

## Enrolling in the School of Prayer Class 3 of 6:

### Learning to Live in Dependence on God

2020-10-04 Sermon

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[read **slides 1-6** with music on]

[**slide 7, blank**] In his book, “Too Busy Not to Pray,” Bill Hybels begins with these words: “Prayer is an unnatural activity.

From birth we have been learning the values of self-reliance as we strain to achieve self-sufficiency.

Prayer flies in the face of those deep seated values. It is an assault on human autonomy, an indictment of independent living.”

When we pray: “Give us today our daily bread,” it is a prayer of dependency.

And so by the end of our time together this morning, I hope each one of us will be able to say, *“I will seek to live in daily dependence on God.”*

If you’d been standing in that crowd listening to Jesus as he spoke these words -“give us today our daily bread” –

[**slide 8**] your thoughts would have immediately gone back to your history, back to your Jewish roots,

back to the time when God delivered your ancestors out of Egypt, back to when Moses – a.k.a. Charlton Heston - was leading the Israelites on their exodus from Egypt.

They witnessed God’s power as they walked through the parted waters of the Red Sea and watched Pharaoh’s army be destroyed.

As they continued on their journey, a pillar of cloud guided them during the day, providing shade from the hot sun,

and a pillar of fire was present at night for warmth - both the pillar of cloud and fire being manifestations of God's presence with them.

After experiencing all of that, you would think they would be willing to follow God anywhere,

that they would trust him with anything, that they would depend on God to meet all their needs, right? Wrong.

We pick up the story in Ex. 16: "In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt!

There we sat around pots of meat and ate food, all the food that we wanted,

but you've brought us into this desert to starve the entire assembly to death.'

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. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites..., 'In the morning you will see the glory of the LORD because he has heard your grumbling against him.'"

Later in the chapter we read: "When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor."

Here we have described one of my sons' favourite breakfast foods, Frosted Flakes, and they're great!

“When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” for they didn’t know what it was.

[slide 9] And Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.

A little later in the chapter they named their Frosted Flakes ‘manna’ which simply means, “What is it?”

To call it, “What is it?” reminds me of some of the lunches I used to have at school.

Did you ever get served ‘mystery meat’ or ‘surprise soup’ from the school cafeteria?

Well, the people of Israel didn’t know what this stuff was, but they knew one thing: it wasn’t there the day before.

They were hungry, and God provided for their needs. As Moses made clear to them, it is the bread the Lord gave them to eat.

Every morning, 6 days a week, God sent them manna to eat.

It was enough to feed all of them every day for 40 years of wandering through the desert until they reached the Promised Land.

God took care of them; he provided for their needs; they could depend on him.

I imagine they got quite creative in how they prepared their manna.

Manna bread, manna burgers, boiled manna, baked manna, fried manna, manna-cotti, and ba-manna splits.

When those listening to Jesus heard him say in Mt. 6, “this is how you ought to pray: Give us today our daily bread,”

their thoughts would have immediately gone back to this story in their history when God provided for his people and taught them to depend on him.

But that historical context is not the only context for this prayer. [slide 10] There is also a kingdom context.

We know that to be the case because this prayer Jesus taught is set within the context of the Sermon on the Mount,

which is all about how to live life as a citizen of the kingdom of God; of how to live under his rule and reign as King.

We discover what that kingdom context is in Jn. 6.32ff where Jesus says: “I tell you the truth, Moses didn’t give you bread from heaven. My Father did.

And now he offers you the true bread from heaven.

The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “give us that bread every day.”

[slide 11] Jesus replied, “***I am*** the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again.”

Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died.

Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. ***I am*** the living bread that came down from heaven.

Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.”

So “Give us today our daily bread” also means that life as a citizen of God’s eternal kingdom is available to us today through the bread of life, who is Jesus.

We see this kingdom context more clearly when we understand what the word ‘***daily***’ means.

You who are history buffs may enjoy this. [slide 12] For centuries the Greek word ἐπιούσιον has been translated as 'daily.'

The trouble is, outside of this prayer, as recorded in both Mt. and Lk., this word appears nowhere else in the Greek language.

Now, if a word appears only once in the entire history of that language, the translator has a unique problem.

It's like when children create a word whose meaning is known only to them.

For example, when very young, one of our 4 children, Jeromey, created the word "ignopchus."

If I chose to use the word "ignopchus" in a sentence, how can any reader possibly understand its meaning?

This is the problem with the word ἐπιούσιον in this prayer.

Is this problem unsolvable? No, it isn't.

That's because there of an Old Syriac translation of the gospels which dates to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

It had faded away and disappeared until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when two copies were discovered.

One copy remains in the Monastery of St. Catherine at the foot of the alleged site of Mount Sinai - which Deb and I had the privilege of visiting in 2010.

The other copy made its way into the British Museum in London, England.

It is probably the oldest and earliest translation of the Greek NT into any other language.

Jesus, of course, spoke Aramaic, and Old Syriac is a close dialect of Aramaic.

[slide 13] This Old Syriac translation renders this verse as: ***“Give us today the bread that does not run out.”***

Does this provide a clue to the meaning of this unique and mysterious Greek word ἐπιούσιον? I think it does.

You see, if Jesus is teaching his followers to pray, “Give us today the bread that does not run out,”

does this include actual bread to eat? Yes it does. Does it also include the bread of life, Jesus himself? Yes it does.

Therefore, there is a double meaning attached to this word.

[slide 14, blank] To recap, we’ve got the historical context – the Exodus story - with the bread from God, the manna from heaven, teaching us to depend on God for our physical needs.

We’ve also got the kingdom context. Life as a citizen of God’s eternal kingdom is available to us through Jesus, who is the bread of life.

He is the one we can depend on to provide for our spiritual needs.

What then, does all this mean for us when we pray, “Give us today our daily bread?”

What applications can we make from this clause of the prayer? [slide 15] There are 3.

**1<sup>st</sup>, I can depend on my Abba, Father to provide for my needs.**

We can make this declaration of dependence with confidence because of what our Abba, Father has done in history.

He provided manna to our fore parents in the desert each day, six days a week, for forty years.

Therefore, we ought not have any hesitation to declare our absolute dependence on him for our physical needs.

And since our Abba, Father is the deepest object of our need,

this portion of the prayer also asks that we may be fed with the bread of life, Jesus himself, for our spiritual needs, as citizens of his forever kingdom.

But sometimes we can be like the Israelites who tried to save the manna until the next day

because they really didn't know if God was going to provide; they really didn't know if they could depend on him to meet their needs.

And sometimes we don't believe that our Abba, Father will provide for us the next day and so we start worrying about what the future is going to hold.

[slide 16, blank] For some of us, that worry can become quite traumatic.

Take, for example, the story of Dr. Jerome Frank who was a Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University.

He knows a lot about worry because every time he flies in a plane, those who sit next to him, who find out what he does, start telling him how worried they are about flying.

Well, back in the day, before there were metal detectors and security scanners,

there was a passenger sitting next to him who was confiding with Dr. Frank about his fear of flying.

"You know," he said, "I used to be deathly afraid about flying.

It all started when a man brought a bomb on a flight to Denver to kill his mother-in-law.

I became sick about flying ever since. I always wondered which passenger was carrying a bomb."

So Dr. Frank probed a little further and asked, “So what did you do about it?”

“Well, I went to one of those special classes for people who are afraid to fly.

And they told me there’s only 1 chance in 100,000 that I would be on the same flight with somebody who has a bomb.”

“And did that make you feel any better?” the doctor asked.

“Are you kidding? At 1 in 100,000 chances, I’m bound to be blown up sometime. But this is what I’ve figured out.

I figured that if the chances of having one bomb on the plane were 1 in 100,000,

the chances of having two bombs on the plane would have to be into the billions. Those were odds I could live with.”

“So what good did that do you?” Dr. Frank asked.

“Plenty,” said the passenger. “You see ever since then I’ve been carrying a bomb with me in my carry-on bag.”

As weird as that guy’s logic was, any time we start to worry about the future we’re not depending on or trusting in God.

Worry is an enemy of trust. Worry can cause us to lose trust in God’s ability to provide for our needs.

Daily dependence on God will build trust with him and free us from fear about the future.

As Dallas Willard said, “Today I have God, and he has the provisions. Tomorrow it will be the same.”

Have you been struggling with worry?



Then I want to encourage you to pray to our Abba, Father every day about your needs for that day

and for anything in the future that you may worry about. Ask him for the faith to depend on him; to trust him with those things.

It's interesting that after Jesus tells us to pray "give us today our daily bread,"

he goes on to talk about how much God cares for the birds and how much he cares for us in Mt. 6.25ff:

"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?

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?

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

So depend on, trust in, your Abba, Father to provide for your needs, both physically and spiritually.

What then, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> application we can make from this clause of the prayer?

This 2<sup>nd</sup> application expands on the 1<sup>st</sup>.

[slide 17] Since I can depend on my Abba' Father to provide for my daily needs... **I can also pray for specific needs.**

It can be easier for us to pray, 'God bless everyone,' than it is to pray more specifically.

It seems more spiritual to pray for the salvation of the world than for a parking space at the grocery store.

Now, of course, we can trivialize this prayer if we think it is only about praying for parking spaces,

or for our team to win the game, or for the weather to be nice on the day of our granddaughter's wedding.

While we are to ask for bread daily, we are not to ask for cake. In other words, we ask for that which sustains life, not for all of life's luxuries.

There is no place for a consumerism mindset in the kingdom of God.

But when we pray for daily bread and turn to the specific things we honestly need, that is not trivial.

We need never limit our prayer requests to God. He's our Abba, Father. He wants us to tell him what's on our heart. Everything is a concern and interest to him.

But sometimes we fall into a trap of not telling God everything that's on our heart. We think,

"Well, you know, it's not really a big enough issue; it's not an urgent enough concern for me to bring to God in prayer."

We don't want to trouble God and fill up cosmic air time on things that we think are too trivial for our Abba, Father.

But the moment you start to exclude things that are important to you from your Abba, Father

is the moment that you're attributing to him a lack of interest, a lack of care, and a lack of concern about you.

Yes, he is the God of the universe. Yes, he's enthroned in the heavens. Yes, he's to be worshiped and respected and adored. But he's also our Abba, Father.

He wants to know everything that's on your heart. And you can bring anything to him in prayer.

**[slide 18, blank]** So what is it that you need today from your Abba, Father? What is it that you need to trust him about; to depend on him for?

You may be someone who has lost a spouse recently. And you are in a place where you need to daily depend upon God

for strength to guide you through the loneliness, the heartache, and the grief that is at a depth you have never experienced before.

You may be someone who has cancer, and every day you have to depend on God for the emotional, spiritual, and physical strength

not only to have hope, but to be there for your family and friends.

You may be someone who is facing a physical limitation.

You may be someone who needs wisdom for job decisions as you go through the day.

You may be someone who needs to daily depend on God just to stay strong because of an addiction or a sin issue that you're dealing with.

You may be someone who's going through days of depression or loneliness or hopelessness, and you don't know how you're going to make it.

Or you may be someone who's just in a spiritually dry time, and you need to come to God your Father and tell him,

“God, I feel so distant from you, so dry in my spirit. I need your help to walk through this desert experience with me.”

Commit to prayer whatever your need is; talk to your Abba, Father about it.

Abba, Father is there for you, but you’ve got to trust in him; to depend on him. So pray for your specific needs.

What then, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> application we can make from this portion of the prayer?

This 3<sup>rd</sup> application expands on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. [slide 19] Since I can pray for specific needs... **I can also pray for the needs of others.**

Notice Jesus says we are to pray for ‘*our*’ daily bread, not just ‘*my*’ daily bread.

It’s impossible to pray for *our* daily bread without being aware of the needs of others; the need for actual food and the need for the bread of life, Jesus himself.

So as we pray this clause of the prayer, we can be praying for others - for the hungry people in our city, in our country, and in our world –

asking our Abba, Father to use us to feed the hungry, to care for the desperate, to give hope to the hopeless, and to share the bread of life, Jesus himself.

I invite you to sing with me a song in which we openly declare our dependence on the one who provides all that we need,

“Jesus, thou art everything to me. Song 502 / 717 P

Prayer: Abba, Father, here and now we declare our dependence on you, and trust you for *our* daily bread.

We will seek to live in daily dependence on you for the bread that does not run out. Amen.