

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

For the week of May 17, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 20

INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 4: Living in Your Father’s Story / Chapter 21

UNANSWERED PRAYER: UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERNS OF STORY (Ch. 21)

MILLER LAYS OUT FOUR RESPONSES TO UNANSWERED PRAYER:

DESERT-- LIVING IN THE GAP BETWEEN THE HOPE (WHAT IS PRAYED FOR) AND REALITY (YOUR STORY AS GOD WEAVES IT)

DENIAL—DISTORT REALITY, PRETEND IT IS CLOSER TO HOPE

DETERMINATION--TRY TO RAISE REALITY TO REACH HOPE BY FORCE OF WILL, MORE PRAYER

DESPAIR—COLLAPSE THE GAP BY RECOGNIZING REALITY, BUT LOWERING, THEN ABANDONING HOPE

Despair, in its own strange way, can be comforting, but it and its cousin, cynicism, can kill the soul....In contrast, people of faith live in the desert. Like Abraham, they are aware of the reality of their circumstances but are fixed on hope. Paul describes how “in hope [Abraham] believed against hope” (Romans 4:18). In the face of Sarah’s barrenness and old age, Abraham still had hope.

Life in the desert....The hardest part of being in the desert is that there is no way out. You don’t know when it will end. There is no relief in sight.

A desert can be almost anything. It can be a child who has gone astray, a difficult boss, or even your own sin or foolishness. Maybe you married your desert.

God customizes deserts for each of us....The theme of the desert is so strong in Scripture that Jesus reenacts the desert journey at the beginning of his ministry...His desert is living with the hope of the resurrection yet facing the reality of his Father’s face turned against him at the cross.

Thriving in the desert....God takes everyone he loves through a desert. It is his cure for our wandering hearts, restlessly searching for a new Eden. Here’s how it works.

The first thing that happens is we slowly give up the fight. Our wills are broken by the reality of our circumstances....

Suffering burns away the false selves created by cynicism or pride or lust. You stop caring about what people think about you. The desert is God’s best hope for the creation of an authentic self....Desert life sanctifies you....Desert life becomes a window to the heart of God....The best gift of the desert is God’s presence. We see this in Psalm 23....The protective love of the Shepherd gives me the courage to face the interior journey.

Kept from Harm....[W]hen Kim was about twenty, I was sitting at the dining room table writing a Bible study on Psalm 121 [THE PSALM WRITTEN ON A PRAYER CARD BEFORE KIM’S BIRTH]. I looked up from the table and said, “Jill, God did it. He did Psalm 121.” We had thought the harm was a daughter with disabilities, but this was nothing compared to the danger of two proud and willful parents. Because Kim was mute, we learned to listen. Her helplessness taught us to become helpless, too.

Kim brought Jesus into our home. Jill and I could no longer do life on our own. We needed Jesus to get from one end of the day to the other. We’d asked for a loaf of bread, and instead of giving us a stone, our Father had spread a feast for us in the wilderness. *Thank you Jesus, for Kim.*

When we don’t receive what we pray for or desire, it doesn’t mean that God isn’t acting on our behalf. Rather, he’s weaving his story. Paul tells us to “continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2). Thanksgiving helps us to be grace-centered, seeing all of life as a gift. It looks at how God’s past blessings impact our lives. Watchfulness alerts us to the unfolding drama in the present. It looks for God’s present working as it unfolds into future grace....Watch for the story God is weaving in your life. Don’t leave the desert.

Next week: “How God Places Himself in the Story”

From *A Praying Life*, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 179-87 (chapter 21)

PRAYER PROMPTS

- If you have learned to “thrive in the desert,” praise God for specific examples of how this shows he is weaving the story of your life. If you have not experienced Psalm 121 protection from harm, pray that God will lead you to experience it. Pray that the Lord will lead you to share your experience with someone who would benefit from it.
- Reflect on this week’s worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Gil Zinke’s message “Grace and Hope Amid Judgment”* (Genesis 3:14-19) 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.”