

Helen Roseveare, an English doctor-missionary, served in the Congo where Nick and Jocelyn Frey work, whom we support in their work with Mission Aviation Fellowship. Helen worked in the same country for many years. She died in 2016. But she told this story:

One night, in Central Africa, I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all that we could do, she died leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying, two-year-old daughter.

We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive. We had no incubator. We had no electricity to run an incubator, and no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts.

A student-midwife went for the box we had for such babies and for the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly, in distress, to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst. Rubber perishes easily in tropical climates. "...and it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk; so, in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over a burst water bottle. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways. "All right," I said, "Put the baby as near the fire as you safely can; sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm."

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with many of the orphanage children.... I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle. The baby could so easily die if it got chilled. I also told them about the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died.

During the prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt consciousness of our African children. "Please, God," she prayed, "send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, the baby'll be dead; so, please send it this afternoon." While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added..., "And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little (2 year old) girl so she'll know You really love her?"

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, "Amen?" I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything: The Bible says so, but there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel

from home. Anyway, if anyone did send a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time that I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the veranda, was a large twenty-two pound parcel! I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone; so, I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly.

Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then, there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children began to look a little bored. Next, came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas, which would make a nice batch of buns for the weekend. As I put my hand in again, I felt the... could it really be? I grasped it and pulled it out. Yes, "A brand-new rubber, hot water bottle!" I cried.

I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, "If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!" Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone: She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked, "Can I go over with you, Mummy, and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?"

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday School class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. One of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child — five months earlier in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it "That afternoon!" "

Isn't that an amazing provision of our daily bread?! And isn't that a humbling story? A little girl believes God will provide while the adult Christian highly doubts. Isn't that how it often goes? We get so focused on being realistic that we forget that we serve a God of the impossible. We forget Jesus' words that we ought to have faith like a child.

Mary the mother of Jesus seemed to be more like the little girl from the Congo. The situation in John 2 is not a life and death issue, like that in the Congo. It was just a wedding where the bride and groom ran out of wine. It was a result of poor planning on someone's part. Cana was a small village and probably the whole village and some surrounding ones were invited. That's why Mary and the disciples are there too from Nazareth. It's even possible that Mary is related to the family and was therefore involved in the planning. That could be why she's concerned.

In any event, running out of wine is not a miracle-worthy problem by most standards. But we do know that this would have been a major embarrassment to the wedding planners, particularly the groom and his family who were generally in charge of a wedding in that culture. In addition, running out of wine showed a major lack of hospitality which is very important in the ancient eastern culture. Providing food and drink to guests is a sacred duty. So there was a real problem. It couldn't be solved by running to the local liquor store. That was not an option. There was nowhere to go, except to Jesus!

But did this mistake require a miracle? No. It didn't require one. Miracles are never required. But when it comes to prayer, what is required is trust.

## **We Trust Him**

Mary's request of Jesus is not technically a prayer. Mary wasn't in a private room praying. She wasn't in a public worship service. But what is prayer in its most basic definition? It's talking to Jesus! And that's what Mary is doing. She sees a need and talks to Jesus about it. In reality, this was probably not Mary's problem. She was just a guest at this wedding. The groom's lack of planning is none of her business. Nonetheless, Mary sees a need. Probably not so much a need for wine as the need to save the family from the embarrassment of running out of wine. This party "faux pas"/mistake could scar the family's reputation for years to come.

We don't have a lot of details for this story. We don't even know if the groom who was responsible for the wedding planning had even gotten word about the low supply of wine. Or if he was freaking out somewhere. Regardless, Mary knew what was going on. So, she tells Jesus about the problem she has discovered.

Jesus' response to his mother is pretty incredible. It almost sounds like he doesn't want to be involved or maybe even doesn't want to be bothered.

*Jn 2:4* *Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come,*" says Jesus. You might loosely translate that as, "Mom, that's not my problem. And that's certainly not the kind of thing the Father has sent me here to address. I have 'bigger fish to fry'. Now is not the time." This is not a rude rebuke of Jesus to his mother, but it is a rebuke of sorts. It contains the message, you might say, "My dear mother, I am taking my direction from my Father in heaven. I march to his beat and fulfill his purposes."

That may have been hard for Mary to hear from her son. However, what we should notice about Mary is that she doesn't snub Jesus or get ticked off at him. Instead, she trusts him, regardless of what he might do with her request. That's the conclusion we draw from her words to the servants at the wedding:

*Jn 2:5* *His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."* She's just been told not to involve him, but she nonetheless trusts that whatever Jesus decides to do will be right. Max Lucado in a sermon said, "Prayer isn't so much asking God what I want as telling him that I want what you want. A declaration of faith. Mary came in faith. Initially Jesus raised an objection but he did something anyway." Yes, Mary makes

her petition then leaves it with Jesus in the confidence that he will do what is best. She trusts him. He will provide in his way.

### **And He Provides**

Mary's request is for wine but it falls under the category of daily bread. You see, "give us this day our daily bread" is about a lot more than bread. Bread represents the most basic human need in Jesus' day.

Interestingly, the word we translate as "daily" in that phrase is used only one time in the New Testament. There are no other Greek texts that use that word. It isn't found anywhere else. So scholars must dig deeper. And the best studies lead them to an early Syriac translation that was only used until the end of the second century. The Syriac is helpful because it is the closest language to Aramaic which is what Jesus spoke. Jesus' words in this prayer were spoken in Aramaic and then translated into the Greek we have in the New Testament. But since there are no other instances of the Greek word, by going back to the Syriac word—which is very, very close to Aramaic Jesus spoke—we get help. To make a long story short, "This Old Syriac second-century translation means... "Give us today the bread that doesn't run out." (K. Bailey).

Author Kenneth Bailey, who has studied ancient Jewish culture and lived there for decades, reflects on this interpretation from the Syriac "Give us today the bread that doesn't run out." He writes, "One of the most basic human fears is the dread of economic privation (or need). Will we have enough? We are managing now, but what about the future? What if I lose my job? What if the 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," writes Bailey, "Jesus is teaching his disciples to pray for release from that fear. To pray for bread that does not run out is to pray for deliverance from the existential angst that there will not be enough. This fear can destroy the human spirit."

That's why as Christians it's so important to remember that Jesus promises to meet our needs as we trust him to do that in whatever way he deems best. It comes in the form of a hot water bottle and a doll. It looks like abundant, quality wine at times. It looks like bread that doesn't run out. It looks like a job, a surprise cash gift, and so much more. The prayer for bread that does not run out is good because Jesus does not want us living with a crippled spirit. He wants us to have true life that comes from him and lives trusting him.

### **We Can Truly Live**

As John shares this story of Jesus turning water into wine, he uses all kinds of imagery and has different levels of meaning. We can't unpack it all this evening. But

what we can say about prayer is that when we trust Jesus, and trust his way of responding to our requests—whether we get what we want or not—then we are going to truly live.

The picture of Jesus' response to Mary's request is one of abundance. The wine was not bargain brand. It's the best! This is quality wine. But there is also quantity. Apparently, 6 of the barrels in this story equals *over* 900 of our standard bottles of wine! It was all high quality. And an abundance. This is Jesus' desire for us as God's children. Not to have lots of wine but to have what it symbolizes: an abundant life. Jesus said in John 10:10,

*Jn 10:10 I have come that you may life and have it to the fullest.*

Some translations say, "... and have it abundantly."

Mary's request was for Jesus to remove the negative stigma the bridal family would have endured if the wine was gone before the party was over. She wanted them to have abundant life, not shame. That's part of the beauty of her request. She's asking for the good of others.

We should notice in that regard that in this petition we are praying "our". It's "give us OUR daily bread" not give me "mine." Mary, for example, had the needs of bridal family in mind as she made her request to Jesus. Mother Teresa once wrote,

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 would 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 that she gave, but I was surprised that she knew.... In her terrible bodily suffering she knew that next door they were hungry also."

Ken Bailey concludes, "This woman with eight children may not have known the Lord's Prayer, but there was only 'our rice' not 'my rice' even when her (own) children were hungry. The prayer for 'our bread' includes our neighbors. It is 'our Father' and 'our bread.'" (*Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 122). Mary's request to do something about the wine problem reflects her desire to help her neighbour. It was an "our" bread prayer, not "mine."

That means we should pray prayers for our daily bread mindful of the needs of others as well as confident that Jesus is able to meet every need. Of course, we can bring our own needs too but it's good to think about "our" more often than I think about myself. Whatever need we have, Jesus shows that we must ask. We have not because we ask not, Jesus once said. And when we ask, we do so trusting that Jesus will respond to the needs we present with the same love he had for his own mother and the wedding hosts and even the whole wedding crowd! His words to her don't indicate that

he didn't love her. Yes, there was an element of respectful rebuke but only because he always had the Father's agenda in mind. And he always will.

We can rest assured that Jesus cares about all of our needs. But because he's concerned with the Father's agenda, he has our abundant life in mind. That's the life where we trust him more fully and enjoy his care for us completely. Then we can rest more fully in all situations he calls us to go through.

We have concerns for our loved ones too... like Mary had for the wedding hosts. If we focus on praying for our wayward family and members and friends, we can know that Jesus will answer. If it's economic problems, Jesus will answer. If it's health concerns, Jesus will answer. You name it; Jesus will answer.

Our job is to pray "give us our daily bread" and then to trust that he will answer it in the way that brings glory to the Father. But answers are not promised instantly. Nor are we promised that we'll get exactly what we ask for every time. We are promised answers though. There is always a response in heaven. The more you speak to God, the more your world is going to be different. You'll start to see things more and more his way. You'll be able to rest in his love when answers don't come fast enough or don't appear to be what we want. Ultimately, we want our prayers to be "Lord, this is the need that I present to you. Now I've given it to you and I'm going to leave it with you. I'm no longer going to worry about it. You are the provider! I trust you to help us live life to the fullest!"

What will happen when we bring our prayers to Jesus? I can't say for sure. But the right thing will happen! We can be relieved of our anxiety and live by faith that, if Jesus has abundance in mind, something good is going to happen. Do you believe that?

Max Lucado said that we tend to get out of bed and think, 'Something bad is going to happen today.' But as children of God, we now live in expectation of an answered prayer. Maybe you'll get the answer before you leave the sanctuary this evening. Maybe before bed tonight. Maybe a lot longer. We don't know. But we know the goodness of Jesus and his desire for us to have an abundant life. We can trust him for the abundant life he has in store for us and those we include in "our" community as we ask for our daily bread.

If Jesus can answer a prayer for a hot water bottle and a doll 5 months before it is even prayed, and if he can step in to save a wedding feast so that the hosts are not embarrassed and the guests are provided with wine in abundance, he can meet our needs for daily bread too—whatever that looks like.

So, let us faithfully pray and trust him when we say, "Give us this day our daily bread—the bread that doesn't run out. Help us to trust you with our needs, the needs of our loved ones and world, and to leave our needs with you rather than living in fear. Let us live out of your abundance." Amen.