

# Thoughts on the Lord's Prayer

## 6. "Give us this day our daily bread"

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**F**IRSTLY we must recognise that God is the provider. Since the fall of man this has always been a difficult thing to keep prominently in focus. Because we must work (and work hard) under the sentence of labour imposed in Eden—"in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. 3:19)—we are inclined to forget that germination, growth and fruiting are all miraculous and very dependent on God.

In our present day, most who live in affluent Western societies have no intimate connection between work and food. True, if we do not work then we have little money and cannot buy food, but we are less connected in thought to agriculture than we once were. Our children need to be taught carefully how it is that God provides the food, because in the main they are not able to experience it for themselves. It is too easy to forget God in the modern food chain, and in forgetting to be unthankful. Many people may give lip service to the idea that God is the ultimate provider, yet how many acknowledge their dependence on Him and translate that into appreciative thanks? We live in an age where the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:21 are even more true than they were then: "when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful".

We might ask, How does God give us the food? It certainly does not drop out of the sky! Even the Israelites had to *gather* the manna, which literally did drop from heaven. The gift from God is the rain and the sun, but we must put the work in to receive the blessing. How then do the widows and the orphans get fed? It is our responsibility to provide for them out of that which God has given us. That we are expected to use what God has given us communally is clear, for we are told to ask, "Give *us* this day *our* daily bread", not "Give *me* my daily bread". If any one of us is unable to utilise the blessings provided by God by reason of ill health or other adverse circumstances then we should provide for them. Remember: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Mt. 25:40).

Turning our attention to the bread itself, it is quite ordinary stuff. The exact mixture and kind

is not important. It is important to realise the type of food requested. Jesus did not say, "Give us our caviar and French champagne", or any such thing. The request is for ordinary, necessary food. God is very unlikely to respond favourably to extravagant requests, whether for food or for anything else.

Much has been said and written about the meaning of the Greek word translated "daily". The word only occurs in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, and almost nowhere else in the entire ancient Greek writings. Virtually the only available context is the Lord's Prayer, making a definite understanding difficult. At least four different meanings have been suggested. It seems to me not to make much difference either way. The sense is clear; we ask for that which is needful for the present or immediate future. It is clear that Jesus would not desire us to be fearful of tomorrow (Mt. 6:25-34). There is also a comparison to be made with the provision of manna; enough for each person, given daily (see Exodus 16). On the day before the sabbath the Jews were literally given "this day [their] bread for the morrow", as the alternative rendering in the RSV margin of Matthew 6:11 has it.

A helpful phrase is in Matthew 24:45: "meat in due season". Here an allocation of food was provided by the faithful steward for each person at the right time. Do we see the similarity between the request in the Lord's Prayer and the action of the faithful steward?

This introduces a further level of thought on a higher spiritual plane. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (4:4). Jesus described himself as "the bread of life" in John 6. We must balance our labour out. It is not good to labour "for the meat which perisheth" at the expense of the "meat which endureth" (v. 27). I think it likely that Jesus expected his followers to make the connection with the living bread and to seek for it also, for he said just prior to giving the prayer, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Mt. 5:6). The response of the disciples is admirable: "Lord, evermore give us this bread" (Jno. 6:34).