

Should you pray for more money? (30:7-9)

“Two things I asked of You. Do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the LORD?” Or that I not be in want and steal and profane the name of my God.”

THE TEXT (NASB)

“Two things I asked of You. Do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the LORD?” Or that I not be in want and steal and profane the name of my God.”

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain. KJV - Proverbs 30:7

INTRODUCTION



If we are self-sufficient and think that God is unable or unwilling to answer prayer, then we shouldn't even bother praying. However, if we are going to pray, let's pray “smart.”

Be humble. Don't insult God's intelligence. If we think that God is stupid then we are even more stupid by praying to Him. It makes no sense to pray to God or to any higher power for that matter, unless we genuinely honour their superiority. We'd never petition a weakling or someone less intelligent. Hence we need to ask for things that will please God and not just please ourselves.

If we are going to pray then we need to design our prayers so that they have the greatest likelihood of being granted.



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COMMENTARY

Primer on Prayer

The Book of Proverbs doesn't say much about prayer, but it gives one absolute essential: “He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination,” Proverbs 28:9. This is a very strong warning. Think about it. The person who *turns away his ear from listening*, is ignoring both the message and the speaker. The law is being *read* to him; he does not even need to exert the effort of reading it himself. He is being spoon-fed. If he rejects a good and gracious communication of God's word to him, then God will reject his prayers. It's simple. If we disdain God's law (e.g. the Ten Commandments) then God will disdain our prayers.

Conversely, the more we respect the Bible, the more God respects our prayers. If we want God to listen to our words, we must listen to His. This is exactly what George Mueller of Bristol England, considered by many an expert in prayer, advised on effective praying.

He would reply:

‘First, read the Bible carefully and thoughtfully. Then you will learn more and more about God's character—how kind, loving, merciful, wise and faithful He is. Then when difficulties come, you will be able to rest on God's *ability* and *willingness* to help you.

‘Second,’ said Muller, ‘try to keep your conscience clear. Don't make a habit of doing those things which are displeasing to God. Otherwise when your faith is tested, you will have no confidence in God because of your guilty conscience.

‘Third, don't try to avoid situations where your faith might be tested. Naturally we don't like trusting in God alone but it is when we do this that our faith is strengthened.

‘Finally, remember that God will not test you more than you are able to bear. Be patient, and He will prove to you how willing He is to help and deliver, the moment it is good for you.’



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- Heroes of the Cross: George Muller by Roger Steer¹

Now, let's look carefully at the prayer in the text..

Who is Praying?

Proverbs chapter 30 was not written by Solomon, but by Agur. Who was Agur? The Hebrew word means “collector”—perhaps of wise sayings. Some scholars believe it was an alias for Solomon. I doubt it. Solomon had incredible wealth and would not be praying to avoid riches. I think Agur was someone other than Solomon. Regardless of who it was, he prayed a divinely-inspired prayer about money matters.

Timing



Note that when he says, **“do not refuse me before I die,”** he means give them to me in the here and now, while I am still living. As Adam Clarke commented, “he wishes the answer now, that he may live the rest of his life in the state he describes.” Gill expresses the same idea. It's not that the petitioner is on his deathbed, about to die, or that he wishes to have his petition fulfilled sometime before death. Instead the expression is an urgent cry for an immediate answer. It makes no sense to have such a prayer answered the day before we die. We need answers as soon as possible so that we can live the rest of our lives with the good things being requested. In the grave we can do nothing. We need results while we are living!

Pray Smart



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We all want to avoid **poverty** but according to the text there are two more goodies we should be asking for. They are not what one might expect. The wise don't request abundant *assets* but abundant *life*. Abundant life is interwoven in continual companionship with an invisible God. Look at the text carefully and you will see that Agur asks for **two things** and describes each.

1. Keep me honest. **Keep deception and lies** far from me.
2. **Give me** the optimal amount of money, **neither poverty nor riches**.

It all begins with integrity, not prosperity. It's an unpopular message in a materialistic culture. Wealth obtained through dishonesty does more harm than good.

Translation: *deception and lies*



The Hebrew word for **deception**, **שׁוֹר** (š?we?, pronounced “sh?v”), appears fifty-two times in the Bible and shows up first in Exodus 20:7 where we are commanded not to take the name of the LORD our God “in vain.” According to the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, the primary meaning is “emptiness” and “vanity.” It designates anything that is unsubstantial, unreal, and worthless, either materially or morally. Although this word is also used in the sense of falsehood, as for example in Deuteronomy 5:20, “you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour,” it's used most often in the sense of “emptiness.” This is the first reason why I believe “vanity” (KJV) or “emptiness” is a better rendering of the word šāweḇ, but there is also another reason.

The dishonesty is covered by the very next word in the text, **כִּזְב** (k?•z??, pronounced “kah-zahv”), which means “lie” or “deception.” I believe an inaccurate translation introduces redundancy into the text. I do not believe the petitioner is asking to be kept merely from



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dishonesty, as the NASB and ESV imply by using two words that mean essentially the same thing. Instead I believe that each of the two things he is asking for have two components. Note that the second part of the prayer also refers to two distinct dangers associated with money: Riches and poverty.

Deception and Futility

I feel it's an important distinction (captured by the classic KJV), especially in an age when we sometimes avoid blatant dishonesty but promote falsehood with beautiful packaging to mask emptiness. In the first part of his prayer Agur is requesting protection from:

1. Deceitful packaging, smoke in mirrors, fuzzy numbers, fog, spin, fine print, and lack of clarity—any instance of “nothing” disguised as “something.”
2. Dishonesty, lies, deceit, and untruth.

Now let's look at the second part of his prayer.

Asset Optimization



When it comes to asset management, it's best to optimize rather than maximize. Having too much money can be just as bad as having too little. The optimal amount is best. Everyone knows that poverty causes trouble, but having an excess also brings trouble yet of a different kind. It was the Japanese car industry that popularized *just-in-time* inventory management. They knew that too much inventory is a waste of capital.

A Different Prize

It seems that Agur is more interested in his relationship with God, namely the LORD, than in his financial affairs. His spiritual affairs took precedence over financial affairs. *He loved God more than he loved money. He knew that too much money was just as dangerous as too little.* Agur understands that money is dangerous, like gasoline; it can power engines, but it can also explode, causing great damage. Money needs to be handled carefully. Agur clearly didn't want to offend God or lose God's favour. Agur was humble. Agur had a healthy view of money. He treated money like his d-o-g rather than his g-o-d.

Gimme Food



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It starts with food, and then it affects every other area of need but the most important question is, “How much?” How much is enough food, clothing, housing, transportation, recreation? What is my *portion*? Who decides its size or composition?

Translation: *my portion*



The Hebrew word for **portion**, **קֶחֶק** (q̄ḥq̄, pronounced “kh?q”), is derived from another Hebrew word, a legal term, referring to an allotment or prescribed amount. It appears in 124 verse texts, the first of which is Genesis 47:22 as the Pharaoh of Egypt gave an allotment (ḥōq) of food to his to his priests during the seven years of famine. Usually it refers to a statute or law engraved in a stone, but sometimes it relates to a physical quantity of a commodity.

Job 23:12 uses it to describe Job’s “necessary food” or “prescribed portion.” In Proverbs 31:15 it’s used to describe a wise wife and mother giving a “portion” to her servants. This could mean a portion of food or a portion of work, but in either case the amount is carefully considered. We find the same word in Ezekiel 16:27 as the LORD reduces the “ration” of food to the inhabitants of Jerusalem because of their spiritual unfaithfulness to Him.

Will That be Food or Faith?



Sometimes God compares the nation of Israel to dumb animals like cattle and sheep. How unflattering! God goes further to say Israel’s faith depends on the fullness of their stomachs. “As they had their pasture they became satisfied and being satisfied their heart became proud; therefore they forgot me,” Hosea 13:6. That’s pathetic! Jesus Christ told the crowds that followed Him, “You are following me just because I gave you plenty of free food,” John 6:26. How ignoble! Humans are more stomach driven than they care to admit.

Carefully Controlled Diets



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I know an elderly woman who suffered a paralyzing stroke. She needs to be fed with a tube going directly to her stomach since she cannot swallow. Her diet is a carefully prescribed mixture of vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, fiber, and water so she stays as healthy as possible although totally bedridden. She is fully conscious and able to move one arm, but unable to speak.

Optimal Nutrition



In the same way, Olympic athletes under intense physical training also have very strict diets. Those under intensive care and the very high achievers both have carefully controlled diets. Most others are undisciplined when it comes to food consumption. In reality, we should all optimize our diets. With bad consumption habits we become our own worst enemies. Wouldn't it be great to have an expert dietitian always available to give us the perfect mix of food so that we operate at peak efficiency? That's what Agur is requesting and what God provides.

Rationing Manna

That's also what happened when God fed his people supernaturally with manna in the wilderness between Egypt and the land of Canaan (Exodus 16:1-36). Note that when they over or under collected manna on a daily basis, God supernaturally intervened so that they ended up with the optimal amount (Exodus 16:17-18). This implies that God added and removed some, to ensure that each family ended up with the ideal amount—not too much or too little. The most is not the best! Someone expressed it perfectly, “God always gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him.”

Translation: *full*



One might ask, “What's wrong with being full?” The Hebrew word for



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full, **שבע** (??•???, pronounced “sah-??h”), is usually used to communicate satisfaction with physical nourishment (first in Exodus 16:8). It describes God’s provision of meat and bread to the Israelites escaping from Egypt in order to satisfy their desire for food. The text implies a direct, yet inverse, relationship between a *full* stomach and personal knowledge of God. Too full a stomach dulls receptivity to communication from God. Can it be that simple?

Does a full stomach bring thankfulness? Or does it foster self-centered independence? When fully satisfied, what do you say to God? Thank you or goodbye? Someone once said, “Empty stomachs have no ears.” But it seems that stuffed bellies need hearing aids. Agur knew his own tendency to ignore God when he felt fully satisfied. Avoiding dependence on God is a natural human tendency, at least for the first Adam. The second Adam does not have this problem.

Who is the LORD?

What’s wrong with denying the LORD? According to the text the LORD is also God. When we see the word “Lord” all in uppercase as “LORD,” it refers to the personal name of God the Almighty. It appears first in the Bible in Exodus 3:13-15 where it translates as “I AM WHO I AM,” comprised of the Hebrew equivalent of the letters YHWH, the proper name of God. For many years YHWH has been transliterated as Yahweh or sometimes translated as Jehovah. Refer to Proverbs 19:17 to learn more.

Here’s the point: The LORD is the name of a person, not a force or a principle. Thus to deny the LORD is to deny, and potentially offend, a person—in this case the most important person in existence. Deny Him at your peril. Agur wanted to avoid denying God but he also wanted to avoid insulting God.

Insulting God

To profane the name of God, the LORD, is to bring him into public dishonor. Bragging about someone and then to shame him through degrading behaviour (like thievery) is an insult. Stealing is a form of dishonesty, and so is lying and false advertising. Agur asks for sufficient personal resources so that he will *avoid being in want and* therefore be less tempted to steal.

People will accept bribes easier if their income is inadequate. Often, police forces and public servants are paid very low wages so many of them accept bribes to supplement their income. Scarcity indirectly encourages dishonesty. Adequate pay keeps a person from excessive temptation. Note that the text begins and ends with the same theme: Honesty.

The optimal amount of money maximizes not our assets but our relationship with God.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus warned His followers that riches can easily impair their ability to perceive spiritual realities. Wealth in and of itself is not evil, otherwise it would not be given to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, as noted in Revelation 5:12. The trouble starts when wealth is pursued as a primary life goal.

Jesus taught His followers how to pray in Luke 11:1-3. He advised that people ask for provisions, “daily bread.” Why didn’t Jesus advise to ask for more than just “daily” (or “needful” as some translate it), and why just “bread?” I believe the text gives us the answer. Having too much usually leads to an independent spirit, and an independent spirit is fatal! How’s that? Disconnection from the life-source is always unwise!

Choose life (with its necessities) rather than wealth plus death.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Learn about the LORD before you pray to Him. Study His letter to humanity—the Bible.
- Pray about all your money matters; having too little, too much, the wrong kind or the wrong timing. Don’t think that just having more money will eliminate all your problems.
- Employers: Make sure that you pay your workers a fair wage.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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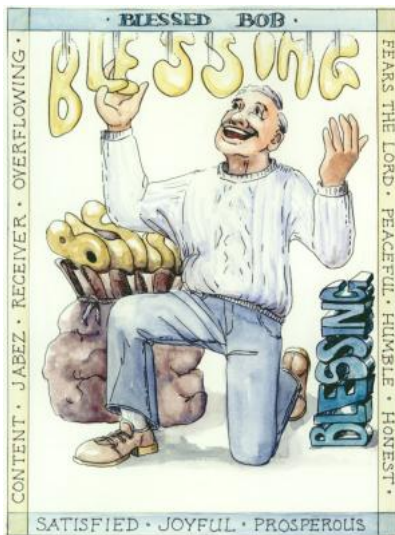
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KEY WORDS

wisdom, advertising, better life (quality), contentment, deceit, food, LORD, poverty, wealth, thief, famine, prayer

ILLUSTRATION

[Who is Blessed Bob?](#)



Blessed Bob is very fortunate. He recognizes that good things come from God! God is shunned by many, but not by Bob. Bob loves God. He wants to receive all the good things that God has for him. He's not too proud to ask God for help. In fact, Bob prays often. Some think that he prays without ceasing. But he is not without fault. Blessed Bob makes many mistakes, and when he does, he admits his errors. He corrects them and presses on.

Bob gets so many blessings he feels overwhelmed. His cup overflows. But he doesn't hoard his blessings. Like Generous Genevieve, Blessed Bob likes to give to others. He is truly prosperous, even though there are many who are financially richer than he is.

We see examples of Blessed Bob in the Bible in the lives of Job and Joseph. Job went through some very good times (Job 29:2-25) and some very bad times (Job 2:7-8). Joseph had similar financial cycles (Genesis 39:2,21). Both men kept their focus on God, not on their financial condition (Job 1:21, Genesis 50:19-21).

More recently we have examples of those who have lived with the same life focus. R. G. LeTourneau was the inventor of the largest earth moving machines in the 1930's and 1940's. He credited God for his tremendous success. He gave away much of his wealth while he was



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still living saying that, "When I shovel money out to God's interests, God shovels money back to me, but God's shovel is bigger than mine." He was called the mover of men and mountains because of his great work and influence. On his gravestone, R. G. LeTourneau left all visitors with these words, SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU MATTHEW 6:33.

Blessed Bob is full of joy. He is satisfied with life!



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FOOTNOTES

¹Roger Steer, Heroes of the Cross: George Muller (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1984), 94.

