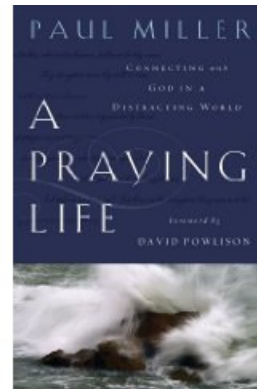


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Many thanks to Michele Bennett and the kind folks at NavPress for the opportunity to review Paul Miller's *A Praying Life*.

If you were to ask the average Christian on the street for a list of the top five things they struggle with, I'm willing to bet that prayer will more often than not appear at the top of that list. Some may say the busyness of modern life steals away too much of their time. Others may say they feel like prayer just doesn't make a difference. While I'm willing to concede that time management challenges and feelings may affect our outlook on prayer, I'm not willing to accept these and other similar excuses as the sole reasons people struggle with or altogether avoid prayer. All excuses aside, I think the reality of the situation is that prayer can be downright difficult. Each of us attempts to approach God in prayer through the context of our own religious training and upbringing or for some, the lack thereof. Many of us are able to recite from memory the rote prayers we learned during our childhood. So many of these prayers are full of Biblical truth and deep theological meaning, but years of monotone repetition have left them feeling old and powerless. On the other end of the prayer spectrum you will find what some call "vending machine" prayers. These sorts of prayers consist of nothing more than our never ending list of wants and felt needs, addressing God like he is the proprietor of a heavenly candy store or a cosmic Santa Claus. Like the rote prayers of our childhood, these too will leave us feeling disappointed and frustrated with prayer and ultimately with God.

If this sounds all too familiar, chances are you could be one of the many who have been living in the midst of a lifelong struggle with prayer. Based on your experiences 'til now, you may seriously wonder if there is any hope for long-term sustained change in your prayer life. Like me, you've probably read other books on prayer, only to shortly thereafter end up right back where you began. While I can't speak to all of the reasons those other books might have come up short for you, I can recommend a new book that has the potential revolutionize your prayer life. The author of this new book is Paul Miller. Paul is the director for SeeJesus.net, a discipling mission and developer of interactive Bible studies. As a part of his work for SeeJesus.net, he has developed *The PrayerLife Study* and *Seminar*, which were the basis for Paul's new book published by NavPress titled: *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. This book consists of thirty-two chapters, organized into six parts. They are as follows:

- Introductory material (Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1-2)
- Part 1: Learning to Pray Like a Child (Chapters 3-8)
- Part 2: Learning to Trust Again (Chapters 9-11)

- Part 3: Learning to ask Your Father (Chapters 12-18)
- Part 4: Living in your Father's Story (Chapters 19-25)
- Part 5: Praying in Real Life (Chapters 26-32)

Paul shares what he has learned over a lifetime of pursuing God in prayer. Much of what he shares is rooted in concrete examples from his own experiences, especially his experiences in the midst of the story God is weaving as Paul has been praying and caring for his family. The many personal examples throughout this book give a ring of authenticity to what Paul is asking us to do in our own prayer lives. This isn't just something he put together for a seminar and reworked for a book, he is practicing what he is preaching. There are many good things I've taken away from this book and have begun incorporating into my own prayer life. Without giving too much away, I'll list a few of the highlights below:

- Approach God the Father as a child with boldness, honesty, and need.
- Pray alone, but pray aloud.
- Start out simple (5 minutes) and increase your prayer time from there.
- Run away from cynicism and learn to trust God again.
- Prayer is an integral part of all of your life, talk to God about the big things and the small things.
- Understand that your life is part of a story God is weaving. Prayer shapes both you and your story.
- Keep praying when there seems to be no answer to prayer or even the "wrong" answer to prayer.
- Prayer cards and prayer journals will be helpful tools to better focus your prayers and show you how God is working in the midst of your story.

In all honesty, this is one of the best books on prayer I've read in quite some time. As I worked through the chapters, I began to evaluate my own prayer life and started to see quite a few areas where I was left wanting. Paul's personal stories helped me to see that there are many things I could do different and better when it comes to praying for my own family and other relationships. On a practical level, I'm especially excited to try incorporating prayer cards into my daily prayer routine. I highly recommend this book to anybody who has struggled with prayer or wants learn more about how God can work in the midst of a life filled with prayer. This book will be beneficial for personal reading, but the length of the chapters also makes it ideal for a small group or Sunday school setting. Readers who enjoy this book may also want consider *Love Walked among Us* (NavPress, 2001), also by Paul Miller. You can learn more about Paul and his ministry at www.seejesus.net.

Paul Miller is the director of seejesus.net, a discipling mission and developer of interactive Bible Studies. In addition to A Praying Life, Paul has written Love Walked Among Us (NavPress, 2001). Paul and his wife Jill have six children, two daughters-in-law, two sons-in-law, and seven grandchildren. They live near Philadelphia, PA.