

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

For the week of May 10, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 19

INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 4: Living in Your Father’s Story / Chapter 20

A FATHER’S LOVE (Ch. 20)

All was not right in my relationship with [my daughter] Emily. There was distance between us. Most of the time she was critical of me. In 2002 I jotted a note on her prayer card, *Help me to move toward her. MILLER THEN GOES INTO A STORY TOO LONG TO TELL HERE OF HOW GOD WORKED IN SEVERAL WAYS OVER AN EXTENDED TIME TO ANSWER THAT PRAYER.*

My two prayer requests—for her relationship with her earthly father and her heavenly Father—were closely connected. A breakthrough in one led to a breakthrough in the other. As I watch God’s stories unfold, I watch for his little design touches, his poetry.

I was also struck by the wisdom of God’s five-year delay to our prayers for Emily. As her heart began to soften while befriending and caring for the orphans [in a year-long trip to Guatemala], her life goals began to change. She switched both colleges and careers. The whole direction of her life changed. God waited to remove the blinders from her eyes until he had Emily where he wanted her.

When I prayed that Emily would not love the things of this world, it seemed as if she was standing alone in the middle of a field dominated by the icons of modern American teenage life: boyfriends, friends, appearance, sports, and clothes. Jesus was a fading childhood memory. My prayer for her seemed so weak, so powerless. Now the words whispered softly over her heart have swept away the once-powerful images. The quest for popularity has been replaced by love, by a desire to be with those who have nothing to offer her. Prayer has won the day. Like the Apostle Paul I can testify that “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are” (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

Broken Images of God...But what if your human father failed you? How can you see God as your father if your father was distant, absent, or harsh?

The good news is that our heavenly Father trumps the failures of our earthly fathers. Listen to this story from Ravi Zacharias, a leading evangelist and apologist:

I came to know Christ on a bed of suicide when I was seventeen—desolate, desperate. My father just finished telling me I’d be a total failure in life. I was born a failure, he said. Somebody brought a Bible to my bedside. I’m so thankful to my heavenly Father that my dad lived long enough to write a letter to me—my dad died fairly early—and said, “Will you ever forgive me for the things I said?” And yet, in the dark of the soul, I found the heavenly Father to be closer than I’d ever realized.

Because we live in a fallen world, God has to use broken images of himself, such as fathers. In fact, all the images God gives us of himself in Scripture are flawed. Think of king or lord. How many good politicians do you know? The early church’s experience of Caesar was not pleasant, yet they took Caesar’s title, “Lord,” and applied it to Jesus, calling him “Lord Jesus.”

The fact that we know our king or father is flawed means we know what a good father should do. Because we are created in the image of the triune God, we have an instinctive knowledge of how a father should love. If we didn’t know what a good father was, we couldn’t critique our own. Modern psychology can unwittingly trap us in our pasts. It is just another form of fatalism that kills our ability to see the story God is weaving in our lives.

Emily can still give you a list of my failings as a father....God uses the weak things of this world—including fathers—to weave his stories.

Next week: “Unanswered Prayer: Understanding the Patterns of Story”

From *A Praying Life*, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 173-78 (chapter 20)

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Pray for those on your Impact List, as well as others at Evangel, who may be facing the same struggles expressed by Paul Miller or Ravi Zacharias—that God will work in his way and in his time as he weaves the story of each life. Pray also that you may be privileged to be part of God’s work—whether by prayer alone, by word, or deed.
- Reflect on this week’s worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Pastor Joel’s message “God Calls!”* (Jeremiah 1:4-10) 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.
- 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.”