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Scripture: Teach Us to Pray- Give us today our daily bread.

If you have been with us the past few weeks, you know that we are in a message series on the Lord's Prayer. I want to take a minute to look at the context of this prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Let's step back to 1st century Middle East during the time of Jesus. It was still relatively early in his ministry on earth but he was creating a bit of a buzz by the things he was saying and doing.

He was teaching throughout the region of Galilee, going in and out of synagogues, preaching the good news of this Kingdom that he came to proclaim, the Kingdom of God. He is healing people stricken by disease. He is casting demons out of others. As word spreads about Jesus, crowds began to gather. He is a bit of a Phenom, perhaps similar to the way a young sports star or musical group can capture the public's attention in our society.

Many just wanted to see what he could do and Jesus leveraged the attention he was drawing to do some very intentional teaching. If you have your bibles, turn with me to the gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. It says in,

Matthew 5:1-2

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him,² and he began to teach them.

Jesus begins to teach them the values that were important in the Kingdom of God. *Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who mourn.* It was revolutionary teaching for this day. Something the people had never heard before. *Forgive each other, what? Love your enemies, huh? Be glad when people insult you. Turn the other*

cheek. If someone asks you for one coat, give them another.

This was unbelievable stuff and completely countercultural to all that this society stood for and the people were captivated. Do you understand that? This section of the gospel of Matthew from chapters 5-7, has been commonly referred by those in the church as the "Sermon on the Mount". It was Jesus' "piece de resistance", His masterpiece of teaching and right smack dab in the middle of this extended sermon, Jesus takes time to teach his followers about a new way to engage their heavenly Father, a new way to pray. Oh, the people around Jesus on this day, were familiar with prayer. That was not a new concept but they had always been used to the type of prayers that they had heard and seen the Jewish religious leaders pray. Prayers that were for display, oozing with hypocrisy and judgement.

Jesus confronts that attitude of prayer in his teachings. He says to those around,

Matthew 6:7-14, (NIV)

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, ...

⁹ *"This, then, is how you should pray:*

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ *your kingdom come, your will be done,*

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us today our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'*

As, we talked about a few weeks ago, everything about this prayer is so intentional. The opening, “Our Father”, is not just some fluffy formality. It is strategic. By teaching us to begin “Our Father”, Jesus is emphasizing our agreement to pursue community with each other and intimacy with our heavenly Father.

Last week, Matt did a great job unpacking the deeper understanding of the first three petitions of this prayer, *hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done*, and did you notice? Your, your and your, the focus of these petitions is on God. Your. As we move through the prayer and come to the next line, you may observe that there is a noticeable shift. What’s the next line?

Matthew 6:11

Give us today our daily bread.

Your, Your, Your, now becomes *us* and *our*. The pronouns have shifted the focus now to us, to our. It appears that Jesus is changing directions in the prayer, moving from the Father’s cause, now to ours and we think, *well, it is about time! Right?* Finally, this prayer gets around to us. That is what prayer is about it, isn’t it? So we can ask God to, *give us*, whatever that may look like in our life. Lord, give us good health, peace, money, contentment, a good day, a good mark on that exam. Give us.

Let me ask you, if you were teaching this prayer, where would you have started? I mean after the obligatory “Our Father”, you’re great, hallowed be your name, your will be done, etc. etc. When it finally gets around to the “us” part, where would you have started? Just think about your prayer life. When it comes to the asking part, what do you ask for? In my prayers, it is usually around guidance and protection for my children and my new grandson. But, did you notice that the first thing Jesus teaches us to pray for when the emphasis shifts from him to us and our? It is,

Give us today our daily bread.

I would suggest to you that many of us here today, really have no idea what it means to pray to God and ask for our daily bread. Why? Well, I went to my ¾’s full freezer in the garage this week and took out a loaf of bread for my lunch and never thought

to thank God for it. It was in the freezer. But there are many around the world today, where this prayer, *Give us today our daily bread*, is a heartfelt and desperate plea”. Did you know that?

This past fall a photograph appeared in the New York Times but quickly went viral perhaps you have seen it. I want to show it but just a warning that it is disturbing. It is of Amal Hussein, a 7-year-old girl from Yemen who was literally starving to death. She represents the plight of many in her country where a brutal civil war has pushed millions to the brink of starvation. Tragically, Amal died a week after this photo was taken. As hard as it is to view a picture like this, it is important for us to be reminded that, *give us today our daily bread* is a desperate plea for many in our world, today.

Why is the very first “us” request in this prayer that Jesus taught, focused on daily bread? Perhaps one reason is that we are physical beings, and we cannot fully enter into the joy of hallowing our Father’s name, seeing His kingdom come and His will be done if we are not physically fed. Our bodies need bread. Bread or a form of bread (such as rice) is a staple food all around the world. In fact, when I was in the Philippines several years ago, you didn’t even have to order rice with your meal, it came automatically. It was just a given that rice was included every time you ate. It is a staple in the Eastern world like bread is for many of us. Food for our bodies nourishment and sustainability is a huge theme in the bible, have you noticed that?

In the book of Exodus in the Old Testament, God’s hears the cries of his people enslaved and in bondage to the Egyptians and he rescues them from their oppressors and leads them to a new land. Look how it is described in,

Exodus 3:8

*So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with **milk and honey**.*

Milk and Honey is an idiom that means it was a land of abundance, of food among other things. Along the way to this Promised Land, it says in Exodus 16, that God provided for his people as they

complained that they had no food. He did it by raining down bread from heaven, manna. Daily bread for them to nourish themselves.

In *Psalm 23*, David worships God by proclaiming,

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.
You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.*

God provides food.

Then we move to the New Testament. What stands out for you as you think of Jesus' life and ministry? Miracles, yes, definitely. His teaching was amazing but as we learned from our summer message series, *Table Talk*, Jesus always seemed to be celebrating or engaging with people around food. Or at a dinner table.

His very first miracle recorded in John 2. Anyone know it? Jesus turns the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. The one miracle that is recorded in all four of the gospels, anyone know? It is the feeding of the 5000 when Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and multiplied them serving hungry people with an abundance of bread. They even had leftovers. Check it out for yourself as you read your bible, the many references to bread and food. At the last supper with his disciples before his crucifixion, what did Jesus do?

Luke 22:19

He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Partake of it, eat it and remember me. So given all that, won't it almost be natural for Jesus to teach us to pray right at the start, after *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. Now, *Give us today our daily bread*. It's only natural. It does raise some questions for us though, doesn't it? Like, what is Jesus really getting at with this petition? What does it really mean? And, the follow up question, how does praying, *Give us today our daily bread* affect the way that we live?

Let's start with the first question.

Question #1 What does praying, *Give us today our daily bread* really mean?

What was Jesus getting at? Yes, food is important for our bodies, strength, health, nourishment but is there something deeper going on here?

In his book on the Lord's Prayer entitled, "Fifty Seven Words that Changed the World", Darrell Johnson suggests that there are at least six layers of meaning to praying, *Give us today our daily bread*.

Firstly, Jesus is inviting us to pray for physical food.

1. It is to pray for physical food.

To pray for daily fuel so our bodies can function in a healthy way. Have you ever been truly hungry? I mean, you haven't eaten for a while hungry not just when you say to your mom or dad, *when's dinner, I am starving?* In 1999, I had an opportunity to travel to Nicaragua. I was part of a relief team to offer aid and assistance after a major hurricane caused mud slides that devastated a region of the country and killed almost 3 000 people. Living amongst people who had very little to share, our daily diet consisted of small rations of beans and rice, with a few sardines thrown in for a special treat.

It was the first and so far, only time when I truly felt the pangs of hunger for a sustained length of time and the side effects that come with it such as fatigue, nausea and headaches. Our bodies need food to function properly.

Jesus invites us to pray for daily food that gives our body health and vitality.

The second layer of meaning to praying, *Give us today our daily bread*;

2. It is to pray for everything necessary to function in the world

Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation stated in one of his writings from the early 1600's, to pray for daily bread means praying for everything that we need for our bodily wellbeing. Which could also

include clothes on our back, food, drink, shelter, land, money, a spouse, faithful friends, good neighbours and even for the government. The list goes on. To pray this petition, was to pray for everything necessary to sustain life.

The third layer of meaning to praying, *Give us today our daily bread*;

3. It is to pray for everything necessary to live life in the Kingdom of God.

The kingdom Jesus came to proclaim.

To pray for daily bread is to pray for wisdom, courage, strength, patience and holiness. All that we need to go into our world and live for Jesus. Today, we may need to have patience, wisdom, perseverance, to deal with unreasonable customers, unsatisfied clients, unruly children and unpleasant neighbours. To find hope in an unpredictable economic situation. Give us what we need today, Lord. To live according to your kingdom.

The fourth layer of meaning to praying, *Give us today our daily bread*;

4. It is to pray for spiritual bread.

To invite the Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives.

Matthew 4:4, Jesus says,
*'People do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the
mouth of God.*

Everything in Jesus' life seemed to combine the physical and the spiritual so seamlessly. He was fully man and fully God, which is a mystery to us but we too are spiritual beings that can draw on the power and strength of the Holy Spirit that the bible tells us is in us. To pray, *give us today our daily bread* is to invite the Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives.

The fifth layer of meaning to praying, *Give us today our daily bread*;

5. Is to pray for Jesus in our lives.

When we come before almighty God and pray, *Our Father, give us today our daily bread*, we are petitioning Him to give us, Jesus.

In one of the most audacious claims he ever made, Jesus standing in the temple area in the midst of one of great Jewish festivals of the day, proclaims to everyone who is within earshot;

John 6:35

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

That statement would have shocked the people around Jesus. Everyone in that culture understand bread as a daily need, a staple for life. Even the poorest of people would bake and eat bread. Jesus' declaration that he is the bread of life, is a proclamation that we need him every day, in our lives. Guiding and directing and feeding and nurturing us. Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, it was prophesized in the Old Testament book of Micah 5:2, that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, and he was.

I know what you are thinking, *Big deal Paul, we all know that, we just had Christmas*. But did you know that in Hebrew the language of the Old Testament, Beth-lehem is two words. Beth, means "house" and lehem means, anyone? "bread". Bethlehem, the house of bread was the place where *Our Father*, gave us, the bread of life, Jesus. A coincidence? I think not!

The Israelite ancestors ate the manna from heaven that God provided in the book of Exodus but now *Our Father* has provided us with bread that comes down from heaven in which people may partake and never be hungry again. It's Jesus. Do you believe that? Are you turning to Jesus every day, fully reliant and trusting in him to sustain you, like daily bread?

In the gospel of Mark Chapter 8, there is this very interesting series of events. It starts with a second miraculous feeding story. Jesus feeds a crowd of 4000 people this time. This is not to be confused with the feeding of the 5000. This is a different occasion. This time, Jesus distributes seven loaves of bread and a few fish to his disciples to feed 4000 people. Once again, everyone is full and there are

leftovers. Immediately after this, Jesus gets in a boat with his disciples to travel to another region to carry on his ministry. But, the disciples had forgotten to bring the leftovers. They only had one loaf of bread between them in the boat and they begin to argue and complain about not having enough bread to feed themselves. Can you imagine? Who is sitting right there with them? The bread of life. The one who right before their eyes had just finished taking seven loaves of bread and multiplied them to feed 4 000 people. Jesus is like, *come on guys, how long have you been with me, haven't you been paying attention? I am your daily bread. I am all you need. Don't worry about whether or not you have bread. I am here.* But they were blind to it. Are we?

The sixth layer of meaning to praying, *Give us today our daily bread;*

6. It is to look to the day when no one will ever be hungry again.

This petition alludes to the time when the kingdom of God is fully realized and Jesus will come back again and the amazing hope and joy we will have when no one will ever be hungry again.

The answer to the first question, what does praying, *Give us today our daily bread* really mean? Six layers.

- 1. It is to pray for physical food.**
- 2. It is to pray for everything necessary to function in the world.**
- 3. It is to pray for everything necessary to live life in the Kingdom of God.**
- 4. It is to pray for spiritual bread.**
- 5. It is to pray for Jesus in our lives.**
- 6. It is to look to the day when no one will ever be hungry again.**

Isn't that amazing?

So, if we, in faith, genuinely and regularly, commit to pray, *Our Father in heaven, give us today our daily bread.*

Question #2 **How will it affect the way that we live?**

Could I suggest a few ways? To pray *Our Father in Heaven, give us today our daily bread:*

1. It will call us into global community and advocacy.

Notice again the wording. Jesus instructs us to pray, *give us today our daily bread.* It is plural, it is not singular. It is not individualistic. It is not just give me. It is give *us*, which is a reference to the global family of God.

Yes, that includes me, you, our families and our church but it is also our brothers and sisters around the world. In Africa, in Asia, in the Middle East. When we pray a heartfelt, *give us*, it takes our eyes off of our self centredness and invites us to be kingdom minded. Do you know that one of the greatest scandals of our world is that there are many who have an overabundance of food, water and resources and there are many more that lack the bare essentials to sustain life?

The truth is in the Western world today, many of us will die because of too much bread than not enough. This one keeps me awake at night. Maybe it does you as well. Here's the truth of my life. I have everything I need and so much more, I have a comfortable home. I even have a second home, a cottage, I have a fridge and a freezer full of food. I can go to the grocery store at any given time and stock up. I have a closet full of clothes and two cars, We have some money in the bank and I have RSP's. We had education funds for our children but they are long gone now. We also have some debt but it is manageable. I have tried to justify why I have so much and others have so little but it becomes harder and harder for me to reconcile. I have food left over in the fridge that will rot before it is eaten. I have clothes sitting in a closet that won't get worn for years.

St, Basil a fourth century bishop said, *The bread that is spoiling in your house belongs to the hungry. The shoes that are mildewing under your bed belong to those who have none. The clothes stored away in your trunk belong to those who are naked. The money that depreciates in your treasury belongs to the poor!*

The challenge for me and for us is that when Jesus teaches us to *pray for our daily bread*, it becomes a prayer that isn't just horizontal. It has a lateral glance. This request is not for me alone but it is a call to community and advocacy for those in need materially and spiritually around the world. Where and how does praying, give us today our daily bread, call you to take action? I will leave that one right there for now.

A second way that praying this petition, *give us today our daily bread* could affect the way we live our lives.

2. It is a call out of a self-sufficient lifestyle to radical daily dependency on “Our Father”.

Not weekly. Not just on Sunday mornings. Not monthly or just at Easter and Christmas, but day in and day out, daily dependency on *Our Father*. Are you there? This is a prayer that calls us to live one day at a time. Can you imagine? To the followers that Jesus was addressing on the side of the mountain when he taught them this prayer, that was really all they had, One day at a time. They had no electricity, no refrigerators. Some of them could store up some crops in barns but that was until the storms came, or the drought hit.

Do you know what happens when we live our lives always having a backup plan or a safety net such as a hoard of food or stash of money just in case? Or have the mentality, *that if I can only get through today, then tomorrow has to be better*. When that defines the way that we live, when a crisis hits, we don't know how to cope. We don't know what it is like to simply live each day as it comes. To take one day at a time and look for God's provision in our daily needs.

See praying for daily bread is the call to radical dependency on God, day by day. To see that he is the only one that can truly meet our daily needs, not our spouse. Not our best friend. Not even Sobeys. Have you ever had that experience? God sustaining you each day? Oh, maybe it wasn't with food, but it was during a time of crisis in your life. Each day, when you couldn't do it yourself, you felt God's provision to make it through. If you have ever had

an experience as difficult as it was at the time, I would suggest that you have been blessed.

By hoarding and storing up and always having a back-up plan, we are doing what our Western culture tells us is responsible and prudent and maybe it is to a certain extent. But, I wonder how much this mentality is robbing us of true spiritual moments and closeness to, *Our Father*. True dependence that grows our faith.

This petition, *give us today our daily bread*, jolts us awake. It exposes our independence and raise a question for us. Does our lack of daily need, contribute to a daily neglect of *Our Father*? If today's provisions are already at hand, I can get back to Jesus later, right? To pray this petition calls us away from our self-sufficiency to radical dependence on *Our Father*. Can you do that?

A third way that praying, *give us today our daily bread* could affect the way we live our lives.

3. It is a call into lifestyle of gratitude.

When we become people of the Lord's Prayer we realize that every time we sit for a meal, we are participating in an answered prayer. We take that so lightly though, don't we? Everything is so plentiful, we take our food for granted. We take our things for granted, but this prayer teaches us that everything we have is an answered prayer and the only appropriate response is *thank you. Thank you, God*.

When we begin to see our world and all that we have through the lens of this prayer, it can't help but foster a spirit of overwhelming thankfulness and gratitude to *Our Father* for his provision and care. Do you know what gratitude leads to? Generosity. When we learn to be thankful, we learn to share.

I find it so interesting that the places that I have experienced some of the most amazing hospitality and generosity have been in parts of the world where they have so little. At least, materially. But their hearts are full of gratitude to God for their daily bread. As Canadians, there has never been a time in history where we have had so much materially as we do now and they has never been a time in history where we have been so depressed, as we are now.

I wonder if much of what we pray for, when we do pray, goes way beyond our daily needs, and it stirs up feelings of panic and fear in us that robs us of thankfulness and generosity? Just wondering. Confession. This prayer as a whole but this petition in particular, *give us today our daily bread*, is really challenging me, personally. Challenging the way that I am living.

I've have come to the realization that I have forgotten how to live in the moment. To live in the now. I have forgotten how to savour the time I have and not wish it away. To be thankful to God and look to Jesus for each new day and do you know what is happening? I am too busy worrying about the future, the days ahead, creating scenarios in my head that foster a mindset of fear instead of faith. Scarcity instead of generosity and it is zapping my joy, just ask my wife.

This week, I began to not only pray about this, but also gather some Godly people around me to speak into my life and help me in this area. Maybe this is an area that you want to talk about with others as well. Are you living in the moment, each day as it comes, thankful and dependent on God or are you wishing days and opportunities away? If only Tuesday would get here or April, then things will be better.

The second question, how will praying, *Give us today our daily bread* in faith, affect the way that we live? I suggest three ways, there may be more.

- 1. It will call us into global community and advocacy.**
- 2. It is a call out of a self-sufficient lifestyle to radical daily dependency on "Our Father".**
- 3. It is a call into lifestyle of gratitude.**

I have hit you with a lot today but what is God stirring in you. Don't ignore it. Turn in to Jesus. He is the bread of life and then be attentive to what he is prompting you to do.

If you have extra food in your pantry, give some to a food bank. If you have extra clothes in your closet, don't just clear them out because Marie

Kondo told you to. Do it because it is an act of faith and give to them to those in need.

If that picture of that starving, 7 year old Amal Hussein, touched your soul. For heaven's sake, do something. As followers of Jesus, it is not enough for us to just feel bad, we must take some action. *But Paul, what do I do?* Just start somewhere. Research some mission or aid organizations that are feeding and caring for the poor with dignity and integrity and start giving something, anything and then invite Jesus to guide you.

Who knows, there may be someone here today that God prompts to help solve the problem of world hunger, but it won't happen unless you take a step and let him lead you. Unless you let your soul feel, something.

You may have noticed in your bulletin we have included a copy of the Lord's Prayer again this week. We are challenging you to put it in your bible or somewhere you will see it and pray through it every day, inviting God to open your heart and your eyes in a new way to all that is encompassed in this beautiful prayer. You may want to journal or even jot down things that you are noticing, things that God is revealing to you as you pray.

Just think, if we all prayed this prayer Jesus taught us every day, a faith community of 1600 people, joining together discerning the heart of God and seeking to partner in his agenda. Wow. Imagine the things God could do through us.

As we revisit the prayer, reading it, praying through it, centering our lives around it, our walk with Jesus will grow. It will nourish our Christian journey and ultimately we will see that the Lord's Prayer reveals as much about how to live as it does about how to pray. **Amen? Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.*

*For yours is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory, forever, Amen*

*A translation based on Matthew 6:9-13 and the
original Greek text.*

Points to Ponder

Teach Us to Pray

Give us today our daily bread

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Think about the prayers you pray. What are usually the first things that you ask God to give you?
2. Have you ever experienced hunger? How does your body react when you have not had enough food? What roles does bread or rice play in your regular diet? Describe food that positively and negatively affect your health?
3. How do you intentionally make Jesus, the bread of life, a part of your daily “diet” or routine?
4. To pray, give us today our daily bread, calls us into global community and advocacy. What are the places in your life where you are sharing what you have with those in need? What do you find yourself holding back?
5. To pray, give us today our daily bread, calls us out of a self-sufficient lifestyle into a daily dependence on Jesus. Describe the tension you may have between living with a “back up” plan and living in the moment or living each day as it comes.
6. To pray, give us today our daily bread, calls us into a lifestyle of gratitude. Do you find gratitude as something that comes easily in your life? How does it impact your generosity to others?