

Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church
Knoxville, Tennessee
February 11, 2018

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The Lord's Prayer; Part 3
"Give us this day our daily bread."
Matthew 6:9a,11

Pray then this way....Give us this day our daily bread.

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I can see how those outside the Christian faith could be confused about our understanding of prayer. What is it we are actually doing? Are we instructing God? Are we shooting our *Wish List* up into the heavens somewhere?

Does God answer one football team's prayers, but not the other team's prayer? (*The Philadelphia Eagles must be Presbyterians! They seemed predestined to win the Super Bowl!*)

But really. Does God have anything to do with a touchdown, or recovering a fumble? Seems trite.

And do I really need to give God a laundry list of things that need to be done today? Scriptures say that God "...knows what you need before you ask..." (Matt. 6:8). So why are we asking?

Would it matter if 1,000 people asked God for something as opposed to just 1? The Bible says *the good shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes after the one that is lost.* (Lk. 15:4). So would God not hear and answer the prayer of but one lost soul? Any good parent would. If my daughter has a need, I'm going to respond to it.

You can see how someone outside the faith could wonder what we are doing when we pray.

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How we pray is at the heart of our relationship with God. Jesus begins prayer by addressing who God is, not with what we need. Prayer begins by hallowing, or making holy, God's name; praying for God's kingdom, for God's will. Prayer begins there.

Only then does the **prayer turn to us**. We've rebooted. We've re-centered our lives, our wills, our feeble plans and desires. So anything we would now pray concerning ourselves will be in the proper context. *Now*, says Jesus, *you can ask for daily bread.*

But we want a lot more than daily bread, don't we? Some folks want to own the Bread Company! Some folks do! Others of us have stocks in a variety of breads. We

don't just want enough bread for today; we want enough bread for days on end. We want to leave our children and grandchildren some bread. Truth is, we think about bread a lot.

Some folks think about bread all day because they don't have any. They see people like us and wonder why we are blessed with more bread than we need, while they have little to none. Did we sin? Are we lazy? Maybe it's because we are uneducated. Why does God give them more bread than they need, and we have none?

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I prayed this prayer every day when I was in Congo. Thousands of people lined along the road, day and night, with nothing to do, nowhere to go, nothing to eat. And I prayed, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" "*Us*" became a big word, like "*Our Father.*" How could I pray for bread only for me? Isn't that Jesus' point? You can't.

There is nobody excluded from the word "*us!*" And he didn't say to pray, "*Give me my daily bread.*" The Christian faith is not all about me. It is personal, but it can never be private. When the Church focuses too much on itself and not on the world, it loses its way. It will never be enough for me to have bread. As long as someone is without bread, we keep praying this prayer. How could you not care for someone God created? The word is "*us.*"

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And then there is the word, "*daily.*" Jesus had to choose that word intentionally. *Daily* is in the present. *Daily* is right now. *Daily* is what is on the plate for today, just today. Jesus said, "*So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.*" (Matt. 6:34) How true that is! Pray for just today.

To pray for daily bread is to pray for the *present*. The next petition will be for forgiveness, which is the *past*. The following petition, to not be lead into temptation, is for the *future*. This is a perfectly balanced prayer. It encompasses all time; present, past and future.

When I pray for daily bread, I think of all that is on my plate for that day. It's a prayer for God to sustain us, no matter what this day may bring. It's a 24 hour prayer, that's it. No more, no less. What do we need just for today?

I think of people facing surgery or a bad diagnosis today. I think of people in pain and poverty, addiction, abuse and violence. When I pray for daily bread, every day, a flood of people's names and situations come to mind. All kinds of things can, and will happen today. What do we need just for today? That's actually a pretty big prayer that comes from only 7 words!

Our friends in Alcoholics Anonymous have a lot to teach us. One of their slogans is "*One day at a time.*" That's it. That's daily bread. Just what we need for today.

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Those who are outside watching us pray could easily ask, "*Doesn't God help those who help themselves?*" Algernon Sidney actually penned that quote and Benjamin

Franklin used it in his Poor Richard's Almanac. It's not in the Bible! But if you work hard enough you will have the bread you need, right? Sorry, that's not in there either.

So is Jesus saying pray for daily bread and do nothing? No, he's pointing to our **dependency** upon God. Whether we work or not work, we are dependent upon the Lord. Whether we inherited a lot of bread or are living hand-to-mouth, we are dependent upon the Lord.

We are sustained by God. Rich and poor. It is God who gives us daily bread; the air we breathe, the food we eat, the mind and strength to live our lives. It is all a gift of "*daily bread.*"

This petition is not so much about getting bread as it is about how you look at bread. Is bread something you achieve, or receive? Does God have anything to do with what sustains your life, or are you self-made? What's our relationship with bread? That'll tell you something about our relationship with God.

We probably have more problems with bread than anything he could mention. Wars have been fought over bread. Marriages have ended over bread. Families have been torn apart over bread. People have gone to prison over bread. Nations have fallen and people have died over bread.

Why is bread in this prayer? If we don't understand our *dependency* on God, how would we ever be *grateful*? If we don't live a life of gratitude, how would we ever live a *life of service*? If we don't live a life of service, how would we ever *follow Christ*? Oh yeah, bread is definitely in this prayer.

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His disciples were smart enough to come to him and ask him to teach them to pray. How do you talk to God? With a lot of flowery words? Apparently not. With instructions on what to do? God doesn't need that. With 3 wishes, as if God were a genie in a bottle? I wouldn't go there! So how? It's right here. And Jesus said, "*Pray then in this way:*"(Matt.6:9a)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Congregation:
Amen