

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

For the week of July 19, 2015

### Developing a Praying Life – part 29

#### INSIGHTS from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller from Part 5: Praying in Real Life, Chapter 30

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##### PRAYER JOURNALING

MILLER CONTINUES HIS DISCUSSION OF A NUMBER OF PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO PRAYER

The practice of journal writing and the idea that my life is a meaningful story are both rooted in Christianity. Augustine’s *Confessions*, an autobiography written around AD 400, describes the interior journey of the soul....

When life makes sense, it becomes a journey, a spiritual adventure. Writing down the adventure as it happens gives us a feel for our place in the story God is weaving in our lives. Journaling helps us to become aware of the journey.

Many of us rush around without much conscious knowledge of the pilgrimage God is carving out for us. When tragedy strikes, we’ve not learned the ways of God, so we have no frame of reference from which to respond. So, we slog through life, missing the divine touches.

Writing in a prayer journal helps us take stock of our location on the journey....When we keep a prayer journal, we can reflect on what God is doing, on the patterns of our Father’s care instead of reacting to life. If we see our lives as a pilgrimage, then it becomes an integrated whole. It makes sense. When we understand the story, it quiets our souls.

**Becoming Aware of Self on the Journey....**Communion or conversation with God breaks down into two questions:

1. How am I doing? What is coming at me? Am I happy, sad, thankful, discouraged, angry, frustrated?
2. What is God saying to me? What does the Word say?

When I reflect on these two questions in my prayer journal, the Living God removes the fog, and I see my own true self. This leads to repentance. Not surprisingly, repentance has a prominent place in the Lord’s Prayer.

**Using a Journal over the Course of a Year....**The year following my December prayer retreat was an interior journey. In February when things started getting difficult, I wrote in my journal, *Help me not to shrink from any cup of suffering you might have prepared for me.* I remembered the list of seven character qualities I’d written in my journal two months before, and decided to turn each of them into a prayer....

##### PRAYER PROMPTS

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- Pray that God will direct you and others at Evangel to share with each other tools and ideas that help your praying life.
- Reflect on this week’s worship service, the music, Scriptures, and Andrew Schumtzer’s message “How God Cares for His Own.” 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.

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*Touch Points* is e-mailed every Friday, posted on the website ([www.evbapt.org](http://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.”

By June, I realized that God didn’t seem particularly interested in saving me from the difficult situation. He just wanted to change me. I wrote, “For the first time in the last four months the idea of primarily focusing on my repentance is appealing to me.” It was a relief to realize that God had boxed me in....Later that month I realized God wanted to teach me how to listen to those who had a problem with me [and wrote about that in the journal].

Journaling allows us to discover the story that God is writing in our lives. Instead of rushing through life, it allows us to pause and reflect.

**Using the Journal During a Morning Prayer Time** [an example]...

As soon as I slowed down to pray and reflected on how I was doing, I realized I was upset. The first word I wrote down was *anger*. I wrote about why I was angry, and I prayed for grace. Then I reflected on what God might be saying to me. I paged through the psalms until I found one that reflected the state of my mind...Then I reflected on the state of my soul: *My inability to wait on you comes from thinking salvation comes from me.* That got me thinking about all the suffering in the book of Revelation, so I turned there and looked up passages on patient endurance.... Then I remembered three recent situations where I’d not waited. I jotted them down....My prayer time began with me feeling angry and overwhelmed, and it ended with the Spirit personalizing Scripture to the state of my heart.

If I hadn’t written down my reflections, I wouldn’t have known what God was teaching me....My prayer time itself was a journey.

You don’t have to write well to keep a prayer journal, nor do you have to be consistent....The act of writing out your worries, joys, and prayers helps you focus and keeps your mind from wandering. But the best part is that over time you will begin to see patterns of what God is doing, to pick up the threads of a story.

*WE’LL WRAP UP MILLER’S BOOK NEXT WEEK, THEN MOVE INTO A FIVE-BLESSINGS APPROACH TO PRAYING FOR OUR MINISTRY TO THOSE AROUND US AS WE APPROACH THE RESTART OF VARIOUS PROGRAMS IN SEPTEMBER.*

From *A Praying Life*, Paul E. Miller, NavPress (2009), pages 249-56 (chapter 30)