

GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD
Matthew 6:11 & Proverbs 30: 7-8

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What kind of bread is your favorite—whole wheat, pumpernickel, rye, or just good old plain white bread? When I was a little boy Wonder Bread was all the rage and you can still find it on grocery store shelves. And how about all those breads with foreign names like Italian and French, or the English hard roll which has such a tough outer crust that you can pitch it across a ballfield. We like our breads, even though many doctors tell us to skip this part of our dietary preferences. Why is it so popular? Well for one thing it's been around for a long, long time. Wheat and other similar grains were probably the first agricultural products to be grown by humanity, especially in the Middle East. It was a key ingredient in the development of those civilizations in that part of the world. For example, grains of wheat have been found in the tombs of the pharaohs in ancient Egypt. Furthermore, it's the staff of life in many parts of the world. One of the news stories coming out of the war in Ukraine has been Russia's threat to sink ships carrying grain from that country to other places where people are facing starvation. For those folks grain and the bread which comes from that grain, is literally the bread of life. So let's take a look at what Jesus had to say in this part of the Lord's Prayer when He told us to pray for our daily bread and see how it applies to our lives today.

To begin with, it has always been associated with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It was included as a regular part of communion services in the early church and sometimes people who didn't recite it were forbidden from receiving the bread and the cup. This part of the Lord's Prayer has also been associated with the Bible. Reading the Bible each day was likened unto consuming a serving of spiritual nourishment. Of course, asking God for daily bread had an obvious connection to Jesus. In the Gospel of John, chapter 6, verse 35, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." Saying the Lord's Prayer was a real and personal way of asking Christ to bestow His life giving strength into our lives. Finally, this part of the Lord's Prayer had a future connotation. On one occasion Jesus was having dinner at the home of a Pharisee. At the dinner one of the dinner guests cried out, "Blessed is the man who will eat bread at the feast in the kingdom of God." (Luke 14:15) That guest was expressing a desire which hopefully all of us possess, a desire to see God's rule and reign to come about right here on earth, even as it is in heaven.

Keeping all of those things in mind, let's focus our attention on two of the seven words in this portion of the Lord's Prayer. First of all let's consider the sixth

word, "Give us this day our **daily** bread." Now what does that mean? Here in America our bread is filled with a lot of preservatives. It can last for a long time. Not elsewhere. In many places around the earth, bread has a short shelf life. For that reason in some countries baking bread or going to the local bakery is a daily exercise, especially for large families. But how about our prayer lives and what we're requesting from God? Basically, Jesus was saying that we should live our lives one day at a time and not become consumed by all kinds of worries and concerns regarding what may or may not come to pass in the future. Remember the story about the Israelites and the food that God provided for them during their 40 years in the wilderness? Each day they were to gather enough manna, enough miracle bread, for that day and that day alone. What happened when they disobeyed and kept more than what they needed for each day? The saved manna started to smell and became full of maggots. In other words, when they became worried and anxious that God couldn't be trusted to care of their earthly needs, all kinds problems erupted. They became the beneficiaries of smelly bread. The same thing can happen to us. When our worries about tomorrow and the day after that and the month after that become the focus of our prayer lives, it's actually a declaration of our lack of faith. So don't gather smelly manna when you pray. Ask the Lord for what you need today and trust Him to take care of your tomorrows. None of us needs "worry maggots" troubling our lives.

George Mueller was a man of prayer. In the 1800's he built a number of orphanages in England and he depended upon the generosity of donors to provide for the children. People knew what he was about, but he never asked for donations. Instead through prayer he asked the Lord to place upon their minds and hearts the desire to support his ministry. One day early on, the children arrived for breakfast to discover that there was nothing to eat. The pantry was completely empty. Nevertheless, the children sat down before their empty bowls and George offered the morning prayer thanking the Lord for His blessings and care. Soon thereafter there was knock on the door. A local baker said that he had been awakened in the night with an overpowering feeling that the orphanage might need some extra bread. So he had gotten up early and baked the bread and was here with the loaves. A little later a milkman came to the door and stated that his wagon had broken down just in front of the orphanage. Could they use the milk since he would not be able to get it to the market before it spoiled? God was busy providing for the daily needs of the orphanage, even before they prayed. I am confident that He can do the same for us when we pray. Therefore, we should not hesitate to ask, "O Lord, give us this day or **daily** needs."

Here's the second word that I want us to take a look at, the word **bread**. Now some of you may be saying, "We've already talked about bread." Yes, we have, but we need to ask ourselves why Jesus used this word instead of some other word for illustrating what we should ask for when we pray. As stated earlier, in Jesus' day bread was literally the staff of life. It was the primary food in every household, except for the very rich who could afford whatever they wanted. Vegetables were sometimes not available and meat was a luxury that was only served on very special occasions. Fresh baked bread with a little olive oil was

what everyone ate. It was relatively inexpensive, but at the same time a vitally important part of their diets. Let me explain. Scientific research has discovered that whole grain wheat, the most common ingredient of bread in the ancient world, contains almost all of the nutrients that are needed to sustain human life. We could actually live on bread and water, at least for a short period of time without any other kinds of food. Jesus did not have access to that kind of research, but He knew that it was true just from observation. What did people eat every day, especially when they didn't have anything else? They ate bread. So what was Jesus saying when He told His disciples that bread was the kind of thing that they should ask God to provide and what is He saying to us about our prayer lives?

Listen carefully. We should ask God for what we **need**, not for what we **want**. Let me illustrate. A well to do father wanted to surprise his son with a special gift upon his graduation from college. So he asked his son, "What would you rather have, a new car or a new boat." The son replied, "I'd like to have a ferry boat filled with automobiles." Perhaps the son was just trying to have a little fun at his father's expense. Nevertheless, this story is a reminder that sometimes we wish for some pretty big things when we talk to our Heavenly Father, things that might not be so good for us if we got them. I'm reminded of the old TV show called "The Millionaire." Various individuals were given a million tax free dollars. They were instructed to do whatever they wished with the gift. Some used their money wisely. Most, however, squandered the money and ended up worse off than they had been before. It's a sad reflection of what has happened over and over again in modern day America. People have won vast sums of money playing the lottery, only to discover that it became a curse instead of a blessing.

So we ought to be careful what we ask for. Indeed that is what a man by the name of Agur said a long, long time ago in the book of Proverbs. He prayed, "O God, I beg two favors from you before I die. First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' And if I am poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name." (Proverbs 30:7-9, New Living Translation) That's pretty good advice regarding our prayer requests, especially with regards to the temptation to ask for more than what we really need. Or as Jesus reminds us, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:23). An abundance of wealth can lead us to start trusting in ourselves instead of the Lord.

There's one more thing that needs to be briefly mentioned. In teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus said, "Give us our daily bread, and "not" give me my daily bread." Asking God for His assistance is more than a personal request. It involves the needs of others as well as our own. It means praying for our friends, our families, our fellow Christians and for others both near and far. They too deserve to be the beneficiaries of God's blessings, blessings that we can even help to bestow upon them when we pray.

So to wrap things up, we can and we should ask God for what we need. That's permissible and appropriate. It's a very important part of the prayer He told us to use as a model for speaking with our heavenly Father. However, there are two caveats, two things we should keep in mind. First, our prayers should be focused on immediate needs and concerns, the things we are facing right now, not things that may, or may not happen in the distant future. Second, we need to make sure that our needs and our wants don't get all mixed up. God has promised to meet our needs, but He's not promised to grant us all that we want. Otherwise, we might turn away from Him and forget our true mission in life as Christians. As Jesus said to the multitudes during His Sermon on the Mount, "So do not worry, saying 'what shall we eat?' or 'what shall we drink?' or 'what shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well" (Matthew 5:31-33). Or in other words, focus your attention on the things that will advance the kingdom of God including your own reliance upon Him by praying, "**Give us this day our daily bread.**"