

A Praying Church - Paul Miller

Discussion Questions

A brief note from Ben:

We often recommend books that don't come from our particular corner of Christianity (Reformed Presbyterian). We find it helpful to read outside our denomination to discover insights and strengths that others have accessed in a greater way. "A Praying Church" is no exception. Paul Miller has thought a lot about prayer and how to create praying cultures inside of churches. But if you are theologically well-versed, you'll notice some issues that we differ on. That's ok 😊. You don't have to get mad or fight about it, we can agree on the major issues and agree to disagree on the minor ones. If you have specific questions, feel free to get in touch (ben@resurrectionchurch.ca).

Chapter 1 - A Glimpse of a Praying Community

1. Miller says on pg.6 that "we tend to think of prayer as somehow a higher life, when it's actually real life." What does he mean by that? Do you agree or disagree?
2. What is "learned desperation" (top of pg.7). What does that have to do with prayer?
3. What would a "praying church" look like to you? Cast a bit of a vision for each other.

Chapter 2 - Who Killed the Prayer Meeting?

1. In his opening story on pg.12, Miller implicitly argues that we don't prayer together because we don't think it 'works.' Do you agree with his reasoning?
2. How would you answer the question on pg. 14, "what do you not like about typical prayer meetings?"
3. In what way did secularism kill the prayer meeting?
4. What other 'things' have killed the prayer meeting?
5. Have you been part of other Christian cultures (African, Asian, other) who have healthier cultures of prayer?

Chapter 3 - The Missing Spirit of Jesus?

1. What is the difference between Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2? What would that look like in practice?
2. What is the church's power train (pg. 25)?
3. Why is there no "gift of prayer" mentioned in the Bible (according to Miller)?
4. What does the Holy Spirit have to do with praying?
5. Why does Miller say we should write "a letter of resignation?" Do you think you need to write such a letter?

Chapter 4 - A Short History of the Praying Church

1. In what ways was Israel a "house of prayer?" Or in what ways were they supposed to be?
2. What was the original intent of the Lord's Prayer?
3. On pg. 41, Miller says that "we are the first generation in two thousand years to have lost this vision of the church as a house of prayer." Agree or disagree?
4. If we get serious about prayer, why does Miller say we should focus on the vertical not the horizontal? (pg. 42)

Chapter 5 - Saints in Motion

1. Agree or disagree - "You can't take our modern way of doing church, add more prayer, and get to a praying church." (p.47)
2. Is our current way of doing church make us "prayer resistant?"
3. What does Miller mean when he says that "saints" are the missing key to understanding how to create a praying church?
4. What is a "saint in motion" and how do they energize the church for prayer?
5. "The saints' stories often seem so minor that I think the saints don't even see the story themselves." Does this seem true to you?
6. What are some of the contrasts that Miller draws between a preaching-centred church and a prayer centred church?
7. Look at the chart on pg.55. What stands out to you?
8. Which of the five "equipping errors" seems especially relevant for our church?

Chapter 6 - Feeding the Saints

1. How does church become an idol? What are some of the warning signs?
2. What does it mean for saints to be blessed (pg.66)?
3. Miller says the while Paul is constant in prayer, many of us are constant in cell phone use. What do you think of that? What would it look like to pray as often as you unlock or check your phone?
4. Look at the chart on 70/71. Anything you particularly agree or disagree with?

Chapter 7 - Are Saints Real?

1. What biblical evidence does Miller point to as evidence for the existence of saints?
2. From the top of pg. 76 - Is ministry love? Why or why not?
3. How is the encouragement "become what you are" different than "stop being what you are?"
4. What tensions keep us from understanding ourselves as saints? Which is most obvious/pressing to you?

Chapter 8 - Saints Unleashed

1. How does the armour of God change when you read it in plural instead of singular?
2. Why does Paul spend more time describing prayer than the other pieces of armour?
3. What does it feel like to be prayed for? Feel free to be honest 😊
4. From the "A Word to Pastors" section: Do you sometimes feel like you are _____ first and a saint second? Why does this happen?

Chapter 9 - The Parable of the Missing CEO

1. What is the point of parables?
2. Someone volunteer to tell the parable of the missing CEO.
3. What are the connections between the parable of the missing CEO and the modern Christian Church (at least according to Miller)?
4. What does the story of Hugh Jackman have to do with this parable?
5. What does it mean that we are "stand-ins?"

Chapter 10 - How the Spirit Works

1. What is the difference between the Spirit and being spiritual? What does Romans 1:11 have to do with this?
2. How is the Spirit like the wind (John 3:8)? How does this relate to prayer?
3. What does the story of Paul learning to pray with his daughter Kim teach us about prayer?
4. Explain the seven ways of the Spirit “interfacing” with prayer:
 - a. Surprise
 - b. Imagination Explosion
 - c. Repentance
 - d. Dying and Rising
 - e. Hiddenness
 - f. Mystery
 - g. Least of these
5. What does the story of Bob Heppe have to do with these seven ways that the Spirit interfaces with our prayers?
6. What does Miller mean that there is an “unexplored middle” in between the reformed world and charismatic world? Do you agree?

Chapter 11 - The Spirit's Path

1. What is the J-curve? How does it relate to prayer?
2. “Many Christians expect that good praying should have a spiritual “high” to it.” (p.110). Agree or disagree? Why does prayer feel tedious at times?
3. How is prayer related to dying and rising? How is social media the opposite of prayer in this sense?
4. How does Mark 4:26-29 make sense of this from a biblical perspective?

Chapter 12 -Management by Prayer

1. What does “planning by prayer” mean?
2. What is the difference between hunting for leaders and asking God to raise up labourers?
3. What is the connection between how Jesus chose his disciples and how the early church sent off Paul and Barnabas from Antioch?

Chapter 13 - Becoming a Praying Leader

1. What is the relationship between a praying leader and a praying church?
2. What does it mean to let dependence not discipline drive your prayer life? How do you become more dependent?
3. What is exemplary about how John Stott prayed?
4. “To be consistent in prayer, you need a system.” What have you noticed has worked for you in past seasons of consistent prayer?

Chapter 14 - Praying Big

1. When Miller says that we should pray big, what does he mean by that?
2. How does the tension between our desires and our reality influence our prayers? (diagram on 136)

3. What happens if you strip the “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” from the Lord’s Prayer?
4. Read the paragraph on pg.139 that begins with “this prayer is strikingly different.” Do you think he accurately captures most prayer meetings? How can we pray bigger?
5. What did you find inspirational or helpful about the story of the missionary James Fraser?

Chapter 15 - The Prayer Triangle

1. Without looking, can you name the three levels of the prayer triangle?
2. Now, what is the difference between vision, strategy and tactics?
3. Take an issue like MAID or abortion and discuss, what would three levels of prayer look like for this issue?
4. Miller addresses a big question - what do you do if you’ve been praying big for many years and the needle hasn’t moved? How does he answer this question?
5. How does human confidence pose a barrier to praying big? How does weak faith?

Chapter 16 - Avoiding the Pitfalls of Prayer

1. What is the problem with “over spiritualizing” prayer?
2. What is the connection between pietism and over spiritualizing?
3. What does it mean to “under spiritualize” prayer?
4. What does “boasting” prayer look like? What does it create if you often pray that way?
5. What does Miller mean by avoiding “Drama-Filled” prayers?

Chapter 17 - Beginning Low and Slow

1. If you are in a relatively prayerless church, how should you start?
2. What does Miller mean that “aches are transferable?” How does this relate to prayer?
3. Why does Miller compare prayer to “low level, no thrills farming work?”
4. Who do you know (inside or outside of Resurrection) who are Anna’s or Simeon’s?

Chapter 18 - Forming a Divine Community

1. Miller says he spends 4-5 hours a week, a tithe of his schedule in prayer. Does that sound like a lot or the right amount?
2. Why do we have to “defend” our prayer time and not leave it until the end? How have you seen this happen?
3. What do you think of the biblical evidence for structured times of prayer? Compelling?
4. Miller says on 182 that he doesn’t like praying for needs that are not part of the community? What do you think about that?
5. He also says he doesn’t like widely posted prayer lists. Again, what do you think?
6. What does Miller mean by following the thread of prayer in a prayer meeting?

Chapter 19 - Restoring Prayer to Sunday Morning

1. Do we need to take back Sunday mornings for prayer (as Miller argues)?
2. Let’s talk about Miller’s ideas for restoring prayer to Sunday morning. What do you think of the following ideas:
 - a. 10 minutes of open mic praying time? (190)

- b. Restore public laments (192)
 - c. Flip prayer and the sermon (193)
 - d. Let the Pastoral Prayer be Pastoral (194)
 - e. Close with a blessing (195)
 - f. Break into groups for prayer (not an official idea, but mentioned a few times, including on 196)
3. What other ideas do you have for praying more/better on Sunday mornings?

Chapter 20 - On a Resurrection Hunt

1. "Every praying person I've met learned to pray because God gave him or her an overwhelming problem." (198) Do you agree with this quote?
2. Do most prayer meetings devolve into fixation on problems? Why is that?
3. What does Miller mean by 'resurrection hunt'? How do you go on a resurrection hunt during a prayer meeting?
4. What questions have you found open up the prayer beyond problems?
5. What does Miller recommend for praying for problems (p.204) with the example of Edna?
6. Pick another example in your life or from someone in your group. What would it look like to enlarge your heart for _____, to pray for the complete _____, and to enlarge _____'s vision to others who are similar?

Chapter 21 - Becoming Real in Prayer

1. Miller says that blunt honesty can transform a prayer meeting (p.207). Have you ever been part of a prayer meeting where someone was very honest? What happened?
2. Why do we struggle to be honest in giving prayer requests?
3. Miller tells of his group praying for "Robert." What do you see in this story that helps you learn how to pray for someone struggling with a physical issue?
4. What does it look like to open up about corporate struggle/weakness? As a lay person, what does it feel like when leaders admit weakness and struggle? How does it change how you pray?

Chapter 22 - The Prayer Menu

1. What is "the prayer chill?" Have you noticed this?
2. Let's look at the "prayer menu" (Table 22.1, p.216).
 - a. What are the horizontal lines for? What do they represent?
 - b. What are the vertical columns for?
 - c. Which of the nine boxes does our group/church do well?
 - d. Which is the weakest?
 - e. What is helpful about this menu? What is unhelpful or missing?
 - f. Choose an issue and do some brainstorming about how to use the prayer menu to pray about the chosen issue.
3. What does it mean to agree in prayer with one another? What does Miller recommend when praying on topics where Christians disagree?

Chapter 23 - Constant in Prayer

1. What does the story of the slinky have to do with being constant in prayer?
 - a. How do you feel about praying for “silly” or “frivolous” things?
2. How individualistic should we be about being constant in prayer?
 - a. How does it feel when an issue comes up and you suggest praying about it. Does it feel awkward? Fine?
3. For the married couples: Do you pray with your spouse? Why or why not?
 - a. Do you think you should? What do you think about Miller’s idea to “pray for your praying?”
4. Does anyone have friends they pray with? Did it feel like going on a first date?
5. What other mini-communities do you have that you pray with? Anyone you wish you would pray regularly with?

Chapter 24 - A Band of Brothers

1. How does prayer fit as part of discipleship? Why did Miller recommend to his son and the son’s friend that they start with praying after they’d messed up?
2. Then Miller recommended that they try to pray during the sin. Why did he do that?
3. What is the difference between praying after temptation, during temptation and before temptation according to the bottom of 238 and top of 239?
4. Why is cynicism such a prayer killer?
5. Does prayer feel feminine? Or not action oriented?

Chapter 25 - Turbocharging our prayers

1. Without looking, what are some examples of fasting in the Bible?
2. What are some of the reasons fasting “works?”
3. What is the link between fasting and repentance?
4. Do we need a “Day of humiliation” for anything?
5. If you “had” to fast for a particular issue or prayer item, what would it be?

Conclusion

1. What are the main takeaways from this book? What will you remember?