



WESTLAKE HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Provision for the Day"
Lord, Teach Us How to Pray:
A Sermon Series on the Lord's Prayer
Matthew 6:25-34
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Introduction.

Has this ever happened in your house? A sixteen-year-old girl stands at an open closet door packed from floor to ceiling with shirts, pants, shoes, and an assortment of other clothes. Her eyes scan back and forth, up and down, and she pushes clothes on hangers left and right, looking for something that strikes her fancy. But her face is locked in an expression that is somewhere between disappointment and disgust. Then she says it. While standing in front of a closet full of clothes that could dress a small village, she yells, "I don't have anything to wear!"

A thirteen-year-old boy rummages through the refrigerator and kitchen cupboards for a snack. He passes over six kinds of cereal and two different kinds of toaster pastries, because the fruit filling isn't his favorite. He snarls in disgust at the half-dozen beverage options because someone finished off his Mountain Dew. Exasperated, he shouts at the top of his lungs, "There's nothing to eat in this house!"¹

It's painful to watch a teenager complain about "nothing to wear" or "nothing to eat," when they actually have more than enough. But before we throw stones at our teenage children, if we're honest we have to admit this attitude doesn't just describe them today; it describes you and me, too. All of us struggle with contentment. We compare what we have to everyone around us, and we, too, complain we don't have enough.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" What does it mean to say this petition in the Lord's Prayer in a land of plenty when we really have more than enough? How can you and I learn to be content and also to cultivate a heart of generosity in a world that urges us look out for #1 and acquire more and more?

I. Our Material Needs.

In some ways it is striking that Jesus taught His disciples to pray about bread. In the context of a prayer in which the Lord talked about the reverencing of God's name, the coming of God's kingdom, and the doing of God's will, it is a bit surprising that smack dab in the middle of this prayer we are also instructed to let the Father know about our basic daily needs. Our tendency is to think that God is too busy running the world to be very concerned with the little things of our lives, but the fact of the matter is He does care about just these little things, like daily bread, and He wants to provide what we need.

God is not so preoccupied with the challenges of running the universe or accomplishing the salvation of the world that He doesn't have time to care about our small needs. He is

our heavenly Father who cares about us, and right in the middle of the Lord's Prayer you and I are assured that God wants us to bring our requests to Him, no matter how small or daily they may appear to be.

This request isn't simply about bread. Bread was the staple of everyone's diet in both the ancient world and in ours, but I believe that it stands for all the necessities of life and the means to buy them. Martin Luther said that the bread was a symbol for everything that pertains to our material needs, things like food and clothes, crops and fields, and even good weather.ⁱⁱ So when we pray this prayer, we are asking God to provide what we need to sustain our lives. Christianity isn't a religion that is so heavenly minded that it is no earthly good, and our faith as believers isn't so spiritual that it fails to appreciate the material world we live in and all our physical needs.

However, our problem in the Western world isn't that we undervalue material things; our temptation is to overvalue them. We have a tendency to take legitimate human needs and pervert them with a desire for the accumulation of more. Need becomes greed, and as we place our focus too much on these things, we begin to want more and more and more. We're never quite satisfied with God's basic provision.

The fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer tells us that God is very interested in the daily "stuff" of life, and there is nothing we need and nothing we do that is outside His concern. Our God wants to provide for you and me.

II. God's Daily Provision.

Our passage this morning in Matthew 6 says, *"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. ...See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"* (Mt. 6:26,28-30).

Here we are urged not to worry about tomorrow but instead trust that our heavenly Father will provide for our needs as we look to Him in faith. It's a call to live one day at a time and to depend on God.

You and I have a tendency to worry about how we are going to make it, and we think it all depends on us. But here Jesus urges us to look to our heavenly Father to be our provider. The Lord's Prayer is a request for God's **daily** provision, no more and no less. Some scholars have suggested that when Jesus said these words He had in mind the events of the Exodus from Egypt when God provided manna from heaven for the Israelites during the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness.

You'll recall that in Exodus 16 God miraculously provided manna every morning to feed the people of Israel. It looked like hoarfrost, but it was actually a starchy food. They baked the manna into little wafers, which tasted like they were made with honey. The manna was only for the day.

Some of the Israelites didn't believe Moses, and they tried to store up more, but immediately when they tried to do that it became moldy and filled with worms. God gave

just enough manna for the day, and this went on for 40 years until they finally entered the Promised Land. What Jesus was saying here was, "Ask God for what you need today, and don't worry about tomorrow. He'll take care of you as you look in faith to Him. Live one day at a time."

Our tendency is to stock pile, store up and hoard, and we want to protect against all the uncertainties of life. But Jesus urges us to resist that temptation and to trust in God to provide what we need. This doesn't mean we shouldn't save for a rainy day or take out insurance, but it does mean we should never look to these things to be our ultimate security. God is the only one who is sovereign in this world, and He alone can be counted on to provide for us.

Another tendency we have with respect to material possessions is that we are quick to take for granted the gifts God has given us, and we sometimes assume we are the ones who have made provision for our daily bread. "Look at what I've got!" we say. "Look at what I've achieved! Look at what I've built!"

All too often, our worth and our identity are tied up in the money we earn and the things we own, and we can become full of pride. We don't realize or acknowledge that the abilities, the brains, and the opportunities we have ultimately come from the hand of God. He should be the One who receives the praise and glory. Sure we may have worked hard, but where would we be without His blessing and provision? If we think that we've done it all ourselves, it only takes a drought, or a drop in the stock market, or getting laid off at work to help us come face to face with the reality that ultimately you and I are far more dependent on God than we know for His daily provision.

Geneen Roth invested her life savings with Bernie Madoff, and she lost it all when his Ponzi scheme fell apart. It caused her to take a hard look at her own values and her habits with money. She spent years saving for a future that was never coming to protect herself from a past that had already happened. She was convinced that she didn't have enough when, in fact, she had more than a million dollars. Then it was all gone.

She writes, "When you are suddenly confronted with having nothing and you realize that you once had a million dollars and treated it as if it *were* nothing, you see that the very beliefs on which you construct your life are totally...in your head and have nothing to do with reality." She continues by asking, "What or where is enough? If it really was something out there, then everyone who had that quantity would know they had enough. And since we know that's not true – anorexics believe they are too fat, the ultra wealthy believe they need more money – we know that enough can't be out there. Enough cannot be in something we can touch or buy or have like money or a thin body or UGG boots. Enough isn't an amount; it's a relationship to what you already have. But each of us has to find this out for ourselves."ⁱⁱⁱ

I have a t-shirt that says on the front, "The opposite of poverty isn't wealth." And on the back it says, "The opposite of poverty is enough." What is enough for you? How content are you in life? What would it take for you to learn greater contentment, and how do you think the Lord wants you to get to that place? These are questions you and I need

to wrestle with, especially in the Westlake area. I believe the health of our souls depends on it.

III. Sharing Our Bread.

So how does all of this work out? If God is the one to whom we should look for provision on a daily basis, what part do we play in all of this? Should we simply sit back as Christians and say to God, "Okay Big Daddy, bring it on!"? That misses the whole point of the Lord's Prayer. I think the answer lies in our call to share our bread.

Someone once said, "You cannot eat bread without breaking it. There is something communal about bread." We should notice that Jesus did not tell His disciples to pray, "Give **me** this day **my** daily bread." Instead, He told His disciples to pray, "Give **us** this day **our** daily bread." Whenever we pray this prayer, it should prompt us to be concerned about the needs of other people around us. The follower of Jesus doesn't have the prerogative to be selfish in his/her prayers; we are called to a life of generosity, to a life of sharing.

The problem of the world is not that there isn't enough to go around. There is plenty to go around if we're willing to share. And whenever we pray this prayer, we should have in mind our responsibility to help God answer the prayer by giving to others who are less fortunate than we are. This prayer is not only a prayer that you and I may receive our bread; it is also a prayer that we may share our daily bread with others.

If we could shrink the Earth's population to a village of 100 people with all existing human ratios remaining the same, there would be 60 Asians, 12 Europeans, 8 would be from Latin America, 14 would be from Africa, and 5 would be American or Canadian.^{iv} 75% of the entire world's wealth would be in the hands of only 20 people.^v Half of them world live on less than \$2.50 a day, and 80 would live on less than \$10 a day.^{vi} Twenty-three would live in substandard housing.^{vii} Eighteen would be unable to read.^{viii} Thirteen would suffer from malnutrition.^{ix} Two would be near death,^x and six would have a college education.^{xi} Do you realize that during the hour of this worship service, 2,400 children will die of starvation around the world.^{xii} You and I live in such a land of privilege and abundance; it is incumbent upon us to share out of our wealth with those in need.

Marquis de Lafayette was a French general and politician who joined the American Revolution and became a friend of George Washington. He was an influential man in both the United States and France. But Lafayette was also a man of compassion. The harvest of 1783 was a poor one, but the manager of his estate had filled his barns with wheat. "The bad harvest has raised the price of wheat," said his manager. "This is the time to sell." Lafayette thought about the hungry peasants in the villages around him and replied, "No, this is the time to give."^{xiii}

Every time we pray this prayer, we should think about the ways we can be generous. Every time we pray this prayer, we would should try and cultivate an attitude of dependence on God and profound gratitude for His abundant blessings. And every time we pray this prayer, we should think about how we can live a bit more simply so that others can simply live!

Conclusion.

Today is Commitment Sunday. It's the day when we are invited to turn in our pledges for the coming year and declare what we are prepared to commit to the Lord's work through this church by way of our time, talent and financial resources for 2012. As I've thought about the commitment Lorie and I want to make, God has been stirring in my heart, and I've been wrestling with this whole question of what is enough, and I've been asking God what He have us do?

I've also been reading a book by Rich Stearns *The Hole in Our Gospel*. Our Tuesday morning men's group is also studying it, and I commend it to you highly. It's the true story of a corporate CEO who set aside worldly success for something far more significant, and he discovered along the way the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to change his own life. Rich uses his journey to demonstrate how the gospel – the *whole* gospel – was always meant to be a world-changing social revolution, a revolution that begins with us.

In the book Rich tells about the time he was the CEO of Parker Brothers. They went through a change in ownership, and he was told his services were no longer needed. This was a traumatic shock after many years of unbridled success, and he took the news hard. He writes, "When you're unemployed, you feel helpless. You can't just go get a job; someone has to offer you one. For a former CEO, this powerlessness was excruciating, but it drove home the message that all we are and all we have come from God's hand." ("Give us this day our daily bread.")

He writes that if he were to summarize all he learned through those wilderness months, he would point back to a catechism he learned when he was 5 or 6 years old. One of the questions was, "Why did God make me?" And the answer, "To love and obey Him." When Rich was laid off, he understood this truth as if for the first time in his life. No matter where he was or what his circumstances were, He was made to love, serve, and obey God. And he realized he could do that whether he was unemployed or as a CEO. The situation didn't matter. When he was eventually offered a job, he took that lesson to heart, and he began each day asking, "How can I love, serve and obey God today?" Looking back on that painful period of unemployment, he now realizes it was one of the richest spiritual season in his life.

"Give us this day our daily bread." We say it every time we pray this prayer. You and I are dependent on God for everything we have in this life, and we are encouraged to ask and give thanks for His daily provision. We are also invited to share out of our abundance with those in need around us. The question is how will we respond? How will we love, serve, and obey God today? How will we commit our resources in the service of Christ in the coming year? And how can we live a bit more simply so that others can simply live?

May God give us the courage to trust Him to provide for our material needs in an uncertain world, and may we respond in faith with generous hearts and open hands. Amen.

ⁱ Adapted from John Ortberg, *Praying With Power*, p. 34.

ⁱⁱ See Martin Luther, *The Sermon On The Mount*, p. 147.

ⁱⁱⁱ Geneen Roth, *Lost and Found*, pp. 149-250.

^{iv} From Rich Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, p. 121.

^v <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats>.

^{vi} <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats>.

^{vii} <http://www.habitat.org/how/why.aspx>.

^{viii} <http://www.chacha.com/question/what-is-the-worlds-literacy-rate>.

^{ix} <http://www.ask.com/web?qsrc=1&o=15732&l=dir&q=How+many+people+are+malnourished%3F>.

^x <http://global-south.blogspot.com/2007/12/how-many-people-die-everyday.html>.

^{xi} http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/05/19/percent-of-world-with-col_n_581807.html.

^{xii} Source: Love in Action.

^{xiii} *Today in the Word*, 8/4/94.