Father as a means of doing his own will. He submits to the story that his Father is weaving in his life.

If you try to understand Jesus’ prayer [to “take this cup from me”] on a purely rational level, it seems crazy. Why would Jesus ask his Father for something he knows he wouldn’t do? But reason is only part of who we are as image bearers of God. Desire, feelings, and passion are also part of who we are. If we remember that Jesus is a person and not a robot, then it makes perfect sense.

All of Jesus’ teaching on prayer in the Gospels can be summarized with one word: *ask*. His greatest concern is that our failure or reluctance to ask keeps us distant from God. But that is not the only reason he tells us to ask anything. God wants to give us good gifts. He loves to give.

Praying in Jesus’ Name...Deep down, we just don’t believe God is as generous as he keeps saying he is. That’s why Jesus added the fine print—“ask in my name.”

The name of Jesus gives my prayers royal access. They get through. He’s not only the Savior of my soul. He’s also the Savior of my prayers. My prayers come before the throne of God as the prayers of Jesus....It is one more gift of God because my prayers are so imperfect....Jesus’ seal not only guarantees that my package gets through, but it also transforms the package. Paul says in Romans 8:26, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words.”

Learning to Abide...One of the best ways to learn how to abide is to ask anything. Jesus added the qualifier “abide in me” only once in the six times he told us to “ask anything.” His primary concern was to get us into the game. Start asking. Don’t just ask for spiritual things or “good” things. Tell God what you want. Before you can abide, the real you has to meet the real God. Ask anything.

It takes reflection to answer the question “what do I want?” It doesn’t take long before you are looking carefully at Jesus’ fine print—“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). ...My experience is that most people do not put God to the test....most people consistently fall off the left side of the Not Asking/Asking Selfishly chart. They don’t ask.

From *A Praying Life*, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 129-139 (chapter 15)

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Are you walking on the road of “Good Asking,” or do you find yourself falling off the cliff of “Not Asking” or “Asking Selfishly”? What does your experience say about learning to abide in Christ?
- Reflect on this week’s Easter Sunday worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Pastor Dave’s sermon,* “The Promise of Easter: Lazarus Raised” (John 11:25-27). 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 reflect on what the Lord may have used during this year’s Lenten season and Holy Week to affect your daily walk with Christ.
- 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.”