

The Book of Proverbs

Lesson 13: The Words of Agur, Lemuel, and the Excellent Wife -- Proverbs 30:1–31:31

Every long journey has a final bend in the road, the place where you can suddenly see where you have been heading all along. We have walked a long way through this book together. We began at the feet of a father who said, plainly and lovingly, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (1:7). We have heard wisdom call out in the street, watched her build her house, sat at her table, and we have been warned again and again about the smooth words of the foolish and the wicked. Now, as the book closes, the voice changes. We hear from a man named Agur, then from the mother of a king named Lemuel, and finally we are given a portrait, an unforgettable picture of wisdom not as an idea but as a life actually lived. This is the destination. This is where the whole road has been bending.

Agur opens chapter 30 not with answers but with a confession. “Surely I am too stupid to be a man,” he says, “I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One” (30:2–3). It is a strange way to begin a section of a wisdom book, until you realize that this is exactly how wisdom begins. The person who is truly wise is the first to admit how small he is and how high God is. And then, having emptied his hands, Agur tells us where to put our trust: “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him” (30:5). Here, near the end, the book sets a guard over the very thing it has been giving us. Do not add to God’s words. Do not improve on them. Take refuge in them, because they are pure and they hold.

Then the voice shifts to a mother. Most of Proverbs is a father speaking to a son, but King Lemuel passes on what his mother taught him, and what a mother she was. She warns her son against the women and the wine that have toppled kings, and then she lifts his eyes to the people he was placed on a throne to serve: “Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (31:8–9). Real wisdom, it turns out, is never only about keeping yourself out of the ditch. It bends down toward the weak. It uses whatever power it has been given to do justice for those who cannot speak for themselves.

And then the book ends with a poem, the famous portrait of the excellent wife, a woman whose worth is far above jewels (31:10). She works and plans and gives to the poor and opens her mouth with wisdom, and the law of kindness is on her tongue (31:20, 31:26). But do not miss why she is praised. The poem itself tells us, and in telling us it tells us why the whole book exists: “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (31:30). There it is. The fear of the Lord, where we began in chapter one, crowning the very last lines of the book. All the wisdom we have gathered was never an end in itself. It was leading us here, to a life that reveres God, a life that in the New Testament finds its fullness in Christ, in

whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). We have arrived. The journey was always meant to bring us home to the fear of the Lord.

Group Discussion: Looking back over the whole book of Proverbs, what surprised you most about what biblical wisdom actually is, compared to what you thought wisdom was when we began?

Personal Reflection: Agur asked God for neither poverty nor riches, but only for what was needful (30:8-9). Where in your own life are you most tempted either to forget God in abundance or to compromise Him in want, and what would real contentment look like for you this week?

Read Proverbs 30:1-31:31

Study Questions

1. Agur confesses his own limits and then declares, "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words" (30:5-6). What does this passage teach us about the purity, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture, and what does it mean in practice to refuse to add to or take away from God's word?
2. Agur began with humility, admitting he had not learned wisdom or known the Holy One (30:2-3). Where do you most need to trade the appearance of having it all figured out for the honest humility that is actually the doorway to wisdom?
3. Agur prayed, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you... or lest I be poor and steal" (30:8-9). What does this prayer reveal about the spiritual dangers hidden in both wealth and poverty, and how does it reshape a believer's view of contentment and dependence on God?

4. Think about your own relationship with money and security. Which is the greater temptation for you right now, self-sufficient forgetting of God or anxious grasping, and how is God calling you to trust Him with your daily bread?
5. Agur points to the four small but wise creatures and the wonders of creation (30:18–19, 30:24–28). How does God display His wisdom in the created order, and why is it fitting that a book about wisdom keeps pointing us back to the God who made all things?
6. Lemuel's mother warned him against the women and wine that destroy kings (31:3–7). What "small" compromises are most likely to erode your own usefulness to God over time, and what guardrails do you need to set now rather than later?
7. Lemuel's mother charged him, "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute... defend the rights of the poor and needy" (31:8–9). What does this teach us about how God expects those with power, influence, or voice to use it, and how does this anticipate the heart of Christ for the vulnerable?
8. The excellent wife "opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy" (31:20). Whose need has God placed within your reach that you have the means to meet, and what is keeping you from reaching out your hand?
9. The poem reaches its crown with the words, "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised" (31:30). How does this verse draw the entire

book together, tying the fear of the Lord that began wisdom in 1:7 to the fear of the Lord that crowns a finished life, and why is the fear of the Lord, and not charm or success, the true destination of all wisdom?

10. As we close this study of Proverbs, name one specific way Jesus has been forming you through this whole book, one habit, attitude, fear, or relationship He has been shaping by His wisdom, and what is your next concrete step in walking it out in the fear of the Lord?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 2:3, in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; 1 Corinthians 1:24,30, Christ the wisdom and power of God; Revelation 22:18–19, do not add to or take away from God’s words; 1 Timothy 6:6–10, godliness with contentment is great gain; Psalm 19:7–11, the perfect, pure, enduring word of the Lord

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