

Pray Like This (Week 4) -Daily Bread **Sermon Summary**

Four specific things to notice and utilize in the sentence, "Give us today our daily bread":

1) The sentence contains a redundancy: why both "this day" and "daily"?

Because Jesus knows human beings, that's why. He knows that we instinctually expend a lot of our attention and energy on yesterday and tomorrow, not today. (This is why He'll say at the end of Matthew 6 in verse 34, only twenty verses after the Lord's Prayer, that "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.")

This evokes a famous story from the O.T., the most well-known about "daily" food, in fact: God's provision of manna one day at a time in Exodus 16 (click [here](#) to check it out.)

Thus, the first pragmatic note on prayer for us is to focus on praying for today's needs, and only today's, not the past or future. In fact, the best time to pray about the future is not now, but when tomorrow becomes today.

2) That word "daily" is previously unseen in ancient Greek; Matthew 6.11 is, to our current knowledge, its first use.

"Daily" is the combination of two words in Greek: "near/by/beside" + "the innermost part of a person, or their essence." So you combine them and the literal meaning of the word is something like "that which is required for me to live or exist."

Human beings have more essential needs than just food. Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" expresses it well: we have physical needs like food, shelter, and safety that must be met first, but then we also have social/relational needs (like connection, friendships, self-expression, love), followed by psychological/spiritual needs (like dignity, a purpose or meaning in life, serving a cause bigger than oneself, connecting to truth and beauty). Click [here](#) to learn more about this pyramid of needs, if you're interested.

So there's a good chance that every one of us has an essential need every day of our lives. We are hungry, even if not for food. That hunger is the telltale sign of what we lack, and that lack should be the spark that ignites our prayer.



3) If God needs to give us what we need, that means a) we don't currently have it and b) cannot provide it for ourselves. Thus, this is dependent and trusting kind of prayer - it is asking God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

So C. Clifton Black at Princeton Seminary notes that "important considerations are that 1) we beseech as a gift that which is not in our power to provide for ourselves, and 2) the one of whom we make this entreaty is God...This request acknowledges the petitioner's essential neediness...Simply put, we are creatures reliant on our Creator." Thus, this prayer is a corrective to our prevailing cultural narrative about self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and being self-made, which is humorously expressed in this dinnertime prayer from Bart Simpson: "God, we worked hard putting all this food on the table by ourselves, so thanks for nothing, amen."

Thus, in our prayer life it's healthy for us to pause on occasion and name all the ways we are depending on God, listing all the ways that we lean on Him or entrust ourselves to Him. This deflates the illusions we carry, and reminds us that the Christian life well lived is one in which we trust God with our lives more than we trust ourselves with them.

4) But this is about "our" daily bread, not just me and mine. That is, it's about everyone's needs - those around me, in my community, and across the globe.

The plurality of this prayer makes it more than a mere request or petition, it is also a commitment and call to action. James Mulholland writes that when a poor person prays for "daily bread," it is a cry of desperation, but when he does - as an educated, white, upper middle class American professional - it ought to be a vow to live generously.

So we are to live in such a way that we see and feel the needs of others, and then pray about them as much as we pray for our own needs. But when we pray, we should also expect that God will prompt, push, or direct us toward someone else's need that we might be able to meet - be it physical, relational, emotional, or spiritual.

5) United Methodist pastor Adam Hamilton summarizes every aspect of this sentence within the Our Father prayer as follows: "When Jesus told us to pray for our essential, substantial, existential bread - the bread that sustains our souls, the bread we need to survive - He was inviting the hungry to pray for physical food, inviting those who have enough to pray for those who don't and be moved to share, and He was teaching all of us to ask for that which will satisfy us in our deepest places. Jesus knew that some of us could have all the physical bread in the world and yet be spiritually starved, just as we can have all the wealth we could hope for and still be poor."

Praying This Week

Give it shot this week - put into practice what we talked about yesterday:

- For those who asked for it, here's the Lord's Prayer from the First Nations Translation of the Bible, used during yesterday's service: "O great Spirit, our Father from above, we honor Your name as sacred and holy. Bring Your good road to us, where the beauty of Your ways in the spirit-world above is reflected in the earth below. Provide for us day by day all that we need. Release us from the things we have done wrong, and in the same way help us release others from the wrong they've done to us. Guide us away from the things that tempt us to stray from Your good road, and set us free from evil and its worthless ways. Amen! May it be so!"

- This prayer from "Liturgies From Below" could be useful as a way to pray about your specific needs or hunger day by day, whatever form they might take: "Hunger for justice, hunger for care, hunger for a better life, hunger to be listened to, hunger for peace, hunger for happiness, hunger for enough, hunger for stability – deep down, we each have a hunger for life, and true life only begins with You, oh God, amen."

- Only focus your prayer on the needs of the current day (not yesterday, not tomorrow, not the more distant future).

- Spend time reflecting on what you lack or that for which you hunger in your life right now. Let that need - perhaps relational, psychological, or spiritual - motivate your prayer.

- At least once this week spend time in prayer (or journaling) about all that you need God to do for you that you cannot provide for yourself. Lean into the idea of living a dependent, trusting life.

- Pray as much about the multi-faceted needs of others, friends and strangers, near and far, as you do your own.

- Listen attentively for the nudge of God's Spirit when you lift up the needs of others; in fact, expect God to prompt you to do something for them to meet that need.