

(God-Centered Praying) 6. Our Physical Needs

by Zac Poonen

God is interested in meeting all our bodily needs, but we must prioritize our relationship with Him before seeking physical blessings.

Scripture: Genesis 1:31, Numbers 10:33, 2 Chronicles 16:12, Job 42:10, Matthew 25:31-46, Mark 6:31, 1 Corinthians 6:13-19, Philippians 4:6, Philippians 4:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Topics: "God's Provision", "Physical Needs"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of acknowledging our physical needs in prayer, as demonstrated by the petition 'Give us this day our daily bread.' He explains that while God is deeply interested in our bodily needs, it is crucial to prioritize Him first to avoid spiritual ruin. Poonen highlights the balance between asceticism and materialism, advocating for a healthy view of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. He encourages believers to seek God's provision for their daily needs while also caring for others, illustrating that true fulfillment comes from serving both God and our community.

Transcript

"Give us this day our daily bread"

God is interested in meeting all our bodily needs. But these needs have to be met in such a way that we are not harmed thereby. Material prosperity and physical blessing have a way of ruining people spiritually if they don't know how to put God first in their lives.

Ten thousand rupees can be used very profitably by a mature, spiritual man; but it could ruin a wayward, irresponsible boy.

And so God wants to get us centred in Him first, before blessing us physically and materially.

Our Bodily Needs First

There are three petitions here in this prayer concerning our personal needs. The first one, amazingly enough, is not a prayer for our spiritual welfare! Isn't that interesting? The very first petition concerning ourselves is not, "Deliver us from spiritual evil," or "Give us victory over sin," or even "Fill us with the Holy Spirit." No. The first petition is, "Lord, take care of my bodily needs."

The Bible says that man is a three-fold being. He has a spirit, which enables him to contact God, a soul, which is his personality, (his intelligence, emotion and will) and his body (1 Thess. 5:23).

The three petitions here concern these three parts of our being. The first one deals with the needs of our body; the second deals with the guilt of sin that can plague our minds (soul); and the third concerns our spirit being delivered from spiritual evil. Our spirit is the most important part of our being. Yet the Lord taught us here to pray for our bodily needs first.

There are two extreme views that are found in Christendom concerning the body. Some have the ascetic view that teaches that unless the body is subdued and denied every comfort, we cannot be holy. But the body cannot be the cause of sin - for Satan who doesn't have a body is full of sin, while Jesus Who has a body never sinned.

The ascetic teaching considers even the marriage-relationship as sinful. But remember that it was God Who created sexual desire in man and He called it "Very Good" (Gen. 1:31). The desire for food, for rest and for sex, are all good and normal bodily desires created by God. We don't have to be ashamed of any of them. We only have to be careful that we don't satisfy any of them in ways that God has forbidden.

The other extreme view found among some Christians is that God wants us to be prosperous. This results in a pampering of the body.

But the teaching of Jesus was neither the extreme of asceticism, nor the extreme of indulgence and materialism. It was caring for the body's legitimate needs so that it could be fit for God's service.

God's Care for Our Bodies

It is because of the wrong idea that many believers hold that God is not interested in our bodies that they do not think of seeking God for healing when they are sick. Like Asa, their faith is in doctors and not in the Lord (2 Chron. 16:12). God may use doctors and medicines and even surgery to heal us. We cannot dictate to Him how He should answer our prayers. But He certainly doesn't expect His children to trust in men. God is greatly interested in our bodies - that they should be healthy and fit to be used for His glory.

Here are three glorious truths that the Bible teaches concerning our bodies : (i) if "the body is for the Lord, the Lord is for the body"; (ii) our "bodies are members of Christ"; and (iii) our "body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor.6:13-19).

We can certainly claim God's power for our body then.

The physical is certainly not more important than the spiritual. We've already seen that God should be first in our lives and that everything else should be secondary. But if we have truly prayed "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," first, then it is right to say, "Give us this day our daily bread," next - for we are asking for bread only in order that we might glorify God by doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven.

Our spiritual state is dependent to some extent on our physical condition too. We read of Elijah that after he had called down fire and rain from heaven, he got discouraged and asked God to take away his life. This courageous man, who could stand against 850 false prophets, fled in fear at the threat of one woman, Jezebel (1 Kings 18,19).

How did that happen? For over three years he had lived all by himself. And now he was drained physically at the end of that strenuous day on Mount Carmel. And when he sat discouraged under a juniper tree, God didn't preach a sermon to him! No. God sent an angel to him with food and drink. Elijah ate and drank and slept. And when he woke up, God gave him some more food and drink (1 Kings 19:1-8). God knew that Elijah was tired and exhausted and that what he needed was nourishment, not exhortation. That's what we need at times too - not long sermons but some good food and rest.

Some Christians have a super-spiritual attitude towards their bodies and say, "I want to burn out for God." And they go about doing their 'service' for God, morning, noon and night, seven days of the week - every week. And then they get exhausted and depressed! Their activity was soulish activity. Their depression has a physical cause, not a spiritual one. The Lord has to tell such people, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest awhile." (Mk. 6:31).

Once when Jesus was traveling in a boat, we read that He was sleeping. He was obviously tired and He was not ashamed to be seen sleeping. There were times when He was thirsty and hungry, and he admitted it. He was not ashamed of His bodily needs. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and we must take care of it.

God is interested in providing us all that we need for our bodies. He knows that we need food, clothing and shelter for our life on earth. And if He hasn't seen it fit to allow you to own your own house, you can be certain that He's interested in enabling you to rent one. He Who sought out a "resting-place" for the Israelites in the wilderness can certainly find one for you too (Num. 10:33). Let's not think of these as unspiritual things that we shouldn't ever ask God for.

It was in order to correct the wrong understanding of God that people had, that Jesus put the request for physical needs first, among the last three petitions in this prayer.

God's Care for Our Earthly Necessities

All our physical needs are summed up in this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." Implied in that request is, "Give me a job. Give me a house to live in. Give me and my family clothes to wear. Give my children education, because one day they have to get their daily bread too." God is interested in all these matters. And if we learn to seek the kingdom of God first, these things will be added to us.

Do you know why we are so worried about all these earthly things - food, clothing, job, house, children's education, etc.? Because deep down in our heart we have a feeling that God is not really interested in helping us with these material things. We feel that God is interested only in our spiritual welfare.

If only the Holy Spirit could convince us once and for all, that God is interested in every part of us - spirit, soul and body! God wants us to ask Him for our earthly needs - and He doesn't ever want us to be worried. That's why the Bible says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

An earthly father is not obliged to provide for the needs of everyone around him. But he is certainly obliged to provide for his own family. God is so good that He provides food even for the birds. How much more He will provide the needs of His own children!

Once when a Canaanite woman asked Jesus to heal her daughter, Jesus said, "Let the children be satisfied first" (Mk. 7:27). She replied that she would be happy with just the crumbs that fell from the table.

And her daughter was completely delivered. Think of that. The crumbs were enough to bring freedom from demon-possession. Imagine then what a whole loaf of bread could do for us who are God's children! And remember that Jesus said, "Let the CHILDREN be satisfied FIRST." And so we pray with boldness, "Our Father, give us this day our daily bread."

Contentment with God's Provision

Notice here, that Jesus didn't teach us to ask for luxuries. We are not praying, "Father, give us this day our daily ice-cream," but "Give us this day our daily bread!" The promise is, "My God shall supply all your NEED" (Phil. 4:19) - not all that we WANT, but all that we NEED. There's a lot of difference between what we may want and what we need. You may want a car, but God may see that you don't need one and so He won't give you one. Somebody else may need one and He may give a car to him. You don't have to envy him and you don't have to grumble against God. Be satisfied with what you have. Don't ask for luxuries. If God gives us some luxuries we can receive them and use them for His glory. But if he doesn't give us any, we'll still praise the Lord.

Let's not compare ourselves with others. God knows what is best for us. If we ask Him for bread He won't give us a stone, and if we ask Him for a stone He won't give us a stone. He'll give us bread instead!

Be content with His provision. One of the secrets of Paul's life was that he was absolutely content. In Philippians 4:11 he says, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."

Daily Provision

The prayer is "Give us this day our DAILY bread." God may give us bread for many days at a time, but the petition here is only for one single day's physical necessities. Jesus told us not be anxious even about what was going to happen tomorrow. God doesn't want us to worry about the future. We are to be dependent upon Him, day by day.

The Lord taught this lesson to the Israelites in the wilderness in a wonderful way. They had to go out and collect the manna every morning. They couldn't collect it for a number of days at a time. They were to be dependent upon God day by day. They had to live like that for forty years. Do you think that was a strain? No. I'm sure it wasn't. It must have been exciting!

If God gave us too much at a time, our hearts would drift away from Him. And so God orders the circumstances of our lives in such a way that often some need arises in the physical realm - because the physical often touches us much more than the spiritual. God allows the needs to come so that we turn to Him again and again. Thus we learn the lesson of perpetual dependence on God.

Even though the manna dropped from heaven, God didn't drop it straight into their mouths! The Israelites had to go out early in the morning and collect it. The lazy person would have got nothing. And so, when we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," we're not asking God to do some miracle and supply us our needs without our doing any work. No. The Bible says that "if a man will not work he should not eat either" (2 Thess. 3:10). Jesus said that God feeds the birds. But He doesn't drop food into their mouths. They have to go out and search for their food. And so God expects us to be hard working too - and to trust Him. Faith is no substitute for hard work.

Health to do God's Will

This prayer is also connected with the previous petition: "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." We're asking God for physical health and strength so that we can do His will.

When sick people have asked me to pray for their healing, I have often wondered, "Does he want health so that he can be strong enough to serve God? Or does he want it to live for himself? Should we ask God to heal him so that he can live for the world?" Jesus taught us to pray for our physical needs so that we may do God's will and not our own.

A Family Prayer

Notice also that the prayer is "Give US" and not "Give ME".

The one who puts God first in his life will find that he can't put himself second. We are members of a family sitting around our Father's table; and the Father doesn't want any selfish children at His table who grab all the dishes for themselves without considering whether others at the table have enough to eat. Such behaviour is bad manners even for the unconverted. How much more for a Christian!

Remember what Jesus said about the day of judgment. When He sits on His throne to judge the people, He will tell many of them, "You saw Me hungry, but you never fed Me. You saw Me naked but you never clothed Me. You knew I was sick but you never visited Me." And they will say, "Lord, when was this? We never saw You naked or hungry." And the Lord will reply, "I live in those who are born again; and when you saw that brother of Mine in need, you did not recognize that it was I who was in need. It was I who was hungry and thirsty" (Mt. 25:31-46 - paraphrase).

This is one of the fundamental differences between heaven and hell. Hell is full of sin, full of self-centredness. Each man lives for himself, with no room for God or for others. In heaven, it's the other way around. God is first and others are next.

I've heard a story of a man who had a dream which was a parable of hell and heaven. He first went to hell; and there he saw everyone sitting at a table with plenty of delicious food in front of them. But yet, they were all skinny and sick and miserable. He discovered that they couldn't eat the food that was set before them, because they all had four-foot long spoons attached to their hands. And of course when you have a four-foot spoon tied to your hand its impossible to eat what's in front of you.

Then in his dream this man went up to heaven and there he saw the same delicious food on the table; and the people sitting around the table in heaven also had these four-foot long spoons attached to their hands. But here they were all healthy and strong. And he asked one of them, "How are you all so healthy and strong?" And the man replied, "Well, you see, I realize that I can't feed myself. So I stretch out my hand and feed someone sitting further down the table, and someone else further up the table feeds me with his spoon; and in this way everyone of us gets enough to eat."

And so this man went back to hell, in his dream, and told the people there, "Here's the way for all of you to eat. Each of you should allow someone else to eat out of your plate and feed someone else further down the table." But they all gave him the same reply. "I won't let anyone eat from my plate," each of them said, "for how can I know that someone else will allow me to eat from his plate!"

It's that kind of 'dog in the manger' selfishness that is characteristic of hell and of all who finally go there. All they're interested in is their OWN daily bread.

If you don't have a concern for your brothers and sisters in Christ, you can't pray this prayer, for your daily bread.

There was a time in Abraham's life, when he had waited twenty-five years to get a son through Sarah and he still hadn't received that child. He had prayed and prayed. No answer had come. Then when he was in Gerar, He noticed that God had judged the people there, by making their wives barren. Abraham immediately prayed for those women that God would give them children (Gen. 20:17). Remember that Abraham's prayers for his own wife had still not been answered. God heard Abraham's prayer and gave children to those barren women. But did God stop there? No. He gave Sarah her promised son at that time too (Gen. 21:1). As Abraham prayed for other people, God met his own need as well!

Those who think of God first and others next, get God's best. "The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends," (Job 42:10). That is God's way.

This petition concerning our physical needs, is sandwiched between two other petitions. On one side is, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and on the other, "Forgive us our sins just as we've forgiven others who've sinned against us." Are you eager to do the will of God and to forgive others who have harmed you? Or are you like the little child who when given a cream biscuit, wanted to eat only the cream between the two biscuits? Are you interested only in your material needs being met - "Give us our daily bread" - neglecting the petitions before and after it?

So we see Christians at two extremes. Some are so super-spiritual that they feel it's wrong to pray for material things. Others pray concerning their physical and material needs alone.

Blessed are those who understand the balance that Jesus taught.

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