

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matt. 6:9-13)

One of Grimm's fairy tales is the story of the fisherman's wife. It tells of a fisherman who lives in a dirty shack with his wife, and one day catches a fish. The fish tells him he is actually an enchanted prince and begs the fisherman to let him go. Out of surprise that the fish can talk, and out of pity, he lets him go. When he gets home, he tells his wife the story, and she asks what the fisherman asked from the fish as a reward. He says he asked for nothing, so she sends him back to ask that it turn the shack into a little cottage. The fish says, "she already has it". When he comes back, he finds his wife is now in a lovely stone cottage, outside there was a little yard with chickens and ducks and a garden with vegetables and fruit. He goes to bed very content, but a week later, his wife says, "Listen, husband. This cottage is too small. The yard and the garden are too little. The fish could have given us a larger house. I would like to live in a large stone palace. Go back to the fish and tell him to give us a palace." The fisherman objects, but finally goes, asks the fish for a palace, and lo and behold, when he returns, his wife is in a palace with servants.

A week goes by, and his wife decides she wants them to be king and queen over the land. The fisherman objects, but eventually goes back, asks the fish, and it is so. Soon the wife wants to be emperor, and it happens again. Then she decides she wants to be pope, and it happens again. Eventually she wants to have power to make the sun and moon to rise. The fisherman with great dread and reluctance goes to ask the fish again. This time, as we are expecting all along, the fish finally says, "Go home, your wife is sitting in her filthy shack again."

Well, that fairy tale has lots to teach about lots of topics: weak husbands, dominant and implacable wives, the dangers of fishing. But its dominant theme is the difference between need and greed. Originally the wife may have wanted to meet a need, but her pride allowed her to think of her greed as a need.

The reason we all so quickly identify with that story is because it is not uncommon. We know the spoilt-child syndrome: the child who gets everything she wants, all the time, and all sense of gratitude and wonder evaporates from her life. Soon she demands that she receive the best and better than the best all the time, and rages at the world when she does not. She feels deprived, cheated, even robbed, when her every whim and desire is not immediately and perfectly met. Those looking on feel disgust: when the one already overstocked and supplied beyond the wildest dreams of the richest sultans of Arabia, acts as if his greed is an essential need.

I wonder what the page would look like if we asked all in this room to write on it what they believe are their essential needs. A lot of what we believe we need has been shaped by how we have lived for some time, what we have gotten used to, what our expectations are for the future.

But what does God say we need? How do we avoid being like the fisherman's wife, confusing our need and our greed? James tells us that the reason some people's prayers are not answered is that they are asking for their greeds.

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. (Jas. 4:3)

Here in the Lord's Prayer, the fourth petition turns to asking God for our needs. But it is important to see how God has done this. The entire first half of this prayer is entirely God-centred. We have addressed God as Father. We have prayed for God's name to be hallowed. We have prayed for

God's kingdom to come. We have prayed for God's will to be done on Earth. What is the effect on our souls to spend 50% of our prayer praying for God's glory, God's program, God's pleasures? It must surely align us to God's desires. It is from that place of submission that we now pray, give us today our daily bread.

What you and I might regard as daily bread would look very different if we have not prayed for God's glory, rule, and desires than if we have. A God-centred view of our daily bread looks very different to a man-centred view of our daily bread.

So with that in mind we turn to this fourth petition, and once again, we want to take it apart. What does Jesus mean by daily bread, second, why does Jesus tell us to ask for it day by day or daily? Then we can understand what it means to pray, Give us this day, our daily bread.

I. What is daily bread?

This phrase *daily bread* is a little difficult. The word for bread in the original is common, but the word for *daily* occurs only in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew and Luke. It's an extremely rare word. It can mean daily, it could mean necessary, it could mean sufficient for tomorrow. It most likely means the portion that is needed to sustain us. In Old and New Testament times, a day labourer was hoping to get enough money on that day to buy what was then the cheapest food, some kind of bread. He lived hand-to-mouth, one day's wage at a time, and one day's food at a time. Actually, millions of people around the world still live exactly that way.

Of course, daily bread is not meant to be taken too restrictively. In the Bible, the word *bread* comes to mean a bit more than merely the food made from wheat or grains. It takes on the meaning of food in general. 6 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, (Acts 2:46)

Proverbs 30:8 Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches-- Feed me with the food allotted to me; (Prov. 30:8). The Hebrew there is literally Cause me to eat the bread of my portion,

Daily bread is then food and drink necessary for my needs. In fact, bread even begins to mean money that you earn to get the bread.

17 Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, But afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel. (Prov. 20:17) In fact, we still speak about the "breadwinner".

So what this refers to is the daily provision of essential needs for physical survival.

What are our essential needs for physical survival? Now compared to the expectations of modern affluence, the Bible has a pretty minimal standard of what a human's essential needs are. As wealthy as most of us here are, we tend to think of electricity and running water as essential needs, or a good medical aid, or a car in working order. But as important as those things might be, they don't qualify for what the Bible regards as your daily essential portion.

Paul gives a succinct summary of what your daily needs are: And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. (1 Tim. 6:8)

Food and drink to sustain you against hunger, and some kind of clothing and shelter to protect you against the elements: this is your daily bread. Indeed, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is explaining why believers should not be worried and anxious, He refers to only two categories:

25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? (Matt. 6:25)

Sustenance and shelter. That's the Bible's definition of daily bread. Not sustenance and shelter and highly fashionable clothing. Not sustenance, shelter and luxury beauty products. Not sustenance, shelter and the iPhone X or designer jewellery or my holiday home.

Now God may or may not grant you those things. But never fall into the trap of thinking that for some humans food and shelter is their daily bread, and for other of us, luxurious, comfortable living is our daily bread. No, food and shelter is the daily bread of all human beings. If you have food and clothing, God has once again given you daily bread.

But it would be a violent change in direction if all we were praying for was food for the body and shelter for the body. Because then we would have been asking for God's glory, and God's kingdom, and God's will, and then suddenly all we're thinking about is food for the stomach and clothes for the body. Certainly the body is not evil, and certainly this prayer is concerned with matters earthly, and earthy, but it would seem like something of a jump. Jesus said life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

Jesus expanded the idea of essential need on more than one occasion. When Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, and replied, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (Matt. 4:4)

He was saying to the devil, "Something is more important and needful to Me right now than breaking this fast. Right now, what I need is something much more than just eating. I have spiritual needs which actually exceed the needs of the body."

On another occasion Jesus was speaking to a crowd that had just had their bellies filled with bread He had miraculously made. So they followed Jesus. But Jesus knew they were not following Him for the right reasons.

26 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." (Jn. 6:26-27)

Jesus goes on to explain that He Himself is a kind of bread, a kind of spiritual food and drink. He explains that physical food sustains you for a time, and you die, but the spiritual food of Jesus Christ provides you with life forever. Jesus did the same thing with the Samaritan woman, when He taught her that the kind of water He would give would quench her thirst permanently.

But the crowd reacted angrily. How can this man give us His flesh to eat?, they ask. But Jesus keeps explaining that what He means is not cannibalism, and, **contrary to what some teach, it is not a reference to the Mass.** Jesus is talking about faith. Faith: coming to God in love for all that He is. As you take in food and depend on it for life, so receive and take in Jesus Christ and trust Him for spiritual life. Looking to Him in humble trust and loving obedience.

Knowing and loving God is a need of the soul. Jesus is teaching knowing and loving God is as much a need for your inner man as bread is for your outer man. And all things considered, Jesus taught, you should prioritise your inner man because your body is going to die.

What is necessary for the whole man is provision for his body and provision for his soul. The definition of a carnal person is one who cares only for the needs of the body, or who is only

conscious of the needs of the body. The person who lives in anxiety about having enough money to eat something and sleep somewhere, but has no concern over spiritual needs, has prioritised body over soul. And prioritising body over soul is fleshly, carnal, worldly.

Now let's take this as Jesus has taught us: daily bread. When you wake up in the morning, you are aware of the needs of your body. You're aware that you need to clean and dress and feed your body. You pray over breakfast and thank God for the food before you.

Do you simultaneously think, today I need to know and love Christ? Today, I need to feed on Him in the Word and prayer? Today, I need to abide in Christ, and live on Him. It is not a luxury; it is a necessity. I must, in some form today, feed on Jesus.

Do you remember George Muller's counsel: "And yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is a plain to me as anything that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is to obtain food for his inner man. As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time, except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man. We should take food for that, as every one must allow. Now what is the food for the inner man: not prayer, but the Word of God: and here again not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts."

Daily bread is the needs of the inner man, and the needs of the outer man. The needs of the body, and the needs of the spirit.

Lord, meet my need of food and shelter today. Lord meet my spiritual need of soul nourishment in Jesus Christ. Fill my stomach, but also fill my soul.

Now this leads us to the second question.

II. Why do we ask for it today, or daily?

At first it can sound like a redundancy to ask, "Give us *daily* our *daily* bread." But this is deliberate by Jesus. He does not say in either Matthew or Luke, give us our daily bread. In both places, He adds the qualification of how regularly this need is to be met. Now, isn't it obvious that if we ask for our daily needs to be met, then we need that need met every day?

Well, in principle that's obvious, but what Jesus is teaching is that you don't get to order a year's supply of daily bread in one shot. You don't get to ask for 30 days worth of daily bread, and then come back to God in a month for another order. No, what does Jesus want us to do?

He wants us to request daily essential physical and spiritual needs one day at a time.

Now why would Jesus want us to do that? We're reminded of when God gave the Israelites manna. Bread from Heaven. The manna was, in a very literal sense, daily bread. God caused manna to blanket the ground every day. Enough for two million people to eat what they needed.

18 So when they measured *it* by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need. 19 And Moses said, "Let no one leave any of it till morning." 20 Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank (Exod. 16:18-20)

What was the principle? Israel was to trust that God was going to provide for them one day at a time. They did not have to hoard up. They did not have to fret. They had to gather, eat, have their needs met, and trust that the next day, God would again meet their needs.

The only exception was before Sabbath. Then God gave them extra so they would not have to gather on Sabbath, proof that God was more than able to provide two day's worth if necessary. When they stored up on any other day, it bred worms, but when they stored up on Sabbath it didn't – proof that God is in charge of whether you get to keep what you save.

What did God want from His people? He wanted daily dependence. He wanted a renewed commitment every 24 hours.

God made us and knows how we think and act. God made the sun and the Earth and its 24-hour cycles. All of this is deliberate. Each day is its own event, bracketed between your times of being unconscious. It's a strange thing, sleep, isn't it? We go for a certain number of hours, and then we just can't go anymore. And then we lie down in these positions of complete weakness, complete vulnerability, and complete unconsciousness for several hours. Then we rise, and we are okay to go for another few hours. A very humbling reminder that we are not gods. Our lives are lived in between periods of total unconsciousness. Those segments of being awake are our days. And with the rising and setting of the sun, God has made it so that we feel it as a cycle, and yet feel that each one is new.

In Old Testament Israel, there was a morning sacrifice at the Temple, to mark the beginning of the day, and an evening sacrifice, to mark its close. Lamentations 3:23 reminds us that God's mercies are, as it were, renewed every morning. It is not that God has to renew His mercy every 24 hour cycle. It is we, who after failure after failure, go to bed, and wake to a new day, where we can begin again with our merciful God.

God wants us to have one-day-at-a-time faith. This is why Jesus cautioned us against perpetual worry about the future. 34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble. (Matt. 6:34)

Why do you think God wants us to have one-day-at-a-time faith? What breeds in the human heart when we don't have a sense of daily faith? Here's an example in Luke

16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry.'" 20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."
(Lk. 12:16-21)

This is what breeds in the human heart when we think we have escaped the one-day-at-a-time principle: pride. Paul tells Timothy to command those who are rich in this world not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Now God may bless you with a lot more than one-day-at-a-time bread. God may have allowed you to store up for many years. But even if He has, He still desires you to have one-day-at-a-time faith. In reality God can wipe out your savings in a day. God can bankrupt your business overnight. God can turn feast into famine, and famine into feast. God may send you through seasons of pouring abundance, and through other seasons of wondering how you would eat tonight. That's why the walk of a Christian, whether abounding or abasing, is a walk of daily faith.

Job was a very wealthy man, with good laid up for many years. But we read of his humble custom: that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings *according to* the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly. (Job 1:5)

It pleases God when whatever our relative state of wealth, we go before Him, and state our daily dependence for daily provision.

III. What Does It Mean to Pray “Give Us This Day Our Daily bread?”

On the first level, we are asking God to meet our essential bodily needs. We are praying for food and shelter. We may also be praying for the means to obtain these: for a job to come through, for a deal to happen, for help with our studies so as to earn money, for physical strength to work and earn. We could be praying for the way this comes about, the economy, the farmers, drought to turn into plenty, a decent government.

On the second level, we are asking God to meet our essential spiritual needs. We are praying that we would not experience leanness of soul, spiritual dryness, and famine. We are praying God would meet us in His Word and prayer. We are praying for our daily, essential portion of faith in Christ.

But remember, you cannot ask for physical food and then avoid working, buying the food, preparing the food and eating the food. And so you cannot ask God to meet your spiritual need of soul nourishment if you avoid the work of opening His Word, reading His Word, meditating on His Word, and praying His Word. And I think just as the next petition is going to say forgive us, as we forgive others, we should do a similar thing with this prayer. Meet my spiritual needs, just as you meet my physical needs.

On the third level, it is implied that we are giving God thanks. Have you ever thought whether or not we deserve daily bread?

Westminster: “What do we pray for in the fourth petition?” Answer: In the fourth petition (which is, “give us this day our daily bread”) acknowledging, that in Adam, and by our own sin, we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them; and that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us, nor we to merit, or by our own industry to procure them; but [*since we are*] prone to desire, get, and use them unlawfully:

we pray for ourselves and others, that both they and we, waiting upon the providence of God from day to day in the use of lawful means, may, of his free gift, and as to his fatherly wisdom shall seem best, enjoy a competent portion of them; and have the same continued and blessed unto us in our holy and comfortable use of them, and contentment in them; and be kept from all things that are contrary to our temporal support and comfort.

What that is saying is, we do not deserve daily bread, but we ask for daily bread from the storehouse of God's grace. Asking for daily bread is not demanding your rights, it is asking for a favour.

Your level of gratitude is proportional to what you think you deserve. What is repulsive to see is to see a child, or an adult Christian adjusting their expectations to expect more and more, to demand more and more, to be grateful for less and less, because now their level of what they think they deserve is way up here, and most of life is now people cheating them, disappointing them, denying them. If you want the simple, childlike joy to return to your life, submit yourself to what God says you deserve. Get into that place, and suddenly food and shelter look like gifts. And suddenly an

abundance of food and shelter begins to fill your eyes with tears, and your heart with speechless gratitude.

*When all thy mercies, O my God,
my rising soul surveys,
transported with the view, I'm lost
in wonder, love, and praise.*

*Ten thousand thousand precious gifts
my daily thanks employ,
and not the least a cheerful heart
which tastes those gifts with joy.*

That's the opposite of the fisherman's wife. That's the heart of give us today our daily bread.