

Sermon 32, Pray Like This, Pt. 7: Give Us This Day, Matthew 6:11

“Wasting food and wasting money are sins in good standing among believers in the Western world and are rarely mentioned at public meetings or in private confession.”--Warren Wiersbe

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Proposition: God wants us to pray for material provision. It's not the most important thing, but it is an important thing!

Today we come to everyone's favorite part of the Lord's Prayer. Oh, I don't mean that we pray this petition in so many words more often than we pray any of the others. But since the Lord's Prayer covers every type of prayer, and contains within itself every lawful prayer that a Christian could pray, this petition is both a petition in its own right and a heading that describes an entire class of petitions. What do I mean? Well, simply this: whenever you pray this petition, you are praying for material provision. Or let me flip it around: whenever you pray for material provision, you are praying this petition. When we have a prayer request for someone to be healed, that's a prayer for daily bread. When we have a prayer request for a new house, or a used car, or for God's provision for medical bills, we are asking for daily bread. If you're anything like me, then this petition looms very large in your mind. It's what you're most likely to think of when someone asks you for prayer requests. I've never heard anyone before worship raise their hand and ask us to pray that so-and-so would be delivered from evil. I've never seen any of you put in a prayer request for God's kingdom, for evangelism, for spiritual growth for us or any other congregation. But virtually all of you have asked for some kind of material provision — myself included!

What this petition teaches us, as I hope to show you today, is that material provision is important, and it's something God takes care of for those who ask Him and work for it. But it's not the most important thing!

Why should you listen? Because this is something you pray so much. You should probably understand some ground rules for asking God for material provision.

I. God's Glory Outweighs Material Provision, vv. 9-11

The first thing you need to see is the order. This is the fourth petition. Three petitions come before this one. All three of them are asking for God's glory — first, His glory in reputation, then His glory in rule, and then His glory in our obedience to that rule. This fourth petition also asks for a positive good thing, rather than the removal of some evil thing. As such, it is the last of the petitions asking for a good thing. It is the final request for provision. It's in the prayer, but it's not the first thing Jesus wants us to pray for. It's not even in the #2 spot. No, it's way down at fourth and last place. It is the first thing we ask for when we ask for ourselves — but it's not the first thing we ask for when we ask for God. Why is that? Because God's glory is more important than material provision. God's reputation outranks your hunger pangs and my hunger pangs.

That doesn't sit well with us. We don't like hearing that our priorities aren't always God's priorities. Now, God provides for His people. Don't get me wrong. We'll talk about that in a second. But recognize that you should be asking God for His kingdom, His holiness, His will first and foremost. That should be the biggest burden of your heart when you pray. That should be what you ask first and most — that God would make Himself look good. That He would manifest His holiness. That we would obey Him wholeheartedly!

II. God Gives Material Provision to Those Who Ask Him, v. 11

But second, we must realize that material provision is important. Your body is important. Your life in this world is important. God made your body and made everything it needs. He put everything necessary for a good life on this earth. And so, His love and care for us teach us to make this request.

A. We Must Request Material Provision: "Give Us Bread"

"Bread" in the Bible is used generally for "food" and really for everything necessary for life. "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19 ESV). That was God's threat to Adam. Everything that Adam could work for, everything he could sweat for on this Earth, is comprehended under the word "bread." Similarly, do you think Jesus is implying that we can't pray for a car, or a house, for electricity and coal, or for clothing and water and milk and other things which aren't strictly "bread" or even "food" but nonetheless are very needful for the body? When Jesus tells us to pray this prayer, He is telling us that it is necessary for us to request material provision. Don't affect to despise this as being unspiritual; Jesus is telling us that it is perfectly appropriate and right to ask God for these things that we need for bodily life in this world. How can we contribute to God's kingdom or obey His laws if we're weak from lack of food?

But also, when we make this request we admit three things about material provision.

1. We Don't Deserve It

The first is that we don't deserve it. Jesus doesn't tell us to pray and ask God for justice. He doesn't say, "Ask God to give you a fair hearing." God owes that to Himself and hence to us. He doesn't say, "Ask God to tell you the truth." God, again, owes that to Himself and thus to us. But we do need to ask for material provision, because God doesn't owe it to us or to Himself. Simply put, we do not deserve that God give us what we need to eat and drink and wear. He doesn't owe it to us. "The universe doesn't owe you a living." Neither does God. We have forfeited any claim we might have had by our sin. The earth was once our friend; now it's our enemy, because we have hurt it with our sin.

2. We Tend to Abuse It

Secondly, as any horse who has been ridden by a drunk rider can tell you, we tend to abuse the material things God gives us. The human race wastes stuff, trashes stuff, gets stuff dirty, wears it out, and uses it oftentimes for evil purposes. What did the earth do to deserve being made the scene of so much wickedness? How did the elements that are used to murder children or to steal other people's property or carry lies do anything to deserve this evil use? They didn't. They are our unwilling partners in evil, forced to do horrible things because they are inanimate objects that can't resist. But it should be obvious how prone we are to abuse God's good gifts.

3. We Can't Enjoy It Without God's Grace

Finally, we must recognize that we can't enjoy God's provisions without His grace. I've used the illustration of gluten before, and I'll use it again. Gluten is a good food. It is a huge part of what helped Europe succeed as the world superpower of the last five centuries. The amount of protein in wheat is enough that people can actually live on it. That protein is called gluten. It's something other staple foods like corn and bananas don't have. Because of the protein content, wheat is something of a superfood. Yet I can't digest this superfood. It makes me sick, rather than nourishing me. In reality, the only reason that food nourishes any of us is because God's grace makes it work. Why does your digestive system work? Why is there oxygen in the air? Why haven't the major domestic crops and animals that feed the world gone extinct? Can you imagine what would become of us if we had to live without corn, wheat, soybeans, chickens, cattle, and pigs? What would we eat? Only the grace of God provides for us.

Who put iron in the earth, so that we could dig it out and make tools? Do you think that we could have made iron, copper, or the heavier metals ourselves? It takes a supernova to make them in nature. Sure, we fabricate metals in a laboratory today— but only using containers and tools already made out of metal.

Who set the continents on their axis? Do you realize that crops from North Africa never crossed the equator to end up in the temperate regions of South Africa — until Europeans brought them on ships? Or that Eurasia had the overwhelming majority of domesticable plants and animals, and that its east-west axis made it possible for those plants and animals to spread? Who made some animals and plants suitable for domestication? God did. We still haven't figured

out how to domesticate zebra, while horses, their close relative, have worked for us for thousands of years. We can't domesticate oak trees, even though lots of people eat acorns. And on and on it goes. It is only God's grace that allows us to enjoy this world at all — only God's grace that has given us the building blocks of the things we have.

So ask Him for provision. Pray that He would give you what you need in order to serve Him. Pray that your daily bread would be provided for you by a most loving Father. Remember that both the physical bread and the blessing of God are needed to make physical provision of any value for you: "He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD" (Deu 8:3 NKJ).

B. We Must Work for Material Provision: "Our Bread"

But though God's grace enables us to enjoy everything that we do in fact enjoy, God is not a welfare office in the sky. He doesn't simply give us everything we need without us lifting a finger. He gives us almost everything we need — but He also makes us work for it. Thus, we pray for *our* bread, as opposed to someone else's bread. It's ours because God gives it to us, but it's also ours because we work for it. How something become yours? You earn it. You pay for it. And the same is true of daily bread. God can feed people who don't work. But He overwhelmingly chooses not to. If you aren't working and getting bread, material provision, that you can rightfully call your own, then you are a hypocrite to even think about praying this prayer. Obviously, I'm not talking to disabled people. If you can work — and virtually everyone who can understand this sentence can work in some way — then you are on the hook to get yourself some daily bread. This is not opposed to the idea that God gives bread; it works in tandem with it. God gives bread by the work of farmers, millers, bakers, and supermarket operators. God gives clothes by the work of oil rig hands, chemists, cloth makers, cloth merchants, clothing designers, and clothing merchants. And so on. To say that a thing is from Walmart is not to deny that it's from God. To say that you got it by your efforts is not to deny that God gave it to you. Everything in this world runs, in one sense, on two levels. On one level is the chain of causation we see all around us; on the other is the working of God's invincible providence and grace. We cannot and must not deny either one. How do I digest my food? By enzymes and by the grace of God. How did this tie I'm wearing get made? By silkworms and by the providence of God. That's why we pray and why we work. We recognize that everything is from God, and we recognize that He chooses to make us work for it and ask for it.

Where does the food on my table at home come from? From my paycheck. When my kids are a bit older, will they work for it? Of course. The fact that a child does chores and helps with the cooking isn't opposed to the fact that my paycheck purchased the food we're eating. My work doesn't cancel my child's, and his work doesn't cancel mine. God's work in providing doesn't cancel ours; it makes our work, well, work.

So pray for provision and work for provision. As we have seen so far, all of these petitions require something from us. This fourth petition may not be phrased in the third person. No matter; this word "our" clues us in to Christ's implication that we need to work. We don't ask for someone else's bread. We ask for ours, not despite its being ours but because it is ours.

C. We Must Ask Every Day: "This Day"

Jesus also teaches us to trust God on a daily basis. Let's say that at current rates of consumption, you retired people have enough saved up to live comfortably for 25 years. You have enough daily bread for 9,131 days. Does that mean that you no longer need to pray this prayer? Of course not. God provides every day, and we need His provision every day. Even if you have enough stored food and clothing to get you through 25 years, you still need God's help to enjoy it. Only His grace makes it possible for you to benefit from all that stuff.

Do you ask God for provision every day? I trust that you do.

D. We Must Be Content with Enough for Now: "Daily"

Jesus teaches us, finally, that we must be content with enough for now. We don't need enough bread to keep us for a week; all we should ask is enough for today. Lord, if I have a roof over my head tonight, and a shirt on my back right now, and a meal in my belly by the end of the day, I've got what I need.

Is that really our attitude? Are we really content with enough for now? Do we trust that God will give daily bread? I read about interviews with professing Christian billionaires. When asked how much money they would need to feel secure, almost all of them said, "Another billion." A billion dollars means that you can spend a million dollars annually for a thousand years. A billion dollars, if you were to spend it over the course of 75 years, is an income of \$1.11 million per month. And yet these people with multiple billions did not feel financially secure. Why not? Because financial security, security of any kind, is ultimately not about money! It's about who you trust. If you trust money, you'll always need more. If you trust guns, or bunkers, or bombs, or your good deeds, you'll always need more! But if you trust in the infinite God, you don't need any more. He is infinite, and therefore He is enough.

You can only be content with daily bread if God Himself is your portion. If you don't trust God for everything, including the salvation and eternal life that He promises to everyone who believes in Him, you won't be able to endure only having bread for one day. You will go nuts wanting more. But if you trust God, if you trust in Jesus Christ the true bread of life, then you can pray this prayer, work for what you need, thank God for what He gives you, and be secure. You don't need another billion. You don't even need another \$10. You only need what your loving heavenly Father promises to give you. No one who trusted Him has been put to shame. Yes, some Christians have starved to death. This prayer is not a promise that you will always have food. But it is a promise that God will meet your earthly needs for as long as He knows it will be appropriate. So far as it serves His glory and your good, He will answer this prayer. Do you trust Him? Venture on Him, venture wholly, as the hymn says. "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phi 4:19 NKJ). Do

you believe that? Then pray, and say, "Give us this day our daily bread." He will. That's a promise. Amen.