

Reach Exodus 16:2-8, 13-21

Give us this day our daily bread...

Have you seen the movie *Secret Life of Pets*? Yes, I am talking about the animated family film portraying the adventurous life pets explore when humans are not around or paying any attention.

There is a scene in the movie when Max and Duke, newly paired brothers, encounter a group of flushed pets on the streets of their NYC neighborhood. These flushed pets live underground in the sewers and wage war against owners and house pets. Max and Duke are house pets. A series of events take place and soon Max and Duke find themselves being chased by these flushed pets. As Max and Duke escape through the sewers the only place left to go is into the Hudson. Swimming mightily, they climb on the back of a ferry, which is headed away from their homeland. As they arrive on the other side how do you think they are feeling? Lonely? Lost? Worried? Anxious? Fear? Maybe but not as much as hungry! In what they believed to be this foreign land they focus on attending to their hunger. Their first attempt is with a young man on a park bench near them. They approach with an attempt of puppy dog eyes and cute wining to get just a taste of the sandwich the young man was enjoying. The young man stuffs the sandwich in his mouth and runs away. Bummed, they hang their heads and sulk. Then, they get a waft of sausage. They follow the scent to a nearby hotdog factory and the animation of the movie makes their gluttony and hunger look like an amusement park of satisfaction. In the end of their fantasy journey, they are so full they could not move. But they had to keep moving. Their journey is not over. Their problems are not solved. They are still not home. As if all that were not enough to deal with, they are chased once again back into the streets, but this time by the animal patrol.

If you have not seen it, you can watch the movie to get the rest of the story. There is also a sequel.

Guess what? We, as God’s children, are not so different from Max and Duke in this movie. To be clear, I am not saying we are dogs. What I am saying is that we too find ourselves, after a series of things that happen in life- job, marriage, children, opportunity, disappointment- being chased in life- by family, expectation, pressure, fear, accomplishment, and maybe even the

law- and it takes us into unknown territories and wildernesses- unfamiliar places with unfamiliar beginnings and ends. We end up on ferries at times that land us safely on the other side only to be further away from what we know and love. And rather than be thankful for the respite and reprieve, we focus only on the next problem. When discomfort or unease rise in life, we tend to respond to circumstances in a similar way as Max and Duke did with their hunger. When we are hungry, we put on our puppy dog eyes and whine a little bit. I do it. Being hangry is a real thing. And when an opportunity comes to be fed, we do not just take what we need, we get lost in our satisfaction and try to take it all and store it away. It is not long before we find that the moment we have in “the sausage factory” was not satisfaction at all, but trickery and false hope. All “the sausage factory” does is temporarily distract, holding our hunger at bay and helping us escape the real issues surrounding us. It is not long, before we are back being chased again.

Guess what else? God knows this about us. God knew that about the Israelites after they had been led into the wilderness. Therefore, God does not give to us and help us satisfy our hunger the same way we might fall victim to. God wants us to be fulfilled to thrive, not just satisfied temporarily to survive. Jesus is quoted saying, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27) Whether we are looking for tangible gifts and satisfactions or emotional blessings, God knows best what we need, and God provides accordingly. As much as we might enjoy it, to be satisfied in life we do not have to go charging into amusement park fantasy lands.

One of the things this text in Exodus reveals for us is when we pray to God, “give us this day our daily bread,” God does not lead us into a fantasy world of food one time and leave us. We can be rest assured, by what God did for the Israelites in the wilderness, that God will give to us as we need daily day after day. What are we to do? We are to trust day after day that what we are given and provided is just right.

Another thing this text in Exodus invites us to think about and reflect on is that God gives us more than tangible items each day. I want us to think for a moment about what God gives us daily. I will admit that some of the things we do not see as obviously as others, but that does not mean God has not put it there as a gift. Consider the following:

Time, Heartbeats, Breaths: Each day, we are given 86,400 gifts. This is the gift of time. We can look at it as seconds or we can consider 1,440 minutes or 24 hours. Each day, we have the gift of time. And in that time, we also receive on average 115,200 gifts. This is the gift of a heartbeat- based on the average heartbeat of 60 to 100 beats per minutes. I took the middle. Also, in that time, we receive on average 20,160 gifts. This is

the gift of a breath- based on the average breaths of 12-16 per minute. I took the middle.

Each day, these thousands of unseen and often overlooked and underappreciated gifts come and go never to be retrieved again. Today is today. Tomorrow is tomorrow. We cannot bank our time, heartbeats, and breaths for another day. God will give us tomorrow what we need then.

Opportunity to listen and hear God- I believe God talks to us every day and multiple times a day, and yet I have heard and read on many occasions that a struggle people have is listening and hearing God. How does God talk to us all every day? I do not know. How is it exactly that we can hear a divinely sovereign God who is not a physical person standing in front of us? I think that depends on us.

One of my favorite illustrations on listening comes from a book by Mark Yaconelli called *Growing Souls*. He writes, "A friend of mine attended a Christian Pastor's conference in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. The participants, gathered from across North America, included one Native American pastor who was on his first trip to a major metropolitan city. During a lunch break the Native American pastor took a walk outside with one of his colleagues. As they stretched their legs along the busy sidewalk, the pastor suddenly stopped, turned to his companion, and said, 'Do you hear that?' The friend paused and considered the bustling noise of the city. 'Hear what?' he replied. Planted along the downtown sidewalk was a small row of trees. At the base of each tree was a circle of flowers. The pastor walked over to one of the trees, knelt down, reached beneath one of the floral clusters, then stood and opened his hand, revealing a small black bug. 'It's a cricket!' Dumbfounded, his friend replied, 'How could you possibly hear that?' The Native American pastor reached into his pants pocket, took out a handful of coins, threw them into the air. As the coins hit the cement, people from all directions stopped and looked down. The pastor turned to his companion and said, 'It depends on what you're listening for.'"

Opportunity to praise God- We not only have the time to praise God daily, but we have the reason to praise God daily. As a matter of fact, God calls us to praise God daily!

John MacArthur, in his book *Worship: The Ultimate Priority*, writes "The only right response to the God who created and gave us everything is to praise and honor God throughout life.... Authentic worship is not a narrowly defined activity relegated to the Sunday morning church service or restricted to any single time

and place, for that matter. Worship is any essential expression of service rendered unto God by a soul who loves and extols God for who God is. Real worship therefore should be the full-time, nonstop activity of every believer.”

Opportunity to give thanks to God- Like praise, we not only have the time to give thanks to God daily, but we have the reason to give thanks to God daily. As a matter of fact, God calls us to give thanks to God daily! Who does not like to be appreciated and thanked? God is the same way.

Anne Lamotte, in her book *Help. Thanks. Wow.*, which highlights three essential prayers we offer to God, says “most of the time for me gratitude is a rush of relief that I have dodged a bullet- the highway patrol didn’t see me as I sped by or Oh my God, thank you that was all just a dream, or I didn’t appear on Oprah in underpants with my dreadlocks dropping off my head. These are all DEFCON 1 moments of relief and gratitude worth giving God thanks.” She describes second and third stages of gratitude as well but then she says, “Gratitude begins in our hearts and then dovetails into behavior. It almost always makes you willing to be of service, which is where the joy resides. It means you are willing to stop being such a jerk. When you are aware of all that has been given to you, in your lifetime and in the past few days, it is hard not to be humbled, and pleased to give back.”

Opportunity to serve others- Is it possible to argue that every breath we take contains the opportunity to help someone? Is there enough need in the world to match every breath taken? All I know is that there appears to be a lot of need, and right now, as we breath today, we have the breaths to dedicate.

In the book *10 Prayers God always says yes to*, one of the prayers is “God, make me an instrument.” One of the first things attached to this prayer is a warning, that when you pray this prayer to God, we must be ready, because God will undoubtedly answer it and give us the opportunity to be an instrument of God’s light. God calls us to serve others and there is not a day that goes by in which we do not have the opportunity to do something for someone else. That person may be your spouse or your child or your parent or a friend or another church member. Who is God calling you to serve today?

Opportunity to love God and love others- God calls us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and ability and love our neighbor as ourselves. To love God and others is God’s greatest commandment, so if God gives us the daily opportunity to listen and praise and give thanks and serve, do you not also think God is going to provide the

opportunity to love God and love others. To love God and love others includes all these things and takes it all one step further into empathy, compassion, commitment, and relationship. To love is to put aside our own wants and needs and conveniences for the sake of God and others. To love is to risk and sacrifice something from you to another.

Opportunity to laugh and smile- Humor is a religious experience. When Ron Culberson was here last January, I purchased one of his books *Is Your Glass Laugh Full?*.

In the book he says, "Please understand that we can have faith and fun at the same time. Humor is a gift from God and the Bible even instructs us to be joy-full. Therefore, humor is a religious experience that can bring joy to our lives and others. Our faith should never put us in religious prison but instead should be the reprieve we need from the adversities and adversaries in our world. Maybe we should pray and play a bit more often." In addition, Billy Graham is quoted saying, "A keen sense of humor helps to overlook the unbecoming, understand the unconventional, tolerate the unpleasant, overcome the unexpected and outlast the unbearable." If we stop long enough to listen and really reflect on what God is doing in the world, and what God asks us to do with our life, it is amazing we are not found laughing a whole lot more. God has an incredible sense of humor. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush that did not go up in smoke. God sent Moses to talk to Pharaoh to set the people free. Moses did not have an army and did not even believe in his own voice. Yeah, God has a sense of humor alright.

Opportunity to be filled- To live, we need certain things: food, water, air, shelter, clothing. God knows this. Our satisfaction with these tangible things is often what dilutes our belief that we can be satisfied with what we have. We fall victim to coveting what another has and think if they have more, we must need more as well. We fall victim to comparisons and competition. God knows what we need, and God will provide. Again, God does not give to us as the world gives. Therefore, we must be willing to consider God's gifts beyond what the world suggests is necessary.

Our prayer to God to "give us this day our daily bread" is answered daily in God's love and providence. Whatever it takes, I believe God will make manna rain from heaven, water flow from a rock, mountains be moved into the sea, when we have faith and trust in God's mighty works. An important side note to acknowledge about the manna God provided to the Israelites in the wilderness. It was not like a scene from the movie *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, and loaves of bread fell from the sky. What God provided was the most important component for the

people to be able to make bread to eat. God does not just give us handouts, God gives us hand ups!

To close, I want to offer a slight twist on our prayer to God. Rather than command God to give us everything we need and then sit back and wait for God to give, what if we also ask God how it is we can participate with God? What if we prayed, "In what ways may we give to you God in our daily life?"

What I think we will find is that what we can give God daily is the reciprocal of what God provides for us daily.

Our ears to listen.

Our all in praising and thanksgiving.

Our hands to serve.

Our hearts to love.

Our spirits to laugh and smile.

Our faith and commitment to be filled and nourished.

On our wilderness journey, a reflective hike in and toward hope, it is imperative for us to believe, and I am borrowing the words from the marquee sign of the Methodist Church at the corner of Boonsboro Rd. and Coffee Rd., "Where God guides, God provides."

Let all God's people say... Amen.