

**The Lord's Prayer and United Mission**  
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**When we are united in God's mission,**  
**Our United Mission will grow.**

***“Give us this day our daily bread.” (Matt.6:11)***

The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that nearly 49 million Americans are “food insecure.” According to ABC news, one child out of every five in the U.S. suffers from hunger. Compounding these discouraging statistics is the reality that hunger is even more prevalent in many other parts of the world.

Today, as I write this column, the agriculture bill is being negotiated in a Senate-House Conference Committee to resolve disagreements on the bill. For the first time since 1973, the Supplemental Assistance Program (SNAP), otherwise known as food stamps, has been left out of the farm bill. The SNAP program has already been slashed by 5 percent. Even today I spoke with someone whose food stamp assistance was recently cut by \$12.00 a month. Especially hard hit are the children for whom food stamps are the last shredded threads of a safety net.

Mostly, the common folk whom Jesus taught were peasants who barely scratched out a living on small farms. They and the daily circumstances of their lives were the context for Jesus' teaching, including the model prayer provided by Jesus, a prayer that include the words: *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* (Matthew 6:5-14).

Who were the people who were taught the model prayer by Jesus? They were Palestinians who lived in the land where Jesus lived and ministered; they were not wealthy or affluent, or even middle class. They were mostly peasants--men, women, and children who struggled from dawn to dark and from day to day to make ends meet and to stay ahead of an oppressive regime, symbolized by the dreaded tax collector.

William R. Herzog II gave insights into the economic context of the people whom Jesus taught. Most of the people farmed small plots of land that had been farmed by the same family for generations. Many grew crops of barley and some chickpeas, from which a wonderful paste was made. But there was just barely enough to get by.

The landlord was always at the door, demanding more money for the rent. Herod's tax collectors and the Romans were everywhere demanding more tribute. The rich, however, didn't pay taxes. Instead they took from the poor. The peasants did what they could to hide their crops and their herds. When they knew the tax collector was coming, they would run some of the sheep and goats up into the hills. They hid what they could, fought for every ounce of barley, and survived.

The words *“give us this day our daily bread”* were not part of an idle or inconsequential prayer. The words were real, and grew out of a life-threatening concern.

The struggle to keep from losing the land was a daily struggle. The landlord would even try to call in the loan before the agreed-on date. Neighbors often put money into a village fund to prevent the land being lost to the landlord. If a man lost his land, he was out on the street--without a home and without a means of livelihood.

In such an economy, most persons barely had enough. Sometimes, the landlord's steward would throw all of a family's possessions outside, pick through them, take what seemed to have value, and order the

family out. The family would be left to pick up what they could carry and leave--many times without a good-bye because they didn't want to put the village in danger. No one dared speak.

Other times, villagers simply disappeared or were thrown into prison--often *debtor's* prison. The soldiers would show up, grab the villager, and cart him off. No explanation, no trial! Even when the prisons were full, the pattern continued.

The words that Jesus taught them were words of life for people in a society in which the rulers did not care what happened to the average person. It was a society of death in which the economy was stacked against the common people who desperately needed--and longed--to hear words of good news. Jesus' words were practical, good news in an economy of death in which people were commonly dragged away and imprisoned.

A major way that American Baptist congregations can take part in fighting hunger and the structures that cause hunger is for American Baptists to give generously and regularly to American Baptist United Mission.

**Thank you for your support through  
American Baptist United Mission.**