

# “The Story of Manna: The Practice of Getting Rest (Part 1)”—Exodus 16:22-36

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take a Bible and meet me in Exodus 16...

This will be our final lesson from this chapter, which has occupied our attention for about a month now, but this final teaching is going to take two sermons. So far we have explored:

**The Problem of Grumbling**  
**The Patience of Grace**  
**The Picture of the Gospel**  
**The Purpose of God**

Today we are going to consider one final lesson,

## **The Practice of Getting Rest**

To do that we need to see how Exodus 16 closes. Today we will focus more on what is foundational to having rest. Next time I preach we will consider more of the nature of that rest itself.

In case you haven't been with us, this chapter fits into the story of Exodus after God's people have been delivered from slavery in Egypt and before they have received God's Law and entered into the land that God promised them. They are wandering somewhere in the wilderness between the land of their past slavery and the land of promise. They have struggled to trust God in this in between season, which has repeatedly manifested in their grumbling about their circumstances. Most recently they have been complaining about not having food and God, in His incredible grace, provides for them quail and daily miraculous bread, which the text calls “manna.” Every day they wake up there is new bread on the ground for them to collect and it always proves to be enough to meet their need. But there is one exception to this pattern, one day when there is no manna to be found, but God even made provisions for His people to receive on that day. To see what I mean, let's pick things up in the story in verse 22. Follow along as I read. This is God's Word...

*“On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, <sup>23</sup> he said to them, ‘This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’” <sup>24</sup> So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. <sup>25</sup> Moses said, ‘Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. <sup>26</sup> Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.’” (Exodus 16:22-26)*

So for six days of gathering (work), one day of Sabbath (rest). This is the pattern that their wilderness years would conform to as God continues to provide them with daily provisions six days a week and enough on the sixth day that they would not have to gather on the seventh (Saturday).

But don't miss the miracle of this. Remember that there were Israelites that tried to gather more food than they needed on Sunday through Thursday, storing it in their tents for the next day, but each time they did that the manna would spoil over night. But now God is saying that He wants them to store extra on Friday and assuring them that when they wake up on Saturday (the Sabbath) it will not be spoiled. There will be no maggots and rot, just fresh manna in their stores. But there would be none outside to gather on that day. So this is miraculous and once again it shows the inadequacy of all the proposals to find natural explanations for the emergence of this daily manna. There is no explanation outside the supernatural provision of God.

Yet, as we have seen, the Israelites have problems with directions. Perhaps they were too lazy to gather extra on Friday. Perhaps they thought that this Sabbath exception was far too restrictive. Whatever the reason, some of their number don't listen and go out to gather on Saturday and find no manna. There's nothing to gather. So they don't eat that day. Look at verse 27...

*"On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. <sup>28</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, 'How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?' <sup>29</sup> See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.' <sup>30</sup> So the people rested on the seventh day." (Exodus 16:27-30)*

It may seem strange that they would disobey such an easy command, but it's important to understand *why* they disobey. The answer is unbelief. A lack of faith. As David Strain explains, "lurking behind their disobedience... is a lack of trust that God will provide. They're dissatisfied. They simply do not think that God's way is the best way."<sup>1</sup>

And now we are at the heart of all this manna business. As we saw last time God is providing because He is glorifying Himself. But He is glorifying Himself by putting who He is on display for His people to see. In this case, He is showing them, through these daily provisions, that He is a God that can be trusted. He is teaching His people that He wants them to depend on Him for their needs every day. This whole manna exercise was an object lesson teaching the people that God is faithful and can be trusted to meet our needs today, and tomorrow, and every day after that.

Apparently these lessons were so important that He repeated them each day for forty years. And even when they got to the Promised Land and no longer received the morning manna, they were not left without class notes. Look at verse 32...

*<sup>32</sup> Moses said, 'This is what the LORD has commanded: "Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt."'<sup>33</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.'<sup>34</sup> As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. <sup>35</sup> The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. <sup>36</sup> (An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.)" (Exodus 16:32-36)*

Again, note the miracle. They collected some manna, put it in a jar and it eventually would be kept in the Tabernacle of Israel. The manna never spoiled and served as a constant reminder to Israel that God can be trusted to provide for sufficient grace for their daily needs. It helped them guard against forgetting the provisions of God and the God of provision. And, friends, we too need to learn this lesson. We must remember that...

## God Wants Us to Trust Him for Daily Provisions

When teaching us how to avoid anxiety, Jesus instructs us to “*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). He’s talking about our true needs, not our greeds. Whatever we need to accomplish His plan for us, even if that plan means we go without for a season for some reason important to His designs. He has assured us that God can be trusted, so we can be free to live for His glory and for His agenda.

And when Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He was, among other things, teaching some of these same lessons of Exodus 16 and perhaps even alluding to Israel’s experience of manna. Let’s take a look at that model prayer in Matthew 6. Turn there, if you will.

Many of you probably know these words by heart, but let’s read them again as though for the first time, reminding ourselves that this is how Jesus taught His followers to pray. Many of you would probably confess that you wish you were better at praying. Well, this is how Jesus taught us how to pray, so listen up. Staring in verse 9...

*“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread...”* (Matthew 6:9-11)

Now notice the address of the prayer—“Our Father in heaven.” It’s necessary for us to view God as Father in order to trust Him enough to pray through the requests of this prayer with integrity. When we pray for His name to be hallowed and for His kingdom to come and His will to be done, we are orienting ourselves toward God. We are reminding ourselves that God is the center of the story (not us). His will is what matters (not ours). His glory is what should be pursued (not ours). Jesus starts with that because if we get this wrong, we will not be able to pray for our personal needs correctly. “Adoration and thanksgiving—God-centeredness—comes first,” writes Tim Keller, “because it heals the heart of its self-centeredness, which curves us in on ourselves and distorts all our vision.” Given how the prayer unfolds in the first half, “our vision is reframed and clarified by the greatness of God” and now we can pray rightly about our own needs.<sup>2</sup>

It’s interesting (isn’t it?) that the first personal request is for “daily bread.” So just like Exodus 16 we see that the purpose of everything is the glory of God and one of the ways that manifests is when we, as His people, depend on Him for our daily needs. Jesus is teaching us here the same lessons that God was teaching His people in Exodus 16. It’s not about us. It’s about His glory. He glorifies Himself when we depend on Him.

*“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread.”* What is “our daily bread”? It’s our necessities. It’s not a request for the luxuries of the world. It’s not a request for the newest iPhone or SUV. It’s not a request for a bigger or better home or an extra zero on the right side of our paycheck. No. It’s more basic than that. It’s, give me what I *need*. Give me what I need for *this day*.<sup>3</sup>

In some ways this reminds me of Proverbs 30:8, 9—“*give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.*” That’s some wisdom for you. There are temptations on both ends of the scale of wealth. When rich, we may be blinded to seeing our need for God.<sup>4</sup> When poor, we may resent the Lord. So the writer of Proverbs, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, expresses a desire to experience neither temptation, lest he stumble in these predictable ways. Perhaps that’s why Jesus focuses our minds only on our daily necessities when He teaches us to pray. And is it not a testimony of God’s abundant grace to us that most, if not all of us, in this place already have tomorrow’s bread in the refrigerator or bank account?<sup>5</sup> “*Every good and perfect gift is from above...from the Father...*” (James

1:17; NIV). We are not asking God to “sell us daily bread.” We are asking Him to provide it, acknowledging our constant need to depend on Him for such gifts.<sup>6</sup> And we find He has given above and beyond the needed portion.

Of course, some of you may see it differently. You may see it like Charlie Anderson saw it in the 1965 movie, *Shenandoah*. There is this scene where Charlie (played by Jimmy Stewart) is having a meal with his children shortly after his wife died. In the past the wife had prayed before the meals. Now the children looked to their father to pick up the task. He was no Christian and his prayer made that reality pretty obvious. He prayed something like this: “Dear Lord, thank you for this meal. We plowed the ground, we planted the seed, we pulled the weeds, we harvested the wheat, we grounded the flour, we baked the bread, but thank you, Lord, for this meal.”

As believers, we have a different perspective. We know who created the plants for our food. We know that He has given the taste buds to enjoy them. We know that He put us in an environment where we were taught to labor. We know He gives (and can take away) the strength to plant and harvest. We know that while His provisions may come through the God-given tasks He has appointed to us, He is nonetheless the giver of those provisions. All of them. We would not have any of them apart from his gracious initiative. So we give thanks for our daily bread and it’s a good habit to do so when we pause to enjoy it.<sup>7</sup>

Yet we are prone to forget the source of these gifts. Why? The irony of it all is that we are prone to forget the source of the gift because He has showered us with such an abundance of His provisions that we have forgotten what it means to “need” such things. We forget to count our blessings because we forget we have them or we confuse them with achievements we produced apart from Him. As Daniel Doriani notes,

“We miss the urgency of this prayer today. Americans live in a land of plenty. Indeed, we have so much food we worry more about obesity than hunger. We buy large quantities of food in well-stocked stores and stuff it in capacious refrigerators and freezers. We plan ahead, so that our food seems to come from our work and our kitchen. In Jesus’ day, it was more obvious to a laborer that he should pray daily for his daily bread. A common laborer lived on a payment for that day’s work. If he could find no work or if his employer withheld his wages, he might go hungry. Western culture has changed enough (monthly paychecks are an example) that we do not feel the urgency to pray for food daily. But our food still comes from God, and we honor him when we acknowledge it.”<sup>8</sup>

This is a good word.

Changing gears a bit, I also want you to notice the “us” language that permeates the Lord’s Prayer. Have you noticed the corporate dimension of this prayer? “*Our* Father...Give *us*...*our* daily bread...forgive *us our* debts, as *we* also have forgiven *our* debtors. And lead *us* not into temptation, but deliver *us*...” It’s corporate. That’s not to say the prayer has to be prayed corporately or that our private prayers shouldn’t be shaped by this model. But He assumes that these petitions will characterize our corporate praying, which itself is an assumption that we will pray corporately. As John Piper once said in a sermon, “There is something self-contradictory about praying with the words ‘our,’ ‘us,’ and ‘we,’ but never experiencing the our, us, and we in prayer.”<sup>9</sup>

As an aside, while we are here...[Commercial:] Notice then the balance to Jesus’ counsel on prayer. In the preceding verses He said,

“*And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and the street corners, that they may be seen by others...But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.*” (Matthew 6:5-6).

So He told us to pray privately but then a few verses later His model prayer is framed as though it were corporate...What gives? Well, Jesus gives that instruction to combat the temptation to turn prayer into an applause-seeking device. He's not condemning all prayer that happens in public or privately with others. He's calling out the hypocrisy of praying in order to promote oneself as someone who prays or prays well. Therefore, as Piper writes, "This is very different from loving those you pray with and wanting to be caught up into a genuine unified togetherness of prayer to the God who is equally Father of all his children." Then he states this (which I've found helpful),

"One of the values of praying together, in fact, is that it can cut the root of pride by exposing us to the humility and heart-searching longings that get expressed in the prayers of others. My own prayers have often been reprov'd and corrected and deepened just by being in a group of godly people of prayer. In fact, I wonder if we should expect our private prayer life to advance in maturity and depth and intensity if we never pray with others who can lift us higher and take us deeper. Wouldn't that be like expecting a young person to become a gifted conversationalist, but always sending him away to play by himself whenever there are serious conversations?...praying together is not for the sake of exalting our individual strengths but for the sake of becoming one with the family and helping each other mature in the life of prayer."

That's good counsel. If all our praying is with or in front of others, there is a problem. If none of it is, there is also a problem. Both corporate and private prayers are needed. They fuel one another. "The more earnestly we pray in solitude, the more powerfully we pray in a group. And the more intense the prayer of the group, the more we will be helped to go hard after God in private."<sup>10</sup> This is, no doubt, one of the reasons we find the early church coming together so often to pray with one another (e.g., Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:24-30; 6:6; 12:5, 12; 13:2-3; 14:23; 20:36). That was part of their DNA. They learned that from Jesus. May the same be said of us. [End of commercial].

But, on a related note, and more in sync with Exodus 16, let me ask—should this corporate aspect of the Lord's Prayer affect the way we understand the petitions? Martin Luther thought so (and I tend to agree). Think about how this "social dimension" relates to the petition for daily bread. Drawing on Luther, one recent book on prayer explains it like this:

"For all to get daily bread, there must be a thriving economy, good employment, and a just society. Therefore to pray 'give us—all the people of the land—daily bread' is to pray against 'wanton exploitation' in business, trade and labor, which [in Luther's words] 'crushes the poor and deprives them of their daily bread.'...For Luther, then, to pray for our daily bread is to pray for a prosperous and just social order."<sup>11</sup>

If Luther is on the right track, then we should heed his warning—"Let them beware of...the intercession of the church, and let them take care that this petition of the Lord's Prayer does not turn against them."<sup>12</sup> Do you see what He is saying? It's not consistent to pray for *our* daily bread (i.e., our society's) and then live in a way that knowingly enables personal actions or systems that exploit the needy and prevent the poor from attaining the very necessities we are petitioning God for on their behalf. To do so would be to set ourselves up against the Lord. That's not where we want to be. So it is wise for us to consider the cause of the poor and our brothers and sisters in the church.<sup>13</sup> Do they have what they need? Let's pray that they do. And let's live in a way that does what we can to ensure that they do, not in a way that creates the problem we are asking God to alleviate.

And notice, there is a corporate dimension to the daily provisions in the wilderness. They were meant for the community and representatives would gather for larger groups. They were to gather an appropriate amount "*according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent*" (Exodus 16:16). The

implication then is that disobedience was felt by the community, the nation. If you didn't listen to God and gathered too much, storing up manna on days you were not supposed to store up manna, then the whole tent dealt with the mess and smell in the morning. And if you were lazy and didn't gather enough on the day before the Sabbath, then your whole tent would go hungry the next day. It had corporate implications, just like the Lord's prayer.

But the point in both cases is that God's provides and that God wants us to rely on Him daily for provisions. And as we obediently seek His purposes, He provides our needs. He wants us to see Him as trustworthy, to see His provisions and let it strengthen our faith in Him. But, of course, the greatest provision we have received, and the one that the Manna itself was a picture of (cf. John 6), was the provision of God's Son, Jesus Christ, the true bread from heaven, the living bread of life. As one writer explains,

“...we must remember the chief display of providence, the cross of Christ. The ultimate medicine for our souls is the cross. It is the Visine that removes the irritation from the eyes of our souls and focuses our sight clearly upon the truth. The cross dramatizes what we deserve. We do not deserve mercy, but we get it. God intervened in our perennial party of selfishness and nailed our sin to the cross (Col. 2:14). We can never clamor about what we deserve when we are standing in the shadow of the cross. The cross reminds us that Jesus got what we deserve and we get what Jesus deserved. It's hard to complain when you remember that you deserve hell. But the cross also assures us that God can be trusted. Isn't that the central issue for us? Can you trust God? Well, stand again in the shadow of the cross and let the apostle interpret it for you and apply it to our life's experiences: 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' (Rom. 8:32). If you can trust God to take care of the biggest issues—sin and death—then you can trust him to take care of you in the secondary matters—everything else.”<sup>14</sup>

Amen. So trust in God. Every day, trust God to meet your needs. And trust in Christ alone to meet your greatest need—the need to deal with your sin—and to give you eternal life. He is the only way...

Now let me tilt my hand for next time I preach. I want us to see that God is not just teaching us that He can be trusted and that He wants us to trust Him daily. We are also meant to learn something about rest, it's importance, and why we can rest...In short, we will see, Lord willing, that...

### **God Wants Us to Rest *Because* He Can Be Trusted**

Can't wait...Let's pray...

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<sup>1</sup> David Strain, “Bread from Heaven – Part 2,” a sermon preached to First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, MS, on March 29, 2015, which can be accessed here: <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/bread-of-heaven-part-2>.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Keller, *Prayer* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 114. N. T. Wright makes a similar point: “The first half of the prayer is thus about God. Prayer that doesn’t start there is always in danger of concentrating on ourselves, and very soon it stops being prayer altogether and collapses into the random thoughts, fears and longing of our own mind.” Wright, 59.

<sup>3</sup> The “daily” aspect of this petition creates situation where prayer will need to be frequent, at the very least daily. This may speak to the regularity of a healthy prayer life that Jesus desires to see in His followers. That the focus here is on “daily bread” does not suggest that prayers concerning things that rise above the level of “necessity” are not ever appropriate to pray for. We should pray about everything (cf. Philippians 4:6). It’s all in how we pray. Paul E. Miller has a wonderful discussion on this in his book, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. He points out that we often “balk at praying, *God, I want a vacation home. Would you get me one?*” and yet “We don’t mind *acting* selfishly, but *talking* selfishly is embarrassing. After all, we aren’t little children anymore. A vacation home is so beyond the purview of daily bread that it feels presumptuous to ask God for one. So what do we do instead of asking God for a vacation home? We look at our finances, talk to a realtor, and go buy one—all without seriously praying about the decision. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying buying a vacation house is inherently sinful. God delights in giving his children good gifts, including vacation homes. But he wants to be part of all the decisions we make. He wants our material needs to draw us into our soul needs. This is what it means to abide—to include him in every aspect of our lives. *Abiding* is a perfect way to describe a praying life. For example, many Christians who are thinking of buying a vacation home might even pray, asking God practical questions, such as ‘Can we afford it?’ ‘Will it be too much work?’ ‘Should we make an offer on this house?’ These are good questions. But we seldom ask God heart questions such as ‘Will a second home elevate us above people?’ ‘Will it isolate us?’ In the first set of questions, God is your financial adviser. In the second set, he has become your Lord. You are abiding. You are feeding your soul with food that lasts. We can do the same thing with a promotion. It feels selfish to pray for one, so instead we’ll work for one! We end up separating a big part of our lives from God because we are trying to feel good about ourselves. As we have seen, we create two selves—a spiritual self and a material self. We also shy away from prayers like these because they invite God to rule our loves. They make us vulnerable. . . . Oddly enough, we can also use prayer to keep God distant. We do that by only talking to God and not to mature believers. I can demonstrate that easily. Which is easier, confessing impure thoughts to a mature friend or to God? The friend is tougher. That feels real. We need to ask the body of Christ, Jesus’ physical presence on earth, the same questions we ask God. If you isolate praying from the rule of Jesus by not involving other Christians, you’ll end up doing your own will. Many Christians isolate their decision making from the body of Christ, then further isolate themselves in their vacation homes. They say something like this: ‘Well, my husband and I prayed about it, and the Lord seemed to confirm it.’ Possibly God did confirm it. It is also possible that you used prayer as a spiritual cover for ‘doing your own thing.’ We can mask our desires even from ourselves.” Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 142-144. I would recommend the entire book for those seeking a practical resource to aid their prayer lives.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 6:9-10 adds, “*those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*”

<sup>5</sup> See Miller, 141.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Matthew* (SAEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 156.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 134-135.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>9</sup> That was said in a sermon with the clever title, “Sweet ‘Our’ of Prayer,” preached on January 4, 1987, at Bethlehem Baptist Church.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Keller, *Prayer*, 114. Building on Martin Luther, *Luther’s Larger Catechism*, trans. F. Samuel Janzow (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 92.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, 92.

<sup>13</sup> “We don’t pray only for our own bread, but for bread for those who have none. As people longing to maintain right relationships with others, we take others’ need of bread into consideration: we share what we have with others who have need. If every person, business, institution, and government worked according to the purposes and principles of God’s kingdom, no one would be hungry.” Author unknown, *Theology of Work Bible Commentary, Volume 4: Matthew through Acts*, 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> Erik Raymond, *Chasing Contentment: Trusting God in a Discontented Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 127-128.