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Author of The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

THE
JESUS
WAY
TO PRAY



AN INTIMATE JOURNEY THROUGH
THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE
*J*ESUS
WAY
TO *P*RAY



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CHAPTER FIVE

THE JESUS WAY TO PRAY FOR PROVISION

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Matthew 6:11

**No one can worship God or love his neighbor
on an empty stomach.—WOODROW WILSON**

My grandparents on my mother’s side of the family were modest people with timeless values. A painting in their dining room always reminded me of their simple faith. Picture an elderly man sitting at a dinner table with his head bowed and his hands folded in the prayer position. With a loaf of bread and a bowl of soup in front of him, he says grace over a simple meal. Before he bows his head humbly, the old man places his wire rim glasses on top of a nearby book, which is presumably a Bible.

Later in life, I learned the framed image was a reproduc-

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tion of Eric Enstrom's photograph of Charles Wilden, taken during World War II. Enstrom staged the photograph to remind people that giving thanks before a meal was still important, even though they had to give up so much during the war. For me, the photograph spoke of my grandparent's daily dependence on God and how Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

To pray for daily bread might seem strange to people who shop at Costco to stock up our refrigerators, pantries, and extra freezers with an abundance of food. Even the grocery carts are bigger at Costco. Recently, I heard an advertisement for a food storage company that boasted of "delicious and hearty gourmet meals that are ready to use" and how they have a shelf life of up to twenty-five years. Twenty-five years? Who needs to store food for twenty-five years, especially when God has promised to supply us with daily bread?

So far, we have learned the Jesus way to pray with passion, praise, and priority. After spending time in the lofty presence of God, our heavenly Father, and hallowing His name above all names, we order our priorities in a God-ward direction.

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Next, we make a petition for something as mundane as daily bread. Prayer is first about God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will before the focus ever turns to our needs. How does the phrase, "Give us this day our daily bread," teach us to pray?

DIVINE GENEROSITY

By starting with the word "give," this part of the prayer assumes divine generosity. Our heavenly Father is a giver by nature; stinginess is not found in Him. God is the most generous person you will ever meet. Read the Bible, and you will bump into God's generosity in many places because His generosity is interwoven with His love.

For example, John 3:16, the gospel in a nutshell, says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life." Romans 8:32 asks rhetorically, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

Because God is loving and generous, He gives good gifts to His children. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and ev-

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ery perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

The story Jesus told about a prodigal son proves this to be true. When the father caught a glimpse of his runaway son returning home, he lavished him with gifts. “Bring quickly the best robe,” the father said to his servants, “and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate” (Luke 15:22-23).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples that prayer was as simple as this: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8). Are you surprised by how willingly God answers our prayers?

Many of us find it hard to ask for something we need, even if the person we might petition is generous and wants to give. Before entering vocational ministry, I worked in

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corporate sales for many years and learned that the hardest thing to do was ask for the order. Waxing eloquently about the features and benefits of my product was easy; however, looking a customer in the eye and asking for his business proved more difficult. Top salespeople always made asking for the order look easy.

Jesus continued by saying, “Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:9-11). Circle the phrase “how much more” in your Bible. By nature, our heavenly Father gives quantitatively more than even the most loving earthly father would give.

If you knew God was willing to generously answer your prayer, would you pray more? Someone wrote this ditty about prayer to remind us to ask, seek, and knock.

*I got up early one morning
and rushed right into the day;*

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*I had so much to accomplish
that I didn't have time to pray.
Problems just tumbled about me,
and heavier came each task.
"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered.
He answered, "You didn't ask."
I wanted to see joy and beauty,
but the day toiled on, gray and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me.
He said, "But you didn't seek."
I tried to come into God's presence;
I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child, you didn't knock."
I woke up early this morning,
and paused before entering the day;
I had so much to accomplish
that I had to take time to pray.*

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PRACTICE UNSELFISHNESS

“Give us this day our daily bread” is also an unselfish way to pray. Two plural pronouns (“us” and “our”) appear in this part of the prayer (Matthew 6:11). Jesus did not say to pray, “Give *me* this day *my* daily bread.” Even the simplest request in prayer must be made in the context of community and with the needs of others in mind because hunger, homelessness, and food insecurity are still all around us.

The Early Church modeled unselfishness in a beautiful way. The book of Acts tells their story of authentic community and outrageous generosity. Acts 2:44-45 says, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

Some people read this and see the early Christians practicing socialism or communism. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Socialist and communist regimes force the redistribution of wealth through taxation and government coercion. Even after a careful reading, there is no mention of the government in Acts 2:42-47. Instead, the early Christians

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gave generously of their own free will, voluntarily meeting the needs of others in the biblical community. Two chapters later, we read about another act of unselfish generosity when Barnabas sells property he owns and gives it to the apostles for distribution to the poor (Acts 4:32-37). Again, there is no government involvement in the transaction of the gift.

Some people will always have more bread than others because equity is not a principle in the kingdom of God. Jesus made this clear in His parables when He taught, for example, about a man who went on a journey and entrusted his property to his servants. “To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability” (Matthew 25:14-30). The ground is always level at the foot of the cross. But some people will always have more or less time, talent, and treasure than others in this life.

Thus, we pray, “Give *us* this day *our* daily bread.” The Jesus way to pray is a powerful antidote to selfishness and greed because it encourages us to pray in a way that considers the needs of others ahead of our own. This reminds me of what Zig Ziglar, a wise and motivational man, once said, “If you

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help enough people get what they want out of life, you'll get everything you want out of life.”

ACKNOWLEDGE GOD AS YOUR ULTIMATE SOURCE

Now, let's turn our attention to the word “bread.” Around the world and across all ethnicities, there is nothing more common in the human diet than bread. Jesus did not teach us to pray, “Give us this day our daily filet mignon.” That would make it sound like prayer is only for the elite. Rather, daily bread places prayer on a shelf anyone can reach.

At the heart of “give us this day our daily bread” is an acknowledgment that God is our ultimate source. That means neither your employer nor the government is your source. At best, they are middlemen in God's supply chain. Your spouse is not your source, even if he or she is the primary breadwinner in the home. Your 401k, IRA, or pension is not your source. Acknowledging God as your ultimate source is fundamental to an effective prayer life.

The poet says, “Back of the loaf is the snowy flour, and back of the flour, the mill. And back of the mill is the field of

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wheat, the rain, and the Father's will." Was Charles Wilden thinking about the Father's will when he said grace at the dinner table in Eric Engstrom's photograph?

In the Old Testament, the Israelites learned to trust God as their ultimate source through a daily supply of manna, "a fine, flake-like thing" that tasted "like wafers made with honey." God instructed the Hebrews to gather a mere one-day supply of manna and return the next day for more (Exodus 16:13-31). Jesus drew upon this Old Testament story in John 6:31-35.

"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

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“I am the bread of life” is one of seven powerful “I am” statements that Jesus declared during His earthly ministry; each one is a declaration of His deity. As the bread of life, Jesus is truly the ultimate source of physical and spiritual life. To pray “give us this day our daily bread” acknowledges this reality and defies self-sufficiency.

DECLARE YOUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD

Finally, the Jesus way to pray calls for our daily declaration of dependence on God, something the prophet Elijah learned at a place called Cherith, east of the Jordan River.

First Kings 17 begins with Elijah speaking truth to a wicked king. The powerful prophet exhibited strength when he said to Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (17:1). Immediately, the Lord instructed Elijah to depart and hide himself by the brook Cherith. The Lord promised to feed the prophet daily with ravens and give him water to drink from the small stream.

A brook needs rainwater, and ravens are not known for sharing their food. So, how was the Lord going to provide

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Elijah's daily necessities from scavenger birds and a tiny brook? Besides, Cherith is nowhere near a Costco. Did any of this cross Elijah's mind? We don't know for sure. The Bible says the prophet simply obeyed the Lord and went to Cherith. However, a few verses later, the Bible also says, "After a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land" (17:7). Has your brook ever dried up? Has your supply chain ever failed?

God always has a plan. As we follow Him by faith, Jehovah- Jireh (the God who provides) is always many steps ahead of us. After the brook Cherith dried up, God gave the next set of instructions to Elijah, saying, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you" (17:9). Now God chooses a poor widow to supply the prophet's daily need for food and water, something that makes no rational sense. However, the Lord performed many miracles, including raising the widow's son from the dead after she, in faith, baked her last cake and gave it to the Lord's prophet. The full story is worth reading in 1 Kings 17:8-24.

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Through it all, the Lord deepened Elijah's faith. He taught the prophet to make a daily declaration of dependence on God. Circumstances like the scarcity Elijah faced can also put us in a place to trust in the Lord with all our heart, lean not to our own understanding, and pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

THE LORD WHO PROVIDES

A scene from the life of Abraham, another Old Testament character, also illustrates the phrase, "Give us this day our daily bread." One of the names by which God revealed Himself in Scripture is Jehovah-Jireh, which means "the Lord who provides." He provides more than daily bread; as Abraham learned, the Lord provides everything we need at just the right time.

Genesis 22 provides the backdrop for the first time the Lord demonstrated His willingness and ability to provide for His servant Abraham, who, in obedience, was about to sacrifice Isaac, the promised child. During the long journey to Mount Moriah, Isaac asked his father, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering," and Abraham replied, "God will provide

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for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:7-8). The following passage describes one of the most holy scenes in the Bible.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”
Genesis 22:9-14

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With perfect divine timing, Jehovah-Jireh provided a substitute ram for the offering, and Isaac was saved from certain death. Of course, this scene foreshadows how Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, would die on the cross as our substitute (John 1:29). By faith in Jesus, we are saved from the penalty of our sins, eternal death, because the Lord provided for Himself a Lamb for the sacrifice.

The next time you eat a simple piece of bread, remember Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord who provides everything you need. Also, remember Elijah, the Israelites in the wilderness, and humble Charles Wilden. Then, pause to thank God for His generosity, practice unselfishness, acknowledge God as your ultimate source in life, and declare your daily dependence on Him. Say goodbye to selfishness and self-sufficiency by praying the Jesus way for provision.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Begin by reciting the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). What does verse 11 tell us about God's generosity?
2. Identify the plural pronouns in verse 11. What do they tell us about this petition for daily bread? Do you know anybody who is food insecure? How can you help them?
3. On whom or what do you depend for daily bread? Who or what is your ultimate source and why?
4. Review 1 Kings 17 and consider Elijah's experience. How did he learn to depend on God for his daily necessities?
5. Read Genesis 22 and consider Abraham's experience on Mount Moriah. How did the Lord reveal Himself as Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord who provides? Consider how this story foreshadows Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).
6. Read John 6:35. What did Jesus mean when He declared, "I am the bread of life"?