

**ESSENTIAL PARTS TO A DISCIPLE'S PRAYER**  
**A SERIES ON THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S PRAYER:**  
**(2) GRATEFUL RELIANCE**

Matthew 6:11

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**PROLOGUE**

Just where do we get our ideas about food?

A market research interviewer was stopping people in the grocery store after they picked up their bread. One fellow picked up a loaf of Wonder Bread, and the interviewer asked him, "Sir, would you be willing to answer a couple of questions about your choice of bread?" The man responded, "Yes, I'd be happy to." "Fine," the interviewer said, "the question I'd like to ask you is this: Do you feel that your choice of Wonder Bread has been at all influenced by their advertising program?" The fellow looked shocked and said, "Of course not. I'm not influenced by that sort of thing at all!" "Well then," said the interviewer. "Could you tell me just why you did choose Wonder Bread?" Of course I can!" the man replied. "Because it builds strong bodies twelve ways!"

**SCRIPTURE**

Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, {2} wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, {3} you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, {4} you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers...{10} You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, {11} giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. {12} By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. {13} From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. {14} You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, {15} and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart (Psalms 104:1-15 NRSV, selected).

"Pray then in this way:...Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:9,11 NRSV).

**INTRODUCTION**

Jesus taught his disciples how to talk to God. We usually refer to this as the Lord's Prayer. But, as we saw last week, it would make more sense to call it the "Disciples' Prayer." It is a prayer that only a disciple can pray.

It is a model for prayer that can be used as written or as a guide for putting our own words into prayer. But just saying words is not praying. The essence of prayer is a heartfelt response to a holy and loving God.

This prayer teaches us that when we put God first then all the other concerns of life fall into line. Our purpose in life is to glorify God and then enjoy a grateful reliance upon God to meet our needs. This reliance upon God is aptly expressed in the request, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

### **1. GRATEFUL RELIANCE TELLS US ABOUT GOD**

Praying for daily bread tells us about God.

From time to time in history there have been church teachers (Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine) who could not believe that Jesus intended our first request to be for literal bread, especially since this prayer has such a noble beginning. Jesus must have meant the bread of the Lord’s Supper or some other spiritual application, they argue. The Church Reformer, John Calvin, had a word to describe such teaching. He called it, “absurd.”

We need to remember that this prayer comes from the same person who healed the sick, turned water into premium wine and used his marvelous power to feed a hungry crowd with real bread. His enemies killed him but within three days he was seen alive again. And one of the first things the resurrected Jesus did for his disciples was — make breakfast (John 21:12-14).

The request for daily bread is a request for the physical necessities of life. The God who is the Creator, Sustainer and Judge of the entire universe is very much concerned with our physical needs. God knows we need to buy groceries, pay rent or mortgages, put clothes on our back and have bills of every sort to meet. And he wants us to talk with him about our physical needs.

There are some people who think we should not ask God to meet our physical needs because they say our physical needs have to do with the body and the body is evil. This, of course, is completely contrary to the teaching of Scripture. If you have any doubts about how God regards the human body just remember God himself in Jesus Christ took on the flesh and blood of a real human body. Remember also that resurrection does not refer to the immortality of the soul but to body and soul brought back from death to new and unending life. God made us, body and soul. God loves us, body and soul. God seeks to redeem us, body and soul.

Praying for our “daily bread” not only reminds us of our dependence on God but also affirms that we can trust God to watch over us. This is what is known as providence. Unfortunately, if you asked the typical American, “What is providence?” the person will

either say it is the capital of Rhode Island or return a blank stare. But the city of Providence was named by Christians who believed in God's faithful care and oversight. They could say with the Psalmist:

“From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work” (104:13).

One of the historic documents that has helped Presbyterian and Reformed Christians understand the teachings of the Bible is the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). In answer to the question, “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” it says, in part:

“That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ who...so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation.”

This is similar to what Paul told the Romans:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28 NIV).

This does not mean that everything that happens to us is good. Nor is it the result of some impulsive decision by God.

Malcolm George, a man with a terrible temper, was playing a round of golf with his pastor. After leaving three straight putts on the edge of the cup, Mr. George exploded. "I missed! I missed! I can't believe I missed!" With that he heaved his putter into a lake, kicked the golf cart and punched his fist into a tree.

His pastor was shocked. "I have never seen such a terrible display of anger," he said. "Don't you know that God doesn't like us when we are angry? I have heard that there are angels whose one assignment is to search out people who express their anger so ferociously and to send lightning bolts from heaven to burn them to a crisp."

George was embarrassed. He promised to do better and for several holes he succeeded. However, on the last three holes his putting again failed him. When the last putt veered off to the right, George went crazy and angrily shouted, "I missed! I missed! I can't believe I missed!" He broke his club across his knee and threw it as far as he could, he kicked up several large clumps of dirt on the edge of the green, and once more drove his fist into a tree.

Suddenly the sky grew dark as an ominous cloud passed over. There was a clap of thunder

and an awesome burst of lightning — and ... the pastor was burned to a crisp! An eerie silence filled the golf course. Then a seraphic but agitated voice from heaven said: "I missed! I missed! I can't believe I missed!"

God does not make snap decisions. He is wise, patient and kind. We can trust him to watch over us. Providence does not mean we are exempted from trouble or pain. It does mean that nothing can ever happen to us apart from the knowledge, presence, and love of God. Even in the midst of the most turbulent storms of life, God is always at work towards our good.

## **2. GRATEFUL RELIANCE TELLS US ABOUT LIFE**

Praying for daily bread tells us about how to live life.

For the longest time, scholars had difficulty understanding the meaning of the phrase translated in the NRSV as "daily bread." This is because it was not found outside the Bible and some people thought Matthew just made it up. Then, not long ago, archaeologists uncovered a parchment that used this word and it referred to a woman's shopping list! This reinforces the idea that we can trust every aspect of our lives to God, even the ordinary, everyday marketplace concerns.

When Jesus taught this prayer, I think his disciples would have recalled the story of the manna in the wilderness provided daily by God after he had redeemed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Ex 16). The Israelites received this food on one condition: that they only gather enough for their immediate needs. This taught them to live one day at a time in dependence upon God. In reference to this, there is an old rabbinical saying, "He who possesses what he can eat today, and says, 'What shall I eat tomorrow?' is a man of little faith."

Jesus reiterates this idea in the Disciples' Prayer. As disciples of Jesus, we are to rely on God for our daily needs, growing in our awareness of our dependence on him and our need to thank him. Jesus does not reject responsible planning for the future only anxious worry about the future. The best way to prevent anxiety is to thank God for today's bread, and trust him to meet tomorrow's needs. Bobby McFerrin whimsically sings, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." But Jesus tells us, "Don't worry, be thankful."

## **3. GRATEFUL RELIANCE TELLS US ABOUT PRAYER**

Praying for daily bread tells us about the nature of prayer.

God provides us with food but this does not eliminate the need for most people to earn a living. If people prayed this prayer then sat back and waited for the food to magically appear they would likely go hungry. God ordinarily uses human means for both production and distribution. Fields have to be plowed, seeds sown, crops harvested, and so on. Barclay says, "Prayer, like faith, without works is dead."

But there are times when our resources are not enough. Matthew tells us of a time when Jesus fed thousands of people from five barley loaves and two fish. We call this the story of the multiplication of loaves and fishes but it is much more than that — it is really the story of the multiplication of compassion. Through an active faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord's compassion can be multiplied in and through us. Now I admit, showing compassion to others is not always easy to do.

The story is told about Henry Cadbury, a famous Quaker who helped translate the Revised Standard Version of the Bible and was chair of the American Friends Service Committee. Cadbury was known as a gentle person with a loving spirit, but one day a neighbor observed another side of him. Cadbury had just put the finishing touches on a portion of sidewalk he was replacing when a child came running down the street and skipped through the wet concrete, leaving mushy footprints. The gentle Quaker exploded with anger. His neighbor admonished, "Why, Henry, I'm surprised to see you so angry. I thought you liked children." Henry replied, "I do like children in the abstract, but not in the concrete."

Most Christians find it easy to love people in the abstract but not so easy to love them in the concrete. Jesus showed us the nature of God's love when he showed compassion even at times when he could have easily been angry and resentful.

Jesus sets before every disciple the tremendous task of communicating himself to others; but he does not demand from us resources that we do not possess. He says to us in effect, "Come as you are, bring to me what you have, however little, and I will use it greatly in my service."

Jesus taught us to pray, "Give *us* this day *our* daily bread" and not, "Give *me* this day *my* daily bread." The Disciples' Prayer is not a selfish prayer. It teaches us to gratefully receive what God provides and then graciously share what God provides. As we look around the world today, many go hungry. But the problem is not a lack of food. There is enough to spare. The problem is distribution.

We cannot pray the Disciples' Prayer with sincerity and ignore those who lack the necessities of life. John asks this haunting question:

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? (1 John 3:17 NRSV).

The primary causes of hunger in the world are poverty and conflict. There are an estimated 1 billion poor people in developing countries who live on \$1 a day or less (Global Poverty Monitoring, World Bank ). Worldwide there are more than 20 million refugees and displaced persons due to wars and social unrest. The result is there are more than 852 million people (one in eight) who are chronically hungry or acutely undernourished.

As you can see, the scope of the problem is staggering. It leads many to shrug their shoulders in defeatism. How can one person possibly make a difference? Yet I am reminded of something Mother Teresa said:

"I never look at the masses as my responsibility. I look at the individual. I can love only one person at a time. I can feed only one person at a time."

God does not expect you to feed 852 million people. But he does expect that you will pray that they will be fed and then be willing to answer the prayer by loving your neighbor, one neighbor at a time.

### **CONCLUSION**

Praying for daily bread reminds us God cares for every aspect of our lives. We are to rely on God to meet all our physical needs but be concerned about living only one day at a time. To do that we need to thank God for today's provision, and trust him to meet tomorrow's needs. Praying for our needs is not only permitted but encouraged. But the Disciples' Prayer is not a selfish prayer. We are to gratefully receive what God provides and then graciously share what God provides with others.