

WEEK FIVE | PETITION FOUR

Give us this day our daily bread.

The phrase *“on earth, as it is in heaven”* acts as a fulcrum or hinge point in the middle of the Lord’s Prayer.

The first three petitions keep us focused squarely on God—his name, his kingdom, his will. We pray that heaven may increasingly invade our earthly experience.

Now, with our hearts and minds calibrated Godward, Jesus invites us to lift up our earthly needs—for sustenance, for forgiveness, and for deliverance—to our Father in heaven.

It starts here: Give us this day our daily bread.

WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN BY “DAILY BREAD”?

Once again, we see Jesus’ genius for packing a universe of meaning into a single phrase. There are at least four implications in this request for “daily bread.”

Basic Needs

The Greek word that gets translated as “daily” in the Lord’s Prayer is *epiousios*. It’s an unusual word not found in any other Greek literature or any part of the Bible other than the Lord’s Prayer. Its exact meaning has been debated for centuries.

- Is Jesus talking about actual bread?
- Or is he employing a purely spiritual metaphor?
- Given that *ousios* means “sustenance” and *epi* is an intensifier, we might say that Jesus is referring to “super-sustenance.”
- With that meaning in view, Origen and other early church fathers assumed that Jesus primarily had spiritual resources in mind.

Then an archeological dig uncovered a fifth-century Egyptian papyrus that contained several instances of the word *epiousios*. As it turns out, the papyrus was a shopping list, and the word *epiousios* was written next to a variety of grocery items.

In a course I took with Eugene Peterson, he reported this discovery with what for him was an immense amount of excitement. He asked us to imagine a mother sending her son to the market with the admonition, “Don’t get me that day-old bread; get me the fresh stuff—the *epiousios* bread!” We can be certain, Peterson concluded, that when Jesus used that word he was referring to something as basic as the day’s groceries.

So the first thing Jesus is teaching us with this petition is that we should ask God for the earthy, everyday things we need to live—from food to shelter to meaningful work and relationships. If we want to operate in a more spiritualized state, this petition cuts through our pretensions and reminds us that we never outgrow petitionary prayer.

Not only does Jesus teach us to ask God for the basics we need to live, he urges us to do it daily. Like the Israelites who had to rely on God for manna each day, Jesus is inviting us into a rhythm of simple, steady God-dependence. The idea is not to come to him now and then, when our needs exceed our resources. It’s to live every day—every hour, every minute—in a state of trusting reliance on God’s provision.

For those of us who worry and plan and crave control, Jesus offers a simple training program for a different way of living. “This then,” he tells us, “is how you should pray: Give us this day our daily bread.”

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The Eucharist

With a request for “daily bread,” Jesus gives us the words to ask not only for the food we need to survive physically, but also for “the bread of life” (John 6:35). “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life,” Jesus told his disciples (John 6:54).

Then, in the upper room, he taught them how to partake. Every time we gather around the Lord’s Table, we’re participating in one of the wondrous ways God answers the fourth petition—by giving us Jesus, the Bread of Life we need to truly live.

The Eschaton

The prophets before Jesus were fond of imagining the age to come as a lavish, sacred meal with God. So, reverberating in the request for earthly bread is a third implication—the anticipation of a wedding feast that will never end. Listen to how the vision is cast in **Isaiah 25:6–8**

*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.*

“Give us our daily bread,” Jesus teaches us to pray, “now and forever.”

Justice for the Poor

Finally, we cannot pray this petition with our whole hearts without thinking about the world’s poor—those who don’t have enough provision for today. Once again, the Lord’s Prayer draws us out of ourselves and into God’s care for the world, signing us up for the revolution by inviting us to seek practical ways we can participate in the kingdom work of liberating the oppressed and feeding the hungry.

LIVING INSIDE THE FOURTH PETITION

This petition for daily bread reminds us of our profound poverty—what Eugene Peterson calls “the condition in which we don’t have what we need to live a full life.” There are many layers to our poverty—and to God’s willing provision.

Consider praying through each of these layers, lingering on the areas where you sense the greatest need.

- **Physical bread:**
Basic sustenance so our bodies can operate
- **Everything necessary for functioning in the world:**
shelter, sleep, clothing, community, meaningful work, art, beauty, laughter, sustainable economy
- **Everything necessary for living in the kingdom:**
the Holy Spirit, scriptural understanding, local church community, courage, wisdom, discernment, justice, the “fruit of the Spirit”
- **Jesus himself:**
the Bread of Life

This petition for daily bread also reminds us of the profound poverty—material and otherwise—that exists both locally and globally. Pray through the list above again, this time with the world’s hungry in view, seeking the ways in which God wants you to participate in this aspect of the coming of his kingdom.