

God's Provision

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good afternoon everyone and lovely to be here today. My name is Paul, I'm part of the leadership team here and it's my privilege to bring us God's Word this morning. Let me just guide you in terms of what we're going to be doing for the rest of our time together.

I will be speaking for a while and after that we'll be having an opportunity since it's the first Sunday of the month to share communion together for all those who want to stay. We are in week three of looking at the Lord's Prayer and my reading today is in Matthew chapter 6 verse 11.

That is the Lord's Prayer and the reading, the verses we're looking at are just verse 11. Reading is, give us this day our daily bread. I wonder if I managed to complete the reading before some of you had found it in your Bibles.

Well, don't worry, you've got plenty of time to find it because that's where we're going to be dwelling. Just in these seven words, give us this day our daily bread. And it's been wonderful for me to be able to really just reflect on those seven words as I've been preparing.

Let me remind you of the context. Graham spoke to us last Sunday on the subject of attuning our life to the Father's frequency. As he focused on the words just before that, Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[1 : 2 0] And he really challenged us to look out and to look at the church and to look into our lives and to reflect on what the Lord's will would be in each of those spheres.

And after such lofty thoughts, in some ways, as I've focused on the Lord's Prayer, it seems a little bit surprising that the very next words, grand themes about God's glory, and we go on to important themes about repentance and forgiveness, are these seven simple words.

Give us this day our daily bread. I'd like to look at each word. And if it's okay with you, I'd like to look at the last word first, the word bread.

Because as I've studied this over recent days, I've discovered that through the history of the church, theologians have sometimes got themselves into a terrible fankel over the word bread.

I think so much so that it seems there's almost been massive fights and disagreements over what Jesus meant when he set out this model prayer and said, give us this day our daily bread.

[2 : 4 0] And some have thought, well, clearly Jesus couldn't possibly be referring to bread. That would be in some ways, you know, inappropriate.

So he must have been referring to bread as an illustration of God's words. And indeed, one of our earlier songs quite rightly used the idea of daily bread being the way in which God feeds us through his word.

And that's perfectly biblical, but some have perhaps said that's all it can be. Others have said, no, no, no, you've got that wrong. When we're talking about give us this day our daily bread, there's a reference there to communion, right?

The bread that is the body of Christ, and it's a reference to the fact that we need to be fed by Jesus. And we do so as we take communion. It's clearly not just bread. And then right about the time of the Reformation, it seems that along came others, and apologies to the theologians, I know I'm generalizing pretty broadly here, right?

But they came along and said, maybe bread means bread. And actually, maybe it is the case that when Jesus says, give us this day our daily bread, it's okay to pray for the stuff that we need.

[3 : 47] Bread is an incredibly universal item. So basic. I wonder how many of you have bought bread this week.

Just in case some of you are not sure what bread is, I thought I would bring along a loaf of bread. One of the many that I have purchased this week. And I've been among those in the UK who have purchased 11 million loaves of bread this week.

I bought this one in Morrison's. It's a Coburg Cobb and it costs 50 pence. I was reflecting this morning, I could definitely have paid six times the price had I bought it in one of the little boutiques in Brunstfield.

But of course, that may have been worth it because it wouldn't have come in one of these plastic wrappers. It would have come in a paper bag. And maybe even slightly more stale. But nevertheless, I might have quite enjoyed paying six times the price.

But what sort of bread have you purchased this week? I wonder. And did any of us pray beforehand that we would be able to have, purchase or receive that bread?

[4 : 56] Or did we proceed with, I suppose, presumption, maybe understandably, that there'd be no issues whatsoever with us obtaining that bread?

I suspect most of us were in the latter category. So why then is it that Jesus includes this reference to bread in this model prayer?

Well, I suppose the first point that I take from it is perhaps a recognition that God knows all that we need. He knows and understands our need for food, for water, but also our needs for so many other things.

And I think in this very basic, in this encouragement to pray for our most basic needs, we are to be reminded in our prayers that there is nothing, there is nothing too small that we cannot bring to God in our prayers.

And there is nothing too big that we cannot bring to God in our prayers. Reflect, please, for just a minute on the things that you've prayed for this week.

[6 : 11] And are you remembering, am I remembering, to bring to God my prayers and my needs for the small things, and also for the big things?

Let's unpack this a bit more as we think about some of the other seven words. And I'd like to look at the first two now. The words, give us.

And my title, as we go through the other six words, I'll have three titles. And this one, I suggest, gives us a sense of childlike dependence. You see, there's no particular deal going on here.

This is not about some sort of contractual relationship. This is not about us saying to our Heavenly Father, now we have done certain things for you, and in return, what we require is this back.

But in this incredibly simple phrase, give us, I think we see a sense of simplicity and a great sense of need.

[7 : 25] And I'd like you to imagine just a child and the needs of a child. Isn't it the case that adulthood brings such a great sense of self-sufficiency in many ways?

We're adults and we need to be in control and we need to have a plan for the day, for the week, for the month, for the year. And we look at our bank statement and we look at our pensions savings, our statement, and we look at what we've got and we work out whether it's sufficient and we worry about it and we stress about it.

And children do none of those things. Children look to their parents and expect that their parents will quite simply provide for them.

Even though Elizabeth and I's children are growing up a bit and are 8 and 11, there is still a sense of absolute dependence on us for their food.

And there is also an absolute expectation that it's certainly not the case that the Tesco shopping will be delivered on a Monday and it will go into the cupboard and we'll then say, well, just fend for yourselves.

[8 : 35] The food's there. Rather, there's a whole process of planning, of preparing, of cooking, of cutting, of serving, of providing, of clearing, of washing, which we as parents, or in most cases Elizabeth as mother, is undertaking in order to provide for our children who are expecting to receive from us.

And I wonder if we might need to recapture, as we focus on this few small words in this incredibly important prayer, our sense of childlike dependence on God for everything.

I wonder if some of us have become a little bit too sophisticated and self-sufficient. And whether at times that necessary planning for life and for adulthood ends up leading to a sense that in our faith and our relationship with God, we are self-sufficient in that sphere as well.

We're not. Let's remember the words of the hymn which says, Nothing in my hands I bring Simply to thy cross I cling Naked, run to thee for dress Helpless, look to thee for grace Foul I to the fountain fly Wash me, saviour, or I die Last time I was speaking, I shared with you some of my challenges this year.

As I suffered a tricky problem with my eyes and couldn't drive and couldn't work for a little while Of realising quite suddenly that even such a small thing going wrong could have profound consequences and making me realise I am not in control.

[10 : 32] And challenging me about whether actually I'm living my life with a sense of childlike dependence on my heavenly father. That week, one of the books that I read was a great book by Louis Giglio called I Am Not But I Know I Am and it's a book based on the story of John the Baptist as he looked to Jesus and said Jesus must increase and I must decrease and Louis Giglio says this in the book Admitting we are not God not in control not running anything not responsible for everyone's wellbeing not the solution for everything and everyone not at the centre of all things does not belittle us but rather frees us.

I am not but I know the one who is I am. Let's be people let's be a church marked by childlike dependence on God for our bread and for every other aspect of life.

Let's move on to some of the other words. Give us this day and then the word daily. Give us this day our daily bread and if we've thought about childlike dependence I think those three words this day and daily encourage us to reflect on our continual dependence on God.

Yesterday's faith in many respects won't be sufficient and all of us are invited once again today to trust God afresh for all that we need.

If I left that bread and decided that I would keep it sitting and would come back to it for my food in two or three or four weeks time well would that be sensible?

[12 : 43] Of course not. It would be rotten. And so bread is something that needs to be renewed and refreshed so regularly and for some of you you'll already be there in the story of God's people in the book of Exodus in chapter 16 where God provided to them manna from heaven that flaky stuff a bit like frosties that was landing on the ground when they were struggling without any food at all and they looked and they thought this is fantastic that these frosties are here and some of them gathered up tons and tons and tons and thought we'll keep it and we'll keep it in containers and it will last for many days and God had already told them look you don't need to do that this stuff's only for today unless the next day is going to be a Sabbath in which case it's going to be for two days but some of them didn't listen and they didn't trust God they didn't trust that God would give them each day their daily bread and so they hoarded it all up and what happened in day two the stuff was full of maggots it was absolutely rotten and God was challenging God's people way back then in the book of Exodus that what he wanted was a people who would look to God in continual dependence yesterday the manna came they'd have to wake up and rely on God providing them again for manna and they'd have to wake up the next day with nothing but absolutely relying on God providing them again with manna and they'd wake up the next day again utterly relying on God providing them with that manna

Lamentations chapter 3 says this because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed for his compassions never fail they are new every morning great is your faithfulness I say to myself the Lord is my portion therefore I will wait for him I want to encourage us that for some of us we might feel that our trust our confidence in God is being shaken we've already heard and thought and prayed for members of our church who this week are wrestling and struggling with serious health issues and others experiencing loss and others with problems and issues that many of us will not even be aware of we come to God this morning who assures us that his compassion never fails and that his love is new every morning and who invites us to live a life of childlike dependence and of continual dependence the God who will provide for us anew on Monday and on Tuesday and on Wednesday and every day ahead and who invites us to simply trust him but let's not miss the final two words that I really want to focus on you've noticed them

I'm sure give us this day our daily bread that prayer could so easily be give me this day my daily bread but it's not a prayer of individual dependence on God it's a prayer that speaks of collective dependence dependence if you're taking notes we need to come together and lift up our hearts and voices together saying God collectively we need you in so many ways the Bible speaks of us being a body that isn't self-sufficient but that is beautifully interconnected so that every part might support the other part in meeting the needs of the other and very simply

I've been thinking of it that some of you might be praying for a particular need and it's another part of the body that God is equipping to provide for that need folks some of us are the answers to the prayers of some of the others who are sitting here in this room today that's a beautiful way in which God makes his church work and so we need to be praying for one another we need to be looking out for one another we need to be willing to share with each other where we are at and what our needs are because God may have some of the answers to those needs and the people that are sitting right next to you or behind you or you'll pass today so please let's not think that God's encouraging us to pray individualistic prayers only about our needs he's not and time and again throughout the Lord's prayer there is a sense of our collective worship towards God our collective need for forgiveness and our collective need for daily bread let's look around us to what extent might we be the answers to some of the prayers that others are praying but as we draw towards a close

I want us to think for just a moment or two about what the consequences for our lives might be if we are really to be people who are marked by an increased sense of childlike dependence on our God of continual dependence and of collective dependence well what are the consequences if we as individuals have this sense of being utterly dependent on God for everything I suppose the one word that has been in my mind as I've reflected on that is the word gratitude if we do not seek to go about life absolutely self-sufficient but if we recognise that our every breath and our every need is utterly in God's hands to provide and we are not sufficient for anything and we then discover that God provides for us in so many ways surely the response ought to be one of outpouring gratitude to God

[19 : 09] I was reading a book this week called Ruthless Trust and the author speaks of spending some time with a group of older black women in the deep south of America down in New Orleans and his comment was that the one phrase that he heard these women say time and time again day after day was this thank you Jesus thank you Jesus thank you Jesus what are our levels of gratitude folks to Jesus for all that he is doing for us and in our lives I wonder if we're marked more by a sense of grumbling than we are by a sense of gratitude and I look into my own heart and life with that challenge before I look out and present it to any others there was also a story that I read of a woman who was desperately ill in hospital and gradually her physical functions were becoming increasingly impaired but she was someone who was looking to

Jesus and a young man went in to visit her in the hospital and she said to him I'm just so grateful to Jesus for the fact that I still have the power to move my neck and my head even though there was no power to move any other part of her body and he said that's wonderful and he visited her a few weeks later and the power to move her head and neck had gone and she said I'm just so thankful to Jesus that I still have the power to see and hear and he said to her in the course of that visit he said that's wonderful he said but what will happen when you can no longer see and hear she said I'll just be so thankful to Jesus that you still come and visit me and I was touched by that simple example of gratitude and I wonder if some of us are wasting our time and our energy grumbling rather than being grateful

I wonder if some of us need to recapture a sense of childlike dependence on God for everything and if in doing so we might find ourselves increasingly grateful for all the ways in which he provides our daily bread but as I close I want to recognize that for some of us we may be struggling a bit with the fact that we feel we have been praying for things and we've not yet seen the answer we have been praying for daily bread we've been praying for the job we've been praying for the better health we've been praying for the renewed energy and we feel it's just not happening and there we see our childlike dependence being tested because we're asking and it doesn't seem to be happening and maybe we can learn from the children as they were speaking about waiting or maybe we can learn from people like

Joni Eareckson and Tada who writes this when life is rosy we may slide by with knowing about Jesus with imitating him and quoting him and speaking of him but only in suffering do we know Jesus we learn things about God in suffering that we cannot learn any other way now I can't do justice to that topic in the time that we've got it's something that we can maybe discuss with each other why is it that sometimes it seems that our prayers to our good father do not receive the answer that we expect or the answer that we want but as we think of our encouragement today to be people who will simply trust and depend on God let's finish with this one verse from God's word 1st John chapter 4 verse 16 says this we know and rely on the love

God has for us maybe that's a verse for some of you this week to take into whatever situation you are facing God encourages all of us to be people of childlike continual and collective dependence on him who can say no matter the circumstances or no matter the challenges whether we feel that the larders are full or are empty we know and rely on the love God has for us let's pause reflect on this and pray together thank you Jesus thank you Jesus for all the ways in which you are providing for us for our physical needs thank you that we can bring them to you thank you there's nothing too small to bring to you for our spiritual needs thank you

[24 : 51] Jesus for the way in which you have provided life and salvation through your own sacrifice on the cross for us thank you Jesus may we be people may we be a church that relies on that depends on and that looks to you for all in this life Amen you you you you you you you you you