

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

For the week of July 5, 2015

Developing a Praying Life – part 27

INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 5: Praying in Real Life, Chapter 28

LAST WEEK, WE INTRODUCED MILLER’S USE OF PRAYER CARDS, OF WHICH A PROMINENT FEATURE IS TO WRITE DOWN A SPECIFIC SCRIPTURE APPROPRIATE TO THE PERSON OR SITUATION AND UPON WHICH PRAYER CAN BE CENTERED. HERE, HE PRESENTS A PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION, WHERE YOU CAN SEE THAT THE USE OF THE PRAYER CARD IS SIMPLY A TOOL THAT HELPS GUIDE HIS PRAYER EXPERIENCE.

Bob didn’t particularly like me—he hadn’t for quite a few years...Every couple of years his anger would flare out at me, but generally he treated me like a servant. Over time, the mellowing and acceptance that often occur in relationships didn’t happen....

Then it dawned on me that I’d tolerated and even loved Bob, but I had not prayed regularly for him. I had assumed that his attitude toward me was like the blue sky, part of the backdrop of life that doesn’t change. I am constantly discovering areas of my life like this. So I wrote a prayer card for Bob and scribbled 1 Peter 3:4 on it, and began to pray daily that God would gentle his critical spirit. Then I waited.

Within a year, Bob went through suffering, and I was able to serve him. Several years later, he went through even more suffering, and I had the opportunity to serve him again. This time, his suffering was so severe that he couldn’t help but feel my love and care for him. For the first time in our relationship, his attitude toward me softened significantly.

When I begin praying Christ into someone’s life, God often permits suffering in that person’s life...The Father can’t think of anything better to give us than his Son. Suffering invites us to join his Son’s life, death, and resurrection. Once you see that, suffering is no longer strange. [See 1 Peter 4:12-13]

Working Your Prayers....My prayer for Bob had a familiar threefold pattern: First, I wrote the prayer down. Then I watched for God to work while I prayed. Finally, God provided an opportunity where I “worked” the prayer request. By *worked* I mean that God involved me in my own prayers, often in a physical and humble way.

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Pray for relationships and opportunities for prayer—among the Evangel family, as well as with co-workers, neighbors and the other places where you find the “Bobs” in your life.
- Reflect on this week’s worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Pastor Joel’s message “Prepare for the Lord.” * 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, 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.”

Notice the three-step pattern [in Jesus’ illustration in Mark 4:26-29]: planting, waiting, and then working again at the harvest. Jesus’ description of how the kingdom works is alien from how many of us pray. First, it seldom occurs to us to plant the seed of thoughtful praying because we think people like Bob don’t change. Or, prayer just feels too easy, almost like a cop-out.

Second, if we do pray, we don’t watch and wait. We want the answer now. We grumble right at the point when God is about to do his biggest work. When Bob suffers, we think that karma has finally kicked in. Bob is just getting what he had coming. We’d likely not admit it, but we are tempted to enjoy his suffering. And people like Bob don’t suffer quietly.

Finally, we don’t recognize the harvest when it comes. We are so cut off from an agrarian society that we forget that Jesus’ image of reaping is hard work. We reverse the kingdom pattern of ask (seed), watch (growth), and work (harvest). Instead of working in partnership with God, we attack the problem. We tell Bob what a pain in the neck he is. Then we watch the relationship disintegrate. Finally, when nothing is working, we might pray. But by that time we’ve concluded that Bob is hopeless and God is powerless. We decide that prayer doesn’t work.

But what really doesn’t work is us. For starters, we only prayed after we’d mucked up the situation. Then, by praying at the end, we didn’t allow any time for God to weave his story. Secretly we want him to answer our prayer by doing a magic trick on the other person’s soul. Our “prayer doesn’t work” often means “you didn’t do my will, in my way, in my time.”

Bob again....Only by watching do we realize the bizarre connections God makes in the kingdom. God answered my prayer for gentleness in Bob’s life by my serving Bob while he went through a time of suffering....Suffering opens the door to love. Suffering reaps a harvest of real change.

As I’ve thought about Bob and his life, I’ve been struck by how the two of us have some of the same sin patterns. We both need Jesus. Seeing how I can be like Bob is probably the best kingdom harvest of all.

From *A Praying Life*, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 235-238 (chapter 28)