

# Psalm 127

**Date: Sunday, 21 November 2021**

**Scripture: Psalm 127**

**Sermon: Building Your Life on the LORD**

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## Scripture

*Psa. 127:0 A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.*

*Psa. 127:1 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.*

*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.*

*Psa. 127:3 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.*

*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.*

## **Transcript**

### **Introduction**

Do you find yourself tired, exhausted? That it feels like you're spinning wheels. You work so hard, and get so far but in the end it doesn't really matter? Maybe you know what I'm talking about.

This Psalm addresses this issue. What happens when we build our lives without the LORD in it? What happens when we don't acknowledge God in our lives. Yes, we may pay lip service to God, but this Psalm requires us to see an important truth. If we build our lives without God as the foundation, if we don't depend on Him in our endeavours, if we act as if God doesn't exist, and functionally, we live lives that are independent of him, then we are in danger.

So today, I want to share three things as we look at this passage together. Firstly, the danger of independence. Secondly, where true rest is found. Thirdly, building up children.

### **The Danger of Independence**

So let's have a look at the first point, the danger of living independently. And by that I mean living independently from God. Because that's what the first two verses of this very short Psalm talk about. Have a look with me,

*Psa. 127:1 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.*

Psalm 127:1 (ESV)

If we build a house, and the LORD is not in it, then we're told that it's in vain. If we watch over a city, but if the LORD doesn't watch it as well, then it's going to be in vain that the watchmen stay awake. Here is the danger of living independently from the LORD, if we choose to ignore God, if we fail to acknowledge him in all that we do, we are told it is all in vain.

And the word that the Psalmist uses, the word that Solomon uses for vain can also be translated as worthless. It can be translated as short. It's a word that can also mean futile. Sometimes, when Rachel and I go to the beach, I like to see what people do on the beach. You know, there's a lot of people that go into the water, there's dogs as well (we go to the dog beach), but we also see sand castles being built. I'm sure that you've built a sandcastle on the beach. They can get pretty crazy, people can spend a lot of time building sandcastles on the beach. But what happens over time? If they've built their castles too close to the waves, or when High tide comes, it all disappears. That's the kind of meaning vain has in this Psalm. It's short, temporal, futile, worthless.

But Justin, I work really hard. I don't sleep! Day in and day out, I'm like a shark that keeps going. I just keep on swimming. Okay, maybe you're not like that. Maybe you know people like that. Rachel and I met someone who doesn't have a specific gene, it's something called ADRB1 which means that he doesn't need to sleep more than 4 hours a night. Apparently, his dad has it, and when he was in his teenage years, he couldn't sleep and told his dad, and it's this rare genetic thing which means that he can work longer and sleep less. I thought, that would be great. I don't need to sleep, I can do more and more. Some politicians do that, investment bankers, and some lawyers don't sleep very much. Always in the office.

But the Psalmist gives us a warning doesn't he? What does he say in verse 2,

*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.*

Psalm 127:2 (ESV)

Even if you were to sleep 4 hours a day, the Psalmist again uses the word, "Vain." It is absolutely vain for you to work around the clock. It is futile for you to work anxiously through the night unless the LORD is in it.

In fact, there's a reason why working without the LORD is futile. And I want to show you. Do you notice in verse 2 that the Psalmist says, "Eating the bread of anxious toil"? It's actually an illusion. It's an illusion to when Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It's where the LORD then curses the serpent, and then curses both Adam and Eve. The LORD says to Adam, "cursed is the ground because of you, and in pain (toil) you shall eat of it all the days of your life." (Genesis 3:17, ESV) Adam would then eat bread of anxious pain (toil). The Psalmist is using the same (base) word here in Psalm 127 as in Genesis 3. And that curse is reflected also in the curse that Eve receives. That her pain in childbearing would be multiplied and in toil (pain), she would bring forth children.

Adam and Eve chose to live independently from God and they received the curse. And that curse continues today. Many of us aren't farmers, or don't dig the ground for our job, but I'm sure you can see curse around you each day. You only need to think about your life and you can see it. You look at work and that is toil, and pain. You look at child bearing and raising and that can be toil and pain. You look at life as a whole and that's frustrating. I remember going to Thailand for a mission trip some years ago, and we were asked to dig a hole. The ground was so dry whenever I used the pick to dig the ground, the vibration of hitting the ground would vibrate up the handle, into my hand and up into my arm. It was tough work. All because of the curse! Here is the danger of being independent. If the LORD is not in our endeavours, then we will struggle.

But the good news is that the LORD is our provider, our sustainer, our foundation. Because what does the end of verse 2 say?

*for he gives to his beloved sleep.*

Psalm 127:2b (ESV)

Interestingly, this is the middle line of the entire Psalm. The Psalmist wants us to pay special close attention to what he says. It is the LORD who gives sleep to those who love him. And it's really an image of refreshment, it's an image of the renewal of sleep. Of peace. It is the divine providence in our affairs that we need to acknowledge. That's the promise on offer to us.

And it's not just the Psalmist who states this, but Jesus himself in the New Testament who encourages us not to be anxious in the sermon on the mount. He said that if you were to look at the birds of the air, how they neither toil, nor spin nor gather into barns, you'd come to realise that our Heavenly Father feeds them.

So here's a challenge, can I ask, are you anxiously toiling? Do you work excessively because you believe that if you were to stop, you wouldn't survive? Are you up late at night, unable to sleep, because you are anxious? Are you working without acknowledging God? The challenge is to surrender to God. The challenge is to acknowledge our complete and utter dependence on Him.

Because if God is God, we can sleep each night without worrying about the next day. In fact, I know many of you say to me, "one day at a time." Jesus would agree with you. Or rather, you are agreeing with Jesus. "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Matthew 6:34 ESV)

## **Where True Rest is Found**

Let's look at the second point. Where true rest is found. This Psalm raises the question of where true rest, peace is to be found. Because the central verse of this Psalm is "for he gives to his beloved sleep."

This Psalm was used as people would make the journey from their lands up to Jerusalem. In fact, it's within the collection of Psalms, the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120 to 134). They would sing this collection of Psalms as they made their way up to the temple, during the Passover. It was a Psalm which reminded the Israelites about the rest that they got through God as He brought his people out of Egypt during the Exodus.

And you'll see in the superscript, it's also a Psalm of Solomon. It's a Psalm that the editor attributes to Solomon. Because in 1 Kings 6, Solomon, King David's son,

builds the temple, the house of the LORD. When Solomon says that the LORD builds the house, it's actually a play on words. But Solomon would become the greatest king of Israel. In fact, the kingdom of Israel would know no splendor or glory as Solomon's kingdom. The king was to represent what God would ultimately accomplish through the history of redemption. In fact, when you say his name in Hebrew, it sounds like Shalom, peace! Solomon was meant to be embody what true rest, true peace was to look like for God's people. God renamed Solomon in 2 Samuel 12:25 to Jedidiah, which means "beloved of the Lord," making Psalm 127:2 an allusion to both names.

But we know that Solomon wasn't the perfect king. He drifted from the LORD. His foreign wives and concubines distracted him and take him away from the LORD. And the kingdom of Israel would never be the same.

But Solomon would point to the true perfect king of Israel, Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we come to find true rest for our souls. In fact, that's his invitation,

*Matt. 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

We can often toil, because we need to prove ourselves. We feel like if we were to slow down, then things would fall. We are more like Martha than we are like Mary. We worry, we strive, we toil. And yet, it's not up to us. It's up to God.

God's invitation to us is to find rest, to slow down, to find peace in Jesus. That's his invitation to every single one of us here today. Will you slow down? Will you go to him and find rest?

## **Raising Up Children**

Let's talk about the third point. Raising up children. And when I talk about children, I mean it in two senses of the word. I mean for those of us here who have children in our household, I'm talking about that. But I'm also talking about raising up spiritual children of our Heavenly Father, disciples of Jesus Christ. Let me read verses 3-5,

*Psa. 127:3 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.*

*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.*

Psalm 127:3-5 (ESV)

Many of you might be wondering how does these last three verses fit. The first two talks about a house, and a city, and now here in verses 3 to 5 it talks about children! For the Psalmist, it's a play on the word house. Because house can mean the temple of God, it can mean a literal house, but it also mean house in terms of family.

Children in the Old Testament represented protection, security and blessing. They were necessary to work the farm, they were to provide for their parents in their old age and they were to provide protection for the nation as they defended it against its enemies. Children were essential to the survival of the nation of Israel. They were seen as a blessing because it was a way for the promises to Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17) to be fulfilled. To make Abraham into a great nation. And here, Solomon affirms that children are a gift from God, a sign of his blessing.

It's a lesson for those of us who have children. Children are a sign of blessing from the LORD. And we need the LORD in order to raise our children. Helicopter parenting won't do, we need the LORD in order to parent properly. For those of us who have children, I wonder whether we see prayer as a way in which we raise our children?

Now for those of us who don't have children, maybe you're asking, 'Am I not blessed if I don't have children?' No, that's not the conclusion that we are to come to. Not having children is a reflection of the curse of this world. The people of Israel grew as God's people because they were fruitful and multiplied. But today, what's

also important is for people to enter into the kingdom of God. What's important is that we see that there are spiritual children that need tending to.

Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations and I want to lay down that challenge for us this morning. I want to lay down the challenge for parents. I want to challenge you to see raising your children as really important. You are given a responsibility to raise your children to make them disciples of Jesus.

But I also want to challenge all of us. Whether or not you are a parent. Because each one of us here is given the responsibility from Jesus himself to make disciples of all nations. That includes your friends, your family, your neighbours, your work-mates. Many people think that because I'm the minister, I'm the one that needs to make disciples. But actually, we're all ministers, we're all servants, and Jesus speaks to each one of us and calls each one of us to make disciples in our backyard. That's what each one of us here is called to do.

So I want to give you a few practical ways for us to make disciples. For some of us here, our children that we are currently raising they are our disciples. For all of us it's making disciples of everyone. So here's a few of practical ways.

Firstly, we need to acknowledge that the LORD does the building. Just as it says at the beginning of this psalm. We need to acknowledge that unless God works in people's hearts, they're not going to listen. So we all need to be praying. Praying that God would soften people's hearts. Many of you have children who are not Christian, the best you can do is to pray for them!

Secondly, be on the look out for someone who begins to show an interest in spiritual things. Maybe someone asks you about who Jesus is. When you do discover someone like that, then you know that God has been at work in them.

Thirdly, in order to build up disciples, we need to read the Word of God together with them. At University, I would meet with a person and we'd just read through a Gospel together. Disciples need biblical instruction so they need the Word of God.

Fourthly, in order to build up disciples, it's not just head knowledge that they need. They need to be taught through life. Jesus' disciples walked with him for three years. They learnt from him as they did life together. Jesus showed what it meant to be a disciples through modelling. That's what we need too. We need to show them what being a Christian is, show them your life. Invite them into your home.

I can't stress how important this is. I want to encourage each one of you here in this room to take Jesus' words to make disciples of all nations seriously. You don't need to be extravagant. Start with something small, start small and pray. Let's pray.