

The School of Prayer
Part 6 – We are Beggars, Every One
Matthew 6:9-13

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ February 11, 2024 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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“Pray then in this way:

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 do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.”** (Matthew 6:9-13, NRSV)

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How many of you are quite confident that you will have enough food to eat for lunch and dinner today? Most all of us. I’m aware there are some among us, and certainly many, many more out in the world around us who do not share our confidence, not only for today, but again tomorrow and the day after that. Even some of us here know what it’s like to wonder if the money will stretch far enough to keep putting dinner on the table until the end of the month. But most of us have the opposite problem. We have too much food. We are trying to eat less, not more, dieting rather than starving.

So how does someone like me pray this part of Jesus’ prayer: **“Give us this day our daily bread”**? To be honest, sometimes I have just rushed past this phrase. I may need forgiveness. I may need protection from evil. But in terms of daily bread, I’ve got this one covered. The cupboard is full. How do materially rich Americans who have never involuntarily gone a day without food pray for daily bread? Is this even a prayer we need to be praying?

It is. But to see why, we have to pay attention. Close attention. And so today I want to slow this prayer down and carefully examine three words: “...*our daily bread*”. Together, these three words open up this prayer in important and powerful ways, even for people like us, many of us, who have come to take our daily bread for

granted. So let’s take a look at these words in reverse order.

First, bread. The word “bread” here, in the original Greek, literally means “bread”. Who here loves bread? What’s your favorite kind of bread? Some of you know my fondness for Dutch crunch. Offer me a ham and melted Swiss sandwich on toasted Dutch crunch and I’m offering you my firstborn in return. When we visit Esther’s relatives in Switzerland they serve this simple country bread there called boule – hard on the outside, soft on the inside. The first time I ate this bread along with a grilled Swiss bratwurst, I was ready to immigrate. I love bread. Most of us do.

I point this out because sometimes we want to over-spiritualize this part of the Lord’s Prayer, jumping immediately to the idea that bread is a symbol here for all our needs, even suggesting that Jesus is teaching us here to pray for bread for our souls, not our bodies. There is some legitimacy here, and we’ll get to that, but not before we stop and acknowledge that Jesus is first teaching us here to ask God for literal, physical food, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, for bread, and fruit, and vegetables, and rice, and beans, and all that we need to keep our bodies healthy and our energy strong. Remember, Jesus is the one who saw thousands of hungry people one day and took a little boy’s lunch of fish and bread and miraculously multiplied it to fill their bellies because he didn’t want them to go hungry.¹ Yes, he taught us that we don’t live by bread *alone*, but he didn’t say we don’t live by bread *at all*.²

I’d even go as far as to say that God wants us to have food that we enjoy. Over time some have twisted things to have us imagine that God is against simple pleasures and delights. But what good parent is against seeing their children enjoy good things in life? And our Heavenly Father is good beyond what we might imagine. C.S. Lewis at one point declared, “God is a hedonist at heart.” In other words, God loves pleasure. And why wouldn’t he? God created pleasure. Some rabbis in the ancient world would teach that at the judgment God will hold against us every pleasure that

¹ See Matthew 14:13-21

² Luke 4:4 – “Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” This and all biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

he offered us and we refused or neglected.³ What a gift from God to sit down at a meal that not only fills your belly, but delights your palate!

Beyond this, as we pray for physical food we ought to be reminded that we live under an illusion if we believe today's bread comes to our table because of our efforts alone. We all should have been reminded during COVID of just how fragile our supply chain really is, even in this richest nation on earth. Unless you are eating food that you raised yourself, you and I are very dependent on a system beyond our control that is far more fragile than we might like to imagine.

But even if you are raising your own food, can you really take credit for what the land produces? Some of you know the saga of our orange tree. Planted in our backyard some years ago, the first season it produces only one single orange. All that watering, fertilizing, pruning, and all we got is one orange! I literally put chicken wire around this precious fruit so that it could mature without the squirrels eating it. At harvest time, our family gathered around the table and each enjoyed one and a half slices. Sweetest fruit I ever ate. Next year it was three oranges, then nine, then 18 last season. This season that tree produced 80 oranges! Yes, I counted. The fresh-squeezed OJ has been remarkable. But the process has humbled me. How powerless we are to force food from the earth!

In this part of the world we pray for the weather, but it's sometimes because we don't want the wedding reception or the ballgame to be spoiled. In other parts of the world people pray for the weather because if it doesn't rain, or if it rains too much, there will be no food to eat. We should be reminded daily that our lives are utterly dependent on God's constant provision. Through our daily bread, our lives are spared a little longer, because if all food disappeared in this world, the human race would disappear in about a month. If all water was gone, it would be just a few days. If all oxygen vanished, human civilization would completely end in a few minutes. And if God removed his sustaining presence from creation, left us completely to ourselves, everything would be gone that same instant. Hebrews 1:3 declares that God **"sustains all things by his powerful word."**⁴ Our God didn't just create the world, wind it up, and then step away and let it run on its own. Every moment, every breath, every heartbeat, every sunrise, every piece of fruit and bit of grain that comes from the earth is constantly sustained by him. In our modern world we have been taught that the natural

world, and us as apart of it, are self-sustaining. This prayer reminds us that it is, in fact, God who sustains even the rhythmic functioning of nature.⁵

I can't help but think back to the story of the manna in the wilderness in Exodus 16. God delivers his people Israel from slavery in Egypt, but not long into their freedom they forget their sheer dependence on God to provide. Their feet are still damp from crossing the Red Sea and escaping the Egyptian armies when they build an altar to a self-made god. They actually begin reminiscing about the good old days in slavery when they at least had three square meals a day. Now in the wilderness, they doubt that God will be able to feed them.

If I were God, I would have sent those ungrateful whiners back into slavery until they learned their lesson. But that's not what God does. He provides manna, bread from heaven, to feed them daily, and instructs them not to collect more than they need for each day. Tomorrow there will be plenty for tomorrow. It's all a lesson to remind them that it is always the Lord who provides what we need.

It's said that after the Reformer Martin Luther died, his friends who came into his room to remove his body found a note he has scrawled sometime in his final days: "We are beggars, that is true."⁶ It's true that we are utterly dependent on God for grace and mercy, but also for breakfast and dinner. Our lunch today may not fall from the sky, but that doesn't mean that it isn't an undeserved gift from our Father in heaven. And we become blind and arrogant fools when we look down at others around us in this world who have to beg for their daily bread, forgetting that we all are essentially beggars in this world, dependent upon the compassion of another for even our most basic necessities. It would be good if we got this straight long before our deathbed. We are beggars, every one.

Once we understand that *all of us* should be asking God for daily food, along with thanking him when we receive it, we can then recognize that, yes, Jesus is using bread here also as a symbol for all our needs. What is it that you need from God today besides food? This list is long if you think about it. We need bread, but bread costs money, and money requires having a job that provides a salary, and all of us having fair-paying jobs requires a good government and a good economy, and even this is dependent on peace. When the war in Ukraine began, people in many African countries

³ I'm indebted here to J.I. Packer, *Praying the Lord's Prayer* (Crossway, 2007), 72-73.

⁵ Packer, 71

⁶ Cited by Wesley Hill, *The Lord's Prayer: A Guide to Praying to Our Father* (Lexham Press, 2019), 49.

quickly had no bread because Ukraine had provided a significant percentage of their wheat, and the war disrupted global commodity markets and trade flows to Africa.⁷ So a prayer for peace is a prayer for bread.

Again, what do you need today? Groceries? Yes. But also gas, and good health, and healing in your marriage, and shelter, and social and medical services, and a job, and friends, and patience, and strength, and encouragement to get through the day. Since the God we worship came into this world and became one of us, he is aware of our daily needs, and even the most mundane of those needs are important to him. When Jesus invites us to pray for daily bread he is inviting us to ask our Father in heaven for all the things we need, not just to survive the day, but to flourish in the day.

And here we get to the second key word of this prayer we need to understand to make it our prayer, which is *daily*. In fact, the word is repeated for emphasis when Jesus tells us to pray, **“Give us *this day our daily bread*.”** When the Lord instructed his people to gather the manna in the desert he told Moses, **“I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instructions.”**⁸ This is essentially God asking his people to trust him. In his commentary on this part of the prayer in *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard asks us to imagine a mother who discovers that her child is sneaking and stashing away oatmeal, pieces of toast, and strips of bacon for fear that tomorrow he may not be given enough food to eat. There are situations in this world where we can imagine that child’s actions would be understandable, because not all parents are good parents. But in normal situations, good and loving parents would be astonished and pained to discover that their child does not trust them to provide day to day.⁹

That Jesus teaches us to ask our Father in heaven for bread for the day, and not bread for the week, or bread for the year, means he wants us to trust in our Father alone for these things. Imagine if God gave the Israelites manna for a year. It wouldn’t be long before they started trusting in their storehouses of manna, rather than in the one who provided it all in the first place. Because it came daily, they always were reminded that it was not the gift, but the Giver of the gift, that they needed to trust.

This prayer is a wonderful corrective for fear and greed. It challenges our fear by reminding us that God will provide today what is needed for today, and that tomorrow, as Jesus put it, will worry about itself.¹⁰ It challenges our greed as well because we are not taught to pray for cake.¹¹ Of I would prefer pie. I am grateful for pie when I get it, and such luxuries can be good gifts from a good Father, but Jesus doesn’t teach us to pray for such luxuries. As we pray for daily bread, we ask God for the necessities we cannot do without, and not the luxuries which we do not need.

Having said that, I think Jesus also encourages us to be honest in our prayers. The Anglican Book of Common Prayer includes this line: “Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, *all desires known*, and from whom no secrets are hid...”¹² If simple bread will not satisfy you, and it’s really pie that you want, or if having enough resources only for the short term makes you anxious, and what you really would like is an excessively healthy bank account and retirement which you imagine will give you a worry-free future, you probably should just be straight with God and tell him what you want. He knows it anyway, as all our desires are known to him. Of course, we should know, simply by watching the rich and famous in our world, that worldly treasures do not automatically translate into a non-anxious and joyful life, but in our honest conversations with God perhaps such misguided desires can be exposed so that Jesus can then help us sort them out and adjust them as necessary.

This is another instance where we see that the order of the Lord’s Prayer is as important as the content of the prayer. Before we get to asking God for what we need, Jesus teaches us to begin by addressing God as Father, reminding us from the first words of our prayer that we approach as beloved sons and daughters. Then we are taught that the first requests we bring to our Father in Heaven are not about making our name great, or our little kingdoms strong, or our wills realized, but we are to pray instead about *his* name, *his* kingdom, *his* will. Jesus wants us to get to our needs eventually, but not too quickly. To pray the first half of the prayer with sincerity, is to place your life completely in God’s hands because you love him and trust him. Then, by the time we get to the second half, to our needs, we can lift them to God in confidence and trust. How hard it is to become a child who trusts that her parents will give her what she needs, no more and no less. And yet this is

⁷ “Ukraine/Russia: As War Continues, Africa Food Crisis Looms”, *Human Rights Watch*, April 28, 2022. Read article at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/28/ukraine/russia-war-continues-africa-food-crisis-looms>

⁸ Exodus 16:4

⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (Harper, 1997), 261.

¹⁰ Matthew 6:34 - **“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”**

¹¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, Volume 1 (Eerdmans, 2004), 306.

¹² Cited by N.T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer* (Eerdmans, 1996), 28. Emphasis added.

what Jesus desires for us. We must not let greed or fear get in the way of grace.

Does this mean we don't plan for tomorrow? Of course not. Only a fool never thinks of tomorrow, even in regards to his or her own provision. You are wise, for instance, to make reasonable plans for your retirement as you are able so that you can avoid the day when your lack of planning makes you an unreasonable burden to others. Proverbs 6 advises, **“Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways and be wise...it prepares its food in summer and gathers its sustenance in harvest.”**¹³ The problem comes when we begin to place our trust in those future provisions, which are never guaranteed.

It used to be said in England long ago that no person's property, life or reputation was safe while Parliament was in session. None of what we possess for tomorrow is safe as long as this world is in session. So we plan for tomorrow, yes, but we strive to trust in the Lord so much that if circumstances leave us with only enough for today, we will still be content.¹⁴ We love to pray Psalm 23, **“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.”** But do we believe it? Do *you* believe it? Do you believe that the Lord will never leave you without what it is that you need? Let Jesus teach you to ask for bread, but ask for *daily* bread, bread for *this day*. Then plan for tomorrow, sure, but whether or not your plans succeed, trust that the Lord will provide what you need when tomorrow arrives.

Finally, like all parts of the Lord's Prayer, this part is not just about us. We are taught to pray for *our* daily bread, not only *my* daily bread. While nobody in Sacramento is starving to death, there many people in our own city who are not sure where their next meal is coming from. They must be included in this prayer. Beyond that, of course, there are millions of people in our world who do face the threat of watching their children die because they don't have enough food to eat. Of course we must pray for them.

As we do, not only should this prayer generate daily gratitude that we are among those who have enough to eat, it also ought to generate daily compassion, and maybe even daily repentance. With all the material wealth surrounding us, it is so easy in our part of the world to become confused about what we really need, even to forget what real needs look like. Some of you have seen this sobering video which was put together

by Water is Life, an organization that works to provide clean water in parts of the world where such a necessity doesn't currently exist.¹⁵ (*Watch video at link footnoted below*)

When we pray for *our* daily bread, and remember that we are praying for others in our world near and far who don't have even the most basic necessities of life, we may quickly be led to repent of all the ways we have ignored or neglected the basic needs of our neighbors in this world while, at the same time, complained about our own perceived unmet needs which aren't really needs at all. Perhaps it's not by coincidence that the next part of the prayer leads us to confess our sin. This prayer always ought to stick in our throats, and prick our hearts. As William Barclay once said, “No true Christian can be content to have too much while others have too little.”¹⁶

For this reason, it's so good that our congregation is committed to local and global partnerships which are working to make sure nobody has too little. Along with praying for those in our world who are under-resourced, we should be also be faithful in remembering to pray for these efforts, for the SSIP Food Closet and Mercy Holistic Ministries in our own city, along with One Child One Hen in Kenya, and World Vision in Ethiopia, that God would use these ministries to provide daily bread.

As we pray for the daily bread of others, we should not only pray for God to answer our prayers but to use us, as he wills, to become a part of the answer to this prayer. We pray, “Lord, how do you want me to share from my abundance so that others can have their basic needs met? Lord, how do you want me to vote, so that we elect leaders who are not only concerned with the rich becoming richer, but truly seek a more just and fair global economy that lifts everybody up? Lord, how do you want me personally to give my time and energy to joining in the good work that is already happening towards this end?”

In the Angaza Torchbearers Bible School which Faith helped to start in Embu, Kenya last spring, we take students out twice a week to join local efforts to serve the least of these. I've mentioned before the Embu Rescue Mission, one of the organizations we partner with. This ministry serves street kids, mostly young boys, who are among the poorest of the poor in our world. They are so poor that most of them spend their

¹³ Proverbs 6:6,8

¹⁴ Paul writes in Philippians 4:11-13, **“Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and**

of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

¹⁵ Watch video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxyhfiCO_XQ

¹⁶ Bruner, 307.

days sniffing cheap glue or jet fuel to numb the pain of their lives.

As a short-term ministry, there is little impact we can make in only four weeks. But we are praying about how a long term presence and partnership with this vital work might actually help to provide more than just a daily lunch of beans. The power of this experience for our students, many of whom come from affluent parts of the world, is that they find themselves not only praying *for* those in need, but *with* those in need. And they do not return home the same. As they continue to pray Jesus' prayer for *our* daily bread, the faces of these kids come to mind as they now go before our Father in heaven as representatives of little boys living on the streets in a far corner of the world. As God shapes hearts in this way, he also shapes lives to be used for his purposes.

So we pray for bread, not only food, but for all our needs to be met. And today we pray for bread for today. Tomorrow we'll pray for tomorrow's bread. Finally, we pray not only for ourselves, but for others in the world who cannot pretend, as we pretend, that they are self-sufficient. They know they need God's daily help. As we pray for them, we put ourselves in God's hands to use us to become an answer to this prayer.

In all this, of course, we know that ultimately what we need is Jesus. Even on days when we may go hungry, or see real needs temporarily unmet, we know that if we have Christ that in the end we will find that we have enough, more than enough. Remember Jesus' words from John 6, "**I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.**"¹⁷ Jesus always chose his metaphors carefully. Bread for the belly is important. We cannot live long without it. But if your belly is full today, it will not be long before it is empty again.

Once we feast on Christ, however, we find ourselves increasingly and permanently satisfied, not only in our bellies but in our souls. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once put it, "Christ is the true bread of life. He is not only the giver but the gift itself, for whose sake all earthly gifts exist."¹⁸ As his Kingdom comes, culminating with his return one day to make earth finally and forever just like heaven, we will find that nobody ever goes hungry again. Bellies satisfied. Hearts and minds satisfied. Souls satisfied. In the meantime, let us continue to go to our Father and ask for daily bread, not just for

ourselves, but for all the world. Give us this day our daily bread.

Amen.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read the passage from Matthew 6:9-13 again. When Jesus teaches us to pray for our daily bread, what has come to mind in the past when you have prayed this prayer?
2. Do you believe that the Lord is as concerned with our physical needs as much as he is concerned with our spiritual needs? If so, why is this? Why would God care about the mundane details of daily life?
3. Why, and in what sense, is the Christian life meant to be a day-at-a-time life? Is this how you live your life?
4. Do you trust that God will provide for you tomorrow and in the days to come? Or are you anxious about having enough in the future? Either way, what is the reason for your trust or for your anxiety?
5. What daily bread do you need today? How has God provided?
6. How do you feel called to be an answer to this prayer for the daily bread of others? Be as specific as you can.
7. When Jesus, "**I am the bread of life.**", what does that mean to you?
8. What is one thing that Jesus has taught you through this message? How will that change the way you think and/or live from now on?

Table to Table: A Question for kids and adults to answer together.



*Why do we ask God for our food?
Does our food come from God?
If so, what else do we need God to give us today?*

¹⁷ John 6:48-50

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Harper, 1954), 67.