

Give us Today our Daily Bread

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[0 : 00] An officer and a private were the last two men alive in a World War I trench. There was no way of escape and the enemy was closing in on their position. So the officer turned to the private and said, Jones, there's only one thing for it. Pray.

Jones exclaimed, but sir, I've never prayed in my life. The officer said, Jones, I don't care. You're under orders. Pray. So Jones said, but sir, I only actually know one prayer. The officer shouted, Jones, I'm not going to tell you again. Now pray. And so as the bullets whisked past his head, Jones got down on his knees. He clasped his hands together. He closed his eyes and said, for what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful.

Well, I wonder what is your experience of prayer? Because prayer can sometimes be difficult, whether it's knowing what to pray or how to pray or even who we pray to.

[1 : 08] During the current coronavirus pandemic, Google searches for prayer have increased by 50%. And so it's clear that for many people right now, there is a strong desire to pray.

And so whatever our experience of prayer, the great news is that Jesus teaches us how to pray. He gives us a masterclass in what's called the Lord's Prayer.

And we're studying each phrase in church at the moment. So today we reach the second half of the prayer and we're going to look at the phrase, give us today our daily bread.

So the first half of the prayer is all about God and his glory, because when we pray, first of all, we should focus on God. But on the second half of the prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray for ourselves and for our needs.

Because before we start praying for our needs, we've got to grasp how God is more than able to meet them. And so the simple phrase, give us today our daily bread, teaches us two things.

[2 : 11] It teaches us to acknowledge God as our provider and to ask God with confidence for what we need. And so those are our two points this morning as we look at this phrase, give us today our daily bread.

One, acknowledge God as provider. And two, ask God with confidence. So first, acknowledge God as provider. When we pray, give us today our daily bread, we're acknowledging that God is our provider.

Now, it might seem strange that the first thing Jesus tells us to ask for is bread. Aren't there far greater needs in life than mere bread? Especially in the West with our wealth and our affluence.

Why pray for something as basic and as simple as bread? Surely, our problem isn't that we don't have enough bread, but that we've got so much bread, we don't know what bread to choose.

Now, bread has become a bit of a speciality food these days where there are all kinds available. So here are just a few different types of bread. There's cranberry and orange sweet soda bread.

[3 : 20] There's rye and spelt bread rolls with lemon, honey and poppy seeds. There's multi-seeded gluten-free bread. There's sun-dried tomato, onion and basil sourdough.

And these are just a few. And yet, despite the variety, bread is a staple food. Bread has always been part of the human diet in every culture because it's a necessity for life.

That's why Jesus tells us to pray, give us today our daily bread. We're asking God to provide what we need for life itself.

So the word give in the petition reminds us the very basic necessities of life are a gift from God. God needs to supply food to meet our physical needs in order for us to survive.

So he is our provider who graciously gives what we need. And so praying this prayer is to recognise our daily dependence on God for everything.

[4 : 23] So bread, of course, but all kinds of food, as well as clothing, shelter. In fact, everything that's necessary for life. Just think about it.

We eat food. Food gives us strength, which keeps us healthy, which gives us energy to work, which enables us to go out and buy more food so that we might be nourished, so that we might go and eat and work and so on and so on and so on.

So this is a prayer that extends beyond the physical and the material to our spiritual and emotional needs as well. By praying, give us today our daily bread.

We're acknowledging to God that we depend on him to provide what we need in every way and every day. Because everything we need for life comes from his gracious hand.

But some might say, hang on a minute. I actually provide for myself. I have a job. I studied hard to get that job. I work hard to earn money.

[5 : 29] So I meet my own needs. I don't depend on God for anything. But we've got to be careful. We shouldn't try to kid ourselves into thinking that we are totally self-sufficient.

Because without God's provision, we wouldn't even have the strength to pick up a piece of bread.

That's how dependent on him we really are. He gives life and everything we need to live it.

We have hearts that beat, blood coursing through our veins, and air to breathe because of him.

Now, COVID-19 has been a wake-up call for us.

It's reminded us just how weak and needy that we are as humans. So the fact is that we'd have nothing to eat, nothing to live on, if God did not make the sunshine and the rainfall so that the crops could grow.

If we're going to have bread on our tables or anything else for that matter, God must provide the right climatic and agricultural conditions. We're reminded of this in the Harvest Hymn, We Plough the Fields and Scatter.

[6 : 36] You've probably heard of this hymn or you sang it in primary school. It's actually the golfer's hymn, by the way, We Plough the Fields and Scatter. Anyway, it goes like this. We plough the fields and scatter, the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand.

He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain, the breezes and the sunshine, and soft, refreshing rain. All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above.

Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord for all his love. And so it's not only arrogant, but it's also ignorant to think that we can live without God.

So praying, give us today our daily bread, acknowledges our dependence on God to provide for us, to provide for us today, to provide for us tomorrow, to provide for us every day of our lives.

Because the word translated here as daily is a very rare word. You don't find it anywhere else in Greek literature except in the Lord's Prayer. It has the sense of the day that is coming.

[7 : 45] So if we pray it in the morning, we're asking for bread for the day to come. Or if we're praying it in the evening, we're asking for bread for the next day. Jesus is telling us only to ask for what is sufficient or necessary for each day.

Not to be concerned about tomorrow or the next day or the next week or next year, but for God to provide what we need that day.

Now this probably recalls God's provision of manna for the Israelites in the desert after the Exodus. Manna was basically the bread that God gave to sustain them each day.

And they couldn't gather more manna than was necessary for that day. So that they'd learn daily dependence on God to provide their bread.

So Jesus is teaching us that we must be daily dependent on God. Well, how do we do that? Not by trying to live independently of him, believing that we are able to provide for ourselves.

[8 : 47] But by living in relationship with him, knowing that we can't provide for ourselves and we need him to help us. You've heard the phrase before, don't bite the hand that feeds you.

It means that if somebody provides something for you, you shouldn't disrespect them or be ungrateful for what they give. And yet sadly, so many people do this with God, our creator and our sustainer.

You see, we can enjoy all the great gifts that God gives to us in this life. Food, family, friends, fitness, fun, finance. And yet fail to acknowledge that God has generously provided us with all of them.

And it's a shocking way to treat God. And so by commanding us to pray, give us today our daily bread. Jesus is reminding us and we need reminding that God provides for us each day what we

need to live.

So until we recognize our daily dependence on God, we'll never learn what it truly means to pray. So that's the first point. Acknowledge God as provider. Second point is ask God with confidence.

[10:01] Because as we acknowledge God as our provider, we're to ask him with confidence for what we need. Because there's a clear order in how Jesus tells us to pray.

So we don't jump to give me what I need without having first prayed our father in heaven. That's why we're able to pray with confidence.

It's because we know who we're praying to. The Lord of the universe is also our heavenly father. And so we've got the privilege of addressing the powerful God in a personal way.

That's why we don't pray to a God who is too remote to be interested in us. And we don't pray to a God who's too weak to be able to help us. We pray to the mighty God who is simultaneously our loving heavenly father.

Because when we believe in Jesus Christ, we are adopted into God's family. Where we have the rights and privileges of being God's child.

[11:00] And so we can pray, give us today our daily bread with confidence. That's what children do, isn't it? Of course, they wouldn't say it in those words, but the sentiment is the same.

It's more like, I'm hungry. When are we having lunch? Or can I have something to eat? And so Jesus is telling us to get straight to the point with our heavenly father.

And to ask him for what we need. And it's only possible to do this when we have this father-child relationship. Now, no other religion dare allow its followers such direct access or ask with such confidence.

But Christianity gives us a God who is our father. And so we can ask him directly for what we need in prayer. Because we're not bargaining to get something on the basis of our religious performance. We're going to our heavenly father with hands that are open to get what we need. Trusting that he will provide. And knowing that he will give us what we need.

[12:04] So if Jesus tells us to ask for the most basic need of bread, we can be sure that there's never anything that's too small to take to God in prayer.

Now, as parents, we want to help our children when they're in need. We want them to come to us and ask for help, no matter what it is. So they might come and say, do this, fix that, draw this, find that, help me with this.

And we want to meet the needs of our children physically, spiritually and emotionally. We don't want them to be without anything if we're able to provide it. And so if we, poor human parents with all our limitations, want to provide for our own children, how much more is God, the perfect father, able to provide for us?

His love, his care, his generosity, his goodness are never in any doubt. We can depend on him to give us what we need. And so we can confidently ask him in our prayers.

That's what Jesus wants us to grasp. But some might say, isn't this a contradiction? Didn't Jesus say earlier in verse 8, your father knows what you need before you ask him?

[13:18] So if he knows what we need, why do we need to ask him? Why can't he just give? Well, of course God knows what we need. But remember, we're in this father-child relationship.

And we grow in that relationship as we pray. And so if Jesus tells us to pray, give us today our daily bread, he wants us to talk to God every day and express our dependence on him.

We're saying we want to live in a God-dependent way instead of an independent way. That's why it's a prayer for the necessities we need rather than the luxuries we can do without.

In other words, we pray for our needs, not our greeds. So praying, give us today our daily bread, is asking for what we need, not for what we want.

Because bread is a basic necessity as opposed to an extravagant luxury. And so we don't pray, give us today our daily chocolate cake. No matter how much we want chocolate cake or even think we need chocolate cake, we don't.

[14:29] So perhaps one of the reasons we struggle with prayer is that we don't seem to get the answer we want. So could it be that we're praying more for our greeds and for our needs?

Now, of course, this doesn't mean that we should live on the bread line or become ascetic and deny ourselves everything except bread. And it doesn't mean that we shouldn't plan for the future by making provision for it.

But what it means is that when we depend upon God, he will always give us what we need. We can't guarantee it will always be what we want, but it will be what we need.

And so Jesus is teaching us to pray in such a way that we'll accept the answer as being exactly what we need. So what do you normally pray for?

What are you asking God to give you? Because any decent parent will always give their child what they need, not always what they want. And so we can trust our Father in Heaven to do the same.

[15 : 38] No child knows what's best for them like their parents do. But whether we're under 10 or a teenager or in our 20s, 40s, 80s, we still don't actually know what is best for our lives.

But the great news is our Father in Heaven does. And so just think of what you've asked God for in the past. Just imagine all those prayers, if they were answered, what your life would be like.

If God gave you what you wanted at that time. So Father God, please give me that job. Father God, please give me that house. Father God, let me marry that person.

Aren't we glad that God gave what we needed, not what we wanted at the time? Because God is not some genie in a magic lamp who's there to grant our every wish.

He is a wise and loving Father in Heaven who knows what we need and gives what we need. So let's acknowledge that he is our provider and ask him with confidence.

[16 : 49] And as we do, let's remember that we're not just praying for our own needs. Jesus doesn't tell us to pray, give me my daily bread. And so prayer is wider than ourselves.

When we ask, give us today our daily bread, we're also thinking of others. We're praying for our family. We're praying for our church family, even for our neighbours and our world.

Because we can't pray, give us today our daily bread and fail to be the answer to our own prayer by providing for others when they're in need.

So, do you pray, give us today our daily bread? Because praying this acknowledges that God is the provider of all that we need.

He provides what we need physically and materially so we can live. But he also provides what we need spiritually so we can live forever. You see, we might have food to keep us alive physically.

[17 : 52] But if we don't have Jesus Christ, then we will starve spiritually. And so whether you call yourself a Christian or not, we are all daily dependent on God.

We need him to give us life. We need him to meet our needs. And he gives us this life. But in his grace, he also offers us eternal life.

Now, COVID-19 has taught us just how fragile life really is. And yet what God gives to us is a meaning and a hope that even death can't take away.

And so while we need physical bread for our bodies, we also need the bread of life. Listen to what Jesus says in John chapter 6. He says, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. And whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. He goes on. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

[18 : 56] Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world. So Jesus is the bread that came down from heaven.

And Jesus willingly gave up his life to die in our place for our sins so that we can live forever. And so there's more to life than getting enough bread or anything else in order to survive.

That's why Jesus calls us to come to him so we will never go hungry. And to believe in him so we will never be thirsty. Have you done that yet?

Because whatever we pursue in this life, it will never satisfy. Only Jesus Christ can truly satisfy our deepest needs in life.

So if you want to receive what you need more than anything else, then you must take Jesus Christ and believe in him.

[19 : 58] Just like a starving person would take some bread to nourish them. Because when we have Jesus, we discover we have all we need. In this life right now, but also forever.

Let's pray together. Thank you, Father God, for sending Jesus. He is the bread from heaven who came down into this world.

So that when we believe in him, we are satisfied. We find life in all its fullness. So that we never spiritually starve.

We thank you that when we feed on Jesus Christ by believing in him, you give us life that lasts forever. And so we pray that in this life, we would be grateful for all that you give to us.

For how you provide for us in so many ways, even giving us life and breath. For we pray that we would be grateful for Jesus, the one that you have sent for us so that we might live forever.
[21 : 09] So we give your praise and our thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.