

The subtitle to this book on prayer is “connecting with God in a distracting world”. If you’re anything like me, this might be a struggle that you can relate to all too well. As Christians, we know the importance of prayer. We know we should pray but too often things get in the way. Life is busy. Getting up and out of the house in the morning can be hard enough. When you add everything that needs to be done, it gets even harder - getting the children up, taking the dog for a walk, doing the cleaning, seeing friends and family. And even when you get a free morning in the house there are all the distractions of daily life – television, Internet, phone calls. Life is busy and prayer gets pushed further and further down the to do list.

In his book ‘A Praying Life’, Paul Miller speaks into this busy world that we all know well. He has felt the same frustrations and difficulties with prayer that many of us have. Through openly and honestly sharing his own experiences, he walks with his readers through all he has learnt about prayer. Miller talks about his own struggles, especially with his family of 6 children, one of whom, Kim, has several disabilities. Kim becomes the centre of many of the stories that he shares in the book, as he and his wife Jill explain how they soon realised that “they did their best parenting by prayer.” Miller’s use of personal stories is one of the most compelling things about this book. Through his stories, he invites us to look at his life, his family, his prayers, and as you look at his life, you see parts of your own life. You see similar struggles, attitudes and thoughts.

Miller gets right to the heart of why we struggle so much with prayer. It’s not just that we live in a busy world. The problem is much deeper than that. Miller dares to ask the questions that have at some point been on all of our hearts. Why bother with prayer? Does it really make a difference? What about when prayer feels powerless and weak? What about when prayer remains unanswered? We often struggle to pray because we don’t really believe it helps. Or we don’t fully trust the God we are praying to. Or we struggle to see how God is working in our lives. This book speaks into all of those questions and invites us to take a closer look at ourselves and at the God we are praying to.

Miller points out that one of the reasons we struggle so much with prayer is that we are focusing on praying rather than focusing on God. He says, “making prayer the centre is like making conversation the centre of a family mealtime. In prayer, focusing on the conversation is like trying to drive while looking at the windshield instead of looking through it. It freezes us, making us unsure of where to go. Conversation is only the vehicle through which we experience one another. Consequently, prayer is not the centre of this book. Getting to know a person, God, is the centre.”

That is why Miller bases his whole book on what he has learnt about God and prayer through the Bible. He invites us to learn more about who our heavenly Father is and who we are as his children. He uses examples from people in the Bible – especially from Paul, the disciples and Jesus himself. From these examples, Miller applies what he has learnt to his own life and then allows us to learn with him.

Even when we know that prayer is a vitally important part of a Christian’s life, we still find it hard to know how to pray. Maybe you’re asking questions like, what does a good prayer life really look like? Or how do I actually learn how to have a better prayer life? This book helpfully answers these questions by focusing on the Father-child relationship that the Bible talks about so often. Miller talks about ‘learning to pray like a child’ by crying out to “Abba”. This is a word we have seen last term as we looked at Romans 8. It’s an intimate and personal word for Father. It’s like calling God, Daddy. That might seem strange to us but that’s how Jesus prayed to God and that’s how we are to approach our heavenly Father as well. Miller helps us to see that God is not a distant and uninterested supernatural force but an intimate and personal Father who wants to talk to us and hear from us. We often think we need to have everything sorted before we pray to God. Or we often get distracted by thoughts and worries when praying. But this book helped me to understand that God wants to hear all our worries, no matter how big or small. He wants us to come to him just as we are.

What many people, including myself, have found to be particularly useful about this book are the practical day-to-day suggestions Miller provides for improving our prayer lives. He gives us insight into his own prayer life, including different tools he has used. He includes snippets from diaries, prayer cards and journals, which practically show us how to use these different tools and how effective they can be. Miller talks about how useful prayer cards have been in his own life and gives suggestions about how to start using them. He even gives us a summary of his typical morning routine. For Miller, prayer isn’t an add-on in life but has become an integral part of it.

If, like me, you struggle to “connect with God in a distracting world”, then I would highly recommend this book which will present you with an attractive picture of what a praying life looks like and will inspire you to understand prayer and our Heavenly Father better.