

# Praying for Daily Bread

*Lord's Day 50*

By Rev. Rodney Kleyn

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**Bible Text:** 1 Kings 17:1-16

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## **Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed**

330 W Indiana  
Spokane, WA 99201

**Website:** [www.reformedspokane.org](http://www.reformedspokane.org)

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We have been looking together at the Lord's Prayer. Jesus' disciples asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray,"<sup>1</sup> and Jesus gave them the pattern for prayer in what we call the Lord's Prayer. We have been going through that petition by petition. And tonight we come to the fourth petition.

If you open your Psalters to page 26 in the back, Lord's Day 50 of the Heidelberg Catechism question and answer 125. You have the catechism's explanation of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer.

Question and answer 125 of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Which is the fourth petition? The fourth petition is, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' That is, be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body that we may therefore acknowledge thee to be the only fountain of all good and that neither our care nor industry nor even thy gifts can profit us without thy blessing. And therefore, that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it alone in thee."

I want to read from the Scriptures in the book of 1 Kings chapter 17 and we will read the first 16 verses of the chapter.

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening;

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 11:1.

and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.<sup>2</sup>

We read this far in God's holy and inspired Word.

Tonight we turn our attention, beloved, to the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer where Jesus teaches us to pray for ourselves, where he teaches us to pray for those things that are more directly related to our personal needs.

In this petition he says that we should pray for daily bread. "Give us this day our daily bread."<sup>3</sup>

And then in the following two petitions we also pray concerning our own needs.

Now we want to notice in the introduction of this sermon tonight two important things about the position of this petition in the Lord's Prayer. We are praying here for our own needs and now, particularly, for our earthly needs. And the first thing that we should notice is this, that this petition does not come first in the Lord's Prayer. It is not the most

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 17:1-16.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:11.

important thing that we pray for the things that we need for ourselves. Before this petition Jesus placed three petitions that have to do with God and his interests.

“Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done...”<sup>4</sup>

And then a prayer for ourselves.

And that is important because that teaches us that prayer is more than just a request for our needs. Prayer is, first of all, an acknowledgement of God. Prayer is, first of all, praise to God because he is worthy of our praise. Prayer is, as I have defined it in an earlier sermon, a conscious entering in to the presence of God. And when we come in to the presence of almighty, holy God we ought to be humbled and we ought to be creatures who give him the praise and the worship that is his due.

And so God meets our needs, but we learn from this petition that as our needs are met we are to use all that we have to serve him. Everything in our life isn't for us. The prayer for God to meet our needs isn't so that we may be filled first, but God will meet our needs so that we can use our strength to serve and to worship him. We are under obligation as creatures, that as the Creator gives us what we need, we are under obligation to return homage and worship to him with those things.

So that is first of all. This is not first. This is not primary in our prayers. Prayer is not just about me and my needs, but prayer is first praise and honor of God. And then, as God meets my needs that is so that I may praise and honor him.

Now, then, the second thing we want to notice about this petition is that when we come to the requests that have to do directly with us Jesus puts this one first. There are three. “Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>5</sup> And then, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”<sup>6</sup> And then also, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”<sup>7</sup>

There are three petitions that Jesus teaches us to pray that have to do with our needs. That is very interesting that this one he puts first because as you look at those three petitions it is very clear that this one is not the most important of them, that God gives us bread is not the most important thing. It is must more important that God forgives us our debts and that God leads us not into and keeps us from temptation. Those are more important petitions. But he puts this one first.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:9-10; Luke 11:2.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:11.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 6:13.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 6:12.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 6:11.

Why? Again, to teach us that our natural well being serves our spiritual well being. We pray that God will give us daily bread, but we pray that God will give us daily bread so that we are able to serve him.

God gives us the physical things of life as helps to accomplish us in our spiritual duties. What a grace it is that we are able... that we who are unable and unfit of ourselves to perform duty to God should receive things from him, should receive food from him and strength from him so that we are able to serve him.

Well, tonight we want to look at this petition under the theme, "Praying for Daily Bread." And we will notice three things. First, we have the request and then, second, the reasons and then, third, the response.

"Give us this day our daily bread."<sup>9</sup>

Every word of this petition is weighty and important. And so as we look at what Jesus teaches us to pray in this petition we want to look at each of those words, four main words here: "give" and then "us" and then "daily" and then "bread," four very important words.

This petition is very simple in its meaning, very easy to understand. It uses words that have to do with our daily life. It is not hard to understand. And yet it is very profound in its meaning.

The first word: give. That word, you understand, is a request and not a demand. There is two ways that you can use that word.

"Give me that." That is a demand. That is not the way Jesus intends it here. It is a petition.

We pray, first, "Our Father which art in heaven."<sup>10</sup> We acknowledge God as Father. We acknowledge him as owner. We acknowledge him as giver. We say to him, "[Lord], give us this day our daily bread,"<sup>11</sup> a prayer and not a demand.

We confess when we say this that everything that we have we receive from God, something that is very easily forgotten by us. We have an abundance of things. We work on the job and out of our work we receive things and we don't see God always as the giver. But as we pray this petition each day we learn not to take daily bread for granted, but that it comes from God.

"Give us this day our daily bread."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:11.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

God gives. God gives the rain. God gives the sunshine. God gives the seasons. God gives health. God gives the ability to work. We depend on him moment to moment in our daily lives.

Then Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>13</sup>

And that is an important word as well. That makes this prayer a corporate prayer. When we come in prayer before God we don’t come before God as individuals just to ask for things for ourselves. But Jesus teaches us that when we pray we should remember others. We pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>14</sup> We pray for other members of our family. Indeed, we pray for the necessities of the whole creation that God would continue to provide his creatures with their daily needs.

We are interdependent even for food. We don’t grow the wheat that puts bread on our table. We depend on others in the culture and in the economy in which we live. We need each other and so we pray for each other. I don’t just pray for myself, “Give me daily bread,” but I am praying for my boss and for the business that God will continue to cause that there will be bread supplied through that enterprise.

I pray not only for my family, but I pray for my neighbor. I pray not only for my business and place of employment, but I pray for God by his hand to undergird and to continue to supply daily need through an economy, a national economy and a world economy. We acknowledge that all these things are in the hand of God.

So we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>15</sup> We learn to pray for others. And that is a very important part of prayer, intercessory prayer. We are not individuals.

In the very beginning of the prayer Jesus says, “Our Father which art in heaven.”<sup>16</sup> We remember others in our prayers before God also in earthly necessities.

And then, third, Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day or today,” and then he says, “our daily bread.”

Now there are two very important things to remember about those words, today and daily. And the first is this that Jesus is not talking about time so much, but about quantity. When he says, “daily bread” and “give us this day our daily bread,” he is not talking so much in terms of time, but in terms of the amount that we are asking from God.”

Daily bread, the amount that we need for today. That is the idea, our basic necessities.

If you think of the Scriptures, you can think of instances in the Scriptures where God’s people had to live this way from day to day, having their needs met each day. Think of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2.

Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and each day God fed them manna from heaven and God gave them only enough for that day. At the end of the day, perhaps, they were hungry, but they knew that the next morning when they woke up there would be more food for them again and they learned to depend on God from day to day.

You have that also in the chapter that we read in the two different stories there. First of all, Elijah is at the brook Cherith and he is all by himself and here in this famine he is by a little stream of water and the ravens bring him bread and flesh or meat in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening. And they must have brought him just what he needed and then gone again. And there he was with no source of food, but they came back in the evening. They came back the next morning and Elijah learned to depend on God to meet his daily needs.

And you have the same when he came to the widow at Zarephath. What did she have left? She said to him, “I only have a little handful of flour and a tiny little oil, only enough to make two little cakes, one for me and one for my son. This is the last day we are going to eat. Now we are going to starve and die.”

And Elijah said, “Put a portion of that aside for me as well and this is what God will do. Every day he will give you enough flour and enough oil to bake three more little cakes for you, your son and me, the prophet of God.”

What did they learn? They learned to depend on God from day to day.

After she was done each day baking there was no more flour, there was no more oil. But the next day when they came there it was again. Each day the Lord provided their daily bread.

And that teaches us in the same way that Jesus teaches us to pray for our daily basic necessities in life.

Moderation. We need to learn moderation and dependence on God, trust. We need to learn to trust in God.

Then the fourth word that Jesus uses here is “bread.”

“Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>17</sup>

Now, this word, in the first place, is very narrow. It is restrictive. Jesus teaches us to pray restrictively in our petition for our earthly needs. Bread. What is bread? Well, bread is the basic staple of the human diet. Every culture and every society in the world has its form of bread. There is rolls and loaves and muffins and crackers and crumpets and parkos and rice cakes and tortillas and every culture has this basic staple in its diet, bread. And that is why Jesus is teaching us to pray for when we pray for our daily needs. The most basic thing, the most basic food to fill our stomachs.

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew 6:11.

We are not to pray for bread and butter. We are not to pray for bread and butter and jelly. We are not to pray for bread and meat. We are not to pray for bread and meat and potatoes, but simply, Jesus says, daily bread, the basic necessities for today.

We are not to ask for the luxuries of life, but we are to depend on God and trust that he will provide us with the basic necessities of life and to be content with those things.

And so, first of all, this term bread is very restrictive. But at the same time it is very broad because when Jesus teaches us to pray for bread he is teaching us that we should pray and depend on God for all the necessities of life. The necessities of life are not just bread. We also need clothing. We need shelter. We live in a day and age where there are other things that are necessary for our living. We need transportation. We need a place to live. We need heat in the cold of winter.

And Jesus is teaching us that God is the one who provides all these things that are necessary for our physical well being. And we need to pray to him and depend on him for these things. God is the sovereign. God controls economics and weather and politics and peace and social order and employment and unemployment.

So we pray, “Give us what we need, our daily bread.”

We are learning in this petition that there is nothing too small to ask from God because there is nothing so small that it is beyond the control of the sovereign God. All things are in his almighty hand.

So that is the request. Now that brings us to the reasons we must ask this petition. And these reasons have to do with God. The petition, the request has to do with us and what we need. The reasons have to do with God. We make a confession concerning God as we make this petition.

The first reason is this: that God saves us, body and soul.

You notice how the catechism explains that. And you almost run on as, you know, the Heidelberg Catechism, the first question and answer, “I belong, body and soul to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

“Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>18</sup>

That is, be please to provide us with all things necessary for the body that we may—and you almost expect it to say, “as well as the soul.” But the catechism says, no, “The body.”

Why do we pray for daily bread? Well, it is because when God saves us, he doesn’t only save us from a spiritual point of view, our souls, but he also redeems our bodies. And he

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

is the God who in the beginning created this world and this whole creation is under a curse, but he will come and redeem this creation.

We are not spiritualists who have no interest in and no time for the things of this earthly creation.

Now someone will say that that is so mundane, that you pray for the things that have to do with your earthly well being? That is so carnal. How can you pray such a petition? Aren't there so much more important things to pray for, our spiritual needs? Why pray for the things that have to do with your body?

And, indeed, that was the understanding in the early church. They looked at this teaching of Jesus on the Lord's Prayer and the early Church fathers said, "But he can't be talking about bread that you eat."

And so they began to spiritualize the Lord's Prayer. Rather than understanding what Jesus said literally, they spiritualized it and they said that daily bread was Jesus. He is, after all, the bread that come down from heaven. And you, of course, know how that developed into Roman Catholic theology so that daily bread they understood as partaking daily of the mass and the bread of the Eucharist.

But, you see, we don't need to do that with the Lord's Prayer. We don't need to spiritualize it. God saves us body and soul. And so God is interested in the well being of our bodies and God wants us with our bodies with he has redeemed, which he has created to be, now, the temple of the Holy Spirit. He wants us with our bodies, too, to serve him.

So Jesus says that this is the sum of the law, that you love the Lord God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, your physical strength, you use it, you use your bodies, your well being, your health, to serve the Lord.

God made the body. It is fearfully and wonderfully made. God, in his son, came into human flesh. Jesus Christ himself took on a body like ours. Jesus in his flesh cared for his body. He ate, he slept when he was tired. He cared about the physical well being of others. He performed miracles so that the starving were fed. And now God redeems our bodies. He cares about our bodies. He saves us body and soul. And so we pray also for the needs of our bodies.

But then in the second place we have to pray for daily bread because God is the only one who can give us daily bread. He is the Creator. He is the owner of all things and he is the sovereign distributor of everything.

"The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Psalm 24:1.

And because God is the sovereign owner of all things he has the right to everything and we have rights to nothing. And so if we are going to receive daily bread, that comes from the hand of God. And we must acknowledge him as the giver of our daily bread. We must realize that everything in this world is a part of and under his control. And he works all things even to bring us our daily bread. We forget that.

We go down to the grocery store and we get a loaf of bread. We go to the dairy department and we get some milk. We get a box of cereal and we think of maybe the cows that this has come from or the wheat farm that it has come from. But God is the one, God is the one who provides those things for us. He causes the growth to grow on the mountainsides. He gives the beast its food in its season. He is the one who sends man out to work in the daytime, Psalm 104.

And in Haggai chapter two verse eight the prophet says, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts.”<sup>20</sup> It is all God’s.

In Hosea chapter two verse nine, “Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.”<sup>21</sup>

Whose is the corn? Whose is the wine? Whose is the cotton and the wool? It is God’s. . And he can withhold it. He can withhold food at his pleasure and he gives us. And it may be that we have as much food as we need for a whole year in our basement. But even all that comes from God and we must acknowledge by asking for daily bread that he is the provider.

Now that doesn’t mean we mustn’t work.

If someone will say, “Well, if God is the provider, he will give and then I don’t have to work.”

No, God is a God of means. God is a God who has ordained a method and a way in which he will give us the things that we need. That is true with spiritual things, too. Salvation is completely a work of God’s grace. It is by the grace of God that you are what you are as a saved child of God. But he uses means. He uses other people. He uses the preaching of the gospel. He uses prayer. He uses many different means in your life to bring you to faith. And even to continue to feed you spiritually. And there are things that you have to do as well. You need to be diligent in the use of those means. And so it is with the provision of our earthly needs. God uses means, our work, our industry, to give us what we need.

That is a confession, a confession that we trust and we depend upon God. God owns all things.

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<sup>20</sup> Haggai 2:8.

<sup>21</sup> Hosea 2:9.

One commentator on the Lord's Prayer says that this petition completes the Lord's Prayer. It rounds out our prayers. What would our prayers be if we didn't ask God to supply us with our needs? They wouldn't be complete because we wouldn't be expressing trust in God for our daily needs.

And then the third reason that we have to ask God for our daily needs, our daily bread, is this, that anything that we have depends on the blessing of God. The profit of anything, the usefulness of anything that we have, he bends on the blessing of God.

And the catechism makes that very plain when it says this, that neither our care nor industry nor even thy gifts can profit us without thy blessing. And it is very important as we try to understand it that we see that there is a distinction between things and the blessing of God.

There are many people who receive many things from God, but they don't receive the blessing of God as they receive those things and so all the things that they receive are not to their advantage. They are not good for them. But they only work, as Psalm 73 puts it, to put them on slippery places that lead to destruction. And unless we receive our daily bread, unless we receive the things that we need in life with the blessing of God, those things are going to be destructive to us. They are not going to be of any use to us.

And so we must pray for our daily needs with the blessing of God. Our industry, our hard work isn't going to profit us without God's blessing.

Psalm 127 puts that very plainly. "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."<sup>22</sup> He says, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it."<sup>23</sup>

There are people who do this. They get up early. They sit up late. They are very industrious. They work hard, but there is no acknowledgement of God. There is no receiving those things from the hand of God because they don't receive them in that way from the hand of God. They become not a blessing, but a curse in their life.

We need the blessing of God in everything that we receive and in everything that we do. Otherwise, it is like the children of Israel in the wilderness. They grumbled and they complained. God gave them manna and they didn't like it. They wanted meat. So God gave them quails. He gave them meat. And we read in Psalm 106, he gave them their requests, but he sent leanness into their souls. They got the meat that they wanted, but they weren't thankful for it. They didn't acknowledge God as the giver. They thought that they were entitled to it.

And so God sent leanness into their souls.

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<sup>22</sup> Psalm 127:2.

<sup>23</sup> Psalm 127:1.

Unless the blessing of God is on what we do and comes with what we receive, it will hurt us. And so we must pray. We must pray as we receive things from the Lord.

Well, there is also a response that this petition works in us as we pray. And the catechism explains it this way, “That we may thereby acknowledge thee to be the only fountain of all good.”

And there are really four things here. The first is this, that we acknowledge God.

A person who acknowledges God points to God. He looks to God. That is the idea in the Scriptures of thanksgiving, that we, as it were, point out fingers at God. He is the giver. We acknowledge him. He is the one who owns. He is the one who provides. He is the one who of his goodness gives. We acknowledge God as the only fountain of all good.

Ingratitude is to ignore God, to say as the Israelites did as they came into the Promised Land, “Our strength has gotten these things for us.”

And God judged them for it.

We acknowledge God as the only giver. That is what Jesus is teaching us.

We pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,”<sup>24</sup> to God and we acknowledge him thereby. And then, second, the response is this that we learn to trust and depend on him. As the catechism puts it, “We withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it in thee alone.”

There is so many other things that we want to trust, institutions and the legislation of men. We think that prosperity, that good health, that our needs will be met if things are just right, if the seasons are just right, if our investments are good, if the economy is good, if the stock market is good, if the government makes the right policies.

And we withdraw our trust, the catechism says, from everything else, all other creatures, all institutions of men. And we place our trust in God alone. God will provide our daily bread. That is his promise. He won’t leave us without the necessities of life.

Everybody needs to pray this prayer, rich or poor. Everything that you have is in the hands of God and so we trust him.

And then a third response to this petition as we pray it properly is this: that we are content with what God has given us. And probably for all of us this is the hardest thing, contentment. It doesn’t matter if a person has very little or if a person is very rich. Contentment is always a struggle in a person’s life. The person who has a 30 foot yacht wants a 60 foot yacht because somebody else has one. A person who has a 50,000 dollar Toyota sports car wants the Saab or the Mercedes and so on. We always wrestle with contentment. It doesn’t matter how much or how little we have.

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 6:11.

And that teaches us this very important thing. Contentment is not something that is determined by our outward circumstances. We sometimes think that way. We think, well, I am not content right now, but if I could just get that, then I would be happy. Then I would be content. But then we get it and we say, “Well, if I could just get that and if I could just get that.”

It is never satisfying. It is like a fire that is never quenched. It burns one tree and it wants to burn the next tree and the next tree and that is content.

Our lack of contentment, our covetousness, burning in our souls.

Or we learn to pray this prayer properly, “Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>25</sup>

It doesn’t matter how much or how little we have. We depend on God. He provides. He gives us what we need. He gives us grace with it. We can be happy with what the Lord has given.

Contentment isn’t to be determined by outward circumstances, but it is a grace of God worked in us so that we are, on the inside, happy with what the Lord has given.

We are praying, “Lord teach us to be content with just what we need, the necessities of life.”

And then the fourth response is this: that we get our priorities in life straight and we use everything to serve God and his glory.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”<sup>26</sup> And that means that spiritual things come first. That is what this petition teaches us. It is one among six petitions. It is one part in nine parts of the Lord’s Prayer. And so this, our earthly needs are not the most important thing.

And then as God meets them he meets them so that we can use all our strength to love him and to serve him and to praise him.

Do you pray this prayer? “Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>27</sup> Do you pray it with contentment? Do you pray it with thankfulness? Do you pray it acknowledging God as the giver, trusting in him?

Do you see why you need to pray this petition? Because in your life you don’t always reflect these important spiritual characteristics. We need to pray it however much or however little we have. “Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew 6:11.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Amen.

*Lord, we acknowledge thee tonight as the owner and the provider for us of all things and we depend on thee. We pray that the instruction of this petition of the Lord's Prayer will help us as we live here in a world of material things, that we may use all things to serve thee. We pray it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.*