

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Part 4: "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"

Matthew 6:9-13

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Scripture Reading

"Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'" (Mt 6:9-13).

Almighty and Everlasting God, we acknowledge that you are our Heavenly Father. You are our provider and our protector. Thank you that you care for our needs and that you meet our needs. As we look into your revealed word, I pray that your Holy Spirit would illuminate our hearts and minds to know your gracious love in such a way that we might pray to you as children who trust their dad, who also happens to be the King of all creation. We pray this for the glorious name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

Jesus once told the parable of a wealthy farmer who had just experienced the greatest wheat harvest of his life (Lk 12:13-21). It wasn't just a good year for his crops – it really was a year to end all other years. I imagine the weather season had been perfect. The sun shone, and the rains fell just at the right time. The soil was primed to be particularly rich and nourishing. With all of the many years of studying his craft, the farmer had surgically planted at just the right moment. And the new seed had produced a greater yield than anyone could have ever predicted. In fact, it was a harvest so big that he had nowhere to store the grain.

So, what did he do? Instead of feeding the hungry of his community out of his abundance, he decided to get back to work. But this time, instead of planting seed and harvesting, he tore down all of his barns and silos and built newer, bigger ones to store his abundance. When he finished the construction and stored the grain, it was a farmer's dream come true. After years of tireless effort, this harvest was so massive and his barns were so big that he would now never have to work another day in his life. He said to his soul, "Soul, you can now eat, drink, be merry, and finally at long last find your rest." But that very night, God said to the farmer, "You will not get to enjoy your wealth, for tonight your soul is required of you." This parable is often known as "The Parable of the Rich Fool." Such is the person, Jesus says, who lays up treasure for himself but is not rich toward God.

This story captivates our imaginations because it reminds us of an important spiritual truth: *in our busyness to provide for ourselves and find rest, we often forget that God himself is our greatest provision and he is our ultimate rest.*

This is a truth we desperately need to hear. Our culture is filled with young people who spend their health to get wealth and old people who spend their wealth to get health. We are convinced that once we get a new degree, a new spouse, a new job, a new house, a new car, a new raise, or a new

promotion that after that we will be okay; that then, we will be able to kick back, relax, and figure out how to pray and read our bibles, love our families, and serve our communities. But the treadmills we create for ourselves fail to lead us to an abiding sense of spiritual joy.

Now diligence, hard work, righteous ambition, and seeking to provide for your family are good things. They are biblical values that should govern the way that we work in our God-given vocations. But more than often, our constant, restless chasing of the rainbow's end involves a deeper heart issue. We are convinced that through our worry and our work, that we can make everything all right. But Scripture tells us that it is in vain that we rise early and go to bed late, eating the bread of anxious toil, because God gives to his beloved rest (Ps 127:2).

Beneath all the noise of our busyness, God is offering us a better way to live. In the midst of lives that include hard jobs, sick kids, and unexpected bills, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray this liberating prayer: **"Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11).**

Exposition

I want to argue in this little verse that Jesus is teaching us more than a short request that we are to pray to God. He is teaching us a new perspective and a rhythm of life that will lead us to *true joy*. For contained in this request are three commands: **1.) We are to acknowledge our utter dependence on God, 2.) We are to give God our specific needs through prayer, and 3.) We are to find our delight and rest in God every day.**

1.) We are to acknowledge our utter dependence on God.

There was once a wealthy widow who believed in Jesus and attended church regularly. Still, she was very unsatisfied and concerned about her prayer life. So, she decided to do something about it. She wrote a letter to the greatest living theologian of her day. The theologian happened to be the great Augustine of Hippo, and he wrote her back a pastoral letter teaching her how to pray. And in this letter, Augustine said that the very first thing that must be done in order to cultivate a rich life of prayer is that we must realize *no matter how prosperous we may be, our greatest need is always God*. No matter what problem we are facing, the greatest solution is God himself. Without him, we are desolate.¹

Jesus is teaching us the same truth. By praying, *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* we are acknowledging that we need something that only God has. Despite all of our American craving to assert our own control and independence, despite our tendency to think we can be self-made men and women, we are creatures whose every breath is sustained by the grace of our Creator. We are more vulnerable than we want to acknowledge. But consequently, it is when we embrace the truth of just how vulnerable we really are that we are susceptible to experience the love of God as our provider.²

Thus, in praying the Lord's Prayer, we are not just reminding ourselves of who we really are, and we are reminding ourselves of who God really is. This is why even though this is the fourth week of us studying the Lord's Prayer, we are just now getting to a request that has anything to do with *us*. Before we start making requests about our needs and wants, we have our hearts awakened to know and worship the God to whom we pray. We are praying to the God who is our heavenly father, the God who revealed his name as holy, and the God whose kingdom is coming on earth as it is in heaven. Thus, in prayer, we are not simply talking to God. When we pray as Jesus taught us to pray, we are

¹ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*. (New York: Dutton, 2014), 84.

² Keller, 12.

reorienting our hearts to the way the bible views reality. We remind our hearts to the greatness of God (Mt 6:9-10), and then bring our needs to that great God in prayer (Mt 6:11).

If we believe this to be true in the depth of our heart, it will propel us toward prayer. If we fail to believe this to be true, it will propel us to worry and anxiety. This is why the Apostle Paul writes: *“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:5-7).*

“The Lord is at hand.” Who is the Lord? He is our Heavenly Father, the rightful King of the universe. He is the one moving in our lives for his glory and our good, and as a result, we can let go of our fear. Simply said: *If we are in control, then we should be anxious about everything. If God is in control, we should be anxious about nothing, and instead be a people of prayer.*

2.) We are to give God our specific needs through prayer.

By teaching us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” Jesus is teaching us not only that God is our provider; he is teaching us that God *desires* to provide for us. God wants us to cast our cares on him because he cares for us (1 Pt 5:7). He wants us to ask for bread because he wants to give it!

When we have a need or a want of any kind, it is easy for prayer to be a last-ditch effort of sorts. It’s like the emergency parachute. We only pulled the ripcord of prayer when Plan A fails. But here, Jesus is teaching us to bring our needs to God as the first instinct.

But (we might ask) if we really start praying our needs consistently, wouldn’t God be less likely to listen to our really important prayers? Basically, we don’t want to fill up God’s inbox with so much spam that he starts dropping the ball on the stuff that matters.

Again, this is why, when we pray, we are first called to summon our hearts to worship. We are to remind ourselves of the truth of God’s greatness and majesty. We are to marvel at the reality of his power so that we can pray our each and every need with hearts full of faith. *Because God is so big, so powerful, and so sovereign, there is no request that is too big or too small for him to answer. We cannot overwhelm him with our need, and we cannot bore him with our details.*

Likewise, by reminding our hearts of God’s character as we pray, we can pray in such a way that we not only know that God is able to answer our prayers, but we also know that we can trust him even when he chooses not to answer our prayers in the way we expect. In other words, God isn’t just powerful – he is good. And because he is good, we can trust the provision that he gives us. This is why we can pray at all times with expectancy, confidence, open hands, and thanksgiving regardless of the outcome.

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) sums up the nature of “Give us this day our daily bread” this way: *“Do take care of our physical needs so that we know that you are the only source of everything good, and that neither our work and worry nor your gifts can do us any good without your blessing. And so help us to give up our trust in creatures and to put our trust in you alone.”³*

³ *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*. “The Heidelberg Catechism” (1563). Question 125. (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1988), 74.

3.) We are to find our delight and rest in God every day.

When we read the words “Give us this day our daily bread,” we immediately think of bread as a general metaphor for our provision. And we aren’t wrong. Certainly, it is not less than that, but it is also so much more. Among the Jewish people, who were the first people to be taught the Lord’s Prayer, the phrase “daily bread” would have immediately conjured a very famous episode in the history of God’s people.

Long before the time of Jesus, long before the great kingdom of old, the people of Israel were a nation of slaves. But with power and might, God delivered this nation from bondage so that they could be his chosen people. He led them out of Egypt where they were slaves, and he led them into what was called the Promise Land. However, between Egypt and the Promise Land was a vast, dry desert with no food or vegetation. And when God led people through this wilderness, he fed them by miraculously providing a type of food known as manna (cf. Ex 16; Num 11:8; Ps 78:24).

Manna was a type of sweet grain that appeared on the ground every morning. But here was the catch. God designed manna in such a way that it could not be stored. It had to be collected every day. The only day that the manna could be stored overnight was the day before the weekly Sabbath, which was the day of rest. *Manna, quite literally, was God’s people’s “daily bread.”* And every Jewish listener would have made that connection when Jesus taught about how to pray.

What Jesus is saying is that God doesn’t just want to provide for us; *he wants to provide for us every day.* In the same way, the ancient Israelites collected manna day after day; we must view our pursuit of God as a daily activity. He is reminding us that *we need the spiritual nourishment of prayer just as much as we need the physical nourishment of food.*

We, on the other hand, treat prayer like we treat Netflix. We binge and then take long breaks. But what we need to do is build a habit. The great protestant reformer Martin Luther taught that the best way to build a habit of prayer was to make it the very first and last business of the day.⁴ *Let prayer be the first thing you do when you wake up and the last thing you do before you sleep.* Let it frame your day in reference to God. You can even use the Lord’s Prayer as a guiding outline of what to pray and how to pray.

By making prayer a daily rhythm, we are teaching our hearts that God isn’t just our provider – he is our ultimate provision. He is not a divine errand boy that fetches our wants. *He is our greatest need.* You can pray for security, but it is only in God that you will find true security. You can pray for friendship, but it is only in God that you will find true belonging and affection. He is the source of our greatest delight and rest, and he invites us to drink of this fountain every day.

So, just as I have done every week of this study, I want to challenge you to commit to praying every day in the coming week, using the Lord’s Prayer as a model for your prayer life. This week, as we have just studied the petition “Give us this day our daily bread,” I want to encourage you to pray the following: *“Lord, grant me the humility to recognize that I am dependent upon you for everything in my life. Grant me the boldness to ask you for all my needs and desires. Grant me the wisdom to know that worshipping you is my greatest need and that resting in you is my greatest joy!”*

Conclusion

⁴ Keller, 89.

We see that this is the nature of God most clearly when we see Jesus himself. In Jesus, we are able to behold the infinite, incomprehensible character and nature of God wrapped up within a person. And in the life of Jesus, we see that God is a compassionate God. He is a God who feeds the hungry (cf. Jn. 6). He is a God who provides for the physical needs of his people gladly. But he also knows that he is our truest need. This is why the gospel according to John records that after performing the famous miracle of feeding five thousand people, Jesus says, *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall never hunger; and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn 6:35)*. Yes, Jesus is the giver of bread, but he himself is the bread of life who meets our greatest need.

What is this greatest need? It is the fact that apart from Christ, we are estranged from God. Because of sin, we are separated from the source of all love, joy, and peace. But God the Father sent Jesus to provide for us. He lived the righteous life we could never live. He died the death we deserved. And by his resurrected, he defeated the power of sin and death so that all who believe could have communion with God by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

We remember this truth every time that we celebrate the Lord's Supper. When we hold the bread in our hand and taste it within our mouths, we are reminded that the God who met our ultimate need will be faithful to meet our daily needs. As Paul writes in Romans, *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom 8:32)*.

Through Jesus, we are invited to know God as our heavenly father and provider. Because of Jesus, we are no longer enemies of God. We are not merely tolerated at a distance. Instead, we have been invited to join God at his family table for a feast. And in the ancient Jewish culture, to be invited to sit at someone's table to enjoy a feast was more than just a matter of getting a free meal. In Jewish culture table fellowship was a sign of intimate friendship.⁵

So, it is with that amazing truth that I would like to conclude with an invitation to this feast in Isaiah 55. These are the words of the God who gives us our daily bread: *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food" (Isa 55:1-2)*. AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities:

- 1.) *"Give us this day our daily bread" is a prayer of humble dependence. How does our craving for independence and control contribute to our sense of anxiety and restlessness? Why then is the truth that we are utterly dependent upon God such good news?*
- 2.) *In what way does the request "give us this day our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11) teach us to pray to God for our specific needs?*
- 3.) *How does the request for "daily bread" connect to the manna of the Old Testament (see Ps 78:24; Ex 16; Num 11:7-8)?*
- 4.) *How does the request for "daily bread" connect to Christ himself (see John 6:35)?*
- 5.) *What are some helpful ways to cultivate a prayer life that is a daily and consistent habit?*

⁵ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 83-84.