

“Building Our Homes God’s Way”

Psalm 127

There are 150 Psalms and they were collected together under the Spirit’s guidance into 5 smaller books, which you will see headings in your bibles at Ps. 1 [Book 1], Ps. 42 [Book 2], Ps. 73 [Book 3], Ps. 90 [Book 4] and Ps. 107 [Book 5]. But even within these larger collections, we have mini collections like the Psalms of Ascent in Book 5, starting at Ps. 120-134, fifteen in all. I say all that because the Psalms are not random collections but Spirit-inspired thematic collections. And even in the Ascent Psalms we see an organized pattern.

What are the Ascent Psalms? The Ascent Psalms were songs that the Jewish people sang during those feast days when they were required to go to the Temple in Jerusalem. Kind of like our Christmas Songs, or Easter songs, songs that we typically sing at a specific time to celebrate one of God’s holy days. The context of them gives us some insights into the journey. There is a general progression: 120-122 they are travelling. There is anticipation, anxious about trouble in the hills and the arrival and desire for shalom. In 123-126 they are worshipping and praying to God to improve their circumstances and remove suffering. It’s not an easy trek to get there. It’s a steady climb, and there are dangers all around, as well as dangers back home where they left and to which they must return. Psalm 127 & 128 are in the middle of this unit for a reason. Then there are more prayers for removal of oppression and suffering in 129-131 and strengthened hope in God’s promises. Then in Ps. 132-134 we see they are leaving; they are blessed as they go, they are reminded that God’s anointed is still to come. They have been strengthened in coming to worship and fellowship, they are ready to go home.

But Ps. 127 & 128 are placed in the center of this unit, which means they are the focal point and both of them have to do with the blessing of family. Ps. 128 is a prayer for a blessing over the family who “fears the Lord” (128:4) and Ps. 127 is a reminder to do just that so you receive God’s blessings.

We all want that for our families. We want our children & grandchildren to know the Lord, to be used for His purposes. We want them to be safe, healthy and happy, BUT do we want that because God is in their life and ours or do we just want them to be safe, healthy & happy – without God? Because that’s the question this psalm addresses. Notice the abrupt beginning of the psalm:

¹ *Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.* ² *In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves.*

If we want the blessings of Ps. 128, we have to heed the warning of Ps. 127. The first two verses are a challenge to parents:

Will Raising our Families be Faith-filled or Futile? **(127:1-2)**

The reason why we know the message is for families is because the emphasis on building a house and the blessing of children. As well, God commanded the men to go to Jerusalem three times a year (Deut. 16:16-17).

Deut. 16:16 Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the Lord empty-handed: ¹⁷ Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.

Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost/Feast of Weeks and Tabernacles were all family celebrations. The husband was to lead his family to go and worship the Lord. This is a guiding principle of the Bible: the father leads his family spiritually. Ps. 127 is a reminder of that principle, through two word pictures: do you want a well-established house that withstands the storms? Do you want to protect your community? Who doesn't? What parent doesn't want to have a safe place to live where they can raise their family? If God isn't in it, you're efforts are futile. If we want God's blessing we need to

Follow God's blueprints (v.1a)

For a stable home. So how do we know what to do? How does God build our homes? How does God protect our family? He gave us instructions in His Word. "Unless the Lord builds the house ..." implies we must do it His way. There are many illustrations in the Bible about building badly. People tried to build the Tower of Babel without God, and He didn't let them finish. A monument to man's futility. Or we can build a house without God, only to have the storms of life destroy it, says Jesus in Matt. 7:24-27. Or, we can celebrate our success by building more barns, but Jesus reminds us we never know when God may say our time is up, and we lose everything we built our life on – without God (Luke 12:13-21). James 4 warns us not to make plans without acknowledging God's sovereign hand on our life.

There are many people who have succeeded in life and failed at home because they were focused on success and wealth, and many lost their families. If we're not loving our spouses and leading our families to God, Solomon says it's vain – echoes of Ecclesiastes. If we're not living by faith in God all our efforts are futile or vain – empty. And we do put a lot of effort into our home life; sometimes too much.

² *In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves.*

Notice he doesn't stop after "late". It's not vain to get up early and stay up late if the reasons are right. Depending on the stage of life, we sometimes have no choice. What he's warning about is being anxious about work and home life as if we have to do it all.

Let go of our anxious efforts to control (v.2)

Our children, our finances, our jobs, ... When we try to build all these things without God we end up worrying about so much because we think we have to do everything. Now, the opposite of that is to do nothing and wait on God to do everything. Well no, we have to obey His Word to raise our families and work. But if we know the Lord, we have to trust the Lord to meet our needs because He's in control whether we acknowledge Him or not. In Matt. 6 Jesus said

^{6:25} *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not*

even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Don't try to control your children or your spouse or your life. That's little faith or no faith. That is futile and leads to anxiousness and makes for many sleepless nights. Trusting God leads to trusting while we sleep. Do you think its just a coincidence that God created us to have to be unconscious for almost one third of our life? "But I can get more done if I sleep less." For a while, and then you'll crash. And sleeplessness clouds our thinking. What's the most important theological lesson about sleep? Each night we have to

Trust He's working in ways we can't see (v.1b)

How do you watch a city with the Lord? You set up your guards but you pray that God will watch over the areas you can't see and can't get to. We watch a city without the Lord by only trusting in our own resources. But we can't see very well in the dark. Yet God sees in the dark. God doesn't sleep. He's working when we can't. We need to pray for Him to work in our family's lives because we can't always be with them and see everything they are doing or know everywhere they are. We know God is referring to our families because of vv.3-5 and that the allusion to building a house is used numerous times in the Bible for our households not the building itself. Solomon wrote wisdom literature. Much of Proverbs has to do with raising a family. Instructing our children in the ways of the Lord. So there's no need for a segway in v.3 to explain this is about families. He knows we should know this, so he just continues:

3 Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. 4 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. 5 Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Solomon reminds us that our families are God's gifts to us. Do we see them that way? Here's the second question:

Do We See Our Families as Blessings or Hindrances **(127:3-5)**

Raising children is stressful and challenging. We cannot be as productive in whatever we want to do, because children take up a lot of our time and 'hinder our aspirations', when we're not seeing them from God's perspective. The reason why children are a blessing from the Lord is to rescue us from living for ourselves. The sooner we learn that life is not about us, the sooner we'll appreciate what God has given us. I wonder if anyone has ever done a study on how much people laugh when they have young children and how little we laugh when we don't have them around? Their simple trust, easily entertained and healthy naivete, make us laugh constantly. We need them to lighten up and take ourselves less seriously. The only goal God is concerned with for us is Christlikeness because that's God's goal for us. Not our worldly successes but our spiritual advancement. So,

Thank God for the gift of family (v. 3)

We all like gifts. When someone gifts you, what's our response – 'Thank you!'. Family is a gift we can say Thank you to God every day. Thankfulness keeps our hearts soft. Paul tells us in Phil. 4:6-7, that being thankful helps reduce anxiety,

⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Sons are a heritage or "inheritance" from the Lord. Don't we usually get an inheritance after someone dies? God's saying, its right in front of you, everyday. Do we thank God for it, or do we grumble sometimes because our schedule, our plans or our desires are hindered temporarily. Maybe that's God's way of reorienting our priorities and desires.

Family pays dividends according to Solomon here:

⁴ *Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth.* ⁵ *Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.*

We have another illustration. Children are being compared to arrows, and a quiver is the arrow container. What do we use arrows for? Defend ourselves when we're attacked. In the ancient world, the city gate was the place where business transactions were conducted and where conflicts and disputes were brought for justice. Parents' children can speak up for them and defend their honour because they know better than anyone else what kind of character qualities mom and dad have. At home we are seen for all that we are. What's Solomon talking about here?

Thank God for the security that your family provides (vv.4-5)

When we're being attacked at work or in the world, we have a place of protection when we come home. They stand behind us and vouch for us. It's much easier to contend with your enemies when you know you have support. Maybe that's why the Bible describes us as family. That we have spiritual fathers and mothers and spiritual sisters and brothers in Christ. That we too need to come together and support each other when we're under attack.

I can recall when I was first saved that there was now tensions I experienced from my parents before I moved out. They were not happy with my newfound faith. And then I went to work and I was the only Christian there. Now your trying to defend yourself because you don't participate in things the way you once did. 'You're no fun anymore?' But I had a new spiritual family, who prayed for me and encouraged me when I met with them. That 'family' relationship was crucial to my spiritual growth.

And our love and involvement in helping our families grow in the Lord is crucial to their spiritual formation. Yes, its busy. Yes, it limits our goals and desires at times. But now's the time to revisit those goals and desires and ask ourselves if they are God's goals and desires or our own. Because if they are solely our own, then whatever we're trying to build without God is vain.

How many of us here want to live a vain and futile life? No one? Great. That means we all want to build what God wants us to build. He wants us to build for sure but He wants us to build that which lasts for eternity. Thank God for your family every day. Thank Him for the security they give you. Keep following God's Words and impact their life as long as you live. Don't try to control them and reap a lot of anxiety. Let God do His work which we often can't see so that He is glorified through all that we do. When we want to see God glorified in raising our families we will also receive the greatest joy we can.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message, please
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