

Exodus 16 ⁹ Then Moses told Aaron, 'Say to the entire Israelite community, "Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling."'

¹⁰ While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked towards the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.

¹¹ The Lord said to Moses, ¹² 'I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, "At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God."'

¹³ That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, 'It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the Lord has commanded: "Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer^l ¹ for each person you have in your tent.'" ¹⁷ The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. ¹⁸ And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed.

Matthew 7 ⁷ 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ 'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

The 3rd sentence of the Lord's prayer: *Give us today our daily bread*, is quite surprising. The first 2 sentences of Lord's prayer are very noble and lofty *Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven*. In many ways they reflect David's prayer as he looked forward to the building of the temple and other traditional Jewish prayers, focussing on God and his holiness and being dedicated to doing his will, but this 3rd line is something quite new added by Jesus. And by comparison it seems very mundane and maybe even a little selfish. *Please Lord give us what we need*. Now while this is probably the most basic prayer often used not only by Christians but almost by anyone who has an ounce of faith, we might be quite surprised the Jesus encourages us make this slightly self-centred request and especially so near the beginning of the prayer.

However for Jesus it is rooted in his teaching about God being our heavenly Father who loves us so much more than we realise and our great need to put our trust in him and not ourselves.

Daily bread reminds us of how God gave the children of Israel their bread daily in the form of manna. In response to their grumbling. God doesn't want us to grumble which comes from lack of faith in God, He wants us to ask as a child who trust's his loving heavenly Father. In our gospel reading Jesus tells us that God is our heavenly Father who wants to bless us as his children even more than fallible human fathers do. He is also so keen that we bring our requests to God that He promises over 6 times that our heavenly Father will respond to our prayers:

Matthew 7 ⁷ 'Ask and **it will be given** to you; seek and **you will find**; knock and the door **will be opened** to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks **receives**; the one who seeks **finds**; and to the one who knocks, the door **will be opened**.

In the previous chapter when Jesus starts teaching about prayer, twice Jesus tells us that God our heavenly Father already knows our needs: *Matt 6 v.6 your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*¹

v.31 So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Why do we need to ask if God already knows our needs?

Do you remember what Jesus said to Bartimaeus, the blind beggar on the side of the road who was calling out to Jesus to *Have mercy on him?* “*What do you want me to do for you?*” We probably think well surely it was blindingly obvious to Jesus that Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, wanted to be able to see. Of course it was, but Jesus nevertheless wanted Bartimaeus to spell out his needs first and it’s the same with us.

Of course God already knows our needs,. However, it seems God wants us to ask for the things we need because that is part of the way that our relationship with him grows and develops. It is how we discover that God is indeed a loving caring Father who amazingly, wonderfully, hears our prayers and delights to respond to our requests.

Daily bread. Sometimes we only have faith to pray small prayers and that’s OK. Jesus tells his followers in this passage about prayer, not to be anxious about future days but just focus on your needs for today. Father just give me enough to get through this day: the nourishment, strength, courage, stamina, determination, wisdom etc. We can pray that prayer in complete confidence because Jesus has told us to pray precisely that.

As we do that and we find God answering our prayers – that He is faithful – so our faith and trust in God grows and we find we have faith to start praying bigger prayers.

Does that mean we can ask for anything that we like? Well of course there is nothing to stop us from asking, but it doesn’t mean that God as a loving heavenly Father will always say yes.

Ruth Bell Graham: “If God had answered my prayers when I was young, I would’ve married the wrong man – several times.”

However, James has stern words for Christians asking with self-centred motives:

James 4³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures

But for most of us the problem is that we are not nearly eager enough to ask for anything at all – whether its noble moral qualities like strength courage and peace or just the basic things we actually need day by day.

Jesus goes out of his way to tell us that God is a heavenly Father who loves and cares for us more than any human one, so perhaps we need to start treating him like that rather than seeing him as a remote autocrat who is far too important and busy to consider trivial things like our daily needs.

As a loving heavenly Father, God wants us to look to him for all the necessities of life and by that I don’t just mean the necessities to exist or survive like food but the necessities for kingdom life – not only to live to do what God is calling us to do each day. When I pray: *Give us today our daily bread*, I find it really helpful to think ahead through what my day is likely to hold: tasks to be done, meetings or individual conversations and to pray for those things that are necessary for each thing I am called to do during the day to go well: for diligence, concentration, patience, wisdom, compassion, perseverance, insight or whatever it is that each task or conversation requires.

However, because God is our loving heavenly Father, who knows each of us as individuals and delights in our unique combination of personality and gifts and passions, even more than an earthly parent delights in the uniqueness of each child, He sometimes likes to bless us uniquely and tailor his answers to our prayers to who we are.

*When we were first married, our old Morris Traveller seemed to fall apart almost every month and had just got too expensive to run. We needed a new car and thought we’d love to have a 2CV (Frank Muir’s description – made out of a rather stiff aluminium foil and seemed to cock its leg every time it went around a corner) 2nd hand 2CVs in reasonable nick were very hard to find. Lynda said we should pray about it and what’s more she was going to pray for a bright green one. I said don’t be ridiculous, I don’t think we can specify to God what colour the car is. Lynda said well **she** was going to pray for a bright green one anyway! The very next day my boss (I was a country solicitor at the time) said “You know you were looking for a 2CV” I’ve got a friend who is selling his. I went round to his house and there it was – 3 years old, in good nick, at just the right price....and bright green!*

Of course, sometimes we think we really need something and God still doesn’t give it to us.

Maybe that is a sign that, we need first to stop and listen. *Blind Bartimaeus kept praying ‘Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me’ – but he needed to stop and be quiet for a moment in order to*

hear Jesus say to him 'What do you want me to do for you?' We need to do the same. Rather than blurt out what we think is our need, we need to stop and look Jesus in the face as he says to us 'What do you want me to do for you?' Because maybe then we will look at the situation through Jesus' eyes and realise that our real need is something a bit different from what we first thought. This is how we learn to pray in Jesus' name, not just tacking on that phrase to the end of our request but to pray for the things that Jesus wants for us and our situation.

God does not always immediately answer our prayer because He has a much bigger perspective and a much longer view than us. As a loving Father at times He makes us wait because He has a much bigger purpose in mind. God did not answer Ruth Bell's heartfelt prayers to be able to marry this man or that because He knew she was the right partner for Billy Graham. Some of you will remember Pete Greig's story about *Queen Bertha of Kent in the 6th century AD. A devout Christian she used to pray every day for her husband King Ethelbert to come to faith. This went on for 17 years. I wonder how often she thought, "Why hasn't God answered my prayers?" But eventually in 597 a group of monks arrived from Rome. Their mission not only led to King Ethelbert's conversion but to that of his whole kingdom. Canterbury Cathedral founded on site of Queen Bertha's prayer chapel.*

And sometimes He is more concerned in enabling our faith and trust in Him to grow rather than meet our immediate need which He knows is in fact not an absolute necessity. Jesus said *I am the Bread of Life*, so when we pray give us today our daily bread, whether we realise it or not, we are not only praying for the necessities of that day, but we are praying for our greatest need of all, which is to have more of Christ in our lives and hearts, more of his presence, more of his love, more of his wisdom, more of his Spirit. And that is something that we need to pray for every day.