

Give Us Our Daily Needs, Forgive Our Debts
The Lord's Prayer

We need to recognize God for who He is ... give Him reverence, as is His due. Families and nations fall apart if God is not humbly acknowledged as sovereign and His principles for living are ignored. When we, with genuine hearts, pray that God's name be holy, His kingdom come, and that His will be done, we add to the storehouse of goodness, and dare I say sanity, so necessary for healthy lives and a healthy society. **When we ask that God's name be holy, that His kingdom principles rule, and that His will be obeyed, then (and only then) are we prepared to ask for ourselves: "give us our daily bread," "forgive us our debts," "lead us not into temptation," and "deliver us from evil."**

When we genuinely pray in this manner, we participate in uniting heaven and earth. This why Jesus gave us the most complete prayer. I am talking here about the Lord's Prayer. I've been asking you to pray the Lord's Prayer every day, in public and in private, knowing that Jesus is praying with you, saying "our Father." As you pray, you are making room for His wisdom and character to trickle into your soul.

This prayer is so vital to our Christian life, that I'm using all the Sundays of Lent to talk about it. My hope is that this will encourage all of us through better understanding. I am indebted to two men of God wiser than me, John Wesley and Elmer Towns, for providing insights for this series of messages on the Lord's Prayer.¹

Last week we spent a little time focusing on "the mini-summary" found in the words "on earth as it is in heaven." This "mini-summary" gives us pause to help us focus on the foundation for moving into the rest of the prayer. That foundation being the "thy petitions," that set our place before the Almighty who is also our loving Father.

The Fourth Petition: Our Daily Bread

Once the first three priorities of the Lord's Prayer are established, we can ask for the last four. After we worship God's holy name, live by Kingdom principles, and submit to His will in our living, then we can ask for our earthly needs. The things we need in order to walk with God, and to be forgiven of sin, victorious over sin, and to be protected from the evil one.

Last week I gave a preview of the fourth petition of our Lord's Prayer: "give us this day our daily bread." It is like a hinge, that holds together the "Thy" petitions and the "us" petitions that follow. The reason is this: we cannot worship God, ask for His kingdom and His will, on earth as in heaven, unless our bodies are strong. **"Bread" is symbolic of all the physical needs we have in this life and which are necessary for our spiritual walk with God.**

When God created humans, He did not make us like perpetual motion machines that need no fuel, no maintenance, and no supervision. We are not self-contained, self-sufficient, units. We all need food, shelter, clothing and many other things. **If we did not need bread, most people would not work.** In work and toil, however, we find the

means to buy our bread, as well as meaning, purpose, and happiness. How we go about meeting those needs can glorify God. If we did not need bread most people would do nothing and God cannot be glorified when we do nothing. If we didn't need bread, humans wouldn't invent new ways of doing things, we wouldn't be using the intelligence God has given us. Because we have needs, we grow, we get better, we reach out to others, we produce, we do what God originally intended and told Adam and Eve to do, *Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth...* Gen. 1:28. Then to make it clear God said, *Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree... yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat,* Gen. 1:29.

God Supplies Our Needs

Most Americans, and most people who attend a church, don't pray, "Give me a meal today or I'll go hungry." Sure, there are some who are in serious poverty, and homeless; they may not know where their next meal is coming from, but they are the exception. If you didn't have food, you would pray with intensity, "Give us this day our daily bread."

America produces more food than any nation on earth. But, what about our spiritual bread? Jesus reminded Satan, *It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God,'* Matt. 4:4. Now there's a profound insight! John Wesley explained, "By 'bread' we may understand all things needful, whether for our souls or bodies... the things pertaining to life and godliness. We understand not barely the outward bread ... but much more the spiritual bread, the grace of God, the food 'which endureth unto everlasting life...'"²

Can we use our bread to feed those who are hungry both physically and spiritually? Perhaps one hunger feeds the other. After feeding the 5,000, Jesus was followed by the crowd. They wanted more bread, and He said, *Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you,* John 6:27.

Praying "Give us this day our daily bread" is more than asking for a sandwich. You are asking God for both the cause (opportunity to grow the grain to make bread or earn the money to buy bread) and the results (the food you need). "We ask, for we claim nothing of right or merit, but only of the free mercy of God. Nevertheless, neither the goodness nor the power of God is a reason for us to stand idle."³ Additionally, you are asking God to supply your spiritual needs (and aren't they large?), so that you may use the bread properly (to nourish, to share, to avoid gluttony and hoarding), and in the process of earning and eating you make God's name holy, asking for His kingdom and will in your daily life. *Whatever therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God,* 1 Cor. 10:31. Likewise you ask for bread to allow God to glorify Himself through supplying your needs. For *...God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work,* 2 Cor. 9:8.

When you pray "Give us this day..." you are telling your heavenly Father that you will walk with Him one day at a time. "This day" indicates daily patience. No need to worry about tomorrow, because you trust God today. There is a difference between worrying and planning. The Bible calls the ant "exceeding wise" for though *Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer,* Proverbs 30:25. Ants don't

worry; they prepare. When we pray, we don't have to pray for everything, but we can pray about everything. God doesn't need our shopping list **...for your Father knows what you need before you ask him,** Matt. 6:8.

So, if God already knows our needs, why do we need to ask Him? Here's a wise word from the Bible: **... 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 30:8-9.

Starving souls are easily fed by anger, theft, jealousy, and revenge. There is little spiritual health in such a circumstance, and this is the very reason Christians share food with hungry people. By contrast, people who have too much bread, easily forget the source: God. Most Americans are not starving for physical bread ... but they are starving for spiritual bread. **As Americans have become wealthier,** and more comfortable, **they have drifted farther from God:** they attend church in fewer numbers, they boldly break the Ten Commandments, and many deny God's rightful place in our society. Praying the Lord's Prayer gets our priorities right. Give us today our daily bread – God will supply.

And one more thing: **when we ask, we will receive more answers and clarity about life from God as He supplies our needs.**

The 5th Petition: Forgive Us Our Sins

Our prayer does not begin with "Lord, I'm sorry...forgive me..." We don't begin with confession. We begin with worship: "Hallowed be thy name." Then we seek to live by kingdom principles: "Thy kingdom come in my life on earth;" we ask for God's guidance: "Thy will be done." Then, we ask for the physical necessities of life to sustain our spiritual life: "Give us bread for today." After praying these four ways, we are ready to confront our sin ... sin that blocks fellowship with God.

In Matthew 6:12 Jesus says "forgive us our debts" (οφειλημα) - "debts," meaning what is owed, an obligation, or the consequences of sin. Then he says, (in Mt. 6:14) "trespass" (παραπνομα) - a stumbling or passion of the moment. In Luke's (11:4) version of the Lord's Prayer Jesus says, "sin" (αμαρτια) - meaning to miss the mark from an inability to do good. We can pray forgive us our trespasses, or debts, or sins, for all are New Testament terms for sin and are interchangeable. **We owe a debt to God, "every sin laying us under a fresh debt to God"** – as **John Wesley** put it – and **if we had to pay what we owed we'd be found insolvent.**⁴

This isn't the "sinner's prayer" coming to God for salvation, asking to be a Christian. No, you are already a child of the King whom you can call Father. Disobedience, wrongdoing, does not break that relationship. We are asking for fellowship to be *restored*. The Father/child relationship has already established.

Have you noticed that, even though we have been redeemed and are God's children, we do not always do God's will? **We break fellowship with God by disobeying Him, or ignoring Him.** Often our sins are not intentional but arise from desires that override our good sense, or our commitment to God. We already recognize God's law and have already been forgiven our rebellion when we committed our lives to Christ. But it's our nature to stray from God. That's what we're praying about here.

Some people sin and never feel guilty. But **if you are a child of the Father, you can't sin** – at least not continually – **without suffering some inner guilt.** Granting forgiveness when you ask, is our Father's way of handling your guilt. Our asking is telling the truth to ourselves and to God. You place your sins before God because you believe He will forgive you. This is the first step to doing something about your guilt and broken relationship with your heavenly Father. This also allows us to restore right relationship with others.

Confess inwardly; repent outwardly. When you pray, "Forgive us our debts" it must be followed by a determination to change your behavior so as not to sin again. You do not confess to feel good; you confess to be forgiven. But forgiveness feels good, because our heavenly Father cleanses us of guilt. And that is a big step toward mental health. If you are far away from God today, turn to God, and pray, "Forgive me my debts," - begin the journey home.

BTW when you pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," (or trespasses) you are bringing other people into the relationship with you and our heavenly Father. This is a reflection of your character. Forgiving others is essential. We will look at that more closely next week.

Praying The Lord's Prayer This Week

There are seven positive and valuable results that come from praying the Lord's Prayer daily: **1) You will magnify God each day** with "Hallowed be thy name." **2) You will live by better principles** when you pray "Thy kingdom come." **3) God will guide you for that day** when you pray "Thy will be done." Today we learned the fourth and fifth result: **4) as we pray the Lord's Prayer each day, we receive more answers from God as God supplies our needs.** **5) we receive a valuable gift of freedom from guilt.** Praying the Lord's Prayer daily continues to bring valuable transformation in our lives.

Years ago, pro golfer Lee Trevino appeared in a commercial holding a golf ball and proclaiming, "This ball will take strokes off your game." And golfers thought, "I gotta get one of those balls!"

Then he laughed and said, "This golf ball will take strokes off your golf game, but you've gotta hit it 300 times a day."

The secret is not the ball. The secret is practice... practice... practice. You have to hit that ball continually and correctly until you learn how to hit it correctly and continually.

It's the same with the Lord's Prayer. Praying it one time won't get you answers. Mouthing the words perfunctorily won't bring you anything. You must pray it correctly, with all your heart, according to the will of God, according to God's design. Then You must pray it continually to receive answers.

Prayer is not like a vending machine: put a prayer in the slot and out comes your request. We can't coerce God through fasting, or "name it and claim it." Prayer is not the persuasive words of a lawyer before a jury. Prayer is not a student asking the teacher for extra time to finish the assignment. **The bottom line of all prayer is this: "Holy be Your name."** Recognizing God's sovereignty is the platform for approaching God. He wants and expects us to ask for our daily needs, He is willing to forgive us our

sins ... He desires to be glorified in our lives. Praying the Lord's Prayer brings blessings and God's glory into your life.

Pray the Lord's Prayer every day. Your future depends on it. Let's pray now: Our Father ...

¹ John Wesley "Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount, Discourse VI," (1748); Elmer Towns, *Praying the Lord's Prayer For Spiritual Breakthrough* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997).

² John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount, Discourse VI," (1748); Outler & Heitzenrater, *Wesley's Sermons, An Anthology*, (Nashville, Abingdon, 1991), 232.

³ Ibid, 233.

⁴ Ibid, 233.