

PRAYER

Prayer and Our Tangible Needs

January 21, 2018 - Matthew 6:11

The Lord's Prayer

5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 Pray then like this:

“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 also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

11. Until now the petitions have concerned the great causes of God and his kingdom; at this point Jesus’ attention moves to the personal needs of the worshiper. It is interesting that immediately following the prayer for the perfect establishment of the kingdom of heaven and the accomplishment of the will of God we have a prayer for *bread* here and now. This was so incredible to many in the early church that they spiritualized the expression and understood it of Holy Communion or “the invisible bread of the Word of God” (Augustine, p. 42; he finds other meanings as well). In modern times we often find scholars claiming that the expression refers to the messianic banquet in the coming age. Both miss the point that Jesus takes seriously our physical needs. The word translated *daily* is difficult, but a survey of the evidence indicates that the ancient understanding “daily” fits the facts as well as any; “for the coming day” has essentially the same meaning. The prayer prayed in the morning seeks bread for the day opening out before the praying person, while prayed at night it

seeks bread for the coming day. Both ways of taking the word see it as looking to God for the supply of one's immediate needs, not those of the indefinite future. Jesus says that we should do no more than ask for food sufficient for the day on the day. *Give* recognizes that our basic food is not the result of our unaided endeavor; it is the gift of God, while today is important as pointing to a day-by-day reliance on God. The prayer encourages a continuing dependence on God; it does not countenance a situation in which the disciple asks God for a supply for a lengthy period, after which prayer he can go on for some time in forgetfulness of God. He depends on God constantly, and this dependence is expressed in this prayer.¹

11. Give us this day our daily bread—The compound word here rendered “daily” occurs nowhere else, either in classical or sacred *Greek*, and so must be interpreted by the analogy of its component parts. But on this critics are divided. To those who would understand it to mean, “Give us this day the bread of to-morrow”—as if the sense thus slid into that of Luke “Give us *day by day*” (Lu 11:2, as Bengel, Meyer, &c.) it may be answered that the sense thus brought out is scarcely intelligible, if not something less; that the expression “bread of to-morrow” is not at all the same as bread “from day to day,” and that, so understood, it would seem to contradict Mt 6:34. The great majority of the best critics (taking the word to be compounded of *ousia*, “*substance*,” or “*being*”) understand by it the “*staff of life*,” the bread of *subsistence*, and so the sense will be, “Give us this day the bread which this day’s necessities require.” In this case, the rendering of our authorized version (after the *Vulgate*, Luther and some of the best modern critics)—“our daily bread”—is, in sense, accurate enough. (See Pr 30:8). Among commentators, there was early shown an inclination to understand this as a prayer for the heavenly bread, or spiritual nourishment; and in this they have been followed by many superior expositors, even down to our own times. But as this is quite unnatural, so it deprives the Christian of one of the sweetest of his privileges—to cast his bodily wants in this short prayer, by one simple petition, upon his heavenly Father. No doubt the spiritual mind will, from “the meat that perisheth,” naturally rise in thought to “that meat which endureth to everlasting life.” But let it be enough that the petition about bodily wants irresistibly *suggests* a higher petition; and let us not rob ourselves—out of a morbid spirituality—of our one petition in this prayer for that bodily provision which the immediate sequel of this discourse shows that our heavenly Father has so much at heart. In limiting our petitions, however, to provision for the day, what a spirit of childlike dependence does the Lord both demand and beget!²

¹ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (pp. 146–147). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

² Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 26). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Our daily bread. This first request for personal needs employs a term, **daily**, found only once in secular Greek (Arndt, p. 296). Opinions of its meaning vary among “daily,” “necessary for existence,” and “for the coming day.”³

6:11. This verse alludes to God’s provision of “daily bread” (manna) for his people in the wilderness after he first redeemed them. Prayers for God to supply one’s basic needs—of which bread and water are the ultimate examples—were common in the ancient world (cf. Prov 30:8).⁴

(5) Petition for personal needs such as **daily** food is also to be a part of prayer. “Daily” (*epiousion*, used only here in the NT) means “sufficient for today.”⁵

6:11 “Give us” As the first three petitions dealt with how believers are to respect God, the next three deal with how they want God to treat them.

“**this day**” God wants His children to live by faith in Him daily. One OT example was that the manna was given daily (cf. Ex. 16:13–21). In the Middle East bread is baked early every day and either eaten or dried hard by nightfall. Today’s bread will not do for tomorrow.

“**daily**” This was a rare Greek word. It was used (1) in the Egyptian papyri of a master giving a slave enough food to accomplish an assigned task or; (2) possibly a Greek idiom “for necessary food for today” (“bread of our necessity”); (3) the *Tyndale Commentary on Matthew* has “Give us the necessary strength so that life’s trials do not become for us occasions of spiritual temptations” p.74. The word was only used here in the NT and in the parallel in Luke 11:3.

- “**bread**” Several possibilities of how “bread” should be understood: (1) literal bread; (2) the Lord’s Supper (cf. Acts 2:46); (3) the Word of God, the Bible; (4) the Living Word, Jesus; or (5) the Messianic banquet (cf. Luke 14:15). Option one fits the context best. However, metaphorically it represented God’s provision for all of life’s needs.⁶

³ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F. (Eds.). (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Mt 6:1). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁴ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Mt 6:11). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁵ Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). Matthew. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 32). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁶ Utley, R. J. (2000). *The First Christian Primer: Matthew* (Vol. Volume 9, pp. 53–54). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

11. *Give us to-day our daily bread.* Of the form of prayer which Christ has prescribed to us this may be called, as I have said, the Second Table. I have adopted this mode of dividing it for the sake of instruction. The precepts which relate to the proper manner of worshipping God are contained in the First Table of the law, and those which relate to the duties of charity in the Second. Again, in this prayer, our Lord first instructs us to seek the glory of God, and then points out, in the second part, what we ought to ask for ourselves. But it must be observed, that the prayers which we offer for our salvation, or for our own advantage, ought to have this for their ultimate object: for we must not be so exclusively occupied with what is advantageous to ourselves, as to omit, in any instance, to give the first place to the glory of God. When we pray, therefore, we must never turn away our eyes from that object.

There is this difference, however, between the two kinds of petitions which we have mentioned. When we pray for *the kingdom of God* and the *sanctification of his name*, our eyes ought to be directed upwards, so as to lose sight of ourselves, and to be fixed on God alone. We then come down to ourselves, and connect with those former petitions, which look to God alone, solicitude about our own salvation. Though the *forgiveness of sins* is to be preferred to food, as far as the soul is more valuable than the body, yet our Lord commenced with *bread* and the supports of an earthly life, that from such a beginning he might carry us higher. We do not ask that our daily bread may be given to us before we ask that we may be reconciled to God, as if the perishing food of the belly were to be considered more valuable than the eternal salvation of the soul: but we do so, that we may ascend, as it were by steps, from earth to heaven. Since God condescends to nourish our bodies, there can be no doubt whatever, that he is far more careful of our spiritual life. This kind and gentle manner of treating us raises our confidence higher.

Some are of opinion, that τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν ἐπιούσιον means *our supersubstantial bread*. This is exceedingly absurd. The reason assigned by Erasmus is not only frivolous, but inconsistent with piety. He reckons it improbable that, when we come into the presence of God, Christ should enjoin us to make mention of food. As if this manner of instruction were not to be found in every part of Scripture, to lead us to the expectation of heavenly blessings, by giving us a taste of temporal blessings. It is indeed the true proof of our faith, when we ask nothing but from God, and not only acknowledge him to be the only fountain of all blessings, but feel that his fatherly kindness extends to the smallest matters, so that he does not disdain to take care even of our flesh.

That Christ speaks here of bodily food may easily be inferred: first, because otherwise the prayer would be defective and incomplete. We are enjoined, in many passages, to throw all our cares into the bosom of God, and he graciously promises, that “he will withhold from us no good thing,” (Ps. 84:11.) In a perfect rule of prayer, therefore, some direction must be laid down as to the innumerable wants of the present life. Besides, the word σήμερον, *to-day*, means that we are to ask from God no more than is necessary for the day: for there is no doubt, that he intended to restrain and guide our desire of earthly food, to which we are all immoderately addicted. Again, a very frequent Synecdoche occurs in the word *bread*, under which the Hebrews include every description of food. But here it has a still more

extensive meaning: for we ask not only that the hand of God may supply us with food, but that we may receive all that is necessary for the present life.

The meaning is now obvious. We are first commanded to pray, that God would protect and cherish the life which he has given to us in the world, and, as we need many supports, that he would supply us with every thing that he knows to be needful. Now, as the kindness of God flows in uninterrupted succession to feed us, the bread which he bestows is called ἐπιούσιος, that is, continual: for so it may be rendered. This word suggests to us such a petition as the following: "O Lord, since our life needs every day new supplies, may it please thee to grant them to us without interruption." The adverb *to-day*, as I said a little ago, is added to restrain our excessive desire, and to teach us, that we depend every moment on the kindness of God, and ought to be content with that portion which he gives us, to use a common expression, "from day to day."

But here an objection may be urged. It is certain, that Christ has given a rule for prayer, which belongs equally to all the godly. Now, some of their number are rich men, who have their yearly produce laid up in store. Why does he command them to ask what they have at home, and to ask every day those things of which they have an abundant supply for a year? The reply is easy. These words remind us that, unless God feed us daily, the largest accumulation of the necessaries of life will be of no avail. Though we may have abundance of corn, and wine, and every thing else, unless they are watered by the secret blessing of God, they will suddenly vanish, or we will be deprived of the use of them, or they will lose their natural power to support us, so that we shall famish in the midst of plenty. There is therefore no reason to wonder, if Christ invites the rich and poor indiscriminately to apply to their Heavenly Father for the supply of their wants. No man will sincerely offer such a prayer as this, unless he has learned, by the example of the Apostle Paul, "to be full and to be hungry, to abound and to suffer need," (Phil. 4:12,) to endure patiently his poverty or his humble condition, and not to be intoxicated by a false confidence in his abundance.

Does any one inquire, why we ask that bread to be given to us, which we call our *bread*? I answer: It is so called, not because it belongs to us by right, but because the fatherly kindness of God has set it apart for our use. It becomes *ours*, because our Heavenly Father freely bestows it on us for the supply of our necessities. The fields must, no doubt, be cultivated, labour must be bestowed on gathering the fruits of the earth, and every man must submit to the toil of his calling, in order to procure food. But all this does not hinder us from being fed by the undeserved kindness of God, without which men might waste their strength to no purpose. We are thus taught, that what we seem to have acquired by our own industry is his gift. We may likewise infer from this word, that, if we wish God to feed us, we must not take what belongs to others: for all who have been *taught of God*, (John 6:45,) whenever they employ this form of prayer, make a declaration that they desire nothing but what is their own.

⁷ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, pp. 321–325). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

A related issue is found in the question: “What can I possibly tell a God who knows everything?” Some answer: “Nothing.” Jesus answers: “Anything!” The doctrine of divine omniscience compels us to be totally honest with God in prayer. When dealing with someone whose knowledge of you is limited, you can pretend, manipulate, deceive, even lie. In other words, *ignorance often generates hypocrisy*. Omniscience, on the other hand, demands honesty. What good is it to pretend or play-act with someone who already knows your heart and motivation? Thus, we need never worry about finding ourselves in a desperate condition and discover that God was caught short. “It is as silly as asking for bananas in a hardware store,” says Bingham Hunter, “to ask God for something he doesn’t have. Because your Heavenly Father knows before you ask, he never gets surprised by your request and finds it necessary to send you a form letter saying your answer is back-ordered. He already has everything you will ever need. If God does not answer your petition, it is not because what you asked for is out of stock” (*The God Who Hears*, 41–42). Augustine once said, “God does not ask us to tell him our needs that he may learn about them, but in order that we may be capable of receiving what he is preparing to give.”⁸

4. Give us this day our daily bread

The word “daily” is found in the NT only here and in Luke 11:3. Most believe it means that we are to petition God for whatever food and other physical needs are necessary for the coming day. But we who live in an age of grocery stores and refrigeration are inclined to take our daily bread for granted. In Jesus’ day, however, many people purchased one day’s food at a time, never quite sure if tomorrow’s supply would run short.

Stott reminds us that this petition does not deny that

“most people have to earn their own living, that farmers have to plough, sow and reap to provide basic cereals or that we are commanded to feed the hungry ourselves. Instead it is an expression of ultimate dependence on God who normally uses human means of production and distribution through which to fulfill his purposes” (149).

Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ comments here are worthy of careful consideration:

“Is there not something extraordinary and wonderful about the connection between this request and the previous requests? Is not this one of the most wonderful things in the whole of Scripture, that the God who is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the God who is forming his eternal kingdom and who will usher it in at the end, the God to whom the nations are but as ‘the small dust of the balance’—that such a God should be prepared to consider your little needs and

⁸ Storms, S. (2016). *Biblical Studies: The Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 6:7–15). Edmond, OK: Sam Storms.

mine even down to the minutest details in this matter of daily bread! But that is the teaching of the Lord everywhere. He tells us that even a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without our Father, and that we are of much greater value than many sparrows. He says that 'the very hairs on your head are all numbered.' If only we could grasp this fact that the almighty Lord of the universe is interested in every part and portion of us! There is not a hair of my head that he is not concerned about, and the smallest and most trivial details in my life are known to him on his everlasting throne. This is something you find only in Scripture. You go straight from 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,' to 'Give us this day our daily bread.' But that is the way of God, 'the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy'; who nevertheless, as Isaiah tells us, dwells with him also 'that is of a contrite and humble spirit.' That is the whole miracle of redemption; that is the whole meaning of the incarnation which tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ takes hold of us here on earth and links us with the almighty God of glory. The kingdom of God, and my daily bread!" (2:70).

One more comment: the petition is for daily "bread", not cake! God has promised to supply us with the necessities of life, not the luxuries (although we rejoice when he throws in a few of the latter as well!).

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. **22** "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, **23** but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! **24** "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. **25** "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious 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? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly

⁹ Storms, S. (2016). *Biblical Studies: The Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 6:7–15). Edmond, OK: Sam Storms.

Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. **34** "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:19-34)