

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Matthew 6:9-11

Transfiguration Sunday, February 14, 2021

Valentine's Day

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⁹ (Jesus said unto them,) "After this manner therefore pray ye: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.'"

Sermon, "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"

This is the fifth sermon in a series on the Lord's Prayer

The CEO of Tyson Foods manages to arrange a meeting with the Pope at the Vatican. After receiving the papal blessing, he whispers, "Your eminence, we have an offer for you. Tyson Foods is prepared to donate \$100 million dollars to the church if you change the Lord's Prayer from 'give us this day our daily bread' to 'give us this day our daily chicken.' "

The Pope responds, "That is impossible. The Lord's Prayer is the word of the Lord; it must not be changed."

"Well," says the Tyson man, "we anticipated your reluctance. For this reason, we are willing to increase our offer to \$300 million dollars. All we require is that you change the Lord's Prayer from 'give us this day our daily bread' to 'give us this day our daily chicken.' "

Again, the Pope replies, "That, my son, is impossible. For the prayer is the word of the Lord and it must not be changed."

Finally, the Tyson guy says, "Your Holiness, we at Tyson Foods respect your adherence to your faith, but we do have one final offer. We will donate \$500 million dollars—that's half a billion dollars—to the great Catholic Church if you would only change the Lord's Prayer from 'give us this day our daily bread' to 'give us this day our daily chicken.' Please consider it."

The next day the Pope convenes the College of Cardinals. "There is some good news," he announces, "and some bad news." "The good news is that the Church has come into \$500 million dollars."

"And the bad news, your eminence?" asks a Cardinal. "We're losing the Wonder Bread account."¹

In 1943, psychologist Abraham Maslow published, "A Theory of Human Motivation" in *Psychological Review*. His findings were later expanded and featured in his 1954 book *Motivation and Personality*.

Maslow proposed something which has become known as "Maslow's hierarchy of needs." It's hard to overestimate Maslow's influence on psychology and sociology. If you've ever taken a Psych 101 course, you've no doubt run into the diagram of a

¹ There are multiple versions of this joke on the Internet; this one is from <https://www.maineiac.com/index.php/jokes/religious-jokes/1189-give-us-this-day-our-daily-chicken>

pyramid which arranges Maslow's hierarchy of needs from the most basic to the most profound.

At the bottom of Maslow's pyramid are the most basic physiological needs such as food, water, clothing, and shelter. At the top of Maslow's pyramid is something which he calls self-transcendence which is a personality trait associated with experiencing spiritual ideas such as considering oneself an integral part of the universe.

What Maslow proposes is that basic physical needs must be met before a person can climb to the top of the pyramid and experience self-transcendence.

Now we're going to set aside Abraham Maslow's psychological language and employ more spiritual terminology. Before you can adequately talk to people about their soul, you first have to address their stomach.

A good missions program understands this and puts it into practice. You cannot go into an impoverished ghetto in Nicaragua or Calcutta or even into the backroads of Appalachia and say to someone, "You must be born again," if they have no food. Better to feed them and quench them and clothe them and then tell them about the love of God. Indeed, if you've given those things in the name of Jesus, then you've just embodied the love of God by feeding them and quenching their thirst and providing them with clothes. James said in chapter 2,

¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

Jesus followed this principle throughout his ministry. The one time in which he said, "You must be born again," was when he was talking with Nicodemus in John chapter 3. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler among the Jews. He was a man of means; his basic physical needs had already been met—and Jesus knew this—so he was able to climb a little higher up the pyramid and address Nicodemus' spiritual needs: "You must be born again."

On the other hand, when Jesus met the woman at the well just one chapter later, his starting point was much more fundamental: he opened the conversation by talking about water and thirst and then slowly climb up the pyramid of needs with her where he could subsequently meet those needs.

Jesus followed this pattern throughout his ministry: he healed people—meeting their physical needs—before he told them to "Go and sin no more." He fed the multitudes because he understood that if they were hungry, it would be more difficult for them to receive his teachings.

Jesus does much the same thing in the Lord's Prayer. He's going to invite us to address some of our deep spiritual needs in prayer, but before doing so, he invites us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." In other words, Jesus recognizes that our basic needs for food and water must be met before we can address our deeper spiritual needs.

During the bombing raids of World War II, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. Fortunately, many were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and care. However, even though they were in a safe place, many of these children still could not sleep at night. They were afraid of waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them.

Finally, someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep, clutching their piece of bread throughout the night. The bread reminded them, "Today I ate, and tomorrow I will eat again." It was a way of meeting their basic human needs.

Give us this day our daily bread.

It's a petition rooted in the history of Israel. In Exodus 16, the Israelites had just fled Egypt and had crossed the Red Sea when they began to hunger, so they cried out to God and Moses:

"If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exodus 16:3).

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day."

Give us this day our daily bread. God provided manna for the Israelites every day for forty years until they entered into the Promised Land, which was "a land flowing with milk and honey." But the Israelites had to trust God. As it turned out, many of them collected more than a day's worth of manna and kept it overnight. When they did, they discovered that the manna had spoiled overnight and had become inedible.

However, on the sixth day, the day before the Sabbath, they were told to gather two days' worth of manna so they wouldn't have to work on the Lord's day. On the morning of the Sabbath, they awoke to fresh manna in their jars; it had not spoiled overnight as it had on other days.

God gave them their daily bread. *Give us this day our daily bread* is really an invitation to put your trust in God. It's putting our faith in God to meet our daily needs, recognizing that God is the ultimate source of sustenance. Again, James said,

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.

We sometimes get the mistaken idea that we are our own source of bread and, yes, we work for our bread, but God gives us the ability to work. God sends rain upon the wheat fields where the wheat grows. God sends rain upon the gluten-free rice paddies. God created nature itself from whence our bread comes. So please don't assume that you yourself are solely responsible for your daily bread.

Last fall I told the story of the man driving around a busy parking lot at the mall on an ugly, stormy day. He prayed, "God, if you just give me a parking space near the main door of the mall so I can get in without getting soaked, I promise I will go to church every Sunday for the next six months."

Just then, a car backed out of the parking space closest to the front door. The man put on his turn signal to claim the space and then prayed, "Never mind, God, I found one myself."

The Jewish leaders of the New Testament era had come to believe that when the Messiah came, he would replicate the miracle of manna, and, like Moses, would rain bread down upon the nation every day. You can imagine their excitement when Jesus fed the multitudes with just a few loaves of bread and some fish! He had to be the Messiah! So the next day they chased after Jesus, expecting him to provide them with another helping of daily manna. But Jesus made it clear that their basic needs had been

met and it was time to climb the pyramid and address their deeper, spiritual needs. So he said to them,

³⁵ “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty...³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day” (John 6:35, 37-40).

God wants to meet all of our needs, beginning with our basic physical needs. That sentiment is expressed in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says,

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Mt. 6:25-33; v. 34 below).

In other words, put your faith in God who will take care of you and your basic physical needs. Once those needs are met, then you can go on to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” And as you seek the kingdom of God, you will find it. And you will find righteousness as you experience the self-actualization that accompanies forgiveness and the recognition that you have indeed been created in the image of God and God has placed you on this planet with a purpose that only you can fulfill. Jesus says,

³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

So put your faith in God who gives us our daily bread.