
We begin with these very familiar words

Matthew 6.9–13 NIV 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.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Our reflections today are centered on verse 10

Matthew 6.11 NIV Give us today our daily bread.

There's a lot contained - and implied - in these few words

But before we dive in, it's helpful to remind ourselves of the context

In Matthew 5-7 Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom of God

And he describes the kingdom of God in words and ideas and possibilities that take our breath away with their beauty, audacity and intensity

And then Jesus invites us, commands us...

To take him seriously, and put into practice these ways of the kingdom in our ordinary lives

Matthew 7.24–27 NIV "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Now right in the middle of his description of the kingdom of God, Jesus begins talking about prayer

And that's where we've been, these past couple weeks

We noticed how he warns us about **how not** to pray first, before he teaches us how **to** pray

Matthew 6.5–6 MESSAGE “And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?”

“Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.”

At the heart of genuine prayer is genuine relationship

Prayer is not a technique or method to engage with God and persuade him to support us in our plans and schemes

Prayer is intimate conversation... the kind of conversation that is at the heart of any deep, loving relationship

When we lose sight of prayer as relationship, it easily becomes a show, a theatrical production of sorts, put on to impress others

And so he begins with a warning

And then, he begins to teach us how to pray, for real

Matthew 6.9 NIV This, then, is how you should pray:
“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...”

We begin with remembering **who** it is that we're talking with,

And **what kind of relationship** we have with him...

Now for many of us, it is simply easier to relate to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, than it is to relate to God the Father

For a host of reasons

Perhaps our earthly fathers failed us in various ways - causing us deep hurt, and so we wonder if God the Father is similar

Or we connect the Father with judgement and wrath and the OT, and the Son with mercy and grace and the NT...

But the truth is that the Father loves us in the very same way that Jesus does

And Jesus came to reveal the Father's heart of love to us

On the night that Jesus was betrayed into the hands of those who would crucify him, he was with his disciples

He had spent most of that evening with his disciples, reminding them of all that he'd taught them

Reminding them of the Father's heart toward them

John 14.7-9 NIV Jesus said, "If you really know me, you will know my Father as well..."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

Later on that night, we find Jesus praying to the Father for his friends

And listen to what he says...

John 17.23 "...you love them even as you love me."

The Father loves us, says Jesus, with the same love that he has for Jesus... the Father loves us like he loves Jesus

So when we begin to pray these words

Matthew 6.9–13 NIV Our Father in heaven...

We settle ourselves down into our Father's love

Our Father who knows us - who sees all our sins and brokenness and hypocrisy and what not...

Our Father who loves us... with arms open wide, and welcomes us, just as we are

So we begin with settling ourselves into God's love for us...

Now this is not merely a quiet, contemplative act

Settling ourselves into God's love for us has very concrete and practical implications for our lives

Jesus explains these implications in John 15

John 15.9–12 NIV As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Settling down for real into God's love for us will often bring to mind our own lack of love for those around us

And remaining in God's love for us will require us to go to work on our hearts, to allow the love of God to melt the hardness in our hearts until it overflows in love for those around us

Honest prayer cannot really get going until we begin to deal with our own lack of love for those around us

Listen to how Jesus puts it

Matthew 5.23–24 NIV “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

So you begin to pray...

And right away the Holy Spirit brings to mind someone with whom you are in conflict

What do you do?

You could ignore it and hope the Holy Spirit doesn't notice...

You could come up with reasons to justify the conflict, or place the blame on the other person

Or maybe you make a note of it for later reference

But if we take Jesus seriously at his word, it sure looks like he thinks we ought to stop... right away

...and go and be reconciled first, then get back to prayer

Does that sound extreme? radical? impractical?

Yes, yes and yes - and yet it is the Jesus way... this is the kingdom of God

To continue in prayer while ignoring the conflict you have with a brother or sister... that simply ignore God's heart, doesn't it?

So as soon as the Spirit brings a conflict to mind, our prayer switches to **“help me be humble, and move toward reconciliation, safe in your love for me”**

and then **“help me get up right now and get to it”**

We are able to center ourselves in the Father's love for us

...and **be confident** in his love for us... to the extent that we seek to love those around us with the same love that he has for us

When theological difference, or political partisanship, or racial prejudice, or socio-economic inequality divide us more than the love of God unites us, we have completely missed the heart of God

We must take this very seriously - we are living in a deeply fractured and fragmented world, and it seems evident that we Christians now seem to align more around the issues of the day rather than around the cross of Jesus

But when we allow politics or race or socio-economic differences to define us more than the cross does, we have utterly lost sight of the gospel... we have utterly lost sight of the love of God

And Jesus' point here is that we won't really enter into and experience the fullness of God's love for us until we move toward one another in confession and repentance and forgiveness and love

Third, when we move toward one another in the love of God for us

...because we are his children, because Jesus died for us, then the world will know that Jesus is true and real and sent by God... **then the gospel of Jesus will move out in true power**

The ultimate power of the the gospel doesn't lie in our apologetics, or in our mission strategies, or in our evangelistic techniques, or even in prayer... the power of the gospel lies in the self-sacrificial love that is evident among those who speak of Jesus

And when there is a lack of love among us, between us, our witness to Jesus is empty, powerless, even destructive...

John 17.20–23 NIV "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father... that they may be one as we are one..."

Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

And then we come to the matter of his kingdom, not ours

Your kingdom come...

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Your will, not mine

And as we surrender to God's love for us, we are able to let go of our own will, our own kingdoms, and settle down into God's kingdom

Which then bring us to our text

Matthew 6.11 NIV Give us today our daily bread.

Give us today our daily bread

So this is an honest acceptance that we are dependent on God for everything

The life that we now live... the heart that continues to beat

The blood that keeps flowing through our arteries and veins, the neurons that keep firing, the muscles that still work, to the extent they do

These are all pure gift, and perhaps that's what we mean when we say, Give us today our daily bread

We are expressing our utter dependence on God's provision

And therefore we're asking him for what we need

But there's more to this simple request than meets the eye

It is an acknowledgement of our dependence on God

But it is also a choice to continue to live in dependence on God

And here's where our own kingdoms quietly try to get back in the game

We acknowledge our dependence on God

But then we do all we can to minimize that dependence

Because we don't much like the idea of being dependent, do we?

We would rather not need to depend on anyone...

And we don't want to depend on anyone because we don't really think that anyone will actually look out for us... not really

We believe that in the final analysis, we are all alone in the world

And if we don't look out for ourselves, who will?

Therefore it simply makes sense, in the wisdom of the world, to pursue independence, of every practical kind

But in the kingdom of God, we are not alone

Our Father in heaven loves us

And provides for us what we need and much much more

So if this is true, and we are growing in our trust in him, we begin to realize that our pursuit of independence is just another way we pursue our own kingdoms

But now that we trust him, we can hear this radical invitation: to let go of our frantic pursuit of independence

And settle down into dependence on our God who loves us

And turn our energies to accomplishing the kingdom of God in the world around us, trusting God to provide for us

This is foolishness in the eyes of the world... and deep wisdom in the kingdom of God

Here's what this radical choice looks like

We could use everything we've been given to first take care of ourselves...

... and pursue the kind of independence that reduces our need to depend on God

Or we could use everything we've been given to pursue the kingdom of God and help those in need around us

...even if it means that we then miss out on achieving our own independence

But that seems rather extreme, and unwise, doesn't it?

There's a story that Jesus told in Luke 12 that can make us very uncomfortable, if we take his words seriously

This is one of those stories that seems so radical, extreme and impractical that we generally move on past it

Perhaps it's for a few radicals who like the idea of living in poverty

But it certainly makes no sense for middle America... or so we quickly decide

I have to tell you that reading it this week made me uncomfortable in a very deep way... in a very good way...

The context for the story is a practical request for help

Luke 12.13–15 NIV Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

Whoa! all I wanted was your help in getting my fair share, Jesus

Right? I'm not sure how you got to greed from there...

Luke 12.16–17 NIV And Jesus told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

Here's the moment of decision: here's the choice

I have a surplus... what will I do with it?

There are those around me who are in need, so I could use it to help them

Or I could put it aside for myself, for the future

That's the implicit subtext of the story

And the man makes his choice

Luke 12.18–19 NIV "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

So the man makes his choice... and it does seem like a reasonably wise choice

He saves his surplus, for the future... and having those savings makes him happy... this is all perfectly understandable

Maybe he could have been a bit more generous, but a lack of generosity isn't the end of the world, right?

And right then Jesus introduces a deadly twist into the story

Luke 12.20 NIV "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"

God now enters the story in a rather shocking manner

You fool, he says...

And right there you see the contrast between God's wisdom and our own - what looks like wisdom to us is simply foolishness, says God

You're saving for your future... but your life ends tonight

And all you've saved for yourself will go to someone else

Luke 12.21 NIV "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

So apparently what looks like wisdom and wealth in the eyes of the world looks like foolishness and poverty in the kingdom of God

I wonder if this story shocks you as much as it does me...

Honestly, when I read the story, I quickly move to diminish its intensity, because it makes me really uncomfortable

I certainly haven't sorted it all out for myself, and I'd love to hear from any of you who have further insight into the practicalities of what Jesus is inviting us into

I do know one thing though

If I'm going to honestly hear these words of Jesus, and find ways to make it practical in my life...

I'm going to have to constantly re-anchor myself to the love of God

There's no other way you and I can possibly receive these words

And then Jesus goes on, to spell out what he's saying...

...in words that are both exciting in the freedom they offer, and scary in the trust they demand

Luke 12.22–34 NIV Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 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!”

“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? ... do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom

That’s the freedom that he invites us into... and the freedom begins when we open up our hearts and hands and pocketbooks and calendars and begin to live into the kingdom of God, rather than into our own

Give us today our daily bread

Much to ponder here, isn’t there?

We are being invited to live generously, trusting our God who provides so abundantly for us

Romans 8.31–32 NIV If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

We’re going to end our time together in receiving communion... in receiving Jesus, our bread of life
