

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD (Lord Teach us to Pray - online series)

Ex. 16, John 6, May 10, 2020 - Immanuel - Senior Pastor; Dr. Kelly McClendon

In honor of Mother's Day I'm going to attempt to share a joke I read this week.

As the story goes, three sons grew up and left home to make their way in the world and they prospered and became very wealthy. Getting back together many years later, they discussed the lavish gifts they were able to give their elderly Mom for the most recent Mother's Day.

The first said, *"I built a big house for our mother."* The second said, *"I sent her a Mercedes Benz with a driver."* The third smiled and said, *"I've got you both beat. You know how Mom enjoys the Bible, but she can't see very well now. I sent her a brown parrot that can recite the entire Bible. It took 20 monks in a monastery 12 years to teach him. I had to pledge to contribute \$100,000 a year for 10 years, but it was worth it. Mom just has to name the chapter and verse, and the parrot will recite it."*

Soon after, the Mom sent out letters of thanks: *"Milton,"* she wrote the first son, *"The house you built is so huge. I live in only one room, but I have to clean the whole house."* *"Marvin,"* she wrote to another, *"I stay home all the time, so I never use the Mercedes, and the driver is so rude!"*

"Dearest Melvin," she wrote to her third son, *"You were the only son to have the good sense to know what your mother really likes. That chicken you sent was delicious."*

We're not going to talk about chicken today, or even Mother's very much, but we are going to talk a lot about bread - which, to me, is more delicious than chicken. Bread.

One of the things my dear wife, and the Mother of our children, has been doing during this pandemic is baking more than usual. Last week she made two pies and three loafs of bread - so I'm looking forward to clothing stores opening again so I can buy some bigger pants! I love bread - almost any and every kind - but my wife makes the best - as my waistline can prove.

Jesus teaches us to pray and ask God to give us our daily bread. I'm happy to take that lesson to heart, it's an easy thing to pray for, but then it may mean more than we think it means.

It's interesting that in Western culture, we sometimes speak of one spouse in a marriage as the primary wage earner in the home. More colloquially, we call that person "the bread winner." In many cultures, bread is a powerful symbol of provision for most essential needs.

I want to begin with a quick look at some scenes from the Bible to help us understand what it really means to pray the words; *"Give us this day our daily bread..."*

The first scene or story took place more than 3,000 years ago and we read about it in Exodus 16. By the time this chapter opens up, God's people had been set free by the power of God after hundreds of years of captivity in Egypt. Throughout all the plagues the Hebrews were protected and provided for as God brought both the Egyptian empire to its knees.

Then God parted the Red Sea and made a way where there seemed to be no way. Now, after seeing all of that, after experiencing God's power and provision first hand, you would think that these people would be confident that God was worthy of their trust and obedience.

Nope, not really. When they were just one month out of Egypt Exodus 16 records this,
"...the whole community of Israel spoke bitterly against Moses and Aaron. "Oh, that we were back in Egypt," they moaned. "It would have been better if the LORD had killed us there! At least there we had plenty to eat. But now you have brought us into this desert to starve us to death."

All too quickly they forgot both their dependence on God, and God's ability and willingness to guide them and to provide for them. We often do this as well - individually and collectively.

I am reminded of the words of President Lincoln in his Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1863.

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown.

But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people.

I'm hoping the leaders and people of our nation pray something like this in these hard days.

The Hebrew people had forgotten God, but God had not forgotten them nor forsaken them.

Let's get back to Exodus 16, it is a long text, so I am going to read selected verses,

The Lord said to Moses, *"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.'"* That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, *"What is it?"* For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, *"It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer [about 3 pounds] for each person you have in your tent.'"* The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the *omer*, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed. Then Moses said to them, *"No one is to keep any of it until morning."* (It took them awhile to follow those instructions - but eventually their trust in God grew)

As the story goes on, we see that the Lord provided daily bread, just enough for each day, except at the end of the week they got a double portion to cover for them over the Sabbath day. They lived like this for 40 years, day by day - to their mouths from the hand of God - before they were ready to enter the promised land.

I've always thought this bread-like stuff probably looked a lot like Frosted Flakes cereal. But since Frosted Flakes were not yet invented, they just named it "*Manna.*" Which basically means, "*What is it?*" In other words, "*We haven't a clue what it is, but we've got to call it something.*" Even though the Israelites didn't know what this Manna was, they did know one thing: **They were hungry and God provided food for them to eat.** God had to remind them (as He would again and again) that He could be trusted to guide them and to provide for them.

The second scene is from when Jesus had been out in the wilderness for many days - He hadn't eaten, He was very hungry. The Devil came to Him and said, "*If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.*" Jesus answered, "*No. The scriptures say, 'People need more than bread for their life, they must feed on every word of God.'*" (Mt 4:2-3)

The third scene is when Jesus was on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. Chad read that text for us, but let me summarize it a bit. A great crowd gathered to listen to Jesus, and they stayed long enough to become very hungry. In response, Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fish, multiplied them and fed 5,000+ people (*counting women and children it was probably at least double or triple that number*). Think about it... that's a lot of bread, especially in a poor county a long way from any bakery. After they ate, the people thought "*Hey, this guy would make a great king - He could cut our costs for groceries. We've found a new source of daily bread.*" But Jesus wasn't interested in being that kind of King so He took off to the mountains to pray.

The next morning Jesus was with the disciples on the other side of the lake and the people he had fed the day before tracked Him down for a second helping. Jesus said to them;

"The truth is, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you saw the miraculous sign. [Let me interject - I believe seeing Jesus Himself as the Christ was the real miraculous sign] But you shouldn't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that I, the Son of Man, can give you. For God the Father has sent me for that very purpose." They replied, "*What does God want us to do?*" Jesus told them, "*This is what God wants you to do: Believe in the one he has sent.*" They replied, "*You must show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What will you do for us? [What had He just done!?] After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! As the Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.'*" Jesus said, "*I assure you, Moses didn't give them bread from heaven. My Father did. And now He offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*" "Sir," they said, "*give us that bread every day of our lives.*" Jesus replied, "*I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever be hungry again. Those who believe in me will never thirst.*" (John 6:26-35)

That's three biblical scenes or stories which I believe can help us better understand what Jesus meant when He taught us to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread*"

Before we continue, we should define what is meant by the word "bread" in that prayer. As you should be able to tell from the Bible scenes or stories I've shared, it means more than the kind of bread we bake and eat or to other kinds of food or material things.

To some extent, Jesus is telling us to pray for our basic material needs, God cares about that and God wants us to have what we need to survive and thrive, but I believe it also refers to our other needs as well, whether they are physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual. Our daily bread symbolizes what we need most to sustain and fulfill us in this life, and beyond.

Now I want to talk about some transformations God makes possible when we sincerely pray these words, *“give us this day our daily bread...”* **FIRST of all we can be transformed...**

From Fear To Confidence. We need to understand that before and during the time of Christ most people didn't feel God was someone they could approach personally. They had the priests who could offer prayers for the nation – but the average Jew did not view God as someone that they could go to with their daily needs. In fact one of their main criticisms of Jesus was that He called God “Father” and encouraged other people to do so - it was scandalous for them to imagine a relationship with God that was so intimate and personal.

Jesus challenged this mind-set in the Lord's Prayer, and in his parables and teaching. Jesus taught that we should go to God with all of our needs, even the most basic of needs, because He loves us and wants to help us. He said, *“If you who sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.”* Lessons like that and the Lord's prayer help us to remember that we have a Father who cares about our needs and we can approach Him with confidence instead of fear. Because of Christ, we know that God loves and wants to help us in our times of need.

This prayer can also transform us from Grumbling To Gratitude. Remember when the Israelites were out in the desert - they were grumbling against God. They had seen God's powerful provision. They saw God part the Red Sea, protect them from Pharaoh, and guide them through the wilderness - and yet - they were still grumbling. A month earlier they were slaves - and now they were free! They seem a bit clueless... but don't we do the same thing?

It is so easy for us (like the Israelites) to forget all the ways and times that God has taken care of us... isn't it? One week we are thanking God for all His blessings, and the next we are crying, saying, *“God you don't love me, you won't help me, what have done for me lately?”* What has God done for us? God has blessed us and provided for us again and again.

The word “give” in “Give us this day our daily bread” reminds us that every blessing in our lives is give to us by God. James 1:17 says, *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...”* God has provided us with so many good things - things like food, friendships, family, homes, education, jobs, our minds, this church, the created world of nature, and the fact that we exist at all. Every good thing in our lives is give to us by God.

Now, I think most people want to take some credit for the good things they possess.

They figure, much of it came as result of their own hard work... right? There is some truth to that. The Bible affirms self-reliance, hard work, sacrifice and discipline - and rewards for it - those are good things - but remember to give God the credit because God makes it all possible.

Deut. 8:16-18, says it like this, “[God] gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers...”

Each of us has so much to be thankful for, and we must never forget that God has been good to us. Whenever we pray for a new serving of daily bread, we need to be remember and be grateful for all the days that came before and all the ways God has provided for us.

This prayer can also transform us From Greed to Contentment. Notice that Jesus says that we are to pray for our daily bread - NOT for our daily dessert. We are not told to pray something like, “*Lord give me my daily waffle cone filled Graeter’s Ice Cream.*” I am sure the Lord knows how good that stuff is, and I know some days it feels so essential to have it - but you must admit it is a luxury and not a necessity.

I heard a pastor say that Jesus encourages us to pray for “our needs not our greeds.” We are called to ask God for what we really need, not for everything our self-indulgent culture says we ought to have. Jesus knows how often it is true that what we truly need is the opposite of what we think we want or need.

Shortly after teaching this prayer Jesus said, “*Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own.*” (Lk 12:15) Some versions say, life is not measured by an “*abundance of possessions.*” The word translated as greed here - is a compound Greek word that means “*to always want more*” or to always be wishing for what you don’t yet have. The answer for most people in our culture to the question “*How much is enough?*” is this “*Just a little bit more.*”

Why are people like that? Our sinful human nature is the real reason - but we’re also bombarded, every day by millions of messages that tell us that “having more” will eventually lead to contentment. But this vision of finding fulfillment in more stuff is **just like chasing a mirage in the wilderness**. It is a tempting sight on the horizon promising refreshment. But a mirage can pull us into the wilderness toward greater thirst and finally to emptiness and death.

The Bible offers a very different vision about what leads to contentment in life. When the Apostle Paul wrote Philippians he was sitting in jail, so you might expect him to be whining about his hardships or to be asking for more of something, but instead he wrote,

“I know how to [be content, or how to] live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.” (Phil. 4:12-13)

If you were to ask Paul “How much is enough?” He would probably answer, *“I already have more than I deserve. I have the bread of heaven.”* He had Christ and His grace, all other needs were secondary, and significantly less important.

Next, this prayer can transform us from Selfishness to Generosity. Philippians 2:5 says, *“Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.”*

Notice Jesus doesn’t tell us to pray, “Father give ME my daily bread...” But rather **“Give US our daily bread...”** That’s a completely different prayer with a communal concern or focus.

Those people chasing after Jesus for more miracles were short-sighted, self-centered, and inward in their focus (and we are often just the same).

In this prayer Jesus reminds us to develop a broader world view and to be concerned about the needs of others - both their material and their spiritual needs.

Every time we pray this prayer we are invited and encouraged to pray with and for our brothers and sisters in Christ and for all others whom God has created. If we only pray for our own needs with no thought about the needs of others then we are not praying like Jesus.

Do you know of anyone who has a need for some bread? Someone who has a need for God to help them in some material, or physical, or emotional, or relational or a spiritual way? I sure do. You should as well - they’re all around us. We should pray for their daily bread as often as we pray for our own. We should try to help them in practical ways. If not, we’ve missed the whole point of this part of the Lord’s prayer, and the point of discipleship, according to Jesus.

In this prayer Jesus is clearly teaching that the Christian life is a “us thing” more than a “me thing.” It’s not just about others within the Christian community, it is also caring about everyone everywhere and trying to do what we can to serve them in Christ’s name. One reason we must pray like Jesus, is so we can love like Jesus, and then share and serve like Jesus.

That leads us to the last transformation. When we move from fear to confidence, from grumbling to gratitude, from greed to contentment, from selfishness to generosity . . . we will also **start to move from just living to living a more abundant life.**

Jesus says we are to pray; “Give us this day our daily bread.” There is a final lesson here.

God wants us to come to Him daily in prayer with our most essential needs.

There are two awesome things that happen when we do.

First, we discover that God can meet our deepest needs (*but I must say that it takes a long time to learn the difference between our needs and our wants - especially in light of eternity*).

Second, when we go to God with our needs, we get connected to something more important than bread or material things. We discover that our deepest need is for God Himself. If God is our food we never need to be hungry, if God is our treasure we can never really be poor.

Think about the Manna once more - couldn't God have given them a month's supply at a time? Sure. God could have even given each of them an AMM machine in their camp (An "Automatic Manna Machine") but He didn't. You see, more important than the Manna was that they would be reminded to come and meet with God - every day - to rely on Him.

When Jesus mentioned our "daily bread" in this prayer, I'm sure the first thing the disciples thought about was the daily manna in the wilderness. But I am sure they also remembered how Jesus multiplied the bread to feed more than 5,000 people... or how Jesus said we must be fed each day by the Word of God in Scripture, or how Jesus taught about Him being the bread of life. I hope they thought mostly about that last point - as should we.

In John 6 we read that Jesus said, *"The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... I am the bread of life, no one who comes to me will ever be hungry again. Those who believe in me will never be thirsty... Yes, I am the bread of life! Your ancestors ate Manna in the wilderness, but they all died... I am the living bread that came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever..."*

And so we pray, ***"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day, our daily bread..."*** Amen.