

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, July 17, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

MATTHEW 6:11

11 Give us today our daily bread.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM #23
THE LORD'S PRAYER: OUR DAILY BREAD

Most of us have had times in our life where we've wondered how we are going to pay the bills. Maybe it was an unexpected layoff that led to months of unemployment and the savings just weren't there. Maybe there were unexpected medical bills that just seemed to pile up and there were no reserves in the tank. Maybe you were a young married couple, just making it by, paycheck to paycheck. There always seemed to be more month left than cash in the bank, and you learned what it meant to rely upon God to meet your every need.

I've talked with some very wealthy people in my life who refer to the days where they had to look under the couch cushions for extra change as the "good old days." I've had very "successful" men tell me that their relationship with Christ began to suffer when their bank account ceased suffering. Maybe you can relate. You recall a time when you couldn't make it through a day without praying something like we find in the Lord's Prayer, in Matthew 5:11, "11 Give us today our daily bread."

Elmer Towns tells a story about his early married life in his book *Praying The Lord's Prayer For Spiritual Breakthrough*. He writes:

Our evening meal was tuna casserole – not my favorite, but it was cheap. A can of tuna cost about a quarter, and the noodles were a nickel a package (1953 prices). The proverbial cupboard was bare.

My wife Ruth and I bowed our heads to thank God for our daily bread. In front of us were the casserole, a few slices of bread, iced tea and a Jell-O salad – a simple meal at the end of the day. God had always taken care of us, and we had enough "daily bread" for that day.

Nothing for tomorrow. It was about three days until the next payday.

I was a senior in college, studying for the ministry. I drove a school bus for \$1 per hour. That was not the best of jobs even in 1953, but it was all I could get to fit my hours. Between studying for classes and working in a church, there was not much time to make money. I brought home \$20 a week. In those days I believed my wife should not work, so she was a full-time student along with m.

“Thank you for this food,” I prayed over the tuna casserole. I was truly thankful for God’s provision for that day, and knew that He would take care of tomorrow. I did not know how, thought.

“You know our need,” I told God. I hesitated, looking for words. “We don’t have any money.”

You don’t need long prayers for God to answer. God can hear the shortest cry for help, and do something in response.

“Give us daily bread . . .”

No sooner had I said “Amen” and we saw a laundry truck drive up to our place. Ruth went to the front door. Our laundryman was a neighbor, and also our landlord. He did not own our house, he just collected rent for the owner.

“I don’t have any dry cleaning today,” Ruth told the laundryman, and smiling she added, “and if we did give you dirty clothes, we couldn’t pay for it.”

“Oh no,” he told her. “I didn’t come to pick up cleaning.” He explained that he had been going over our rental account the previous night.

“I came to bring your money,” he explained. “I didn’t pay you for unplugging the pipes.”

Reaching into his pocket, he took out \$25 and handed it to Ruth. There had been a hard freeze when we first moved into our Minnesota home four months earlier. The temperature had plunged to 40 degrees below zero, and the bathroom pipes had frozen, so I borrowed a blowtorch from the school-bus company to thaw them. “I should have paid you three months ago,” the laundryman told Ruth.

We put the \$25 next to the tuna casserole and prayed again: “Thank You for our daily bread.”¹

Have you had an experience like Dr. Towns? George Müller was a famous German-born evangelist who lived in 19th Century England. Those who knew him best called him a prayer warrior. He prayed about everything. Convinced that God cared for the widows and the orphans, Müller opened orphanages all throughout England. In his lifetime, Müller cared for 10,024 orphans and opened 117 schools providing a Christian education to over 120,000 students, many of them orphans. He had a long standing policy of not asking for donations for any of the schools. He relied upon God and God only. In modern currency,

¹ Elmer Towns, *Praying the Lord’s Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough*, (Ventura: CA: Regal Books, 1997), pp. 123-124.

Müller raised close to £90 million for taking care of orphans and distributing close to two million Bibles around the world.² Could you be like George Müller?

There is something beautiful about the fact that God wants us to ask Him to provide for our daily needs. If you've been with us for a while in this series you know that the Lord's Prayer includes six petitions. Up to this point the petitions have been God focused – "hallowed by Your name," "Your kingdom come," "Your will be done."

We now come to the first of three petitions that are focused on us. Martyn Lloyd Jones was so moved at the petitions concerning us in the Lord's Prayer that he wrote the following, "All our great needs are summed up in them. 'Give us this day our daily bread.' 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.' 'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' Our whole life is found in those three petitions, and that is what makes this prayer so utterly amazing. In such a small compass our Lord has covered the whole life of the believer in every respect. Our physical needs, our mental needs and, of course, our spiritual needs are included. The body is remembered, the soul is remembered, the spirit is remembered. And that is the whole of man, body, soul and spirit."³

God cares about every one of the needs that you and I have. When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," it is about more than food. Bread is a symbolic word. Towns writes, "Bread gives us strength to walk . . . work . . . dig . . . or type at the (computer) word processor. Bread gives us stamina that drives us to close a business deal. Bread keeps our minds clear to think and to make long-range plans for our employer. Bread gives the teacher energy to handle restless children. Bread stands for more than food. It stands for the results we get from eating food. It stands for all the physical things we need in life.

'Bread' is a symbol word that stands for money . . . for time . . . for a job . . . for material things. Bread stands for the roof over our heads and the clothes on our backs. It stands for a car to give us basic transportation, or subway money to get us to work. Bread stands for fuel oil in the winter . . . for air conditioning in the summer . . . for physical healing so we can work . . . for a raise so we can properly support our families. Bread stands for every physical need in our lives.

When you pray 'Give us this day our daily bread,' you recognize five factors about your needs in relationship to God.

Five Essential Facts About Our Daily Needs

1. We have daily needs
2. God supplies our needs
3. We must ask God to supply our needs

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Muller (as accessed on 7/16/2011)

³ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 341-342.

4. Our needs are supplied one day at a time
5. We don't have to pray *for* everything, but we have to pray *about* everything."⁴

I like how Towns divided up his teaching and I want to borrow his outline today.

1. We Have Daily Needs

Sometimes I wish we didn't. Sometimes I wish that life was like a permanent vacation. Wouldn't it be nice if we didn't have to worry about working? Wouldn't it be nice if we didn't have to work so hard to make ends meet? Wouldn't it be nice if we had everything that we could possibly need?

On the surface, the answer might seem obvious. "Of course," you say. "Sign me up. Where do I get that job? Where do I get that life?"

But, remember what I told you earlier about many of my wealthiest friends? They've told me that they long for the "good old days" when they didn't know how they were going to pay the next bill. Listen, God isn't against us planning. It isn't an evil thing to experience the blessing of God on your finances, your career, and your health.

Kent Hughes writes, "in commanding us to pray, 'Give us today our daily bread,' God is fostering in us a daily dependence upon himself. No other line in the Lord's Prayer so sharply challenges the direction of today's world. The man on the street wants to compound his security and his independence. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with planning for future rainy days, but it is wrong to make total independence your consuming goal. Whether you are rich or poor, God wants us to depend upon him 'daily.' He wants us to pray for our daily needs, and he wants us to daily thank him."⁵

Towns says, "Perhaps God made people to have needs so when they stray from Him, their needs would make them turn to Him."⁶

Maybe this video will help shed some light on the topic: (Our Daily Bread Video – 1:28)

We all have daily needs. What do you need to rely on God for?

2. God Supplies Our Needs

It may seem un-American to depend upon someone else to meet our needs. We're taught to be independent people. And, in a sense that is a good thing. Even the book of Genesis encourages us to leave the home of our parents and make a new home. But, that doesn't

⁴ Towns, pp. 124-125.

⁵ Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), p. 183.

⁶ Towns, p. 128.

mean that we are to depend upon ourselves, our wit, our ingenuity, our work ethic, our brains, our creativity, apart from God to supply our needs.

The New Testament author James said it well in James 1:17:

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Has God blessed you with creativity? Praise Him for it. Has God blessed you with more than enough? Recognize that it comes from Him. God is both the Giver and the Sustainer of life. When we pray for God to give us our daily bread, we are recognizing His role as the One who provides. We are acknowledging our need for God. We are remembering Who our Provider is.

3. We Must Ask God To Supply Our Needs

We have daily needs, and God is the one who supplies for our needs, but we need to ask. Prayer recognizes the sovereignty of God. It recognizes that God is in control.

In James 4:1-3 we read, “1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

Towns says, “Too often we think that prayer is like a vending machine – we pop in a coin and out comes a cold drink or a packet of peanuts. Daily bread, however, does not come from a vending machine. We do not drop a prayer in some slot and expect daily bread or anything else we want from God to pop out automatically.

Some would have us think we could demand things from God. They say we should fast to get things from God, or that we can ‘name it to claim it’ from God. God, however, does not operate by vending machine strategy. The bottom line in all prayer is ‘Hallowed be Thy name.’ Prayer is not what we do . . . what we ask . . . what we beg. Prayer is a way to glorify and worship God. Prayer recognizes the sovereignty of God.

Prayer is declaring the majesty of God and submitting your life to His will . . . Prayer is the platform from which you worship God.”⁷

4. Our Needs Are Supplied One Day At A Time

When we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we are acknowledging that we walk in a day-to-day faith. Each day, we seek God. That’s one of the great desires of God’s heart.

⁷ Towns, p. 131.

It's what David wrote about in Psalm 63:1.

1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

It's the faith that the author of Hebrews described in Hebrews 11:6.

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Maybe part of the reason that God gave us needs was so that we would learn what it means to earnestly seek Him.

I know that in my life the days of trials are the days that I seek Him the most. Many of you know about the events of this past week in our home. I was preparing for the Pastor's Book Club on Wednesday when my cell phone rang twice. I ignored my son Chris' first call, but answered it when he rang again. What I heard on the other end of the line was a bit of panic. My wife was playing disc golf with our sons and Josiah Kimball when she took a fall. Chris said, "I think mom's ankle is dislocated. She can't move. Where are you? Can you come carry mom to the van?"

When Chris told me where Cyndi was, I knew that carrying her to the van would be impossible. I called an ambulance, and the paramedics worked their way to Cyndi's location. We would find out at the hospital that Cyndi has the worst possible fracture that you can have in your ankle. Called a trimalleol fracture, the three outer bones that hold together the ligaments and tendons of the ankle have broken. Cyndi is unable to put any weight on her ankle and has to wait until this Tuesday for surgery. The best we can do for Cyndi right now is offer her pain management. It's been a long week. And it's been a week where we have relied upon the Lord in special and unique ways. We are calling out to Him daily for our needs. Our daily bread has literally been taken care of by this Body. Cyndi's pain is being managed and God is sustaining her and all of us day by day. That's how He often times chooses to meet the needs of His people.

A few years ago I came up with a spiritual equation.

Nothing + Jesus = Everything

Everything - Jesus = Nothing

When all is said and done, if you've had a great material life, but don't have Jesus, you have nothing. In John 6, Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life.

He said, "48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

(John 6:48-51)

When we ask for God to give us our daily bread, we're not just asking for Him to meet our physical needs, we're asking for Him to meet our spiritual needs. We're asking Him to fill us with Himself. Many of you have read the small devotional magazine, "Our Daily Bread." It's an appropriate title for a devotional, because when we spend time with God, we are feeding on the only thing which truly satisfies.

5. We Don't Have To Pray *For* Everything, But We Have To Pray *About* Everything.

God isn't looking for you to give Him a grocery list of all of your needs. Remember, He isn't a vending machine. In Matthew 6:8 when introducing the Lord's Prayer do you remember what Christ said?

8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

We are to ask for enough for the day, and we are to thank Him for what we have received.

In Proverbs 30:8-9, Solomon wrote, "8 Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. 9 Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."

So where are you at today? Would your life show others that you are dependent upon God, or would your life show that you are self-sufficient?

I want to add a sixth point to Towns' outline.

6. We Are To Pray For Each Other's Needs

I think Jesus purposely put the little word "us" in the Lord's Prayer. Give "us" this day our daily bread. We are to pray for the needs of others. It may be that God has blessed you with more than enough. But, there are others who are hurting. There are others who would be so blessed to have some of what God has blessed you with. When we pray for others, often times we find that we are part of God's solution. It's a wonderful thing to be used by God to be a blessing in the life of someone else.

Dr. Helen Roseveare, missionary to Zaire, told the following story. "A mother at our mission station died after giving birth to a premature baby. We tried to improvise an incubator to keep the infant alive, but the only hot water bottle we had was beyond repair. So we asked the children to pray for the baby and for her sister. One of the girls responded, 'Dear God, please send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late because by then the baby will be dead. And dear Lord, send a doll for the sister so she won't feel so lonely.'

That afternoon a large package arrived from England. The children watched eagerly as we opened it. Much to their surprise, under some clothing was a hot water bottle! Immediately the girl who had prayed so earnestly started to dig deeper, exclaiming, 'If God sent that, I'm sure He also sent a doll!' And she was right! The heavenly Father knew in advance of that child's sincere requests, and 5 months earlier He had led a ladies' group to include both of those specific articles."⁸

This past Friday, our children's and youth ministries combined for an event for the first time ever. They spent the first part of their afternoon at Feed My Starving Children, an organization dedicated to providing meals for starving children around the world. In just a couple hours, our students packaged enough food to feed 53 children for an entire year. Not everyone who prays, "Give us this day our daily bread," receives the answer, "yes," from God. I'm glad that we had a chance, as a church, to be part of that answered prayer for 53 kids. God has blessed us so much; so much in fact that for some it can be easy to forget God.

I want to close with this great piece entitled, "Those Who Can't Pray the Lord's Prayer," found in Dr. Towns' book.

If you don't know Christ . . . you can't pray, "Our Father."
If you glorify yourself . . . you can't pray, "Hallowed be Thy name."
If you reject His rules . . . you can't pray, "Thy kingdom come."
If you won't submit . . . you can't pray, "Thy will be done."
If your life is only for here and now . . . you can't pray, "On earth as it is in heaven."
If you are self-sufficient . . . you can't pray, "Give us our daily bread."
If you won't forgive . . . you can't pray, "Forgive us our debts."
If you see sin . . . you can't pray, "Lead us not into temptation."
If you are a friend of evil . . . you can't pray, "Deliver us from evil."
If you build your own kingdom . . . you can't pray, "Thine is the kingdom."
If you want power . . . you can't pray, "Thine is the power."
If you always take credit . . . you can't pray, "Thine is the glory."⁹

I want to be able to pray the Lord's prayer?

How about you?

Let's pray it together now.

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

⁸ http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/prayer_answered.htm

⁹ Towns, p. 141.

Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.