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The Prayer of Agur

30: 1-9

A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.

Ancient wisdom for discovering your sweet spot in life.

What is a sweet spot? Tennis players know there is a sweet spot on their racket where the ball jumps off the nylon strings with maximum velocity and precision. When that happens, there's no vibration in their hand and the ball travels straight and true. The same is true of baseball bats and vocal performances. You'll hear players say things like, "It was a fastball right down the middle, and it found the sweet spot of my bat." Or vocalists say, "I love that song. It's really in my sweet spot." Career counselors will describe your sweet spot as the job where your gifts and passions meet with the needs of the marketplace. In other words, doing what you love, doing it well, and getting paid for it. Likewise there is a way **ADONAI** wants you to live. Where you're living with purpose, not futility. Where your senses realize clarity, not chaos. It's not running too fast nor too slow. It's not amassing a fortune or living in squalor. You'll find your sweet spot when you have a sense of belonging because you know **God** loves you for who you are, not for what you have or what you do. Sound good?⁵⁵⁰

Utterance from a collector (30:1-3): These are the sayings and the oracle (Hebrew: *massa* meaning *oracle* or *burden*) **of Agur, son of Jakeh.** It is possible that *massa* is a place; however, the idea of a *burden* normally describes a prophetic **oracle** of some kind. In Hebrew, the name **Agur** can be translated as "collector." Which leads us to ask, "What did **Agur** collect?" As you will discover, **he** was a list maker. The short lists **he** includes in the second half of **his** chapter are the kind of deep thoughts with an ironic twist you might expect from a standup comedian specializing in observational humor. You might say **Auger** was a collector of ideas and questions, which **he** would ultimately share with us.

The name of **Agur's father, Jakeh**, comes from an Arabic root meaning *carefully religious*. If I may speculate, it's possible that **Agur's father** would get caught up in scrutinizing the complexity and subtext of every papyrus scroll laying around the Temple or every word passed down by word of mouth from the days of **Abraham, the Exodus, judges, and kings**. Being carefully religious can be a healthy pursuit, unless getting caught up in the details prevents you from applying **God's Word** to your daily life. I think I prefer the approach taken by **Jakeh's** slightly rebellious **son, Agur**, who uses down-to-earth common sense to observe and reveal the obvious. After reviewing **his** personal lineage. **Agur** introduces us to **his** audience of one.

Agur declared to Ithiel (Hebrew, scholars translate **his** name as *God is with me*). It could be that **Agur** sought out Ithiel as someone with godly insight who might be able to answer his many questions. But you'll notice at this point, **Agur** doesn't speak with great confidence or authority. **He** delivers a mere utterance that suggests some hesitation or searching for the right words. **"I am completely worn out, ADONAI, but I can prevail" (30:1 Hebrew)? Agur** admits to being weary but **he** still wants to say something worthwhile: **I can prevail, he** writes, with a hint of hopeful desperation.

In the verses that follow, our new friend powers through his weariness to formulate some perceptive questions. Still, there's a disarming and welcome humility about his approach. **Agur** is the refreshing opposite of those slick, conceited "teachers" to claim to have all the answers to every question. Personally, I prefer to listen to a Bible teacher who acknowledges his need for **a Savior**. Someone who tells self-deprecating stories and admits **he** doesn't know it all. Therefore, **Agur** declares: **Surely I am the most stupid person alive, because I lack common sense; I have not learned wisdom, nor do I have knowledge of the Holy One (30:2-3 Hebrew). Agur** uses irony and exaggeration to humbly declare **his** ignorance compared to **ADONAI's** unrivaled power and supreme **wisdom**. Despite **his** extensive quest for knowledge, **Agur** knows that **his wisdom** does not come close to the sovereign **wisdom** of **YHVH, the Holy One**. The introduction to his oracle contains **five rhetorical questions**:

Agur asks six questions worth asking (30:4): As **Agur** begins **verse 4, he** speaks with clarity and conviction, asking six questions: **Who has visited heaven? Who has cupped the wind in the palms of his hands? Who controls the seas? Who made the earth? What is His Name? And what is the Name of His Son?** Then **he** answers **his** own questions by saying: **Surely you know!** You have to love **his** confidence. It's the same confidence expressed in **Psalms 19:1**:

The heavens declare the glory of God. Agur is acknowledging that **his** confidence comes from something beyond **himself**. **He's** confirming that anyone who considers the wonder of nature . . . the wind, the seas, the size and scope of the earth . . . must acknowledge **the Creator**.

In the B'rit Chadashah, that confidence is reinforced and takes a step further. **Romans 1:20** tell us that **since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse**. In other words, **the creation** proves there is a **Creator**. There really isn't any excuse for not coming to that conclusion. People who think otherwise are probably a little too distracted with their own personal accomplishments to notice **God's** accomplishments.

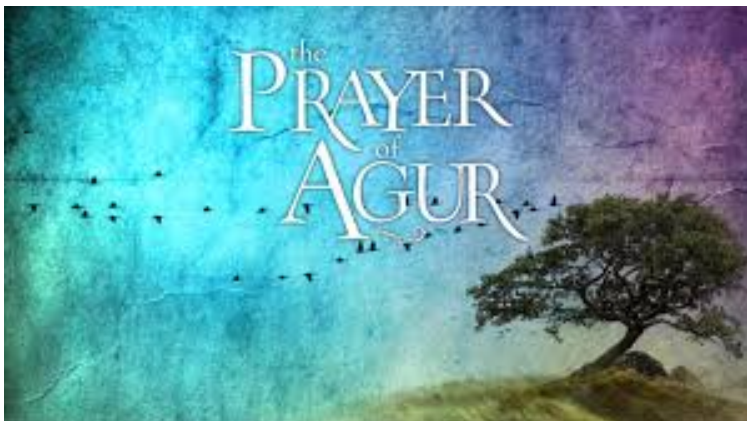
Going back to **verse 3**, **Agur** has just confessed that **he** doesn't **have knowledge of the Holy One**. In **verse 4** **he** explains why. **Agur** has been busy pondering the source of **creation**, deliberating about who or what controls the universe. **Agur** asks big questions. Then **he** lands on the obvious answer. **Surely you know! he** tells his audience with exceeding confidence. Indeed. Surely anyone who has ever contemplated **the heavens, the seas**, or the scope of **the planet** knows that **ADONAI** is large and in charge. While the first four questions center on the idea of creation, the next two bombshells take on the task of identifying who is in control. **What is His Name? And what is the Name of His Son?**

Keep in mind that **Agur's** writings appear in the middle of the TaNaKh. As **he** asked those questions, a great number of names for **the Creator** of the universe had already been established, including **LORD (YHVH), El Shaddai (God Almighty), El Elyon (God Most High), ADONAI (YHVH), Ha'Shem (YHVH), and ADONAI Jireh (ADONAI will provide)**. After a dose of humility, **Agur** reveals a firm grasp on **God's** sovereignty. **His** confidence establishes a foundation for the sincere prayer **he** will be offering in just a few more words. By asking: **What is His Name?** **he** confirms that not only is **God** worth praising, but even **His Name** is glorious. Just as we are commanded in **Deuteronomy 28:58, His glorious and awesome Name** must be revered.

Then comes **Agur's** sixth question. **What is the Name of His Son!** When **Proverbs** came together, anyone paying close attention to the writings of the prophets would have seen scores of verses foreshadowing the coming **Messiah**. But there had been only three references that **the Messiah** would be **the Son of**

God: 2 Sam 7:12-15, Ps 2:7-12 and Ps 89:24-28. The members of **Agur's** ancient audience may have been a bit perplexed since they would not have known the name of **Yeshua** - but that's the nature of prophecy.

Agur takes a moment to endorse Scripture (30:5-6): After establishing **his** humility and stunning **his** audience with insight about **God** and **His Son**, **Agur** tell us that **every word of God is pure; He shields those taking refuge in Him. Don't add anything to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you to be a liar (30:5-6 CJB).** This is reinforced in **Second Timothy 3:16** where we are promised that **all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. Aagur's** warning in **verse 6**, that anyone adding to **God's Word** will be rebuked, foreshadows one of the last verses in the Bible. **Revelation 22:18** promises: **If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book.** That is to say **God's Word** can, and does, stand on **its** own. In **his** own way, **Agur** was saying, "**ADONAI** is eager and able to give you refuge from all the crud of this world. If you go your own way and listen to what the world says, you will suffer the consequences. **Agur** is confirming that the Bible speaks to everyone in the world who is willing to listen. **God's** love extends to every soul. But **God's** protection only applies to those who have surrendered to **Him**. **Agur** doesn't spend any time at all defending the Bible. **He** just wants you to make sure - before **he** begins **his** prayer - that you know where **he** stands.



Agur's Prayer, Part I (30:7-8a): **Agur** wants us to find our **sweet spot** for our finances. **He** begins **his** three-verse prayer with a promise to keep **his** request short. Just **two things. ADONAI, I have asked two things of You; do not refuse them before I die (30:7 NIV).** That's a good strategy for prayer. If we drone on and on with a long list of complaints, frustrations, and requests, we're

going to start adding items we don't really need, plus we'll have a hard time tracking **God's** response. Any time you can boil your prayer down to a small number of specific heartfelt desires - as modeled by our friend **Agur** - you're going to find yourself more aware of **God** working in and through you to deliver answers. So what **two things** does **Agur** ask for? After thinking it through, he identified his top two most hazardous personal weaknesses. The two things that **he** struggles with the most: discerning **truth** and owning stuff.

First, Agur prays: **Keep falsehood and lies far from me (30:8a Hebrew)**. You can almost hear **Agur's** thought process and expanded prayer, as if he's saying, *"I know the world is filled with lies, and they trip me up way too often. Father in heaven, please protect my ears from hearing lies that might lead me down the wrong path. And keep my lips from lying so that I might not deceive others.* I think **Agur** is on to something. **Truth** matters. Whether it's input or output, whether you are hearing it or speaking it, there's **truth** and we know it. It sets us free. Ignore **truth**, and bad decisions result. **Satan, the father of lies**, has been obstructing **truth** since the Garden of Eden, and we all know how that turned out.

An excellent example of disregarding **truth** comes from Pontius Pilate, the wishy-washy Roman governor of Judea who couldn't make up his mind about what to do with **Yeshua**. In **John 18:37-38**, he asks **Yeshua** a series of questions attempting to discern whether **He** really claimed to be a king. **The Master** responded: **You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into this world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me.** Pilate scoffed: **What is truth?** If Pilate had been paying closer attention, he would have known that **the man** he was about to sentence to death was **truth** incarnate. **Messiah** was, and is, **ADONAI's** promise of love, hope, faith, and virtue in human form. Curiously, Pilate suggested more than once that **Yeshua** was innocent, but he caved to public pressure. Once you start denying the existence of **truth**, then every decision you make will be without a firm foundation.

Part I of **Agur's** prayer is a sincere brokenness before **the Creator** of the universe. Somehow **he** knows the destructive consequences of **falsehood** and **lies**. **He** recognizes that the Adversary - even though he is a master deceiver - can't stand up to virtue and integrity. **Agur** wants us to be on the winning team. That comes from hearing **the truth**, discerning **the truth**, and speaking **the truth**. The three short opening lines of **Agur's** prayer also foreshadow one of the key teachings that **the Lord** would give regarding prayer during the Sermon on the Mount: **Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (Matthew 6:13).**

Agur's Prayer, Part II (30:8b-9): The beginning of **Agur's** prayer is a personal request that **he** would give and receive only truth. That's extraordinary, but not surprising. After all, everyone wants to know what's really true. Even liars know lying is wrong. However, **Agur's** second request is a stunner. **He** dares to pray for a life of moderation. **Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread (30:8 NLT).**

Moderation? That's not on anyone's checklist, especially in the twenty-first century. We are living in an age of extremes. For most people, bigger and better. More house. More car. More closet space. More shelves for more trophies. More activities. More responsibility so you can gain more of the above.

On the flip side is another extreme: a subculture of people – even entire communities – who are choosing to live as minimalists. It's not a new phenomenon, but minimalism has recently made it back into the public eye. They are obsessed with cutting up credit cards and cutting down on the amount of clothes they need. Their expressed goals include napping more and living 100 percent debt-free. They are conspicuously moving into micro apartments and tiny houses. Committed minimalists pause before purchasing and practice the "one-in, one-out" rule, they don't buy something without getting rid of something they no longer need or use.

Agur is not endorsing minimalism, or that wealth and influence define success. **He** endorses neither fast nor slow, big nor small, fancy nor simple. Our engaging friend **Agur** has identified **the sweet spot**: the perfect balance of getting what you need and needing what you get. **He** sums it up nicely: **my daily bread**. Any of **Agur's** peers who heard this prayer would instantly connect this request to the daily manna that **YHVH** had provide to their ancestors as they wandered the desert for forty years as described in **Exodus**. **Manna** appeared once a day, provided by **ADONAI** in just the right amount at just the right time (see the commentary on **Exodus**, [to see link click Cr - I Will Rain Down Manna from Heaven for You](#)).

As twenty-first-century readers, we recognize the phrase: **give us this day our daily bread** from **the Lord's** Prayer, delivered almost a thousand years later by **Yeshua** in **His** Sermon on the Mount (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Dp - When You Pray, Go into Your Room and Close the Door](#)). The words are comfortable, and we nod our heads. *Yes, Lord please meet our daily needs.* The thing is, that's not what **Agur prayed**. **He** added the word **only**. That introduces an entirely deeper level of trust in **the One** who provides. Raise your hand if you have the courage to say: **but give me only my daily bread**. Why, by the way, would

anyone pray that way? The last verse of **Agur's** prayer presents two good reasons.

For if I grow rich, I may have too much and deny you, saying, "Who is ADONAI?" And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus dishonor the name of my God (30:9 Hebrew). Do you know your weaknesses? Have you considered when and where you are most vulnerable to temptation? **Agur**, a bright guy who had a lot going for **him**, identified the chink in **his** armor. It was greed. This passage reveals that **he** was well aware **he** had trouble dealing with money. **Agur's** personal obsession over **his** cash flow was **his** Achilles' heel. **He** knew that too much or too little could easily distract **him**. Even destroy **him**.

To be clear, **money** itself wasn't the problem. It was **Agur's** emotional attachment to **money**. That idea reminds us of the often quoted (and misquoted) warnings of the B'rit Chadashah. **The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (First Timothy 6:10a).** It's worth noting that many quote this verse but leave off the first three words. **Paul** was not saying that **money** causes **all kinds of evil**. What **kinds of evil**? **Some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10b).**

Once again, let's applaud the self-awareness displayed by our friend **Agur**. **He** is praying, in essence, "**Lord**, keep me dependent on **You**. **Having complete trust in You is the sweet spot in which I want to live.** I can't do life without **You**." **Agur** also realizes that if **he** has too little, his physical hunger will likely override **his** integrity. **He** will **steal** food and get caught, and **the Name of ADONAI** will be dragged through the mud. **Agur** knows **Deuteronomy 5:19, Do Not Steal**, is still valid, and accepts that **stealing** is punishable by the courts and **God**.

Having more than we need; having less than we need. Both extremes are a lose-lose proposition. But somewhere in between is that beautiful concept known as **contentment**. Is that something you can pray for? Can you pray to have neither too much or too little? Can you pray for *just right*? If having just enough becomes one of your top priorities, you'll find plenty of biblical support. **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. I can do all this through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:12-13); Godliness with contentment is great gain (First Timothy 6:6); Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil (Proverbs 15:16).**

Now let's move beyond **Agur's** temptations and vulnerabilities and talk about yours. Perhaps greed isn't a problem for you. Congratulations! But beyond greed, what about laziness, envy, anger, pride, lust, or gluttony? Commonly called the seven deadly sins, these vices are not listed in the Bible. But they can be a helpful place to start when choosing to do a self-examination of what's broken in your life.

Like **Agur**, if you trust **ADONAI** with your weaknesses, you just might find a satisfying balance in your life. Whether you're lazy or a workaholic, ask **God** to help you find that **sweet spot** balance of work and rest. If you're a control freak, you'll want to find a career path or avocation that requires an impassioned organizer, but ask **the Lord** to help you consciously let some things slide once and a while. Maybe you have a troubled relationship with food, leaning either toward deprivation or over-indulgence. That's a tough one, but without **God's** help, you can find a healthy balance.

No one is saying it's always easy to live in **contentment** with who you are and in every circumstance. From the outside looking in, moderation may even seem boring. But it's not at all. In fact, it's freeing - especially when you invite **God** to help you find your **sweet spot**. Expect to find joy in having things just right.

Whatever character trait causes you problems, there may be a constant push and pull against extremes. Like **Agur**, you'll want to identify when and where you are most likely to feel Satan's tug. In some cases, you may want to seek the help of a counselor, an accountability partner, or trusted family member. And when you find your balance, continue to pray for **God's** protection. Pray that you'll never forget the Adversary's seductive power, because he's always just around the corner. But also pray to cast your cares on **the Lord**. **Don't let your heart be troubled (John 14:1)**. Trust **Him** for shelter in any emotional storm. Trust **Him** for your **daily bread**. This is **ADONAI's sweet spot** for your life.⁵⁵¹