

How to Pray Part 5

What Do You Need?

This past week Mary Jo got sick and as the day dragged on Monday, her head hurt, her body ached, and she started having chills. Monday evening she wasn't very hungry, and her throat was hurting. Very unlike her, Mary Jo went to bed early and Tuesday morning was dreading going to work. Before she could call and take off the day, she got a text from work telling her she wasn't needed to come in Tuesday but that she would be scheduled to work Wednesday, which was her normal off day. Most people would say that was a coincidence. The people at work did not know she was sick but due to staffing issues, wanted her to take that day off. Because she is a person of faith and prayer, she was convinced the Lord intervened on her behalf. Do you think God works that way, that He answers prayers and that it was Him who got her the day off to recuperate? What do you make of prayer? Is it worth your time and effort? Today we will take a deeper look at the part of the model prayer that goes, **Give us today our daily bread.** (Matthew 6: 11 NIV) The Big Idea we will consider is: Up your game and pray with confidence in God to give you what you need the day you need it.

At the risk of overcomplicating something so simple as "Give us today our daily bread", there are three points to be made regarding the Greek structure of this part of the prayer. First, the term translated bread, means mostly just that. It is bread, like you would use for sandwiches. Bread, however, came to mean all sorts of food. You may have heard that in the seventies, bread was a slang term that meant money. The way we use words of course changes over time and the same is true of the Greek word "artos". It also meant any necessity of life. Bread, or artos is a critical component to avoiding starvation in many parts of the world, and even more so in Jesus' day. Artos came to mean everything essential for your well-being. Artos was a comprehensive term, and I am sure that is how Jesus meant it. He wasn't just telling us to pray for something to sop up our soup but rather to pray for anything you need. Let God know what is stressing you, where you want His help, His intervention. For many, that is the whole reason they pray. They need God's help and Jesus tells us that we should pray for help...every day.

The second grammatical point is not terribly profound, but it is crucial to grasp the importance of this part of the prayer. The verb translated "Give" is in the form of a command. Jesus has no problem with you pushing your agenda. He in fact wants you to tell Him exactly what you need from Him. It is strange to consider the idea of ordering God around, but He certainly does not want you to be mousy about this, apologetic. When we were much younger, we were just like this with our parents. Even though they were huge compared to us and had all the power, we still made it clear that we wanted milk or a candy bar or to go home when we had been at the store too long. Only the most abused and neglected children are afraid as infants to demand things of their parents. In a way that is almost incomprehensible. God wants us to be clear about our needs and concerns and to boldly trust Him with our desires. He does not want us afraid to ask, even to such a degree that He puts this part of our praying in the form of a command.

The third grammatical point is actually two that I have combined into one. There are two Greek terms used here that are marvelous to ponder. The first is epiousios. It means "what is sufficient for the coming day". The second term is seymeros and it means "this day". We are told to pray for the specific matters of the day we have entered; everything we need for the day. This is critical when it comes to praying and your mental health. Jesus quite specifically makes it clear that He wants you to lay out before Him everything you need today. Whether it is your issues at home, a presentation you will make at school, a problem you face at work or your struggle with an addiction. Tell God about those things that matter to you and let Him know you need Him to help you with them.

There is an urgency to praying for the things of this day that isn't quite as intense as when you pray about something happening a month or a year from today. The prayer of Jabez is precisely what we mean. He prayed, "**Oh, that you would bless me indeed,**". (1 Chronicles 4: 10b NKJV) Do you see the earnestness to that prayer? As David Wilkinson notes, it is "like adding five exclamation points, or writing the request in capital letters and underlining it." Prayers of the day have great passion to them because there is no more time, it must be done now. A friend told of when he and his wife lost their young daughter at an amusement park. In a panic, he went off looking for her. You must believe Pastor Mark was praying fervently the prayer of today, the prayer of now. When he finally found Rachel, she was happily standing beside a park worker munching on a candy bar the staff member gave her. Panic and the crush of the moment make praying much more determined, more demanding which is the sort of praying Christ is advocating.

Jesus adamantly insists that we stay in the moment, in the day if you will. Two examples of this come to mind. The first was when He sent the disciples off and told them not to spend much time fussing about how to respond to opposition. **But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.** (Matthew 10: 19-20 NIV) Trust God to show you the way, even at the worst moments of your life. Don't fuss about what is on the horizon. Stay in the moment and the Holy Spirit will get you through what you face. The second example is when Jesus explicitly said that we are not to worry about tomorrow. After listing two areas that many stress about, food and clothing, He makes this command. **Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.** (Matthew 6: 34 NIV)

Jesus does not argue against planning for tomorrow. He isn't saying we should just live willy-nilly without any thought to what we are facing in the near future. In fact He asked the rhetorical question, **"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?"** (Luke 14: 28 NIV) It is foolish to not look ahead! And yet our praying is designed to remove the worry and anxiety from life. Keep your mind locked in on Christ and let Him take you through today. Mother Theresa once said, "Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We only have today. Let's get started!" Rather than fretting over what you will face tomorrow, which Jesus clearly rejects, pray and ask God for what you need today. Prayer is your time to decompress, to let go of your anxiety. As you look to Christ to see you through the unknowns and even the knowns of the day, you can relax and shake off your worry.

To many, the account of Daniel in the den of lions seems like a fable but it is the historical documentation of what happens when people pray for the daily needs and release the future to God. Daniel was the Jewish man of faith who became the king of Persia's most trusted administrator. **Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.** (Daniel 6: 3 NIV) Just as there is jealousy in the workplace today, it was equally fierce in Daniel's time. **At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.** (Daniel 6: 4 NIV) But when it comes to jealousy and hatred, where there's a will there's a way and they came up with a plan to bring down Daniel. Daniel was famous for his praying to the LORD and so they used that against him. **So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: "O King Darius, live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den.** (Daniel 6: 6-7 NIV) They were pretty nasty guys. The king, not realizing the impact of this law upon his trusted friend Daniel, which could not be repealed even by the king, authorized its enactment.

This is where the account gets most fascinating. When Daniel heard about the new law, he calmly went up into his upstairs room, threw open the shutters of his window and very publicly prayed to the LORD in clear sight of anyone. The text says that he was praying for help from God. The law was clearly designed to destroy not only Daniel's career but also his life. But like Jesus has taught us, rather than worrying about tomorrow like so many do, he prayed for his needs for that day. "God help me!" He did not fret over what his public praying could cost him. He did not let anxiety wreck him. Daniel prayed for what he faced today and didn't worry about tomorrow. **Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.** (Daniel 6: 11 NIV) We know of course that Daniel was thrown into the lions' den and the LORD miraculously kept the ferocious and ravenous lions from touching Daniel the entire night he was there.

Here is the point. Each day you face big and small matters that can be disastrous for you or just aggravating. You can get upset over them, fuss about them, worry and become anxious or you can follow Daniel's example and with supernaturally generated peace, pray about them. Your daily bread is just that, it is daily, and God cares about it just as much as you do. The idea of praying is to connect with God. As you do so by asking for your daily necessities, difficulties and concerns, you become more and more infused with God Himself. When that happens, your life is upgraded because you become wiser, happier, braver, given to more enthusiasm for what is ahead and growing increasingly flexible and creative. God within you becomes God outside you as He clears the path for you to successfully overcome your difficulties and be victorious in what you face. The Big Idea for today is this. Up your game and pray with confidence in God to give you what you need the day you need it.