

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

For the week of May 3, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 18

INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 3: Learning to Ask Your Father / Chapter 19

WATCHING A STORY UNFOLD (CH 19)

MILLER BEGINS WITH A STORY ABOUT THE CONCERN THAT HE AND HIS WIFE, JILL, HAD FOR ONE OF THEIR DAUGHTERS, EMILY, AND HER ATTACHMENT TO MATERIAL THINGS. HE INTRODUCES AN IDEA THAT HE WILL EXPAND ON LATER, USING A NOTE CARD WITH TWO SCRIPTURE VERSES SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSING EMILY’S NEED AND THEIR ROLE AS PARENTS:

1 JOHN 4:18 (“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear”) AND 1 JOHN 2:15-16 (“Do not love the world...”)

Love of material things was not an all-consuming sin in Emily’s life. It was just a slight bent in her heart. If a ship is off a few degrees, it is imperceptible at first, but over time it becomes a vast distance. I was praying to prevent the distance of a heart gone astray. I prayed for little Emily because I couldn’t get inside her heart.

Our Prayers Shape Us....God wants to do something bigger than simply answer my prayers. The act of praying draws God into my life and begins to change me, the pray-er, in subtle ways.

One of the first things I noticed as I prayed for Emily was that I became more aware of her as a person. It also took the steam off my tendency to fix things with quick comments....Prayer softened me....

Jill’s and my love for Emily was informing our prayers, and our prayers were in turn shaping how we loved Emily. Our prayers didn’t sit in isolation from the larger story God was weaving in her life and in ours. The act of praying was alerting us and shaping our decisions....

My prayers for Emily exposed my own heart. I began to see that I, too, loved the world and the things in the world. Even my frugality was a form of the love of money. The obsession of saving small amounts of money isn’t different from the obsession of gaining large amounts of it. In both, money is the center. I also began to notice that I tended to be extra polite with a donor to our ministry. That, too, is a form of the love of money.

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Thank God for the way he has used prayer to shape your life—and encourage others by telling of your experience.
- Reflect on this week’s worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Pastor Dave’s message “Have This Letter Read to All”* (1 Thess. 5:27) 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.”

I often find that when God doesn’t answer a prayer, he wants to expose something in me. Our prayers don’t exist in a world of their own. We are in dialogue with a personal, divine Spirit who wants to shape us as much as he wants to hear us....Prayer doesn’t exist in some rarified spiritual world; it is part of the warp and woof of our lives. Praying itself becomes a story.

Parenting and Prayer....It is surprising how seldom books on parenting talk about prayer....

Until we become convinced we can’t change our child’s heart, we will not take prayer seriously. Consequently, repentance is often missing. When we see, for example, our son’s self-will, we usually don’t ask, *How am I self-willed? How am I angry?* We want God’s help so we can dominate our son. We forget that God is not a genie but a person who wants to shape us in the image of his Son as much as he wants to answer our prayers.

Increasingly, parents in our culture are moving to the opposite extreme and becoming passive....reinforced by pop psychology’s tendency to make descriptions of childhood stages into rules....When we do this, life takes on a fixed, given quality. Prayer becomes pointless.

HERE, MILLER REFERS BACK TO THE CHART OF GOOD ASKING USED EARLIER, URGING READERS TO AVOID FALLING OFF THE ROAD OF GOOD ASKING INTO DEMANDING ON THE ONE EXTREME AND DESPAIR ON THE OTHER.

If you are on the road of Good Asking, you have also given up—but in a good way. You’ve given up your ability to change other people. Instead, you cling to God and watch him weave his story. Frankly, Jill and I do our best parenting by prayer.

Field Hockey and Faith....*MILLER CLOSSES WITH A STORY OF EMILY’S LOVE OF FIELD HOCKEY AND HOW SHE HAD TO WORK THROUGH DISAPPOINTMENT BEFORE HER LAST YEAR BECAME HER BEST....*Because we were praying thoughtfully for Emily, we could see God’s larger picture weaving in and through her disappointments. God permitted mild pain in her life in order to grow her soul into his. No one works like him.

Next week: “A Father’s Love”

From A Praying Life, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 165-172 (chapter 19)