



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



HG58: The Lord's Prayer (5/8)
Provision: What God Wants To Give Us

Matthew 6:5-13

Home Group Study Notes

30th October 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Imagine you could have a meal, anywhere in the world, with any four famous people of your choice dead or alive. Who would you choose? Where would you eat? What would you eat?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1: Have you ever been in a situation where you have wondered where your next meal was coming from? What happened?

2: Having too much and too little both bring problems. What is the best response to: a) riches in our own lives; b) poverty in the lives of those around us (local; national; international)? Is Agur's prayer in Proverbs 30:7-9 a wise one for us to make our own?

3: Discuss the merits of the following quote from Martin Luther: *“Daily bread doesn't just refer to food. In this prayer for daily bread it stands for all the physical things we need for life; everything that nourished for life. Food. Drink. Clothing. House. Yard. Fields. Cattle. Money. Possessions. A devout spouse. Devout children. Devout employees. Devout and faithful rulers. Good government. Peace. Health. Good friends. Faithful neighbours.”*

We are to live Moderately: This prayer is for bread. It is for the very basics of life. As has been said, it is a prayer for our needs and not our greed's. It is so easy to confuse what we want with what we really need. (Consider what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:6-10). In our prayers we need to come to God and ask him to show us how we can learn to live at the level he wants us to live. After all, we are far more likely to find contentment in seeking moderation than we are in desiring more (Agur's prayer in Proverbs 30:7-9 is a wise one for us to make our own). The Lord's Prayer gives a mandate to ask for necessities but no mandate to ask for luxuries.

We are to live Generously: When we ask same question: 'What shall we eat?' There are some who are expressing their difficulty in choosing because they have so much. Then those who, when they say 'What shall we eat?' are expressing their despair because they have nothing. What does this prayer, 'Give us our food for today' say to this? This petition reminds us that we are asking for our daily bread and not just my daily bread. There seems to be no doubt that Jesus was expecting his disciples to pray for food both for themselves and for their community. It's a prayer of care and concern for others too: the poor, the hungry. It seems to me that the automatic extension of this part of the Lord's Prayer would be something like: 'Lord, thank you. You have given me far more "bread" than I can use. Help me to use the surplus wisely. Help me to be a responsible steward.'

We are to live Gratefully: Gratitude is the response to answered prayer. We cannot pray for today or tomorrow's bread without giving thanks for yesterdays! As we realise that we are dependent on God, we ought to realise that the fact that we have travelled so far in our lives is due to God's mercy and goodness. Through its extraordinary advertising power, the world about us emphasises that there is so much we ought to want. And because of this it is good to remind ourselves that we have been so extraordinarily blessed by God. We have much to be thankful for. (Philippians 4:6-7 strikes the right note of prayer and thanksgiving).

We are to live Prayerfully: Far too often we treat prayer as merely the lubricant to our lives - when we come to a sticky spot we squirt a bit on. The fact is, the Bible teaches that far being a little oil to make things run smoothly, we are to let prayer shape our lives - as I suggested earlier. As we pray this part of the Lord's Prayer and think about what it means, we should deepen both our sense of dependence on God and our trust in him. We ought to look back with gratitude and look forward with expectation and hope. We are to plan for the future but not be obsessed and preoccupied by it. We are to as if every day were our last, but planning as if we will live for many years.

And Finally: I wouldn't be surprised if you found some of the questions raised here about giving God first priority, living moderately and living generously, awkward and troubling. I do. If so, be encouraged. I don't believe that God intended this prayer simply to be a tremendous comfort to us. He intended it to be the pattern around which we should build our lives. I believe that in the area of what we desire and how we give, most of us have deviated a very long way from God's pattern. As we pray this prayer and apply it, we may find that through it God is pushing our lives back into the shape he wants them to be. And, whilst that may be uncomfortable, it may also be amazingly rewarding.

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen.*

To be spiritual in the Bible's terms is not to be removed above the world, but rather to be in it. It is spiritual to be involved in this world's affairs. The Lord's Prayer brings heaven and earth together in a natural and rather unembarrassed manner. From asking that God's will be done, there is no hint that we are passing to something completely different as we go to asking for bread. Jesus told us that we don't live by bread alone, but that we need spiritual nourishment (John 6) but, as we are in partnership with God, whatever we ask for we need to be prepared to work with him for the answer. Harvest is a good example: God provides the conditions etc we still have to work to bring crops in. Jesus *is* the bread of life, we need more of him in our lives on a daily basis, the bread we are asking for is the presence of God that dwells in us, feeds and sustains us with life itself. In John 6:32-33 reminds us that He is the true bread of heaven. It occurs to me that although Jesus is the bread of life and he offers us spiritual nourishment many of us are not taking it from Him. He may offer food to refresh us but unless we take it, and take time to feed from him then we will remain undernourished. He will not force feed us, we need to approach and accept from Him, as always this takes discipline and commitment from us.

It may mean setting aside a regular time for prayer and worship; it may mean making Sunday morning's a priority and that it is the first thing you put in your diary and the last thing you would consider changing. It means putting God before anything and everything in your life. I know some of you are really challenged by the need to put God first. But, if we are asking God to unite his church we need to be praying for it every day. If our church needs a move of God we need to be praying for it every day. If we are asking for spiritual nourishment and revival we need to be praying for it every day. If our family needs deliverance, we need to be praying for it every day. If our town is oppressed by the enemy, we need to be praying for it every day. If we're praying for something to happen next week, we need to be praying for it every day. We can't wait for it for another year. Lord, we need you to show up suddenly and do it for us, today. And we're praying for it every day. We can't pray too long. We can't pray too hard. We can't pray too often. We can't live on yesterday's mercy. We can't live on yesterday's grace. We can't live on yesterday's faith. We need to be praying, afresh, every day.

How should we Live the Lord's Prayer? The Lord's Prayer is very much a one-step-at-a-time, very down-to earth, practical prayer. But then faith is pretty much a one-step-at-a time business, isn't it? But what are the practical implications for us, as we 'live out' the Lord's Prayer?

We are to live Dependently: We live in a society that sees itself as being totally independent of God. We imagine that life revolves around us and that, with the aid of our technology, we have mastered the world and can do anything and everything. We are taught that an automatic right to most things. This part of the Lord's Prayer speaks to that arrogance and over-confidence in our Western culture. Just because our agriculture is more sophisticated than in Jesus' time doesn't alter the fact that we still depend totally on God for what we eat. As Tom reminded us, we might be able to grow and package the Harvest, only God is able to provide the soil, sun, rain and wind. We need to remember that everything we have comes from God himself. One reason why God limits the scope of this part of the Lord's Prayer to 'today' rather than 'tomorrow', is that it forces us to come to him day after day to ask for his assistance to give us food and all our other needs. Dependence on God is the only safe position for us to be in.

We are to live Trustingly: If our society is over-confident (we have the technology), it also suffers frequent swings into panic ('Help! We're all going to die'). We are like that as individuals. One day we are assured, unworried, even complacent; we have money in the bank and the world is at our feet. The next day we are mortal, feeble and vulnerable and we wonder how we are going to survive. This part of the Lord's Prayer doesn't just address our overconfidence; it also addresses our fears. Maybe your "daily bread" is a need for guidance, health, housing, a good government, a happy marriage, or maybe you are tired or rundown, and the daily bread you need is for energy.

4: There seems to be no doubt that Jesus was expecting his disciples to pray for food, both for themselves and for their community. Yet there is more to bread in the Bible than just nutrition for the body. Read Isaiah 55:1-3, is this literally food and drink? If not, what do you think is being offered here?

5: Are you praying every day for God's provision and blessing on your life, both physically and spiritually? What are the consequences of not doing so?

6: Read through the section: *How should we live the Lord's Prayer?* Which of these suggestions would you find easiest to follow? Which of these would you find the most difficult?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG58: The Lord's Prayer (5/8) Provision: What God Wants To Give Us

Matthew 6:5-13

Home Group Sermon Notes

30th October 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: As we continue our journey through the Lord's Prayer, we notice a change in focus. The prayer is no longer centred on 'you' and 'your'; but rather on 'us' and 'our'. The previous petitions could be seen to be the more spiritual and this is the one which affects us in a material sense - and I suspect that this is the one petition that we feel most comfortable with. However, it seems to me that the three former petitions should influence what we ask for. Because it's only once we've acknowledged God as Father; put Him first; honoured Him, prayed for His Kingdom to come and His will to be fulfilled, that we can confidently ask God for things that we need. But there can be a danger of falling into the trap of thinking that having prayed for what *God* wants, it's now time to twist God's arm to give us what *we* want. However, because of our relationship with the Father, what he desires is what we should desire and, because he is our Father, He delights to give us what we truly need. So when we pray for what we consider to be our needs, we must be aware that we are praying for our lives to increasingly resemble God's master plan; we are praying that we might become the sort of people he wants us to be (Psalm 37:4).

What does it mean to pray: Give us today our daily bread?

Daily: The word daily is exactly what it means: daily. It's not: '*Grant us, Lord, such a vast quantity of food that we will never need to ask you again*' but rather something like: '*Grant us enough food for this very day*'. I always find that an amusing thought, especially when we consider how much food there is stored in our cupboards, fridges and freezers and how long we could survive if we didn't shop for a couple of weeks. This petition concentrates on the immediate and looks no further than today.

Bread: Bread was (and still is) one of the most basic of foods. The one essential basic of all foods that every diet needs is bread. In Biblical times bread was the staple diet. However, bread or bread alternatives, is a different thing in different cultures. In Oriental countries it consists of rice based products. In Native American culture it's Corn and in most Western cultures it's essentially wheat. I'm sure there were luxury items in the diets of people in Jesus' day (meat, honey, olive oil, grapes, figs, etc.), but this prayer doesn't include them. It stops with bread. In fact, bread has, almost, become synonymous with 'food' hasn't it? If you didn't have bread, you starved. The New Living Translation uses 'food' rather than 'bread' - that's fine as long as we remember that it refers to basic essential food necessary to keep us alive rather than some five-course cordon bleu meal.

Daily Bread: But there is, it seems, more to the meaning of 'bread' than we would understand it, because those listening to Jesus would have read far more into the word 'bread' than we do. The central event in Jewish history was the Exodus, where God brought his people out of Egypt and took them through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness into the Promised Land. During that time in the wilderness God had kept them alive by feeding them with manna (Exodus 16:13-31).

- Manna was a fulfilment of the Lord's promise to Moses that he would give his people bread (Psalm 105:40).
- Manna appeared on a daily basis in quantities that were adequate for that day. It couldn't be stored; therefore it needed to be collected daily.
- The exceptions were the sixth day of the week, when twice as much manna appeared (and could be stored for one day) and the seventh day (the Sabbath) when nothing appeared.
- This manna appeared without fail for 40 years, feeding the entire nation of Israel until the Promised Land was reached.

To Jesus' listeners, their knowledge of the Exodus was central to their faith and it reminds them/us that God has a superb track record of supplying his children with food, even under the most unpromising of circumstances.

Bread of Heaven: The word 'bread' would also have pointed to the future. Among the prophecies associated with the coming Messiah was that he would have a great banquet (we read about this in Isaiah 25:6-10). Jesus himself used images of banquets and feasts when he talked of the coming of the kingdom in glory. In praying 'Lord, give us bread' Jesus' original hearers would have been looking forward to the coming kingdom when they would eat the 'bread of heaven' with him as King. The Lord's Supper reminds us that Jesus became our source of life through death. We are to come often, daily, to eat and drink of Him. The more we eat/fellowship with Him, the more His spirit will be demonstrated in us. This Bread is freedom from the distress of life. It's grace in the pain of life. It's God's presence in the loneliness of life. It's rest in the demands of life. It's peace in the disruptions of life. It's community in the isolation of life. It's security in the uncertainty of life. It's bread that nourishes the soul. It's the Bread of Life. And may it continue to fill that hungering in our souls.

The Physical vs. The Spiritual: I've already mentioned the shift in focus from the first part of the Lord's Prayer. There we were praying about God's kingdom, about his name being glorified and his will being done and now we are suddenly asking God for bread of all things! Of course, in reality, we are not just praying about bread, but mortgage repayments, friends with illnesses, damp in the bathroom and children who don't sleep at night! I think Was Martin Luther right when he wrote in wrote in 1529, that: ... *daily bread doesn't just refer to food. In this prayer for daily bread it stands for all the physical things we need for life; everything that nourished for life. Food. Drink. Clothing. House. Yard. Fields. Cattle. Money. Possessions. A devout spouse. Devout children. Devout employees. Devout and faithful rulers. Good government. Peace. Health. Good friends. Faithful neighbours.*

Some people have even gone so far as to try and alter the meaning of these words. They suggest that Jesus didn't mean real bread but was really referring to the Lord's Supper which is far more 'spiritual' than real 'physical' bread. This is one of Christianity's historical mistakes (everybody blames the Ancient Greeks!) because we divide the world from heaven and the spiritual from the physical. With this view there are two realms in the universe: heaven and the earth. One is non-physical, spiritual and pure and the other is physical and unspiritual. Which suggests that to be involved with earthly matters is therefore second best. Spiritual things are all that matters. Because it is physical, this world is not really important at all. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit (coupled with common sense) has frequently triumphed over this view. There is a long and very honourable history of Christians building schools and hospitals, reforming unjust laws and improving society (Shaftesbury, Wilberforce and Martin Luther King, to name but a few). At the time, those who did these things were made to feel rather odd by others who felt they were getting too involved in the non-spiritual world.