

Prayer in the Shorter Catechism (9)

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[0 : 00] If you could turn again with me to Matthew chapter 6, Matthew chapter 6 and from verse 9.

This then is how you should pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. Give us this day our daily bread. I wonder if there is a better known prayer in all the world than this.

Never mind praying for presidents and prime ministers, for nations and for states. Some variation of give us this day is seldom off our lips.

And if it is, it's only because in our first world prosperity we have forgotten that everything we have and everything we are we owe to God.

[1 : 01] Yes, even down to the bread we have at breakfast time. Our Westminster fathers, many of whom lived closer to the bread line than we do today, when asking the question, what do we pray for in the fourth petition?

Answered in the fourth petition, which is give us this day our daily bread. We pray, and I quote, But of God's free gift, we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life and enjoy his blessing with them.

Now, I think you can see that whether it's the petition directly or the father's explanation of this petition, the word daily is prominent.

This is not merely the best known prayer in the world, but the most often repeated prayer in the world, because it is or should be at least recited by every Christian every day.

It is an everyday prayer for everyday bread. That being so, it seems to me that it's composed of three themes. Daily grace.

[2 : 31] Daily need. Daily blessing. We're going to discover that far from being a merely earthly prayer for mundane needs, it is in fact a deeply spiritual prayer, which reveals our attitude to the gospel.

First of all then, daily grace. Daily grace. Our catechism answer begins, In the fourth petition, In the fourth petition, we pray that of God's free gift, we may receive.

Of God's free gift, we may receive. So our daily bread, along with all the other necessities of life, are God's to give and ours to receive.

Bread is the stuff of life, And yet the stuff of life, just as well as salvation to life, comes from God.

Just because our bread doesn't fall from heaven and appear in the ground as it did in the days of Moses, doesn't mean to say that it's any less God's gift to us.

And as God's gift to us, it is entirely undeserved. It is a gift of his grace and a demonstration of his love for his world.

[3 : 49] But then you say, well, that's crazy. I worked for this bread with my own hands. I earned the money. Then I went to the supermarket.

And I bought it with the money I had earned. What nonsense is this, that this bread is a gift of God's grace? Stand back for a second and consider what would happen if all the harvests in the whole world failed.

No amount of money would buy us bread. Think of what would happen if you couldn't work and there was no social security system.

Then no amount of money would earn your bread. Who blesses us with harvests? Who gives a man breath in his lungs? Is it not God?

Manna may not fall from heaven onto your breakfast table in the morning, but the grace of God does. Every day. Bread is the stuff of life.

[4 : 54] And yet the stuff of life, as well as salvation to life, comes from God. It's all of a oneness, you see. Babies are absolutely dependent upon their parents for everything.

Food, clothing, shelter, being physical things. Love, safety, and belonging being things entirely as important, but more abstract. If we are dependent upon our Heavenly Father, then this petition of the Lord's Prayer reminds us that we are to be dependent upon him for everything.

Everything. For bread on our hearts. For bread on our tables and for grace in our hearts. For the clothes on our backs and for strength in the mind. It's all a oneness, you see.

The entirety of our dependence upon God. I love the humility and simplicity of Psalm 131. I'm sure you do also.

I have stilled and quietened my soul. Like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

[6 : 02] And you know, it's also undeserved. Because by nature we are rebels against God and his enemies. Our sin has separated us from him.

But he fed us then. And he feeds us now. Between 1914 and 1918, the British Navy blockaded all the ports in Germany, which would have been used to resupply the German army fighting on the Western Front.

Denying them weaponry. And even more basic necessities. Food and clothing. In today's world, warfare is most often conducted using economic sanctions.

Denying the enemy the resources necessary to keep going. But in his grace, God supplied those who were his enemies and who were against him.

He graciously put bread on their table and clothes on their backs. He gave them homes in which to live and families to love and who loved them. Such grace to us then, before we were Christians.

[7 : 15] Such grace to us now. That's how loving and gracious our Heavenly Father is. Because his love to us is so infinite that it overflows down into the very bread we eat and all the other necessities of our lives.

Every few months or so, every few years at this rate of knots, Glasgow City Free Church remembers the death of the Lord by eating bread and drinking wine.

As we take that sacramental bread into our mouths and we chew it and we swallow it, we're thinking of the grace of God in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

This prayer is challenging us. So much love and grace, you see.

He does not merely feed us sacramentally and spiritually. He feeds us daily. Physically. Daily grace.

[8 : 36] Second, daily need. Daily need. Our catechism answer continues. In the fourth petition, we pray that of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life.

A competent portion of the good things of this life. Although the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer speaks directly about bread, we are to understand it in terms of everything necessary for life.

The so-called good things of this life. So we're thinking about food and we're thinking about clothing and we're thinking about housing alongside everything else necessary for the preservation of our lives.

In Matthew 6, Jesus drives home the reality of God's provision for all our needs. He points to the birds of the air and to how their heavenly Father feeds them.

He points to the flowers of the field. And he challenges his disciples to find clothes to wear which are more splendid than the appearance of the simplest flower.

[9 : 51] And then Jesus says, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. We're back here in a way to what we spoke about earlier.

Namely that in our society, when we need something, we go and buy it. We are immunised against immediate need because of our affluence.

And therefore, because of our affluence, we no longer feel the need to pray for our need. Do you remember at the beginning of the coronavirus lockdown, end of March, beginning of April, people bought toilet roll to the extent that an entire section of the supermarket was totally wiped out.

You couldn't buy lurole for love nor money. Now, imagine that the whole of that supermarket that you went to was as empty as that toilet roll section.

In fact, imagine that the whole of every supermarket in Scotland was as empty as the toilet roll section during the first few days of the coronavirus lockdown.

[10 : 59] There's no fruit. There's no vegetables. There's no bread. There's no meat. There's nothing. Imagine that for one reason or another, we couldn't buy clothes for our children.

Imagine that our power was cut off. We couldn't eat our homes. Just imagine what that would be like. And then realise what life, that this is what it would be like, unless God gave us all these things on a daily basis.

We depend upon him for everything we have. Everything. Jesus said, apart from me, you can do nothing. And now in this fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, he is in effect saying, apart from me, you have nothing.

But notice how our Father's and West Minister didn't just talk about us receiving our necessities, our bare necessities, but rather a competent portion of the good things of this life.

These good things go beyond our necessities. They represent those things which we not only need, but those things which we may enjoy. For those among you who are teetotalers, I ask you now to close your ears.

[12:17] Many years ago, I was at the home of a free church elder in the far north, where after an evening service, he poured everyone in his house a dram of whiskey.

But before anyone could lift their glasses to their mouths, he proceeded to say, stop, we need to ask a blessing and to say grace over this. Ah, but you say maybe that's silly.

That's stupid to ask a blessing over a dram. But I'm sure that old free church elder knew that even the good things of this life, the things which gladden the heart maybe, are gifts from God.

So next time you're at the gym, thank God for the treadmill. Next time you're in the garden, thank God for the flowers. Next time you're hill walking, thank God for the strength in your legs and the breath in your lungs.

It's all part and parcel of his grace. Daily need. And then lastly, daily blessing.

[13:19] Daily blessing. The fathers in Westminster conclude their answer by reminding us that the fourth petition is also asking for the enjoyment of God's blessing.

I could quote many scriptures which talk about enjoyment of the basic things of this life. For example, in Ecclesiastes 2 and verse 24, we read, There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.

To eat and drink with the blessing of God, that's about as good as it gets. We talk about saying a blessing over food, but the food itself is God's blessing to us.

But this last thought here. God never blesses us. Listen carefully to this. God never blesses us, but that he means us to bless others with the blessings with which he has blessed us.

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[14:32] So when we pray this prayer, give us today our daily bread, we must be prepared to give others their daily bread from the portion that God has blessed us with.

That in effect, we become the answer to the prayers of others for their daily bread. When I wrote this sermon, well, a month ago, I suppose, reports were coming in of a young Ugandan failed asylum seeker who took her own life in Govan.

She had no money with which to buy any food. Beside her dead body, they found her starving baby. Now, I don't want to lay a guilt trip on any of us.

But could we in Glasgow City Free Church have been at least part of the answer to her prayers?

Give us this day our daily bread. Is there anyone you know who struggles to have a competent portion of the good things of this life?

Not just necessities, but things which give them joy. Many of us have been blessed with double, triple, quadruple portions of God's grace.

[15:55] Can you be the means of answering their daily prayers for their daily bread? There is no more common prayer in the whole world than give us today our daily bread.

But do you know what we're really praying for? We're praying for daily grace, daily needs and daily blessings. Lord, let us never grow beyond daily dependence upon you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.