

“Bread”
 Matthew 6:11
 April 21, 2002
 Dr. Jerry Nelson

(Slowly, seriously):

“Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

Your kingdom come,

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And now about breakfast - “give us today our daily bread.”

As you have heard or recited the Lord’s Prayer, in the past, have you ever been struck with the apparent incongruity of this fourth request in comparison with the others?

There you were praying along about the great and eternal truths of God’s holiness, God’s kingdom and God’s will and then suddenly the prayer turns to “bread”.

It abruptly changes from God’s glory to breakfast bagels.

In Luke 7:1 it says, “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray...’”

Now Jesus’ disciples had been taught to pray from childhood.

But something about the way Jesus prayed captured them.

And so Jesus taught them the prayer we have in our text from Matthew 6 where we read: “This, then, is how you should pray...”

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,

your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

There are six requests, six petitions.

The first three are in direct reference to God:

1. His name
2. His kingdom

3. His will

God, cause your name to be honored, your authority to be accepted and your will to be done in all the earth.

The last three are in direct reference to us:

4. Give us

5. Forgive us

6. Lead us

Give us bread, forgive our sins and lead us not into temptation.

It is that fourth request we think about today – give us bread!

This request that may seem strangely out of place amidst the spiritual issues of God's kingdom and even forgiveness and temptation.

“Father, give us today our daily bread.”

There are some who consider such a request so mundane in the grand scheme of things that Jesus can't possibly have meant literal bread or food – he must have meant spiritual food.

But Jesus knows nothing of the dualism that permeates so much of other religions and philosophies.

Too many, even today, think of the body and the material world simply as necessary evils to be endured.

They speak as if the non-material, the metaphysical, the world of spirit and ideas is the only real world.

Some religions suggest that we achieve the ultimate only when we are released from the physical – when we rise above it, conquering and discarding it.

Even some Christians seem to believe that being released from the body is the final reward.

Not so!

We do not long for the immortality of the soul but for the resurrection of the body!

God created the heaven and the earth, the material, and it was good.

God created the human body and it was good.

God is not anti-material.

To the contrary, God created matter and it is in a very material way that we will exist for eternity.

The physical, our daily bread, is not inconsequential - it is not the insignificant thing of life that we must get out of the way so we can speak of the lofty things.

You can't enjoy the what some call the "finer" things of life such as a Beethoven symphony **if you are cold** or Rembrandt's painting **if you are hungry**.

When you run for an air raid shelter it is wiser to take a coat than a CD collection. (Thielicke Our Heavenly Father)

We are physical beings!

I think it was journalist G.K.Chesterton who was asked, if he was stranded on an island what book would he most want to have.

The questioner no doubt expecting to hear a title of great spiritual depth or philosophical height was surprised when Chesterton replied "I would want A practical guide to shipbuilding."

Yes, life contains the sublime but it also contains the mundane.

No matter your age or occupation, a large percentage of life consists of what we might otherwise call "trivialities" – sleeping, eating, dressing, standing, waiting, cleaning, walking, or sitting.

We spend time deciding what to wear.

We sort through fruit to find the best.

We study internet sites or magazines to learn all we can about the best car or computer to buy.

We answer e-mail, we read a letter, we make a phone call, we put gas in the car, and we fix a meal.

Imagine if Jesus said, "I want you to pray only about the "big" things of life and eternity because the rest is too trivial."

It would be as if God was like a father who said we could only see him on Sunday about important things.

If he did so, God would rule himself out of most of what is life.

But our Father created us and accepts us as we are, yes, able to dream large visions but also existing in the everyday stuff of life.

Yes, we can get priorities reversed but all of life is important to God – it is how he has made us.

God will not only meet us when we think lofty thoughts but when we are in the midst of everyday life.

We don't need to pretend we care only for the big things of life when underneath we are worried about bread, or health, or a job, or other physical necessities of life.

God knows our hearts – we might as well be honest.

God is the one who taught us to pray about “bread”.

He wants us to do so.

A breadboard plaque hung in our kitchen for years:

It was a quote from Martin Luther: “God is found midst the pots and the posies”

All of life is transformed by the presence and touch of God.

“Father, give us today our daily bread.”

How long has it been since we have seriously prayed that prayer or anything like it?

Who here, honestly, does not know whether you will have food for breakfast in the morning?

Except intentionally or accidentally, most of us in this room have never missed a meal.

And some of us haven't missed more meals than others!

In an age of affluence and refrigeration is this prayer for **daily! bread!** irrelevant?

Not if we truly understand the prayer and have a realistic understanding of our actual situation.

In few words Jesus says and teaches a mouthful:

“Give us today our daily bread” teaches us dependence, contentment, generosity and gratitude.

It teaches us that in our dependence on God we need to be content, generous, and grateful.

The very first word, “give”, speaks to what we lose sight of so easily. We are to pray “Father give...” – if our Father doesn’t give we won’t get.

We imagine that we provide for ourselves.

We reason that it is our ability and hard work that is responsible for our livelihood.

We dare to assume that it is with our own arm we reach whatever we need, not remembering that we stand on the shoulders of parents, friends, teachers, and a host of others.

And most of all not remembering that life itself is from God.

The truth is we are dependent on God.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7 the apostle Paul rightly asked, “What do you have that you did not receive?”

James pointed out, James 1:17

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...”

The Psalmist described, Psalm 145:15-16 “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”

I understand that the Czech language has a term for bread that is translated as “God’s gift”.

If a piece of bread fell from the table it would be picked up carefully and tenderly kissed as one said, “bozi darek- God’s gift”. (from Lochman 101)

Do we forget that the money we have was earned by using time, health and intelligence that was given to us?

If others don't "give" to us and mostly if God doesn't "give" to us we would have nothing.

This dependence on God is also seen in the word "today"- "Give us **today** our daily bread."

Until a 9/11 happens or a close friend of the same age dies, or a job is lost, we feel secure.

And the security is based on an imagined independence - our sense of immortality or our sense of competency.

But when that changes we realize afresh how dependent we are.

Jesus said when we pray we are to recognize and acknowledge our day-to-day dependence on God.

The Israelites, those hundreds of thousands of Hebrew people who left Egypt 3500 years ago and headed to their Promised Land, every day had a lesson in their complete and day-by-day dependence on God.

God fed them with quail in the evening and manna in the morning.

The quail flew into the camp in the evening and the manna fell to the ground in the morning.

They had no way to preserve any of it and were dependent on each day's provision.

In truth that is how dependent we are.

And the stories in our newspapers each day of the fragility of life remind us of that truth if we will only see it.

We are dependent on our Father's provision!

Now the second thing the prayer teaches us is that we are to be content with what God provides.

The request is "Give us today our **daily** bread."

"Today" and "daily" - that is not a redundancy.

That word “daily” most likely refers to the amount of bread – the daily portion – the exact amount to meet the needs of the day.

Back to that story about the Israelites, in Exodus 16:4, “Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.”

When we pray as we ought to, we don’t pray for more, we pray for enough.

Our physical needs are legitimate but as a result of sin, they tend to dominate.

Legitimate hunger becomes gluttony, greed, and hoarding.
Power and sex tend in the same direction.

In excess, the legitimate need becomes illegitimate.

The word “daily”, in the prayer, puts limits on the legitimate.

The need is real and worthy but it must be controlled.

We have a freedom in praying for our needs but we also have a responsibility to test them so that “needs” don’t get out of hand.

The rich farmer in Luke 12 let it get out of hand.

Luke 12:16-21 Jesus “told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’” Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ (Then Jesus added this commentary) “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

We live in a society of overabundance.

We call it freedom but has our ability to “more than meet our needs” really led to freedom?

Jan Lochman wrote, “At first sight it might seem so to an observer from past centuries. Much has been achieved compared to the elementary conditions of life that obtained for our ancestors. Yet most of us know better. In relation to our society we cannot speak of the realm of freedom in the full sense. Our realm of freedom is at the same time a realm of new compulsions. Many of us are linked to the excessive, artificially provoked, and manipulated needs of our consumer society. They do not make us freer or richer. At the cost of our true human and co-human needs, they make us poorer and more dependent.” (Lochman 95)

Marshall Shelley, who grew up here in Denver and is now with Christianity Today tells of spending a day with his father-in-law, a Kansas farmer, hoisting hay bales from a baler to a flatbed truck.

Afterward they philosophized about city life and farm life.

His father-in-law said, “The biggest difference I see is that city people tend to expect each year to be better than the last.

If they haven’t gotten a raise, acquired something new, or found themselves somehow better off, they’re dissatisfied.”

He went on to say, “On the farm, you don’t expect the fields to yield more each year.

You expect good years and bad.

You can’t control the weather, and you pray that you avoid disaster.

You work hard and accept what comes.” (Marshall Shelley
“Within a Leader’s Soul, Ambition and Contentment Must Coexist in Peace” Leadership,
Summer 1990 p3)

It’s called contentment – trusting our Father.

As a college junior, Deborah Bragg lived for six months in a Nicaraguan village wracked by drought and flood.

It was there she learned how to trust God for daily bread.

At harvest season insects moved in and threatened to destroy the entire crop.

The woman with whom Deborah lived awakened her one morning and said they had to work fast to get the crop before the insects did.

She wrote: “The field looked as if a fire had swept through it. Black worms hung greedily on the bare stalks, swaying heavily in the wind. My mother (so I called her) got on her hands and knees and began praying to God, pleading with God to help her husband accept the fact that all his hard work was in vain and that he would not be able to provide for his family.

Then she praised God for the corn she would be able to salvage that day – and thanked God for teaching all in the community a lesson on trusting the Lord for food and the future.

Bragg said, “I had never seen anyone pray to God in the middle of a field, on bended knees, with a cornstalk in her hand. I didn’t know what to think. But after her words sank into my heart, I realized that this was the food God had decided to give us for the next few months, and **I** fell to **my** knees. Together we thanked God for God’s love and kindness.”

The two women worked hard and managed to salvage two bags full of corn.

As they walked the more than a mile to their home the older woman gave skirts full of corn to friends she passed.

When they stopped at one home to get a drink, the older woman not only gave the balance of her own corn to the hostess but she took corn out of the bag carried by Deborah.

Deborah wrote: “We drank, and my mother gave the woman enough corn for her entire family – out of my bag! I had picked that corn. It was mine. Because of my mother’s generosity with my corn and hers, (there remained) only two ears each and that was our breakfast and lunch.”

Deborah said she couldn’t get over her resentment until a miracle happened.

Another woman and her daughters stopped at Deborah's home on their way home from the field and left enough corn to feed us all.

And that kind of sharing went on for the balance of the six months. (Deborah Bragg "Daily Bread" The Other Side Ju/Ag 1988 p17)

The writer of Proverbs captures this contentment best:
Proverbs 30:8-9

...Give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
and say, 'Who is the LORD?'
Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonor the name of my God.

Contentment is what Jesus calls us to.
Our Father will supply our daily needs.

The prayer also teaches us to be generous.

In the context of the prayer for God's kingdom to reign, the words "us" and "our" certainly mean more than just a collection of individuals, it means us together.

This is not a self-centered prayer but a prayer for "us" – thus it is a prayer for social justice – that there would be bread for all of us.

When we who tend to be overfed and overfull pray this prayer we are praying for our brothers and sisters who do not have bread – "give US bread."

The church described in the Bible, in the book of Acts, gave attention to those who were in physical need.

It was a logical and natural outgrowth of being Christ-followers.

Bread is to be shared.

In Isaiah 58:7 God said the kind of religion he has chosen is "to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him...

As we pat our well-filled stomachs and say “it’s a sin how much we have eaten”, we may be speaking more truth than we think.

Dieting and even fasting may be in order today not to lose weight but to genuinely make more available for others.

Self-denial and benevolence are called for, but more is needed.
Those who seek a New World order are right.

Something is wrong when the rich get richer and the poor get poorer – not in some slick slogan-way that politicians might exploit but in real ways.

We want greed and conspicuous consumption to disappear.

We want fair wages, an end of unemployment, and the elimination of exploitation.

We want children in our city and every city of the world to have bread.

That is not a plea for economic socialism or a naïve belief in utopia but it is a conversion to a new way of thinking and praying that doesn’t end with me but “us” – give US today OUR daily bread.

There is a Latin American prayer: “O God, to those who have hunger give bread; and to those who have bread give the hunger for justice.” (In Lochaman 98)

Only God can remedy the human condition but we can be God’s means to make a difference one person at a time.

In his book Neither Poverty nor Riches Denver Seminary professor Craig Blomberg has written:

1 billion people in our world live in poverty - by any standard of “poverty”

48 million people are living as refugees

2 million children die each year from easily preventable infectious diseases.

1.3 billion people have no access to safe drinking water.

And the 387 billionaires of the world have a net worth that exceeds that of the bottom nearly 3 billion people of the world.

Americans spend:

2 times as much on cut flowers as on overseas Protestant missions.

2 times as much on women's hosiery.

5 times as much on pets

17 times as much on diet and diet products

26 times as much on soft drinks

140 times as much on legalized gambling

And \$385 billion are spend on ads to convince us of our "need" for these things.

By comparison, American Christians give just 2.4% of their income to charitable causes.

Canadian Mennonite Paul Boers commented that:

It is troubling to know people who have a lot of money.

Not because we are tempted to want what they have, though that temptation is certainly there for some of us, but because we are tempted to think we are not like them, to think that we are not wealthy. (Boers [Lord Teach us to Pray](#) 92)

Comparing ourselves to those who have more does two things:

Creates discontent: "I need more because I'm not rich"

Promotes injustice: "I can't give because I'm not rich"

When Jesus says we are to pray "Give US today OUR daily bread" he is calling us to care and generosity.

Theresa McSheffrey was travelling one night by bus in Tanzania when the vehicle overturned.

As the passengers waited into the next morning for rescue they began to share food with one another.

"When a woman gave her last piece of bread to Theresa, the missionary responded, "Mama, save that for yourself and your little girl.

The woman smiled and replied, 'Sister, we have some bread now, and we all share that. If we have

nothing to eat later, we will share the hunger.” Carroll B. Houle, Maryknoll article quoted in The Other Side November 1987 p 9

Lastly the prayer also teaches us to be grateful.

I grant you that this is only implied but it is implied all over this part of the prayer.

The very first words of the prayer set the tone of gratitude:
“Our Father...”

One man wrote, “God’s omnipotence (power) is surpassed only by one attribute: his love” (Thielicke Our Heavenly Father 86)

Our daily bread is a gift from God and a proof of his goodness.

Psalm 145:15-16 “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”

And our prayer is a response to that goodness and love.
How can we pray with anything else but gratitude?

In the Bible the word “bread” is used not only of literal bread and food but of all the necessities of physical life. (Mark 14:22;Acts 27:35-36;2 Thessalonians 3:8-12)

And there is no better time than when we sit for a meal to express our gratitude.

Our grandparents and parents required us to pray before a meal. Then somewhere along the way, we lost our sense of dependence – we lost sight of the miracle of “daily bread” - and we expressed our ingratitude by no longer giving thanks at meals.

One man wrote: “No wonder that the family has ceased to be a place of meeting and has often become instead a place of... fractious lodging.” (Lockman paraphrasing Pfendsack from Unser Vater (Basel:1961), p57)

That made me think that **in detachment from God and neighbor and without gratitude** we eat to our peril.

Meal prayers are especially appropriate because at the most basic level of life (food for our hunger) we see God’s hand in sustaining us.

The prayer at meal may be as simple as:

“God is great, God is good
And we thank him for our food. Amen”

It may be as formal as:

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who feeds the whole world with your goodness, grace, loving kindness and tender mercy: you give food to all flesh, for your loving kindness endures forever. Through your great goodness food has never failed us: and may it not fail us forever for your great name’s sake. You, are blessed, O Lord. Amen.”

It may be as spontaneous as:

“Our Father in heaven, thank you for this food this day. We acknowledge your provision in all of life. You are merciful and gracious in meeting our every need. We love you and thank you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

“Our Father...Give us this day our daily bread.”

With your gracious provision we are content, generous and grateful.

Amen!