

**“Enough is Enough”: Matthew 6:5-15**

By Wyndy Corbin Reuschling

In the next couple of weeks, most of us will likely be celebrating the national holiday called “Thanksgiving”. What always strikes me about Thanksgiving is the gratitude we express for abundance. We are to give thanks for abundance, as if abundance is perhaps normal and something we deserve, and something we actually ought to celebrate.

Abundance was always apparent at the Thanksgiving feasts celebrated in my extended family. Around 4:00 in the afternoon, family members were saying “enough is enough” probably about the relatives as well as the food. I should know that “enough was enough.” I was usually on clean-up duty on Thanksgiving. I’m not sure if this was a statement of my cooking skills (“oh, honey, don’t bother to bring anything”) or a sign of grace since I was the one who usually traveled to get where I needed to be on Thanksgiving.

Whatever the reason, each year, it was apparent there was never enough room in the refrigerator for the more than enough to fill tupperware and cool whip containers with leftovers which could easily provide 3 to 4 meals for the same 21 relatives.

**Ambivalence:**

I have a confession: I am ambivalent about Thanksgiving, even while I go on celebrating it with friends and family.

1. **I am ambivalent about Thanksgiving:** Thanksgiving is one of those mixed days in our national history. While many of us participate in the abundance of good food and renewal of family relationships, we are keenly aware (or ought to be) of those who cannot participate in abundance and who don’t even have enough for daily bread.

2. **I am ambivalent about Thanksgiving:** On Thanksgiving, we selectively recount the story of the pilgrims, their courage and valor, while at the same time selectively ignoring the cost their growing abundance and expansion meant for native peoples who were already living here even as some of us reap the benefits.

3. **I am ambivalent about Thanksgiving:** Thanksgiving is one of the days exposing the huge discrepancies in our world that can’t be addressed through charity, important as charity is for teaching us how to be generous. The

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discrepancies are the result of injustice that relies on the poverty of certain people to maintain the wealth of the few as noted in global consumption patterns.

The United Nations' Report on Human Development reminds us that "inequalities in consumption are stark"<sup>1</sup> Globally, the 20% of the world's people in the highest-income countries account for 86% of total private consumption expenditures - the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%. More specifically, the richest fifth:

- Consume 45% of all meat and fish, the poorest fifth 5%.
- Consume 58% of total energy, the poorest fifth less than 4%.
- Have 74% of all telephone lines, the poorest fifth 1.5%.
- Consume 84% of all paper, the poorest fifth 1.1%.
- Own 87% of the world's vehicle fleet, the poorest fifth less than 1%.

### **The Book:**

I am ambivalent about Thanksgiving, even as I go on celebrating, it. As I read the Bible, I see the dangers of pursuing material abundance, especially at the cost of others which is an act of injustice that disturbs God.

And as the text for today reminds us, Christ did not command us to pray for and assume abundance, perhaps except for spiritual abundance in knowing Christ. Christ encouraged us to pray for "just enough," our daily bread. We find this prayer in the text that was read this morning, Matthew 6:9-13.

Many of you may come from traditions where this prayer is prayed as regular part of our worship services. We often refer to this prayer as "The Lord's Prayer." But perhaps we ought to refer to this prayer as "The Disciples' Prayer," as some do, since it is instruction given by Jesus to his disciples on how we ought to pray.

This Disciples' Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13, is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is considered to contain the substance of Jesus' moral teachings on how we ought to live and what we ought to do as disciples of Christ. Jesus' teachings in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chapters of Matthew are very clear and concrete, leaving no mystery of how we ought to act as Christians.

Jesus gives very specific instructions on prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. He starts this teaching on prayer with two negative commands about prayer: don't pray like the hypocrites and don't pray like the babblers.

1. Don't pray like the hypocrites who were more concerned with appearances, caring more what others thought of them than what God thought. Don't pray like the hypocrites, but instead pray in secret.
2. Don't pray like the babblers. The babblers to whom Jesus is referring

were “mere talkers, mimickers.” Jesus associated the babblers with pagans. As Dallas Willard notes, the babblers illustrate the danger of making prayer a mechanical process, since babblers “falsely imagine that mere sounds, repeated over and over again, will gain the desired effect.”<sup>2</sup> Instead of directly addressing God as “our Father,” it has been suggested that babblers relied on repeating a list of divine names hoping to arrive at naming the “right god” in order to receive what they wanted.

Don’t pray like the babblers, but instead pray to your Father, the one true God whose name is hallowed and ought to be treated that way.

The good news about this passage, however, is the specific, positive instruction Jesus gives us on how we ought to pray. We are not left with what not to do; we are left with what we should do when we pray.

Unlike the hypocrites and babblers, we ought to pray to our Father in secret with honesty and directness in our motives and words. The example which Jesus gives is to pray like this.

Richard Foster in his book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, believes this wonderful example of prayer for the disciples of Christ contains three primary petitions or requests: Give, Forgive and Deliver. Along with the request that God our Father forgive us of our sin (with the understanding of the imperative that we forgive others) and the request that we might be delivered from evil (our own failures when tested and protection from the evil one, Satan), we are also commanded to ask that God give us our daily bread with directness and honesty, without the concern for appearances (unlike the hypocrites and babblers).

What is the daily bread to which Jesus refers?

1. The daily bread for which we are to ask is parallel to the provision of daily bread from heaven for the Israelites recorded in Exodus 16.

- The Israelites were released from slavery in Egypt and were on the way to the promised land of God. God provided for them through their desert wanderings by “raining down” bread from heaven. God also gave clear instructions: take what you need for each day because what God provides for each day is sufficient. It did not “pay” for those who took more: the unused, hoarded bread was full of maggots the next day.
- In the desert the people of God were to gather **JUST ENOUGH** for each day, gathering twice as much on the sixth day to keep them for the Sabbath.
- Early on, the people of God were to practice gathering “just enough” to keep them from hoarding and to live out their faith in God as their provider.

2. The daily bread for which we are to ask is the provision of life's essentials, not luxuries. We pray for the "enough is enough" to keep our bodies healthy and our physical needs met.
  - Jesus is concerned here with not just the "daily-ness" of our request but the measure and content of it: we are to ask for "just enough" for this day's provision.
3. The request for daily bread concerns the immediate, not the worry that there may not be enough in the future.
  - The request for daily bread reminds us of our daily dependence on God, and the fact that all material provisions belong to God.
  - God is the sustainer of all of life, and all of life matters to him: both the spiritual and the physical which Jesus links together in this prayer.
4. However, this prayer is not just for "my" daily bread. This is a corporate prayer that starts with "Our Father." Therefore, we are to pray for the daily needs of all, both daily and in adequate measure that "enough will be enough" for the physical and spiritual well-being of all people.

Unlike the hypocrites and babblers, we are to pray simply and directly to God, asking for the provision of daily bread.

### **The prayer today:**

This simple request for daily bread perhaps appears bizarre, and even quaint, to those of us familiar with lofty religious and churchy language and those of us living in an affluent, consumer driven culture such as ours. And we can perhaps become "ho hum" about it in the danger of repeating it week after week. But this prayer is survival for the millions of people in our world who have no resources themselves for the provision of daily bread.

Do we stop celebrating Thanksgiving? No. But perhaps the Disciples' Prayer can give a reorientation to what we are doing when we stop, remember and celebrate on this day. I think there are four implications of the direct and simple prayer as we ask for our daily bread and as we participate in a national holiday that celebrates an abundance out of proportion to the world in which we live.

1. It forces us to ask when is "enough is enough." It reminds us to look critically at our own culture and the ways in which pervasive consumerism and the obsession to accumulate erodes our own spiritual well-being and the physical well-being of others. We are damaged spiritually because we forget that our very lives are dependent on God, and others are hurt physically because as we obtain more and more, others receive less and less.

2. It sensitizes us to the inequity and imbalances of our society. This prayer to “*our Father*” reinforces our responsibility to pray and work toward the supply of daily bread for others. This, too, is spiritual work for the people of God and evidence that we understand our own dependence on God and our responsibilities for others
3. It helps us retain proper balance and perspective. God cares about what we need. In the disciples’ prayer, we are reminded that we need daily bread, forgiveness and deliverance from evil, an apparent odd mixture of physical and spiritual needs.

Are we just as obsessed with confessing our sin, forgiving others, seeking forgiveness and being diligent in avoiding temptation as we are with daily wants which we call needs, and working for the needs of others?

How ironic that one of our greatest temptations in this culture is the drive to consume more and more, and to confuse wants with needs, a temptation from which we need to be delivered as we are reminded again in this prayer of the measure of daily needs and when enough is enough.

4. We are reminded of our dependence on God. Our attitudes toward physical needs and the substance of daily bread are ultimately a spiritual issue and a reflection of our willingness to trust God with all of our lives: our very salvation as well as our material existence.

At the close of his chapter looking at the Prayer of the Disciples in Matthew 6, Richard Foster proposes a prayer for us as we ignore the intent and substance of how we should pray as taught by Jesus in Matthew 6.

“Dear Father, I don’t want to treat you like Santa Claus, but I do need to ask things of you. Give me, please, food to eat today. I’m not asking for tomorrow, but I am asking for today. Please forgive me for the infinite offenses to your goodness that I have committed today....this hour. I’m not even aware of most of them. I live too unaware. That in itself is a sin again heaven. I’m sorry. Increase my awareness. And in my ignorance if I have asked for things that would be totally destructive, please, do not give them to me - do not lead me into temptation. Do protect me from the evil one. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.”

### **Conclusion:**

When is enough enough? This question is perhaps more easily answered by those who find the prayer for and provision of daily bread a matter

of survival, and as a result, have a deeper and more dependent relationship with God than I'll ever have. It's an important question, one that I believe is ultimately a spiritual one, placed by Jesus in the Disciples' Prayer right along with matters of forgiveness and temptation from evil. My attitudes toward daily bread are just as important as my understanding of forgiveness in Christ and my desire to avoid temptation. How I pray and what I do in these areas reflect my trust in God and my willingness to allow the reality of Christ to permeate all of my life, as I learn to trust God for daily bread and adjust my life and make decisions accordingly to "enough is enough."

May God grant us courage to ask for two things according to Proverbs 30:7-9:

Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die. Keep falsehood and lies from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Consumption.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 194.

<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 185.