

Pray for Your Daily Bread

A Study of the Fourth Petition

Text: Matthew 6:11: “Give us today our daily bread.”

My brothers and my sisters in Christ Jesus. If you’ve ever driven through the Rocky Mountains, you’ve probably seen the sometimes nerve-wracking roads that lead you up, through, and around. As those roads wind and dip and ascend, there are usually two things on both sides of that road: One side is a sharp craggy mountain close to the road on one side, and a steep cliff down to oblivion on the other. Stop paying attention and go to either side, and you are in some serious trouble.

As you, no doubt know, by now, in each of the petitions that we have studied thus far, each short phrase appears as a small puddle of water but is as deep as the ocean itself. This is true of our study of the fourth petition, the first petition that Jesus teaches his disciples to ask for something. This is a petition that deals directly with the disciples' physical needs.

This is also, no doubt, a prayer that you have questions about as it concerns the realm in which we exist and spend most likely, most of our time engaged with and concerned about. It is the physical world, summarized with that phrase, daily bread. From Luther’s explanation, we understand that it is not just the food on our plates but everything else that makes our physical existence possible and secure. Food and drink, a place with which to live, physical health, and safety from war and weather. A family and friends, as well as employment and even clothing.

What I want to focus on today, because we can't ever talk about everything, is the barriers to our prayer of “Give us this day our daily bread.” And in an examination of my own life and sinful human nature, I found that barriers to this godly, god-given prayer seem to come on two opposite sides stemming from one central issue: a misunderstanding of who God is and his centrality in all things similar to a road leading through the mountains with dangers on both sides of the road.

Do we forget the small things? Be Humble!

The first ditch, on one side of this petition, is overconfidence and pride, especially in our deep seeded American values of hard work and self-sufficiency. Sometimes we can forget to ask God for, well, just about anything. We think of ourselves as the sole purveyors of all that is right with our lives and their material things. I have worked hard in school so I could get a good education, I show up to my job and haven’t taken anything from anyone, I saved, I searched, I am in control of my daily meals, my house, my finances, and my health.

It becomes so easy, especially in modern times, to be so far removed from the truth. God is the one responsible for all of the things that we have to take care of us in our lives. Not just the big ones like closing on the house or the big promotion, but even those little insignificant things like your favorite coffee cup. Jesus encourages us to ask God and also to give thanks for even the items we use every single day just to exist.

As Jesus tells us to pray for our daily bread, he reminds us of how little we are in control of our lives. Even the idea of grabbing yourself a quick bite of bread from your cupboard is from him. God made that grain grow in the fields, sending rain and workers to harvest it; it was processed and shipped to a store that was within distance for you—keeping it from thieves and ruin or war. He gave you the gifts you have to be able to work at your job to bring yourself income to pay for it. Sitting on a table in a home granting you the health and strength needed to make it. All because he wants you to be fed, healthy, and ready for the day he has laid before you.

God taught his people this lesson so vividly in the desert after the Exodus. God rained down bread from heaven, a literal daily bread, always enough for the day at hand, and taking too much would yield no excess as it would spoil. And all of those years in the desert, day in and day out, God provided their most basic daily needs. No one starved, and his care was always there. Remembrance of our daily bread is really a lesson of God's care for you in the most basic of human tasks and needs. Every day God opens his hands to put food on your plate, a place to lay your head in safety, a body that functions, and so much more. Even though we haven't done or earned anything that would merit this constant care, God gives it to us anyways, each day and every day.

Do we fear the big things? Be Confident!

The second ditch in regard to this petition is fear and anxiety. Again, oft-forgotten in modernity, we forget that up to modern times, refrigeration and storage, and industrialization, daily bread was something that was a genuine need. In Jesus' day, many workers were paid just one day at a time, and the amount of bread that was available depended on the quality of the harvest, sufficient rain, safety from thieves and war, and enough supplies. Starvation was always a very real threat, as disaster was always right around the corner: Drought, or war, or sickness, or an injury away. Jesus is teaching his disciples to pray for God to meet their very real physical needs for the day. God is the one who is in control of each of the day's supply, and he teaches them to deliberately ask God to provide them with what they need for their survival. God provides for your very real physical problems; this is not a concept; this is concrete

Have you ever felt that God was too far detached to help you with your very real physical problems? The fourth petition doesn't mean that you can only come to him when the bare minimum for your survival is in danger. Are you in search of a job that can provide for your family? Pray that God will provide you with a job. Does your car need new tires, and you don't know how to afford them? Pray that God would help you get new tires. Is

your physical safety in danger? Is your marriage struggling? Is your roof in trouble? Is your health at risk? Give us this day our daily bread. God is the creator of the universe, and he is more thrilled to hear your prayers and more than able to provide for your needs.

As we talk about daily bread and the physical concrete things we ask for, we need to remember that God will always answer your prayers for your needs as if we truly understood what our needs were. When Hezekiah prayed that God would save his city from an entire army, God heard that prayer for his daily bread and struck down 185,000 soldiers of Assyria and sent them away. When Hannah prayed bitterly in tears that God would grant her a child, God heard that prayer, and he gave her a son.

But when Paul prayed that the thorn in his flesh would be removed: God heard that prayer for daily bread, but God said what you think you need is your thorn removed, but you really need a reminder of my strength and grace, and God granted it. When Elijah prayed that God would take his life, God heard that prayer for daily bread, but what God said what you really need is assurance that I am still in control and he fed him and showed him his power to continue on in his ministry. You can be confident that God will answer your prayers for your daily bread, no matter how great, in whatever ways you need them, not always in the way you want.

My brothers and sisters, in this world, you will continue to live your daily lives interacting with the physical world. Pray for your daily bread. Never forget to pray for your daily bread with humility and confidence. Pray knowing that your God controls all things and blesses you daily with all of the things you need for your life and also that he will answer your prayers for your daily bread in amazing ways that you couldn't possibly imagine. Amen.