

How to Be a Human: Living with Humility, Order, and Wonder (Proverbs 30)

Proverbs: The Wisdom of God as a Way of Life
Zionsville Fellowship | March 29, 2026 | Drew Hunter

We are all equally human in this room. But we're not all equally adept at being human.

Here's what I mean:

Everyone out there driving this morning are drivers.

But they are not all equally adept at being drivers.

We are all equally human, but it takes wisdom to live well.

It takes wisdom to navigate life well.

Some people have more wisdom than others. But it's available to each of us.

This is why we're in the book of Proverbs—because it shows how to live well in God's world.

God designed the world to work a certain way. And he designed us to fit into it a certain way. Wisdom is about discerning God's design and adjusting to it. It is about respecting reality and living in line with it. It is living with the grain of God's creational order. Proverbs shows us who to be adept at being human.

We've seen in our series that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. This is a posture of trusting reverence toward God. It is a posture of humility that respects God and respect the reality he made. It reveres God and embraces his good design for life.

From that starting point, Proverbs leads us in a curriculum of character development. It moves from elementary to intermediate to advanced wisdom. And this morning we begin the final section. It's not an appendix, like some have said—it's the culmination of the whole book.

Proverbs 30 was written by a man named Agur. And he is a model for living with wisdom. He shows us how to find wisdom in two places—in God's word and in his world.

Here's what we'll learn from this chapter: **We gain wisdom by seeking the truth in God's word and seeing the order in God's world.**

This chapter has two sections—verses 1–9, and then verse 10 to the end.

The first is Agur's search for truth in God's word.

The second shows how he sees God's order in God's world.¹

We gain wisdom from both sources—gaining truth from God's word, and then observing order and patterns in the world.

1. Seek the Truth in God's Word (v1-9)

The first step to living adeptly as a human is seeking the truth in God's word.

The first 9 verses take us on Agur's search for truth. Notice how—without wisdom and truth—he feels less than human.

1 The words of Agur son of Jakeh. The oracle.
The man declares, I am weary, O God;
I am weary, O God, and worn out.
2 Surely I am too stupid to be a man.
I have not the understanding of a man.
3 I have not learned wisdom,
nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.
4 Who has ascended to heaven and come down?
Who has gathered the wind in his fists?
Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is his name, and what is his son's name?
Surely you know!

Do you hear his exhaustion? He says he's too stupid to be a human—not because he has a low IQ. But because he lacks wisdom about the deepest realities of life and God.

Now, I want to acknowledge this text is hard to understand.

He is doing one of two things here—and I'm not sure which.

1. First, he may be showing us his search for truth before he found it in God's word. He says he is weary and worn out—as though he is about to give up. He asks, *Who has created all these things? What is his name?* It seems like he doesn't know at this point.
2. Or second, he may be exemplifying true wisdom and humility. The very beginning of Proverbs said that the truly wise are those who know they need more wisdom (Prov. 1:5). The wise know that the more they know, the more they know how much they don't know. If you think you have arrived at wisdom, you haven't.

Now, I'm not sure which of these is going on here—is he showing the search for wisdom before he finds it in God's word? Or is he actually advanced in wisdom and using hyperbole to say he isn't yet wise? I don't know.

But both lead to the same place: our search for wisdom leads us to God's word.

This is where he leads us in verses 5 and 6.

He moves from the search for wisdom to the source of wisdom, which is God and his word.

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

6 Do not add to his words,
lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.

His search for wisdom didn't lead him to despair, skepticism, or cynicism. That is where the postmodern search for truth leads. It leads to your truth and my truth and their truth—which means we've turned truth into opinion.

But this man located the one source of what Francis Schaeffer used to call *true* truth. He says "every word of God proves true." You can't say that about any other person or book in the world. Only God's word. Because God is true, his words are true.

And the goal—as he says here in verse 5—is for us to take refuge in God. We will be worn out in our search for truth if truth is opinion. But when we find the truth in God's word, we can take refuge in him. This is relational—it's not just information, but knowing God.

Then he warns us not to add to God's word. Don't make stuff up and say that God said it. This is why we're committed to biblical exposition here on Sundays, by the way. Because we believe that God's word is true; and my words may not be. When I speak on Sunday morning, I want to do my best to show us the truth of God's word. We want to hear God's word, and we want to know what it says.

And what a warning for teachers who add to God's word here—"lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar."

This leads into a prayer in verses 7–9, which is the only prayer in Proverbs.

When we find true wisdom from God's word, how do we respond? We respond with humble, dependent prayer. And this man only prays for two things here—just two essentials. If you want to know how to pray and what to pray for, here it is:

7 Two things I ask of you;
deny them not to me before I die:
8 Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that is needful for me,
9 lest I be full and deny you
and say, "Who is the LORD?"
or lest I be poor and steal
and profane the name of my God.

What two things does he ask God for?

1. First, to keep him from lying. To help him be radically committed to speaking truth.

Why? Because lying is distorting reality. We want to speak words that align with truth and with God-given reality.

If you have an issue with honesty, your first prayer, your first commitment, should be this one. People should know that they can always trust your words.

2. And second, he asks God to give him neither poverty nor riches.

Why? Because both have temptations that could lead him to dishonor God.

If he is rich, he may become self-sufficient and deny God's care.

If he is poor, he may be tempted to steal and thus dishonor God.

What you do with your poverty or wealth is ultimately about God. Both riches and poverty comes with temptations to neglect or dishonor God.

This is Agur's search for truth—and he finds it in God and his word.

Maybe you resonate with his search. Maybe you are searching for truth and answers.

And you haven't found it. You've read the philosophers and you're left unsatisfied.

Agur says the truth is found in God's word.

And we can now also say—the truth is revealed especially in Jesus Christ. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." If you are searching for truth, I encourage you to explore Jesus. Read the gospels in the Bible—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And ask God to reveal himself and his truth to you.

And if you have already found the truth in Christ and his word—then don't neglect it. The wise know that they lack wisdom—and so they treasure Christ and the Bible. Paul said that in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). So, let's not get bored with Jesus and bored with the Bible.

So, this is the first step in wisdom: seek the truth in God's word.

2. See the Order in God's World (v10-33)

The second step is to see the order in God's world.

And this flows from the first. Remember—Agur was asking who created everything. And once we find God through his word—then we find the one who designed the world. And this means that we can observe the order of the world and learn wisdom. We can see how people live in line with God's ordered reality or not. We can observe the creation itself and gain wisdom from it.

So now we watch Agur observe the order in reality and gain wisdom from it.

Before we look at the details, notice how even Agur organizes his observations with order. From verse 10 to the end of the chapter, he groups things into fours. He makes lists of four over and over. He is observing the world, and he is poetically ordering his thoughts. He is reflecting God's design and order by ordering his own observations.

We'll see six sets of observations.

And my goal here is twofold—because I think Agur's goal is twofold.

1. First, to learn the wisdom he's giving us from his observations.
2. And second, to follow his example—and to observe the order in the world, and begin to make our own ordered observations. To live with curiosity and wonder, and to learn wisdom from this observation.

Think of it like this. God's word does not just tell us what to think. It gives us a lens through which to think. Think of the Bible like a pair of glasses. We don't just look at the glasses; we learn to look through them. And when we do, we see everything more clearly. What was once blurry becomes ordered and clear. That's what Agur is doing here; and that's what he's teaching us to do.

So, six sets of observations.

First, observe arrogance.

One of the marks of true wisdom is *humility*. And we gain wisdom by noticing the opposite, which is *arrogance*. Agur lists four kinds of arrogant people in verses 11–14. He uses striking imagery to lead us away from this kind of life.

- Verse 11: "There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers." To curse a parent is the epitome of arrogance. Rather than blessing and honoring those who gave us life, this is cursing and dishonoring them.

- Verse 12, “There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth.” They are morally unclean, but they think they are fine. They don’t see their sins, character flaws, and blind spots. If someone brings them up, they get defensive and blame-shift. But the humble see their sins, confess them, and receive God’s forgiveness.
- Verse 13, “There are those—how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift!” They lift their eyes above others and look down on them, and it reveals a lifted heart.
- Verse 14, “There are those whose teeth are swords, whose fangs are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mankind.” Pride leads to oppression.

Second, observe endless desire.

This begins in verse 15: “The leech has two daughters: Give and Give.” A leech sticks to you and takes your blood—which is a symbol of life. The daughters are greedy and demanding. Not even a please or thank you—just “give and give.”

This isn’t just about leeches; it’s a picture of certain kinds of people. We all start this way as children—we say “gimme, gimme.” Then we get more sophisticated with our selfishness.

When it gets entrenched, we become the kinds of people who always take and never give. We expect everyone else to call, to visit, to reach out when we’re sick, to give generously. But then we don’t do the same.

This is the consumer mindset that enters into churches. It happens when people demand music, or preaching style, or ministries to be just how they like it. They want the ministries to serve them, but they don’t serve and bless others. Or if they do serve, they think this earns them a right to their demands. They are never satisfied and cannot be pleased.

If they stay at a church, they are typically always bothered about something. Or if they leave, then hop from one church to the next because none of them measure up.

We all have some of this in us. And that’s why Jesus is so compelling. The leech says give, give. Jesus says to people like us—I gave you life, and I give you my life. Take, take.

Then Agur observes four more things that have endless desires in the rest of verse 15–16.

Third, observe astonishing mysteries. He makes another list of four in verses 18–20.

18 Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand:
 19 the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock,
 the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin.

How would you respond if you had never seen a bird—and then you saw an eagle soaring?

If you had never seen a snake before, and then you saw one stationary on a rock. You wouldn't know how it could move without legs. But then it moves with elegance, quickness, across the rock.

Then you see a ship charting a course on the high seas without overturning or sinking.

And it all leads to the final one—the mysterious attraction of a young man and woman. And the marvel of intercourse.ⁱⁱ

And then he gives a contrast—another astonishing way—but in contrast to the young couple.ⁱⁱⁱ

Verse 20 says, “This is the way of an adulteress: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, “I have done no wrong.”

This is astonishing because of how out-of-order and against-the-grain of creation it is. A young man and woman being together the way God designed is a wonder. But this woman treats this act as casual as eating a meal. Then she moves on as if nothing wrong happened.

This is commonplace now in our culture for men and women. Our culture lives with a contradiction: we sense deeply that sex is a mysterious joy. And our culture values it above all else. But then it cheapens it to the value of a casual meal. And we're left disillusioned.

This is because it's against-the-grain of God's good design.

Fourth, observe overturned social structures.

He lists four examples of people who overturn social order. And the consequences are damaging. He says in verse 21, “Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up.” Society collapses under the weight of these four examples.

- Verse 22, “a slave when he becomes king.” This probably refers to an official servant who usurps authority to become king.^{iv} The servant is supposed to be loyal to the king; but when he usurps authority, he becomes a tyrant. Society collapses under his rule.
- Next is “a fool when he is filled with food.” This probably assumes a fool should have negative consequences in life. But instead, this one inherits wealth and is filled up.
- Then, verse 23 mentions two kinds of women who get elevated stations in life: “an unloved woman when she gets a husband and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress.” This is probably not just a woman who has not been loved; it is probably a hated woman who was hated for good reason. And the maidservant probably gained the affection of the husband and displaced his wife.^v

Fifth, observe the surprising wisdom of little animals.

Beginning in verse 24, he lists “Four things on earth are small, but they are exceedingly wise.” They are small and vulnerable—but they compensate with wisdom.

- Verse 25, “the ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in the summer.” If they were strong, they could get food all the time. But they are not, so they store it up.
- Verse 26, “the rock badgers are a people not mighty, yet they make their homes in the cliffs.” Rock badgers don’t have numerical strength, so they wisely hide up in the cliffs.
- Verse 27 “the locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank.” Locusts are vulnerable because they don’t have a leader. And yet they use wisdom to work together without one.
- And verse 28, “the lizard you can take in your hands, yet it is in kings’ palaces.” Lizards can be caught and held in your hand. Yet they make their dwelling place in the king’s palace.

What do we gain from observing these things in creation? We learn the importance of compensating for weaknesses with wisdom.

I have a poor memory, so I write everything down.

I used to miss appointments, so I have a foolproof system for keeping track of my schedule.

What are your weaknesses and vulnerabilities? How do you compensate for them? How can you gain wisdom to compensate?

Sixth, observe those with confidence.

Verse 29 begins to list, “Three things are stately in their tread; four are stately in their stride.” He observes the animal world and sees four that display firm confidence. He lists “the lion, which is mightiest among beasts and does not turn back before any.” Then “the strutting rooster, the [male]-goat, and a king whose army is with him.”

I’m reading a biography of George Washington right now. It is striking how he immediately gave people a sense of confidence. He was tall. He stood straight with good posture. He dressed with dignity. He walked with elegance. And he was never afraid to ride out into danger. His presence gave confidence and unity to the colonies.

This all leads into the conclusion of the chapter in the final two verses.

He shows that this humble posture of wisdom leads to peace; but arrogance leads to strife. It’s a final exhortation to turn away from arrogance and embrace humility.

Verse 32, “If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth.” It’s warning against pridefully setting yourself forward for leadership positions.

If you are arrogant and you become a leader—in a home, in a church, in a company, in the government—what happens? Verse 32 says it will lead to strife: “For pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood, and pressing anger produces strife.” If you are arrogant, you will press against peoples anger rather than calm it. And it will lead to strife.

How to Be a Human

This is how to be human.

There are a lot of drivers out there—but not everyone can drive well. There are a lot of humans out there—but not everyone lives well.

And let’s be honest—the very things we point out about bad drivers, we’ve also done. When we do it ourselves, we have every excuse ready. But when someone else does it, they’re an idiot. But in our humble and honest moments—we know we fail, too.

It’s the same with being human. Proverbs is not written to congratulate ourselves for being wise. It is here to help us acknowledge that we need God’s help. We have all lived with arrogance and foolishness. And we need God’s word, his forgiveness, and his help.

Let’s wrap up with three suggestions for how to integrate this into our lives.

First, seek the truth in God’s word.

Very practically, we need to read his word. We need to meditate and reflect on his word. We need to apply God’s word to our lives.

We talk a lot about engaging with the Bible at our church. And this is why. Because we believe—as Agur said—that every word of God’s proves true. There are a lot of good books and articles and social media posts and podcasts. But only God’s word is thoroughly true.

This is why we commend getting a plan to engage God’s word every day. And not just once a day, but thoroughly integrating it into your life. Jesus said that God’s word is like food—we don’t live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from God’s mouth. So we will be famished for wisdom if we don’t get it from God’s word.

So, maybe you gave up on your Bible reading plan for the year.
Maybe you are committed, but it's hit or miss.
Maybe you used to read the Bible with your spouse or family—but you let it go.
Maybe you believe preaching is important—but you've allowed sports to crowd it out.

This is an invitation to re-engage. To make engaging God's word a non-negotiable. To make a fresh plan to humbly seek the truth in God's word.^{vi}

Second, learn to see God's order in creation.

Let this chapter become an example for you. Agur is not just giving us wisdom—he is modeling for us how to find it. This is what a wise person does: they learn to observe God's world in light of God's word. They let the Bible become a set of glasses through which they look at the world. And they see the order—and can spot things that are disordered.

Agur is just getting us started here. He's giving us examples.
Now we can go and seek to gain wisdom in the same way.

Think about the difference it makes when you start paying attention to order—and you start seeing patterns in creation. And you start seeing the organization of things.

- Trees used to just be trees to me. Then I took an ecology course and learned various kinds of trees and how to identify them. The whole world of trees opened up to me. And then when I started woodworking it all became even more astonishing.
- Fish used to just be fish to me. They were all the same and I didn't care. Then I started fishing and learning how God designed them all differently. The powerful fight of a smallmouth, the crazy psycho personality of northern pike, the beauty of blue gill.
- Maybe you've had the same experience with clouds. Or birds. Or stars and planets and galaxies.
- You can do the same with God's design for humanity. Right now Western society is overturning God's order for gender and sexuality and marriage. People are confused. But none of this disorder will work in the long-run, because it's trying to move against the grain of creation. We're being told that gender doesn't matter, but it keeps re-asserting itself. We are told marriage doesn't matter, and then we see the negative consequences on children.
- And you can observe different kinds of people and ways of living like Agur did—and pray for God to help you like Agur did regarding wealth.

Observe two kinds of conversationalists: Some people are fillers, some are drainers. Pray for God to help you be a filler.

Observe three kinds of husbands: There are passive husbands, there are domineering husbands, and there are husbands who lead with love. Pray to be the one who leads with love.

And what does it take to be able to do this? It takes one thing that we are short on today—and that's time to reflect and think and observe. You can't become this kind of wise person if you fill your life with busyness. You have to slow down. Stop. Be silent. Find time for solitude. Take notes and organize your thoughts. Slow down and be in awe of God's creation.

Did Jesus not teach us to do this? Look at the birds of the air and consider how God cares for them. Look at the flowers of the field and see how God clothes them. And learn this lesson—how God will care for you as well.

And that leads us to the final suggestion: learn wisdom from Jesus.

Jesus embodied everything the wisdom of this chapter perfectly. He lived with a humble dependence on the Father. Jesus meditated on scripture and lived in line with it. Jesus observed the flowers and the birds and the wind and harvest. And he reflected on them and applied their lessons to us.

And there is one moment in Jesus's ministry in particular I want to end with. This is Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus, who was supposed to be a wise teacher of Israel. And listen to how Jesus applies observations about nature, and seems to draw on this very text.

Jesus first makes a connection between how one is born and how one becomes a Christian. He said, "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Nicodemus marveled at this—how can someone be born a second time? And Jesus then made a connection from how the wind blows to how the Spirit makes us Christians. He said, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (3:7–8).

How do you become a Christian? Jesus says—think about how humans are born, and how the wind blows. You need a spiritual rebirth. And you need the Spirit to do this to you—and it's a mystery, like the way wind blows.

And then Nicodemus marveled at this. And Jesus seems to allude to this text in Proverbs 30. Do you remember when Agur was searching for God and searching for truth in verse 4? He asked, "Who has ascended to heaven and come down? What is his name, and what is his son's name?"

Listen to what Jesus said to Nicodemus next: “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (3:13).

Jesus is the end of our search for wisdom. No one has ascended to heaven to find and bring wisdom down to us. But Jesus—the very source of wisdom—came down to us from heaven.

All his words prove true. He lived a life of embodied wisdom. And he invites us to find wisdom by humbly trusting him. We receive forgiveness of sins, and begin the path of living as we were always meant to live. This is how to be human.

ⁱ Proverbs took us through a progressively advancing journey in wisdom. Now, in chapter 30, we come to the “fringe of vast, divine mysteries” (Von Rad, quoted in Ryan O’Dowd, *Proverbs*, 412).

ⁱⁱ This is probably referring to the first experience of sex with a newly married couple (Bruce Waltke and Ivan De Silva, *Proverbs*, 422).

ⁱⁱⁱ “His awe of human eros between a man and his virgin stands in stark contrast to his disdain for the adulteress, who reduces sex with many men to nothing more than eating a meal” (Waltke and De Silva, *Proverbs*, 421).

^{iv} Waltke and De Silva, *Proverbs*, 422.

^v See Waltke and De Silva, *Proverbs* 423. Similarly, Longman says she was hated before she got this position. Now that she has it, she will start to take revenge (Longman, 532).

^{vi} And this is not the same as listening to endless podcasts and reading endless books. It is a plan for making the Bible the primary book of your life—and then judging everything by it. Ryan O’Dowd refers to George Steiner’s observation of “the triumph of the secondary” (Ryan O’Dowd, *Proverbs*, 411). notes that we often focus on “secondary” sources of consumption, rather than primary ones. Secondary ones are reading books about the Bible rather than the Bible itself. Listening to endless sermons rather than listening to and reading scripture. Watching shows about family and friendship rather than experiencing it for ourselves.