A PRAYING LIFE—COMMUNITY GROUP SCHEDULE
PART 5—Praying in Real Life—PACKET 5
November 22nd and 29th

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**
November 8—Chapters 22-24—**Lesson 10**
November 15—Chapters 25-27—**Lesson 11**

Part 5: Praying in Real Life

November 22—Chapters 30-32—**Lesson 12……..….Pages 2-4**
Listening to God is rooted in reverence and relationship with Him through His Word and Spirit, and journaling helps us reflect on what we see Him doing and recognize patterns in His work.

November 29—Chapters 33-34—**Lesson 13……..……Pages 5-7**
We can bring all of our real life to God in prayer, and we can trust Him with all the pieces of our stories that are unfinished.

Optional Review: Prayer Practice 11—Look for the Storyteller and Stay in the Story

1. Were you able to see God in the Word and God's hand at work? Were you able to keep on praying, loving, obeying, and trusting this week? Why or why not?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?

1 Peter 4:12-13 12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

Psalm 25:14-15 14 The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him,
And He will make them know His covenant.
15 My eyes are continually toward the Lord, For He will pluck my feet out of the net.

Psalm 16:7-8 7 I will bless the Lord who has counseled me;
Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night.
8 I have set the Lord continually before me;
Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

1. As you look closer at these Psalms, what is the relationship between fearing the Lord and keeping your eyes continually toward Him? What is the relationship between receiving counsel from the Lord and keeping Him continually before you? What makes fearing the Lord and keeping your focus on Him easy? What makes it difficult?

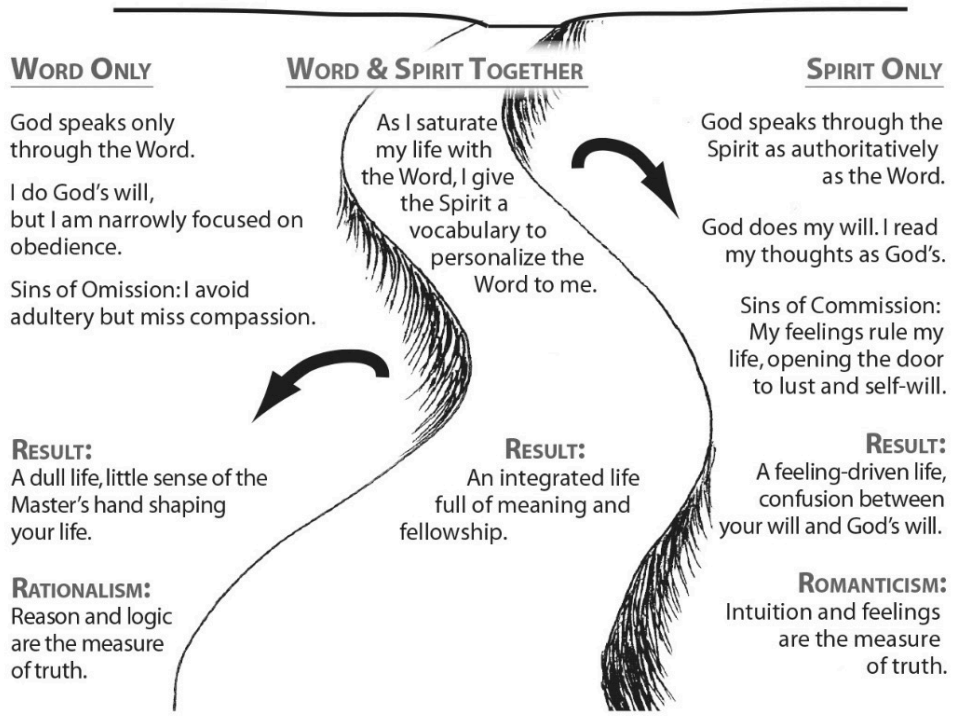
Lesson 12 Questions to Answer: How do I see the work God is doing? How do I listen to God? How do I use a prayer journal?
Lesson 12 Summary Statement: Listening to God is rooted in reverence and relationship with Him through His Word and Spirit, and journaling helps us reflect on what we see Him doing and recognize patterns in His work.
(Chapters 30-32 from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller) Pick and choose what you use!

Section 1: God's Work Is Work We Join

A. "If Satan's basic game plan is pride, seeking to draw us into his life of arrogance, then God's basic game plan is humility, drawing us into the life of his Son. The Father can't think of anything better to give us than his Son. Suffering invites us to join his Son's life, death, and resurrection. Once you see that, suffering is no longer strange." p. 242

B. "We reverse the kingdom pattern of ask (seed), watch (growth), and work (harvest)." p. 243

2. Why might we have a tendency to work before we ask? What are the advantages of asking God before we begin working? Why are asking, watching, and working all important to living a praying life?



Section 2: Word and Spirit Together

C. "'Word Only'—Going Wrong by Not Listening: If we focus exclusively on God's written Word when looking for God's activity in our lives but don't watch and pray, we'll miss the unfolding story of his work. We'll miss the patterns of the Divine Artist etching the character of his Son on our hearts." p. 250

D. "Don't pray in a fog. Pray with your eyes open. Look for patterns God is weaving in your life." p. 251

E. "'Spirit Only'—Going Wrong by Elevating Human Intuition" p. 251 "Unless Scripture guards and directs our intuitions, we can easily run amok and baptize our selfish desires with religious language ('God told me to marry her…')." p. 252

F. "We need the sharp-edged, absolute character of the Word and the intuitive, personal leading of the Spirit. The Word provides the structure, the vocabulary. The Spirit personalizes it to our life. Keeping the Word and the Spirit together guards us from the danger of God-talk becoming a cover for our own desires and the danger of lives isolated from God." p. 254

3. How have you tended to lean toward "Word Only" or "Spirit Only" in your approach to listening to God? How is Miller's picture of bringing God's Word and Spirit together helpful in understanding how God leads us?

4. Why are biblical guardrails important in listening to God?

Section 3: Journaling to Recognize God's Story

G. "When life makes sense, it becomes a journey, a spiritual adventure. Writing down the adventure as it happens gives us a feel for our place in the story God is weaving in our lives. Journaling helps us to become aware of the journey." p. 258

H. "Here's where a prayer journal can help. Communion or conversation with God breaks down into two questions: 1) How am I doing? What is coming at me? Am I happy, sad, thankful, discouraged, angry, frustrated? 2) What is God saying to me? What does the Word say? When I reflect on these two questions in my prayer journal, the Living God removes the fog, and I see my true self. This leads to repentance." p. 260

5. Why is self-awareness important in our lives and in our relationship with God? Why are God's Word and prayer indispensable to keeping a prayer journal? How do God's Word and prayer lead us to repentance and help us continue walking in repentance?

I. "When we keep our eyes on the Shepherd, we become aware of ourselves. The valley of the shadow of death becomes a valley of vision. As you can see, journaling allows us to discover the story that God is writing in our lives. Instead of rushing through life, it allows us to pause and reflect." p. 262

J. "The act of writing out your worries, joys, and prayers helps you focus and keeps your mind from wandering. But the best part is that over time you will begin to see patterns of what God is doing, to pick up the threads of a story." p. 264

6. Have you tried journaling in the past? What was your experience? What have you learned in <u>A Praying Life</u> that may enhance your experience with journaling?

Section 4: Prayer Practice 12—Write Something After Reading The Word and Reflecting

1. Ask: How am I doing? What is coming at me? Am I happy, sad, thankful, discouraged, angry, frustrated?
2. Ask: What is God saying to me? What does the Word say?
3. Reflect on these questions.
4. Write something. It doesn't have to start with a long writing.

Optional Review: Prayer Practice 12—Write Something

1. Were you able to write anything in a journal? Was this similar to past writing experiences you have had, or was it new? How so?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?

Matthew 22:37-40 37 And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

1. How does prayer shape the way we love God and trust Him with our stories?

2. How does prayer shape the way we love others and pray for them?

Psalm 62:5-8 5 My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope is from Him.
6 He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken.
7 On God my salvation and my glory rest; The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God.
8 Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him;
God is a refuge for us. Selah.

3. In the context of Psalm 62, what does it mean to "pour out your heart before Him?" What does it mean to "trust in Him at all times?"

Lesson 13 Questions to Answer: What does prayer look like in real life? How do we deal with unfinished stories?
Lesson 13 Summary Statement: We can bring all of our real life to God in prayer, and we can trust Him with all the pieces of our stories that are unfinished.
(Chapters 33-34 from A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller) Pick and choose what you use!

Section 1: Praying in Real Life

A. "I'm actually managing my life through my daily prayer time. I'm shaping my heart, my work, my family—in fact, everything that is dear to me—through prayer in fellowship with my heavenly Father. I'm doing that because I don't have control over my heart and life or the hearts and lives of those around me. But God does." p. 265

4. How does prayer help us manage what is dear to us? How does prayer bring our real lives into fellowship with God and under God's control?

B. "As I pray, I'm dealing not with surface stuff, but with the state of my heart and of the people for whom I am praying. My prayer time is anything but boring. I am thanking, repenting, protecting, and caring. My prayer time is alive with God." p. 268

C. “Prayer time…(and) a praying life…(are) both being and doing. I’m with God. I sense his presence. He is speaking into my life. But our relationship doesn’t float. I’m not hunting for an experience with God; I’m inviting God into my life experience. He is in me, and I am in him. As I bring to him my real life with my real needs, he acts in amazing ways. He is at work touching my life, doing what I can't do. The result? Thanksgiving. You don't have to work at worship when God is so alive.” p. 268

5. What are some benefits of inviting God into our life experiences? How does a vibrant prayer life help you experience the life of God?

D. “I woke up in the middle of the night recently with this rather odd question on my mind: *How would you love someone without prayer?*… Love without being able to pray feels depressing and frustrating, like trying to tie a knot with gloves on. I would be powerless to do the other person any real good. People are far too complicated; the world is far too evil; and my own heart is too off center to be able to love adequately without praying. I need Jesus.” p. 268

6. How is prayer a great way to love others?

E. “We don’t need a praying life because that is our duty. That would wear thin quickly. We need time to be with our Father every day because every day our hearts and the hearts of those around us are overgrown with weeds. We need to reflect on our lives and engage God with the condition of our souls and the souls he has entrusted to our care or put in our paths. In a fallen world, these things do not come automatically.” p. 269

Section 2: Trusting God with Unfinished Stories

F. “In this chapter I want to deal with a particularly difficult set of stories: the unfinished, the ones with sad endings, the seeming tragedies… We can never forget that God is God. Ultimately it is his story, not ours.” p. 271

7. Why is it important to remember that ultimately it is God's story, not ours, when we face difficult or unfinished stories?

G. “…But the Jewish poet who wept by the rivers of Babylon never saw the end of the story. Like all the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, he lived with the story unfinished in his lifetime. He lived by faith.” p. 274

H. “There are times when I can see what God is doing in another person’s life, but telling that person would crush his or her spirit. I suspect God is at times silent about stories because we just can’t handle it.” p. 274

8. How can we live by faith when we cannot see how God is working or how our stories will end?

l. “Living in unfinished stories draws us into God’s final act, the return of Jesus. While we wait for his return, it is easy to predict the pattern of the last days. The book of Revelation pictures a suffering church, dying as creation itself is unraveling. Through suffering God will finally make his church beautiful and reveal his glory. In the desert you see his glory. In the last days the bride will be made beautiful, pure, waiting for her lover. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” p. 276

9. How does the promise of Christ’s return give us hope as we live with unfinished stories?

Section 3: Looking Back and Looking Toward A Praying Life

10. What is one principle from A Praying Life that has most shaped your understanding of prayer?

11. How has your practice of prayer changed as a result of this study?

12. What is one way you want to continue growing in your relationship with God through prayer?

13. How can we encourage one another to continue living a praying life?