

“GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD!”

Matthew 6:11

Lord's Prayer Lenten Series

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You may remember the Old Testament story of the Children of Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Some have humorously stated that the reason they did that was because their leader, Moses, was a man and he wouldn't ask anyone for directions.

Be that as it may, the people wandered all these years on their way to Canaan. And to help provide for them in this desert-like and rocky land, God gave them a bread or wafer like food called manna. In fact, each morning except on the Sabbath, the ground was filled with manna which the people would collect. It was truly “bread of heaven.”

And yet the interesting thing was that the Hebrews were instructed to gather only what was needed for one day. Only on the 6th day, the day before the Sabbath, were they instructed to gather enough for two days. The reality was that if anyone gathered more than they should or tried to hoard it, it would breed tiny worms and be spoiled by the next day.

This meant that the Children of Israel needed to truly trust God for their daily bread. Having only what was needed for that day they needed to not worry whether their next day provisions would come. It meant that they truly believe that God would provide for their daily needs.

In many ways, this is what the petition, “Give us this day our daily bread,” is referring to. We are asking that God will provide for our basic needs today, right now. We are not worrying about tomorrow or the next day. For to really pray this petition is to trust God to provide.

And yet today we have easily lost sight of what this prayer means. Most people in our country, of course, have very little history or understanding of our agricultural roots where families actually grew and produced their own food. Today most people buy their groceries with very little thought about where it came from—more or less about God providing for all our needs.

With freezers, refrigerators, and preservatives we can fill our cupboards to overflowing. The only worms or spoilage we may face today is freezer taste in meat that we have kept too long because we have so much that we didn't need to use it up.

We in our society also throw away tons of leftovers along with tons of partially eaten or used food. Most of us have such an abundance of food that we hardly think anything about waste or about where our next meal may come from.

And the same thing is also often true about other areas of our lives. With the abundance we have of material stuff—like cars, trucks, homes, cabins, computers, smart phones, clothes, investments, land—the majority of us do not even think about the daily bread of daily blessings.

In fact, since many of us are able to work with financial advisors and to plan for our retirements, along with our wills and estates, it is easy to forget that God has any part in this picture.

And so why should we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread?” Jesus is teaching us to remember that no matter how much money or things we have God is the source of all those blessings. No matter how skilled we might be in our vocation or in financial planning, God is the source of all our talents, skills and intellect. It is he who blesses us day by day.

A second thing that Jesus is teaching us through this prayer is to not worry all the time about tomorrow or the next day. To not get so consumed by IRA’s and possible future challenges that we aren’t able to enjoy today. To not get so wrapped up in wanting more and more stuff so that I’m not able to enjoy or appreciate all that I already am blessed with.

Jesus says in Matthew 6:25ff, ***“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body what you should wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them.”***

Jesus goes on to say, ***“And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”*** And later Jesus says, ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”***

It is so easy to get wrapped up in the stuff of this world that we lose perspective on life. It is easy to put things, or status, or popularity over family and relationships. It is easy to think we need to consume our lives with work so we can have the American dream of financial freedom—only to then consume our free time with travel, recreation and gadgets—and as a result only remember God once in awhile when we happen to free up a little time to go to worship.

Jesus wants us to be reminded everyday that all we have—all our talents, our jobs, our money, our investments, our health—are gifts of this gracious hand. And that is why we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” We need to remind ourselves each time we eat, walk into our homes, cash our pay checks, hug our families, travel on vacations—it is all a gift of his daily bread.

A third thing that Jesus is teaching us through this prayer is to be concerned about those who are hungry and who don’t have enough daily bread. The fact that we pray, “Our Father,” rather than “My Father,” reminds us that our needs are not all that matter. In fact, this petition will never be answered until all God’s children have their needs met with daily bread.

As our land prices and retirement funds grow with little effort through appreciating assets. And as our shopping carts are filled to overflowing and the cost doesn’t hardly dent our checking accounts. And as we often waste more food and money in a day than many ever see it is important for us to think about the awesome responsibility we have to be able to give from our wonderful and amazing blessings.

We can give food and money to the food shelf, to world hunger, or give our time to serving those in need. We can help support our missions and missionaries where they serve on our behalf to help others around the world. And we can help support our church and its mission so that the life giving bread of Jesus is proclaimed and shared with all. For the bread of Jesus in us lasts unto eternal life.

A few years ago Newsweek magazine had a special feature article called a “Boomer’s Guide To Health, Wealth & Happiness.” The premise of this special report was on how those of us who are baby boomers are getting older and how we are facing many issues that can cause us great concern. For example, as our parents are dying many are realizing that we are the next in line.

At work many are coming to realize that those in the younger generation are taking our place. We are the generation who is beginning to wonder if social security will survive, and who saw what we thought was our financial security in homes and investments plummet in the economic crisis. It is a time when many baby boomers are embracing their spiritual side. Some are aging rebelliously. And many are reordering their priorities.

And yet this article stated that many of us are still searching for something. Many struggle with having so much and yet they don’t know how to be happy. To pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” reminds us that we are not alone; that God wants to walk with us each day; that God wants us to know the joy and peace of trusting our lives to him.

Give us this day our daily bread. May we, my friends, not just say these words by habit or rote. Instead, may we truly think about their meaning and truly pray them. For God wants each of us to trust him day by day for all things. He also wants us to always remember that all our blessings are gifts of his gracious and awesome love.

Remember, our God truly wants us to not be consumed by all the stuff in our lives, but rather to give and share of our blessings with others. The lesson is that as we share our daily bread of giving, love, witness, and care with others God’s kingdom comes on earth.