

Proverbs 30 – Daily Pursuit and Refuge

The words of Agur that begin Proverbs 30 might seem strange in a book of wisdom. You don't expect a writer of wise proverbs to lack wisdom, much less to describe himself as "more stupid than any other person" (v. 2)! Agur's confession of ignorance here, however, helps make his point—God stands alone as the supreme source of truth. None of us can measure up, not even Solomon, Agur, or any other person who contributed to the pages of Scripture. In fact, human attempts to conceive and construct wisdom ultimately bring us to a place of deep and certain humility. None of us can fathom the depths of God's matchless wisdom (v. 4-6).

As we come to the last two chapters of Proverbs, the heart behind Agur's words in verses 2-6 are essential if we are to continue receiving God's everlasting wisdom for everyday life. We do well to read and contemplate the Proverbs each day. At the same time, we must come to terms with this: the more we seek God's wisdom, the more we will realize we still don't know.

This is precisely why God's wisdom is a daily pursuit. God doesn't give us all His wisdom at the moment of salvation, once and for all time. As long as we live, we'll face new situations that will leave us feeling ignorant, just like Agur. As we study Proverbs, we won't somehow know God completely and have all the answers. What we can know, though, is that the wisdom we need every day originates with God who loves us and wants to show us the way. And He will—as we trust Him and take refuge in the truth of His timeless Word.

30 *The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh—an inspired utterance. This man's utterance to Ithiel: "I am weary, God, but I can prevail. ² Surely, I am only a brute, not a man; I do not have human understanding.³ I have not learned wisdom, nor have I attained to the knowledge of the Holy One.*

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh: [Proverbs 30](#) is a collection of wisdom from a man known only to this chapter of the Bible. When the men of Hezekiah gathered additional material for Proverbs. They added these words of Agur. We have no other mention of Agur the son of Jakeh.

Solomon wasn't the only man of wisdom in his day or afterward. [1 Kings 4:30-31](#). It appears evident that Solomon was not the author of this chapter; and nothing definite is known about the writers. The wisdom of Agur in [Proverbs 30](#) is filled with observations on life and the natural world. Agur is one "inviting us to look again at our world with the eye of a man of faith.

Surely, I am more stupid than any man: Many previous proverbs teach that humility is an essential aspect of wisdom. Here, with poetic exaggeration, Agur declared his own limitations when it comes to understanding and wisdom. David said, I was like a beast

before you ([Psalm 73:22](#)). Job spoke of man, who is a worm ([Job 25:6](#)). Philosophy had failed him, and revelation was his sole confidence.

Nor have knowledge of the Holy One: Agur was also careful not to boast of his spiritual knowledge. He brings his lesson to us with great humility, not from a position of superiority. Earthbound mortals cannot find transcendent wisdom apart from the transcendent Lord. Real wisdom must find its starting point in God's revelation; in his light, we see light.

⁴ Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Whose hands have gathered up the wind? Who has wrapped up the waters in a cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is the name of his son? Surely you know!

Who has ascended into heaven: Like [Job 38-39](#), Agur called men and women to understand their limitations in understanding God and His creation. The wise and humble answer to each of these questions is, God, and not man. Where is there a man that can do this? And none but he who made and governs all the creatures can know and teach these things.

What is His name, and what is His Son's name: After challenging his readers regarding the natural world, Agur finished with a challenge regarding man's limitations in spiritual knowledge. One can only know what is His name (God's nature, character) and His Son's name by God's own revelation. In all these things, we humbly depend on God's revelation for our knowledge. **His Son's name:** Agur knew there was something special about the Son of God. We don't know to what extent he prophetically anticipated the Messiah, God the Son, Jesus Christ – but Agur knew that God had a Son, and the Son had a name. ([John 3:31-33](#)).

⁵ "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

⁶ Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.

Every word of God is pure: Agur valued and explained the purity of God's word. It is all good and all helpful, being completely pure. Because it is pure it can and should be trusted. A metaphor taken from the purifying of metals. Everything that God has pronounced, every inspiration which the prophets have received, is pure, without mixture of error, without dross. Whatever trials it may be exposed to, it is always like gold: it bears the fire, and comes out with the same luster, the same purity, and the same weight. Nothing is learned solidly by abstract speculation. Go to the Book. Here all is light and purity. While the secret things belong to the Lord our God, yet the things that are revealed are our holy directory.

He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him: In the context of writing about God's word, Agur explained that God is a shield. The sense is that God gives His pure word to protect His people if they will use the wisdom and encouragement of His word to put their trust in Him. Additionally, a shield is something we trust, and if we wisely trust God and His revelation of Himself in His word, He will protect us. It isn't enough to know every word of God is pure if you don't take the next step and trust Him as

your shield. Notice ([Proverbs 30:5b](#)) that the aim of revelation is to promote trust, not bare knowledge, and trust that goes behind the words to the Speaker.

Do not add to His words: God's word needs no addition or improvement from us. We don't need to take away from His words or add to His words (as in [Revelation 22:18-19](#)). If we do, we are targets of God's rebuke and will be exposed as liars. If we say something different than God's word, then He is right and we are wrong. He tells the truth and we will be found a liar. The temptation is to improve on the text if not by actually adding new material, then by interpreting it in ways that make more of a passage's teaching than is really there. It is what Paul called 'going beyond what is written' ([1 Corinthians 4:6](#)).

⁷ "Two things I ask of you, Lord; do not refuse me before I die: ⁸ Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. ⁹ 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.

Two things I request of You: These verses contain a wise and humble prayer from Agur. He earnestly asked God for two things, and he wanted to receive them on this side of eternity (Deprive me not before I die). The author recognizes his weaknesses, both in his tendency to forget God when life is too easy and to turn in desperation away from God when life is too hard.

Remove falsehood and lies far from me: Agur first asked for personal integrity. He wanted to be a man marked by truth, and not by falsehood and lies. Knowing God is a God of truth ([Proverbs 30:5-6](#)), he didn't want such deception anywhere near him. The 'falsehood and lies' of [Proverbs 30:8](#) are the deceptiveness of both wealth and poverty. The former convinces one that God is not necessary; and the latter, that either he is of no help or that his laws are impossible to keep.

Give me neither poverty nor riches: Agur's second request was to have neither great poverty nor great riches. He wanted to be satisfied with God's provision in his life.

Feed me with the food allotted to me: But there is other food which is needful. The daily bread of love, of hope, of holy thought, and fellowship. There is other hunger than that of the body. But this also will be provided, according as each day requires.

Profane the name of my God: Agur wanted neither poverty nor riches out of concern that either extreme might lead him to profane the name of God. He did not want to arrogantly deny God because he felt he was so rich he didn't need God. He did not want to be so poor that he would use poverty as an excuse to sin (lest I be poor and steal). Either path would profane the name of God.

If a wise man like Agur was tempted to allow riches to profane the name of my God, we must also be on guard. Even an Agur full fed may grow reckless, and dip his fingers in the devil's sauce; so that he forgets himself, and denies the Lord. We instinctively want to honor and even protect the name of our God, even if our god is an idol. This statement

of Agur showed that. In sum, the glory of God, not his personal need, motivates Agur's requests.

¹⁰ "Do not slander a servant to their master, or they will curse you, and you will pay for it.

Do not malign a servant to his master: This proverb has to do with harsh, unfair criticism spoken to another about a third party not present. It shouldn't be done, and doing it without the knowledge of the one spoken against makes it even worse. If it is wrong to do this in regard to a servant, it is even worse to do it against someone else. In general, do not meddle with other people's servants. Behind this injunction is a demand that one respect the person of the menial worker. His work relationship with his master is between the two of them; one should not interfere here no more than one would interfere in a matter involving a superior or an equal. **Lest he curse you:** The one spoken against may rightfully speak a curse against the one who secretly maligns others. The curse may in fact come to pass if the one who maligns is found guilty of the offense.

¹¹ "There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers; ¹² those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth;¹³ those whose eyes are ever so haughty, whose glances are so disdainful;¹⁴ those whose teeth are swords and whose jaws are set with knives to devour the poor from the earth and the needy from among mankind.¹⁵ "The leech has two daughters. 'Give! Give!' they cry. "There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say, 'Enough!':

There is a generation that curses its father: The generation that disobeys God's command to honor father and mother ([Exodus 20:12](#), [Ephesians 6:2](#)) puts its folly on full display. That generation sows seeds of conflict that will grow into a bitter harvest of personal and community strife. Many forms in which this proud abomination shows itself: resistance to a parent's authority, contempt of his reproof, shamelessly defiling his name, needlessly exposing his sin, coveting his substance, denying his obligation.

There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes: The generation that is blind to their own stain of sin will never be washed from its filthiness. When we ignore or cover our sin, it never gets resolved. Anyone who thinks he is pure apart from God's divine cleansing conceals an unsuspected depth of depravity ([Proverbs 3:7](#); [12:15](#)). Jesus condemned the self-righteous Pharisees of murder and of belonging to this generation. There is a generation, a group of people, who may observe all outer ritual but pay no attention to inner cleansing (see [Isa 1:16](#); [Matt 23:27](#)). The generation that walks in pride and arrogance will experience God's resistance, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble ([James 4:6](#), [1 Peter 5:5](#)). Who are proud and insolent, advancing themselves, and despising all others in comparison of themselves, and showing the pride of their hearts in their countenances and carriages.

There is a generation whose teeth are like swords: The generation filled with greed devours everything as if their teeth were swords and their fangs like knives. They devour the poor from off the earth and, like the leech, can never be satisfied (give

and give). These cruel oppressors are marked by pitiful cowardice. They vent their wantonness only where there is little or no power of resistance as they devour the poor.

The leech has two daughters: Personifies the blood-sucking horseleech, which had two sucking organs at each end (one to suck blood, the other to attach itself to its host), as a mother of two (see [Proverbs 30:7](#)) daughters. Leech must be quickly eliminated from doing more damage, so also the wise must either exercise precaution to avoid the greedy or take quick and decisive action to get rid of them and so preserve his life and health.

¹⁶ the grave, the barren womb, land, which is never satisfied with water, and fire, which never says, 'Enough!'

Three things that are never satisfied, four never say "Enough!": The thought of the generation that greedily devours everything made Agur consider that there were four things that could never be satisfied. The formula three and then four implies that the list is specific but not exhaustive.

- **The grave, the barren womb**: The dead never seem to stop dying and the grave of humanity never seems to be filled. The barren womb feels the ache of its emptiness and what is often felt like an unfulfilled purpose. Barren women want children. How impatient was Rachel! how importunate was Hannah!
- **The earth that is not satisfied with water—and the fire**: The earth seems to continually drink and absorb the water poured out upon it, and fire will burn as long as there is fuel to burn. These all are examples of things that never seem to say, "Enough!"

¹⁷ "The eye that mocks a father, that scorns an aged mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures."

The eye that mocks his father: This eye belongs to the fool, the one who mocks and disobeys father and mother. This upsets the social order and sets the generations in conflict. His eye reveals his inner state of mind.

The ravens of the valley will pick it out: Agur used a vivid poetic description to tell of the ruin waiting for the child who mocks and scorns their parents. The poetic image is doubled, sending multiple ravens and young eagles to do the terrible but fitting work. This fool was blind in his mocking and disobedience; this poetic image tells of a fit penalty for someone so morally and spiritually blind. The ravens of the valleys or brooks are said to be most ravenous; and the young eagles or vultures smell out carcasses, and the first thing they do to them is to pick out their eyes. The mother eagle shall scoop out such an eye, and carry it to the nest to feed her young. Many of the disobedient to parents have come to an untimely end, and, in the field of battle.

*¹⁸ "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand:
¹⁹ the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock,
the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman."*

Three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four: Agur gave no advice in the proverb, but reminded us all that there are things that are too wonderful for our complete understanding, things we should simply be amazed at and a bit humbled in the presence of. It isn't entirely clear what these four things have in common.

- All four things are visible for a while, then hidden.
- All four things progress without leaving a trace.
- All four things have a mysterious means of progress or motivation.
- All four things move in the domain of something else.

The way of all four wonders move in and cleave to their appropriate and difficult environments according to an invisible course in an easy, intriguing, gracious, undulating manner, without leaving a trace and without being taught, and yet reaching their goals.

- **The way of an eagle in the air:** The flight of a majestic eagle amazes us with its power, height, and grace.
- **The way of a serpent on a rock:** The serpent suns itself on the rock, yet is ready to flee at the slightest disturbance – and can slither itself over hard and sharp rock without injury!
- **The way of a ship in the midst of the sea:** A ship is so small in the midst of the sea, yet it virtually conquers the sea by using it as a road for travel and trade.
- **The way of a man with a virgin:** The power of young love and its desire seems that it would overwhelm both a man and a virgin, but they marry and make a productive life together. This mystery might begin with the manner of obtaining the love of the woman but focuses on the most intimate part of human relationships. So the most intimate moments of love are at the heart of what the sage considers to be wonderful.

²⁰ *“This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, ‘I’ve done nothing wrong.’*

This is the way of the adulterous woman: Like Solomon, Agur presented his wisdom in proverbs to his son or a young man. Surely this proverb also applies to the adulterous man, but because of his audience he has first in view the way of the adulterous woman. The fifth, and unnatural, marvel ([Proverbs 30:20](#)) is that of a person utterly at ease and in her element in sin; an act of adultery is as unremarkable to her as a meal.

She eats and wipes her mouth: Since this woman is characterized by her adultery, her eating here is a tasteful reference to her sin of adultery. She satisfies her hunger for adultery, then casually wipes her mouth and considers herself blameless (I have done no wickedness). This adulterous woman represents many who sin against God, their marriage, their family, their community, their partner in adultery, and their own bodies yet consider it no wickedness at all. She just finishes up and goes home without a care and certainly without a sense of guilt.

²¹ “Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: ²² a servant who becomes king, a godless fool who gets plenty to eat, ²³ a contemptible woman who gets married, and a servant who displaces her mistress.

For three things the earth is perturbed: Using the three-and-four phrasing once again, Agur spoke of four things that trouble the earth: things that are fundamentally not right. Agur gave his list of four unbearable things.

- **A servant when he reigns:** Agur did not mean a man with a servant’s heart like Jesus would later perfectly display. He meant a man with a servile, debased mind, who is a slave to sin instead of a free man. It is unbearable when such a man reigns. The proverb does not have in view a slave like Joseph who rose to power through wisdom ([Genesis 41:41](#)).

- **A fool when he is filled with food:** When a fool is satisfied, it only rewards his folly and gives him the energy and the resources to be even more foolish. This, Agur tells us, is unbearable. Can we wonder that he causes trouble and is a curse, since he gives full rein to his appetite and becomes even more devoid of understanding than before?

- **A hateful woman when she is married:** This is unbearable because the hateful woman should never be able to find a husband, and there seems to be a fundamental injustice when she does. It is also unbearable for her husband and her family, to live with a hateful woman. A hateful woman: “Points to a quarrelsome, unlovable woman whom society rejects, the opposite of a prudent wife. The implication may be that she is naturally unpleasant. The tension from the threat of Hagar in [Genesis 16:5](#) and [21:10](#) shows how unbearable this could be.

²⁴ “Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise: ²⁵ Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer; ²⁶ hyraxes are creatures of little power, yet they make their home in the crags; ²⁷ locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks; ²⁸ a lizard can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in kings’ palaces.

There are four things which are little on the earth: Agur looked to the world of animals and noted four small animals, yet they are exceedingly wise. No human trained them in their wisdom; they are truly taught of God – and so we may also be. **They are exceeding wise:** Size doesn’t determine wisdom. There are big fools and those who are small and not just wise, but exceedingly so. Agur listed these four examples which each teach a principle of wisdom. Wise for animals to denote their skill to cope and their masterful cunning to survive in spite of their severe limitations that expose them to threats that endanger their very existence.

- **The ants are a people not strong:** Ants are small and don’t have much strength compared to a person or a large animal. Their wisdom is shown in that they prepare their food in the summer. They work in the time when work can be done, and aren’t lazy or procrastinators. Hard work can overcome individual weakness.

- **The rock badgers are a feeble folk:** The conies or rock badgers (also known as marmots) don’t have the speed or strength to stand against a large predator, especially

one with sharp teeth. But they wisely make their homes in the crags and make the strength of the rock their own strength. Find refuge among the strong. It shall be our wisdom to work ourselves into the rock Christ Jesus, where we shall be safe from hellish hunters.

- **The locusts have no king:** The locusts don't seem to have any kind of appointed leadership or structure. Yet they have the wisdom to advance in ranks, overwhelming anything that is in their way. If the locusts fought against themselves, they would get nowhere. They fight against the vegetation that they consume. Teamwork can win the day. They are well known for their amazing ability to form gigantic swarms that can wreak devastation of a scale almost beyond imagination.

- **The spider skillfully grasps with its hands:** The spider isn't loved, but it wisely uses its skill and unique abilities to go anywhere it wants to, even in king's palaces. Using your gifts and unique skills can take you anywhere. The spider does her work painfully and curiously, spins a finer thread than any woman can do, builds a finer house than any man can do, in manner and form like to the tent of an emperor. This base creature may teach us this wisdom to be exact in our trades, and labor so we can excel.

²⁹ "There are three things that are stately in their stride, four that move with stately bearing: ³⁰ a lion, mighty among beasts, who retreats before nothing; ³¹ a strutting rooster, a he-goat, and a king secure against revolt.

There are three things which are majestic in pace: For the fourth time in his brief collection of proverbs, Agur used the three-and-four structure to explain four wonderful things, four examples of majesty.

- **A lion, which is mighty among beasts:** A lion has respect from all other animals, moves swiftly, and never retreats. Courage displays majesty.

- **A greyhound, a male goat also, and a king whose troops are with him:** The last three examples are given without explanation. Yet when we consider the speed and grace of a greyhound, we see majesty. When we think of the stubborn persistence of the male goat, we see majesty. When we think of the power and determination of a king whose troops are with him, we see majesty. Each of these moves with majestic pace: swiftly, stubbornly, or powerfully. It is most likely that this was the greyhound, which in the East are remarkably fine, and very fleet. Scarcely any thing can go with greater fleetness, in full chase, than a greyhound with its prey in view.

³² "If you play the fool and exalt yourself, or if you plan evil, clap your hand over your mouth!³³ For as churning cream produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife."

If you have been foolish in exalting yourself: Agur personally expressed his own humility in the beginning of this chapter ([Proverbs 30:1-4](#)). Here he advises his readers to not be foolish in exalting yourself. Instead, follow what James wisely told us to do: *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up* ([James 4:10](#)). If you start to exalt yourself, put your hand on your mouth.

If you have devised evil: If you use the power and resources of your mind to devise evil, then stop. It is better to put your hand on your mouth and not say another word. **The forcing of wrath produces strife:** This is the result of self-exaltation and the plotting of evil. As surely as the churning of milk produces butter and as surely as wringing the nose produces blood, so the expressions of wrath will make for conflict and strife. The wise man or woman knows a better way. Those who make trouble get into trouble. Strive for peace and harmony through humility and righteousness.