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The Lord's Prayer #5:
Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread
Matthew 6:11

There are many things we have need for instruction in, but paying attention to *our needs* is generally not one of them, right? At least, at a superficial level, that is what we might think. But when we remember the distinction between *needs* and *wants*, *necessities* and *desires*, we should quickly begin to realize that actually we could use some help in thinking through how to put our priorities in order, after all. How do duties, needs, and wants all fit together in life, and in what order? And what do we do with our *needs* once we have identified them?

Today we are continuing our ongoing study of the Lord's Prayer, and we've come to the fourth petition: "Give us this day our daily bread." It is a request that directly addresses this whole important issue of putting our priorities in order and of responding to our real needs correctly.

And before we get into some of the issues involved in this simple prayer, we do need to notice once again *the order and structure* of the Lord's Prayer. We are at a critical junction in the structure of the Lord's Prayer. The preface- Our Father in heaven- and the first three petitions—hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven—all focus on *God*, on His person and priorities, His will and works.

But now, and only after this sustained God-ward focus, we turn to *our own concerns*. Now, it is worth pointing out here that when we are taught here to pray for "daily bread," we are not to understand Jesus to be teaching us simply to pray about *food*. He *is* doing that, of course, but He is doing *more*. In Jesus' day, bread was the most basic component in the daily, necessary diet of most people, just as it remains to this day, even in our own culture and generation. Talking about daily "bread" is a summary way of talking about need: it is shorthand for fundamental necessities, whatever they may be.

So after teaching us to confess in prayer the fatherhood and Trinitarian nature of God and to pray for God's glory, kingdom, and will, Jesus teaches us to pray here for our needs, our necessities. Not our wants—that is very important—but our needs.

And that order teaches us about godly priorities. It teaches us that God's glory ought to be more important to a child of God than food on their table and money in their bank account. It teaches us that the spread of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is more foundational to the Christian life than food and clothing and hearth and home. It teaches us that knowing God's will and doing God's will on earth is more to be desired than full bellies and financial security.

"Seek first," Jesus goes on to say in Matthew 6:33, "the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you." That is the message of the Lord's Prayer. It is drumming home in our thinking every time we pray it—God first. Prize the Lord. Delight in the Lord. Your needs cannot trump God's glory. Our needs cannot take priority over Christ's prerogatives.

The structure of the Lord's Prayer teaches us to keep our needs in their place. How easily our needs grow and God's glory shrinks! Think of your own prayer life. Sometimes our God-ward emphases in prayer consists in little more than a brief nod in God's direction as we thank Him for giving us this or that blessing. But then we move quickly on to our needs. For some of us we scarcely pray at all unless there is a crisis. The pursuit of God's glory does not move us to prayer the way a financial crisis can, isn't that right.

But Jesus is calling us in the Lord's Prayer to put our needs in their place.

Secondly, and alongside of that, the fact that Jesus teaches us to pray "Give us this day our daily bread" at all reminds us that however much God's glory must take priority in both our prayers and in our lives, our needs are not irrelevant.

Isn't that amazing? Jesus is reminding us that God His Father is interested in our empty bellies and family dysfunction and financial difficulties. He cares about the details. He wants to know about your stresses and concerns. He has an ear to hear you when you cry out in confusion or sadness or desperation or need.

Whatever the need, however mundane and specific, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ cares about it, because He is our God and Father and He cares about us.

We said a moment ago that some of us struggle to do anything else but pray about our own needs. But there may be some here who struggle to feel that the

details of their needs are worthy of God's attention at all. They find prayer in generalities easier and somehow more reverent. Prayer, when it finds any place in their lives, is made up of expressions of thankfulness and vague generalizations.

Let me say that both extremes reveal how self centered our prayers really are. The first person who only prays about their needs is obviously preoccupied with themselves. But the second person who only prays in generalizations and is uncomfortable bringing the details of their private needs to God shows how little they think they really need God. I can deal with it myself. Why bother God with it? He's not interested anyway in my little concerns surely? So for this person, no less than the first, their prayer life reveals their self reliance. I can deal with it. God won't be interested anyway.

The Lord's Prayer directly challenges both. God must come first, so put your needs in their place. But remember as you do that your needs do have their place. God delights to hear the cries of the hearts of His children, in all the details and particularities of their need. Whatever it is, however seemingly slight to you, our heavenly Father is glorified when His children go to Him for help in prayer.

So the structure of the Lord's Prayer shapes our priorities. Now let's turn to think about this fourth petition itself.

And I want us to see how praying, "Give us this day our daily bread" teaches us how to respond to our needs.

How do I respond to real needs when they arise in my life? For the most part, people respond to need with worry, self reliance, despair, or pride or some mixture of all four. Isn't that how we do it? That's how I respond to need: anxiety increases, I look to myself to fix it or address it, and then I fight off the despair that comes when I discover, yet again how inadequate I am as the solution, or I feel good about myself for taking care of business, confirmed in my smug self reliance and pride.

When we praying the Lord's Prayer, this petition specifically offers another way.

And the first thing entailed in praying "Give us this day our daily bread" is confession.

One of the best expositions of the Lord's Prayer is found in our own Westminster Larger Catechism. In the answer to question 193 on this fourth petition the Catechism begins like this, "In the fourth petition, acknowledging that in Adam, and by our own sin, we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them; and that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us, nor we to merit, or by our own industry to procure them; but prone to desire, get, and use them unlawfully."

The Catechism says that this petition involves an acknowledgement, a confession of at least two things. First, we are confessing our inadequacy to meet our own needs, and secondly, we are confessing our sin that renders us undeserving of even our most basic necessities. And I want us to spend a moment or two wrestling with that twofold confession.

First, as we pray for daily bread, we are being asked to *confess our ultimate and final inadequacy to meet our own needs*. We are being taught to face the *insufficiency* of our own efforts and energies as the sole and primary source for meeting our daily needs.

When God made our first parents, Adam and Eve, He placed them in Eden with two trees—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which they were forbidden to touch, and the tree of life, which they were to eat from freely. Those two trees were symbolic. They were there to teach Adam and Eve two fundamental truths. The tree of knowledge was forbidden to teach them that good and evil was defined by God and His will alone, not by human beings as they chose. Staying away from this tree and its fruit was a way of living out their submission to the law of God. The second tree, the tree of life, was to be eaten of as though to say that life is sustained by eating the fruit God alone provides.

Adam and Eve were to live their lives with those two truths always before them. God sets the boundaries of righteousness and sin. He alone is Lord of the conscience. And God alone, having made them, sustains them. Spiritual life and physical life alike were gifts of God. Even before human beings fell into sin and rebellion, back in the unfallen creation, they were to live a life of utter dependence on God even for their daily food. We were made dependent, even before sin, on God for life itself.

One of the great cultural drivers that pushes us all is the need to succeed, to be self-made men and women, to forge our own way and make something of our lives. It has become a part of the American dream to be pioneers and do it *our* way. Getting down on our knees and praying “Father... you give me my daily bread today, please? If you don’t give it to me, however hard I work, however ingenious my business strategy, however wisely I invest, if your don’t give me my daily bread, no matter what secondary means I might use to get it, I will go wanting at the end of this day,” can sit hard with many of us.

But we Christians are people who have come to recognize that no matter how gifted and talented and privileged we might be, our daily needs come to us only because God, whom we confess to be Lord of all, graciously condescends to give them. Christians confess themselves utterly dependent creatures, not at all self sufficient. Praying for our daily needs shatters our pride, and our failure to do so unmasks it.

Secondly, in praying “Give us this day our daily bread,” we are confessing *our sin* that leaves us always undeserving of even our basic daily needs. The Catechism says we confess that, “in Adam, and by our own sin, we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them.”

Do you catch the force of what is being said there? It is saying that your every sin places you in a position that deserves to be plucked, that very moment, from this life and condemned to hell forever, and that every breath you take, every morsel of necessary food that you consume, and every dollar you spend, is a gift of sheer, extravagant, patient, grace from the hand of the God whose righteousness is inflamed against our sins.

Now we are given to thinking about human rights, aren’t we? The Declaration of Independence says that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”

Now in one sense, of course, that is a fine statement of fundamental rights that need to be protected and defended. In another sense, however, we can say that

those “inalienable rights” are also *gifts of grace*, gifts that we have *no* fundamental claim upon. That we enjoy any of them at all is only because of the astounding mercy of God.

We do not *deserve* life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We are not *owed* it. However much we can stand on those constitutional rights before the courts of this country, *we cannot stand on them before the court of heaven*. That we may enjoy them in any degree whatsoever is all due to God’s sheer mercy.

James, in chapter 1:17 of his letter, reminds us that, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” And Paul challenges us in 1 Corinthians 4:7, asking, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” The Lord’s Prayer, in teaching us to pray “Give us this day our daily bread,” is teaching us to remember that even our daily necessities, even the most basic, fundamental needs that sustain our lives, are gifts of sheer mercy and grace. All we have has been received as a gift of mercy alone.

Sometimes people talk about social justice. And what they mean is caring for the poor, striving to ensure that the basic necessities of life are met and the preservation of human dignity is safeguarded. And while I want to say that those activities are good and important, and often commanded by God even, they are not matters of social *justice*, they are matters of social *mercy*. When we pray “give us this day our daily bread,” we are not praying about our *rights and entitlements*. God is not bound to put bread on our tables each day and money in our bank accounts each month. We are not praying for *justice*; we are praying for *mercy*—not for what we *deserve* but for what we *do not deserve*.

And at this point, even this prayer for simple physical sustenance points us to the *gospel*, doesn’t it? The gospel is that in Jesus Christ God does not treat sinners as their sins deserve. He gives them mercy because He gave His Son justice.

In John 6:35 Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” Whenever God gives us daily bread for our bodies, we need to understand that He is no less ready to give life to our souls by Jesus Christ His Son. As He sustains our bodies by His

common grace, He longs to give us spiritual life by His *saving* grace. Bread feeds our bodies, the Bread of Life, the Lord Jesus Christ, can give life to our souls.

So we are confessing these two truths as we pray this fourth petition. We are insufficient and inadequate to provide for all our needs. We are always God dependent. And secondly, we are sinners. That means that daily bread is not a right but a mercy, not a divine obligation but an act of divine grace.

But we are also *asking* for something here. And that is the second part of how we are to respond to our needs. It may seem rather obvious, but this petition reminds us that we are to respond to our needs with *prayer*.

First, we are to pray, here, *as children* who go to their fathers instinctively with their needs. “*Our Father* in heaven...give us this day our daily bread.” That is the prayer of a child dependent on his Father. Hudson Taylor, the missionary to China, wrote in his journal,

“I am taking my children with me, and I notice that it is not difficult for me to remember that the little ones need breakfast in the morning, dinner at midday, and something before they go to bed at night. Indeed I could not forget it. And I find it impossible to suppose that our heavenly Father is less tender or mindful than I... I do not believe that our heavenly Father will ever forget His children. I am a very poor father, but it is not my habit to forget my children. God is a very, very good Father. It is not His habit to forget His Children.” (Cited in Phillip Graham Ryken, *When You Pray*, 113)

Our Father loves to hear and answer the prayers of His children for their every need. We need to remember, as Hudson Taylor obviously did, the promise of Matthew 7:7-11. Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

I wonder if you pray like that? Do you pray like a child resting on their father's protecting abounding all sufficient love? If not, it may be because we are not yet truly His children. Before we can pray like children, we need to rest in His Son. Faith in Christ alone enables us to pray to His Father as *our* Father.

Secondly, we are to pray daily. Give us this day our daily bread. The assumption in the petition is that each day we pray for that day's sustenance. Nothing expresses our dependence on God more than our prayers. This petition speaks both directly to that dependence and to the response we ought to make to it in prayer.

Paul called us to pray without ceasing. We are to be praying always. Philippians 4:6-7 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

The way to kill anxiety in the face of need is to pray and supplicate the throne of God with thanksgiving, letting your requests be made known to God. Instead of anxiety, God's Word promises the peace of God which surpasses all understanding to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

There is peace for you before the throne of God in prayer. Go to Him like a child to his father, resting on the Son, Jesus Christ alone. Go to Him confessing your insufficiency and need, and go to Him confessing your sin seeking mercy. Ask seek and knock, for the Father who knows what you need before you ask Him, delights to give good gifts to those who do.

Amen.