

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

For the week of June 21, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 25

INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 4: Living in Your Father’s Story / Chapter 25

LIVING IN GOSPEL STORIES

MILLER BEGINS WITH ONE OF THOSE STORIES THAT IS TOO LONG TO TELL HERE, BUT BECOMES CENTRAL TO WHAT FOLLOWS. IN ESSENCE, HE DECIDES TO TAKE HIS AUSTISTIC DAUGHTER KIM WITH HIM ON A TRIP, TO GIVE HIS WIFE JILL A BREAK AT HOME. NEEDLESS TO SAY, JILL GETS HER REST, BUT AT THE COST OF A DIFFICULT TRIP WITH KIM.

The gospel, the Father’s gift of his Son to die in our place, is so breathtaking that since Jesus’ death, no one has been able to tell a better story. If you want to tell a really good story, you have to tell a gospel story.

My trip with Kim was a gospel story. I gave up a piece of my life for Jill...I called home. Ashley picked up. She and Jill were at a Mother’s Day dinner. She said, “Every fifteen minutes Mom says, ‘It’s just so nice. I can’t believe how calm it is.’ In the gospel Jesus took my sin, and I got his righteousness. That is how gospel stories work. Jill gets a restful weekend, and I get a stressful one. Whenever you love, you reenact Jesus’ death.

Consequently, gospel stories always have suffering in them. American Christianity has an allergic reaction to this part of the gospel. We’d love to hear about God’s love for us, but suffering doesn’t mesh with our right to “the pursuit of happiness.” So we pray to escape a gospel story, when that is the best gift the Father can give us. When I was sitting on the plane thinking, *Everything has gone wrong*, that was the point where everything was going right. That’s how love works.

The Father wants to draw us into the story of his Son. He doesn’t have a better story to tell, so he keeps retelling it in our lives....Living in a gospel story exposes our idols, our false sources of love....When our idols are exposed, we often give up in despair—overwhelmed by both the other person’s sin and our own. But by simply staying in the story, continuing to show up for life, even if it seems pointless, the kingdom comes. Poverty of spirit is no longer a belief. We own it. It describes us.

Repentance, in a strange way, is refreshing....When we remove our false selves, repentance creates integrity. We return to the real source of love—our Heavenly Father. We become authentic.

Enjoying God’s Story....If we stop fighting and embrace the gospel story God is weaving in our lives, we discover joy. Paul bubbles over with joy as he writes the book of Philippians, chained between two Roman soldiers....

You should have seen Kim smile when [we did some fun things on our trip]. When you bind yourself to someone who at times can be difficult, you are in a place where you can discover God and then joy.

Watching for Unseen Connections....To see a gospel story, we need to reflect on how seemingly disparate pieces are connected. The best place to pick up the unseen connections of our designer God is in disappointment and tension—such as my plane trip with Kim. We saw the hidden connection between the humbling of a plane trip and the potential pride in front of an audience. We saw the connection between my pressure and Jill’s relief. [In an earlier chapter] we saw an unseen connection between repentance and grace. By *unseen* I mean that there are no visible, causal links. As we bring God’s mind to our stories, we can see his hand crafting connections behind the scenes.

Nothing in the modern mind encourages us to see the invisible links binding together all of life...The marketing slogan of Las Vegas—“What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas”—describes how our secular world views life. There is no link between Vegas and the rest of your life.

Baloney. This is my Father’s world. Everything you do is connected to who you are as a person and, in turn, it creates the person you are becoming. Everything you do affects those you love. All of life is covenant.

Next week: we move into Part 5 and some practical advice on techniques that can help improve your prayer life.

From *A Praying Life*, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 211-217 (chapter 25)

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Pray that the Holy Spirit will direct you to expose the idols in your life, to experience the “unseen connections” to the gospel story, so that “all of life is covenant.”
- Reflect on this week’s worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Dr. Pio Tica’s message “God Wants to Use You.” * 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.”