

# Prayer of Agur: Feed me with the food I need

Stewardship Sunday 2021 worship guide



## Introduction

For Stewardship Sunday 2021, we chose Proverbs 30:7-9a – a short and powerful text often referred to as the *Prayer of Agur*. The phrase that stands out is when Agur prays, “Don’t make me either poor or rich, but give me only the bread I need each day.” A pretty bold request.

Along with some background, we have provided resources for you to review, adapt and make your own so the final service fits your context. Below you will find: a call to worship, responsive reading, invocation, children’s time, sermon, prayer of confession, offering prayer and benediction. Include your own hymn and chorus selections into the order of worship as fits the preference of your congregation.

May your church be as blessed in your presentation of this worship service as we were in bringing these resources to you.

## Order of service

### Call to worship

God is present in this place!

We come together in corporate worship for personal reflection, for communion with others, and for experiencing the life-changing presence of our God.

As we join in worship together, allow your thoughts to be focused on God, whose presence provides sufficiently, even abundantly, for our needs. May it be so today and every day.

### Responsive reading (based on Psalm 16)

*(from Resources for worship planners, by Christine Longhurst)*

Keep me safe, O God,  
for I come to you for refuge.

**In your presence, O God, is joy and contentment.  
Show me the path that leads to life.**

You are my Lord.  
Every good thing I have comes from you.

**In your presence, O God, I find joy and contentment.  
Show me the path that leads to life.**

I bless the Lord,  
whose wise teaching guides my days  
and centers my mind at night.  
God is always present with me.  
I will not live in fear, or abandon my calling,  
for his presence surrounds me wherever I go.

**In your presence, O God, I find joy and contentment.  
Show me the path that leads to life.**

So my heart is glad,  
my soul is full of joy and contentment,  
and my body is at rest.  
Who could ask for anything more?

**In your presence, O God, I find joy and contentment.  
Show me the path that leads to life.**

## Invocation

Holy God – We invite you into our midst. We pray that you would help us to find our contentment in you – contentment greater than what the world can provide. We pray that our contentment in you will satisfy our longing for enough. As we worship, sing, pray and meet you in this place, we ask for your spirit to move within us. Quiet our hearts. Help us to hear a word from you. THE word that you want us to hear. Amen.

## Children's time

Welcome the children, saying something like, "Today we are going to be reading from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is a book in our Bibles. It is a part of the Old Testament and written a very, very long time ago. But even though it is a very, very old book, it still has good things to teach us."

## Introduction

Introduce the reading with the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. You could say: "How many of you know the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*? Now that story is not in our Bibles, but the story is similar in some ways to our Bible story today."

Goldilocks finds herself in the house of the three bears. Three things happen while Goldilocks is in their house. She tries some of the bear's porridge, she tests out their chairs, and she takes a nap in their beds.

If you know the story, do you remember what she says about the three bowls of porridge? The first bowl was...too hot. The second bowl...too cold. And the third bowl was...just right. Then Goldilocks tries out three different chairs in the house. The first chair she tried was...too hard. The second...too soft. And the third...just right.

Then Goldilocks feels sleepy and decides to try out the beds in the house. The first bed is...too hard. The second...too soft. And the third bed...just right. This story reminded me of our Bible story for today."

### **Bible story**

*...Don't make me either poor or rich,  
but give me only the bread I need each day.  
If you don't, I might have too much.  
Then I might say I don't know you.  
I might say, 'Who is the Lord?'  
Or I might become poor and steal.*

**Proverbs 30: 8b-9a (NIV)**

### **Summary**

In summary, say something like: "Goldilocks didn't want porridge that was too hot or too cold, or a bed or chair that was too hard or too soft. She was looking for something that was just right for her.

That is like what this verse in Proverbs is telling us. It isn't good to have way too much of something. And it isn't good to have way too little either. It is good for us to have just enough. This verse in Proverbs is a prayer to God asking for just enough. Not too much and not too little, but the perfect amount.

So, if you go home and look around and see that you have a lot of something (toys, books, etc.), think about how you could share those things with someone who may not have them. Because it is good for us to have just enough. Not too much and too little."

### **Closing prayer**

God, thank you for loving us and taking care of us. Help us learn to share with one another so we can all have enough. Amen.

## **Sermon: Feed me with the food I need**

**Scripture selection: Proverbs 30:7-9a**

### **Introduction**

We live in a world where we are compelled to always want more. This Stewardship Sunday meditation will challenge you to consider the places in your life where you have too much – too much time, too much

money, too many obligations, too many relationships. The meditation offer ideas to help you pare down what you have too much of and then suggest spiritual disciplines to keep you on track.

### Background

The book of Proverbs is not meant to be read from one chapter to the next. It's a book filled with *mashals*: one-, two- and sometimes four-line poems that give insight into human behavior. The poems are written in a way that makes them memorable and easy to recall when needed.

They are meant to be teaching tools. A teacher or parent would read/recite the *mashal* and then extrapolate on the point the poem was making. In fact, the earliest version of Proverbs was likely used to teach civil servants for King Solomon's vast empire.<sup>1</sup>

While we don't know much about the writer of Proverbs 30, Agur, son of Jakeh, we sense his deep devotion to following God in verses 7-9a, "...give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, "Who is the LORD?" (NRSV)

### Understanding Agur's prayer

Agur's prayer shows an astute understanding of human nature. When we have too much, we can use it to keep God out. When we have more than enough money, we don't need to rely on God because we can take care of ourselves. When we have too many obligations, we find it hard to make time for God. When we fill our lives with relationships, we are caught up in the lives and stories of other people and lose the story of ourselves and the work God wants to do inside of us.

An excellent example of a life of too much is that of King Solomon, the writer of the original edition of Proverbs. In the early part of his reign, King Solomon's eyes were only for God. One night, after a day of worshipping and offering sacrifices, King Solomon found himself dreaming. In the dream, God said, "Ask what I should give you" (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon asked for wisdom in order to be able to lead God's people. God was so happy that Solomon did not choose something for himself, that God not only gave him wisdom but also "riches and honor," verse 13.

Wisdom, riches, honor, fame, a vast empire to rival that of ancient Egypt – Solomon had it all. From the passage in 1 Kings 3, it is clear that all Solomon had was because of God. But as he grew in understanding and wisdom, he thirsted for more understanding and wisdom. He eagerly devoured any and all information he could find, and he began to believe that the point of everything was not God but more knowledge.

In fact, King Solomon's focus had shifted so far from God that in his later years, he built sacred places dedicated to other gods, (see 1 Kings 11:4-5). In his pursuit of wisdom to lead God's people, he pursued wisdom and led God's people away.

### Question for reflection

- In what part of your life, do you have too much; for example, time, talent, money, relationships, work? How has that affected your relationship with God? With others? With yourself?

<sup>1</sup>Miller, John W. *Proverbs: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2004),

When we long for more, how do we keep from turning away from God? How do we determine when we have enough? How do we stay focused on the prayer, "Feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, "Who is the LORD?"

Many modern authors have spent time considering the idea of enough. We will look at three of them. All three of these authors focus their attention on finances, but their ideas can be applied to more than just finances.

Author and theologian Lynn Miller tied the idea of having enough with learning to be content. In his book, *The Power of Enough: Finding Contentment*, Miller suggests that establishing your enough has a great deal to do with the call on your life. Your needs are dependent on calling. If you are called to offer hospitality, you will have different needs than if you are called to prison ministry.

Another view on the idea of enough comes from Mark Scandrette and his wife, Lisa. Mark and Lisa live a "call to radical simplicity." They sat down and established what their minimum standard of living would be so they could pour themselves into ministries that they would not be paid for. This included identifying things like saving, retirement savings, even health insurance, as luxuries. Their income would go to pay for housing and food since those were essential needs.

The third view is from John Cortines and Gregory Baumer in their book *God and Money: How we discovered true riches at Harvard Business School*. Their Ivy League education and opportunities propelled them into highly compensated employment. As Christians, they felt a call to not be controlled or consumed by consumption. John and Gregory each chose a spending limit and everything above that limit would be used for generosity.

### Question for reflection

- Think of the places in your life that are "too much." Are they part of the calling God has put on your life?
- In those places, how much would you really need to follow your calling?
- Could you put a limit on your "too much?" What would make that difficult?

From the above three examples, we learn that we can use several tactics to determine how much is enough for us. We can look at our calling and the plans God has for us. We can decide what we need and/or we can create a limit that keeps us from going over what we have decided.

Here is a personal example that uses the above strategies. A mentee of one of our team members wants to live a life of zero waste. Here's the experience our team member shared...

"She sent me YouTube videos of people who live very intentionally with very little. After about the third video, I was feeling convicted. While I didn't want to live on only two pairs of pants and three shirts, I felt challenged to tackle my wardrobe. I started by asking myself, 'Does this item of clothing bring me joy?' Another way of saying that might be, is this part of my calling to be me? Do I feel like myself in this item of clothing?"

By asking this question, I was able to put five items in the Goodwill pile. That wasn't very much – my closet was still full.

Then I thought about how I wear my clothes – in other words, what do I need? I work in a professional office, which means five days of dressy clothes and two days of casual clothes. I looked at my closet again and realized I could give away more of my casual clothes because I needed fewer of them. The Goodwill pile got bigger.

Finally, I decided to create a limit. I would only keep clothes that I wore at least three times a month. It didn't seem like a big limit, but I knew myself well enough to realize that I get bored wearing the same things and if I didn't give myself enough options, I would just buy more. The Goodwill pile got even bigger.

What I didn't anticipate was the feeling of relief I experienced when my closet emptied. Somehow, looking at my packed closet gave me a feeling of being pressed. Now that my clothes had room, so did my spirit. I was no longer looking at clothes that didn't fit me anymore; that were too tight, didn't look good on me, represented a different time in my life, an old relationship or a past from which I needed to move on.

I thought that by having more than enough clothes in my closet, I was giving myself options to express myself. What I realized was that I was hanging on (clinging) to things that I didn't need to hang on to – and that letting go gave me more freedom to be the person I am now."

### Question for reflection

- Where are the places in your life where you have too much (in your closet, pantry or collections)?
- Spend some time thinking about why you want to have so much of that. What need does it fill?
- What would it be like if you could let go of some of that "too much?"

### Spiritual disciplines

As we learn to live with enough, we can use spiritual disciplines to keep our eyes focused on God. Spiritual disciplines are ways of practicing our Christian life – they can be thought of as regular exercises that help build spiritual muscles.

According to author and theologian Richard Foster in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, spiritual disciplines can be broken down into three categories:

1. Inward spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting, meditation and study in the Christian life.
2. Outward disciplines: simplicity, solitude, submission and service.
3. Corporate disciplines: confession, worship, guidance and celebration.

Here are some ways you can use these exercises as ways to help you live a life of enough.

1. Inward spiritual disciplines:
  - a. Prayer: ask God to give you a desire to change that part of your life where you feel you have too much.

- b. Fasting: think of your “too much,” and decide to stop adding more of it for a week, month, or season. See how that changes your desire or need for it.
  - c. Meditate: on your desire for more, ask God to give you insight into why you crave what you do, why you feel that you don’t have enough of it.
2. Outward disciplines:
- a. Simplicity: consider living with less for a time. In my clothing example, I could have chosen five outfits and worn only them for a month.
  - b. Solitude: spend time being alone with God. If you have never done this, start with 15 minutes, every day. Invite God into that space.
  - c. Submission: submit your desire for your “too much” to God. Every time you long for it or think about it, submit that desire to God.
  - d. Service: find ways to use your “too much” in service of others.
3. Corporate disciplines:
- a. Confession: find another person that you can trust, tell them what you are trying to do, ask them to hold you accountable and be willing to confess when you have fallen back into your accumulating ways.
  - b. Worship: every time you crave your “too much,” spend time in praise and worship to God instead.
  - c. Guidance: ask God for guidance, spend time listening to God in prayer, reading scripture, seeking counsel from your pastor or others.
  - d. Celebration: celebrate your life, write down all the things for which you are grateful. Thank God for all that you have.

## Conclusion

Agur’s heart was focused on God and he wanted to make sure that would not change. He had seen the impact of King Solomon turning his eyes from God to wisdom. As you contemplate those places in your life where you have too much, consider ways in which you can find “enough” by looking at the life God has called you to live.

Are you called to be hospitable? Are you called to be in service? Are you called to meditate? Whatever your calling, focus your eyes on God and ask God to help you determine what it means to have enough within that calling. Use spiritual disciplines to keep you on track and practicing living a life of enough.

Let’s conclude by praying part of the prayer of Agur, “Feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, “Who is the LORD?”

## Prayer of confession

*(from Words for Worship, by Arlene Mark, page 177)*

Almighty God, source of all life, giver of all that is good, we gather to offer our praise and thanks.

The richness of our lives, when we stop to take measure, is more than we can comprehend. We have blessings of joy and hope, the challenge to labor and the luxury of leisure. Your world is full of wonder, and its beauty delights us.

We praise your generosity and confess that we are ungenerous receivers. We are slow to share and quick to squander. We take for granted what we have and anticipate more.

Give us an awareness of our blessings so that we will share joyously and live responsibly. Give us a sense self-worth so that getting things does not usurp other values.

For all your goodness, let us express our gratitude by genuinely caring for our world through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### Hymn

#### Offering

*(from Suscipe by Saint Ignatius)*

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace; That is enough for me.

### Hymn

#### Benediction: A prayer for vision

*(from Sir Francis Drake, 1577)*

Disturb us, Lord, When we are too well pleased with ourselves; when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little; when we arrived safely because we have sailed too close to shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of the things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the water of life. Stir us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas, where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes and to push us into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love.

Amen.



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