

Teach Us To Pray: Give Us This Day

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We've been learning to pray for two weeks—learning to call God our Father. Everyone who is a follower of Jesus has that privilege. We can come to him knowing that he cares for us deeply and intimately. Yet, simultaneously, we were reminded of God's hallowed-ness—his holiness. And, this reminds us that, even though God is our heavenly Father, he is altogether different or separate from us. He'll not stand or tolerate sin in his kids; he'll not just overlook our rebellion. And, because of this, in order to make us his children, the Lord sent Jesus to the cross to pay for our sin and rebellion—holy God in human flesh as the ultimate sacrifice.

You see, it's only through faith in Jesus that we are able to call God Father.

Then last week, we learned what it means to pray for God's kingdom to come on earth, even as it exists in heaven. We were challenged to want something better than this fallen-world life. And, we considered how we might work for it right now—how we in the church must be a resistance movement against the sins and injustices of this life. The Lord's kingdom has come already, but it is not yet fully experienced. And, since this is the case, we must work all the more diligently until that great day when heaven fully invades earth, and Christ reigns forevermore.

So, we must pray and work for that day with great anticipation and longing.

That's where we've been. That's how Jesus teaches us to begin to pray to God. Just think about that beginning for a second. Think of how you usually begin to pray whenever you pray. If you're like me, you don't begin like Jesus teaches us to begin. If you're like me, starting prayers this way isn't natural for you.

- Movement one according to Jesus—God: who he is and what he deserves. Father God, holy God, may your name be praised.
- Movement two according to Jesus—God: his kingdom over our kingdom, his will over our will...right here, right now, more and more and more.

Jesus teaches us that prayer rightly begins with our Creator God—who he is and what he is doing. Prayer must start, Jesus tells us, with a singular focus on God. Only after we've *reoriented* ourselves or *repositioned* ourselves (with his character

and his work in the spotlight) can we begin to properly pray for our personal needs. It's only after such a reorientation that we know what to ask for ourselves.

So, today, in the third week of this sermon series, we finally come to the place where we usually try to begin our prayers—our needs, our asks, our wants.

As we recite it together and, then, study it together, let's keep this movement of the prayer in its context. Let's keep it grounded in the character of the Lord God and grounded in his mission and purpose for all things.

Join me now in the Lord's prayer.

Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ **Give us today our daily bread.**

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

[For, yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

We need to consider the nature of this line—*Give us this day our daily bread*. What's the ask here? We can learn so much if we get to the bottom of that question. So let's ask: (1st) Is this a spiritual or a physical request? Is Jesus teaching us to pray for a symbolic kind of spiritual bread or nourishment here? Or, is Jesus teaching us to pray for a literal meal? And, after we've asked that, let's ask: (2nd) Is this a request for needs or desires? Is Jesus teaching us to ask only for what's absolutely necessary? Or, is it okay to pray for more than mere basics?

1. Is this a spiritual or physical request?

I know when I come to God with requests, they're often of a physical nature. (And, they're also usually at the front of my prayer time—long before considering who God is and what he's all about, long before I pray all the *Father in heaven* stuff, or *your kingdom come* stuff.) You see, I'm thinking more about me.

- Please Lord, don't let me get sick right before I travel out to the Rockies for my camping trip.
- Please heavenly Father, help all five of our kids earn full-ride scholarships to college.
- Please Jesus, let there be a parking spot right in front of the hardware store. (My mother-in-law is notorious for praying for parking. And, to her credit, she's great at praising the Lord when she gets a good one.)

And, I'll bet many if not most of you pray similar kinds of prayers all the time, prayers for some type of physical provision. Are we all being shallow when we pray for such things? Is Jesus disappointed by such prayers?

On the other hand, I don't exclusively ask for physical provision, and I'll bet that you don't either. There are times when all of us pray for deep spiritual changes in our own lives and the lives of others. There are many instances in which we pray against the dark spiritual forces operating in this world.

- Dear Lord, give her an overwhelming sense of how much you care for her; don't let Satan attack her self-esteem any longer.
- Jesus, transform my son's heart; open his eyes to all you've accomplished for him—how you died in order to save him.
- Heavenly Father, open up the Bible to me now. Please speak into my life. Help me to feast on your holy word.

So, which is it? Which are we supposed to pray for? Are we to ask for spiritual or physical bread? The answer is...*Yes*.

When Jesus walked the earth, he preached to large crowds of hungry people; he opened up the deepest spiritual truths for them—truths about what's really wrong

with the world, about how dangerous and deadly sin is, about his heavenly Father's love for them. He offered them all this spiritual bread.

Yet, when he saw that they were physically hungry after that spiritual feast, he didn't send them away but gave them something to eat—real bread and real fish, an actual meal to satisfy their actual hunger.

The same is true when Jesus encountered people who were sick and diseased. He didn't simply tell them how to get healthy spiritually. He literally healed them. Jesus cured them of their sicknesses and diseases.

If you go back to Genesis, what do you find? You find God creating a world, a physical world. He created trees that you could climb, water you could bathe in, and people you could shake hands with. And, what's more, all of that physical stuff was good and very good; it was all spiritually excellent.

And, remember what came right before this daily bread request in the prayer. Jesus just told us to request something else—*your kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven*. Friends, right before this, we're told to pray for the unseen spiritual realm of heaven to invade this physical universe. In the end, there will be no separation between what's physical and spiritual.

God will once again dwell among us! Jesus will walk and talk with us!

One of the great heresies which has been often perpetuated among Christians is that physical things are bad and spiritual things are good. That isn't good theology, and that's not how Jesus teaches us to pray.

So, friends, don't divide what God doesn't divide. Don't separate the spiritual from the physical in your prayer life.

Before we move to the second question, consider Christ's temptation by Satan in the wilderness. The devil comes to Jesus after he had been fasting for forty days and forty nights. (In one of the most "captain obvious" moments in all of Scripture, Matthew tells us that Jesus was hungry.) So, what does Satan do with this hunger? He uses it to tempt Jesus.

If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread (Matthew 4:3).

That's a heavy temptation for someone who hasn't eaten anything for forty days and nights. (When I had just begun to date Natalie, I tried to join her in fasting for a week. I can tell you that by about day two I knew exactly where every billboard around Columbia, Missouri was that had a picture of food on it. I could smell food from a mile away. I didn't think of anything but food.)

Yet, how does Jesus answer this challenge from Satan? His response helps us as we think about the connection between spiritual and physical things. Jesus says:

It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

We must have communion with God. We must have spiritually lifegiving food from God, conversation with God, if we are to live. But, what is often ignored here is Jesus' introduction to that truth—"Man shall not live on bread *alone*...."

We do need food to live...just not *only* food. You see, you are both a spiritual and a physical being. When you are hungry or sick, there are spiritual ramifications. When you're under spiritual attack, there are physical ramifications. These two parts of you are intertwined. *Isn't this the reason Satan tempts Jesus, when he's hungry?!*

So, when you pray, pray for healthy trips to Colorado, full-ride scholarships for your kids, and parking spots at the mall. But, don't pray for these physical things as if there's no spiritual dimension to them. Don't forget that the way you view them and pray for them forms the very way you think about God and this world.

And, when you pray, pray for people to know how much God loves them and for people to get saved. But, don't pray for these spiritual things without any thought about ways you can provide some tangible encouragement or meet some real need to help them in their spiritual struggle. We must not forget that our spiritual prayers cannot simply remain spiritual prayers. *We are called to act them out!*

Well, let's briefly consider our last question?

2. Is this a request for needs or desires?

And, as with the first question, the answer is...Yes.

Look, some people have taken the two words "daily bread" and have imagined that they must mean—*bare minimum*. They've supposed that we shouldn't ask God

for anything more than the absolute basics. You could sum up this type of thinking like this: “Jesus taught us to pray—Give us this day our daily bread, not daily cake. Don’t push it with God! Just ask him for the basics.”

Friends, it’s this kind of thinking that has led to all kinds of hollow movements in the church—like men and women intentionally inflicting misery upon themselves and doing without almost any daily bread in order to please God (e.g. the ascetics). Or, those who won’t save for retirement or rainy days since that’s not trusting God to provide for those needs when they come.

Such bare minimum thinking about daily bread betrays an ugly view of God. What kind of God are you praying to if you can’t or shouldn’t request anything more than the bare necessities? Certainly not the God whom Jesus teaches us to address as our heavenly Father. And, not the One whom Jesus tells us loves giving good gifts to his children whenever they ask (Matthew 7:11).

Nope! We’ve got to keep this prayer in its biblical context!

You know, there are days for going without. There are days to fast and pray and mourn. On those types of days, we pray to God for a certain kind of daily bread. Not strong drink and rich food! Not a party with music and dancing! Instead, we ask for a time of silent meditation and reflection. That’s the daily bread that’s appropriate at those moments in life.

On the other hand, there are days of celebration—day where joy overflows. And, when those days come, we pray for another kind of bread. All the best foods! All the best music! All the best dancing! (Jesus loved to party. He was so good at it that he was accused of being a big-old sinner by the Pharisees. I think, above all else, Christians should be characterized as a joyous and fun people. The kind of people who know when it’s time to party and throw the very best ones.)

What am I getting at? What’s the point?

Well, it’s this. When we pray for our daily bread, we pray for the kind of bread which that day calls for. And, it means we’re content—before our heavenly Father—with whatever the bread of the day is.

- When it’s God’s will that we celebrate, we are happy to feast on our portion for that day and praise him for it.

And...

- When it's God's will that we fast and meditate, we are equally happy to go without any food on that day, while worshiping him nonetheless.

This is all part of what we've been learning to pray over the last two weeks—
“...hallowed be your name (not mine, Lord), your kingdom come (not mine Lord),
your will be done (not mine Lord), on earth (in me, Lord Jesus) as it is in heaven.”
Do you see? Jesus must become greater; we must become less (John 3:30).

And, so we pray for our daily bread. Give us whatever you will, Lord. *Amen.*