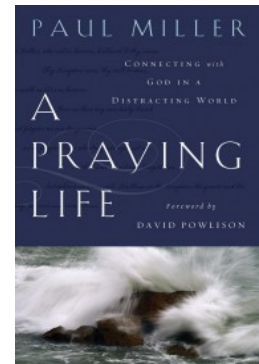


A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World

Author: Paul Miler
Publisher: NavPress
Format: Softcover
Pages: 288
ISBN: 1600063004
Stars: 5 of 5



As a lifelong Christian, I've heard a great deal of teaching about prayer and read a good many books on the topic. I've been taught to model my prayers on The Lord's Prayer. I've learned the ACTS method (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication). I've been encouraged to trust God for impossible answers, and above all, I've been made very aware of my spiritual shortcomings with regard to the discipline of regular, personal prayer.

Like many, I have tended to view prayer as a spiritual discipline I need to accomplish. So I try harder to do this prayer thing -- this spiritual event accompanied by certain kinds of emotions and feelings. When I fail, I am overcome with guilt. When I don't pray, I find it hard to start praying again. It seems I just never measure up to my perfect ideal of what my personal praying should be. Don't get me wrong, I've enjoyed wonderful seasons of prayer. I've had many spiritually high moments in prayer. I've seen God work through my prayers. But I don't have the level of spiritual stamina at praying that I would like.

Given this context, I jumped at the chance to receive Paul Miller's *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*, by NavPress, for free. The specific challenge was to read the book, and post about the results of a personal 30 days of real prayer, implementing the principles from the book in my own prayer life. Thanks again, Michelle Bennett for that challenge. I'm so glad I read this book.

A Praying Life is easily the best book I've read in the past several years. Miller speaks with an uncommon grace, and his book plants the spiritual discipline of prayer squarely upon the truths of the Gospel. A praying life is the goal, not regular disciplined moments of spiritual ecstasy. Miller's book is distinguished from others I've read in that it stresses prayer's connection with the gospel, it explains how a lack of prayer betrays a lack of dependence on God, and it illustrates through Paul Miller's own personal family stories, how prayer connects with all of life. In short, the book makes a praying life seem real, and possible.

I wish I could say after these 30 days, that my prayer life has been completely revolutionized. But after reading the book, I can definitely say my thinking about prayer has. I want to share a few of the principles that came home powerfully to me as I read this book.

First, I was reminded that Jesus invites us to pray. And our prayer is part of a life lived in confidence in the Gospel.

Jesus does not say, "Come to me, all you who have learned how to concentrate in prayer, whose minds no longer wander, and I will give you rest." No, Jesus opens his arms to his needy children and says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, NASB). The criteria for coming to Jesus is weariness. Come overwhelmed with life. Come with your wandering mind. Come messy....

We know that to become a Christian we shouldn't try to fix ourselves up, but when it comes to praying we completely forget that. We'll sing the old gospel hymn, "Just as I Am," but when it comes to praying, we don't come just as we are. We try, like adults, to fix ourselves up.

Private, personal prayer is one of the last great bastions of legalism. In order to pray like a child, you might need to unlearn the nonpersonal, nonreal praying that you've been taught. (pg. 29-30)

Prayer mirrors the gospel. In the gospel, the Father takes us as we are because of Jesus and gives us his gift of

salvation. In prayer, the Father receives us as we are because of Jesus and gives us his gift of help. We look at the inadequacy of our praying and give up, thinking something is wrong with us. God looks at the adequacy of his Son and delights in our sloppy, meandering prayers. (pg. 53-54)

Second, I was challenged to see that when I don't pray, I am basically telling God I'm good enough that I don't really need him. Ouch! This point has really revolutionized how I think about prayer. I have more of a desire to pray, even though I'm still not "good enough" at it. Although I'll never really be good enough, still I want to show my dependence on God in praying constantly for specific help.

If you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life. You'll always be a little too tired, a little too busy. But if, like Jesus, you realize you can't do life on your own, then no matter how busy, no matter how tired you are, you will find the time to pray. Time in prayer makes you even more dependent on God because you don't have as much time to get things done. Every minute spent in prayer is one less minute where you can be doing something "productive." So the act of praying means that you have to rely more on God. (pg. 47)

Third, prayer really is about being helpless. We come to Christ in the gospel as a helpless sinner. We are to have faith like a helpless child. We should pray as helpless Christians. We really do need our Savior's continual help! This last line should get the "duh!" award. But so often we live like we really don't. The more mature we become as Christians, the more aware of our sinfulness and helplessness we should be. And thus we should pray more.

Fourth, I learned that "we don't need self-discipline to pray continuously". Instead "we just need to be poor in spirit".

Poverty of spirit makes room for his Spirit. It creates a God-shaped hole in our hearts and offers us a new way to relate to others. (pg. 64)

If we think we can do life on our own, we will not take prayer seriously. Our failure to pray will always feel like something else — a lack of discipline or too many obligations. But when something is important to us, we make room for it. Prayer is simply not important to many Christians because Jesus is already an add-on. (pg. 57)

A big theme of the book is how suffering is often the context where we learn to pray. It grows us and shows us our true need. It helps make prayer important.

Fifth, prayer is not about some special feeling or perfect spiritual experience.

Instead of hunting for the perfect spiritual state to lift you above the chaos, pray in the chaos. As your heart or your circumstances generate problems, keep generating prayer. You will find that the chaos lessens. (pg. 72)

Too often we seek the perfect spiritual state, when we really should just pray to God out of a heart full of need.

Sixth, I learned that prayer changes things. As we pray we should look for ways our prayers are having an effect. We should seek to use prayer to change the hearts of those we love. Our problems and all of life's difficulties can be shaped and met with prayer.

When you stop trying to control your life and instead allow your anxieties and problems to bring you to God in prayer, you shift from worry to watching. You watch God weave his patterns in the story of your life. Instead of trying to be out front, designing your life, you realize you are inside God's drama. (pg. 72)

That's the secret of the praying life. It's not your own story, it's God. He becomes the One in control. By prayer we see Him working. By prayer we let Him into our lives.

Seventh, I was given a practical method of prayer which I've begun to adopt. He explains how to have a prayer card -- a 3.5" notecard -- for each major area in life that you pray about. Have one for each of the members of

your family and pray a specific verse for them. Add individual requests to the card over time. Keep track of answers to prayer. I've slowly begun to create cards and I find them easier to use than a prayer list. It's more personal and focused on the subject or person at hand.

I've only scratched the surface of what is contained in the book. It is very readable, because Paul Miller interweaves personal stories of his children and life together with various prayers he has. He shows how prayer helped him deal with situations and persons. How prayer was answered slowly over time in the lives of his children. How prayer allowed him to parent well, and love others rather than react negatively.

I'm confident that if you pick up *A Praying Life*, your prayer life will improve as well. May God challenge us all to have praying lives.

Originally published on Aug. 15, 2009 at [Fundamentally Reformed](#) by Bob Hayton.