

March 5, 2023
Give Us Today Our (Fresh) Daily Bread
Matthew 6:11

Imagine a world of ducks. It's winter. Every morning, the ducks shake out their feathers and swim across the icy water or waddle over the ice, and every morning, they hunt among the snow and grasses along the shore to find seeds to eat. After a day foraging, they return home and complain about how hard they had to work for their food. The next morning, they do the same. They know there will be food there - there always is - they just have to work too long and too hard (in their own minds) to get it.

Some ducks, who get up particularly early, claim they've seen a person spreading seed. But other ducks don't believe it. The seed is always there. That's how the world works.

A few ducks are not well. They have difficulty getting food each day. One or two of their friends bring them some. Other ducks just scoff. *"They're just lazy. Let them look after themselves,"* they would say. *"I work hard enough to feed my ducklings."*

There really is a man. He does scatter seed every morning along the shore. He keeps the seed by the shore so it's easy for the ducks to get. But the ducks are greedier and greedier. They want more and more seed. They're fighting and squabbling. Some get lots. Others get none. They're making a dreadful mess. And they're getting out of control. So, one morning he thought maybe he would stop spreading the seed ...

What if one day, God, the One who keeps the sun shining, who keeps the earth turning, who sustains the natural systems which bring the seasons, who maintains the cycles of sun and rain – who created this beautiful, balanced, fruitful world – were to say, *"Everyone takes it all for granted. They honestly think it's their own hard work that keeps them fed. They never for a moment give me a thought or are thankful. In their greed, they're destroying one another and my creation. Maybe today I'll stop it all ..."*

Of course, our loving, heavenly Father, would never do that. Thankfully.

Give us today our daily bread ...

When Jesus teaches us to pray, He teaches us to be thankful for the daily things which God graciously and freely provides to us. Things we take for granted. Bread, in Jesus' prayer, is shorthand for everything necessary for life: food, clothing, shelter, family, friends, employment, health, safety, and so much more.

It's a simple prayer that God would supply us with the basic things we need. We pray for necessities of life, recognizing all good gifts, ultimately, come from God.

It's astounding to reflect on the truth that God – the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the King who is building His eternal kingdom, the Lord before whom the nations of the world are only dust – should care for our needs. Even down to the mundane detail of things like daily bread.

Jesus models and teaches this truth time and time again. He multiplies loaves and fishes to provide people with food. He tells us a tiny sparrow cannot fall to the ground without our loving Father knowing it. He says even the hairs of our heads are numbered. Can you imagine God is that interested in you and your life?

This prayer begins by celebrating God as the Creator of the universe (or multiverse). It highlights lofty ideals like the kingdom of God and will of God. And now we're talking about bread. Ordinary, boring bread. Yes, Jesus is on a mission to build His Kingdom. But He also cares about life. Real life. Our basic needs. Things like where our next meal is coming from. It's all important to God.

Some things to note ...

First, Jesus' prayer is for bread, not cake. God assures us He will provide for us the necessities of life – not the luxuries. In our society it is very easy to confuse the two. (FYI the most expensive cake ever made cost \$75 million. It was for a daughter's birthday/engagement party. The 2 m cake weighted in at 500 kg. Decorations included 4000 diamonds in pink, black, yellow, and white worth \$45 million).

Second, Jesus' prayer doesn't assume we do nothing. God doesn't miraculously cause groceries to arrive on our doorsteps. God's plan for providing those necessities includes those of us who can earning a living. Teachers teach. Nurses nurse. Farmers farm. Grocery-store people grocer. Mechanics mechanic. Bakers bake. Pastors pastor.

Just as God provides for the wild birds and wildflowers, He provides for us. But birds search for their food and flowers extend their leaves to the sunlight and their roots into the soil. God does not drop grubs down the gullets of young birds, nor does He miraculously drop grubs into our mouths (thankfully). We do what we do, too.

God really does provide for us miraculously. He has created natural systems which are capable of producing more than we need.

But ... there are parts of the world where this prayer is more troubling than for most of us. Even within our own country, province, and city, some have access to more than enough food. While others don't have enough. Daily bread is not a reality. In many cases, it's nothing you or I have done (or people in regions like sub-Saharan Africa have done or not done) that we have plenty and they have little. It's nothing God has done.

The problem is not supply of life's essentials. The problem is distribution. That's not a God-problem. It's a human one. God has provided more than enough resources to provide daily bread for all. But human choices, from economics to war, from greed to climate change, from global distribution systems to politics creates an unequal world. Of course, you and I can't change a lot of those things. But we can do some things.

We can support the Soup Kitchen and the Food Banks. We can support overseas missions that seek to help people become more self-sufficient through micro-loans and community development. We can find other ways to address issues of homelessness and poverty, unequal access to education and opportunity, racism and other issues.

Third, Jesus' prayer is for daily bread. We only live one day at a time. Tony Campolo wrote a book entitled *Carpe Diem* ("Seize the Day") in which he encourages us to live each day passionately with God and for God. We never know what day may be our last. *"Deadness,"* he says, *"has invaded our lives. Our souls. Our churches. We say, 'If I should die before I wake ...' We ought to pray, 'If I should wake before I die.'"*

Are we so busy planning for tomorrow we have forgotten to live today? *"Most of us spend so much time planning to be happy,"* writes Blaise Pascal, *"it's inevitable that we never are."* Live this day with Jesus.

Jesus says, "I am the bread of life ..." (John 6:32-58)

Bread – representing the basics of life – is essential to life physically. But life is about more than having just our physical needs met. We are spiritual beings as well. We need "spiritual bread." Jesus says, He is the Bread of Life.

Think for a moment about what bread is ... it's living kernels of grain, broken, crushed, and ground into flour. It is kneaded, shaped into loaves, and allowed to rise. It's baked to a golden brown. Nothing is more wonderful than freshly baked bread.

Jesus became God's grain. He was bruised and crushed. In His suffering and on the cross, He took our sins upon Himself. And out of that crushing, out of the grave, out of death itself, rises the risen Lord. He is God's bread of life for us.

Anyone who hungers for life from God, for the power of Christ, for bread from heaven, can find it through the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit takes the blessings of Jesus, the resurrected life of Jesus, the qualities of Jesus, the character of Jesus, and forms them in us. We are given new life in Jesus. His life becomes real in us. He becomes part of us. His life becomes our life.

We become part of Him. Together with our brothers and sisters around the world,

through time and space, here in our own city and our own church community, we are the Body of Jesus. We are His presence. His hands. His feet. His voice. His ears. His arms. His love made tangible and real.

This prayer, then, has a deeper meaning than just a request for physical food, although that's part of it. On another level, it is a deep, desperate yearning to know Jesus, the Bread of Life, today. It's a prayer to be filled with His Spirit, today. It's a prayer for the power of God made real in us, today. Fresh, every day.

If we're filled with the life of Jesus, what happens? Do we remain the same? No. As we walk in the Spirit, gradually but surely, God changes us. Our characters become a bit more like Jesus. As we pray, we think a little more like Jesus. We think about things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). We live more and more like Jesus, with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

The life and love of Jesus reaches out through our hands to touch the hands of those who suffer, to shovel a walk for a friend, to call a lonely person, to forgive someone who has wronged me, to smile at a stranger, to encourage someone, to lift the load for someone who is carrying a heavy burden, to build someone up.

It has been said, *"You are what you eat."* Enjoy the good gifts God gives you.

But go deeper ... You are what you eat. Jesus says, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty ... I am the bread of life. Anyone who eats the bread from heaven will never die ... Anyone who eats this bread will live forever"* (John 6:35, 48-51).

Every day, pray with Jesus. Have an open, honest conversation with Jesus. Fresh. Every day. If we feed our souls and spirits on God's bread from heaven – on Jesus – we will become a little more like Him. What a difference THAT would make in our world ...

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