



40 DAYS OF PRAYER

40 Days of Prayer Guide

Letter from Pastor Jason.....	1-2
Weekly Prayer Focus	3-8
Life Group Discussion Questions	9-24



TRINITY
WELLSPRINGS
CHURCH
COMMUNITY OVERFLOWING

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40 Days of Prayer

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." Luke 11:1

Dear Trinity Wellsprings Church,

We are embarking on a spiritual journey together, a season of prayer.

If we want to see God work in our midst, then nothing can replace prayer. There is no program or plan, no strategy or shortcut, no money or mission that can replace the power of prayer, which asks humbly, yet boldly, for God's Spirit to work in our midst. As J.I. Packer put it, "The Spirit does not move where there is not much prayer."

Thus, I am asking our congregation to open themselves up for 40 Days of increased intentionality to prayer, both privately and corporately.

The centerpieces of our "40 Days of Prayer" will be a seven-week sermon series on prayer from Sept. 22 to Nov. 3 and the Church Wide Study of Paul Miller's delightful book entitled *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. We are asking you to jump into a LIFE GROUP for these seven weeks, most easily by coming to "Wednesdays Together".

This Fall, Wednesdays Together will be studying "A Praying Life" by Paul Miller for seven weeks (Sept. 18 – Oct. 30). Join us for dinner (5:30-6:15 pm) followed by Life Groups (6:15-7:30 pm). If you've never been in a Life Group, "come and see" for just these seven weeks! Do your best to read "A Praying Life" book, but come even if you get behind in the reading! The 9:00 & 10:30 TWC Institute of Discipleship classes (in the Seminar Room) will also participate in this Church Wide Study. Buy a copy of the book for \$10 at church for the best price.

Beyond the sermon series and the Church Wide Study, I want to share five ways you can participate in the 40 Days of Prayer with your church family.

Five Ways to Participate in the 40 Days of Prayer

Prayer Labyrinth & Journey

Wednesday September 25 (5:30-7:30 pm)

For our second WEDNESDAY TOGETHER during the "40 Days of Prayer" -- after dinner together -- we will embark on a "Prayer Labyrinth and Journey" by engaging with God in prayer thru a silent, personal prayer exercise followed by a corporate journey of prayer.

The entire church family is welcome -- even if your Life Group meets on another day.

A Praying Life Seminar: Connecting with God in a Distracting World

Friday Oct 4: 5:15-6:00 Potluck | 6:00-8:30 pm Praying Life Seminar

Saturday Oct 5: 7:30-8:00 Breakfast | 8:00 – 12:00 noon Praying Life Seminar

Seminar Cost: \$10/person; Childcare available through grade 6

Featuring Guest Speaker: Bob Allums

"The 'A Praying Life' Seminar is the most practical training in prayer possible. I highly recommend it." Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, NYC

24-Hour Concert of Prayer (Oct 20 – 21)

From 12:00 noon on Sunday (Oct. 20) to 12:00 noon on Monday (Oct. 21).

Sign up for a 30-minute time slot to pray for Trinity Wellsprings Church to “pray around the clock”. *More information to follow...*

October Fasting

The goal of fasting is to draw near to God. Biblical fasting has nothing to do with losing weight but eliminating distractions for a spiritual purpose; it hits the reset button of our soul and renews us from the inside out. Fasting enables us to concentrate on seeking God in prayer and through God’s Word. It is very important to know your body and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. Here are three options that people at Trinity might consider:

- **Partial Fast:** This fast is sometimes called “The Jewish Fast” and involves abstaining from eating any type of food in the morning and afternoon (from 6:00 am to 3:00 pm). Consider trying it for the Four Fridays in October – Oct. 4, 11, 18, and 25.
- **Complete Fast:** In this type of fast, you drink only liquids (typically water with light juices also as an option). Consider starting out with a Partial Fast on Oct. 4 (then break your fast at the Potluck “A Praying Life” Seminar), then segway to a Complete Fast for the last three Fridays of October – Oct. 11, 18, & 25.
- **Soul Fast:** If you have health issues or do not have much experience fasting, consider refocusing certain areas of your life that are out of balance. For example, you might choose to stop using social media or watching television for 21 days and then carefully bring that element back into your life in healthy doses at the conclusion of the fast.

During the month of October, Trinity will be providing more guidance about fasting (electronically on-line) for those wanting to seek God through the spiritual discipline of fasting. Fasting is not “spiritual one-up-manship” but rather a biblically grounded way of seeking God.

TWC Prayer Wall: “Leave a Prayer, Take a Prayer”

During our 40 Days of Prayer, you are encouraged to “**Leave a Prayer, Take a Prayer**” in one of three locations around the church (lobby, chapel, Beach House). Pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ at Trinity and for situations in our community and world.

The rest of this **40 Days of Prayer** booklet provides you with a **PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE WEEK** so you can be in prayer for our church family alongside your brothers and sisters in Christ and **THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** for the Church Wide Study *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller.

Grateful to be on this journey of prayer with you all,



Pastor Jason Carter

40 Days of Prayer

Weekly Prayer Guide for Trinity Wellsprings Church

TO: Trinity Wellsprings Church family

RE: An Invitation to 40 Days of Private Prayer

An Invitation. Consider these 40 Days of Prayer as a gentle invitation from your Heavenly Father.

God loves you. He's crazy about you. He longs to spend time with you because...well...how do I put this gently?...not because you're so great or anywhere near close to being perfect but because that's the essence of his Triune being – our God is a relational God.

Beyond the sermons and the community prayer events, God beckons you to sit quietly with Him. Or stand, yell, and complain before Him (aka: the prayer of lament...we'll get to that in the sermon series and in *A Praying Life*). Maybe you schedule time with God before the day begins. Or, before the night ends.¹ Or, during the middle of the day sometime. As with any relationship, communication is key. And when you communicate with God, it's called prayer.

Maybe you've never established a rhythm with God. Or lapsed. Or grown tired of it all. These 40 Days of Prayer is a gentle invitation to start (or re-establish) a rhythm. As John Ortberg puts it, "Practices such as reading Scripture and praying are important – not because they prove how spiritual we are – but because God can use them to lead us into life."

Maybe it's 15 minutes. Maybe longer. Maybe you read through the Book of Psalms and learn how the ancients prayed. Maybe you read through Paul's letters – Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Maybe you pick up *A Praying Life* and see your life of prayer begin to sprout up in earnest for the very first time. Maybe you pick up a journal and begin to write out your prayers before God. Maybe you get note cards to pray for people in your family, in your church, and people going through tough times.

Maybe these private times of prayer – where the real you meets the real God – begins to transform your life, like countless Christians have experienced over the centuries. Give it a try. 40 Days. You and God.

A gentle invitation is hanging out there...just waiting for you to respond. ~ Pastor Jason Carter

¹ Maybe you arise 15-30 minutes earlier in the morning. Or make a vow to shut things down at night 15-30 minutes before your normal bedtime routine. To spend time with the God of the Universe – what an awesome privilege!

Week 1: Sept 22 – Sept 28 | FOCUS: Leadership of Trinity Wellsprings Church

- **Pray for our Session:** Kathy Bills, Jason Carter, Richard Geach, Tim Huggins, Joelene Lanterman, Marissa Mayo, Jill Means, Lisa Palmer, Bill Rylander, Ryan Schumacher.
 - Pray for God’s wisdom and guidance, for sweet times of fellowship together, and for a spirit of unity and joy as they lead Trinity’s church family.
- **Pray for TWC Pastors:** Pray that Trinity’s pastors will be refreshed spiritually, enjoy close-knit marriages, and be faithful fathers (and grandfather for Steve).
 - Pray for Pastor Steve Schantz and his wife Carol. Pray for Benjamin (son) and Brianna and Vernon Perry (daughter & son-in-law), grandson Vern, and granddaughter due in December.
 - Pray for Pastor Jason Carter and his wife Lisa. Pray for their three sons (Kenyon, Jackson, and Tristan). Pray for progress for speech and learning for Tristan (diagnosed with autism). Pray for Linda Faria (Lisa’s mother) who recently transitioned into a Nursing Home in Melbourne.
- **Pray for the SHINE Capital Campaign**
 - Pray for the Capital Campaign Steering Committee: Co-Chairs Tom & Marissa Mayo, Co-Chairs Brian and Ana Saunders, Pat Ambrose, Mike Elmer, Ken Farson, Gary Hall, Keith Johnson, Joann Webster, Jim Wright.
 - Pray for (i) a spirit of unity and increased fellowship amongst our entire congregation during the Campaign, (ii) shared excitement over the present ministry and future vision of Trinity, (iii) sacrificial giving and generous hearts that might release a flood of joyous Kingdom giving that would bless our church, our community, and world through the SHINE Capital Campaign.

Week 2: Sept 29 – Oct 5 | FOCUS: The Worship of God’s People at Trinity Wellsprings Church

- Pray for the Worship of Trinity Wellsprings Church, for each service 8:00/9:00/10:30.
- Pray for Cross the Jordan (9:00) and Agape Praise Band (10:30), for musical skill and song selections that point our congregation to the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ and a “big God” theology that opens our hearts to the majesty of God.
- Pray for Staff members Scott Jordan (Executive Director of Worship & Administration), Sandy Bryan (Director of Music Ministries), and Amanda Avey (Pianist) – that their lives might embody the truth of Psalm 150 - “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord”.
- Pray for Trinity’s Choir & Handbell Choir who lead us faithfully and skillfully in Worship, that our congregation would be characterized by Psalm 42:1 – “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.”
- Pray for the preaching of the Word of God at Trinity Wellsprings Church: that the preachers might be biblically faithful to the Scriptures and that the hearers might respond in ways that release more of the fullness of Jesus into their lives.
- Pray for all of our guests and visitors, that they might experience a warm welcome from the body of Christ and encounter the crucified and risen Lord Jesus in their lives.

Week 3: Oct 6 – 12 | FOCUS: REVIVAL & GOSPEL GROWTH

- Pray for a revival in our church and in our community.
- Pray for an increasing number of visitors to be brought, invited, and welcomed to Trinity and then stay to be deeply disciplined in Christ.
- Pray that Trinity would see people come to know Jesus for the first time – people both young and old.
- Pray for Trinity’s own outreach through practicing “**Radical Hospitality**” by inviting people who do not (yet!) have a church home into their homes or for a meal. Pray for opportunities for our church family to share a “**Gospel Encounter**” with those who do not yet know the love of Christ.
- Pray for the Space Coast “City Fest” with Andrew Palau (March 28-29, 2020) and the events leading up to this evangelistic and community-wide event.

Why don’t you pray for 5 people who do not know Christ this week? Make a mental list of these people. Pray that **you may be a witness for Christ and bring them into Christian fellowship.

Week 4: Oct 13-19 | Children and Youth of Trinity Wellsprings Church

- **JAMLand Children:** Pray that every child feels known, loved, and safe in order to be fully open to learning about Jesus.
 - Give thanks for each adult and teen leader/volunteer who believes in the joyful investment of the next generation; pray for new volunteers to step forward.
 - Prayer for our pre-teen ministry, that it will become a special time and place just for 5th and 6th graders in our community to grow in Christ.
 - Pray for Coastal Community School as this Christian hybrid school is on our campus during the week – pray for their children, students, and our relationship with the families.
 - Pray for families at TWC, that our church continues to find innovative ways to guide and support families in our church.
- **BeachHouse Student Ministries: Encounter with Jesus** -- Pray that students take steps toward having an authentic relationship with Jesus that they can call their own. Pray that they will read their Bibles and seek the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - **Purpose** -- God has a plan and purpose for every student. Pray over our students asking God, no matter the circumstances, to give them passion and a deep-seated purpose for living unto the Lord.
 - **Friendships** -- Pray God will give our students wisdom in choosing their friends and that God will bring people into their lives who will point them to Christ.
- **TWC Staff of Youth & Children:** Pray for Randy Gerry (Director of Student Ministries and Community Engagement) and his wife Lexi. Pray for Jill Means and Amber Saxon (Co-Interim Assistant Directors of Children’s Ministries) and their husbands Bill and Ben (respectively).

Week 5: Oct. 20-26 | FOCUS: Our Local, State, and Federal Governments and the Issues that Divide and Sadden Us as a Nation

Local and State Governments:

- Pray for the City Council of Satellite Beach: Mayor Frank Catino, Vice Mayor Mark Brimer, and Council Members Mindy Gibson, Dominick Montanaro, and Jodi Rozycki.
- Pray for the City of Melbourne's Major Kathy Meehan.
- Pray for Brevard County Commissioners: Rita Pritchett, Bryan Lober, John Tobia, Curt Smith, and Kristine Isnardi.
- Pray for Florida Governor Ron DeSantis

Federal Government:

- Pray for President Donald Trump and Vice-President Mike Pence.
- Pray for Congress: Especially for Florida's Senators Rick Scott and Marco Rubio in the Senate and Florida's 8th District's Bill Posey in the House of Representatives.
- Pray for the Supreme Court: Chief Justice John Roberts, Clarence Thomas, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer, Samuel Alito, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh.

Pray for the Issues that Divide Us and Sadden us as a Nation:

- Pray for healthy civil discourse in our divided nation. Pray that the Church can be a place where we model healthy discourse in a safe, authentic community.
- Pray for the younger generation in our schools -- against depression, suicides, and mass gun violence that sadly portray our nation's youth in moments of hurt and rage.
- Pray for an end to racism in our country: that mutual understanding between all races would characterize our nation.

Week 6: Oct. 27–Nov. 2 | FOCUS: Our Mission Partners Locally and Globally

Local Mission Partners

Community of Hope

- Pray for our lack of capacity. They often have to turn families away.
 - Pray for volunteer coordinators, as staff is very small.
 - Pray for our infrastructure, replacing appliances and general maintenance.
 - Pray for “drop-in-shelter” which helps with families facing sudden homelessness.
-

Family Promise of Brevard

- Pray for families with teenage boys and a present father to find this ministry (only ministry in Brevard that is qualified to keep these entire families together.)
 - Pray for more churches in Brevard County to join as host churches
 - Pray for families who graduate from the program to remain transformed and able to maintain safe, affordable, long-term housing.
-

Love INC

- Pray for the launch of Transformational Ministry program, focused on comprehensive education for clients.
 - Classes include budgeting; affirming potential; setting boundaries; The Daniel Plan
 - Pray for the Personal Care Pantry, which is used to address immediate resource needs of clients. (We’re collecting shampoo and conditioner)
 - Pray for supernatural compassion to arise in Brevard County to walk with clients that have lost hope, are hurting, and need encouragement.
-

Nana’s House

- Pray for neglected, abused, needy, abandoned children newborn to 11 years old.
 - Pray for the physical condition/maintenance of our homes that they keep children safe and secure.
 - Pray for unification with families.
 - Pray for more volunteers as they are 100% volunteer operated with little overhead.
 - Pray for a safe, loving, Christian environment for these children.
-

Neighbor Up Brevard

(Formerly BNDC)

- Pray for the children who attend the DOCK annually and their small staff. Pray for the teen program where the goal is for 100% graduation of high school.
 - Pray for the continued drop in crime in the Booker T Washington neighborhood.
 - Pray for the Evans Center which serves low/moderate income residents.
 - Pray for the annual Gifts from the Heart Christmas Shop.
-

Pregnancy Resources

- Pray for unity of vision for all staff and leadership.
- Pray for more abortion minded clients to seek our services.
- Pray for each individual we come in contact with to know the hope, healing and peace of Christ as they struggle with difficult life and death decisions.
- Pray for us to expand our reach to those impacted by an abortion in their past.

Global Mission Partners

Bethel Mission, India

- Pray for annual 21 Day Prayer campaign and for more souls to come to know the Lord year-round
 - Pray for the government corruption preventing them from using some of their land
 - Pray that many more souls to come to know the Lord through their ministry.
 - Pray for the fundamentalists who are against the preaching of the Gospel.
 - Pray for the children's home and feeding program attending to poor and destitute.
-

Fishers of Men Ministry, Haiti

- Pray for new churches and school plants throughout the area.
 - Pray for our feeding program that provides a hot meal to school children that often is the child's only meal that day.
 - Feeding program is \$80,000 annually feeding 3500 kids/5 days per week
 - Pray for our annual leadership conference and crusade.
 - Pray for God to provide vehicle purchases and facilities upgrades.
 - Pray for the Jay Threadgill family as they continue to grieve the loss of their son.
-

Helsby Family, Middle

- Pray for training in marriage and family counseling to village pastors from 8 churches.
 - Pray for missionary care we provide for those in our region from any denomination.
 - Pray for planned engagement with Muslims and Hindu groups to introduce the Gospel.
 - Pray for more dependable vehicle replacement.
 - Pray for wisdom in how to use time and resources wisely.
-

IBPC Seminary, Equitorial Guinea

- Pray for Gregorio Nsomboro, the new rector as he fulfills his new role.
 - Pray God give bi-vocational professors joy in service & effective teaching in classroom
 - Pray for finances at both Bata and Malabo campuses; strategic partnerships w/local churches; pray for effective continuing education events that IBCP hosts.
 - Pray the lives of students are transformed by deep understanding of Bible, the Gospel, & be released for effective ministry.
 - Pray for mentoring relationships amongst the professors/students.
-

Candy Reiger, Haiti / D.R.

- Pray for our missionary, Candy Reiger, working with Missionary Ventures. She is a single female working to develop teams and mentoring others in Christ's name.
- Pray for Digging for Dignity program – providing good sanitary facilities for families.
- Pray for new construction in past year (3 residences and 1 church) and more to come.
- Pray for continued new construction opportunities for residences and churches
- Pray for funding for aging equipment, appliances, and vehicles

A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World by Paul Miller

Life Group Questions for Trinity Wellsprings Church

A NOTE, A WORD FOR THE BUSY (OR NON-READER), and A CHALLENGE:

NOTE: To make this book “digestible” in 7 weeks, Chapters 12, 13, 16, 26, 27, 28, 30, 33 have been eliminated from this Discussion Guide. To stay up with the reading & discussion (and not get discouraged), you may want to put a mark in the Table of Contents besides these chapters and come back to them later. Of all the skipped chapters, Chapter 12 might prove most helpful.

A WORD FOR THE BUSY (OR NON-READER): You can certainly participate in the Life Group discussion if you fall behind in the reading. Why? First, because we will open our Bibles each week. Second, we’ve tried hard to pull out the best tidbits, quotes, and thoughts every week from the book. ALSO: If you’re short on time, you’ll notice that each week gives you ONE CENTRAL CHAPTER to concentrate on. You can always come back to the book or that section of the book later.

CHALLENGE: Most weeks, there will be more questions than your group can get to. That’s okay. This discussion guide can also be used during your personal devotions. Get a journal, a pen, and begin to write out your responses to the questions. Pen some prayers. Reflect on your life. Let God probe your heart. This study is definitely conducive for use during your private prayer time.

Week 1 (Sept. 18): Intro & Learning to Pray Like a Child - Chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-30)

- *Read by Sept 18 for Wednesdays Together Chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-30)*
- *If you are pressed for time, simply read chapter 2.*

Chapter 1: “What Good Does it Do?”

- Before jumping into group discussion, spread around the room or building. The leader will give everyone 5 minutes to spend alone with God in prayer. Then come back and discuss the questions.
1. Philip Yancey asks the question: “Why does prayer rank so high on surveys of theoretical importance and so low in surveys of actual satisfaction?” Think about how you pray now. What is most frustrating to you about prayer? (pp. 2-3) What did you feel in the 5 minutes of alone time with God?
 2. “American culture is probably the hardest place in the world to learn to pray.” (pp. 3). What is it about American culture for you that makes it particularly difficult to pray?

3. Imagine that prayer is like being on the phone with your earthly father. What is it like to talk with your heavenly Father?
 - a. Dry (“What do I say?”)
 - b. Desperate (“I’m calling because I’m really in trouble and I don’t know who else to call.”)
 - c. Dutiful (“I’m calling because it’s a special day or scheduled time.”)
 - d. Drowsy (“I just can’t keep my eyes open—gonna need some coffee...”)
 - e. Disconnected (“Hello? Is anybody there?”)
 - f. Distracted (“Uh, sorry, Dad, I gotta run...gotta get to work.”)
 - g. Distant (“Do you even care what’s going on with me?”)
 - h. Dependent (“I can’t make it through the day without talking to you.”)
 - i. Delightful (“Can you believe we’ve been on the phone for a whole hour already?”)
 - j. All of the above, at different times.

Chapter 2: Where We are Headed

4. Paul Miller writes, “*A praying life feels like our family mealtimes because prayer is all about relationship. It’s intimate and hints at eternity. We don’t think about **communication** or **words** but about whom we are talking with. Prayer is simply the medium through which we experience and connect to God. Oddly enough, many people struggle to learn how to pray because they are focusing on praying, not on God.*” (pp. 8). Read Revelation 3:20. What kind of God would describe prayer as a meal?
5. Paul Miller cautions us, “*So don’t hunt for a feeling in prayer. Deep in our psyches we want an experience with God or an experience in prayer. Once we make that our quest, we lose God. **You don’t experience God; you get to know him.** You submit to him. You enjoy him. He is, after all, a person.*” (pp. 9) What do you think about this caution with respect to prayer?
6. Read Philippians 4:6-7. “*Learning to pray doesn’t offer us a less busy life; it offers us a less busy heart.*” How do you think a praying life affects a busy life? (pp. 11-12)

Chapter 3: Become like a Little Child

7. “Little children, even in adult form, are important to Jesus.” How do you think Mark 10:14-15 relates to leading a praying life?
8. Paul Miller urges us to “**Come Messy**” to prayer: “*The difficulty of coming just as we are is that we are messy. And prayer makes it worse. When we slow down to pray, we are immediately confronted with how unspiritual we are, with how difficult it is to concentrate on God. We don’t know how bad we are until we try to be good. Nothing exposes our selfishness and spiritual powerlessness like prayer.*” (pp. 19)

Part 1: What’s “messy” about you that makes it hard to pray? Is it hard to believe that Jesus really wants the real you to meet the real God in prayer? (pp. 21)

Part 2: What do you think Mark 2:13-17 has to do with prayer?

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "We must lay before Him what is in us not what ought to be in us."

Philip Yancey: "To put it another way, we must trust God with what God already knows."

Chapter 4: Learning to Talk with Your Father

9. Read Matthew 7:7-11. How does this scripture relate to prayer?
10. Patricia Hampl: "Fundamentally, it [prayer] is a position, a placement of oneself." Philip Yancey: "It takes effort to remember who we are." Ole Hallesby: "Only he who is helpless can truly pray." What is the thread that ties all of these definitions of prayer together? What does Paul Miller's emphasis on *Becoming like a Little Child* in prayer mean to you -- and how do you put it into practice to lead a life of prayer?

Final Question: How does the prospect of having a vibrant, powerful praying life make you feel?

- a. Anxiety ("What if something – or nothing – happens?")
- b. Anticipation ("I can't wait—let's go!")
- c. Awe ("Who me, have that kind of relationship with God?")
- d. Apathy ("Who cares? It's not that important in my life.")
- e. Arrogance ("I don't need God's help—I can do life myself.")
- f. Alienation ("He probably won't listen to MY prayers.")
- g. A combination of more than one.

Week 2 (Sept 25): Learning to Pray like a Child – Chapters 5-8 (pp. 31-62)

Read by Sept 25; No discussion on these chapters at Wednesdays Together; instead, we will do a silent, guided prayer exercise followed by a corporate prayer journey. If you are pressed for time, just read chapter 6.

For all other Life Groups, here are the week 2 questions:

1. Does it surprise you that Jesus prays? Write down all you observe about how Jesus prayed (esp. pp. 35-36).
2. Paul Miller gives us a clue as to the quality of Jesus' focused prayer. "*Love incarnates by slowing down and focusing on just the beloved. We don't love in general, we love one person at a time.*" (pp. 34). Can you discern the difference between loving God "in general" in your prayer life, and loving Him "one person at a time"? How does this change the tone, content, and pace of your prayer life?
3. Have you ever heard someone say, "*I pray all day long. I try to talk to God all the time and everywhere.*" Perhaps your own view of prayer sees this as "enough". "*Isn't this all I need for healthy communication with my Father?*" And yet, Jesus lived a life of specific and intentional prayer – and, apparently not just for our example -- but for His own need

in the flesh. *“Jesus prayed to God because God infused him with a spirit of prayer and also because of who Christ is in relation to his Father, namely, the Son of God. His identity, coupled with God’s own desire to commune with his Son, explain why Jesus needed to pray.”* (Mark Jones, *The Prayers of Jesus: Listening to and Learning from Our Savior.*) If God in the flesh needed private, focused, one-on-one relational time with the Father, what does this say about my own need? Can I expect to be close to my Father with only “thought prayers” during the day? Do I dare ask the question: “Why do I feel my time is better spent elsewhere?”

4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Consider Paul’s three requests of God for healing and how we might be tempted to call the result an “unanswered prayer”. Paul Miller suggests that just the opposite is taking place. In our very act of coming to him helpless, in need, and having to continually rely on him to sustain us, even IN our weakness, THIS IS GOD’S ANSWER to our need! (pp. 43) What do we learn about Paul’s prayer that can help us in our own prayer lives?

Part 2: Thinking of 2 Cor. 12:7-10 -- In what area(s) of your life do you sense your most intense need for God? And which areas in your life do you tend to say, *“I got this, God.”*

Sometimes it is easy to list the things we’ve asked for and not received (yet!). Have you ever seen God’s hand in answer to an *old* request and experienced the *AHA!* moment of remembering that you had in fact prayed about that very thing some while back? Is it humbling to know that God remembers what we’ve forgotten?

5. Read Matthew 5:3. Paul Miller reminds us: *“You don’t need self-discipline to pray continuously, you just need to be poor in Spirit.”* (pp. 54) How hard (and important) is it to develop “learned helplessness” which is at the root of prayer?
6. Read Galatians 4:6 & Romans 8:15. What do these scriptures teach us about prayer?
7. *“Anxiety is unable to relax in the face of chaos; continuous prayer clings to the Father in the face of chaos.”* (pp. 58) *“Instead of hunting for the perfect spiritual state to lift you above the chaos, pray in the chaos.”* (pp. 60) Read Matthew 10:29-31. Think about how Jesus’ words help you face anxiety.

Part 2: Adam & Eve broke fellowship (*stopped praying!*) in the Garden. Led by God’s Spirit, an attentive prayer life is part of learning to trust again. If able, share a time where you prayed and God empowered you to be at peace in the middle of chaos. How does that kind of peace differ from simply being aloof or detached?

CLOSING PRAYER GROUP EXERCISE: Share some anxieties that you have right now in your life. Lift those prayer requests up to the Father as a child would ask a parent.

Week 3 (Oct 2): Learning to Trust Again (“From Cynicism to Prayer”); Read Chapters 9-11 (pp. 63-88)

- Read by Oct. 2 for Wednesdays Together – Chapters 9-11 (pp. 63-88)
- If you are pressed for time, just read chapter 10.

Chapter 9: Understanding Cynicism

1. “Satan’s first recorded words are cynical. He tells Adam and Eve, ‘For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God’ (Gen. 3:5). Satan is suggesting that God’s motives are cynical. In essence, he tells them, “God has not been honest about the tree in the middle of the garden. The command not to eat from the tree isn’t for your protection; God wants to protect himself from rivals. He’s jealous. He is projecting an image of caring for you, but he really has an agenda to protect himself. God has two faces....Since the Fall, evil feels omnipresent, making cynicism an easy sell. Because cynicism sees what is ‘really going on,’ it feels real, authentic. That gives cynicism an elite status since authenticity is one of the last remaining public virtues in our culture....Cathie: “It is easier for me to feel skepticism and nothing than *to feel* deep passion. So cynicism takes root and ‘feels’ more real to me than truth.” (pp. 64)

What is cynicism?² How does cynicism prevail in everyday life?³

² What is a cynic? The cynic beckons others to “come and see” how stupid “they all are” and join them in detached mockery of everyone else’s honest and humble attempts at faith and prayer; since all of life is wrapped up in self-interest (on one hand) and evil (on the other), what good does it do to hope or prayer or have faith? Better to distance yourself from this world and from relationships because everything will let you down in the end. As Paul Miller intimates, if a cynic receives an answer to prayer, she thinks: “*It would have happened anyway.*” (pp. 63).

³ Carey Nieuwhof writes about Cynicism by offering the following:

Is any part of you growing cynical? I think you know what I mean.

I have to:

- Fight the “been there” “done that” and “I can explain that in ten seconds if you let me” tendency that comes with having lived a while.
- Battle the “I don’t think I’m going to trust anyone again” impulse after feeling burned.
- Work at staying hopeful when I see some people make the same mistake over and over again.

Can you relate? Cynicism is simply the general distrust of others or a lack of hope in people or their desires. At it’s worst, it becomes jaded negativity, skepticism, contempt or scorn. The number of cynics around me amazes me and discourages me. Cynics never change the world. Instead, they tell you how they know why the world can’t change.

And yet most people as they live a little find themselves fighting cynicism. So how do you battle it?

I wonder if there is a link between cynicism and curiosity.

Ever notice:

Cynical people are rarely curious (they already know the answer, and it’s not good by the way).

Curious people are almost never cynical.

Some of my favorite people are the relentlessly curious. The ones who:

- Never stop learning
- Ask great questions
- Are interested in others and in new experiences
- Don’t settle for standard answers
- Push the boundaries (to continue reading, go to: <https://careynieuwhof.com/how-do-you-kill-the-cynicism-inside-you/>)

Carey Nieuwhof also lists “6 Signs You’ve Grown Cynical as a Leader”. To read the full blog, see: <https://careynieuwhof.com/6-reasons-leaders-grow-cynical-and-how-to-reverse-it/>

1. You Know Too Much
2. You Haven’t Grieved Your Losses
3. You Haven’t Dealt with Your Issues
4. You’ve Projected Past Failures onto New Situations
5. You’ve Decided to Stop Trusting
6. You’ve Lost your Curiosity

2. Paul Miller writes, “The cynic is always observing, critiquing, but never engaged, loving, and hoping.” “To be cynical is to be distant.” He talks about our “listless, detached age.” “While offering a false intimacy of being ‘in the know’, cynicism actually destroys intimacy. It leads to a creeping bitterness that can deaden and even destroy the spirit.” (p. 65) Do you agree with Paul Miller that cynicism is dangerous to the spiritual life?
3. Paul Miller: “A praying life is just the opposite [from cynicism]. It engages evil. It doesn’t take no for an answer. The psalmist was in God’s face, hoping, dreaming, asking. Prayer is feisty. Cynicism, on the other hand, merely critiques. It is passive, cocooning itself from the passions of the great cosmic battle we are engaged in. It is without hope.” (pp. 65)

Does cynicism swim in the ocean of **CRITIQUE** while prayer trades in the commodity of **ENGAGEMENT**? (Engagement with God, engagement with relationship, and engagement in our world.) How so?

4. Read Psalm 23. Paul Miller writes, “Cynicism begins, oddly enough, with too much of the wrong kind of faith, with naïve optimism or foolish confidence.” How is David’s faith and prayer in Psalm 23 different than naïve optimism?

Chapter 10: Following Jesus out of Cynicism

Paul Miller offers five cures in this chapter for following Jesus out of cynicism:

1. Be Warm but Wary.
 - a. What does it mean to be warm but wary? (p. 69-71)
 - b. Read Matthew 10:16-22, 26, 28, 31-32, 34. How does Jesus respond to evil with faith?
2. Learn to Hope Again
 - a. 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?
 - b. How does hope and prayer work together in Scripture or in your life?
3. Cultivate a Childlike Spirit
 - a. “Both the child and the cynic walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The cynic focus on the darkness; the child focuses on the Shepherd.” In your own life, how has hope played a part in your own prayer life?
4. Cultivating a Thankful Spirit
 - a. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; Colossians 4:2; Philemon 1:4
 - b. “Cynicism looks reality in the face, calls it phony, and prides itself on its insight as it pulls back. Thanksgiving looks reality in the face and rejoices at God’s care. It replaces a bitter spirit with a generous one.” (p. 77) Can you think of a time when

expressing gratitude dispelled bitterness or changed your perspective on a difficult situation? Describe briefly what happened.

5. Cultivating Repentance

- a. *“All sin involves the splitting of the personality—what James calls being ‘double minded’ (James 4:8)...Repentance brings the split personality together and thus restores integrity to life.”* (p. 78) How does prayer and repentance hold out the promise of bringing a single-minded integrity and the blessing of a clean conscience back into your life?

Chapter 11: Developing an Eye for Jesus

- How do you think your life (or your days) would change, if you approached every day asking: “Where did I see Jesus today?” (pp. 83)

Prayer Group Exercise: Spend several (5-10) minutes offering short, 1-2 sentence prayers like a child before your Father.

Cynicism Homework: For one day, try to record every cynical thought that enters your mind. When you catch yourself, pray quietly, “Lord Jesus, save me from my cynicism. Give me eyes to see you.”

Week 4 (Oct 9): Learning to Ask Your Father – Chapters 14-15, 17-18 (pp. 8)

- *This week, the section “Learning to Ask your Father” is really long (chapters 12-18, pp. 89-143).*
- *By October 9 Wednesdays Together, read Chapters 14-15 (pp. 103-123) & Chapters 17-18 (pp. 131-143)*
- *If you are pressed for time, simply read chapter 15.*
- *Note: Life Groups won’t have a chance to discuss chapters 12-13 (pp. 89-102) or chapter 16 (pp. 125-130) but you are encouraged to read those chapters by yourself.*
- *Married Men, be sure to read chapter 17! Married Women, be sure to read chapter 18!*
- *If you are keen on intellectual history and how it informs our prayer lives, be sure to read chapter 12!*

Quote: “What do I lose when I have a praying life? Control. Independence. What do I gain? Friendship with God. A quiet heart. The living work of God in the hearts of those I love. The ability to roll back the tide of evil. Essentially, I lose my kingdom and get his. I move from being an independent player to a dependent lover. I move from being an orphan to a child of God.” (pp. 109)

Chapter 14: How Personal is God?

1. *“The Wonder of the infinite-personal God is displayed, more than anywhere else, in the Incarnation. Nothing can prepare us for the birth of God: a six-pound, four-ounce Jewish*

*boy with dark brown curly hair [Paul Miller is using his sanctified imagination a bit here, but you get the point!] born in the fall or winter of 5 BC in a shepherd's cave on the side of a hill in the city of Bethlehem in the Roman province of Judea in western Asia. It is so particular it staggers the imagination. God found a parking spot, a specific place and time where his love would touch our world. **Prayer is a moment of incarnation – God with us. God involved in the details of my life.**" [pp. 108-9) Reflect on Paul Miller's statements here. What does this teach you about prayer? About God?*

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

2. Read Jesus' promises in John 14:13-14, John 15:7, 16 and John 16:23-34. What about these promises makes you nervous? Have you ever asked God for anything and it didn't happen? How did that affect you?
3. Read James 4:2-3, where James comes to the rescue. Then look at the chart on page 116.
 - a. The first danger is the cliff of "Not Asking". What does James say about this? Does this describe your tendency in prayer? How so?
 - b. The second danger is the cliff of "Asking Selfishly." What does James say about this? Does this describe your tendency in prayer? How so?
4. Read Mark 14:36. What two antidotes does Jesus offer to both these dangers in prayer? How does he avoid the "Not Asking" Cliff? How does he avoid the "Asking Selfishly" Cliff?

Paul Miller writes of a similar posture to prayer in the Old Testament book of Daniel: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are in a similar situation when they face the heat of a blazing furnace. They respond to Nebuchadnezzar's command to bow before him with the identical balance of Jesus. They tell the king, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O King." (Daniel 3:17). They avoid the cliff of Not Asking by boldly declaring that God would rescue them. Then, in the next breath, they say, "But if not, be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods (3:18). While this sounds like a contradiction, these men are **asking boldly** and **surrendering completely**. They avoid a functional deism or separation from God by their bold statement of God's deliverance; then they avoid living selfishly by their complete surrender to the story God has placed them in." (pp. 117)

How should **ASKING BOLDLY & SURRENDERING COMPLETELY** become part of our central practice and posture in how we think about prayer?

Chapter 17: What We Don't Ask for: "Your Kingdom Come"

5. What stages does God take the husband through as he begins to pray for his wife? How does he become (or live out) the gospel for her? (pp. 131-134)⁴

⁴ Pastor Jason: **Growing in your marriage is delighting TO LOVE more than longing to BE LOVED. This is also becoming like Jesus.** The husband slowly begins to focus not on his wife's critical spirit or complaining but to focus more on simply loving her.

6. What kind of prayers should spouses pray for one another?

Chapter 18: Surrender Completely: “Your Will Be Done”

7. Paul Miller unpacks an incident with his son Andrew (pp. 137-139). What did self-will look like in this situation? How might Paul have thought and acted if he’d been depending on Jesus and cultivating a spirit of prayer towards his son?
8. Paul Miller writes, “In the Beatitudes, he says, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.’ (Matthew 5:5) In other words, he is saying, “Give up power in relationships, and I will show you an entirely different way to do life.” It’s like Jesus is saying: “I’m going to show you how to close one door after the other until you open the door of prayer in order to get things done.”

Look at the chart on page 141. Paul Miller observes that for the rest of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus closes one door after the other until you “open the door to prayer” and begin asking for help from the Father.

Many of the closed doors represent possible (but ultimately failing) responses to relationships (revenge, putting up walls, pride, criticism, control). Yet, part of living “a praying life”....is relating to others through prayer. What do you think about these ideas?

9. What do you learn about the wife’s irritation of asking her husband “*Honey, you forgot to take out the trash again?*” As you think about your life, where are you resorting to self-will instead of prayer?

GROUP PRAYER EXERCISE: Paul Miller writes, “Prayer is the positive side of a surrendered will.” During your prayer time, focus on surrendering aspects of your life to God. Confess places where you are spinning your wheels in self-will.

Week 5 (Oct 16): Living in Your Father’s Story – Chapters 19-21 (pp. 147-169)

- Read by Oct. 16 for Wednesdays Together chapters 19-21 (pp. 147-169).
- If you are pressed for time, simply read chapter 21.

Quote: “*Most of us isolate prayer from the rest of what God is doing in our lives, but God doesn’t work that way.*” (pp. 150)

Chapter 19: Watching a Story Unfold

1. Paul Miller: “*God wants to do something bigger than simply answer my prayers. The act of praying draws God into my life and begins to change me, the pray-er, in subtle ways.*” (pp. 148) How did Paul love his daughter Emily better because he was praying?

2. “Until you are convinced that you can’t change your child’s [or any person’s] heart, you will not take prayer seriously.” (pp. 151). Look at the drawing on page 152 – what strikes you about the drawing?

At some point, we give up our ability to change others. When this happens, what is the difference between giving up **while on the road of Good Asking** and giving up off **while careening off the Cliff of Despair** (on one hand) or **falling off the Cliff of Demanding** (on the other)?

Chapter 20: A Father’s Love

3. How did Paul Miller pray for his daughter Emily? What did God do in you as you read the chapter?

Chapter 21: Unanswered Prayer: Understanding the Patterns of Story

4. Where is your desert? Where is there a large gap between hope and reality in your life?
5. Have the leader read “Thriving in the Desert” starting in the middle of page 166 thru the first two paragraphs of pp. 167. What does the desert do to you and to your prayer life? Have you seen any of these truths, that Miller writes about, applied or lived out in your life?
6. If you need more questions this week for your group, consider sharing together the “Prayer Journaling Homework” and processing these soul-level issues as a group. (If not, you are encouraged to journal the questions below.)

Prayer Journaling Homework – You may want to work through these questions in a journal during your private prayer time. In the chapter on **Unanswered Prayer** (chapter 21), Paul Miller gives three pictures of where we can go in the desert: denial, determination, and despair. Which one best describes where you go? (pp. 162-64)?

- a. If denial, what reality are you not facing?
- b. If determination, in what ways are you using your self-will to close the gap?
- c. If despair, how have you partaken of the bread of bitterness (p. 166)
Be as specific as you can.

The Week’s Prayer Homework: Paul writes, “If a ship is off a few degrees, it is imperceptible at first, but over time it becomes a vast distance. I was praying to prevent the distance of a heart gone astray.” (pp. 148). Think about one of your kids, or someone close to you. What bend in his/her heart troubles or frazzles you? What can you pray for him/her in response to this?

Week 6 (Oct 23) Living in Your Father's Story – (Prayers of Lament), Chapters 22-25

- Read by Oct. 23 for Wednesdays Together Chapters 22-25 (pp. 171 – 205)
- If pressed for time, simply read chapters 22 & 23 about Prayers of Lament.
- There are no discussion questions for Chapters 26-27, but you are encouraged to read those chapters by yourself.
- Leaders: Be sure to leave 10 minutes for prayer at the end.

Chapter 22: Hebrew Laments: Relearning Desert Praying

1. **Defining prayers of lament in the Bible,** Paul Miller writes: *“[Prayer of lament]bring together two things (reality and promise) that recoil from one another. A lament connects two ‘hot’ wires -- God’s promise and the problem. When that happens, sparks fly....Laments might seem disrespectful, but in fact they are filled with faith, a raw, pure form of faith that simply takes God at his word. Every child is a professional lamenter, as in, ‘Mom, you said you’d take me to the pool this week! Why haven’t you? I want to go today.’ The child is bringing together promise and hope (‘Mom, you said...’) with reality (‘Why haven’t you?’)”* pp. 173. What do you make of Hebrew Laments and their place in the Old Testament? (Many scholars, in categorizing the Psalms, believe there are just as many -- or more -- Psalms of Lament than Psalms of Praise in the Psalter.) What do Hebrew Laments say about God, about us, and about prayer?
2. Paul Miller argues that there is an intimate connection between lament and love. *“There is no such thing as a lament-free life. In fact, if your life is lament-free, you aren’t loving well. To love is to lament, to let your heart be broken by something.*

*If you **don’t** lament over the broken things in your world, then your heart shuts down. Your living, vital relationship with God dies a slow death because you open the door to unseen doubt and become quietly cynical. Cynicism moves you away from God; laments push you into his presence. So, oddly enough, **not lamenting** leads to unbelief.”* (pp. 174) What do you make of this connection, that lamenting is often an expression of love? How do you see yourself loving in your lamenting? Be specific.
3. **A Misconception about Laments.** Miller writes, *“One of the misconceptions about laments comes from the word itself. To lament means to grieve. So we naturally think of lament prayers in the same category as funeral dirges—a form of grieving with no expectation that anything will change...but by far most laments are not prayers of surrender, grieving what cannot be changed, but a call to arms. They are the spiritual warfare equivalent of ‘going nuclear’: You have no other option, so you reach for your most powerful option—your ability to cry out to the living God for help.”* (pp. 175-6).

4. Psalm 44 is a “communal lament”⁵ which illuminates many of the typical features of a Psalm of Lament. “A lament usually contains some *direct address to God* (Ps. 44:1, “O God”, a *complaint* describing the occasion for the lament (Ps. 44:9-22), a *petition* for redress (Ps. 44:23-36), some *statement of trust* concerning God’s proclivity to save and vindicate (Ps. 44:1-8), and a *vow* to offer public thanksgiving after God has intervened favorably (Ps. 44:8; this last element is often absent or only suggested in communal laments).”⁶

Psalm 22 is an “individual lament”⁷. Read Psalm 22. What do you learn about prayer through reading Psalm 22?

Martin Luther: “*What is the greatest thing in the Psalter but this earnest speaking amid the storm winds of every kind? . . . Where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of the saints, as into death, yes, as into hell itself. . . . When they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict for your fear or hope, and no Cicero or other orator has so portrayed them. And that they speak these words to God and with God, this I repeat, is the best thing of all. This gives the words double earnestness and life.*”⁸

Paul Miller, “*Lamenting shows you are engaged with God in a vibrant, living faith.*” (pp. 175)

Chapter 23: Understanding How Laments Work

5. Paul Miller argues that “*we lost some of our Jewish DNA and took on some Greek ways of thinking*” (pp. 179). “*The ideal life for the Greeks was that of the philosopher—calm and well-ordered, with long discussions with like-minded, intelligent friends. The Greeks called this ideal ‘Stoicism’. A Stoic would never make a whip to clear out a temple or wail over Jerusalem’s coming destruction....the church breathed its air for centuries, affecting how we still think and feel today. A Stoic would consider a lament inappropriate: too emotional, too aggressive.*” (pp. 180).

“*Jesus is not a Stoic, gritting his teeth until the Resurrection; nor is he a determinist, saying, ‘I know God is going to raise me from the dead. I just have to get through this.’ He is fully alive to both his situation and His Father’s love for him.*” (p.p. 180)

Have you tried being a Stoic in prayer? How’d that turn out for you?

⁵ Communal Laments in the Psalter include Psalms 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129. (Psalm 89 is difficult to classify because it fits into more than one category as a mixed type.)

⁶ See <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/psalms-of-lament>

⁷ Individual Laments in the Psalter include 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31, 36*, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89*, 120, 139, 141, 142. Two other “classes” of Lament in the Psalter include Penitential Laments (6, 32*, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) and Imprecatory Laments (35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140). [* Indicates that it is difficult to classify or a hybrid type of Psalm that could fit into multiple categories.]

⁸ *Word and Sacrament*, Luther’s Works, vol. 1, ed. E. T. Bachmann. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960, pp. 255–56.

Do you need to give yourself freedom to lament? What would that look like for you?

6. Paul Miller offers a distinction between laments and complaints. What are the differences that the author sees between the two? (see p. 187) How does that strike you? Where do your expressions of frustration typically tend to fall?

Chapter 24: How God Places Himself in the Story

7. God often communicates himself in his silence and hiddenness. Like any relationship, we are not fully revealed to another person in this life but remaining hidden. We never view the pure essence of another. In Matthew 15:21-28, Jesus heals a Canaanite woman's daughter through a posture of silence and ambiguity. Miller observes that Jesus "lingered at the edge" and intentionally occupied a position "not at the center, at the edge" as she related to him. This is often how God meets us in prayer.

Miller writes, *"Likewise, Jesus' ambiguity with us creates the space not only for him to emerge but us as well. If the miracle comes too quickly, there is no room for discovery, for relationship. With both this woman and us, Jesus is engaged in a divine romance, wooing us to himself. The waiting that is the essence of faith provides the context for relationship. Faith and relationship are interwoven in dance. Everyone talks now about how prayer is relationship, but often what people mean is having warm fuzzies with God. Nothing wrong with warm fuzzies, but relationships are far richer and more complex."* (pp. 192).

"When God seems silent and our prayers go unanswered, the overwhelming temptation is to leave the story – to walk out of the desert and attempt to create a normal life. But when we persist in a spiritual vacuum, when we hang in there during ambiguity, we get to know God. In fact, that is how intimacy grows in all close relationships." (pp. 194)

Where is God in your story? If God is lingering at the edges of your story, what do you think he's wanting to grow in you? Be as specific as you can and share with the group.

This week's **Group Prayer Exercise** is dangerous. Have 3-4 people share a personal lament. Your lament. Your heart. (Don't share a neighbor's problem or about your mom's health problem – you can lament those later in private.) Share a lament that is currently occupying the center of your heart. After sharing, have the group try its hand in 'communal lament' for the specific laments of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

You might remember to move from: (i) *direct address to God* (ii) to an honest and compelling *complaint* describing the occasion to God (iii) to a passionate *petition* addressing God's character (reminding God who God is) and perhaps (iv) offering some *statement of trust* concerning God's

character to save and to vindicate and maybe ending with (v) a **vow** to offer public thanksgiving if God chooses to act. Don't get caught up in the mechanics – just pour your heart out in lament.

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

Marriage Homework for the Week: Think about the role of lament in the context of your marriage. *"I learned to love Jill in new ways by listening to her laments about the kids, me, or whatever. Instead of chiding her when she said things that were incorrect or imbalanced, I let her pour out her heart. Instead of making sure the expression of her frustration was correct, I became more concerned that my sense of the state of her heart was correct. I couldn't care for her soul if I didn't feel it."* (pp. 186).

Week 7 (Oct 30): Praying in Real Life – Chapters 29, 31, 32, 34

- Read by October 30 for Wednesdays Together – Chapters 29, 31, 32, 34.
- If you are pressed for time, simply read Chapter 29.
- This week "Praying in Real Life," brings the poetry and power of the book's primary themes into practical application.
- Chapter 28 gives an introduction to this section and Chapters 30 and 33 recount anecdotes and insights from Paul Miller on what prayer looks like for him - these chapters might encourage you if you feel like prayer is going against the grain and rarely feels natural.
- Leaders: Be Sure to Leave 10 Minutes to Answer the Final Question and Close with a Good Time in Prayer.

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

1. Basic guidelines for using prayer cards:
 - a. Each card is a "prayer snapshot of a person's life"; use short phrases.
 - b. When praying, pick out a few key areas and pray for them.
 - c. "Put the Word to work": write a Scripture on each card for that person.
 - d. You can update the cards as desired, but typically once a year.
 - e. Answers to prayer can be written in a prayer journal.
 - f. It's helpful to date some of the prayer requests.
2. Paul Miller writes that prayer cards have advantages over a prayer list, because a "list tends to be more mechanical" and can be overwhelming. How might a prayer card help you focus your prayers for others?
3. Pages 231-235 have sample prayer cards for family members, people Paul Miller has prayed for, and other areas of his life. Take a moment and write down a sample prayer card for someone close to you. Then follow up with a prayer for that person using the card as a guide.
4. What was it like to pray with the card you made as a way to focus your thoughts in prayer?

5. A sample prayer deck:
 - a. One card for each family member
 - b. 1-3 people in suffering cards
 - c. 1 friends card
 - d. 1 non-Christian card
 - e. 1 church's leadership card
 - f. 1 small-group card
 - g. 1 missionary, ministries card
 - h. 1-3 world or cultural issues card
 - i. 3 work cards
 - j. 1 co-workers card
 - k. 3-5 repentance cards
 - l. 3-5 hope or big dream cards

6. Which of the cards listed above strikes you as most significant in your life at present? What do you hope for in that area of your life?

Chapter 31: Listening to God

7. Paul Miller begins the chapter relating a time when he prayed for God's direction and heard a surprising answer. Because the Spirit "comes in on the same channel as the world, the flesh, and the Devil," we might doubt whether we can hear from God or not. Yet Miller cites as evidence for the possibility of hearing from God that his prayer was immersed in reflection on Scripture, it surprised him, and it came about in time.

What were some times in your life when you sensed God speaking to you? What was the context and result of that communication?

8. Paul Miller writes that Christians can go wrong in two ways: (a) by not listening (Word only) or (b) by elevating human intuition (Spirit only).

"Word only" can lapse into Rationalism if we believe that God only speaks through his Word, whereby we become narrowly focused on obedience but miss the Master's hand shaping our lives.

"Spirit only" can careen into Romanticism if we believe that God speaks through the Spirit as authoritatively as the Word, whereby we find our feelings ruling our lives, opening the door to self-will, lusts, and confusion.

With the Word and Spirit together, we give the Spirit a vocabulary to personalize the Word to us resulting in an integrated life full of meaning and fellowship.

Which of the two errors that the author details in this chapter are you more susceptible to -- "Word only," or "Spirit only"? How might you cultivate a listening heart that holds both together more consistently?

Psalm 16 says: "I bless the LORD who gives me counsel, in the night also my heart instructs me" and "I have set the LORD always before me."

Chapter 32 – Prayer Journaling: Becoming Aware of the Interior Journey

9. Paul Miller writes that *"when life makes sense, it becomes a journey, a spiritual adventure...journaling helps us become aware of the journey."*

Do you sense that your life is a meaningful story? Have you practiced journaling at some point in your life? If so, how has the practice helped shape your perspective and helped you notice God's work in your life?

10. How is the modern quest for self-fulfillment different than becoming aware of our true selves in the journey with the Shepherd?

11. Paul Miller breaks down journaling into two types of questions:

- a. How am I doing? What is coming at me?
- b. What is God saying to me? What does the Word say?

How would you answer those questions today? How might consistent reflection on both types of questions help you see God's leading along the way of your journey?

Chapter 34: Unfinished Stories

12. Paul Miller reminds us at the close of the book that the story is God's and not our own, and that therefore we will die with unfinished stories. Ultimately, this means that we must trust him, and also acknowledge that sometimes God doesn't tell us what He's doing.

"Living in unfinished stories draws us into God's final act, the return of Jesus...through suffering God will finally make his church beautiful and reveal his glory...in the last days the bride will be made pure, waiting for her lover. Come quickly Lord Jesus..."

What are some unfinished stories that you have experienced? Take some time to pray and place them fully in God's hands, trusting him for the conclusion.

Final Sharing Time: What was the one big idea that most stands out to you after reading & discussing *A Praying Life*?

Group Prayer Time: Share some "unfinished stories" in prayer with the group before the Father in prayer.

