

“Daily Bread”

Lent: Teach us to Pray

Matthew 6:7-15

03/19/23

Introduction

Pray.

George Muller. During my time in seminary I was assigned to read the biography of a man named George Muller. If you're not familiar, George Muller was a 19th century minister whose calling on his life was to care for vulnerable children across England.

Over the course of his 93 years of life, Muller started 117 schools which cared for over 10,000 orphans and educated over 120,000 children. But that's not what he is most known for in Christian circles today. Muller is most famous because of his fundraising strategy for this work, or rather lack thereof. Muller believed that God had called him to never ask for donations from donors, but rather to “pray in the donations”.

Over the course of his ministry Muller raised what today would be the equivalent of \$97 million dollars, having never asked for a single dime.

The biography tells one story about a particular morning early in his ministry where he stood up in front of 300 orphan children with nothing in the kitchen or pantry to feed them. Muller prayed – “Lord, thank you for providing our daily bread.” As the story goes, as soon as Mueller said ‘amen’ there was a knock on the door, and a local baker was standing there with 3 huge trays of fresh baked bread. Moments later the milkman appeared, as his cart had mysteriously broken down outside and he was wondering if Muller could use the loads of fresh milk.

We are continuing this morning in our line by line journey through the Lord's Prayer.

And we are looking this morning at v11 – **Give us this day our daily bread.**

A prayer that, for George Muller some 200 years ago, had been answered in the most immediate, tangible and specific way.

Now to be honest it's very tempting for me to preach a very simple sermon this morning. To tell you that incredible story of George Muller, tell you that this line invites us to bring our requests to God, to stir up your emotions with stories of God's provision and then get you praying. And that wouldn't be wrong. That would be faithful to the text and the invitation of the Scriptures.

But to be honest with you, when I read that story almost a decade ago in seminary, and even now when I tell it, there's all sorts of mixed emotions that rise up within me, and I wonder if the same is true for you.

On the one hand I'm stirred to greater faith.

A desire to pray bold prayers that God might answer miraculously and immediately. And that's real and that's in there.

But there's also these feelings of shame and sadness and insecurities that sit on my heart as well.

There's a part of me that hears that story and wants to run from prayer.

First, because I immediately start to think about my prayers that seem to be left unanswered.

I think about all the times there were no (figuratively speaking) random bakers showing up at my door, where God didn't deliver on what I asked him to do. Times I asked for what I felt like were reasonable, God-glorifying requests that were not resolved how I wanted.

But it also makes me want to run because I don't really know what to do with my desires as a follower of Jesus.

- Like I know what to do with the big Kingdom ones – that my neighbor would get saved, that the Lord would be with those in my life who are suffering – I get that bring those to God absolutely.
- And I know what to do with the desires I have that I know are evil and against God's design – desires I have that I should not have – I bring those to God in confession and repentance.

But what do I do with my desires in the middle? Those desires that aren't world changing or wicked but are just there?

It's the great parking spot prayer conundrum right? Should I pray for a parking space? Dan's Gma - "Father God, full of grace, help me find a parking space." Is that ok? Does God care about that? Am I allowed to ask for that? What if I'm not even sure it's a good desire, or a big enough desire or want or need?

Do you wrestle with these questions?

- Am I supposed to or even allowed to pray about this lingering cough that won't go away after being sick the past few weeks?
- Am I supposed to or even allowed to ask God for a promotion at work or to get more recognition from my boss?
- Am I supposed to or even allowed to ask God to help my kid sleep through the night so I don't have to get up at 2am all the time?
- Am I supposed to even allowed to ask God for a husband or a wife, or more friends, or a friend?

Do you resonate with that at all?

So what do we do with this line from Jesus - Give us this day our daily bread?

Because it feels out of place. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. Got it, I can pray those prayers. And I get what comes next a little – Forgive us our sins. Lead us not into temptation. Those seem spiritual enough.

But give us...bread? How common. And yet, as I've been learning over the past few weeks, if we have eyes to see it...how beautiful and necessary it is to learn to pray this line for life and communion with God.

Exodus 16 + Manna

But to see that we need to be willing to venture a little bit deeper than just what's on the surface. Because this is a specific word choice from Jesus. He doesn't simply teach us to pray - "Give us this day our daily needs." He says "give us this day our daily bread." And that matters.

It would have been impossible for his audience of Jewish disciples to hear that phrase "daily bread" and not have in the back of their minds Exodus 16, the most famous of daily bread stories in the Old Testament.

I want to look at the story together today as we consider this line in the prayer because I think if we understand this story it'll really help us understand how to pray this line in the prayer today and into this week and on and on.

Exodus 16.

Daily Bread and Our Prayers

Alright that's the story. That's what is almost certainly ruminating in the back of the disciples' minds as they hear this line from Jesus - *pray then like this...give us this day our daily bread.*

So let me try to apply this into our lives...

Here's what it means that we can ask our heavenly Father – “Give us this day our daily bread” – It means...

1. We can and should and must bring all of our requests to God.

Notice the trajectory of the passage:

- V2-3 – They're hungry, and they start grumbling to Moses and Aaron - you led us out here to kill us with hunger
- V6-8 – What are we that you grumble against us? Your grumbling is not against us? Your grumbling is against the Lord!

SO, v9 – **'Come near before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.'**

Do any of you have a lack of bread? Do any of you hunger? Do any of you long for what is not being satisfied? Bring your grumbling to God.

Meaning – No request is too small or mundane for us to bring to our heavenly Father.

What do we do with our needs? Our wants? Our desires – we bring them before God and we ask Him.

It's a good thing for the people of God to have bread. Not having bread is never a good thing in the narrative of Scripture and God never rebukes his people for coming to ask for bread. Famines. Lev 26 - Promised Land.

He does not chastise the Israelites in **Exodus 16** – How dare you ask for bread in the wilderness! Get over it. You have me! I took you out of slavery. BE CONTENT! Not at all.

What does God say in v12? **12 “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”**

I heard your grumbling, your need, your desire – here's some bread!

That's the invitation of this prayer – we bring our desires for bread to God. There's nothing too ordinary, nothing too boring, nothing too normal that God does not invite us to bring into conversation with Him. We voice our needs to God. We go to God with our need for bread and our lack of bread and we ask Him.

But this is hard for us...let's just be honest...it's hard to ask God for daily bread, is it not?

For some of us, we're really afraid, validly so, of turning God into a cosmic genie. We don't want to have this relationship with God where we think He exists just to satisfy my needs and take care of me and answer my requests. And listen – that's a good fear to have. God is not your personal butler. He will not be ordered around by you.

But maybe for a good chunk of us in the room, that's not actually the side of the ledge we're going to fall off of. Maybe for some of us, our fear of turning God into a genie actually keeps us from asking him for anything.

For others of us, somewhere along the way we got it into our minds that contentment means doing away with desire. That if I'm supposed to be content with what I have, that means I have to stop desiring what I don't have.

- I'm not truly content in my singleness until I stop desiring a spouse.
- I'm not truly content with my job, until I stop desiring a better one.

Can I just free you up here? That's NOT the Bible! According to the Scriptures, contentment is not a doing away of the desire, but a trusting of God in the midst of the desire, such that we're willing to ask him for it.

And yet still for others, we struggle to ask for daily bread because we don't want to be dissatisfied. And so unfortunately we've convinced ourselves or others we're content when really we're just afraid that we'll be let down. What looks like contentment is actually cynicism and self-protection. We call it contentment because it seems holier, when really we're just afraid to ask for something and God say no, and then we're faced with disappointment, hurt, and grief.

Let me suggest to you that typically we are much more shy/reserved/afraid to ask for our needs than God tells us to be.

James 4:2 – You do not have, because you do not ask.

Matt 6:7-8 – 7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Matt 7:7 – “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

Phil 4:6 – Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

So ask him for what you need, desire, and want.

I'm learning this first hand right now. Praying for daily bread in my house looks like:

- Lord, I need to find my kid's shoes so we can leave on time.
- Lord, I need you to help me get this left turn out of my neighborhood so I won't be late to my meeting.
- Lord, I need you to help me have words for this hard conversation later.
- Lord, I need you to help this caffeine kick in because I am struggling to stay awake while doing this project right now.

Now, should I be asking for all of those things? I'm gonna be honest...idk. I think so? I think that's the invitation of the prayer and of the rest of Scripture, but here's what I do know – as I've been learning to ask for the small, mundane, trivial, and uncertain...my faith in God is growing.

Because...and that leads to point 2...

2. Asking for daily bread is an act of faith.

Look back with me at Exodus 16:4 – **4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.**

“Whether they will walk in my law or not” – that’s OT phrasing for – whether or not they will trust me and follow me.

If I give them bread, but make them go back day by day, and on the 6th day for 2 days so they can honor and keep the Sabbath...will they trust me? Will they trust I'll provide it again tomorrow? Will they trust I know what they need? Will they trust my ways and my hand of provision in their lives? And as we saw some gather and try to keep it. Some don't gather enough for the 7th day.

They have to learn to trust. To pray – give us this day our **daily bread** – and then trust that God actually will.

Asking for daily bread is an act of faith.

Lord, I'm asking for what I need today, and I trust in faith that you're good. And that you know what I need. And that Matthew 6 says if I seek first your kingdom, you'll take care of exactly what I need.

So when I ask you for daily bread it means I'm trusting that what you give me is exactly what I need.

I'm trusting that you answer according to your good purposes.

Sometimes that answer is yes. And because we actually prayed, we get to rejoice with gratitude at the giving hand of God.

Sometimes that answer is no. And we learn to say with the Psalmist is **Psalm 34:10 – those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.**

That's the prayer of faith. God I'm trusting that because you said no that was not what you had for me. I'm trusting you know what is best. Lord, I would have given myself that promotion if I were you, but I'm trusting that I lack no good thing. I'm trusting you to take care of what I need, and you'll provide and answer what I lack as you see fit, in your timing and in your way.

And we can even go back to last week's prayer – Lord I'm going to lament this. I'm grieving it. And even that lament from your good and gracious “no” is an act of faith and trust.

JI Packer – “Now comes the real test of faith. You, the Christian, have prayed for today's bread. Will you now believe that what comes to you, much or little, is God's answer? And will you on that basis be content with it, and grateful for it?”

Just by way of exercise in learning to trust God's “no”, it'd be worth taking some time this week to think through all of the previous 'no's' you are now grateful for

Sometimes that answer is 'keep asking'. God loves to hear his children ask. Sometimes He intends to say yes, but desires to grow our faith through making us ask more and for longer durations than we are often ready to.

Sometimes that answer is to change our desire.

Don't worry about sorting out whether your desire is right now before bringing it to God, bring it to Him as His child and let Him sort it out for you!

Harper. Cake for breakfast. That's so stupid. But I'm so glad you're asking so I can sort out your desire and show you what it is you should truly want right now.

NT Wright – “Our natural longings for bread and all that it symbolizes, are not to be shunned as though they are of themselves evil. God knows our desires in order that we may turn them into prayer. In order that they might be sorted out, straightened out, untangled, and reaffirmed.”

OK SO:

- **We can and should and must bring all of our requests to God.**
- **Asking for daily bread is an act of faith.**

Deuteronomy 8

But there's one more thing happening underneath the surface of Exodus 16 I want us to see that ties the bow on this line, and for that, turn over to **Deuteronomy 8**.

Deut 8:2-3 – **2 And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.**

3. Asking for daily bread leads us to God.

God let you hunger. God let you go without. Bread is never just about bread. There's a deeper desire, a deeper hunger.

So God says I let you feel that hunger, and then I fed you – so that you might understand life does not come from bread, but from me.

The point of prayer is what? What is the underlying goal of prayer? **Communion with God.**

So in telling us and inviting us to pray – “give us this day our daily bread” – Jesus is not moving us on from communion to requests, he's taking us deeper into communion.

Every desire we have, every longing and hunger for bread in our souls...can be a place of communion with God...if we talk to Him about it.

That's why God delights in us bringing him every small thing we desire – because it keeps us coming back to Him. Give us this day our daily bread is not actually about the bread, it's about God.

Pete Greig - How to Pray. Croatia. Sailing. Adriatic Sea. Mosquitoes. “Amen” – breeze swept the mosquitoes away.

“To this day, I don't know whether that was an actual, proper answer to prayer or just a well-timed meteorological fluke masquerading as one. But this I do know, and i know it for us: when you pray about the small things in life, you get to live with greater gratitude.”

I would add one small line – “You get to live with greater communion.”

If you never bring your desires to God, you’ll never find communion with Him on the other side.

So we pray – Give us this day our daily bread – praying at all times for everything. Because in so doing we put our faith in our heavenly Father and find Him in the midst of our requests.

Practice

Petition – Bringing our requests to God.

Intercession – Bringing requests for others to God.

Exercise

Space for petition.

Space for intercession.