

A mother once overheard her young son praying the Lord's Prayer with great intensity, and had to suppress a giggle when she heard him pray, with great sincerity, "Give us this day our jelly bread."

That doesn't sound too bad, does it? Come to think of it, something cold to wash it down would be pretty nice. But you know, jelly bread, that's just an appetizer really, how about some meat and potatoes to go with it? You know, why not a banquet? After all, we deserve it. Lord, we're grateful for the bread, but how about some cake while you're at it?

Human nature sure is something. That's why, when it comes to the things that we need, Jesus teaches us to pray in a pretty specific way: Give us this day our daily bread.

With these words, Jesus invites us to pray for the stuff that is so central to our lives. We take "daily bread" to mean everything we need to sustain life: food; clothing, shelter, family, health, good weather, competent government, strong personal relationships, you name it. To be able to directly request these things from God is a tremendous privilege, but we must proceed with caution. You know why, don't you? It's all too easy for people to chase after the gifts and forget the giver. It's all too natural to take my jelly bread and eat it and act like I'm entitled to it. And then to start liking jelly bread so much that I start thinking of ways to stockpile bread and jelly, so that I never have to go without it. Does that sound silly?

A woman in her mid-forties once wrote the following statement: "I always thought that by the time my husband had his own business, we had paid off the mortgage on the house, and the kids were old enough to look after themselves, that I'd be home free. I thought there'd be no more problems. But it hasn't worked out that way. I worked hard, and got most of the things I wanted, but they don't seem to mean what I thought they would. I have a nice house, but I have spent fifteen years in it bringing up two kids, and I'm fed up with it. These days my husband and I seem to spend half our time arguing about what went wrong. We feel as though we've wasted a lot of time. But I don't think either of us really knows what we want now—except it's something else besides what we have."

You may know someone who feels the same way. When you enjoy the gifts of life without acknowledging the Giver, there is something missing. Life becomes a treadmill where too much is never enough. You may know someone who feels the same way, and that someone may even be you.

The Lord's Prayer offers an antidote to that "hunger for more" that permeates human nature. "Give us this day our daily bread" is that antidote; it is practical theology--news about God you can use.

And it all starts with the words "give us." We are to understand everything we have as gifts given by a generous God. This is God's world. He created it. He sustains it day to day. If we have anything good, it's because God has given it to us. In a sense, Jesus is teaching us humility

in this petition. What I mean is, it takes genuine humility to pray "give us," because it takes you out of the position of earning and puts you in the position of receiving. And you may not like that too much, especially if you struggle with trying to justify yourself. I talked about this on Sunday. This can be kind of offensive to human conventional wisdom. Human conventional wisdom thrives on "I made this," "I did this," "It was my hard work," "I built my little kingdom right here." But Jesus telling us to pray "give us" challenges that thinking directly. When you think about it, this is just an extension of the gospel. The gospel also takes you out of the position of earning and puts you in the position of receiving, because you could never earn good standing with God based on your performance. He gives his fatherly love as a gift, and you can receive it because of Jesus' work, but your work is not going to get it. You cannot build a ladder to God with your good behavior; but you can trust that Jesus built a ladder with his cross, and came down that ladder to live perfectly and die your death. When you believe you are that loved, you gain a whole new perspective for understanding yourself and other people. And when you believe that God is behind every material blessing you have, you actually gain a much healthier perspective on work and stuff. More on that in a minute.

But next comes the phrases "this day" and "daily bread." Take note of how specific that is. This is not a prayer for a huge surplus or perpetual security. This is a prayer focused on need, not more than enough. Jesus isn't saying that material things are unimportant, but they are not the most important. This is exactly the point he makes in Luke chapter 12 when he says "Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Material things dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs. He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern." Daily bread, in correct perspective, right there in Jesus' words.

And then there's one little word I haven't mentioned, and that's "our." That little possessive pronoun. "Give us this day our daily bread." It's true. We do work hard to provide for ourselves and our families, both needs and wants. We use our talent and skill to do the best job possible, and we should want to. But what Jesus invites you to accept is that the ability to work is a gift. Gainful, honest employment is a gift. After all, you can't make someone hire you. Our daily bread is ours in the sense that God gives us opportunities to not only earn money, but to do something useful in the process. Again, if you push the gospel through your ideas about work, your work stops being a means to an end, or a way of simply getting paid. You can actually get into the work for the sake of the work; or to say it differently, you can enjoy what you do because it blesses other people. All good work does that. There's so much I could say on this subject, but I'm going to leave it there for now. It's just fascinating how God lets us participate in gathering our daily bread, much like he sent manna to his people in the desert and they went out there with their baskets and gathered it up.

Jesus really challenges us by teaching us this prayer. He confronts some of our most deeply held assumptions about how life works. But he doesn't do it just for the sake of being controversial; he does it in order to give you something better. "Give us this day our daily bread" teaches you to look to God for the blessings that are present in your life today.

Dr. F.W. Boreham tells about his stay in a quaint old cottage in England occupied by a minister's widow. She had given him her bedroom and in the morning when he pulled up the

blind, he saw that into the glass of the windowpane had been cut the words: "This is the day." He asked the elderly lady about it at breakfast. She explained that she had had a lot of trouble in her time and was always afraid of what was going to happen tomorrow. One day she read the words of the above text. It occurred to her that it meant any day, this day. "Why should I be afraid of the days if He makes them?" So the widow scratched the words as well as she could in the windowpane, so that every time she drew her blind in the morning she was reminded that "This is the day." Realizing the Lord made it, she was no longer afraid.

You can pray "give us this day our daily bread" without fear, because your holy Father is responsible for both the bread and the day.