

A Praying Life

book study



participant discussion guide



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Welcome!

The book *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* by Paul E. Miller—helps us see prayer as a way to connect with God in real, everyday life. Prayer is often one of the most talked-about—and least practiced—parts of the Christian life. It's not about performance—it's about coming to God as we are, not as we "should" be.

This discussion guide is designed to help you and your group, engage more deeply with the book by providing a reading schedule and questions for reflection with each week.

Let's not feel pressure as we start this journey. Instead, let's come expecting God to meet us. He's inviting us to trust Him, depend on Him, and find joy in Him. Together, we'll learn what it means to live a praying life.

Please note: All content is adapted from A Praying Life Discussion Guide by Paul E. Miller.

Page numbers may vary if you are using an e-book version.

Reading Schedule

Introduction

Chapters 1-2

Week 1-Part 1

Learning to Pray Like A Child

Chapters 3-8

Week 2-Part 2

Learning to Trust Again

Chapters 9-11

Week 3-Part 3

Learning to Ask Your Father

Chapters 12-18

Week 4-Part 4

Living in Your Father's Story

Chapters 19-27

Week 5-Part 5

Praying in Real Life

Chapters 28-34



Introduction

Chapter 1: "What Good Does It Do?"

Think about how you pray now. What is frustrating to you about prayer (pp. 2–3)?

Chapter 2: Where We Are Headed

Describe the differences between an isolated prayer life and a prayer-intertwined life (p. 9).

How does a praying life affect a busy life (pp. 11–12)?

Part One

Learning to Pray like a Child

Chapter 3: Become like a Little Child

Describe the differences between coming to God messy and coming put together – using the chart below (pp. 19-20).

	Coming Messy	Coming Put Together
What does it look like?		
How does God respond?		
What's hard about it?		

Why is it so important to come to God just as you are (pp. 20-22)?
Why can this be so hard for us?

How does the knowledge that you can come to Jesus distracted, weary, and cynical (like Nathaniel) impact you? How is this like the gospel?

Chapter 4: Learn to Talk with Your Father

Think of a child you know. What do they ask for? How often? In what way?

In what ways are you similar to and different from that child as you talk to your Father?

Chapter 5: Spending Time with your Father

Why did Jesus need to pray?

What did Paul mean when he says, "Jesus defines himself only in relationship with his heavenly Father" (p. 33)? How would your life look differently if you did the same?

Chapter 6: Learning to Be Helpless

Why is helplessness the key to a praying life (pp. 42-43)?

Where are you feeling helpless right now? Write down your thoughts. Talk with your Father about those things. Remember, He likes messy.

Chapter 7: Crying "Abba"—Continuously

Paul writes, "We don't need self-discipline to pray continuously; we just need to be poor in spirit." (p. 54) Read Matthew 5:3. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Why does the kingdom of heaven belong to people who are poor in spirit?

Paul writes, "Interrupting, selling and boasting are just a few of the things that draw me into continuous prayer, into continual childlike dependence on my Father. Each of us has our own list. We can let it drive us into a praying life." (p. 52) What is on your list? What sinful tendencies can drive you into continuous prayer?

Chapter 8: Bending Your Heart to Your Father

Paul writes, "Anxiety is unable to relax in the face of chaos; continuous prayer clings to the Father in the face of chaos." (p. 58) Why can't anxiety relax? What makes prayer a much better alternative?

Where are you experiencing anxiety? What is your natural response to this chaos? Read Matthew 10:29-31. How does this change your outlook to know that your Father has numbered the hairs on your head?

Part Two

Learning to Trust Again

Chapter 9: Understanding Cynicism

What is cynicism? What does it feel like?

What are some of the fruits of cynicism and how is cynicism the opposite of a praying life?

Chapter 10: Following Jesus Out of Cynicism

Six Cures Jesus Offers for Cynicism

1. Be Warm but Wary

How can we keep informed and vigilant without cultivating a cynical spirit?

2. Learn to Hope Again

Paul's friend said, "Expect nothing. Then if something good happens, be thankful." How can this attitude be compelling? How does it reflect cynicism? How does it kill hope and affect our prayers?

3. Cultivate a Childlike Spirit

Paul writes of page 75, "Both the child and the cynic walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The cynic focuses on the darkness; the child focuses on the Shepherd." Read Psalm 23. How does focusing on the Shepherd lift the fog of cynicism?

4. Cultivating a Thankful Spirit

Paul writes, "Nothing undercuts cynicism more than a spirit of thankfulness. You begin to realize your whole life is a fit." (p. 77) How does thankfulness help us? How is it different from naïve optimism?

5. Cultivating Repentance

How does being cynical hinder us from cultivating repentance?

5. Developing an Eye for Jesus (Chapter 11)

Chapter 11: Developing an Eye for Jesus

Where do you look for Jesus? Practice looking for Jesus and write down where you see Him.

Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.*

*He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,*

*for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.*

Part Three

Learning to Ask Your Father



Chapter 12: Why Asking Is So Hard

What does the enlightenment have to do with prayer? How has this given birth to cynicism (pp. 94-95)?

Chapter 13: Why We Can Ask

What is appealing about this infinite yet personal God?

Chapter 14: How Personal is God?

Paul writes, "If you are going to enter this divine dance we call prayer, you have to surrender your desire to be in control... You've got to let God take the lead." (p. 114) What about your life do you want to control and not give to God? How do you think He's going to mess it up?

Chapter 15: What Do We Do With Jesus' Extravagant Promises about Prayer?

What do you want God to do for you? Talk with Him about it. Remember, abiding can't begin to happen until the real you meets the real God.

Chapter 16: What We Don't Ask For: "Our Daily Bread"

How does someone who is abiding pray differently from someone who is not abiding? Describe how the "asking" looks different. How does each respond to Jesus as King, as Lord? To the body of Christ (pp. 128-130)?

Chapter 17: What We Don't Ask For:

"Your Kingdom Come"

What stages does God take the husband through as he begins to pray for his wife? How does he become the gospel for her (pp. 133-136)?

Chapter 18: Surrender Completely:

"Your Will Be Done"

How are prayer and self-will at odds? What is the fruit of each (pp. 143-145)?

*"This, then, is how you should pray:
"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one."*

Matthew 6:9-13

Part Four

Living in Your Father's Story

Chapter 19: Watching a Story Unfold

On page 153, Paul writes, "Until we become convinced we can't change our child's (or any person's) heart, we will not take prayer seriously." What does prayer do that all other methods can't do?

Chapter 20: A Father's Love

What did God do for Emily through Paul's prayers? Make a list of all that He did.

Chapter 21: Unanswered Prayer: Understanding the Patterns of Story

What is your desert? Where is there a large gap between hope and reality in your life?

Chapter 22: Hebrew Laments: Relearning Desert Praying

How do you see your laments full of faith? Give an example of a time in your life when you fervently lamented.

Chapter 23: Understanding How Laments Work

Write out a lament connecting God's past promise with your present situation, while hoping for a better future.

What are some of your favorite Psalms to pray through and how do they help you in your lamenting?

Chapter 24: How God Places Himself in the Story

Generally speaking, where is God in our stories? Why is He not a magic prayer machine (p. 196)?

As you think about your own desert, how do you see/have you seen God lingering at the edge? In what ways do/did you perceive Him growing faith in you?

Chapter 25: Praying Without a Story

On page 202, Paul outlines two approaches to a praying life—one believes there is no story, while the other lives in the story God is weaving. As you look at the fruits of each category, which fruits do you see manifested in your life?

Chapter 26: Hope

The End of the Story

Why can we hope when we pray (pp. 209-210)? Why can we dream big?

Chapter 27: Living in Gospel Stories

Paul writes, “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.” (p. 219) What are the key themes in the gospel story?

How does God retell these themes in your own life?

Part Five

Praying in Real Life

Chapter 28: Using Prayer Tools

Are you someone who likes systems, or doesn't? If not, why not? If yes, how do you keep track of important dates or what you need to accomplish?

According to Paul, why do we need a prayer system (pp. 228-229)?

Chapter 29: Keeping Track of the Story: Using Prayer Cards

In what ways might prayer cards be more helpful than a list?

Chapter 30: Prayer Work

What happens when we do "prayer work" backwards? What is frequently going on when we say, "Prayer doesn't work"?



Chapter 31: Listening to God

Read John 14:16-17, 26 and John 16:7-8, 13-14. Jot down all the phrases that describe who the Spirit is or what the Spirit does. Why do we need the Word of God and the Spirit when we pray?

Chapter 32: Prayer Journaling

Become Aware of the Interior Journey

How does journaling help us to see the story God is writing for us (pp. 258-259)?

Chapter 33: Real-Life Praying

Contrast hunting for an experience with God to inviting God into your life experience.

If someone were to walk into your real-life praying, how would they describe it?

Chapter 34: Unfinished Stories

In your own words, list what God did for Israel through their unfinished story—specifically, their captivity. Which of these things might God be doing for you in your “captivity” or your unfinished story?

