

Wisdom for Life

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[0 : 0 0] Today's scripture reading is Psalm 127, a song of a sense of Solomon.! 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. 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. Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord.

The fruit of the womb are a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. 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 gates. Amen. Thank you, Danielle. Well, next Sunday we are going to be starting a new sermon series, a five-part sermon series titled God's Word to the Family.

And this morning's sermon, based on Psalm 127, I think is an excellent introduction to the upcoming sermon series. Now, if you are familiar with the Psalms, you probably would recognize that the Psalm that we are considering this morning is not a typical Psalm.

It's not a Psalm that's lifting up praise and adoration or prayer or lament to the Lord. Instead, it is a wisdom Psalm.

[1 : 3 8] And from the superscription of the Psalm, it says a song of ascents of Solomon. We're able to tell that Solomon was the author of this Psalm.

And it is a part of a group of Psalms called the Psalms of ascents, 15 of them from Psalm 120 up to Psalm 134. And the background to these Psalms is that they were sung by the children of Israel when they made their pilgrimages three times a year from wherever they lived in the promised land to go to Jerusalem to worship God.

And these Psalms are very helpful for us to study because they help us to see the kinds of themes and thoughts that the pilgrims considered as they were journeying to Jerusalem.

And this particular Psalm, Psalm 127, we find in it what we can call wisdom for life. And it's wisdom that is greatly needed in our families today.

And so, brothers and sisters, let's hear it afresh. Some of us have heard it before, but let us hear it afresh this morning. And by God's grace, let us apply it to our lives. But first, let me pray for us.

[3 : 0 4] Heavenly Father, we thank you. How precious is your word. How kind of you to give us your word, that it would be a companion for us as we journey as pilgrims on this earth.

Lord, would you speak to us now from your word? You know what we need collectively and individually. God, would you help us now to hear as we ought and then to obey as we ought.

Lord, I ask that you would anoint me by your spirit, that I would be faithful to proclaim your word to your people. And Lord, may all that is said and done this morning bring glory to your great name.

As in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Most of the Psalms, when we consider them, they are written to God. But there are few Psalms that are written to us.

And Psalm 127 is one of those Psalms. And what we find in Psalm 127 is that Solomon, in all of his God-given wisdom and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he addresses us concerning three of life's most important and foundational activities that we engage in, which are working, resting, and raising children.

[4 : 43] And what the Psalmist tells us in these verses is that we need to engage in all of these activities under God.

And when we look at how he communicates these words to us, they come not just as counsel of wisdom, but they come as a warning.

They are a warning. They are a warning to help us to avoid living an empty life. And here's how I would summarize this wise warning that Solomon gives us in Psalm 127.

Earthly labors that ignore God, neglect rest, and devalue children are meaningless. And yet it is so easy for us to do exactly what Solomon warns us not to do.

And that's because we live in a world that is making a whole lot about human accomplishments.

[6 : 01] And with little regard for how we accomplish and the cost at which we accomplish, the price that we pay for the things that we accomplish.

And so we need to hear this warning of Psalm 127. If we've heard it before, we need to hear it again, because this is a peril that is with us as long as we are on this earth.

We need to hear it again if we're going to live lives that are informed by the wisdom and the warning that is in Psalm 127.

And so in our remaining time, I want us to consider Solomon's three-part warning found in Psalm 127, beginning with the first one, which is ignoring God.

In verse 1, Solomon addresses ignoring God in our work. Notice again how he says it. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

[7 : 03] Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. This is a sober and universal warning.

And it calls us to be aware of the reality that whatever we do, whatever work we engage in without God's help, is vain. It's a call to recognize that the only worthwhile endeavors in this life are those endeavors in which God is involved.

Those endeavors which God helps us to accomplish. And the idea is that we are to be consciously aware of God's involvement in what we do and his blessings upon what we do.

And that's how our labors are made worthwhile. And brothers and sisters, we need the Lord's help in a primary way. Now, we would miss what Solomon is saying if we reduce the activities that he is pointing out to building houses and watching cities.

Solomon is only using building houses and watching cities as examples. They were common activities during his time.

[8 : 28] But Solomon's point is not just limited to the building of houses and watching cities. I think we can consider all legitimate activities, all human endeavors, whatever they might be.

We need the Lord's help in a primary way if they're not going to be in vain. And so we need to humble ourselves. We need to recognize that ultimately if the Lord is not at work with us in whatever we do, at the end of the day, it's all in vain.

It's very insightful to consider the word that Solomon uses for vain. In the original language, it is a word that means mist or vapor or wind.

And the point that Solomon is making is that whatever we give ourselves to, no matter what we accomplish, if we do it in a way that does not include God's involvement, it is a fleeting mist or a vapor, it amounts to nothing.

It may be the latest and greatest and best whatever we can consider. If God is not involved in it, we may have amazing skill.

[9 : 58] We may have invested enormous resources in it. It may demonstrate the amount of knowledge and education and learning that we have accomplished.

But friends, if God is not in it, if we're neglecting God in what we do, it is nothing more than a fleeting vapor in the grand scheme of things.

It is a passing mist. And so what Solomon is saying to us is that if we do whatever we do in this life, away from the superintendence of the Lord, away from the blessing of the Lord, it is empty.

It is meaningless. It is purposeless. And to get a very good appreciation of what Solomon is warning us about in how we approach our work, we just need to read the book of Ecclesiastes, the first three chapters.

Help us to see how meaningless work can be when it's done away from the Lord. And what we find in Ecclesiastes is the preacher. And Ecclesiastes talks about how he had no restraints upon him.

[11 : 14] He had no restraint of resources. He had no restraint of wisdom. He had no restraint on his desires. He accomplished whatever he wanted to accomplish. And in the end, what the preacher says is that all the works of his hand, he said it was a striving after the wind.

He said it was all in vain. And so once again, brothers and sisters, we have this opportunity this morning to do what the pilgrims did annually, like three times a year, as they considered the wisdom and the warning of Psalm 127.

See, when they were singing this psalm, they had left everything behind. They were on their journey, and it was a time of reflection. And they were being reminded, unless the Lord builds the house, unless the Lord watches over the city, it's all in vain.

They didn't have the distractions of work and the distractions of their familiar surroundings to take them away from giving focused thought to the wisdom that is found in Psalm 127.

And in a sense, we find ourselves in a similar place this morning. Our work is away from us. We're settled. We're in this place. And God is addressing us through his word.

[12 : 40] And he is soberly saying to us, unless the Lord builds the house, unless the Lord watches over the city, it's all in vain.

And how easy it is for us to carry out our work and do all that we do, and we ignore God in our labors.

Brothers and sisters, if God is not with us, if God is not in essence building what we are building, watching what we are watching, accomplishing with us what we are accomplishing, we labor in vain.

It is a mist. It is a passing vapor, regardless of what we accomplish. But not only did Solomon, in this psalm, point us to the meaninglessness of work without God, he also warns us in this psalm about neglecting rest, which is my second point.

Look at what he says in verse 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.

[14 : 12] Solomon counsels us and warns us about rest. And as he does that, he still has work in view. And he points to an all-familiar practice that we human beings so easily engage in.

We work unnecessarily long hours in an attempt to get ahead and to accomplish things. We get up early. We go to bed late. We work on a day. Working long days.

And why do we do that? One of the main reasons we do that is we really are anxious about our needs being met.

And we somehow believe that our work ultimately meets our needs. Our work doesn't ultimately meet our needs.

It's partially true that our work does meet our need, but not in an ultimate sense. And this is Solomon's point. Notice he talks about anxious toil in verse 2.

[15 : 25] He warns against excessive work, too little sleep, and he says, the reason that you don't need to be engaged in anxious toil is that God gives rest, or he gives sleep, to those whom he loves.

When Solomon talks about anxious toil, he's referring to being excessively driven to work and to worry, trying to meet our needs and our own strength.

The bread of anxious toil also points us to the lack of enjoyment that we have from the fruit of our work. It's worrisome work. In Solomon's time, largely people associated their daily work with their ability to eat.

And that was the kind of economy that they had. And what Solomon is saying, he is talking about people who they work and the bread that they eat.

It's not bread to be enjoyed. It's anxious bread. It's the fruit of anxious work. And it just gives them the sustenance to go and keep doing the same thing again.

[16 : 40] But the fruit of our labors are to be enjoyed. The fruit of our labors are a part of God's gift to us. But when we work excessively and we work anxiously, there's no enjoyment in the fruit of our labors.

And so as an alternative, what we see Solomon pointing to, instead of working excessively and anxiously, what Solomon says is, God gives rest to those whom he loves.

He gives us rest as a gift. And the idea is that we can rest because God provides for us. The idea is that even as we rest, God is providing for us.

And our ability to stop working and rest is an expression of trust in God and faith in God, believing that he is the one who is with us and he is the one who is going to prosper our work and he is the one who gives us rest and who cares for us even as we rest.

But brothers and sisters, I think you'd agree that we all come to this part of Psalm 127, aware of the fact that we can work and wear ourselves out and we rest too little.

[18 : 10] We work too much and we rest too little. And what we're being reminded of is if we're doing that, what we're accomplishing really amounts to nothing.

Solomon says, it is vain. It is a vapor. And if we overwork and we underrest as a general practice, I recognize that sometimes we go in seasons where we have to do that.

But if our general practice is that we are always excessively working and we are always underresting, it points to something far deeper.

It points to we're not trusting the Lord to meet our needs. We're not trusting the Lord to bless our labors so that we don't have to engage in forever-ending days lacking sleep and making ourselves sleep-deprived wrecks.

I think it's fitting to say something about the Sabbath as we consider this issue about work. Under the old covenant, God gave the Sabbath to the children of Israel as a sign between him and them as he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

[19 : 35] And the Sabbath is under the new covenant is no longer binding upon us. We see this in Romans 14. We see this in Colossians 2. The Sabbath is no longer binding upon us as a command that we must obey.

But there's wisdom in what we may call the Sabbath principle. There's wisdom in recognizing that God intended for the children of Israel, he said to them, you work six days and then you rest on the seventh.

And I think there's wisdom for us to consider how we might incorporate a principle of rest in the rhythm of our week. I realize that for some people this is more difficult than for others.

But my concern is not so much with the person whose job may have them on some kind of a schedule that they are afraid on both ends and they have a difficulty finding some rhythm.

My concern more is for those of us who don't find ourselves in that dilemma and yet we find ourselves just working and working and working simply because we can.

[20 : 52] Believing that it is our labors that get us ahead. And don't get me wrong this morning. We need to work. We need to labor. But we must do so with an awareness that God has given me the strength.

God has given me the way of us all to do this. And if God is not with me all that I'm doing is utterly meaningless. We must not ignore God in our work or we must not neglect rest in our work.

So I wonder this morning how are these words from Psalm 27 landing on our ears and on our hearts? Are you working with the awareness that it is God who ultimately meets your needs and God who is giving you rest rest that you can embrace knowing that he is going to take care of you?

Or are you engaged in anxious toil? Are you engaged in this worry that my hands will meet my needs and therefore I must labor I must work and there is no reference to the Lord?

If we're living that way friends we are on a merry-go-round of emptiness. We are on a merry-go-round to nowhere because God gives rest to those whom he loves.

[22 : 31] So here in Psalm 27 Solomon gives us godly wisdom wanting us not to ignore God in our work wanting us not to neglect rest in our work and then third and finally Solomon gives us godly wisdom concerning children and he warns us against devaluing them and this is my third and final point.

Let me consider verses 3 to 5 they seem almost out of place they don't seem that they fit with the foregoing verses.

what Solomon is doing is Solomon is helping us to see the connection between being overly busy trying to make a living trying to progress in life and how we can easily overlook the gift of children that God has given to us.

In short what Solomon is pointing to is the real risk of devaluing the gift of children that God has given to us.

And so in verses 3 to 5 Solomon shares three important truths about children. First in verse 3 he tells us that children are a gift from the Lord.

[23 : 59] Notice how he says it. Behold children are a heritage from the Lord the fruit of the womb are a reward.

Some translations instead of using heritage as the ESV does some translations use gift. But I think heritage communicates more strongly the kind of gift the children are.

See we can give gifts and they're just not enduring. Some gifts you give and they have an expiry date on them. But the idea of a heritage is something that is enduring something that is lasting something that is worth passing down.

And God gives us the gift of children. Notice how Solomon says it. He declares it in a way to point out that it's a truth that we can easily overlook.

Notice how he says he says behold behold children are a heritage of the Lord. And normally when we are missing something or we're not seeing something as clearly as we ought to see.

[25 : 10] Someone may say behold look see that they want us to grasp what it is that is in front of us. And it's almost as if Solomon comes and he shakes us and he says look children are a gift from God.

He's trying to impress upon us something that we can easily overlook. Something that we just don't see in all of our busyness.

In our frantic living that we don't see the gift that they are. And Solomon is saying to us he is counseling us but he's also warning us don't you see that children are a gift from the Lord.

And brothers and sisters apart from salvation the most precious gift that God gives is the gift of children. More precious than work.

More precious than anything else. And the implication is that in our busyness in our going after accomplishing and achieving in a frantic way that God did not design for us we can miss the blessing of these children that God entrusts to us.

[26 : 41] Children are a gift from God. And it matters not the circumstances of their birth. They may be born in wedlock out of wedlock. They may be born with physical or mental disabilities.

It matters not. Every child is a gift from the Lord and to be received and treated as such. Every child, without exception. And this is true from the moment of conception.

And this is why God's people are to be those who protect human life. There's no other legitimate position for us. We protect human life from the moment of conception.

We do all that we can to demonstrate that this is a precious gift that God has given to us. And we do so mindful that it is a stewardship and God will one day hold us accountable.

The second important truth that Solomon tells us about children is in verse 4. And what he tells us is they need to be guided.

[27 : 58] Notice how he says it. He says, like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. And so here we see Solomon likening children to arrows.

And what he's saying is that the same way a mighty warrior takes arrows and aims them and directs them at a particular target, that's what raising children is like.

It's taking them and being intentional to direct them in a certain way towards a certain target. And since they are gifts from God, the only logical target to direct them toward is to God and his ways.

That's the target for all children. Whatever endeavors they may give themselves to, whatever gifts God has given to them, and however they live out those gifts. The general target for all children is the same, to point them towards the Lord, to raise them in the ways of the Lord, to direct them in the ways of the Lord.

One of the best ways to direct them is by our own example. It is to lead the way. I'm sure we've all seen these illustrations at one time or another where you see this man walking, for example, and this boy trying to mimic his steps.

[29 : 24] Or you see a girl who's imitating her mother in feminine ways. We are called to steward and to direct our children.

They have to be directed. They cannot be left to themselves. Any more than arrows can be left and they're expected to go to a particular target.

We must intentionally direct them to the target of the Lord and his ways. But again, how easy is it to neglect this intentionality because of the busy, frantic lives that we live?

And then third, Solomon says it is a blessing to have as many children as we can manage.

Look again at what he says in verse 5. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them. He will not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

[30 : 35] Now, I know this counsel doesn't go over very well in our day and time, but this is God's word. And if we accept that children are gifts from God, then having as many as we can, can manage, should be the logical result.

And we acknowledge that there are different capacities, and Solomon points that out when he talks about happy is the man who fills his quiver with them.

Well, quivers didn't have one size. Some quivers were larger, some were smaller, and the quiver was really tailored to the warrior, how big he was, how many arrows he could carry in the quiver.

And so the quiver was tailored to him. So some had larger quivers, smaller quivers. But here's the point. I don't think the point that Solomon is making is that we need to have a specific number of children. Because in truth, someone might have X number of children, and you may have Y number of children, and you try to compare those two, you may say, well, this person in essence really has more, even though numerically they may have less because of their circumstances, for example.

I think the point is that we need to have a positive view about children. That's the point. Children are not a burden. Children are not a drag.

[32 : 08] Children are a blessing from God. And this is what we are called to see. they don't cramp our style of the things we want to accomplish, what we want to do.

No, these are gifts that God has given to us to be stewarded. And we need to adjust our lives so that we may rightly steward them and rightly direct them in the way that they should go.

God has God. And verse 5 concludes, Solomon says that the man who receives children as a blessing and who invests time in raising them and directing them will not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gates.

And in context, what Solomon is saying is that such a man's children will not bring him to shame. I think it's important to remind us that what we're reading is a wisdom psalm.

It's very much like the book of Proverbs. And wisdom psalms and the Proverbs, these are principles about life, they're not laws of life.

[33 : 30] And so the reality is that while it is generally true that the outcome for receiving children as a gift and investing time in raising them, that you would have this wonderful outcome, that they would not put you to shame in the gate, the reality is that in a broken world, this principle does not always hold true.

It's not a law, it's not a guaranteed outcome, this is a principle from a wisdom psalm that we're reading this morning. And so the reality is that we can value children, invest time in raising them, and while by the grace of God, there are some families that have experienced the wonderful blessing of saying all of their children that they've invested in, come to saving knowledge in Christ, and come to be children who don't put parents to shame.

The reality is that over the course of human history, beginning with the first family, Adam and Eve, it doesn't always turn out that way. Adam and Eve had two sons, raised them in the same household, and one turned out to be a worshiper of God, the other turned out to be a murderer.

And such is the reality of raising children in a broken world. We want all of our children to be worshippers of God, but this psalm doesn't promise us that.

Indeed, nothing in God's word promises us that. The world is broken. Have you ever thought about how you can have a person who's come to faith in Christ and their parents would say, we're atheists.

[35 : 32] They came from an atheistic home and they have come to saving faith. And then on the other hand, you have someone raised in a godly home, raised by godly parents, who did their sincere best in raising them and they haven't come to saving faith.

And so my point this morning is that while this is a wonderful principle that we should embrace in faith and trust the Lord for, let us recognize it is not a law and in a broken world it isn't always realized.

But nonetheless, brothers and sisters, these are wise words. The words of Solomon in Psalm 127, these are wise words. But the truth is that Solomon himself did not keep these words.

Solomon himself did not live a life that was marked by the wisdom that he gives in Psalm 127. Solomon's kingship, Solomon's family was a train wreck.

And so it reminds us that we need more than just wisdom this morning. We need counsel. And while Solomon can counsel us, we need someone who's greater than Solomon, who can do more than counsel us, but who can enable us to live out this counsel.

[37 : 07] And there is one who's greater than Solomon. There's one who is greater than Solomon, who spoke more soberly than Solomon, who warned us about how we are to live our lives and what we are to give ourselves to, and that greater one is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he says that we can labor and give all of our labors to whatever we give them to. He says if we were to gain the whole world and we were to lose our souls, he said you gain nothing.

It's all empty, it's all vain. If in the process of your labors in this life, you gain it all, but you lose your soul, the sad reality is that none of us will gain it all.

None of us will gain the whole world. And it means that we can so easily settle for even far less, and we can lose our soul.

but Jesus did more than give us that counsel. He did more than just say to those who are listening to him, what would it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul?

[38 : 29] He did more than that. And he had to do more than that. He had to do more than that because Psalm 127 has a back story to it. There's a back story to Psalm 127.

The back story to Psalm 127 is Genesis 1-3. And in Genesis 1-3 we find that God created Adam and Eve in his image and in his likeness.

And he placed them in a paradise garden. And he blessed them. And he called them to live life under his rule, under his lordship, under his salvation, sovereignty.

And Adam and Eve rebelled. Adam and Eve were wise in their own eyes and did not follow God's instructions. And God expelled them out of the garden.

But God had mercy on them. And even as he spoke to them on the day that they sinned, he made them a promise. He said that I'm going to send you a deliverer, I'm going to send you a redeemer.

[39 : 47] And at a time that the Bible describes as the fullness of time, God sent his son. God sent Jesus Christ who came to this earth and who lived a perfect life, who obeyed the father in every single thing, and then who went to the cross and who died for disobedient sinners, like Adam and Eve and all the rest of us.

And because of the death that Christ died, rebels could be reconciled to God and forgiven and enabled to obey the Lord, enabled to do what Psalm 127 calls us to.

And it's only through his enablement, it's only through his power that we are able to do more than hear the words of Psalm 127.

And even then we will not live out Psalm 127 perfectly. We drift from it, we forget. We get on the treadmill of life and we can neglect these things, forgetting God and our labors.

working excessively and not resting sufficiently, ignoring the gift of children. And so we need to hear this again and again.

[41 : 18] In the same way the children of Israel, in that annual way, three opportunities to sing Psalm 127, be reminded of these truths, we need to come back to this again and again, brothers and sisters.

And we need to do so mindful of how much we need the Lord's help. We need more than just these words of wisdom. We need divine enablement to enable us to live out these words.

And so may the Lord help all of us. May the Lord help all of us to live meaningful Christ-centered lives, working and resting and raising children by the power of God and for the glory of God.

Let's pray. Father, we acknowledge how easy it is for us to ignore you in our work and neglect rest that you have given to us as a gift.

And Lord, most of all, to allow our excesses to cause us to devalue the children that you've given to us, to not cherish them, to not invest in them, to not steward them.

[42 : 49] Lord, would you have mercy on us? Would you help us help us with the grace to love us to live us? to! Lord, many of us, we sometimes live with regret.

Lord, would you help us entrust all of that to you, knowing that ultimately you're the one to whom we look. You're the one upon whom we depend.

And so, Father, I pray you'd work in all of our hearts this morning and encourage our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen. This is time for our closing song.