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# **One Day at a Time**

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**Series: Let God Be God**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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# One Day at a Time

It is hard to imagine a race with no finish line. How would anyone ever know who won? The runners would just go round and round and round until everyone collapsed. Some race. It is just as hard to imagine a football game with no clock. How would anyone ever know when the game was over? The players would just pass and run and punt and block until the crowd got bored and went home, or the team got hurt and went to the hospital. Some game. And can you imagine if there were no stopping and starting to your day at work? Imagine if all you could do was stay until there was either no more work to do, or no more energy to do it? (Perhaps some of us do that.)

No, the thing that makes a race exciting is that final stretch when you know you're near the finish line. You give it all you've got, and you know someone will get a ribbon, and everyone will get a rest. The thing that makes a football game exciting is that you know that when the clock runs out, the team that is ahead at that time is the winner. So the closer you get to the end of the game, the more the excitement builds. The thing that makes your day at work or at school passable is that you know that when the clock hits a certain point, you call it quits and go home, and you get a fresh start the next morning. If it all just went on and on with no breaks, we'd all break from the pressure.

God is quite aware of that need in man. It was for that very reason that an omniscient God in eternity past designed all of life in neat, twenty-four hour packages, each with a starting place and each with a stopping place. He knew that was all His children could handle. They could handle one day's work at a time, one day's worries at a time, one day's joys at a time, one day's pressures at a time, and one day's responsibilities at a time. He knew that His children could not completely grasp the expanse of eternity, nor could they completely handle the seemingly endlessness of time. So He lovingly sliced the loaf of life into carefully divided pieces, each of which would be precisely the number of minutes that perfectly suited His creation. He called them days.

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He could have made them fifty-six hours each. Praise God He didn't. He could have made the sun go down every three hours. Praise God He didn't. He could have interspersed the nights with the days at random, so that man would never know until he looked out the windows of life what to expect, but praise God He didn't. So perfectly consistent are the days and the hours and the seasons of life, that man can carefully plan his wardrobe, his schedule, and his activities on a God-ordained system that is flawless.

Night always follows day. Always. Summer always follows spring. Always. The sun even comes up with such precision that man can send astronauts reeling into space, program in advance their exact position at an exact time, and plan to the minute when they will return and where. Why? Because man is so talented? No, man is the variable. He makes mistakes. God is the absolute. He has drawn on the calendars of time such exacting standards that we do not measure His accuracy by our clocks; we measure our clocks by His accuracy. Our God is so faithful that it never even dawns on us to question His laws. They have never failed, and they never will. Ours is a God of perfection and purpose, and it will always be so.

*It is both His perfection and His purpose that caused Him to create time as He did.* His perfection made it to be infallibly consistent. His purpose made it to be incredibly practical. The two together caused Him to divide life into time—workable segments that you and I can cope with on our way to eternity. He made our bodies to need rest at the precise increments into which He divided the light from the darkness. And in the same way, He gave our souls the capacity to plan, to pursue, and to perceive life...one day at a time.

### I- THE WAYS OF GOD

It might be well to note at the outset that the ways of God are beyond our understanding. Isaiah quoted God as saying: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways." By His ways, we mean the system of design that governs His choices. In other words, He is not limited to the wisdom of man; therefore, He is able, from a higher vantage point, to direct our paths through deserts, for instance, because He can see the river on the other side. He is able, from a higher vantage point, to weave into the pattern of our lives pain, for He can see beyond the physical hurts to the spiritual benefits of suffering. He is able, from a higher vantage point, to even allow His own people to be

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persecuted, His own Son to be spit upon, railed at, and nailed to a Roman Cross; for He could see beyond the Cross to the Crown, beyond Christ's agony to our salvation.

His ways are not a little higher than ours. They are not slightly beyond our understanding. They are as much higher as the heaven is higher than the earth. If you cannot stand on earth and touch heaven, then fret not that you cannot stand on earth and fathom the depths of the nature and plan of God. It was not meant for you to understand in its entirety here. He has saved the best for later when He will expand your capacity to comprehend spiritual truth by removing the wrappings of sin so your spirit can stretch to its limits. Until then, suffice it to say, His ways are higher than ours.

It is important that we grasp that. Too many today, as in days gone by, are patenting God. They are wrapping Him in a package that man can handle and defining His nature by the package they've designed. Don't do that. God isn't wrappable. His principles are predictable, and His absolutes are definable; but His nature cannot be limited by any of man's religious formulas. That's what has so baffled believers since that day in the garden when Adam and Eve couldn't believe that a loving God would limit their diets, then couldn't believe that a Holy God would still love them with their eyes open. They didn't understand the awesome ways of God. So faithful was He, that He had to punish them. So loving was He, that He had to forgive them. His ways were beyond their understanding.

We, too, cannot fathom the ways of God. Just when we think we have the keys to spiritual perfection isolated into either a doctrinal or a practical package, along comes someone or some group who seem to have missed the method, but heard the message, and God uses them to change their world. He never changes His Word, yet He continues to honor it, even at the hands of those who, from our perspective, appear to misuse it. How can He? Fret not... His ways are higher than ours.

Prayer is another unsearchable treasure. Just when we think we have it isolated into what works and what doesn't, along comes someone who hasn't read the same books or had the same experiences. They pray, and God casts mountains into the sea. On the surface, prayer seems to be an enigma. God honors faith, but demands submission. He demands that we ask, but already knows what we need. He uses physical illustrations, then asks us to pray

for spiritual fruit. How, then, should we pray? If His ways are so much higher than ours, can we learn enough of them to learn to be obedient? Of course we can. The key is we are to honor the principles without binding Him legalistically to our own limitations. We are to maintain the integrity of the word without compromising the freedom of God to be Himself. We can do that when we pray, if we pray as He taught us to pray.

That, of course, is what we are studying. Jesus took His disciples up into a mountain, sat them down, and taught them about this blessed kingdom He had prepared for them. It was to be a kingdom of the heart that would express itself in the kingdom of this world, as His children laid up treasures for a kingdom yet to come. That “three-kingdom concept” was, oftentimes, more than His bewildered followers could grasp. But their failure to understand it did not alter its truth. In the same way, Jesus did not give them a “canned” prayer to pray, but He gave them an outline to use, so they could be true to the principles, while still free in the Spirit.

First, He told them to pray without fanfare, without ever calling attention to the fact that they were praying, so that their Father who alone could hear them when they prayed in secret, need not share His glory, and His children need not lose their rewards. Then He taught them to pray with a spirit of awe. He taught them to pray, “Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.” In other words, God’s Son taught God’s children to honor God’s name. That doesn’t mean all our prayers must begin with the same words, or even the same thoughts. It does mean that for prayer to be prayer, a certain attitude of heart must exist in the life of the one praying that places God in His rightful place on the throne of Heaven.

*That means that if you view God as less than He is, your prayer life will be less than it was intended to be.* His very name is Holy. It is to be revered. The very mention of His character ought to envelop us with reverence as we try to behold the stark contrast between who He is and who we are. We are not mini-gods assigned to planet earth to pull the right strings and say the right words and thus overpower the God of Heaven, forcing Him into submission. God forbid. We are to so envision the majesty of His ways as higher than ours that at the very recognition of His Glory, we will cry, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.” In other words, when we long to have nothing but His best, we will ask for nothing but His will. When we envision the perfectness of an eternity where God is at the center of all things, and all of

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His creation worships Him in Spirit and in Truth, we will desire that kind of existence on earth, even as it will be in heaven. God-controlled, God-designed, God-exalting... may all of life be no less than that, we pray, “on earth as it is in heaven.” That is the preamble to petitioning God.

### II- THE DAYS OF GOD

Jesus then gets incredibly practical. He continues:

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)

At least four principles emerge from this one phrase that further define the ways of God. The first has to do with the process of asking in Scripture. Jesus says, “when you pray, pray like this...”. Then, having taught His disciples how to honor God by revering God, He teaches them how to honor God by asking God to do what He has already promised to do.

*What He has promised to do is to meet our basic needs one day at a time.* Not in advance. Not a minute too late. Not according to our standards, but according to His. That is what He has promised to do. Now, Jesus says, “knowing what the Father desires to do... ask Him”.

#### 1- Give...

The word translated “give” here is apparently used several ways in the New Testament. Here it means “to supply”. Jesus says, “Ask your Father to supply what He has already allotted to you.” It would be much the same as being in the military and having certain uniforms assigned to you. They would be there, paid for, with your name printed on them. All you would have to do is appear before the supply sergeant, ask for them, and they would be yours.

You wouldn't have to tell him what color uniform looked best with your eyes. (In fact, I wouldn't suggest it.) It wouldn't make sense to tell him you wanted twice as many uniforms because you didn't like to do laundry; he'd tell you that wasn't exactly your choice to make. You wouldn't have to describe the kind of things you'd be doing so he could determine what fabric to use. He would know in advance what you needed even before you asked. In fact, it would all have been already provided for you, long before you asked.

But unless you ask, you won't get them; not because you don't need them, but because that is your part of the bargain. All you must do is ask; but you must ask, or you get nothing. Now when

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you enlisted in God's army, He promised to "supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus". He promised to meet your spiritual needs beyond your comprehension, offering you "riches in the heavenlies". He promised to meet the very basic needs of your life physically in the process, guaranteeing you enough food to eat and enough clothes to cover your body. Because of His incredible grace, He obviously gives most of us much more than that; but to all of us He promises that, provided, of course, that we ask.

*If we ask, we receive. If we seek, we find. If we knock, doors will open.* Conversely, if we fail to ask, we fail to receive. If we fail to seek, we fail to find. If we refuse to knock, those doors of provision become seemingly impenetrable stone walls. Why? If God knows what we need, why must we ask? For at least three reasons:

1- *When we ask, it causes us to exercise our faith. The muscles of faith must be exercised,* or they will cease to function. By failing to ask, we fail to place ourselves in the necessary position of vulnerability. It's one thing for a little boy to tell his friends that his daddy has a shiny silver dollar in the desk drawer that he plans to give to the lad. His friends would be in awe. They would be impressed with his claim to ownership of something so unique. But talk is cheap. "If it's really yours, go ask your Dad for it," his friends might chide him. "Then we'll know if it's really yours." In other words, it's easy to say something's yours if you never ask for it. But you place it all on the line when you ask. We need to do that. So Jesus says, "ask".

2- *When we ask, it increases our level of dependence.* When what you need just to exist must be asked for, you hardly have much to boast about. It is a humiliating experience to have to ask for the basic necessities of life. Society considers it demeaning, to be sure. God considers it necessary, to be sure, lest we begin to believe that God owes us something that He has decided to give us simply out of the goodness of His heart.

3- *When we ask, it accrues more glory to God.* Taking the self out of self-sufficiency takes man's glory out of the story and restores the credit for all of life to the hands of the Provider. So for those three reasons, God has insisted (even when we have a promise from God Himself) that we have to ask for it to claim it. So Jesus quietly addresses the issue: "When you pray, learn to humble yourself before the God of heaven, yielding to His sovereignty, searching for



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His will, asking Him to supply that which He has in eternity past promised to supply to those who name His name.”

### 2- Give Us...Our

Principle 2 surfaces in the next word. It says, “Give us... our”. It is apparently a corporate prayer from one member of the Body of Christ on behalf of the whole body. It is not, “Give me this day my daily bread.” That would be more typical of how we pray. Jesus sees our individual needs before we ask, but desires that we ask, not simply for what we want, but rather for what believers the world over need. So this prayer does not focus on t-bones for us when there is no bread in Ethiopia. It focuses on a sovereign, omniscient God’s love for His children wherever they are; and the whole of Scripture, in context, would seem to indicate that if our needs are being met more than their needs, then it would only be natural for us to give part of ours to them. God has provided enough for all Christians everywhere. He has, however, quite clearly left some of the distribution procedures in our hands to test the depth of our love for the brethren.

The early church clearly understood this principle. They viewed the needs of the whole Body in the light of the provisions made for the whole Body. If some who were willing to work could not, those who could shared what God had entrusted to them. If one church suffered want, and another had abundance, the one who had gave to the one who didn’t. “They had all things in common.” That’s what it means. Then how dare we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” when He has already given us more than that, and we are unwilling to pass on to the rest of the world their needs. Before you rise up in anger at that thought, cross-reference it in Scripture for yourself and reach your own conclusion. Give US this day OUR daily bread. An individual prayer for a corporate need.

### 3- This day, our daily...

Principle 3 is just as revolutionary. It has to do with arranging your prayer priorities in 24-hour-sized requests, so you can have both the faith to believe and the memory to remember when God does what He promises. Again, there are several reasons God divided life into days. Those reasons help us understand how to pray.

*1- Every new day is a living illustration of the faithfulness of God.* Lamentations 3 clearly explains it:

because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning:

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great is thy Faithfulness.

(Lamentations 3:22b)

God has designed each new day to represent a new issue of the mercy and grace of God. Yesterday's mistakes are history. Yesterday's lost minutes cannot be redeemed. But a loving God has wiped the slate clean, and the very rising of the sun sends a love letter from the heavens to His children saying "I am faithful; begin again." Great is His Faithfulness. Amen.

*2- Daily prayer for daily provisions reminds man that God is the provider of all things.* The manna in the wilderness was God's picture book of how and why He meets His children's needs. He meets them one day at a time, without their deserving it, without their hoarding it, without their ordering it. It was not always the quantity they wanted, not always the quality they wanted, but always sufficient to meet their needs. So God divided the night from the day to remind man every morning that not only is He faithful, but were it not for His faithfulness, we would have nothing—no air to breathe, no strength to walk, no job to work, no light to see. It's all a gift; and it's all renewable...one day at a time.

*3- The division of time into days reminds man of the limits of His spiritual capacity.* Man not only needs God's daily provision in the physical realm, in the world of the Spirit, as well, man can only handle the plan of God one day at a time. That is why in Matthew 6, Jesus warned us to "take no thought for tomorrow, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof". That is why Paul spoke in I Corinthians 15 about "dying daily", why he commended the Bereans in Acts 17 for "searching daily", why he said in II Corinthians 4 that the inner man is "renewed daily", and why Jesus clearly said in Luke 9 that we are to "take up our cross daily". One day at a time. That's all we can handle. So God ordained that man spend time with Him every day. We would not be able to store up spiritual strength indefinitely anymore than the Israelites could store up manna indefinitely. Each became perishable after a certain date. Both had the same limits...one day at a time.

*Our God is asking us to concentrate* our prayers on the needs of the Body of Christ around the world for today. While the phrase "this day" is such an unusual one that Greek scholars have for centuries struggled over its exact meaning, one thing seems certain. It has to do with the literal provision to meet our basic physical needs one day at a time. Think about that. It just might revolutionize the way you pray. Instead of a long list of personal wants, why not concentrate on praying your way around the world for those who

belong to your God who do not have their “daily bread”. Then as you pray, let God lead you as to what part you would have in being part of the answer to your own prayer.

#### 4- Our daily “bread”

The phrase “daily bread” also carries with it some grounds for theological argumentation. Most agree that in the context in which it is used here, it is defining the most basic physical needs that man has. It does not say daily wants. It does not say daily steaks. It does not say daily spiritual bread either, though the analogy applies. It says, “Give us today the things we need today to exist today. Supply us with the basics, Lord, just as you promised.” Oh, that we could learn to pray like that. Most of us have redefined our basic needs so materialistically and so presumptuously that we don’t even understand the word “need” anymore. What we think we need is what our peers have, and we are always seeking peers who have more so we can presume upon God for more ourselves.

Or what we think we need is whatever it takes to ease the burdens of life in our world, with no thought that what we consider a burden is to most of the world a luxury. To us, it is a burden to eat only two meals a day. To many of our brethren around the globe, two meals a day would be heaven on earth. To us, it is a burden to have only one car. To most of the world, it is a luxury to have two. We don’t pray for needs; we pray for wants. And today’s “I’ve got a hunch God owes me a bunch” theology only fuels the fire. It translates the promises of the spirit into the language of the material and makes God out to be unfaithful if His provisions do not measure up to our presumptuous demands. That is not praying; that is playing...God.

*We need to learn to pray:* “Give us this day exactly what we need today, Lord.” No more. No less. Not what I need. What my brothers and sisters and I need. In the light of that, most of us ought to be filled, not with a list of petty pleadings, but with a heart full of compassion and love for those who share Christ’s love, but lack life’s needs. Oh, to learn to live; oh, to learn to pray, one day at a time.

### III- IN PRAISE OF GOD

Tomorrow morning, why not fall to your knees at sunrise in utter adoration and praise at who God is, and humbly surrender to His sovereignty by yielding to His will. That’s praying! Then consciously ask Him to do whatever will most glorify His name on

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earth as it will one day be glorified in heaven. It may not be what you would plan. In fact, it probably won't be. Your perspective is so limited. But nonetheless, ask Him. Then give that one day, that one twenty-four hour segment, back to Him, trusting Him to give you for that one day, all the grace that day will require. Then as you yield up that day, and take up your cross for that day, why not quietly ask Him to meet the needs of the Body of Christ around the world as He sees fit for that day. Open your heart and your pocketbook as you do, and ask Him what He would have you do to be a channel of disbursement for those whose needs He plans to meet through you.

Our God wants us to ask Him to meet our needs. Not because He does not know what they are; He knows long before we ask. He knows; but in all likelihood, we don't. So He insists that we ask. It will exercise our faith; it will make us dependent; and it will multiply His glory. We must ask. Not now and then. Every day, one day at a time. Not every other day... every day... one day at a time. We must "ask that we may receive; that our joy may be full".

Then, having asked for one day's needs to be met, and having yielded to His will for one day's plans, we can get up and go forth singing, prepared to give life and to live life the way the Master designed life... one day at a time.

Jesus said when you pray...pray like this,

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:9b-11 NAS)

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