A PRAYING LIFE—COMMUNITY GROUP SCHEDULE
PART 4—Living in Your Father's Story—PACKET 4
November 1st, 8th, and 15th

Schedule

Introduction

September 6—Introduction, Chapters 1-2—**Lesson 1**

Part 1: Learning to Pray Like a Child
September 13—Chapters 3-5—**Lesson 2**
September 20—Chapters 6-8—**Lesson 3**

Part 2: Learning to Trust Again

September 27—Chapters 9-11—**Lesson 4**

Part 3: Learning to Ask Your Father

October 4—Chapters 12-13—**Lesson 5**
October 11—Chapters 14-15—**Lesson 6**
October 18—Chapters 16-18—**Lesson 7**

Prayer Cards Introduction
October 25—Chapters 28-29, Appendix—**Lesson 8**

Part 4: Living in Your Father's Story

November 1—Chapters 19-21—**Lesson 9** (stapled by itself)**……..……Pages 1-3**
We look to the love God has demonstrated in Christ, continue asking boldly, and surrender completely as we trust our Father's story.

November 8—Chapters 22-24—**Lesson 10** (stapled with Lesson 11)**…….Pages 1-3**
Laments connect our circumstances with who God is, what He desires, and what He has done.

November 15—Chapters 25-27—**Lesson 11** (stapled with Lesson 10)**……..Pages 4-6**
Don't demand that the story go your way. Look for the Storyteller. Stay in the story.

Part 5: Praying in Real Life
November 22—Chapters 30-32—**Lesson 12**
November 29—Chapters 33-34—**Lesson 13**

Optional Review: Prayer Practice 8—Creating Prayer Cards

If you practiced using prayer cards this week, what did you learn about your prayer life through this practice? (If you practiced a different prayer discipline, then feel free to share about it.)

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

1. **How can we trust that God is working through both the good and the challenging things in life to accomplish His purposes and conform us to the image of His Son?**

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

2. **Why is it important for our confidence to rest in God's grace rather than in our performance or ability to understand our circumstances?**

Psalm 63:1 O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly;
My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You,
In a dry and weary land where there is no water.

3. **How can difficult seasons deepen our longing for the Lord Himself?**

Colossians 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;

4. **How does practicing prayer help us remain devoted to prayer, alert to what God is doing, and thankful?**

Lesson 9 Question to Answer: What should I do when God doesn't seem to answer my prayer?
Lesson 9 Summary Statement: We look to the love God has demonstrated in Christ, continue asking boldly, and surrender completely as we trust our Father's story.
(Chapters 19-21 from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller) Pick and choose what you use!

Section 1: Trusting Our Father's Story

A. "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." p. 150

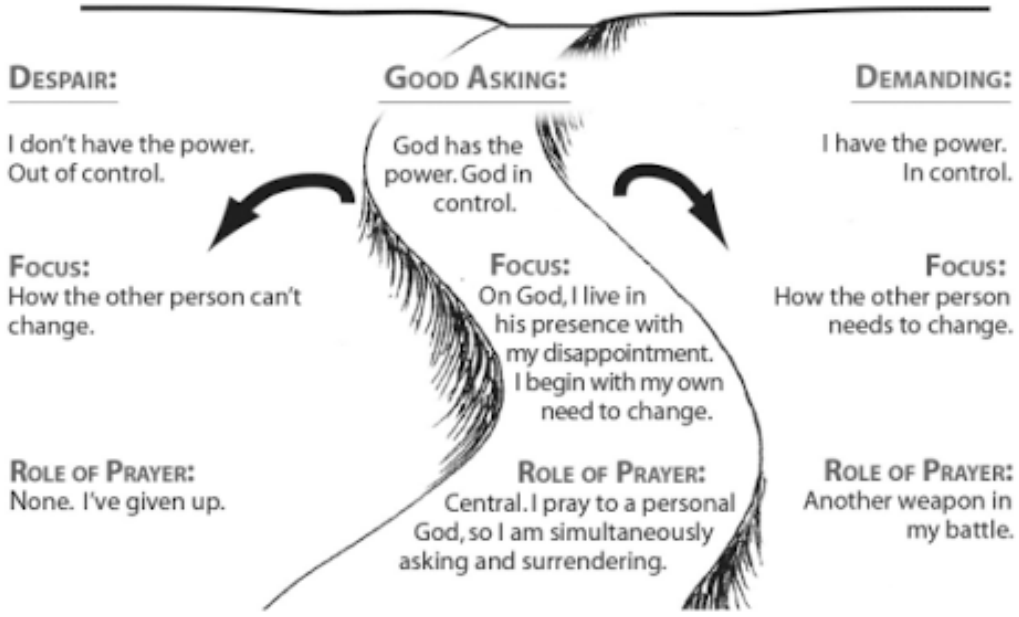
B. “Our prayers don’t exist in a world of their own. We are in dialogue with a personal, divine Spirit who wants to shape us as much as he wants to hear from us.” p. 152

C. “Most of us isolate prayer from the rest of what God is doing in our lives, but God doesn’t work that way. Prayer doesn’t exist in some rarified spiritual world; it is part of the warp and woof of our lives. Prayer itself becomes a story.” p. 152

D. “We forget that God is not a genie but a person who wants to shape us in the image of His Son as much as he wants to answer our prayers.” p. 153

5. **What is “something bigger” that God wants to do in our lives? Are you willing to let God shape your life, even when that involves difficulty? Why or why not?**

E. “The following chart summarizes the two attitudes that keep us from entering into the story that God is weaving in their lives of our children (or any person). Often we begin by being demanding, and then as we encounter human self-will, we drift into despair.” p. 153 (Another chart on “Good Asking” was on page 118.)



6. **Do your prayers flow out of seeing God’s overarching story for your life and the lives of those around you?**

7. **Do you tend more towards despair or being demanding?**

F. “I, completely undeserving, received the greatest gift of all, eternal life, because of God’s love and his grace upon me.” p. 160

8. **Do you spend time in prayer meditating on God’s boundless love and amazing grace? If so, how is this helpful? Does it help you trust the good He is working toward in your life?**

Section 2: Trusting God in the Desert

G. “The hardest part of being in the desert is that there is no way out. You don’t know when it will end. There is no relief in sight. A desert can be almost anything. It can be a child who has gone astray, a difficult boss, or even your own sin or foolishness. Maybe you married your desert. God customizes deserts for each of us.” p. 167

H. “Suffering burns away the false selves created by cynicism or pride or lust. You stop caring about what people think of you. The desert is God’s best hope for the creation of an authentic self.” p. 168

I. “Desert life sanctifies you. You have no idea you are changing. You simply notice after you’ve been in the desert awhile that you are different. Things that used to be important no longer matter.” p. 169

J. “The desert becomes a window to the heart of God. He finally gets your attention because he’s the only game in town.” p. 169

K. “Without realizing it, you have learned to pray continuously. The clear, fresh water of God’s presence that you discover in the desert becomes a well inside your own heart.” p. 169

L. “Thanksgiving helps us to be grace-centered, seeing all of life as a gift. It looks at how God’s past blessings impact our lives. Watchfulness alerts us to the unfolding drama in the present. It looks for God’s present working as it unfolds into future grace. Watch for the story God is weaving in your life.” p. 171

9. Why does God take those He loves through a desert?

10. What is/was your desert?

11. Have you seen fruit from your desert? How?

Section 3: Prayer Practice 9—Watching for God’s Story

In your day to day life this week, bring one ongoing prayer request to your Father. Ask boldly for what you desire, then surrender the outcome to Him. Slow down to remember His demonstrated love in Christ, and watch for His work in your life. Close by thanking Him for His goodness, even as you wait for an answer.

Optional Review: Prayer Practice 9—Watching God's Story

1. Were you able to ask boldly and surrender to His outcome? If so, were you able to watch for God's story? Why or why not?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?

Psalm 6:1-3

NASB	NIV
1 O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, Nor chasten me in Your wrath.	LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath
2 Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am pining away; Heal me, O Lord, for my bones are dismayed.	Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint; Heal me, LORD, for by bones are in agony.
3 And my soul is greatly dismayed; But You, O Lord—how long?	My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long?

1. How does David bring his agony, anguish and uncertainty to God? How do you bring your own agony, anguish and uncertainty to God?

Isaiah 64:1-12

1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down,
That the mountains might quake at Your presence—
2 As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil—
To make Your name known to Your adversaries,
That the nations may tremble at Your presence!
3 When You did awesome things which we did not expect,
You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence.
4 For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear,
Nor has the eye seen a God besides You,
Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.
5 You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness,
Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned,
We continued in them a long time; And shall we be saved?
6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;
And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
7 There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You;
For You have hidden Your face from us
And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities.
8 But now, O Lord, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter;
And all of us are the work of Your hand.
9 Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord, Nor remember iniquity forever;
Behold, look now, all of us are Your people.
10 Your holy cities have become a wilderness,
Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.
11 Our holy and beautiful house, Where our fathers praised You,
Has been burned by fire; And all our precious things have become a ruin.
12 Will You restrain Yourself at these things, O Lord?
Will You keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?

2. How do God's people express their ruin to God, and how do they cry out to Him to act?

Lesson 10 Questions to Answer: What is a lament? How do I pray when my hope does not match reality?
Lesson 10 Summary Statement: Laments connect our circumstances with who God is, what He desires, and what He has done.
(Chapters 22-24 from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller) Pick and choose what you use!

Section 1: What Is a Lament?

A. "These were Hebrew laments, a long-forgotten but deeply biblical way of praying." p. 174 "Laments bring together two things (reality and promise)." p. 175 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." p. 175 & p. 176

B. "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… Cynicism moves you away from God; laments push you into his presence." p. 176

C. "To lament means to grieve…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." p. 177 "You have no other option, so you reach for your most powerful weapon—your ability to cry out to the living God for help." p. 178

3. Why is it important to understand reality and hold on to the promises of God?

Section 2: How do I Lament?

D. "The Israelites lamented because they longed for a better world, the way the world is supposed to be. They believed in a covenant-keeping God, one who keeps his word. That's what makes laments so passionate, so in-you-face." p. 182

E. "When you lament, you live simultaneously in the past, present, and future. A lament connects God's past promise with my present chaos, hoping for a better future." p. 182

F. "Isaiah's faith drives this lament (in Isaiah 64). He believes three things about God: First, God is sovereign. He can do something. Second, God is love. He is for me. He wants to do something. And finally, God is a covenant-keeping God. He is bound by his own word. He will do something. Isaiah's faith feeds off the character of God." p. 186

G. "So how did God respond to Isaiah's lament? Jesus. It's that simple. He gave his Son, who created a new Jerusalem, his body. He rent the heavens and came down as a little baby. God became flesh." p. 186

4. How does your faith draw strength from the sovereignty, love, and character of God? How do you find hope in Jesus' incarnation and His coming return?

H. “When you first read laments, you notice their passion, but most laments are also closely reasoned arguments, where the lamenter argues with God. When you argue, you make a case, using both passion and reason.” p. 187

I. “What is so striking about biblical laments is that God almost never critiques them. He delights in hearing our messy hearts.” p. 188 “God delights in welcoming messy, broken hearts.” p. 189

5. How do redemption and restoration give us confidence to bring our messy hearts to God?

J. “Let me offer a caution with laments. Be careful you don’t slip into complaining like the Israelites in the desert. What is the difference between a complaint and a lament? Three differences stand out. First, a lament is directed toward God… Second, a lament submits… Finally, laments almost always circle back to faith… To summarize: Good lamenting is appropriate; it goes somewhere; it is simple and honest. Bad lamenting is magnified, endless; it is complicated by bitterness, self-pity, escapes, and denial.” p. 189

6. What is good about lamenting? What is bad about bitterness, self-pity, escape, and denial?

K. “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.” P. 194

L. “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.” p. 196

7. Why is waiting on God better than walking away from God? What is the value of continuing to bring your concerns to God, appealing to His character and promises, and trusting Him while you wait?

Section 3: Prayer Practice 10—Praying in the Desert: How to Lament

Step 1: Turn to God and cry out your complaint to Him. Lay out your problem before God.
Step 2: Appeal to God to hear your complaint and respond. Try to ground your appeal in God’s promises and character as revealed in the Bible. How are those connected to God's response to your complaint?
Step 3: Declare your trust in God whatever the circumstances, whatever his response.

Optional Review: Prayer Practice 10—Watching God's Story

1. Were you able to practice lamenting this past week? If so, were you able to watch for God's story? Why or why not?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,

Philippians 2:6-7 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

1. How does Jesus' death on the cross keep us humble? How does Jesus' resurrection keep us hopeful? Why is it good for us to be humble and hopeful?

Lesson 11 Question to Answer: What does it look like to pray in light of the story God is weaving in our lives?
Lesson 11 Summary Statement: Don't demand that the story go your way. Look for the Storyteller. Stay in the story.
(Chapters 25-27 from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller) Pick and choose what you use!

Section 1: Don't Demand that The Story Go Your Way

A. "We don't like the messiness of unanswered prayer—or answers that are different from what we requested." p. 201

B. "The praying life is inseparable from obeying, loving, waiting, and suffering." p. 201

C. "(When there is) no story (we become): bitter, angry, aimless, cynical, controlling, hopeless, thankless, blaming… (When there is a) story (we become) waiting, watching, wondering, praying, submitting, hoping, thankful, repenting." p. 202

D. "It was work, prayer mistakes, frustration, more work, more prayer, breakthrough, work, prayer, and so on. Again and again, often at the last moment, we saw God provide. And he never did it without humbling us." p. 203

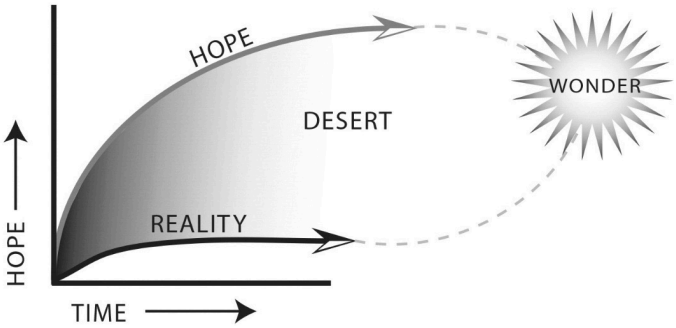
2. Why are unanswered prayers difficult? Why are waiting and suffering difficult?

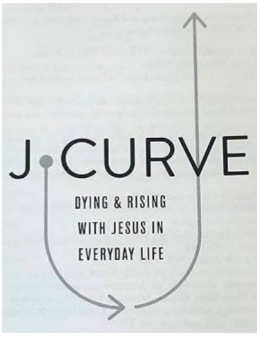
3. Why is it easy to get bitter, angry, aimless, cynical, controlling, hopeless, thankless and blaming? Why is it helpful to be waiting, watching, wondering, praying, submitting, hoping, thankful and repenting?

Section 2: Look for the Storyteller

E. “Most of our prayers are answered in the context of the larger story that God is weaving… Living in our Father’s story means living in tension…To live in our Father's story, remember these three things: 1) Don’t demand that the story go your way. (In other words, surrender completely.) 2) Look for the Storyteller. Look for His hand, and then pray in light of what you are seeing. (In other words, develop an eye for Jesus.) 3) Stay in the story. Don’t shut down when it goes the wrong way.” p. 205

F. “To see the Storyteller we need to slow down our interior life and watch. We need to be imbedded in the Word to experience the Storyteller’s mind and pick up the cadence of his voice. We need to be alert for the story, for the Storyteller’s voice speaking into the details of our lives. The story God weaves is neither weird nor floaty. It always involves bowing before his majesty with the pieces of our lives.” p. 206





G. "As we wait and pray, God weaves his story and creates a wonder. Instead of drifting between comedy (denial) and tragedy (reality), we have a relationship with the living God, who is intimately involved with the details of our worlds. We are learning to watch for the story to unfold, to wait for the wonder.” p. 213

4. How does the Word help us experience the Storyteller’s mind and pick up the cadence of His voice so that we know the larger story that God is weaving?

5. How does worshiping God help us to bow before His majesty with the pieces of our lives as we watch for the story to unfold and wait for the wonder?

Section 3: Stay in the Story

H. “The downward journey is a gospel story. Our lives repeatedly react the dying and rising of Jesus. I call it the J-Curve, because, like the letter ‘J,’ Jesus life first goes down into death, then up into resurrection.” p. 219

I. “We love to hear about God’s love for us, but suffering doesn’t mesh with ‘the pursuit of happiness.’ So we pray to escape a gospel story, when that is the best gift the Father can give us.” p. 220

6. Why might suffering cause someone to want to escape the gospel story? Why is the gospel story the best gift the Father can give us?

J. “But by simply staying in the story, continuing to show up for life, even if it seems pointless, the kingdom comes. Poverty of spirit is no longer a belief. We own it. It describes us… Repentence is refreshing… When we remove our false selves, it creates integrity. We return to the real source of love—our heavenly Father. We become authentic.” p. 221

7. Why is it hard to stay in the story and wait for the kingdom to come? What good does poverty of spirit do? Can repentance really be refreshing?

K. "If we stop fighting and embrace the gospel story God is weaving in our lives, we discover joy—the resurrection side of the J-Curve. Paul bubbles over with joy as he writes the book of Philippians, chained between two Roman soldiers. He even prays with joy…If we pursue joy directly, it slips from our grasp. But if we begin with Jesus and learn to love, we end up with joy…When you bind yourself to someone who at times can be difficult, you are in a place where you can discover God and then joy.” p. 221

L. “Seeing God’s design in our lives brings meaning and hope.” p. 222

M. “To see a gospel story, we need to reflect on how seemingly disparate pieces are connected. The best place to pick up the unseen connections of our designer God is in disappointment and tension.” p. 223

8. Why might joy slip from our grasp if we pursue joy directly? Why do we end up with joy if we begin with Jesus and learn to love?

Section 4: Prayer Practice 11—Look for the Storyteller and Stay in the Story

This week, choose one circumstance, disappointment, unanswered prayer, or difficult relationship in your life and intentionally bring it before God each day.

1. Don’t demand that the story go your way. Acknowledge your desires and the temptation to control things. Surrender your expectations to His purposes as your loving Father and Lord.
2. Look for the Storyteller. Spend time in God’s Word. Seek God’s presence. Watch for how God might be working in the details of your life.
3. Stay in the story. Keep praying, loving, obeying and trusting. Turn away from bitterness and discouragement. Give thanks in all circumstances.