

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

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Matthew 6:7-13

Sermon Series:
Pray Daily: Igniting
Our Passion for God

Today marks our 22nd day of prayer. For those who are visiting us today, our church is engaged this summer in 90 days of prayer.

We want prayer to become habit-forming in your life. A habit is something we do over and over again until a new behavior becomes firmly established. Once a new habit is learned, we no longer need to expend time and energy in motivating ourselves to do it.

Ninety percent of everything we do is the result of habit. Psychologist William James described people as “bundles of habits.” Most everything we did earlier this morning was the result of habit. What time we awoke, what we had for breakfast, the ritual of getting dressed, the route we took to church, where we parked and sat this morning was likely the result of habit.

It takes anywhere from 21 to 45 days to establish a new habit, so 90 days of prayer ought to clinch it for you. Our goal is not a 90-day prayer experience, our objective is a lifelong encounter with Jesus Christ through prayer. We want prayer to become such a regular part of our day, that if we skip it, we’ll miss it. Our goal is not creating new habits for habit’s sake. Our intent is to ignite our passion for God.

The first three petitions of The Lord’s Prayer orient us to God’s concerns: Your name hallowed, your kingdom come and your will be done. The fourth petition pertains specifically to our interests: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

How do we pray this prayer in an age of prosperity? It seems almost insincere to pray for daily bread when there is food enough in our pantries to last for months on end. We are blessed with so much material prosperity, compared with the rest of the world, that we lose all sense of our daily dependence on God. I am tempted to think of myself as my own provider. I don’t really need God for my daily bread.

In the classic war western movie *Shenandoah*, Jimmy Stewart stars as a Virginia farmer trying to keep his family out of the Civil War. There is a scene at the outset of the movie where his family is gathered at table for an elaborate meal. Jimmy prays, “Lord, we cleared this land. We plowed this land, planted it and harvested it. We cooked the harvest. We wouldn’t be here and eating it if we hadn’t done it all ourselves. We worked dog-boned hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you just the same anyway, Lord, for the food we’re about to eat. Amen.”

We would do well to heed the words of Deuteronomy: “My power

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and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. Remember the Lord our God, it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth” (18:17-18).

God supplies a favorable climate and ample rainfall for our daily bread. What would happen if our region, which consumes 500 million gallons of water daily, experienced a prolonged drought? Despite the lack of rainfall, our reservoirs are nearly full. Our grocery stores supply a dizzying array of breads from which to choose. We’ve got it made, folks, yet we hardly even notice.

Our attention, today, is directed to this fourth petition—“Give us this day our daily bread.” I’ll be focusing specifically on the last three words of this petition, “our daily bread.”

The first word is “bread.” You’ll notice the other five petitions of this prayer are obviously spiritual in nature: your name, your kingdom and your will, as well as our debts and our temptations. But this fourth petition is undeniably physical. Give us...bread.

Some people insist on praying for spiritual bread from heaven. The first century heresy called Gnosticism believed the material world to be evil while the spirit world is good. Therefore, Jesus would not be overly concerned with temporal bread; his focus would be exclusively on spiritual food.

There is a danger in over-spiritualizing Jesus’ words. The Bible affirms the goodness of the

material world. When God fashioned the material world, he pronounced it good. Madonna is right in one respect, we live in a material world! Praying for bread is entirely appropriate for life in this material world. God cares about our physical well-being.

The second word is daily, as in “daily bread.” The word “daily” is the only instance where this specific Greek word appears anywhere in Scripture. This word is found nowhere else in ancient literature as well. We call a word or phrase that occurs only once in a written language a hapax legomenon. There are other words that appear once in the Bible. Take the phrase “gopher wood.” God directs Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14). Since this phrase is not found anywhere else in ancient literature, no one is quite sure what on earth is meant by the phrase “gopher wood.”

The words that begin this fourth petition, “Give us this day,” most likely provide us with the clue. Since the adjective associated with bread must be consistent with the words “this day,” most scholars translate the word as “daily.”

Now why am I making a big deal out of this word “daily”? Jesus doesn’t direct us to ask for a month’s supply of bread. He doesn’t lead us in prayer for silos full of bread. If we pray this prayer in the morning, we ask for bread sufficient for the coming day. If we pray it in the evening, we ask for bread enough for tomorrow. Either way, Jesus invites us to pray for daily bread. How does God

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provide for our needs? God supplies our need day by day.

When God's people in the Old Testament escape slavery in Egypt by way of the desert, they complain about being hungry (Exodus 16:1). "We're hungry" sounds like something our kids used to say from the back seat on long car rides. The people complain they ate better as slaves in Egypt than nomads in the desert (16:2-3). So God resolves to shower them with bread from heaven (16:4). Sure enough, the next morning they discover a wafer-like substance with the appearance of frost covering the ground (16:14). The people ask "man-nu" or "what is it?" (Exodus 16:15) The name sticks - manna. God instructs the people to gather only a day's portion (16:4). Anything more would spoil.

We might call this "the manna principle." God provides for His people on a daily basis. In the manna principle, manna comes one day at a time.

Children instinctively understand this manna principle. Children don't normally hoard their food. They trust their parents to provide for their daily needs. Children are naturally adept at living in the moment.

Most adults have a hard time living in the moment. We fixate on the past or obsess about the future. When are we going to learn that we can't change the past or control the future? The only thing we can affect is the present. Jesus

instructs us to pray for what we need in the present moment. God help us to live in the moment.

Jesus says later, in his Sermon on the Mount, "So do not worry say-ing, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'... Your heavenly Father knows that you need these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. There-fore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:31-34).

Give us daily bread is essentially a prayer for what we really need. Give us bread, not fine cuisine. Give us essential things, not frivolous things. Give us what we need today.

The third word is "our," as in "our daily bread." Notice Jesus doesn't pray for "my bread." He doesn't pray in first person singular. He prays for our bread, not his bread.

I suspect when many of us recite The Lord's Prayer, we pray it as a prayer for me and mine. This prayer was given by Jesus as a communal prayer. We pray it in solidarity with people all over the world.

We can never turn a blind eye to the poor and pray this prayer. We pray this prayer in a world where there is enough food to feed everyone. Hunger is strictly a human invention. If only people had learned the lesson of daily manna!

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Sir Thomas More said it well in the 1500s: “The things, good Lord, that we pray for, give us grace to work for.”

This prayer has pointed reference to our material need, although Jesus also speaks about another kind of bread. He said, “Do not labor for the bread that perishes, but the bread that endures for eternal life.” People respond, “Sir, give us this bread from heaven.” Jesus declares, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry” (John 6:35).

I know people whose every material need is supplied, who enjoy every possible creature comfort, who are still hungry. Bruce Springsteen had it right: “Everybody’s got a hungry heart.” The Rolling Stones still “can’t get no satisfaction,” even though Mitch still sings, “And I try and I try and I try and I try.” St. Augustine had this to say in the 5th century: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

“Man does not live by bread alone.” Panera Bread and Great Harvest Bread will never satisfy our hungry hearts. This craving we experience is, in actuality, a hunger for God.

We’re hungry for love, attention, success, praise. Some of us keep thinking I’ll meet the love of my life or land that perfect job or buy that dream home. Some of us hop like a monkey from person-to-person, desire-to-desire and thought-to-thought. We may find

what we are looking for temporarily, but before long, we’re craving for more.

Only Jesus can satisfy our hungry hearts. I don’t know how to say it any other way. Only you satisfy our hungry hearts, O Lord.

