

“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”

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We older adults, including parents and Church leaders and professors and friends, often admonish you to plan for the future. We encourage you to pursue education and vocational training as preparation for life in the years ahead. We urge you to lay a foundation for marriage and family and to act on those plans. We caution you to think of possible consequences down the road when making decisions about what you do today (for example, what you put on the Internet). We counsel you to think about how you will measure success in your life and then to establish the patterns and practices that will lead to that success.

All of this expresses a wise and prudent course in life, and in what I say tonight, I do not minimize in any way the importance of thinking and planning ahead. Thoughtful planning and preparation are key to a rewarding future, but we do not live in the future—we live in the present. It is day by day that we work out our plans for the future; it is day by day that we achieve our goals. It is one day at a time that we raise and nurture our families. It is one day at a time that we overcome imperfections. We endure in faith to the end one day at a time. It is the accumulation of many days well lived that adds up to a full life and

a saintly person. And so I would like to talk to you about living well day by day.

Look to God for What Is Needed Each Day

In Luke it is recorded that one of His disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). Jesus then gave a pattern for prayer that has become known as the Lord’s Prayer. The same is recorded in Matthew as part of the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 6:9–13).

Included in the Lord’s Prayer is the petition “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11) or “Give us day by day our daily bread” (Luke 11:3). I believe that we would all readily acknowledge that we have needs each day that we want our Heavenly Father’s help in dealing with. For some, on some days, it is quite literally bread—that is, the food needed to sustain life that day. It could also be spiritual and physical strength to deal with one more day of chronic illness or a painfully slow rehabilitation. In other cases it may be less tangible needs, such as things related to one’s

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obligations or activities in that day—teaching a lesson or taking a test, for example.

Jesus is teaching us, His disciples, that we should look to God each day for the bread—the help and sustenance—we require in that particular day. This is consistent with the counsel to

pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. [2 Nephi 32:9]

The Lord’s invitation to seek our daily bread at our Heavenly Father’s hand speaks of a loving God, aware of even the small, daily needs of His children and anxious to assist them, one by one. He is saying that we can ask in faith of that Being “that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given” (James 1:5). That is, of course, tremendously reassuring, but there is something at work here that is more significant than just help in getting by day to day. As we seek and receive divine bread daily, our faith and trust in God and His Son grow.

Looking to God Daily for Our Needs Nurtures Faith

You will remember the great exodus of the tribes of Israel from Egypt and the 40 years in the wilderness before entering their promised land. This massive host of well over a million people had to be fed. Certainly that number in one location could not long subsist on hunting game, and their seminomadic lifestyle at the time was not conducive to raising crops or livestock in any sufficient quantity. Jehovah solved the challenge by miraculously providing their daily bread from heaven—manna. This small edible substance which appeared on the ground each morning was something quite new and unknown. The name *manna*, in fact,

was derived from words meaning “What is it?” Through Moses, the Lord instructed the people to gather enough each day for that day, except on the day before the Sabbath, when they were to gather enough for two days.

At the beginning, despite Moses’s specific instructions, some tried to gather more than enough for one day and store the balance:

And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning.

Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank. [Exodus 16:19–20]

As promised, however, when they gathered twice the normal daily quantity of manna on the sixth day, it did not spoil:

And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein.

And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the Lord: to day ye shall not find it in the field.

Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none. [Exodus 16:24–26]

Again, however, some could not believe without seeing, and they went looking to gather manna on the Sabbath.

And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?

See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. [Exodus 16:28–29]

It seems that even in ancient times, as today, there were some people who couldn’t resist shopping on the Sabbath.

By providing a daily sustenance, one day at a time, Jehovah was trying to teach faith to a nation that over a period of some 400 years had lost much of the faith of their fathers. He was teaching them to trust Him, to “look unto [Him] in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:36). He was providing enough for one day at a time. Except for the sixth day, they could not store manna for use in any succeeding day or days. In essence, the children of Israel had to walk with Him today and trust that He would grant a sufficient amount of food for the next day *on* the next day, and so on. In that way He could never be too far from their minds and hearts.

We should note, by the way, that 40 years of manna was not meant to become a dole. Once the tribes of Israel were in a position to provide for themselves, they were required to do so. After they had crossed the Jordan River and were prepared to begin their conquest of Canaan, beginning at Jericho, the scripture records that

they did eat of the old corn of the land [that is, the previous year’s harvest] on the morrow after the passover. . . .

And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year. [Joshua 5:11–12]

Likewise, as we plead with God for our daily bread—for help in the moment that we cannot ourselves provide—we must still be active in doing and providing that which is within our power.

Trust in the Lord—Solutions May Come over Time

Some time before I was called as a General Authority, I faced a personal economic challenge that persisted for several years. It did not come about as a consequence of anyone’s

wrongdoing or ill will; it was just one of those things that sometimes come into our lives. It ebbed and flowed in seriousness and urgency, but it never went away completely. At times this challenge threatened the welfare of my family and me, and I thought we might be facing financial ruin. I prayed for some miraculous intervention to deliver us. Although I offered that prayer many times with great sincerity and earnest desire, the answer in the end was “No.” Finally I learned to pray as the Savior did: “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). I sought the Lord’s help with each tiny step along the way to a final resolution.

There were times when I had exhausted all my resources, when I had nowhere or no one to turn to at that moment, when there was simply no other human being I could call on to help meet the exigency before me. With no other recourse, more than once I fell down before my Heavenly Father begging in tears for His help. And He did help. Sometimes it was nothing more than a sense of peace, a feeling of assurance that things would work out. I might not see how or what the path would be, but He gave me to know that, directly or indirectly, He would open a way. Circumstances might change, a new and helpful idea might come to mind, some unanticipated income or other resource might appear at just the right time. Somehow there was a resolution.

Though I suffered then, as I look back now, I am grateful that there was not a quick solution to my problem. The fact that I was forced to turn to God for help almost daily over an extended period of years taught me truly how to pray and get answers to prayer and taught me in a very practical way to have faith in God. I came to know my Savior and my Heavenly Father in a way and to a degree that might not have happened otherwise or that might have taken me much longer to achieve. I learned that daily bread is a precious commodity. I learned that manna today can be as real as the

physical manna of biblical history. I learned to trust in the Lord with all my heart. I learned to walk with Him day by day.

Work Through Large Problems in Small, Daily Bites

Asking God for our daily bread, rather than our weekly, monthly, or yearly bread, is also a way to focus us on the smaller, more manageable bits of a problem. To deal with something very big, we may need to work at it in small, daily bites. Sometimes all we can handle is one day (or even just part of one day) at a time. Let me give you a nonscriptural example.

A book I read recently, titled *Lone Survivor*, recounts the tragic story of a four-man team of U.S. Navy SEALs on a covert mission in a remote sector of Afghanistan five and one-half years ago. When they were inadvertently discovered by shepherds—two men and a boy—these specially trained Navy servicemen had a choice either to kill the three or let them go, knowing that if they let them live they would disclose the team’s location and they would be attacked immediately by al Qaeda and Taliban forces. Nevertheless, they let the innocent shepherds go, and in the firefight that followed, only the author, Marcus Luttrell, survived against well over 100 attackers.

In his book, Luttrell recounts the extreme training and endurance required for one to qualify as a SEAL in the U.S. Navy. In Luttrell’s training group, for example, of the 164 men who began, only 32 managed to complete the course. They endured weeks of near-constant physical exertion, in and out of cold ocean water, swimming, paddling and carrying inflatable boats, running in sand, doing hundreds of push-ups a day, carrying logs through obstacle courses, and so forth. They were in a near-perpetual state of exhaustion.

I was impressed by something a senior officer said to the group as they began the final and most demanding phase of their training. He said:

“First of all, I do not want you to give in to the pressure of the moment. Whenever you’re hurting bad, just hang in there. Finish the day. Then, if you’re still feeling bad, think about it long and hard before you decide to quit. Second, take it one day at a time. One [phase] at a time.

“Don’t let your thoughts run away with you, don’t start planning to bail out because you’re worried about the future and how much you can take. Don’t look ahead to the pain. Just get through the day, and there’s a wonderful career ahead of you.”¹

Generally it is good to try to anticipate what is coming and prepare to deal with it. At times, however, this captain’s counsel is wise: “Take it one day at a time. . . . Don’t look ahead to the pain. Just get through the day.” To worry about what is or may be coming can be debilitating. It can paralyze us and make us quit.

In the 1950s my mother survived radical cancer surgery, but difficult as that was, the surgery was followed with dozens of painful radiation treatments in what would now be considered rather primitive medical conditions. She recalls that her mother taught her something during that time that has helped her ever since:

I was so sick and weak, and I said to her one day, “Oh, Mother, I can’t stand having 16 more of those treatments.”

She said, “Can you go today?”

“Yes.”

“Well, honey, that’s all you have to do today.”

It has helped me many times when I remember to take one day or one thing at a time.

The Spirit can guide us when to look ahead and when we should just deal with this one day, with this one moment. If we ask, the Lord will let us know through the Holy Ghost when it may be appropriate for us to apply in our lives the commandment He gave His ancient Apostles: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought

for the things of itself. Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof” (3 Nephi 13:34; see also Matthew 6:34).

God’s “Daily Bread” Is Needed in Reaching Our Potential

I have suggested that asking for and receiving daily bread at God’s hand plays a vital part in learning to trust God and in enduring life’s challenges. We also need a daily portion of divine bread to become what we must become. To repent, improve, and eventually reach “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13), as Paul expressed it, is a step-by-step process. Incorporating new and wholesome habits into our character or overcoming bad habits or addictions most often means an effort today followed by another tomorrow, and then another, perhaps for many days, even months and years, until victory is achieved. But we can do it because we can appeal to God for our daily bread, for the help we need each day.

This is the season of New Year’s resolutions, and I would like to quote to you the words of President N. Eldon Tanner, formerly a counselor in the First Presidency:

As we reflect on the value of resolving to do better, let us determine to discipline ourselves to carefully select the resolutions we make, to consider the purpose for making them, and finally, to make commitments for keeping them and not letting any obstacle stop us. Let us remind ourselves at the beginning of each day that we can keep a resolution just for that day. As we do this it gets easier and easier until it becomes a habit.²

A little over a year ago, Elder David A. Bednar spoke about consistency in simple daily practices such as family prayer, scripture study, and home evenings as being crucial in building successful families. Consistent effort in seemingly small, daily steps is a key principle in achieving any great work, including

progress in the pathway of discipleship. As an object lesson, Elder Bednar compared daily acts to individual brushstrokes in a painting that together, over time, produce a work of art. He said:

In my office is a beautiful painting of a wheat field. The painting is a vast collection of individual brushstrokes—none of which in isolation is very interesting or impressive. In fact, if you stand close to the canvas, all you can see is a mass of seemingly unrelated and unattractive streaks of yellow and gold and brown paint. However, as you gradually move away from the canvas, all of the individual brushstrokes combine together and produce a magnificent landscape of a wheat field. . . .

. . . Just as the yellow and gold and brown strokes of paint complement each other and produce an impressive masterpiece, so our consistency in doing seemingly small things can lead to significant spiritual results. “Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33).³

President Ezra Taft Benson, speaking of repentance, gave this counsel:

We must be careful, as we seek to become more and more [Christlike], that we do not become discouraged and lose hope. Becoming Christlike is a lifetime pursuit and very often involves growth and change that is slow, almost imperceptible. The scriptures record remarkable accounts of men whose lives changed dramatically, in an instant, as it were: Alma the Younger, Paul on the road to Damascus, Enos praying far into the night, King Lamoni. Such astonishing examples of the power to change even those steeped in sin give confidence that the Atonement can reach even those deepest in despair.

But we must be cautious as we discuss these remarkable examples. Though they are real and powerful, they are the exception more than the rule. For every Paul, for every Enos, and for every King Lamoni, there are hundreds and thousands

of people who find the process of repentance much more subtle, much more imperceptible. Day by day they move closer to the Lord, little realizing they are building a godlike life. They live quiet lives of goodness, service, and commitment. . . .

We must not lose hope. Hope is an anchor to the souls of men. Satan would have us cast away that anchor. In this way he can bring discouragement and surrender. But we must not lose hope. The Lord is pleased with every effort, even the tiny, daily ones in which we strive to be more like Him.⁴

Seek the Lord's Help in Serving Others

Remember that we should not only be looking inward when we seek a daily measure of divine bread. If we are to become more like the Master, He who came “not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Mark 10:45), we will seek His help in being of service to our fellow-man day by day.

President Thomas S. Monson lives this principle better than anyone I know. There is ever present in his heart a prayer that God will reveal needs and means for him to assist those around him in any given day or moment of the day. One example from his time as a bishop illustrates the fact that sometimes even a little effort may, with the workings of the Spirit, yield remarkable fruit. I quote from Heidi Swinton's biography of President Monson, *To the Rescue*:

One to whom [President Monson] reached out was Harold Gallacher. His wife and children were active in the Church, but not Harold. His daughter Sharon had asked Bishop Monson if he would “do something” to bring her father back into activity. As a bishop, he felt prompted one day to call on Harold. It was a hot summer's day when he knocked on Harold's screen door. The bishop could see Harold sitting in his chair, smoking a cigarette and reading the newspaper. “Who is it?” Harold asked sullenly, without looking up.

“Your bishop,” Tom replied. “I've come to get acquainted and to urge your attendance with your family at our meetings.”

“No, I'm too busy,” came the disdainful response. He never looked up. Tom thanked him for listening and departed the doorstep. The family moved without Harold ever attending services.

Years later, a Brother Gallacher phoned the office of Elder Thomas S. Monson and asked to make an appointment to see him.

“Ask him if his name is Harold G. Gallacher,” Elder Monson told his secretary, “and if he lived at 55 Vissing Place and had a daughter named Sharon.” When the secretary did, Harold was startled that Elder Monson remembered such details. When the two met some time later, they embraced. Harold said, “I've come to apologize for not getting out of my chair and letting you in the door that summer day long years ago.” Elder Monson asked him if he were active in the Church. With a wry smile, Harold replied: “I'm now second counselor in my ward bishopric. Your invitation to come out to church, and my negative response, so haunted me that I determined to do something about it.”⁵

Daily Choices Have Eternal Consequences

Thinking of our daily bread keeps us aware of the details of our lives, of the significance of the small things that occupy our days. Experience teaches that in a marriage, for example, a steady stream of simple kindnesses, help, and attention do much more to keep love alive and nurture the relationship than an occasional grand or expensive gesture. That is not to say, brethren—you who are married—that your wife wouldn't appreciate something new and really nice to wear or occasionally some other gift that expresses, with an exclamation point, how you feel about her (within the parameters, of course, of your miserable budget). It's just that a constant, daily expression of affection, in both words and actions, is far more meaningful in the long run.

Likewise, in daily choices we may prevent certain insidious influences from entering our lives and becoming part of what we are. In an informal discussion that Elder Neal A. Maxwell and I had some years ago with a priesthood

leader in a stake conference setting, we observed that one can avoid most pornography and pornographic images just by making good choices. For the most part it is simply a matter of self-discipline not to go where pornography is likely to be found—physically or in cyberspace. We acknowledged, nevertheless, that because it is so tragically pervasive, pornography could assault a person minding his own business quite by surprise. “Yes,” observed Elder Maxwell, “but he can immediately reject it. He does not have to invite it to come in and offer it a chair to sit down.” So with other influences and habits—slovenly appearance, carelessness in conduct, abusive and profane language, unkind criticism, procrastination, and so on—our attention each day to avoiding the very beginnings of such things can protect us from awakening some future day to the realization that because of inattentiveness, some evil or weakness has taken root in our soul.

In reality, there aren’t very many things in a day that are totally without significance. Even the mundane and repetitious can be tiny but significant building blocks that in time establish the discipline and character and order needed to realize our plans and dreams. Therefore, as you ask in prayer for your daily bread, consider thoughtfully your needs—both what you may lack and what you must protect against. As you retire to bed, think about the successes and failures of the day and what will make the next day a little better. And thank your Heavenly Father for the manna He has placed along your path that sustained you through the day. Your reflections will increase your faith in Him as you see His hand helping you to endure some things and to change others. You will be able to rejoice in one more day, one more step toward eternal life.

Jesus Christ Is the Bread of Life

Above all, remember that we have Him of whom manna was a type and symbol, the very Bread of Life, the Redeemer.

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. . . .

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

I am that bread of life.

Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. [John 6:35, 47–51]

I bear you my witness of the living reality of the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, and of the infinite power and reach of His Atonement. Ultimately, it is His Atonement, His grace, that is our daily bread. We should seek Him daily, to do His will each day, to become one with Him as He is one with the Father (see John 17:20–23). I bless you that as you seek it from Him, your Heavenly Father will grant you your daily bread, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Marcus Luttrell with Patrick Robinson, *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10* (New York: Little, Brown, 2007), 124.

2. N. Eldon Tanner, “The Message: Just for Today,” *New Era*, January 1975, 5.

3. David A. Bednar, CR, October 2009, 18; or “More Diligent and Concerned at Home,” *Ensign*, November 2009, 19–20.

4. Ezra Taft Benson, “First Presidency Message: A Mighty Change of Heart,” *Ensign*, October 1989, 5.

5. Heidi S. Swinton, *To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 160–61.