A Praying Life
Group Guide

Chapters 21 - 25
Group Discussion Guidelines

As you lead the discussion of *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller, remember that the goal isn’t to re-teach what he presented in the book. We also don’t want to review his writing or talk about what we did or didn’t like. It also isn’t the time to defend Paul Miller from all criticism. If you or others in your group disagree with something he’s written, make sure you understand his full point before launching into a disagreement. Then, as quickly as possible, turn your discussion to the Scriptures, coming under their authority, not Miller’s authority. Finally, use wisdom in deciding how much time should be spent discussing that specific topic.

Instead, it’s the time to push people toward application. The questions below aren’t focused on content as much as they’re focused on application.

In order to lead a discussion on the book, make sure you’ve read the chapters prior to leading your discussion. You may find it helpful to complete the book prior to leading the discussion, but this isn’t necessary.

When it’s appropriate, ask individuals or your group what application specifically looks like in their own life.

Finally, there are two many questions here to be covered with sufficient depth. You’ll need to pick the ones you believe are best for your group to think through.
CHAPTER 21
UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERNS OF STORY

Main Idea: Miller describes the difference between our hope/expectations and reality as the “desert.”

In this chapter:
What surprised you?
What encouraged you?
What convicted you?

Miller gives three ways we usually react to a “desert” situation: Denial (No, really, everything is fine), Determination (I can fix this), or Despair (Why bother?). Which one of these do you find yourself doing most often? Why do you think you react that way?

Miller writes, “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” (p. 184). What situation in your life right now might be a “desert?” How might God be using this situation to draw you to Himself?

What are some specific ways a “desert” situation might actually be beneficial for us in the long run?

Jesus endured the ultimate “desert” situation on the cross. How does His death and resurrection give you hope in your “desert?”

CHAPTER 22
HOW GOD PLACES HIMSELF IN THE STORY

Main Idea: God’s character is good even in our disappointment.

In this chapter:
What surprised you?
What encouraged you?
What convicted you?

What would you need to believe about God in order to persist in a situation where He is making you wait or when your prayers seem unanswered?
Miller writes, “Everyone talks now about how prayer is a 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. 191). Do you think that you can be completely “real” with God? Is there a situation in your life where you are not being honest with Him? What are some specific ways you could begin to be honest and wrestle with God in prayer this week?

Miller writes, “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. In fact, that’s how intimacy grows in all close relationships” (p. 192).

Is there a situation in your life where you feel as though God is not answering your prayers? What would change about your prayers if you viewed this simply as “part of the conversation?”

CHAPTER 23
PRAYING WITHOUT A STORY

Main Idea: Our prayers are connected to the larger story of our lives.

In this chapter:
What surprised you?
What encouraged you?
What convicted you?

Miller writes, “Most of our prayers are answered in the context of the larger story that God is weaving” (p. 201). Do you view your prayers as part of a story that God is weaving? How can viewing your story and prayers within the larger context of God’s story give you hope? How have you seen God working in your past?

Miller writes about viewing Jesus as a person rather than a “prayer machine.” Which view of Jesus do you have when you pray? Why do you think that is? How might keeping your prayers connected to the larger story of your life help you see Jesus as a person?

Miller writes, “Sometimes when we say ‘God is silent,’ what’s really going on is that he hasn’t told the story the way we wanted it told.. with His own stories, the ones we live in, He is seldom silent (p. 201). Where, specifically, have you felt that the story you’re living in wasn’t going “the way it’s supposed to?” How can you begin to pray with honesty and faith in God’s control?”
CHAPTER 24

HOPE: THE END OF THE STORY

Main Idea: Hope shapes our view of the story.

In this chapter:
What surprised you?
What encouraged you?
What convicted you?

Describing a struggle in his family’s life, Miller says, “Our prayers didn’t float above life..Praying was inseperable from working, planning, and good old-fashioned begging” (p. 209). Do you recognize God working in a particular story in your life right now? Pray each day this week that God would show you what He is doing, and how the events of everyday life connect to His story.

“Some writers suggest that God focuses simply on us knowing Him. That is just another version of the despair chart. He is also concerned about our situation” (p. 205). What parts of your everyday life do you not take to God in prayer? Pick one or two and pray about them every day this week.

To see the marvel of the stories that our Father is telling, we need to become like little children (p. 210). Why do you think Miller says that we must be like children to see God at work in the everyday? What are some things you can do to cultivate this childlike attitude?

CHAPTER 25

LIVING IN GOSPEL STORIES

Main Idea: Praying in light of a connected story sanctifies us. Miller defines a “Gospel story” as one where God uses our suffering or trials for the benefit of others.

In this chapter:
What surprised you?
What encouraged you?
What convicted you?

Miller writes, “Living in a Gospel story exposes our idols, our false sources of love” (p. 214). Do you have a difficult situation in your life currently? What false sources of trust or love might it be revealing? What would it look like for you to trust Jesus instead?
Read Philippians 2:1-11. What about this passage seems counterintuitive, or the opposite of the way the world “normally” works? Where might God be trying to do something similar in your life? What can you do to cultivate the “mind… which is yours in Christ Jesus?”

Miller writes, “If we stop fighting and embrace the Gospel story God is weaving in our lives, we discover joy. Paul bubbles over with joy as he writes the book of Philippians, chained between two Roman soldiers” (p. 215). How is it that Paul can have joy in a Roman jail? How can praying in light of the Gospel give you joy in your difficulties?