

A PRAYING LIFE—COMMUNITY GROUP SCHEDULE

PART 2 and PART 3

September 27th, October 4th, 11th and 18th

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Part 1: Learning to Pray Like a Child

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Part 2: Learning to Trust Again

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“The cynic focuses on the darkness; the child focuses on the Shepherd (p. 75)” so we need to see Jesus and offer grace to one another.

Part 3: Learning to Ask Your Father

October 4— Chapters 12-13.....Page 5-7

While the Enlightenment mindset makes prayer difficult by separating God from the world, the truth is that we can pray and ask because God is infinite and personal.

October 11— Chapters 14-15.....Page 8-10

We can come to God with whatever is on our surrendered heart because He cares.

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We should ask to see Jesus and keep Him on the throne in God’s provision, presence, and plans.

Prayer Cards Introduction

October 25— Chapters 28-29, Appendix

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November 1— Chapters 19-21

November 8— Chapters 22-24

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November 22— Chapters 30-32

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Review your Experience with Prayer Practice 3 if you wish on September 27 in Community Groups as you Bridge to Part 2 Lesson 4

1. Were you able to practice prayer throughout your days this week? Describe how you felt about it.
2. Did you find yourself becoming more dependent upon God as you prayed throughout each day? Did you find greater peace as you offered these prayers? How did you shift from worrying to watching as you practiced prayer?
3. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through this practice?
4. What, if anything, was difficult for you as you practiced prayer throughout the day?

Psalm 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.
3 He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.
4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.
6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 13:20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,
21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

1. **What do these three Bible passages tell us about God? How could these passages help you when you experience cynicism, anxiety or doubt?**

Lesson 4 Questions to Answer: How does cynicism undermine our prayer life? What is the cure for cynicism?

Lesson 4 Summary Statement: "The cynic focuses on the darkness; the child focuses on the Shepherd" (p. 75) so we need to see Jesus and offer grace to one another. (Chapters 9-11 from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller) **Pick and choose what you use!**

Section 1: Understanding Cynicism

A. "Cynicism and defeated weariness have this in common: they both question the active goodness of God on our behalf. Left unchallenged, their low-level doubt opens the door for bigger doubt." p. 65

B. "If Satan can't stop you from praying, then he will try to rob the fruit of praying by dulling your soul. Satan cannot create, but he can corrupt." p. 66

C. "Cynicism creates a numbness toward life." p. 67

D. “To be cynical is to be distant. 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. 67

E. “A praying life...engages evil. It doesn’t take no for an answer. The psalmist was in God’s face, hoping, dreaming, asking. Prayer is feisty.” p. 67

F. “Genuine faith comes from knowing my heavenly Father loves, enjoys, and cares for me.” p. 68

G. “In naive optimism we don’t need to pray because everything is under control, everything is possible. In cynicism we can’t pray because everything is out of control.” p. 69

H. “Without the Good Shepherd, we are alone in a meaningless story. Weariness and fear leave us feeling overwhelmed, unable to move. Cynicism leaves us doubting, unable to dream. The combination shuts down our hearts, and we just show up for life, going through the motions.” p. 70

2. What is cynicism? Why is cynicism so dangerous? How does it subtly shape how you see God and reality? How does cynicism undermine our prayer life? Why do you think people are cynical?

3. How is naive optimism different from faith?

Section 2: Six Cures for Cynicism

I. Be Warm but Wary

I. “The feel of a praying life is cautious optimism—caution because of the Fall, optimism because of redemption.” p. 72

II. Learn to Hope Again

J. “Hope begins with the heart of God. As you grasp what the Father’s heart is like, how he loves to give, then prayer will begin to feel completely natural to you.” p. 73

III. Cultivate a Childlike Spirit

K. “The Shepherd’s presence in the dark valley is so immediate, so powerful, that cynicism simply vanishes... As you cling to the Shepherd, the fog of cynicism lifts.” p. 75 (See also the quote from p. 75 in the Lesson 4 Summary Statement.)

IV. Cultivating a Thankful Spirit

L. “Nothing undercuts cynicism more than a spirit of thankfulness... Thanking God restores the natural order of our dependence on God.” p. 77

M. “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. 79

V. Cultivating Repentance

N. "Repentance brings the split personality together and thus restores integrity to the life. The real self is made public. When the proud person is humbled, the elevated self is united with the true self." p. 80

VI. Developing an Eye for Jesus

O. "Cynicism looks in the wrong direction. It looks for the cracks in Christianity instead of looking for the presence of Jesus." p. 84

P. "We need to focus on how Jesus is reshaping the church to be more like Himself. We need to view the body of Christ with grace." p. 86-87

Q. "A grace-saturated vision enables us to defeat cynicism and talk with our Father, restoring a childlike simplicity and wonder." p. 87

4. What is the cure for cynicism?

5. Which of Miller's cures is most needed in your life? Why?

6. What does it look like to see Jesus and offer grace to His people?

Section 3: Practice Prayer

In Community Group: Lead or delegate someone to pray that we see Jesus and offer grace to one another.

Outside of Community Group:

Practice 4 The Week Following Community Group Lesson 4 from **September 27**

Prayer Practice 4: List What You Are Thankful For—Count Your Blessings

Miller says that one of the cures for cynicism is thanksgiving. God is good and loving and He provides for us. This week we will practice counting our blessings.

Exercise: Make a list of all the things God has blessed you with. Think through the details of your life: your loved ones, your home, your job. Think about creation: the stars, mountains, the ocean. Start with a list of 10 things. Then, add to it throughout the week. See if you can get to a list of 50 or 100 blessings. As you add to your list, thank God for His goodness in providing these things.

For Reflection:

1. Were you able to make a list of your blessings this week? If so, did you find it difficult? Why or why not?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?
3. What were some things that made it onto your list that surprise you?

Review your Experience with Prayer Practice 4 if you wish on October 4 in Community Groups as you Bridge to Part 3 Lesson 5

1. Were you able to make a list of your blessings this week? If so, did you find it difficult? Why or why not?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?
3. What were some things that made it onto your list that surprised you?

Section 1: Grounded in the Word

Psalm 61:2 From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

1. **Do you believe that Yahweh, the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is the Rock that is higher than we are? Why or why not?**

Psalm 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 Chronicles 6:18 “But will God indeed dwell with mankind on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house which I have built. **19** Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You;

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the high and exalted One
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,
“I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.

2. **How do these verses reveal that God is both infinite and personal?**

Lesson 5 Question to Answer: Why does secularism make prayer difficult?

Lesson 5 Summary Statement: While the Enlightenment mindset makes prayer difficult by separating God from the world, the truth is that we can pray and ask because God is infinite and personal.

(Chapters 12-13 from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller) **Pick and choose what you use!**

Section 2: Why does secularism make prayer difficult?

A. “Western culture (North America and Europe), along with public cultures created by the West through communism (such as Russia and China), is the most publicly atheistic culture that has ever existed. Among the thousands of cultures in the history of humanity, our culture is the only one not to have any regular public acknowledgement of a spiritual world. In view of the sweep of human history, our culture is odd.” p. 92

B. "Author Nancy Pearcey summarized this split between facts and feelings, saying, 'The lower story became the realm of publicly verifiable facts while the upper story became the realm of socially constructed values.' This way of viewing the world is called secularism. When you lump God together with feelings and subjective opinion, then God is marginalized. Prayer feels odd." p. 92-93

C. "Now, we see a flat, two-dimensional world that relegates God to the sidelines as a feel-good cheerleader. Prayer is private and personal, not public and real. If it makes you feel good, then pray for sick people or commune with God, but don't take it seriously or make it public." p. 93

D. "Secularism is a religious belief that grew out of the pride of human achievement, particularly scientific achievement. It masquerades as science or reality, opposed to religion, which it calls opinion. Secularism claims to have given us the gift of science when, in fact, Christianity gave us the gift of science." p. 94

E. "The Enlightenment mind-set marginalizes prayer because it doesn't permit God to connect with this world. You are allowed a personal, local deity as long as you keep him out of your science notes and don't take him seriously." p. 95

F. "The Enlightenment doesn't say that religion is not real. It *defines* it as not real." p. 95

G. "Secularism is a cynical view of reality" p. 96

H. "Under the influence of the Enlightenment, our modern culture has ruled out prayer and religion from the discussion." p. 97

3. What is secularism? Where does secularism relegate faith in our lives?

4. What does the Enlightenment do with prayer? How has this way of thinking given birth to cynicism? How does the Enlightenment worldview rob us of childlike curiosity and wonder?

5. Why does secularism make prayer difficult?

Section 3: We Should Pray and Ask because God is Infinite and Personal

I. "Because it is my Father's world, we should pray and ask for his help. It is a complete unity of thinking and feeling, physical and spiritual, public and personal. It is my Father's world." p. 98

J. "To teach us how to pray, Jesus told stories of weak people who knew they couldn't do life on their own. The persistent widow and the friend at midnight get access, not because they are strong but because they are desperate. Learned desperation is at the heart of a praying life." p. 100

6. Think about times you have been desperate. Did this change how you prayed? How so?

K. “David captures the infinite-personal God with the first sentence of Psalm 23, ‘The LORD (infinite) is my shepherd (personal).’” p. 101

L. “Likewise, we can feel Solomon’s wonder in his prayer of dedication for the temple as he contemplates the infinite God dwelling personally with us.” (2 Chron. 6:18-19) p. 101

M. “Isaiah is also in awe that God ‘[dwells] in the high and holy place [infinite], and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit [personal]’ (Isaiah 57:15). p. 102

N. “Majesty and humility are such an odd fit. This is one reason we struggle with prayer. We just don’t think God could be concerned with the puny details of our lives. We either believe He’s too big or that we’re not that important.” p. 103

7. What is appealing to you about this infinite yet personal God? Why can you ask him?

O. “A praying life opens itself to an infinite, searching God. As we shall see, we can’t do that without releasing control, without constantly surrendering our will to God. ‘Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matthew 6:10) is actually scary.” p. 103

8. What is scary about releasing control and constantly surrendering our will to God? Are there other areas of your life that you need to pray about or surrender in?

Section 4: Practice Prayer

In Community Group: Lead or delegate someone to pray that we see God as infinite and personal...remembering The Lord is my shepherd.

Outside of Community Group:

Practice 5 The Week Following Community Group Lesson 5 from **October 4**

Prayer Practice 5 Praying Psalm 23

Pray out loud using Psalm 23 two to three times this week... or add variety by using 2 Chronicles 6:18-19 and Isaiah 57:15 on the second and third times... giving slow-paced attention to God as infinite and personal.

Review your Experience with Prayer Practice 5 if you wish on October 11 in Community Groups as you Bridge to Part 3 Lesson 6

1. Were you able to use Psalm 23, 2 Chronicles 6:18-19 and/or Isaiah 57:15 in order to slow down with the infinite and personal God? Was that a useful exercise or practice? Why or why not?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?
3. Did you run across any other passages that show God as infinite and personal?

Matthew 7:7-11 7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

1. Why do we not like to ask?

2. Why does asking nothing of God seem spiritual? What is wrong with this? (See p. 108 in A Praying Life...marked APL as well)

John 14:13-14 13 Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

John 15:7, 16 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you... 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

John 16:23-24 23 In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

3. What about these promises makes you nervous? Have you ever asked God for anything and it didn't happen? How did this affect you?

4. In 14:13-14, what qualification is given to the promise, “Ask anything and I will do it?” What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? (Also see p. 121 in the book)

Lesson 6 Question to Answer: Should I really ask for what I want, even trivial things?

Lesson 6 Summary Statement: We can come to God with whatever is on our surrendered heart because He cares.

(Chapters 14-15 from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller) **Pick and choose what you use!**

Section 1: Why Can We Ask?

- A. "Prayer is a moment of incarnation—God with us. God is involved in the details of my life. Another author of another excellent book on prayer said that prayer was mainly about us being with God and not about God answering our prayers." p. 111
5. **When have you seen God involved in the details of your own life? What was that like?**
- B. "If you are going to enter this divine dance we call prayer, you have to surrender your desire to be in control, to figure out how prayer works. You've got to let God take the lead. You have to trust." p. 114
6. **What about your life do you want to control rather than give to God? How do you think He's going to mess it up?**

Section 2: What Keeps Us from Asking?

James 4:2-3 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.



7. **The first danger is the cliff of "Not Asking." What does James say about this? Does this describe your tendency in prayer? How so?**
8. **The second danger is the cliff of "Asking Selfishly." What does James say about this? Does this describe your tendency in prayer? How so?**

Mark 14:36 36 And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.”

1 John 5:14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

9. 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?

- C. “One of the best ways to learn how to abide is to ask anything. Jesus added the qualifier ‘abide in me’ only once in the six times he told us to ‘ask anything.’ His primary concern was to get us into the game. Start asking. Don’t just ask God for spiritual things or ‘good’ things. Tell God what you want. Before you can abide, the real you has to meet the real God. Ask anything.” p. 124
- D. “All of Jesus’ teaching on prayer in the Gospels can be summarized with one word: ask. His greatest concern is that our failure or reluctance to ask keeps us distant from God. But that is not the only reason He tells us to ask anything. God wants to give us good gifts. He loves to give.” p. 120

10. Why does Jesus tell us over and over again to ask? What is He concerned about?

11. How do you balance asking boldly with surrendering completely?

12. What things do we tend not to ask God about? Make a list.

Section 3: Practice Prayer

In Community Group: Lead or delegate someone to pray that we ask boldly and surrender completely.

Outside of Community Group:

Practice 6 The Week Following Community Group Lesson 6 from October 11

Prayer Practice 6 Ask Boldly, Surrender Completely

1. Sometime this week (every day if you like)—Identify something—even something small or seemingly trivial—that is genuinely on your heart.
2. Ask God boldly. Tell Him specifically what you want.
3. Surrender completely. Pray Mark 14:36 on the top of this page.
4. Leave it with God. Resist trying to figure out how God will answer or taking control of the situation yourself.
5. Notice God. Watch for ways God is involved in the details of your life.

Review your Experience with Prayer Practice 6 if you wish on October 18 in Community Groups as you Bridge to Part 3 Lesson 7

1. Were you able to ask boldly and surrender completely? Was that a useful exercise or practice? Why or why not?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?
3. If you did ask boldly, were you able to leave it with God? Did you notice God?

Matt. 6:9 “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
10 **‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done,** On earth as it is in heaven.
11 **‘Give us this day our daily bread.**
12 ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 ‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]”

1. **How is Jesus’ prayer for daily bread an invitation to bring all our needs to him?** (This is taken from a quote on p. 127)
2. **As you consider “Your kingdom come,” how does knowing that King Jesus is present and at work give you hope for real change?**
3. **As we talk to Jesus, why is the perspective of “Your will be done” so important?**

Lesson 7 Question to Answer: What should we ask for?

Lesson 7 Summary Statement: We should ask to see Jesus and keep Him on the throne in God’s provision, presence, and plans.

(Chapters 16-18 from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller) **Pick and choose what you use!**

Section 1: God’s Provision “Our Daily Bread”

A. “In the church, most prayer requests are limited to sickness, joblessness, kids in crisis, and maybe an occasional missionary.” p. 127

4. Why is prayer bigger than our emergencies?

B. “Often our need for daily bread opens doors to deeper heart needs for real food. The day after Jesus fed the five thousand, the crowds met him on the beach at Capernaum hungry for breakfast. Jesus told them he had better food for them: ‘The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’ (John 6:33).” p. 128

5. How can our physical needs point us to our deeper need for Jesus?

C. “This is what it means to abide—to include him in every aspect of our lives. Abiding is a perfect way to describe a praying life.” p. 128

6. What is the difference between simply asking Jesus for things and including Him in every aspect of our lives?

Section 2: God's Presence "Your Kingdom Come"

D. "When you start 'asking anything,' you'll be surprised with how your life begins to sparkle with the presence of God." p. 136

7. In what ways do you think 'asking anything' helps you see Jesus and experience the presence of God?

E. "Prayer is deeply personal and deeply mysterious. Adults try to figure out causation. Little children don't. They just ask. If you slow down and reflect, you'll begin to see whole areas of your life where you've been prayer less." p. 138

8. Can you let God be God and enjoy how He wants to care for every area of your life? Why or why not? Do you trust that Jesus, who is alongside you like a friend, is also the One who is in complete control and on the throne?

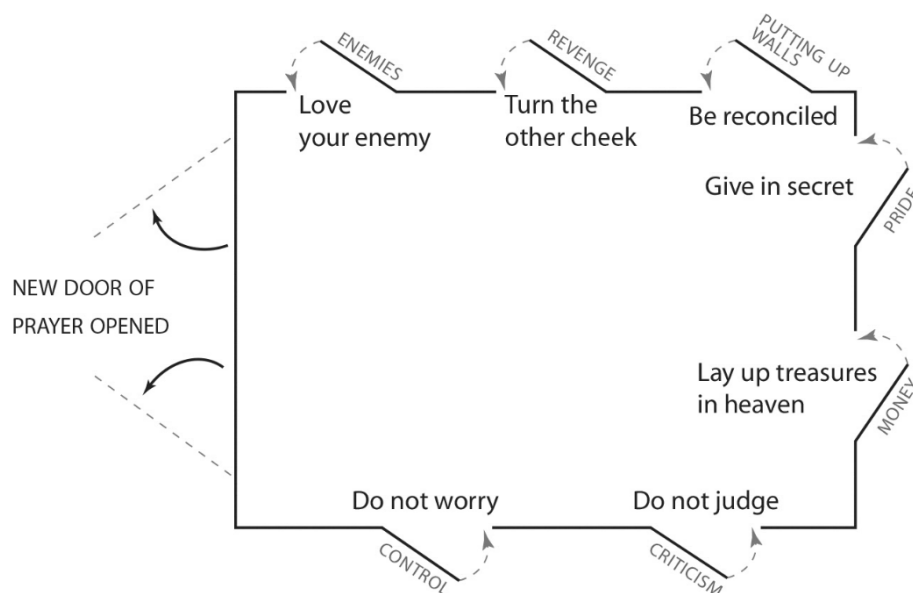
Section 3: God's Plans "Your Will Be Done"

F. "Until we see how strong our own will is, we can't understand the second petition of the Lord's prayer—'Your will be done' (Matthew 6:10)." p. 140

9. How is seeing our own self-will crucial in understanding the need to pray for His will to be done?

G. "The great struggle of my life is not trying to discern God's will; it is trying to discern and then disown my own. Once I see that, then prayer flows. I have to be praying because I am no longer in charge." p. 141

H. "Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is a blueprint for getting in touch with your self-will and letting God take control. Jesus introduces us to what it means to be a child of our heavenly Father." p. 141



I. “Having closed all your doors, Jesus opens the door to prayer and tells you how he gets things done (see Matthew 7:7). He asks for help from his Father. He talks to his Father and tells him what he wants. Prayer is the positive side of the surrendered will. As you stop doing your own will and wait for God, you enter into his mind. You begin to remain in him...to abide. That is the praying life.” p. 143

J. “Self-will and prayer are both ways of getting things done. At the center of self-will is me, carving a world in my image, but at the center of prayer is God, carving me in his Son’s image.” p. 144

K. “We can’t pray effectively until we get in touch with our inner brat. When we see our own self-will, it opens the door to doing things through God. Instead of singing Frank Sinatra’s song ‘My Way,’ we enter into God’s story and watch him do it his way. No one works like him.” p. 145

10. What does it look like to move from “my way” to entering into God’s story and watching Him do it His way?

Section 4: Practice Prayer

In Community Group: Lead or delegate someone to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread, Your kingdom come, Your will be done...”

Outside of Community Group:

Practice 7 The Week Following Community Group Lesson 7 from October 18

Prayer Practice 7 Praying the Lord’s Prayer

Begin the week by reading the Lord’s Prayer.

Then continue to use it as a guide, but begin praying in your own words while keeping the same principles.

God is infinite.
God is personal.

Ask Boldly
Surrender Completely