

Hallowed be your name

4— Give us daily bread

Jesus teaches us to ask for daily bread. Of course, in asking for ‘bread’, we can assume that all the things necessary for our earthly life are included. Jesus mentions some of these later in his teaching—everything from what we wear to how long we live (Matthew 6:25-27).

God knows that our life is very physical

Our body ‘talks’ to us. ‘I need this or that’. Or even, ‘I must have this or that!’ And, of course, sometimes our physical needs are urgent, painful and pressing—making something work, keeping a job, feeding the family, keeping well. Like Martha, many things can make us distracted, worried and upset (Luke 10:40-41).

We have every reason to bring physical needs to the Father. Jesus says he ‘knows that you need them all’ (Matthew 6:32)—that is, all the things needful for our life. Pointedly, he says, ‘If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him’ (Matthew 7:9-11)! And Paul says, he ‘gives us all things to richly enjoy’ (1 Timothy 6:17).

Our life is not only physical

This request is the only prayer for physical needs. We want his name revered, his kingdom to come and his will to be done. And after this, we pray for forgiveness and deliverance. But here in the middle, there’s just one prayer for all our physical needs.

It would be helpful to pray along the lines Jesus teaches and see what happens! If we start your prayer thinking about the Father’s character, and authority, and his plan for our lives, we’ve set the scene for our personal requests. We don’t have a God who is dwarfed by our needs. Rather, we have needs that are dwarfed by who he is, how he rules and his choices for us. If our God is too ‘small’, our needs take centre-stage and we can never be confident that he can help, or that he cares to. And other things happen, more sinister—as we shall see.

Asking and doing

This prayer actually reads, ‘Today’s bread, give today!’ Some people do live with what they earn or produce in a day, but many of us have reserves. We have parents, savings or secure employment. The government has programmes we can access. Do we need God’s ‘bread’—every day?

Of course, parents, governments and other authorities have responsibilities. And we are responsible to work so as to provide enough for ourselves and others (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12; Acts 20:34-35). There is great dignity and satisfaction in doing just this. But is everything just up to us?

The Bible warns us about trusting uncertain riches, or uncertain friends, uncertain governments, even uncertain health. Anything in this world can be ‘here today, gone tomorrow’ (James 4:13-16).

Trust in the Father

So, Jesus says, ‘Ask your Father for daily bread’—not encouraging short term planning, or irresponsibility. He is preserving us from wrongful anxiety. He wants us to be free of all cares so we have headspace for God, for those around us and for the joys of living in his creation. Confidence for tomorrow won’t come from a bank balance, a government, or robust health, but from our holy Father, his authority and his will.

Being anxious is a big issue for everyone and Jesus addresses the matter later in his teaching. He uses the word five times in just a few verses (Matthew 6:25-34).

Paul teaches us the same thing. ‘Do not be anxious about anything, but, in everything, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your

hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:6-7). Notice, it's not just our bodies that need caring for. It's our hearts and minds. And they can only be kept safe in Christ Jesus.

On several occasions, Jesus says his disciples have very little faith (Matthew 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). Or asks, 'Where is your faith?' (Luke 8:25). Our Lord's concern is not just for our comfort but for our trust!

If we don't trust God to look after us, who or what are we trusting? Typical alternatives are our governments, our medicos, or whoever 'they' is when we say, '*They* should do something about that.'

Here's where Jesus becomes really personal (Matthew 6:19-24). What is our treasure? Who is our master? If we don't love our Father in heaven and trust what he's promised to do, other things take his place. We have another 'god'. An idol is anything that makes us angry when we haven't got it. The possibilities are endless—but usually, for each person, it comes down to one particular thing.

Jesus gives us a one sentence parable. If our eyes aren't working, we're in the dark. And if we are not 'seeing' that God is our Father, the light we think we walk by is, in fact, darkness. And how dark it is! All manner of evil is let loose inside people who are not sure of God's interest in and love for them. Discontent, bitterness, rivalry and anger boil away—with fateful consequences.

So, it turns out that Jesus isn't just being nice when he tells us to ask for our daily bread. He is seeking to secure us as children who know their Father. 'Your treasure needs to be in heaven', says Jesus. Our Father is there. God's kingdom is established from there. That's where his will is done properly. And confidence about daily life will be a by-product of a well satisfied soul.

And who makes things prosper? We were never meant to live without God's blessing to enable things to happen (Genesis 1:22, 28). So here, we acknowledge that we get everything we need from God—including our ability to work (Psalm 104:23-24).

Mind discipline is important.

So, when we are agitated about something, what can we do? Jesus is quite practical (Matt. 6:25-34).

We can think about the fact that we are alive, and have a body. Jesus says, if God can make a body, can he also feed and clothe it? Good question!

Then, if God thinks about feeding birds and making flowers beautiful, and he is my Father, will he think about feeding and clothing me? Again, good question!

Again, if we worry, will we live any longer? Probably shorter actually! Another good question.

And finally, every day will have problems—unless, of course, we've decided to escape all responsibility. And Jesus says there's enough to deal with in one day without worrying about the next one. If you think about it, a lot of the things that cause us to worry are not actually happening at the moment.

Everything comes back to the question, 'Do I have a Father in heaven? Is he holy—so as not to do anything wrong? Is he in charge? Am I working in his paddock or in mine? Notice, they are all God questions.

So, when we come to our 'daily bread', we are not in our territory at all but firmly in God's territory. This world belongs to him. I belong to him. When I am talking about my needs, I am talking about his business—before it is mine. Perhaps we will discover that God is more interested in looking after us than we are in looking after ourselves.

So, here is what will happen when we ask for daily bread. He won't just give us what we need. He will keep us as his own.