

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Hi everyone! Define the word “essential” ...

In the space of six months, we have probably all shifted our thinking about what is ‘essential’ to life and wellbeing vs what is non-essential. As we head towards Easter, there would normally be an eagerness to buy chocolate eggs, but supermarkets are struggling to maintain stocks of flour, rice, pasta, soap and toilet paper. Our ‘normal’ lives may have been punctuated with things like birthday celebrations, coffee catch-ups, gym sessions and holidays. Instead, we now spend our time indoors and many of us are reliant on internet-based applications, to maintain connections with work colleagues and friends.

**GETTING STARTED:** In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, what worries or concerns you the most? Is it fear of getting sick? Is it a fear of dying? Do you fear losing your job and a regular income? Do you fear that you will run out of food? Or do you find the social isolation and lack of contact with others, to be the most daunting thing?

**PRAY:** Early in Matthew 6, we find the Lord’s Prayer. Here, Jesus taught us to pray. Read this together:  
*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. **Give us this day our daily bread.** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. (NRSV)*

*Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. **Give us today the food we need,** and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. (NLT)*

❗ Bread and milk are something we need to buy frequently. They perish quickly, if they’re not used. However, most of us have never entertained the thought that we might not be able to buy these things ‘on demand’. The people in Jesus’ day didn’t have refrigeration, let alone pre-packaged and tinned food (or toilet paper). In an agricultural economy, a bad season meant no food. While we read Scripture through the lens of our 21<sup>st</sup> Century existence and the current angst due to the current pandemic, we can tend to forget that Jesus originally preached to people who lived in very different socio-economic circumstances. Ken Bailey, in *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* highlights that the word we read as “daily” in English Bibles is translated from a Greek word found nowhere else in Greek literature. Because of this, the early church had four different views on what this meant. Given that Jesus spoke in Aramaic and Syriac is a language closely related to Aramaic, Bailey goes back to the Old Syriac 2<sup>nd</sup> Century translation, where this word means “*lasting, never-ceasing, never-ending or perpetual*” (or, to rephrase the line in this prayer) “**Give us today the bread that doesn’t run out**”.

He comments: “*One of the most basic human fears is the dread of economic privation. Will we have enough? We are managing now, but what about the future? What if I lose my job? What if my kids get sick? What if I am unable to work? How will we survive? One of the deepest and most crippling fears of the human spirit is the fear of not having enough to eat. Perhaps in the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for release from that fear. To pray for bread without ceasing is to pray for deliverance from the existential angst that there will not be enough. This fear can destroy the human spirit. If Jesus is teaching his followers to pray “Give us today the bread that does not run out,” does this include bread for today? It does. Does it also include bread for tomorrow? By all means. Will it be enough to keep us alive? It will. How about a little more than just enough to keep us alive? Does “bread without ceasing” include “the bread we need”? That meaning is also included. The idea that we ask God to give us bread without ceasing covers all four options found in the early church.”<sup>1</sup>*

💬 How do you feel about the thought of praying for “bread that doesn’t run out”? Is that a new thought for you?

❗ The line “Give us today our daily bread” includes two words which are communal and plural: Give “us” and “our” bread. Bailey highlights that “we ask for ours, not mine” ie our bread, our rice”, not “my” bread. “Our bread” should also include bread for our neighbours. It is “our Father” and “our bread”. He also highlights that “all bread comes as a gift. It is not a right and we have not created it ... This perspective on the material world is critical for the joyful life commended in the Gospels.”

💬 When God answers our prayers and gives “us” “our daily bread”, what then does that mean for us and how we see that provision? Read the following verses from Acts. How did the early church view their responsibility to each other and the needy among them? [Acts 2:44, 4:32, 6:1-7]

<sup>1</sup> Bailey, Kenneth E., (2008) *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes. Cultural Studies in the Gospels.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 119-123.

TEAR APART THE TEXT

- 🗨️ What things stood out for you, from the sermon this week?
  
- 🗨️ What point was Phil making when he talked James Stewart's analogy that life is like a portrait with a foreground and background? (the obvious stuff that's going on in our world that we can focus on vs the spiritual background/ reality). What does it mean for us to take our focus off the all-consuming foreground and lift our eyes to the spiritual reality, so we see the 'big picture'?
  
- 🗨️ In Matt 6:19-21, Jesus tells us not to store up treasures on earth. Our society, though, is obsessed with people 'buying' things and accumulating wealth and possessions. Why is this such an obsession and addiction?
  
- 🗨️ In Matt 6:22-23, Jesus highlights that being able to (physically) see, makes the difference between us living in light vs living in darkness. In the next breath, Jesus switches the metaphor, referring to spiritual sight vs spiritual blindness. In what way does our reliance on 'things' and 'experiences' make us blind to the things of God?
  
- 🗨️ In Matt 6:24, we are told that we need to choose between serving God and serving money. Why is serving God and serving money, mutually exclusive?
  
- 🗨️ In Matt 6:25-32, we read three times: don't worry / be anxious ...! What reasons are given, for why we don't need to worry about the stuff of everyday life, including what we will eat and wear?
  
- 🗨️ What do these verses tell us about the nature of God? What do they tell us about how God is involved in the everyday stuff of life? Eg what do the pictures of how God looks after the birds and the wildflowers tell us?
  
- 🗨️ In Matt 6:33, we read "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." [NLT] What does it mean to "seek the kingdom of God above all else"? What does Jesus promise, when we prioritise the Kingdom of God?
  
- 🗨️ In Matthew's gospel, he records both the feeding of the 5000 (Matt 14:13-21) and the feeding of the 4000. (Matt 15:29-39) When repetition occurs in Scripture, we should take note – because it is intentional. When we read that Jesus miraculously produced and distributed food to these two crowds, what can we learn from:-
  - 1/ Jesus' desire to ensure that the everyday needs of people were met;
  - 2/ Jesus producing food, where there were no other sources of food evident or available; and
  - 3/ The disciples being involved in distributing food and caring for the needs of others.
  
- ⚠️ Kenneth Bailey cites a story by Mother Theresa: "I will never forget the night an old gentleman came to our house and said that there was a family with eight children and they had not eaten, and could we do something for them. So I took some rice and went there. The mother took the rice from my hands, then she divided it into two and went out. I could see the faces of the children shining with hunger. When she came back I asked her where she had gone. She gave me a very simple answer: 'They are hungry also.' And 'they' were the family next door and she knew that they were hungry. I was not surprised she gave, but I was surprised she knew...I had not the courage to ask her how long her family hadn't eaten, but I am sure it must have been a long time, and yet she knew - in her suffering...In her terrible bodily suffering she knew that next door they were hungry also."<sup>2</sup>

**APPLICATION:** Phil told us that, in Matt 6, we learn that God sees, hears, cares and provides, but also that our anxieties reveal our priorities. What does it mean for you lay up treasures in heaven by loving God and radically loving / demonstrating love for your neighbour?

- 🗨️ HEAD – What have you learnt from the study this week?
- 💔 HEART – What has challenged you, personally?
- 👏 HANDS – What are you going to do about it this week?

<sup>2</sup> Mother Theresa, (1997) *The Joy of Living*. Comp J Chalihi and E. Le July. (New York: Viking/ Penguin), p337-338.