

## OUR DAILY BREAD

The Lord's Prayer Sermon Series, Week 3  
A Sermon by the Rev. Joyce L. J. Lawson

Proverbs 22:9, Isaiah 58:6-8  
Matthew 6:9-11, John 6:30-31, 35

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### VIDEO

Too often, I think we approach the Lord's Prayer like a beverage we quickly gulp down when it is meant to be slowly sipped like a fine wine so that we fully appreciate the depth of its flavor. We fail to savor the Lord's Prayer because we say it too quickly by rote. The fact that Jesus told us to **"Pray then in this way..." (Matthew 6:9)** means there is a lot of meaning for us in the specific words as well as the pattern of this prayer. This six-week series on the Lord's Prayer is about us taking the time and learning how to "savor" this prayer by diving deeply into what it says and means.

Two weeks ago, I began with **"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name" (Matthew 6:9)**. I shared with you the implications of addressing God with the inclusive word "our" and the relational word "father." As we acknowledged God's dwelling place as "heaven," I invited you to imagine the awesomeness of a God who created an immense universe but who is also as close to us as our breathe. And then I shared with you that "hallowed be thy name" is not an acknowledging of God's holiness, but a request that God's name be revealed as holy to others through what we say and do.

Last Sunday, I focused on the statement, **"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10)**. Earth is not supposed to look like my kingdom or your kingdom, but God's Kingdom. Life is not about my will or your will being done, but God's will. As the One who most fully embodied God's Kingdom and will on earth, Jesus showed us that heaven looks like love, peace, mercy and justice; it's a place where people are not hungry, thirsty, sick and without clothes and shelter. To pray the Lord's Prayer is not our asking God to change those conditions and solve those problems, but our acknowledging that God expects us to do it by rolling up our sleeves and getting to work.

Today, we dive deeper into the statement, **"Give us this day, our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11)**. After the previous two statements, we might think this one seems straight forward. However, when we pray this today, do you expect to find a pot roast with potatoes, carrots and gravy magically ready and waiting for you to eat when you get home? You might like such a thing to happen, but I don't think any of us expect it. So, what are we praying for when we pray for daily bread? Well, let's figure it out by looking at the seemingly insignificant but key word of "daily." The word "daily" is found in both Matthew and Luke's versions of the prayer, and in Greek that word is **"Epiousian" (epee-oooh-see-on)**.

The word "epiousian" appears nowhere else in Greek literature up to this point. When it appears in Matthew and Luke's Gospels it's the first and earliest usage of the word as far as scholars are aware. Remember, Jesus spoke in Aramaic, which left early Christians to translate what he said into Greek, which was the universal language of the Roman Empire at that time. So, in the first century

someone used "epiousian" (epee-oooh-see-on) to describe the bread Jesus was inviting us to pray for.

Guess what? "Epiousian" does not literally translate as "daily." In fact, we don't know exactly how to translate it since the word had never previously been used. But apparently no existing Greek word was quite right to capture what Jesus had said in Aramaic, so a Greek speaking Christian made up a word. "**Epi**" is a preposition that means "**on, in, upon, to;**" it is a spatial relationship preposition. "**Ousian**" means "**essence, being, substance.**" When we say the word "daily" we are referring to that which is essential, substantial, necessary for us to be, to exist, to survive. It's like we are saying, "**Give us this day the essential bread we need to survive.**"

If you are someone who does not have enough food to eat, then the bread you need to survive is physical food. When many in this world pray these words, they are praying that their children will have the food to eat and the water to drink that will allow them to survive and thrive. Do you think there are people in this area or not far away who pray this prayer in this way? They are probably people who live at or below the poverty line, and who are not always sure where the food is coming from for their next meal. There are certainly other places around the world where the situation is even more dire.

But being that we are mostly people who are not worried about our next meal, what are we praying for when we say, "**Give US this day OUR daily bread**" (Matthew 6:11)? At this point I want to draw your attention to the words "us" and "our." Have you ever seriously considered that when you pray these words you are not saying, "give me this day my daily bread"? Because you are using the words "us" and "our," you are praying, "Give all of your children daily bread, Lord!" You are praying for all of God's children.

And how does God answer this prayer from those praying it in poverty-stricken countries like South Sudan and Malawi, or from food insecure areas of Cleveland and poverty-ridden areas of Appalachia? How does God provide for them? It's true that God provided manna for the people of Israel during the days of wilderness wandering following the Exodus from Egypt. But food does not typically appear in miraculous ways on someone's lawn, or outside their door or on their table. God answers prayers like these in the way God most often answers prayer – by sending people.

We are the instruments God uses to answer other people's prayers! So when we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," Jesus is telling us to pray for everyone with our eyes wide open to see those who are hungry and our sleeves rolled up to do something about it. "**For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...**" (Matthew 25:35), said Jesus. I mentioned last week that the daily rhythm of the Christian life is pray and work. When we engage in this rhythm there are blessings that not only go out to others but also come back to us. "**Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor**" (Proverbs 22:9). I know you know this! There is something joyful that is activated in our hearts when we help someone else, and that's because generosity and blessing go hand in hand. This truth is expressed throughout scripture.

Because most of us are not even close to living at or below the poverty level, our praying for daily bread points us to something else that Jesus said, **"From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded"** (Luke 12:48). When we pray for all to have daily bread, those of us who have much accept the responsibility of being the answer to someone else's prayer for food. So, how do we do this? More specifically, what are the ways YOU do this? Perhaps you feel a tug on your heart when you go grocery shopping, so you regularly purchase items for our ongoing Food Barrel collection. Perhaps you volunteer monthly or as often as you can at the Cleveland Food Bank. Perhaps you generously participate in the Christmas Sponsor-a-family collection or generously respond when my discretionary fund that helps address the needs of local individuals is getting low. What else, who else do you think God wants you to notice and take to heart so that you can be the answer to prayer?

When we pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* some are praying for the food they need to survive, some are praying for those who are hungry and for God to show them how they can help them. But for everyone who prays this prayer, there is yet another kind of bread that is essential for survival. I'm referring to the kind of bread that satisfies a hungry heart and helps us live with meaningful purpose. Jesus said, **"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work"** (John 4:34). In other words, Jesus' food and our food as Jesus followers to do God's will. This is the very thing we pray when we say, *"Thy will be done"* (Mt. 6:10) right before we pray for "our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11).

The key to this deeper meaning of daily bread that gives our lives purpose by doing God's will is found in Jesus words, **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"** (John 6:35). By praying for daily bread, we are praying for that which satisfies us on a deeper level, a spiritual level. John is the only Gospel that doesn't tell us about Jesus initiating Holy Communion as part of the Last Supper. Instead, when Jesus feeds the multitudes in chapter 6 that is when he reveals himself to everyone as the "bread of life." When we eat the bread and drink from the cup of Holy Communion, we not only remember but we continue to acknowledge that Jesus is the bread of life.

So, when we are literally hungry and don't know where our next meal is coming from, we pray, **"Give us this day the essential bread we need to survive."** When we have plenty and pray these same words, we pray for those in need, and we offer to help them. And every time we pray these words, we are also praying for the bread of life, for Jesus to satisfy our hearts and souls and to lead us in doing God's will. Let us pray... Good and gracious God, as we share in Holy Communion, give us the bread we need for our lives to thrive with the love and grace of Jesus Christ! Amen.

Jesus invites all who follow him to come. As we eat and drink, let us be filled with the blessing of his presence and compelled by his example to be a blessing to others. In this church, all are welcome at Jesus' table. Let us begin our preparation by joining together in confession...

