The Prayer of Agur - Part One

# Finding Balance in God

## (Proverbs 30:1-9)

I am so glad to have all of you with us today as well as those of you watching online because you are here for the first of a two-week miniseries called “The Prayer of Agur.” As we begin, how many of you would say that if you had just a little more money that it would bring you some relief, make life just a little bit easier? Just be honest, if I gave you $10,000 right now wouldn’t that make you happy? Almost everybody would say a little more money would make life better. You see, we all believe if we had just a little bit more, just a little bigger, a little faster, shinier, or with more bells and whistles, because then we would really be happy. So much of our lives is really a search for contentment, to find that place that’s really comfortable, an environment that’s just right, because deep down inside we’re motivated to find balance in life, having just the right amount of caution with the maximum amount of velocity.

Today, we’re going to discover that there is a sweet spot where God wants us to live, it’s a life of balance where we’re living with clarity, purpose, and contentment each day. And we’re going to find this tucked away in this little prayer of Agur which if you’ve never heard of Agur before that’s okay because his name is only recorded once in the entire Bible. In fact, he only gets honorable mention because he is the author of Proverbs chapter 30, and hidden within these verses is this little amazing prayer for living in God’s sweet spot. And so, let’s turn to the Word of God in Proverbs chapter 30 and begin reading at verse one.

“The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh — an oracle: This man declared to Ithiel, to Ithiel and to Ucal” (Proverbs 30:1).

Now, for those of you who have never heard of Agur, you have now been biblically enlightened because verse one is all that we know about him. We know his name, we know that he is the son of Jakeh, and we know his words were addressed to Ithiel and Ucal, whose identities are also unknown. The one thing that we do know is that Agur’s words were God breathed, they were included in the Bible, because they were weighed and determined to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. That is pretty amazing when you consider this chapter follows the wisdom of King Solomon and comes alongside of other spiritual giants like Moses and Paul, and then you’ve got Agur.

The thing that I really love about Agur is that he seems like a pretty normal guy, he is someone that we can relate to, because he made a difference without being famous. Agur like a few other characters in the Bible is only briefly mentioned but he found his purpose in the will of God and made a difference. Consider Jochebed for example, her name only appears twice in the Bible, but because she protected her son from Pharaoh, she literally launched biblical history when she set Moses afloat in a basket on the Nile River.

Or then there was Simeon who meets Joseph and Mary with the newborn infant Jesus in the temple. Taking Jesus into his arms, he speaks prophetically over him, declaring that he will be…

“A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32).

Just like the shepherds who spread the good news about this child on that first Christmas morning, Simeon barely gets mentioned.

Or then there was the criminal on the cross next to Jesus of whom we don’t even know his name. He was just another criminal in the lineup, criminal number one, and then there was criminal number two, and he identified Jesus as the Son of God. His only claim to fame was that he recognized Jesus and confessing his own sinfulness, he made a profession of faith calling him Lord, and at that very moment Jesus said something to him which has filled countless believers with hope. Jesus promised him in Luke chapter 23,

“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Each of these characters only received brief mention in the Bible, but each one made a difference, not because they were famous, but because they found their purpose in the will of God. I find that to be incredibly encouraging and I hope that you do too, because while we may not be famous, we can all make a difference as we discover God’s purpose for our lives.

And so, following this brief introduction in verse one, this unknown man, identified as Agur, takes a position that we all need as we come to God in prayer. He admits his limitations in verse two saying,

“I am the most ignorant of men; I do not have a man's understanding. I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One” (Proverbs 30:2-3).

And his humility is refreshing as he admits that he has limited understanding or knowledge of God and recognizing that he is both unprepared and unworthy to stand before God in his Glory. Agur humbles himself like Isaiah who said,

"Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips…" (Isaiah 6:5).

Having laid that foundation, Agur now begins to ask questions that we should all consider. And I pray that his words would prompt our thinking, because when we meet God face-to-face, it’s literally going to blow our minds, because his Glory is that far beyond our imagination. Suddenly, sounding kind of like Job, Agur asks,

“Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know” (Proverbs 30:4).

He says, “Surely anyone who considers the wonder of nature, the wind, the seas, and earth itself must acknowledge the eternal power and divine nature of God.” In fact, that’s what Romans chapter 1 says,

“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities…have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

And so, Agur says, “Surely you know,” because Creation itself testifies to it’s Creator; and then he adds this staggering question, “What is his name and the name of his son?” Now, the first part of that question would have been easy for his audience, but the second part, “What is the name of his son” would have sent shockwaves through the religious establishment. You see, Agur wrote this in the middle of the Old Testament era, and so he’s writing this close to a thousand years before the birth of Jesus. This was written 250 years before the prophet Isaiah said,

“To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

But in Agur’s day there was only the slightest hint in the Scriptures that the Messiah would be the Son of God. And so, we don’t know to what extent Agur anticipated the Messiah, but he had received divine revelation that God had a Son, thus revealing his authenticity as a prophet of God.

Today you and I have the benefit of seeing how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus, but at this point in history Agur stuns his audience with this prophetic word about God’s Son. Then as we move to verse five, he pauses to endorse the Scriptures with what sounds like a blend of the Psalms, with just a twist of the book of Revelation saying,

"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar” (Proverbs 30:5-6).

And so, Agur reminds his readers that though the Scriptures were written by men, they were inspired in that moment by the Holy Spirit. And so, it was as he was speaking these words that he was speaking from God, which is exactly what Peter tells us. In his second letter, chapter 1, verse 20, he says,

“You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

And so, trusting God’s Word is foundational for us as believers, because his Word can and does stand on its own. We can trust it because "Every Word of God is flawless” and therefore before we pray or do anything, we need to align ourselves with God’s Word.

This is the point that the Holy Spirit has strategically brought us to as we prepare to dig into this buried treasure of ancient wisdom. It’s really a pattern for trusting God as Agur lays out this prayer to discover God’s will for our lives. He begins very wisely in verse seven, saying, “Two things I ask of you,” and any time you can narrow down your prayer requests to specific points you’re going to find yourself so much more aware of God answering those prayers. And so, he continues saying,

"O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:7-9).

The simplicity of this prayer is what first caught my attention, but it’s also a great strategy for prayer. Now, of course, you could pray a thousand prayers and God would hear them all, but Agur only asks for two things. The first thing he asked is that God would,

“Keep falsehoods and lies far from me.”

It’s unclear whether he is referring to being influenced by falsehood from within or from without, but it seems as if he is recognizing that the world is filled with lies and that they trip him up way too often. And so, he’s asking that God would protect his ears from hearing lies that might lead him down the wrong path, but also that God would keep his lips from lying so that he might not deceive others. I believe this is a prayer that we can all appreciate, because we all want to know the truth, sometimes we ignore it, but we all want to know what is true, because truth matters. And so, Agur expresses his desire to know truth, recognizing that God is the source of all virtue and integrity, and he asks for the ability to hear, discern, and speak only the truth.

And then Agur’s second request is that God would give him a life of balance, contentment, or moderation. In verse eight he says,

“Give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread” (Proverbs 30:8).

And this prayer catches us by surprise, because moderation is not something that many of us value in the twenty first century. In fact, I am sure that most of you would agree, if something is good, more must be better. And so, we chase after more stuff, we sign up for more activities, we volunteer for more responsibility, because more has to be better.

Now, Agur wasn’t endorsing minimalism even though sometimes it can be helpful to cut up the credit cards and clear out the clutter. But in this passage, he is merely identifying the fact that there needs to be balance; that there is a perfect mixture of getting what you need and needing what you get. And so, he sums it up nicely saying,

“Give me only my daily bread” (Proverbs 30:8).

Now, for some of us, when we hear that we instantly think of Jesus teaching his disciples how to pray in Matthew chapter 6.

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread” (Matthew 6:9-11).

And if you have a church background, you’ve probably heard that before, it’s familiar to you, but when Agur wrote this passage of Scripture, the Hebrew people would have understood it differently. They would have instantly connected this prayer to the daily manna God had provided during the 40 years wandering in the wilderness. The psalmist described it this way,

“They asked, and he brought them quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock, and water gushed out; like a river it flowed in the desert” (Ps 105:40-41).

You see, it was in the Old Testament book of Exodus that God provided manna, bread from heaven every morning for the Israelites. It was always right on time and just the right amount. And so, God was teaching them that there should be a balance because there are dangers or excesses in both extremes. For example, someone seeking to be healthy and get the most out of life could live at the gym and feed on steroids, or on the other hand they could choose to lift 12 ounces at a time while binge watching Netflix. And so, it’s important that we find that balance, being content with our daily bread.

You see, no matter who you are, your finances, health, relationships, activities, and emotions all have a sweet spot, a place of balance. In fact, the apostle Paul described it to Timothy, he said,

“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that” (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Now, I am assuming that most of you had something to eat this week, and it seems like everybody has clothing, except maybe for a few of you watching online, but the Bible says if we have food and clothing, we should be content with that. And yet the reality is that most of us are not content, we’re constantly looking for the newest technology or ways to make more money, and so the question is how much do we need to be satisfied? And generally, the answer is just a little bit more; it doesn’t matter where you are on the pay scale, it’s always just a little bit more.

Agur in this prayer, introduces us to a deeper level of trusting God. He didn’t pray “give us today our daily bread,” but he prayed a more courageous type of prayer saying, “give me ONLY my daily bread.” In other words, no more and no less, only my daily bread, and in the next few lines we’ll discover that he had good reasons for praying this way. In verse nine he said,

“Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:9).

Agur recognized his weakness for physical, tangible stuff, material blessings, and that he was easily tempted to trust in his stuff, trusting his 401(k), trusting his gold. And so, he knew if he had too much, he would be tempted to trust in himself as his provider and distancing himself from God. And then, on the other hand, if he had too little, he recognized he might be tempted to steal and dishonor God. And so, his prayer was that there would be balance, his cash flow would be just right, and it wasn’t that money was the problem, it was his emotional attachment to money.

In fact, the Bible talks about that, the apostle wrote, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil…” (1 Timothy 6:10). And you know how that verse ends, it doesn’t describe all kinds of evil, but it says, “Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:10). And so, Paul describes the consequences of this spiritual attachment to money.

In the same way, Agur recognized his tendency to cling to stuff in a culture that was so far removed from ours and yet we have to applaud his self-awareness. His prayer expresses a sensitivity to the things of God and his desire to be dependent on God and God alone. His deepest desire was to trust God so completely that he could maintain balance in his life. On the other hand, his deepest fear and concern in verse nine was that he may,

“Dishonor the name of God” (Proverbs 30:9).

And so, Agur recognizes that whether he has more than he needs or less than he needs, both extremes have their problems, both present difficulties; but somewhere in between is that sweet spot, that beautiful biblical concept known as contentment.

The theme of contentment is found several places in the Bible, but nowhere more powerfully than Philippians chapter 4. The apostle Paul says this,

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:12).

Now, I know some of you are thinking that all of this talk about contentment and staying away from the extremes sounds boring because there’s no thrill, no adrenaline rush in that. And I understand, so the next verse is for you, Paul says,

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

That’s a great verse for you risktakers, those of you living by faith, those of you living on the edge, because it makes you want to get up and do something. And it is there, sandwiched between these two verses, that Paul is revealing the secret of being content, these two verses are inseparable, because the launchpad for doing greater things is humbly trusting God for his daily provision.

I think both Paul and Agur are on the same page, finding inspiration from the same source, because trusting God gives you confidence. When you finally understand that God loves you, cares for you, and will provide for your every need, suddenly the pressure is off because you have nothing to prove, you can dream dreams and explore life without panicking because God is inviting you into his sweet spot. That’s where you find peace, where you find purpose, where you make a difference, because you can do everything through him who gives you strength. And so, I want to encourage you to trust God, drawing near to him, because as you do the extremes become less attractive and you will become more and more like him. As you choose to depend on him alone for your daily needs you will discover godliness with contentment that will allow you to enjoy life like never before, because his grace is empowering.

And yet, the way that many of us live communicates that we believe God’s provision is not enough, because we live in a way that says if we had more of this, or more of that, then we would finally be satisfied. And our culture constantly feeds that lie telling you that what you don’t have is what you need to be happy in life. But Jesus warned us, he said,

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

Over the years I have said it, we sing songs about it, and that is that the only thing that truly satisfies is more of Jesus. He alone is enough. No, let me rephrase that, he is more than enough. Jesus is not just enough, he is way more than enough, that is why Paul said,

“What is more… I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord…” (Philippians 3:8).

I pray that like Paul and Agur, you would have revelation, that you would have spiritual breakthrough, finding contentment in God alone. Knowing his name and the name of his Son, knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection, because he is way more than enough. He is everything, he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is living water, he is the vine, he is the rock, he is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He is our redeemer, our righteousness, our Lord and Savior. He is the Lion and the Lamb, our soon returning King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Lord invites us through the prophet Isaiah, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.  Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:1

Let’s bow our heads in prayer as we make personal application of these truths.

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