

Dear friend,

In the fourth petition of the “Lord’s Prayer” Jesus commands us to ask our Father in heaven, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Again we ask, what is it that Jesus commands us to ask our Father to do for us? Before I answer that question I want to remind you of something I mentioned in an earlier essay. In giving us this prayer Jesus is telling us the things that God wants to do for us. If we will form our prayers according to this prayer we can be absolutely certain that God will hear and will answer because it is in this prayer that the Son of God, our Savior, Jesus the Messiah is telling us what God wants to do.

Another thing to draw our attention to before answering our question is this: by putting this request for “daily” bread in the prayer Jesus is letting us know that prayer is a daily event for the Christian. Every day we are to ask our Father to do all these things. There will never be day when you and I do not need to ask our Father to do these things.

There are several questions that this simple request raises which we need to answer. First, to what does “bread” refer? Can we ask for more than bread? The great reformer Martin Luther explains what is meant by bread most clearly in his “Shorter Catechism.” “Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors and the like.” Everything we need to support our physical existence on this earth for as long as we live upon it is to be asked from our Father in heaven.

Second, how does God provide us with our daily bread? As we think about how God provides for our physical necessities we at once recognize God’s providential care of his world. God provides us with food not only by providing rain and sun and fertile soil but also by providing farmers and truckers and railroads and butchers and grocery stores and grocery store clerks and farmers markets and doctors and hospitals and trash collectors and sewage treatment plants and jobs and health and motivation to work at our jobs and everything that we need to live here. So when we pray for God to give us daily bread we are asking God to continue working in his world to cause all created things to work together so that we are provided for in every way we need to be provided for physically.

Third, why does he so strongly emphasize “daily” bread? Are we not to ask God to provide for any need in the future? Jesus includes “daily” in order to restrain our greed and to promote our peace. We have a Father who promises to provide for us (Matthew 6:25-34) and he promises to do so in response to our prayers (Matthew 7:7-11). Therefore, our prayers are an expression of our confidence he will provide and a declaration that we are content with his provision. We are not asking God to provide everything today that we will need for the rest of our lives. We are to ask God to provide us today with what we need for today. By praying this prayer we learn to want what we need this day to live for the glory of God and in submission to his rule and obedience to his commands. We learn to be free from anxiety about the future because we are thinking only about what we need this day.

Fourth, if I don't ask God to give me my daily bread does that mean I will go hungry? In one sense this petition is an odd one in light of everything the Bible says about God's caring for his creation. Psalm 145:15-16 says, "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." Jesus says in Matthew 5:45, "He (God our Father) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Paul says in Acts 14:17, "He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." If God gives food and everything that everyone needs for physical life to all without their asking, then why does Jesus want me to ask? Martin Luther again gives a clear answer to this question. He says that Christ commands us to ask for daily bread because "he wants us to realize that our entire life and that of everyone else depends on God; to receive all our physical blessings with thanksgiving and to look to God for physical as well as spiritual provision."

Fifth, if I do ask does that mean I will never go hungry; that I will always have everything I want and need? This is a far bigger question than I have space to deal with here. Let me simply draw your attention to what Paul says in Philippians 4:12, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." Then in II Corinthians 11:27 as he defends his "credentials" as an apostle he says he was "...in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure..." Was Paul not asking the Father to provide his daily bread? I cannot imagine that to be true. Thus God's provision of our physical needs is governed by his goodness and his wise love for us. He will provide us with everything we need to do his will, both revealed and secret, for as long as he has ordained that we live upon this earth.

Sixth, why does he tell us to ask for "our" daily bread? Is it wrong to pray for "my" daily bread? Jesus teaches us by the word "our" that we are to always pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ when we pray. Our prayers are never exclusively concerned with our personal needs but always include the needs of our brothers and sisters. We always pray as a member of the body of Christ. Prayer is therefore not just a private matter but always concerned for the good of the whole body of Christ.

Learning to ask with you,