

A Sketch of the Rested Mind - Psalm 127

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[0 : 00] Well our text for this evening is Psalm 127, unless the Lord builds the house. And I think that, in my own experience at least, one of the most common answers to the question, how are you doing?

One of the most common answers I hear regularly is, I'm just so tired, I'm so frazzled. And I think we've all heard of virtue signalling, it seems to be a common phrase today, whereby we display our politics on Facebook and social media so that everybody sees how virtuous we are.

I think there's another phenomenon called exhaustion signalling. We want everybody to know how tired we are, how spent we feel. I saw an example of this in a satirical piece in the Daily Mash. I don't know if any of us read that, but it was an article stating about a husband and wife who are competing with one another to see who's the most tired. And it speaks of the husband and the wife, you know, making performative yawns, pretending they've forgotten what they were saying halfway through it.

And the husband says, oh, I'm so tired when he gets home from work, you know. I got up at six o'clock this morning and the train was absolutely rammed and I couldn't get a seat. And then I got to work, I was solid all morning and I had to train the new guy at lunchtime.

[1 : 31] So I skipped my lunch and then I came home absolutely frazzled. And the wife says, well, you know, you got up at six, but I was awake till two in the morning.

I was just so worried about my job. I had too much to do. My job just doesn't give me a moment to think. And, you know, lunch, what is that?

I can't remember the last time I ate it. And the husband comes back. Well, you know, you know, I say I got up at six, but I was awake from half four because I was so stressed. Everything is just bearing down on me.

And, you know, I'm stressed about Brexit as well. And she says, Brexit, you know, what's that? I don't have time to read the news. Is that something? And so on it goes ad nauseum.

Exhaustion signaling. I'm so, so tired. But I think that, you know, with exhaustion signaling, unlike virtue signaling, you know, virtue signaling, there's not normally much virtue there in the first place.

[2 : 28] But with exhaustion signaling, I think there is genuinely tiredness. And people are crying out for help because they're so tired. And it seems that there's a crisis of sleeplessness in today's culture.

You know, despite all the technology we possess for making our lives more efficient, you know, toasters, washing machines, tumble dryers. You know, we seem to be more worn out than ever. You know, more worn out than previous generations who didn't have access to these, you know, technological innovations. And in his book, *Why We Sleep*, the author, Matthew Walker, notes that in the developed world, roughly two-thirds of people fail to get the required eight hours per night. And while we're all too aware, in Scotland at least, of the negative consequences of a bad diet, or of overly consuming alcohol, or of smoking, relatively speaking, I think we are all too ignorant of the negative impact upon our health of a failure to get the right amount of sleep.

And his book, Walker, notes that regularly sleeping less than six hours per evening cripples the immune system. It doubles the risk of cancer, while also increasing the risk of stroke, and heart disease, and diabetes.

[3 : 57] And so the danger of an under-rested body is all too apparent from the studies. But the effect on the mind is also quite notable.

Studies have shown that those who fail to sleep are at increased risk of mental illness, including depression, anxiety, and uncontrollable rage.

And those of us who are parents, and whose children haven't slept well, we know that this is all too true. And Walker goes on to quote Charlotte Bronte, saying that a ruffled mind makes a restless pillow.

A ruffled mind makes a restless pillow. And some, if you're not rested, if we're not sleeping, we're unable to think clearly.

You know, you see it with the toddler. So, so tired. And nothing's going right. And then, all of a sudden, she drops a bit of toast on the floor, and the tears are going horizontal at that point.

[5 : 03] She is not thinking in perspective. She is not able to rationally appraise the situation, and say, that was only a bit of hovis. And I've got no proof for what I'm about to say, but I would suspect that in the area of restlessness and sleeplessness, the professing Christians are possibly the worst offenders in this regard.

Now, I've got no time to investigate why this might be the case. But what I hope to do this evening is demonstrate that the servants of the Lord should be those who are able to sleep the soundest and to rest for the longest.

You see, despite the pressures that they face of studying, or of work, or of trying to find work, and of family, despite these pressures, which are supplemented by the extra pressures of trying to live a godly life in the midst of a hostile culture, despite all this, the Christian, the believer, should be marked by an inner can, which is the product of a well-rested mind.

And in the psalm that we're going to be looking at this evening, Psalm 127, we read something of the attitude of the worshiper. You see, Psalm 127 is one of the songs of ascents.

We read that at the start, a song of ascents of Solomon. And so this psalm, it was a pilgrimage hymn, if you like, where the Church of the Old Testament approached Jerusalem and approached the temple, which were built upon the hill, the hill of Zion.

[6 : 50] And so they were going up the way. And it was a song of ascents. And as they approached the covenant presence of God, they sang these songs of ascents. And something that is a common feature of the literary works of the Bible, can't say literary, is the fact that they use various devices to make a point.

And one of the devices they use is putting something in the center. And you might notice that Psalm 127 is the middle song of ascents.

Now don't check that just now. I know you'll be counting through, but take it from me, it's the middle one. And so, you know, what the compilers of the psalm are trying to tell us is, this is an important psalm.

This psalm is something which is definitive. This psalm is something which is quintessential, if you like, to the worshiper.

But on top of the psalm itself occurring at the middle of the songs of ascents, the psalm has a middle verse. The literary structure of the Hebrew is arranged in such a way that it has a verse that appears smack bang in the middle.

[8 : 08] And we don't see that in our English Bibles. Now I apologize for referencing Hebrew and Greek and all that stuff. It's often a pretentious endeavor to appear learned.

But sometimes it can be useful. And in this instance, I think that it is. You see, the center verse in this psalm is verse 2.

If we have a look at that just now. Verse 2 and the line which reads, He grants sleep to those he loves. And that's what the psalmist is trying to get across.

That is the kind of fulcrum, if you like, of the psalm. The beating heart of the psalm. And as such, the beating heart of the songs of ascents. Here is what marks and sets apart the worshiper.

Here is the quintessence of a worshiper. Somebody who has received sleep. Now sleep in this regard is meant to evoke something for us.

[9 : 12] because, you know, when you sleep, you're at your most vulnerable. You know, you could be susceptible, if you like, to an enemy attack.

We read something about watchmen being stationed around the city and we'll go into that a bit later. But when you sleep, you're vulnerable. When you sleep, you're unproductive.

You're not building a house, like the psalmist said. You're utterly useless at that point. And so the worshiper here is somebody who has the confidence to rest in their covenant king.

They are confident to rest because they know the one who is in covenant with them. Sleep, you see, is the ultimate, the ultimate disposition of dependence.

And that's what the psalmist is trying to get across. The worshiper is one who depends upon his Lord. She depends upon her Lord because, number one, she is confident in his capabilities. [10:15] She's confident in his power. She knows the one that she is in covenant with. But number two, she knows the disposition of her covenant Lord towards her.

He regards her as his beloved one. Now, the NIV doesn't use the word beloved, which is unfortunate, but we'll come to that later on.

It says he grants sleep to those he loves. It pluralizes it, but in the original, it should say his beloved. He grants sleep to his beloved one. And so the worshiper then, the quintessence, the essence of somebody who worships is that they are well rested.

They have a confidence in their Lord. They are replenished through a sense of his love for them. And so they are not like the neurotic person, the anxious person, you know, eating the bread of anxious toil, which the psalmist talks about.

You know, they're not energized by a nervous energy, which impels them and compels them and leaves them frazzled at the end of the day. No, they are those who rest and bask in the covenant love of their God.

[11:35] And so what I want to do this evening is to go through the psalm and see something of the mindset of the rested worshiper, paint something of a thumbnail sketch of the rested mind, and hopefully we can use it to encourage our own hearts to a repose of love in our covenant Lord himself.

And I'll preface what I'm going to say by cautioning us. As we study this, I think that the worst reaction we could have to this is to feel bad because we're not sleeping properly, or to feel guilty because we're anxious.

That would defeat the purpose of what I think the Lord wants to do for us through this text this evening. He wants to show us the vistas of his grace and the depths of his love that we might with a wearied yet happy mind go to bed this evening confident in our covenant king.

So therefore we will look at the sketch of the well-rested mind. So in the first place, note that the rested person is one who is able to trust in God's power.

He or she is able to think rationally about the abilities of her God. Solomon begins the psalm with the statement unless the Lord builds the house those who build it labour in vain.

[13:08] Now I think one of the interpretive keys for this psalm is that we recognise the word house here is something which has layers of meaning built into it.

There is the obvious meaning which we are going to look at here and when Solomon speaks of house he means a physical structure. And it's a significant term for Solomon to use because if we remember the text that we read from 1 Chronicles 29 verses 1 and 2 we read that Solomon's father King David had tasked his son with the building of the house of God.

Now house is a synonym for the temple. It was the place where the covenant presence of God the God of Israel would be intensified in a mysterious manner amongst the people of God.

The temple was where God would live if you like and so it was called his house. And so Solomon had a massive task ahead of him in the building of the temple.

And he had a massive task for two reasons. The first reason is this, it had to be a grand structure. You know this was the dwelling place.

[14:24] the covenant repose of the three times holy almighty one of Israel. It would have been entirely inappropriate if Solomon had built a two bed semi or a prefab for the covenant king.

And when you think about the spatial dimensions that were required, this was a meeting place for an entire nation. They were to come and make pilgrimage to the temple, offer sacrifices and confess their sins.

And so Solomon had to build something huge and gigantic and great. And so the scope of the project, that was something which was a challenge.

But think too about the person who was the project manager. Basically it was a wee boy barely out of shorts. That's what David says in 1 Chronicles 29.

He says, Solomon my son is young and inexperienced. Can you imagine going to your seasoned architects and engineers and saying, here's your project manager. He's young and inexperienced.

[15:27] That's a great pep talk for the guys. That's really going to inspire confidence in them all. But that's what David says. He's young. He's inexperienced. He doesn't know what he's doing.

And I think in this psalm we see something of perhaps Solomon's own trepidation. He's referencing the building of the house of God and he's reckoning with the very real possibility of failure.

He says, unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers labor in vain. In vain. Now the word vain there means useless, worthless, to no avail.

And Solomon's saying, you know, unless the Lord built the house, it could have imploded in a variety of ways. You know, we could have started building it and then not finished. Or we could have built it and it would have collapsed.

Or we could have built something that nobody visits. You know, like galaxies end in Disney World, something like that. Nobody turns up. And Solomon is very conscious that he was dependent.

[16:40] He wasn't resting upon his own ingenuity, his own administrative and project managing skills, but rather he was casting himself upon the abilities of his covenant king, unless the Lord builds the house.

And it's very interesting when you look at the verb tenses here in this psalm, because, you know, when Solomon speaks about the builders themselves, he uses a past tense, a perfect.

And it would seem that as Solomon wrote the psalm, it would seem that the building had been completed. So he's saying unless, you know, the Lord builds the house, those who built the house, when they did it, it would have been in vain.

So he's referencing something that happened in the past. But when he speaks of the Lord's work, he uses an imperfect, continuous verb. He says, unless the Lord goes on to build, unless the Lord continues to exert his mighty power, those who build, build in vain.

And so Solomon's thinking to himself, you know, I'm looking at this majestic structure, but I can't rest on my laurels. I continue to trust in my covenant king.

[17:54] I continue to rely upon his supplies of energy and of power and of sufficiency. His past reliance upon the Lord's grace didn't cease with the completion of the project.

And so we need to take from this that it is possible, entirely possible, for ventures to fail. Ventures gone about by religious people, Christians, they can fail if they are not done with a conscious dependence upon God's power and sufficiency.

mercy. And you know, it's only the spiritually rested mind that is able to reckon with us. You know, there's, I suppose, when we're faced with something huge, something gigantic in our lives that we have to tackle, the frazzled mind, the tired mind, the irrational mind is prone to one of two ditches. It can say on the one hand, look at that task ahead of me. It's too big. I'm young and inexperienced. I'm just a wee boy or a, you know, out of shorts or a wee girl out of shorts.

And so we run. We disappear. We disappear in a cloud of dust. That would be one reaction. That would be one, I suppose, manifestation of the frazzled mind.

[19:29] But the other one would be this. It would be to say, well, this is a big job. I need to give myself to this. Therefore, heart and soul, I'm going to get up early.

I'm going to go to bed late. I'm going to work at it with all my might. Because it all depends on me. I may not be up to it, but I'm going to give it my best. That, again, is a rational thinking.

It's not biblical thinking. It's not a mind that is, I suppose, enjoying a sweet repose and the love and the power of its covenant king.

You know, I'm reminded of a story of the two great evangelists of the 18th century, Whitefield and Wesley. And the story goes, I don't know if it's true, but it's got a nice point to it, I suppose.

So bear with me on this one. But Wesley and Whitefield, famous evangelists, and Wesley, he was an Arminian, which means that he believed that, you know, it's all down to us to make the decision to trust Christ.

[20:34] Ultimately, we have free will. Whereas Whitefield, he was a Calvinist. He believed that the results were up to God, that God saves his elect, and the preaching is a preaching to gather in the elect.

And so the two of them are preaching in the field, and they always had fierce disagreements about Calvinism and Arminianism. But they went home that night after a busy day preaching, and Whitefield knelt at the end of his bed and prayed, and he said, Lord, bless our labors today, you know, bring to faith those whom you have ordained to receive eternal life.

And he went to bed, and Wesley looks at him and he says, Mr. Whitefield, is this where your Calvinism leads you? And he knelt down at his bed and started to pray fervently.

And so Whitefield falls asleep, and maybe about three hours later, he is awoken by the voice of Wesley, and he looks over, and Wesley's still praying.

So Whitefield gets out of his bed and puts his hand on Wesley's shoulder and says, Mr. Wesley, is this where your Arminianism leads you? This neurosis, this sense that it all depends upon you.

[21 : 54] Well, the rested mind doesn't think like this. It's able to trust in the provision and the power of its God. And that takes us to our second point this evening.

The well-rested mind doesn't merely trust in the power of God, as I mentioned provision there, it also expects God to give the results.

It rests in God's power, and it receives God's provision. And that's where verse three comes in. If you look at verse three, it says, children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Now, I don't know about you, but that verse, to me, it seems to just jump out of nowhere. You know, he's talking about building a house. He's talking about watching over a city.

He's talking about the need for sleep, and then he mentions children. I don't know about you, but I don't see children as an answer to prayer regarding sleep. Lord, help me to sleep more.

[22 : 59] You know, we'll have another child. It doesn't work that way in my experience. So how does verse three fit into the psalm? How does it answer the concerns of verses one and two?

Well, I think that it all has to do, again, with the word house. house, and I mentioned at the start that the word house has layers of meaning built into it.

It can mean a physical structure like the temple, but it can also mean a nation. If you think about it, Israel was described over and over again in the Old Testament as the house of Israel.

God said, my people, the house of Israel. But also, you know, house could be used to describe a family, an individual family within the wider nation. If we remember Joshua speaking to the people of Israel and he says, choose this day whom you will serve.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. So Joshua speaks of a house in terms of a family. So there, the word house has layers of meaning built into it.

[24 : 06] And Solomon is kind of playing on words. He says at the start, unless the Lord builds the house, and he's thinking of the temple in the first place, but in the second place, he's thinking of the house of Israel.

When you think about Solomon's job and his vocation, if you like, as the king of Israel, his task was not merely to build the temple, but to build the nation.

He was to enable the nation, to facilitate the nation to grow numerically, and to prosper economically and financially, while preserving the nation from possible attack, from the surrounding countries.

And so Solomon says, here's my job, I need to build up the house of Israel, I need to build up the nation, and what does he say? What's the answer to this concern? I need to do this, this is such a huge task, building a country, who all worship the Lord.

Here is the answer, in verse three, behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, sons are a reward. And what he's saying is this, he's saying, the Lord builds the house, and the Lord gives the house.

[25 : 21] It's all the Lord's work. You see, as individual sons are birthed in the families of Israel, the nation populates and grows.

Solomon was all too aware that he needed, that he was resting upon the provision of God in order to accomplish the task ahead. And so here's another aspect of the rested mind.

It expects God to answer prayer. It expects God to meet needs. It expects God to come through in marvellous ways.

I mean, look at the task that he had. He had to build up a nation. And he was recognising, you know, sons are a heritage from the Lord. It's his reward. God will give it. You know, God makes demands of us.

Yes, that is true. But he also gives what he demands. So do we have that mindset? Are we thinking rationally? Are we expecting the Lord to answer our prayers?

[26 : 26] You know, when we pray for our needs to be met, you know, are we looking for answers? Or are we not surprised when we receive no answers? You know, often you hear, we talk about, you know, in this kind of upwardly mobile circles, I need a new car, maybe go for a higher purchase, or, you know, PCP, I'm not quite sure.

And, you know, there's nothing wrong with that, that's fine. But I think that, you know, if that's all that we are going to, you know, if we're just thinking, how can I get some finance for this, without going

to the Lord and saying, Lord, I need a new car.

I need you to come through in some kind of a way. on secular institutions to meet our needs. We're not thinking rationally. So I would encourage us, you know, let's go to the Lord with our needs, our very basic needs, and trust him to meet those needs.

And when the Lord meets his needs, he's not stingy. You know, the text says, you know, blessed is the man whose quiver is full of sons. The picture here is, you know, the man was destitute, he had nobody in his family, and all of a sudden, he has a massive brood around him.

The Lord is generous, a good measure, pressed down and shaken, as Jesus says. So the rested mind, it trusts in the power of God, it receives the provision of God, but also enjoys the protection of the Lord.

[28 : 02] And this is the next point, you know, that the rested mind is not concerned about safety. Notice Solomon's words again in verse one, he says, unless the Lord watches over the city, those who keep watch, watch in vain.

And he's referencing here the house of Israel again, the nation. He says, you know, the nation needs to be built, that's true, but the nation also needs to be preserved.

It was in the Middle East, and surrounded by nations which wanted to extinguish it and wipe it off the face of the earth. And Solomon was very conscious of the need to post sentries on the city walls, to watch out for advancing enemy forces.

And so Solomon says, you know, unless the Lord watches over the city, these guys are up there for no reason. It's a waste of time. And so he recognized his need and his, I suppose, his dependence on the Lord for the Lord to offer protection for the thing that he had given.

And I think that it is notable that the very means that God gives to protect something is the very thing itself that he's already given in the first place.

[29 : 23] That's something of a mouthful. But again, that's where verses 3, 4, and 5 answer the concerns of verses 1 and 2. He says, unless the Lord builds the house, the builders build in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city where the house is, the watchmen watch in vain. And the children being born, the children who came as the Lord's gift, as the Lord's reward, they became the means for protecting the work that God had begun.

You see, the more sons a man had, the more troops that Israel had, in order to ward off enemy forces. That's where verse 5 comes in. You know, the man will not be put to shame when he contends with his opponent at the gate.

Just like the school gate, you know, where all the fighting goes on, back in Israel, at the city gates, that's where the fighting went on. And so, the more sons a man had, the bigger the army.

The more sons a man had, the more sentries that could be posted on the city walls. Because the more sons a man had, the more laborers he had for the family business. And so, bread would be provided for all.

[30 : 35] And he wouldn't be eating the bread of anxious toil. He wouldn't be laboring alone. The Lord's gift became the means of the Lord's protection. And so, I think that is a significant point for us.

Because often, I think it's tempting for us when we start a new venture. Or we go in a risky direction. And I know as a church, we're looking at something quite challenging in the future.

The possible purchase of a new building. These things are scary. And you know, when things are going well, we have this nausea that it will all suddenly implode.

You know, something bad must be around the corner, because this is going too well. And you know that? God, again, is a manifestation of the tired and frazzled mind.

I think many of us, you know, rather than worrying about big things, we worry about the most basic thing. You know, how am I going to continue as a Christian? How will I keep going?

[31 : 41] You know, I might be looking at a life of perpetual singleness, because there's hardly any Christian people out there that I can meet and marry. You know, I have very few friends who understand me, you know, they think my views are bigoted and small-minded.

I feel very alone. And you despair, you know, you think, how will I go on as a Christian? And you feel that you're just holding on by your fingernails. But you know, that is, again, a manifestation of the tired mind, the frazzled mind, the mind that is not thinking logically.

God doesn't save his people from their aging sea to drown them in a puddle. The apostle Paul says, you know, he who began the good work and you will continue it to the day of Christ Jesus.

God doesn't begin projects and then stop and walk away. You know, he's not like a wasteland student, you know, doing his project and thinking, oh, I want to play, I don't know, whatever, call of duty for the rest of the night.

God doesn't do that. He comes through and he finishes his projects. He doesn't leave you to finish something in your own strength.

[32 : 54] So finally then, we have noted that the well-rested mind can trust in the power of God, receive the provision of God, it enjoys the protection of God and it can do so because it trusts and basks in the covenant love of God.

Verse 2, as I said, it's the beating heart of the psalmist. It's the beating heart of the psalm itself and the songs of ascents. The worshipper depends on the love of his covenant king.

And the word here, those he loves, I think that's a bit kind of bland, but vanilla. The NIV is going for relevance, but it is kind of taking away a little of the potency because the original word which the ESV translates beloved is something which is rich with significance for Solomon.

He wrote the song of songs, a love poem between the lover and the beloved one. And here's what he's saying, he's saying, you know, the rested person is one who is confident because they know the power of the covenant king.

And not only that, but they trust in the love of that covenant king. And it's not just some kind of wishy-washy love, it's an intense, deep, almost a romantic love that Solomon is referencing here.

[34 : 26] So I would ask us tonight, as we go to bed, are we comfortable in imagining that as we lay down to rest, that Christ himself is gazing upon us with intense affection, saying, there is my beloved one, I give her sleep, I give him rest, I'm here for him.

You know, the tired mind, the tired mind, the one that is impelled by nervous energy, that mind is one, I would argue, that has forgotten that he or she is loved.

often we're so tired, we're so frazzled, because we forget that the creator of heaven and earth, we forget that the redeemer of the church, the one who purchased the church with his own blood, we forget that he loves us both corporately and individually.

And if we reckoned with that and realized that, we would go to bed confident and restful. I think something that is notable in this text in verse 2 is the footnote for verse 2.

If you look at your Bibles just now, you'll notice that there is an alternative rendering for verse 2. It says, for while they sleep, he provides for those he loves.

[35 : 54] So again, you know, Solomon's full of wordplay here. And the verse could either be, he gives his loved one sleep, or he acts for his beloved one while they sleep.

And that is the mystery of the psalm. The worshipper goes to bed at night because she knows, because he knows, that God can do more for them while they sleep than they could if they labored 24-7.

They're not building the house while they're in bed. They're not watching over the city. They're utterly vulnerable and unproductive, and yet they're confident that he, the one who looks over them, will do more for them while they sleep than they could in a thousand years of wakefulness and labor and toil.

And if you think about sleep, for Solomon at least, Solomon had one of his greatest ever experiences while he went to sleep. He was about to take the throne, and the Lord came to him in a dream and said, what do you need, Solomon?

He said, I need wisdom. The job's too big for me. And the Lord gave him wisdom while he slept. That was Solomon's experience. God can do more for you tonight while you rest than you could in a lifetime of labor.

[37 : 14] So in conclusion then, how do we develop the rested mind? The mind which is confident in the Lord's power, provision, protection, and love. I would say that it comes through realizing the purpose of the psalmist.

You see, this was a hymn of worship. As the people of God ascended the hill, they would be reminded that the temple stood in front of them, the Lord had built the house. As they worshipped with the people of Israel, they would realize the Lord had populated the house and preserved the house.

The act of worship was one which fed and nurtured this idea of God's covenant love. And so with us, as we worship our Lord and Saviour, on the Lord's day and individually, we look at him.

You know, the temple's not there anymore, but he is. The temple made without hands that will never be destroyed. As we think of the church full of his spiritual children, which he has populated with his own power, we can grow in an appreciation for and rest within his covenant love. So come to him tonight if you've not done so. Don't try to impress him without how hard-working you are. He's already done it. His nail-pierced hands are testimony that you can't work hard enough for him.

[38 : 31] Jesus paid it all. So do we know his rest? I'll leave his words with you. Jesus says this to the anxious. Come to me, all you who labor building the house and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I'm gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Thanks be to God.
we'll conclude. We'll conclude.