



DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR THE BOOK BY PAUL E. MILLER

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# Contents

Introduction	<i>1</i>
PART 1: WHY PRAY TOGETHER?	
1 A Glimpse of a Praying Community	<i>4</i>
2 Who Killed the Prayer Meeting?	<i>7</i>
3 The Missing Spirit of Jesus	<i>11</i>
4 A Short History of the Praying Church	<i>14</i>
PART 2: WHAT IS THE CHURCH?	
5 Saints in Motion	<i>18</i>
6 Feeding the Saints	<i>21</i>
7 Are Saints Real?	<i>25</i>
8 Saints Unleashed	<i>29</i>
9 The Parable of the Missing CEO	<i>32</i>
PART 3: HOW THE SPIRIT RESHAPES A PRAYING COMMUNITY	
10 How the Spirit Works	<i>36</i>
11 The Spirit's Path	<i>39</i>

12	Management by Prayer	42
13	Becoming a Praying Leader	44
14	Pray Big	47
15	The Prayer Triangle	49
16	Avoiding the Pitfalls of Prayer	52
PART 4: THE ART OF PRAYING TOGETHER		
17	Beginning Low and Slow	56
18	Forming a Divine Community	59
19	Restoring Prayer to Sunday Morning	61
20	On a Resurrection Hunt	63
21	Becoming Real in Prayer	65
22	The Prayer Menu	67
PART 5: SPECIALIZED PRAYING IN COMMUNITY		
23	Constant in Prayer	70
24	Band of Brothers	72
25	Turbocharging Our Prayers	74
	About the Author	76



## Introduction

My running partner and I go to an exercise class once a week specifically because the instructor pushes us beyond what we would do on our own. The instructor is no drill sergeant, but she has a creative plan each time we meet and it helps us get a little more out of exercise. That's my hope for this discussion guide—that it helps you enter the material and get a little more out of reading it than you might get on your own.

Many thanks to the women in my Bible study who read a draft copy of *A Praying Church* and discussed it with me, helping me develop an eye for what might help other readers digest the book. The prayer practices are included because it feels important not just to read about prayer, but actually to pray together. In our study, we discussed two to three chapters at a time, and I chose one of the prayer practices to use; you can easily tailor a study to the pace and interests of your group.

May God send the Spirit of Jesus into your discussions and fill you with wonder as you watch him work!





PART 1  
WHY PRAY  
TOGETHER?



## A Glimpse of a Praying Community

*A Praying Church* suggests that we are meant to know a kind of communal dependence on the Father and a hopeful expectancy about his work that few of us have known personally, let alone in community. It can be difficult to feel the absence of something you've never known, but as C. S. Lewis famously observed in *Mere Christianity*, our desire for more can be an indication that there is more to be found: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."<sup>1</sup> As you read this book, I invite you to bring your restlessness into the conversation and see if some of your longings are actually a homesickness for the kind of prayerful community we talk about growing in this book.

1. Paul Miller gives us a window into a few prayer meetings he had one morning. What stood out to you about those prayer meetings?

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1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980), 121.

2. If you have glimpsed a praying community in your own life, what did it look like? If you haven't yet experienced one, what do you imagine it would be like?
  
3. When you have prayed with a group—maybe this one, maybe another—what have you enjoyed? What has been hard?
  
4. Why do you think prayer sometimes *feels* like a luxury?
  
5. We often think faithfulness in prayer is a matter of discipline. While discipline is clearly a factor, Paul writes: “I do these morning prayer times not from discipline but from *learned desperation*” (7). How does starting from desperation and/or dependence differ from starting with discipline? In your experience, what is the correlation between your sense of need and your prayer life?



## Prayer Practice:

- Where might the Holy Spirit use you as a catalyst for a praying community? (You could start with the group you are studying with, your family, or your roommates.) Pray for wisdom on how to begin a praying community.

Paul Miller reflects about his morning prayer times, “each of [them] is strikingly different from the others, based on the focus and who is involved, but that’s true of all our conversations” (6).

- Conduct a prayer experiment this week and ask the Spirit to help you initiate two prayer times with different people. Reflect on them afterwards. How were they different based on the different participants and context? What did you enjoy about them? What was hard?



## Who Killed the Prayer Meeting?

Paul Miller’s answer to the question “who killed the prayer meeting?” is more complex than “Colonel Mustard in the Library with a wrench.” One “prayer-meeting-killer” that subtly affects us all is secularism. I love how a story Paul Miller tells in his earlier book, *A Praying Life*, illustrates the influence of secularism on the micro-moments of life:

For her seventh-grade science project, our youngest daughter, Emily, decided to measure bacteria levels along the bank of a local stream. I was doing the project with her, and at our first stop, we waded into the creek, got a water sample, and carefully tested it. We were both nervous about following the precise steps of our little bacteria-testing kit, so before we started, we prayed.

. . . After we finished our first test, Emily took out her logbook to record each step. She asked me what we’d done first, and I told her we’d prayed.

She said, “I can’t write that.”

“Why not? We prayed.”

“That isn’t how it works, Dad. They don’t want us to say that.”

Emily had gone to Christian schools her whole life, starting with nursery school. She regularly attended church and Sunday school and went to a Christian camp in the summer. All her friends were Christians, along with her brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. Frankly, she lived in a Christian ghetto. Yet this mysterious “they” trumped this massive Christian influence in her life.<sup>2</sup>

Secularism is the “they” in this story, which essentially puts a drop-ceiling in between the “Spiritual world” and “real world.” And nothing kills prayer faster than forgetting that God is living and active and on the move in everything from science experiments to daily grace for parenting.

1. This chapter opens with the story of an Indian evangelist who was excited about attending a prayer meeting at a large US church, only to discover that few people came and they scarcely prayed. Tell us about a time when you bumped into this tension between words about prayer and actual prayer.

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2. Paul Miller, *A Praying Life* (NavPress: Colorado Springs, CO, 2009, 2017), 90-91.



## Prayer Practice:

- Have a prayer meeting where you “pray down” that drop-ceiling that secularism creates between our worlds and the “Spiritual world.” Some verses to use as you enter the time:

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1).

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16-17).

- Prayerfully join together, confess if there are places you’ve felt were beyond his reach, and ask the Father to help you see the world as he made it, a place filled with his presence and glory, alive to the work of the Spirit.