

XXVIII. God's Blueprint in Biblical Perspective

Foundations From Genesis

The Family: Parenting – Part 5

Psalm 127

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We will be looking at Psalm 127 for this study. I wanted to use this text as our concluding study on sanctity of life in general, the sanctity of family and in particular Biblical parenting, but I also wanted to get to it because of the place that this Psalm has in God's kindness that has been ordained to have in my life. I'm hoping and praying that we'll have that dynamic in your life. There are some Psalms that have just undergirded my life for which I am forever grateful. In the days of adversity, I have loved to just be absorbed in Psalm 127. In the days of challenge, I love to just revisit Psalm 46, but Psalm 127, while with great application to Biblical parenting, it is a life stabilizing psalm. It is one that goes beyond parenting into every area of life because of the theology that it presents, the assurances that it makes and the promises that it portends. Therefore, I want to walk through the psalm with you and then do some distillation with application in terms of parenting itself.

This Psalm in its content is gloriously and majestically life stabilizing. It is stabilizing to me to know that God has warned me and informed me that you can do nothing apart from Him. Without Him, I can do nothing, but it also transforms and stabilizes when I hear a corollary verse that declares to me, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). Oh, I can make every attempt in the world to do things without Him. I can plan my life. I can go get an education. I can do this and do that, but in terms of establishing that which is pleasing to God and that which endures forever, I can do nothing – not out of the strength of the flesh. The flesh profits nothing. It is the Spirit who gives life, but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

How does He strengthen us? He does it through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, with His Word that provides strength to the sinews, power to the muscles, spiritual muscles. That's what I need in my life, and that's what I need to depend upon. I am so grateful for covenant vows that keep reminding me of this. Here are covenant vows in baptism that we take; in humble reliance upon divine grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, I will endeavor... It begins with humble reliance, with absolute dependance upon God's grace and God's Spirit. Our covenant membership vows are; in humble reliance upon divine grace, I will seek to live a life that honors my Savior... Our ordination vows are; in humble reliance upon divine grace in the power of the Holy Spirit...

Psalm 127 underscores for us a basic truth. It does so with penetrating negative statements, and it does so with powerful, positive statements. I want to distill some observations from it and then give you some applications. This is a unique psalm in that almost all of the Psalms in your Bible are Psalms of David but there are some Psalms from Solomon, and this is one of them. This Psalm is from a son of David, Solomon. Psalm 127 is entitled Unless the Lord Builds the House. It's included in that section of Psalms that are sung coming up to Mount Zion to go to the temple for worship. It's called a song of Assent. We try to picture that pattern of ascending to the praise of God, singing praise to Him in our opening hymn each Sunday that reads in our bulletin; A hymn of assent into the presence of God. These are glorious God centered hymns. They're a place for psalms that focus upon our need, our repentance, our lament

but this is one of those Psalms that focuses on the majesty and transcendence of God as we come to worship that God.

Let's look at Psalm 127. He starts two times saying the word 'unless.' Psalm 127:1 says *[1] Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.*

In other words, he is not saying that someone who is laboring to build a house doesn't end up with some kind of a house in structure, but that house, built by our strength, does not stand the purposes of God or for the purposes of eternity. That takes the Lord to build that house and that's a house that is a house of blessing instead of ending up as a house of vanity.

I want you to be on the alert for the word, vain. When I see that word in some place like the Psalms, that is part of that quadra of literature we call wisdom literature, you immediately think of another wisdom book, and that's the book of Ecclesiastes, in which it states all is vanity and striving in the wind without the presence and power of God. That is exactly what Solomon is saying here. In other words, when you study Psalm 127, I believe you're studying a song that was written by Solomon as a distillation of what he wrote in Ecclesiastes.

So, unless the Lord builds the house, then your buildings are vanity, emptiness like cotton candy, sugar coated because there will be an immediate sense of pleasure, just like cotton candy when you put it in your mouth for it will taste pretty good for a moment, but there's nothing to it. It's gone. It's empty. It's vain. All you got was just sugar-coated air with cotton candy. That's what this labor is. The house is there. You get the keys, you walk in and there's that moment of exhilaration but that's what it is, a moment. There's nothing of endurance to it. There is nothing of eternality to it. For it to have endurance, gravitas, eternal impact that house that is being built, the Lord has to build it through the builders. It is the Lord who builds it, otherwise it is in vain.

Now in that same verse he brings a second negative statement. He goes from a house being built to now the calling of a watchman on the wall. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. We have a great example of this in the Bible when the Lord was going to set His people free from captivity in Babylon. His people will be in captivity for 70 years but the very nations God uses to bring them in captivity are the very nations God will bring discipline upon. So, while God brings His redemptive work into the life of Nebuchadnezzar, He brings the witness of Daniel and his three companions to the Babylonian Empire, there comes a time in which the Babylonians feel the wrath of God, the temporal judgment of God, as they are dismissed by the Medo-Persians.

Even in moments like this, there is revelry going on. The Book of Daniel says there are parties going on and the nations think they are secure due to the size of their armies, their fortresses, their centuries, their watchmen, their power, their chariots, their horses and they think they can't be touched. Then comes that statement we even use today – the handwriting is on the wall. For that evening they will fall even though they feel secure in everything they have.

If you want to hire a security guard, then praise the Lord. If you want to put in a security system, then praise the Lord but that's not your confidence. Your confidence is not in a person, not in technology, not in anything and it doesn't mean we don't make use of it. God has made us rational, not irrational. God has made us logical, not illogical, but our confidence is not in the mechanisms that exist or the individuals that exist. Our confidence is in the Lord. Again we see the language of vanity here. If you are made a captain in the army and given the night watch, if you fall asleep, in almost every army, that is a capital crime, and you're put to death because you have now positioned all of your comrades and colleagues for destruction by your lack of attention. And it is a declaration of having not done what you were called to do for the sake of

others. Therefore, since you endangered their life, sentries who have fallen asleep historically are given that capital punishment.

A watchman stays awake. They don't take a nap. The Psalmist is telling them with all of your efforts to be alert, which is certainly appropriate and certainly the Lord can use that. But you're not to be dependent upon technology, yourself, or your abilities. It is in the Lord Himself. Our efforts are actually empty unless the Lord attends it with His blessings of common grace or redeeming grace in His Providence. Then the Psalmist switches from the warning of vanity without the presence and the power of God – the negative – to the positive in the next verse. This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible.

Psalm 127:2 says [2] *It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.*

I had a friend that I used to pray with when I was in college and he always loved to pray at 5:00 in the morning. He would say, 'Early, shall we seek the Lord?' I'll never forget that but I explained to him that the most beautiful part of the day is not the dawning, but the gloaming in the evening. I would say 'that's the time that we need to meet with the Lord' but he never was convinced of that.

Here we have been given an insight. This is not saying, should I get up early or should I sleep late or should I go to bed early or go to bed late? Although I will tell you what my mother said; 'Nothing good happens after 11:00pm.' This is what I heard when I was growing up and here is what my father said; 'Every hour of sleep before 12 noon is worth 2 hours of sleep after 12.' To me, those were some amazing insights, although I'm not sure you will find them in the Bible. But here is a declaration of a person that rises early, goes to bed late, engages in life but what is driving and sustaining this person? They are eating the bread of anxiety, fear and worry. Your work is not out of joy to the Lord. Your work is out of the vanity, that if I don't do it, then it can't be done and I must depend on myself.

In other words, this is the guy that goes to bed late because he's working late. He gets up early, not out of joy but anxiety. This is the guy in his study that has this horrendous needle point from the doctrine of demons – God helps those who help themselves. In other words, God depends on us to do what we do, which allows Him to do what He does. That does not lead to joy, that leads to anxiety, fear, and oppressive concerns. I do not believe that concern is sinful. The same Paul who says not to fear and to be anxious for nothing, is the same Paul that tells us of his, "concerns for all the churches." So, is there a place for God informed concern that leads us to God centered action in life? Yes, but these manmade fears and manmade anxiety is based upon the notion that if I don't get it done, then God can't get it done. This person is glad to have God as a coach and a helper in the areas of their inabilities but they ultimately rely upon themselves.

The Psalmist then makes an astonishing statement at the end of this verse – *He gives to his beloved, even when they sleep.* Most of us have read the books that give us medical advice on the value of sleep. My mother believed in this, so whenever I got sick, she would give me an aspirin and tell me to go to sleep. After I got married and we had kids, I can't tell you how many times my wife said to our kids when they came into our room because they didn't feel well; 'Honey, go get a glass of water, take two aspirin and go back to bed for you will feel better in the morning.' In other words, she believed that sleep was beneficial.

This text isn't talking about the fact that God made rest as a part of our life in terms of the rhythms of life. We see this in a week, for six days you labor and then you have a Sabbath in which you rest from your labors and rest to go into labor. So, there is the gift of the creation

Sabbath for us. It's a part of life and then God provides for us every day. We rise to do work for the Lord and then we rest at night and then do it again the next day. At night we're not only resting from physical, mental and emotional labor but we're resting from metabolic labor. That's why the first meal of the day is called breakfast – break fast – for God has built feasting and fasting daily and weekly into our lives.

What is your perspective on it? Do I work? Yes. Do I rest? Yes, but here's what I know. When I am resting in the Lord, the Lord is never resting. He gives to His beloved not only well-being because sleep is therapeutic, but He gives to His beloved providentially. I have been in the pastoral ministry now for four decades and I can't tell you how many times a sermon outline will come to me in my sleep, not in my dreams and I will actually get up and write it down. I keep a small pad and pen on the nightstand next to where I sleep because of this. I might even get ideas, thoughts or clarity during the night. So, God not only gives to us mentally, medically, emotionally and physically, but He also gives to us intellectually, even while we sleep.

Now, is this a statement that is telling us, if you want to be effective in life, then sleep all the time? No, in other words, sleep is not being designed as a means of grace right here. It is a gift of grace, but it is not a means of grace. It is telling us that the same God who works according to the ordained means of grace in ordinary affairs of life, is not stopped by our sleep. He can actually give to His people. His providence has extraordinary as well as ordinary means in our life.

This is why, as see these rhythms of life – Sabbath, work, rest, feast, fast – you can engage in them under the sovereign hand of God knowing that when you're doing the God ordained rest on a Sabbath or in an evening, God's hand is not shortened. On the contrary, He does and is giving, in those moments when you're resting by His design and when you're resting in Him, because when you're not resting and working, you actually are still resting in Him. You're not depending on your toil, but on the One who works in you. You are working out with dependance on what He is working in. Now the Psalmist moves from this to the matter of family and then children.

Psalm 127:3-4 says [3] *Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.* [4] *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.*

Children are an inheritance from the Lord. The womb is not an entitlement. The womb is in the providence of God – a reward and when children are entrusted to us who are a blessing from the Lord are raised to bless the Lord. They become worshipers and warriors. They then are raised by us in the Lord, the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to bless the Lord and to be a warrior, like an arrow in the hands of the Divine Warrior.

According to this passage, my encouragement in parenting, is that you have your children while you're young. I can give you many reasons for that. One is the gift of idealism, and one is the presence of energy that you desperately need with children. They are born with energy. So, you need the energy in parenting. One of the blessings of grandparenting is I don't need energy. I just show up when I can have fun with them and then just turn them over when we're done. Just like last Saturday, I had fun with one of my grandchildren and as we spent time together. We went to Mapco and we both got our frozen coffee as I showed her how to sweeten it up. After that time together I then dropped her off with her mother and said, 'Y'all have a great day. I had a great time with her.' That's something I need to do because I can't keep up with her all day, but as a parent you do. We need some rationality in this matter of childbearing. Let's continue in the passage.

Psalm 127:5 says [5] *Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.*

I preached a sermon on this in Charlotte, North Carolina. I made the comment that if you were a soldier in the Civil War, depending on the battle, a soldier would either carry 45 cartridges or 60 cartridges into battle and either would be considered a full cartridge based on the commander's orders which to carry. When an Israeli went into battle with his bow and quiver, a full quiver was considered five arrows. After this sermon I preached a lady wrote me recently to give me an update on her children who I baptized. The letter said, 'Pastor, you'll notice in the letter that our children are doing well and we give God all the praise and all the glory. Our last one just went off to college and is walking with the Lord. You may wonder why we had five. Well, you said that a full quiver was five so we felt it was our duty to have five.'

That is not what this text is saying. God will determine your full quiver or whether this quiver will not have the arrows, but He wants you to use your ability to help others in the context of life or to help others as they shift from one quiver to the other biologically and/or through adoption. The Psalmist is saying any child that God has brought to you and put into the quiver of your life, then you are a blessed man. You are not blessed if it's an entitlement. You are blessed if God chose to do it, or what God is choosing to do with you and in the context of your family.

This deserves a lot more treatment than I can give in this study, but I would just make this warning. We can make children into idolatry if we have them and we can make children into idolatry if we don't have them. We have to seek contentment in the Lord and then the ability to follow the Lord. I know these are challenging statements, but you don't have children because they take the place of the Lord and you do not diminish your trust in the Lord if you don't have the children that you want from the Lord. You must fix my heart and my mind upon the Lord. For those who might make their children idols, instead of a blessing from the Lord, we actually turn them into a curse, because we put them in place of the Lord. We need brothers and sisters who will surround us and throw the flag to challenge us. Also, if we are desiring of children or more children and it's not there in the providence of God, then we need those around us who will embrace us, love us and walk us through it while warning us of the pitfalls of idolatry without children, just like there are the pitfalls of idolatry with children. This is what I love about Christ's Church. If we are one in Christ we are able to help one another in either situation before the Lord.

According to Psalm 127, what is the end result? The end result is the parents are not put to shame even by his enemies when he speaks with them in the gate. One of the things I love to do is to take people to certain ancient towns and show them the gates of the city. Today, we call it the courthouse. Today we would say, 'here's where the city government is, here is city hall, and here's the courthouse' and all of those would be right there in the gates of the city. There would be the place for the magistrate and the kings to sit. There would be placed for holding court. There would be a place for debates. There would be a place for assembly. All of those things would take place in the gates of the city. As someone arrives at the gates of the city, their children become an occasion of them being honored, even their enemies have to affirm the hand of the Lord upon their children.

On the reverse side of this, what is it saying about children? That children are to live and honor their father and mother. Again, if we are making our children an idol, they will never honor you because they can't honor you by taking the place of the Lord in your life. That's why it is important that we have a God centered home, not a parent centered, not a child centered, but a God centered home. In a God centered home parents are honored by children who are raised in

the Lord not who take the place of the Lord. Then the parents are able to turn that honor as a witness to the Lord, even in the gate, even in the presence of their enemies.

After going through this text of Scripture, I want to give you a couple of distillations that I think will help you in life. The first distillation is, our efforts, apart from God's sovereign grace through His presence and His power in our life, will always be futile. We may exercise our lives, but it will be an exercise in futility if the Lord is not at the foundation of our life where we are in humble reliance and dependence upon His presence and power. Without you, Lord, I'll do a lot, but I do nothing. I can do for Your glory and in that I take joy.

In our lives, our work, our workplace, there's a word that's out there that some of us look at with disdain in our society. It is the word professional. In fact, a colleague of mine wrote a book about ministers and declared that ministers are not professionals. I know what he's getting at, so I'm not picking at it and I think there are some great insights, but I believe that every Christian, as they live life in the marketplace, in the home and in the church, what we do, we do as professionals. The reason I say that is because that word has its root in the Reformation.

In the Reformation, there was a liberation that the only people that count in the Kingdom are the clergy they ordained. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox and others labored to declare that whenever you live your life to the Lord and in dependence upon the Lord, that becomes a *profession of faith* and that's the root of professional. We do what we do well for the Lord in dependence upon the Lord, and the excellence is not for the metrics of more money. Certainly, employers are free to reward that, but we do it under the eye of God and our joy in the labors of life – parenting, marketplace, employment, ministry – is to show our faith that our God is able and we are not. That becomes the true definition of professional.

The Psalmist makes the point that the home builder, house maker, the watchman, the over worker – all of these things are in futility if, in fact, we are not living in dependence upon the Lord and unto the Lord for the Lord is our strength, not our efforts. Our efforts in the arena of life are an exercise of futility apart from the presence and power of the Almighty in our life, by the grace secured through Christ, our Lord. We are not partially dependent upon Him. We are absolutely dependent upon Him – His presence, power and His sovereignty. God's presence, power and purposes should be present in our life and our efforts are dependent upon them. He is not dependent upon us. He can give to us even while we sleep. He has extraordinary abilities. He can work ordinarily or extraordinarily. None of us are irreplaceable or indispensable, but He is indispensable and indescribable. The sovereign gifts and grace from God through Christ to us and for us is not dependent upon us.

Here is a second distillation. Our life efforts – parenting, work, ministry, everything that we do – must be embraced with absolute humble reliance upon the presence, power and purposes of God. God spoke and brought everything into existence. He doesn't need me to get His purposes done. I need Him. Does that make me a fatalist? No, because I know He ordinarily works through means. Does that make me lazy in life? No, but what it does do is, it brings humility in life. I don't know who came up with this, but I love it; Most of us think humility in life is thinking less of ourselves. Humility is to think less of myself. Actually, humility is to think less about ourselves and more about Him. It's not about me. It's about Him and that's where I find my effectiveness and joy, when it becomes about Him. That's the process the Psalmist is bringing us to think our way through. In other words, we have a God who works with us, in us and through us, and we call that synergism, but we also have a God who works over us, without us, and sometimes in spite of us. That's what we depend upon in His glorious work.

Now, I want to download this in terms of children and parenting. Here are five observations from this text. First of all, children are not a burden to be endured. Is parenting burdensome sometimes? Yes, so cast all your burdens on Jesus, but the children are not a burden. Parenting may be burdensome, particularly if we're trying to do it without the Lord. Children are a Divine blessing to be stewarded.

Secondly, children, as a blessing are not to become an object of worship. How many of us are laying the seeds of destruction in the lives of our children when we make them into idols, or when we make them into idols by trying to relive our lives through them instead of raising them for life in Christ. Children are to become an occasion and a calling to worship, to praise God from whom all blessings flow. Children are a blessing, therefore, they're an occasion for us to worship God, not an object to take the place of God in the worship of life.

Thirdly, children are to be raised in and for the Lord as worshipers of Him and warriors for Him.

Number four, if we find our place in the precarious position of childlessness, we need to seek the Lord. We need to seek contentment in the Lord and we need the people of the Lord around us to surround us. We need the means of grace to wash over us. We need to consider what God's purpose is in this, what is God doing in me, what does God want to do through me in this and let Him be your strength.

Finally, children who are gifts from the Lord and who are prepared for the Lord by the strength of the Lord, when they serve the Lord, will honor their father and their mother. When in the Lord, they honor their father and their mother, then their father and mother will be honored in the gates and then be able to honor the Lord from whom all blessings flow and say 'It is the Lord who has done this, for my parenting would be vanity without Him.' So, now in the gate we will take the occasion of parenting not to receive accolades, but to point others to the Lord from whom all blessings flow because of His sovereign grace, presence, power and purposes. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments together in Your Word. Thank You for the Lord Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. Father, I just simply want to ask You to please allow us, in the discipleship of believers, to disciple believers, to establish God centered, God reliant, God exalting homes through God reliant, God empowered parenting. I sense that even in the midst of a cultural death spiral, we haven't awakened to the truth of our precarious position as men and women of Christ and for Christ and as parents in this world. So, would You awaken us, equip us and enable us to stay the course and to exalt Christ, to equip Your people, to evangelize the lost, declaring our God who brings us into His family through being born again and by being adopted? Make us ready to work in our families that men and women might see the grace of the Lord Jesus in homes that are different from the disassembled homes of the world that surrounds us. So, Father, build homes. I pray with the Prophet, do Your work of grace and turn the hearts of fathers along with mothers to their homes. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.