

INTRO: Allison and I have been married 32 years and there is one little wedding present that we still fairly often use. It’s a pewter bread plate.

It looks like something you could buy in a souvenir shop in Williamsburg. There is a picture of a farmer embossed on the plate, he has a scythe, he’s cutting wheat. And in old English letters it says: “Give us this day our daily bread.” When we set the table we use that little plate for bread or crackers or biscuits. We like it, because it speaks of God’s goodness in providing that meal and all our family meals over the years.

“Give us this day our daily bread” marks a shift of emphasis in the Lord’s Prayer.

We might say it’s a shift from focusing on God to focusing on ourselves. The first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are about God.

Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. Then the last three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are about us.

Give us our daily bread. Forgive us our debts. Lead us not into temptation.

So here the Lord Jesus is teaching us the importance of praying for ourselves—for the things we need, and for forgiveness, and help to live a good life. And when it comes to praying for yourself, the first thing he wants you to do is to ask your Father in heaven for bread.

This is such a change from the lofty and spiritual things that come just before it, that there have been some Christians who have said, this can’t mean literal, physical bread. The Lord has just told us to pray for God’s name to be hallowed, his kingdom to come, his will to be done as it is in heaven. And now it can’t be right that he is telling us to come down from that lofty spiritual. But that’s exactly what he is telling us.

John Calvin says this petition of the Lord’s Prayer is for us to comment is that the “feel that his fatherly kindness extends to the smallest matters.”

I think Calvin nails it.

I’ve said all along that more than anything else, Christ drives home that in prayer we must be continually aware we are not addressing a distant God, but our Father in heaven.

We come to him as his beloved sons and daughters.

And nothing is more natural than for a child to ask his or her father for things. I remember one time years ago I was talking to another Christ Covenant dad

after church and one of my children came and stood next to me, not interrupting, but making clear from her body language that she wanted to ask me something. This other dad said: “I know that look. She’s about to ask you for money.” And this child of mine grinned sheepishly and said: How did you know? Then proceeded to ask me for some money to do something with a friend.

Your Father in heaven wants you to ask him for the things all the time.

Every day, for everything, even for little things.

Jesus tells us to pray for our daily bread.

Paul says in Philippians to pray without ceasing.

That must mean that a thousand things a day are legitimate subjects for petition.

Money for your electric bill, and tires for your car, and health for your sick child, and the meeting with your boss tomorrow and the algebra test 5th period, and on and on.

The idea is that we should have a constant awareness of our heavenly Father and a freedom and willingness to ask him for needs of all kinds.

Now, this is the point I want to drive home in this sermon.

If you pray this way—without ceasing, asking your heavenly Father every day, many times a day, to give you the things you need, if you pray this way—it will leave its mark on you.

It will have profoundly positive effects on your soul. Let’s see how.

Two big ways. I’ll give them to you as we go.

MP#1 If you pray every day, asking your Father for everything, your heart will be changed towards things and people.

Let's start with things. Stuff. The material substance of life.

Your earnings. Your acquisitions. Your bills.

This is a huge part of everyday life.

Not a day goes by that you don't think about these things.

But how do you think about them?

Do worry? Do you envy other people? Are you discontent?

Is this a source of conflict in your family and marriage?

This is a part of life that is full of stumbling blocks.

Christians otherwise devout and moral can be blinded and enslaved by this.

But if you turn your financial affairs into petitions every day—

If every thought about your material situation becomes a prayer to your Father, it will in time change your heart toward this important part of your life.

Earlier in the service we read Proverbs 30:7-9.

Some people are surprised to read that and realize that Jesus didn't come up with the phrase "daily bread." He got it from this passage in Proverbs.

It's a prayer by a man named Agur (we don't know anything about him). He prays: "Lord, give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me my daily bread. Otherwise, I might 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."

Why did this wise man ask for daily bread?

Why didn't he pray for the whole amount right now?

Lord, make me rich and I won't have to bother you about this again.

Lord, stack it up in a big pile, and I will come and get some whenever I need it.

He didn't pray for that because he couldn't pray that way.

It would have gone against everything he knew about the life of faith and what is good for the soul and what God wants.

You see it was his prayer for his daily bread that gave him a clear, godly mind when it came to the matter of money.

If you are always praying to God about your money and possessions, if you are always making them a matter of conversation with him, then you will be enabled, more and more, to view them rightly.

I read recently that if you had bought \$1000 of Walmart stock in 1980

it would be worth \$1.9 million today.

I worked for Walmart the summer of 1983 and 1984 and they had a stock buying plan for all employees and my dad told me, Andrew, you should take some of your money and buy Walmart stock.

But I didn't think that was a good ideal. This was fun money for college.

You can't go on a date with Walmart stock.

So when I read that fact about Walmart kicked myself for not listening to old dad.

What if I had invested \$1000 or even \$500. I'd be a millionaire!

And I'm embarrassed to admit it, but for a few minutes I indulged in a pity party.

And I felt this surge of discontentment with my standard of living.

I would love to be a millionaire, but I what I really want, deep down is to be a content person, content with God's provision.

And I want to be a generous person.

And want to take seriously warnings about the love of money.

When you think about money—don't daydream or worry or envy—pray.

And as you pray, you will find that your mind is clarified and this important part of life is brought into submission to the truth and the judgment of your faith.

When God gives you what you need, you'll be grateful.

And if he gives you more, that's his gift to you so you can prove to be a faithful steward.

But in either case, because it has been a matter of sincere and frequent prayer, it is bathed in the convictions of your faith.

I also said that if you pray every day, asking your Father for everything, your heart will be changed towards people.

Jesus says to pray give us this day our daily bread.

Not give me this day my daily bread.

Other people are a huge part of everyday life.

We certainly think about other people and our dealings and relationships

with them just as much every day as we think about material and financial things.

And if every thought about them becomes a petition—then your heart is changed.

Spiritually-minded Christians throughout the ages have said that there is no better cure for bad feelings toward other people than praying for them.

This is especially true when you are envious of someone.

When someone in your circle of friends and colleagues seems to be getting more of

what you want for yourself, or who excels you, or who is more talented than you and advances in ways that you haven't.

Among pastors, it's your fellow seminary buddies who have the bigger churches and the more prestigious pulpits and who seem to have it easy.

I sat in class with him. Why does he have more than me?

How would you pray for that person?

Would you pray: Father, bring that person down.

You can't be a Christian and pray that prayer. You know full well what God would think of that prayer and what he would think of you if you dared pray that way.

You should pray that the Lord will supply all his needs as you pray for your own.

You should pray for his daily bread too.

When you start to pray that way for this person, you recognize immediately how sinful your spirit is. That the way you have been thinking about him or her is so judgmental and jealous.

It's not gracious and loving, in the way God thinks about you.

When you encounter this person or think of him during the day and you pray, and ask God to bless him, to show him good and make him happy—then those prayers will start to lay an obligation on your heart to think about him and treat him in a way that is consistent with your prayers.

You can't ask God to bless a person and then curse him in your heart.

Praying cleanses your heart towards others.

Don't worry, don't fantasize, don't be discontent, don't envy—pray to your Father in heaven.

And prayer will start to make a mark on your soul.

If you pray every day, asking your Father for everything,

then the two biggest aspects of your daily life—your finances and relationships will be brought under the judgment of your faith.

And, second . . .

MP#2 If you pray every day, asking your Father for everything, you will see his answers more clearly.

There are many mysteries to prayer—and one of the big ones is how God answers.

When I was a boy I was taught that God answers in three ways—yes, no, and wait.

That was helpful to me as a child, and I still go back to it.

But as I've gotten older I've realized, as I'm sure you have, that God's yeses are not always what you expect.

Sometimes a no is a yes in disguise.

And sometimes you realize that God answers in a way that is even bigger than the categories of yes, no, or wait. Because he raises the level of grace in your life in such a way that you see things very differently than you did at first.

I'm not saying that God doesn't give specific and clear answers to prayer.

He does. George Muller's prayer journal. Needed 160 pounds for bill. In mail. And, of course there are healings and other miraculous answers that are clearly the hand of God.

And even small things. Lord, please help me find a parking place, and he does.

But sometimes his answers are harder to see.

And your spiritual sight is sharpened through frequent prayers for daily bread. What is daily bread specifically? It's what you need for life.

Jesus is teaching us that when we pray to our Father and ask him for things, what we are really asking him for are the things necessary for abundant life.

That was the heart of Agur's prayer.

Don't make me rich or poor—both are detrimental to godliness in different ways. Lord, give me what I need.

But here's the thing. We don't always know what we need.

We feel pangs and longings. We think we understand what they are and we ask for the things that we think we need. But we might not be right. So when God gives us what we really need, it might seem like a no, but it's really a fatherly yes!

When children are little, one thing you can say that will always make them mad is:

I know someone who needs a nap.

You say that when they become whiny and demanding and sometimes focus on getting something or doing something.

But you know they aren't being bad, they're fatigued.

They don't need the thing they are focused on and demanding.

They need sleep. So you put them to bed and they cry.

But then they wake up sweet and happy.

We don't always know what we need, but God does.

And praying helps you grow up and see that you thought you needed one thing,
God knew better and gave you what you really needed.

I remember one time praying about a problem in the church that was really
bothering me, and asking God to please fix it.

And later that day I got a call from a preacher friend and he started telling me
about some of the problems in his church and they were so bad that when

I hung up I had a completely different view. Thanking God for my little problem.
The Lord didn't fix it the way I prayed, but he said yes.

Praying for daily bread is essentially trusting the Father to provide for our needs,
even when we don't see him providing in the way we think at first he ought to.
Sometimes the bread we most need isn't bread at all.

Sometimes the healing we most need isn't healing at all.

Sometimes the need God intends to meet for us is based on a higher need
and his greater purposes.

Nowhere is this more clear than in John 6. Jesus feeding the 5,000.

You remember that miracle. There was this great hungry crowd.

He multiplied the loaves and fishes and fed them all.

Then Jesus left and went over to the other side of the lake and the crowd followed.

When they found Jesus he said:

I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because
you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures
to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal
of approval . . . I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who
believes in me will never be thirsty. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in
the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may
eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this
bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Do you understand what is happening in this story?

The people came to Jesus with a need—they were hungry. And he met that need.

He gave them bread to eat and satisfied their physical hunger. They wanted more.
But Jesus saw they had another need they were not aware of.

It was a greater spiritual need, far more desperate.

And when they came to him again he said, No.

I am the bread that you seek. Eat this bread and live forever.

Most of the time God meets both our physical needs and deeper spiritual needs.

But sometimes, in order to meet our deepest needs,

he lets the lesser needs go unanswered.

Don't forget that this prayer for daily bread is part of a bigger prayer.

It's part of a prayer that begins with a request that God's name be hallowed, and that his kingdom comes in our lives and families and world, and that his will is done, not ours.

When we pray, meet my needs, Lord. It usually means bread if you're hungry, and healing if you're sick. But sometimes God says:

For my kingdom to advance, for my name to be hallowed, and my will done—and for you to understand your need for me, and for you to grow in holiness and wisdom—I'm going to allow you to remain hungry for a little longer.

Praise God he's a good enough father to do that. Because we don't like pain.

We don't like to wait. And if we could take the easy way out and get our stomachs filled and never have to learn another lesson, that would be fine.

But our Father in heaven sometimes gives and sometimes withholds—but he always answers our prayer for daily bread—always gives what we need.

And if you ever doubt that—look at what he's given you in his Son.

All your needs have been met in the life and death of Christ.

Remember how J.C. Ryle put it. He said that for a Christian

“the great business of life is a settled business, the great debt a paid debt, the great disease a healed disease, and the great work a finished work; and all other business, diseases, debts and works are then by comparison small.”

God still cares about the small things. Because they don't seem small to us.

Even though your great big debt of sin has been paid, the financial debt you are facing can still feel pretty big.

And your Father knows that. He knows your weakness. He cares for you.

And he wants you to come to him often, daily, with that need—and as you do, become more spiritually attuned, and you'll see him do what he's promised to do—to meet all of your needs.

CONC:

After Jesus spoke to the crowds he said:

I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.

What does that remind us of? Of the purpose of the Lord's Table.
If you want real food, real healing—trust in me, feed on me in by faith.
Lord's Table gives us a tangible assurance of that provision.
Take and feel and taste and eat the bread of life.

Are you praying for daily bread?
Do you sometimes doubt your Father is really listening and answering?
Do you think he really knows what you need?
Keep praying, and come to the Table.
Eat by faith of the Bread of Life.