

*Matthew 6:12 "Give us today our daily bread."*

Dear Children of Our Heavenly Father,

## HOW MUCH BREAD SHOULD I PRAY FOR?

### I. Prayer for "Daily Bread" Comes after Prayer about God

A couple years ago we went to a tax preparer for our income tax. I hadn't done that before. It was a very good experience because the preparer showed us a deduction that we had been missing. And so because of his expertise, we were able to get back a bit of money for that year, and the previous three years. It sure paid to ask the tax preparer for help!

One day the disciples saw Jesus praying and they requested, "Teach us to pray." Were they appealing to a pro so they could get some extra dough in the pocket? Were they praying for better jobs than fishing the Sea of Galilee? Did they think of prayer as a heavenly tax rebate system – send in the forms and hope the cash comes back?

I don't think they thought of prayer like that. But some people do. There is the "Name it and claim it" religion. If you need a new car, just name it and you can claim it from God—if you have been good enough—so they say.

Others use prayer out of desperation. They ignore God for decades, but when the back is against the wall, suddenly they are on God's doorstep, hat in hand. Is that the purpose of prayer?

Is prayer like a scholarship? When you can't get through on your own, fill out the paperwork. Show off your effort. Highlight your extra-curricular activities. Maybe the cash will come your way. Many view prayer as the way to get goodies from God.

I really don't know what the disciples expected, but Jesus did teach them about prayer. To a lot of people, Jesus' prayer is unsatisfying.

Now why do I say that? After four weeks of studying this prayer, let me read to you what we have studied, "*This, 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.*" Now you heard me emphasize the word "*your*." And you might think I was adding emphasis. Actually, no. In the original biblical language, they can emphasize things that English has difficulty doing in print. And the way Jesus told them to pray was, "*Father... your name... your kingdom... your will.*" Jesus used the word "*your*" emphatically.

So these disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, and Jesus says, "Let's get one thing straight, guys. Prayers are God-centered." And now we are ½ of the way through the best prayer we could ever pray, and we haven't said a word about ourselves and what we want. I thought prayer was telling God what I want, what I need. "No," Jesus says, "in prayer, God is first."

Today we get to the second half of the Lord's prayer and things change.

My father-in-law, when he found out his daughter was seeing a future pastor, he had some choice words of wisdom. (You know the sorts of words fathers like to share with the young men dating their daughters, right?) He is a church-going man. Goes probably 45 to 50 weeks of the year even though they live nearly an hour from church. He is a heavenly minded man. But he is also very practical: a farmer, cabinet maker, truck driver. Seeing this prospective preacher blowing in from another state courting his daughter, his comment about pastors was, "Some pastors are just too heavenly minded to be any earthly good."

There's truth to that. Ever seen people like that? No earthly good because they are so heavenly

minded? And we might think that this Lord's Prayer has turned out to be so heavenly minded it isn't any good. "God's name, God's kingdom, God's will.." This world is a messed up place. When are we going to get to something of some earthly good?

Here, half-way through the prayer, and not before, Jesus assures us that earthly concerns do have place in a heavenly-minded prayer. So Jesus teaches his disciples, "When you pray, say... ***Give us today our daily bread.***" God is concerned for our life in this world where we need to pay the rent and put food on the table. And a part of this most precious prayer in the world, deals with these down to earth concerns. "***Father, Give us today our daily bread.***"

## II. "Daily Bread" Is Less Than We May Prefer

And yet... Jesus' words really aren't exactly satisfying, are they? Think of two imaginary restaurants.

One restaurant has an all-you-can-eat buffet. It has American, Italian, Chinese and Mexican food. Shish-kebabs, steaks, breads, soups, lettuce salads, spinach salads. They fry bacon just the way you like it, crispy or soft. They have deserts heavy on the chocolate, ice cream with plenty of toppings. All of it hot food to be put on a hot plate. Except you can get a cold plate for the cold stuff. When you look at row after row of the buffet you began to resemble that dog we had. He was a boxer. When he would see us eating at the picnic table, he would come on over and sit there, just drooling. That's what happens when you look at this restaurant's buffet tables.

Across the street is a second restaurant. This restaurant has a very different philosophy. On a simple sign outside it says, "Dine with us. Enjoy whatever we put in front of you." Their website explains their vision, "We won't give you a menu. We won't give you a choice. We won't even tell you what the meal is until it's on the table in front of you. And sometimes it might not even taste all that good, but we make this promise: you will have at least enough food and it will be at least nutritious enough to keep you alive."

That's kind of what "***Give us today our daily bread***" sounds like.

Well, as you can imagine, restaurant #2 isn't doing very well. The owner brings in the business consultants. These outsiders have no trouble identifying problems. The business owner obviously doesn't understand the first thing about people. They tell him, "You can't just say, 'Trust us. We'll put enough grub in front of you to keep you alive.' Give the customers what *they* want, not what you think is best for them!"

Yet Jesus teaches us to pray, "***Our Father in heaven, Give us today our daily bread.***" No promise of an all-you-can-eat buffet. No promise even of delicious food. Nor of plenty of food. Jesus tells us to ask for the most basic of foods, not the most scrumptious. Jesus tells us to ask for "today's" food, not a lifetime of it. He implies that this is going to be an ongoing, day-by-day concern. Which is why people crowd into the all-you-can-eat buffet that this world offers.

## III. All Must Pray for "Daily Bread"

But maybe it was different for the disciples? They were mostly poor men who didn't have 401k's. No cars, and probably a simple two or three room house. Those are the sorts of people who need to pray for their daily bread.

But not me. I may not be one of the rich and famous, but we have food in the pantry, a couple cars in the driveway, more clothes than I can wear (even if the wife says I should throw most of them away). I'm not one of those who needs to pray, "***Give us today our daily bread.***"

And maybe you can go beyond that: a decent retirement set aside, no debt, house is paid for, kids are employed, insurance in case of house fire or health emergency or even disability. And you think, "I feel bad for people who need to pray, '***Give us today our daily bread.***' Down and out. Some made bad

choices. Others got caught in a bad place. I mean, I need to thank God that he has taken such good care of me that I don't need to pray, ***"Give me today my daily bread."***

If you are tempted to say, "Not applicable" to the prayer ***"Give us today our daily bread,"*** listen to this word of God. In Proverbs a wealthy, powerful man prayed: *"I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: ... 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."* (Proverbs 30:7-9). If that isn't a perfectly written word of God, I don't know what is. Let me read that again: *"I ask of you, O LORD: ... give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread."* That sounds like the long way round of praying what Jesus is telling us today, ***"Give us today our daily bread."***

So now, let me ask you a question: Who do you think most needs to pray for daily bread. I think it is not the poor who most need to pray for daily bread, but the rich. When you have less, not to say that poor people are more godly than the rich, but at least when you have less, you realize that you need someone else. And so they go to God in prayer.

But not so the rich. They are pretty sure that their own wits and strength have gotten them where they are going. And all this noise about only praying for "today" and praying for "daily bread" certainly can't apply to them – Why, they haven't eaten a piece of ordinary of bread in years. And they have plenty. They don't need to pray for more.

Listen. I don't think Jesus was trying to get people to pray for the right things. Here's what I think. I think Jesus was trying to get people to pray with the right attitude. That might be an overstatement, but I don't think this petition of the Lord's prayer is mostly about *getting* bread or food. I think it is mostly about our attitude, an attitude that rich and poor alike need to have.

First, ***"Give us our daily bread"*** teaches us to rely on God. Whether we think we went out and got today's food by ourselves or not, it is God who gives it. Anyone who does admit his reliance on God has set him/herself up in heaven next to God.

***"Give us today our daily bread"*** teaches us, secondly, to trust God. It breathes a trust that God will give what he knows to be best for us.

The third attitude that ***"Give us today our daily bread"*** teaches us is contentedment. We are essentially saying, "Just give me what I need. Bread is good enough, and if you choose to give me veggies and meat, well, I will thank you even more."

Finally this phrase teaches thankfulness. When we realize that God provides our needs, instead of feeling smug, we thank him.

So is the Christian life like a diner where the cranky waitress slaps food that we don't want on the table? Let's try this—I am not saying this is the ideal, it simply is the way things used to be, and maybe still are for a few of you—You used to go to school as a child and you came home and you knew that in an hour or two mom would have a meal for you. Sometimes you asked, "What's for supper, Mom?" but usually you didn't. Because it didn't matter. Mom was going to make what she wanted, and you trusted her to make what was good. Now why would you put up food *not* of your choosing at home, when you would never put up with that in a restaurant. We could think of several reasons, but the main reason is that your mother's home-cooked meal was not based on a business proposition, but on a relationship. And that taught you reliance, trust, contentedness and thankfulness.

And when we pray, ***"Give us today our daily bread"*** the unbelieving world with all its bling and consumerism and ring tones and more, More, MORE! looks at us Christians and thinks, "You guys are weird. 'Give us today our daily bread?'" But they don't understand do they. They don't understand the relationship that we have. That our Lord Jesus has bled and died for our sin. That our heavenly Father has promised eternal life in his name. That the Holy Spirit has worked something in our hearts

that this world cannot understand: faith in Jesus, and faith that our heavenly Father will indeed ***“Give us today our daily bread.”***

Dear Lord, make us so reliant on you, so trusting in you, so content with you, so thankful to you that we can boil down all our anxieties and wishes and prayers for life in this world down to a simple sentence, ***“Give us today our daily bread.”*** Amen.