

SESSION THREE:  
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

pilgrim

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The aim of this session is to explore the ways in which God feeds his people, and to understand what it means to pray the words: Give us this day our daily bread.

# Opening Prayers

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O God, make speed to save us.  
**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

All creation looks to you  
**to give them their food in due season**

PSALM 104.29

Some went astray in desert wastes  
**and found no path to a city to dwell in.**

Hungry and thirsty,  
**their soul was fainting within them.**

So they cried to the Lord in their trouble  
**and he delivered them from their distress.**

He set their feet on the right way  
**till they came to a city to dwell in.**

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his goodness  
**and the wonders he does for his children.**

For he satisfies the longing soul  
**and fills the hungry soul with good.**

PSALM 107.4-9

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

MATTHEW 6.31-33

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for all the benefits that you have won for us, for all the pains and insults that you have born for us. Most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day.  
**Amen.**

AFTER RICHARD OF CHICHESTER (1253)

## Conversation

**What three things do you feel most thankful for this day?**

## Reflecting on Scripture

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### Reading

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup>When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup>When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup>This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.' <sup>17</sup>The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. <sup>18</sup>But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. <sup>19</sup>And Moses said to them, 'Let no one leave any of it over until morning.' <sup>20</sup>But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. <sup>21</sup>Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

EXODUS 16.13-21

### Explanatory note

God has led the people out of slavery in Egypt and they are now beginning their long journey through the desert. The people complain and look back to the food they enjoyed in Egypt and want to return.

You may have heard of *Manna*. This passage describes God sending *Manna* for the people to eat – literally *Manna* means ‘what is it?’, so it appears in verse 15 even though the translation doesn’t include the word here.

*An omer* is an ancient unit of volume used for grain and other dry goods.

- Read the passage through once
- Keep a few moments of silence
- Read the passage a second time with different voices
- Invite everyone to say aloud a word or phrase that strikes them
- Read the passage a third time
- Share together what this word or phrase might mean and what questions it raises

## Reflection

STEVEN CROFT

### Bread of heaven

Bread plays a powerful part in the story of God’s people. On the night God led the Israelites out from slavery in Egypt, the people were commanded to bake unleavened bread to take with them. At Passover all down the years, the Jewish people have remembered the Exodus by eating bread without yeast for seven days (Exodus 13.3–9).

In the journey through the wilderness, Israel learned to depend on God for daily bread: the manna which fell from heaven. There was just enough for that day, provided directly through God’s grace.

In the countryside around Galilee, crowds followed Jesus out into the desert. Jesus took just a few loaves and gave thanks, broke the bread and gave it to the people. Jesus makes it clear that this gift of physical

bread is a sign of his gift of the deeper spiritual food which we need. Jesus himself is the bread of life (John 6.35).

*Through the wilderness, Israel learned to depend on God.*

Again, in an upper room on the night before he died, Jesus celebrated a meal with his friends at Passover. He ‘took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: “Take, eat. This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me”’ (see 1 Corinthians 11.24).

All of these stories about bread should be in our minds when we pray this line of the Lord’s Prayer. It is this line, with its double stress on ‘this day’ and ‘daily’ which has led many Christians to use the Lord’s Prayer every day as the heart of their own personal prayers.

### Praying for ourselves?

At first sight, ‘Give us this day ...’ looks like a prayer for ourselves. The Lord’s Prayer began with a focus on God (praise) then moved on to prayer for others (known as intercession) and now we come to prayer for ourselves (petition). That’s a good order for our own prayers.

But look more closely. ‘Give us this day ...’ is indeed a prayer for ourselves but it’s a very modest prayer and it is this modesty which is life-changing.

In Janis Joplin’s most famous song, ‘Mercedes Benz’, she asks the Lord for not only the luxury car of the title, but also a colour TV and a night on the town. Perhaps when we first approach prayer we think it’s about asking for the good things of life for ourselves.

Greed shapes so much of our culture and there is a distortion of Christianity which is based on coming to Jesus and growing rich in material goods (it’s called the prosperity gospel). But the Lord’s Prayer is the opposite. It is the antidote to greed and wanting more and more.

For Jesus teaches us to ask (and therefore to want) just enough. Not wealth. Not a big house. Not new clothes. Just bread. And just enough bread for today. 'Give us this day ...' is a prayer that teaches us to be content with enough (and that means it is indeed, in its way, a passport to great happiness).

### In short

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us the importance of asking God for what we need. At the same time it reminds us only to ask for 'just enough' – not everything we might want, simply what we need.

### For discussion

- How easy or difficult do you find it to pray for your own needs? Is there a particular way you shape your prayers?
- How would your attitude to money and possessions be reshaped by praying this prayer and meaning it every day? How would the world be reshaped if everyone prayed like this?

### Physical and spiritual food

Daily bread is a gift from my Father in heaven. It is a sign of God's provision and love. If I can see my relationship with God in something as basic and ordinary as bread then surely I can see the other things in my life as provided by God and be deeply thankful for them: my home; my possessions; my family; my friends; my work.

As I pray this prayer, my perspective changes. My Christian faith is not only about part of my life. My Christian faith is about the whole of my life.

For every meal, I need to give thanks. For every moment, I give thanks. At the end of the day, I give thanks. I live my life in a relationship with the maker of the world.

The prayer overcomes the gap between the physical and the spiritual. For some people in history there has been a separation of the spiritual and the physical. We compartmentalize our lives. But, with this idea of bread, the Lord's Prayer helps us connect the whole of our lives, physical and spiritual.

We are certainly praying for something physical: real bread for our real bodies. But we are also praying for something spiritual – Jesus the living bread, the food for our souls. Longing for Jesus himself is near the heart of the prayer. We are not *just* physical bodies but we *are* physical bodies.

Father, give us all we need for our whole selves to thrive. Give us living bread each day. Give us Jesus.

### In short

Praying for daily bread encourages us to give thanks for everything in our lives, from the most basic upwards. It also reminds us that we have spiritual as well as physical needs.

### For discussion

- How can you build into your day reminders and moments of thanksgiving to God for all his many gifts?
- What difference does it make that the prayer says 'Give us this day ...' rather than 'Give me this day ...'?

## Concluding Prayer

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you most humble and hearty thanks for all your goodness and loving kindness. We bless you for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life, but above all for your immeasurable love in the

redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ for the means of grace and for the hope of glory. And give us, we pray, such a sense of all your mercies that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful and that we show forth your praise not only with our lips but in our lives by giving up ourselves to your service and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

THE GENERAL THANKSGIVING  
(ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER)

## Sending Out

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Reflect this week on your own approach to money and possessions. How can you see them more as gifts from God? How far does a desire for more shape your life?

Reflect as well on the challenge of saying a prayer of thanks, a grace, before each meal. Is this something you could learn to do?

These readings may help you in your reflections:

Wants are the bands and cements between God and us.

THOMAS TRAHERNE (C.1636–74)

People hold cheap what they see every day of their lives, but when confronted by extraordinary events are dumbfounded, though these events are truly no more wonderful than others. Governing the universe is a greater miracle than feeding five thousand people with loaves of bread, but no one marvels at it. People marvel at the feeding of the five thousand not because this miracle is greater, but because it is out of the ordinary. Who is even now providing nourishment for the whole world if not the God who creates a field of wheat from a few seeds?

AUGUSTINE (354–430)

We do not complain of what God does not give us; rather we thank God for what he does give us daily.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (1906–45)