

Psalms of Ascent - Psalm 127

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is David. I'm one of the elders here at Lampstand.

Obviously, I'm different. Eric is our normal Sunday speaker, but today he's getting a break. I pray that what you hear today blesses you, and if not, we'll look forward to seeing you next week.

We've been going through a selection of psalms this summer. Today we're in Psalm 127. This group of psalms was most likely read or sung while the ancient Israelites were on their way to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

But the subject matter of this psalm, the one we're doing today, it isn't about what you normally think of when you think of going to the temple, or for us, going to church on Sunday. Interesting. You are welcome to turn with me to Psalm 127. If you're using one of the Bibles from the back there, it's on page 298.

[1 : 30] The book, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, was written in the late 1800s in Scotland.

It's a bit of a dark book. It's about a doctor who experiments on himself and creates this second person out of, like, from himself.

Now, the doctor is a good-ish kind of person, someone who obeys the rules, does what they're supposed to, maybe does some things when he's by himself that he's not proud of, but kind of like what we think of an everyday person in our neighborhood is like.

But the person that Dr. Jekyll creates is pure evil. And all those sinful desires that Dr. Jekyll might have, they begin to come out of Dr. Jekyll when he becomes Mr. Hyde.

In some ways, we all live a bit like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Some days or even some hours, it goes back and forth.

[2 : 44] Sometimes God's Spirit is moving in us and on us, and we desire to do good. But then other times, our sinful hearts seem to rule over us.

So there can be this Jekyll and Hyde split inside us, and then here in our culture in America, this split personality can become pronounced based on the day of the week.

You see, we have a problem sometimes at church. Who we are on Sunday is sometimes different than who we are the other days of the week.

We put on this front or this disguise or this other person for the holy people at church on Sunday, but then we go back to being our normal selves when we go home, and we don't have to act so holy.

But God doesn't want us to grow into who he wants us to be just on certain days of the week. God doesn't want us to be Dr. Jekyll on Sunday and Mr. Hyde Monday through Saturday.

[3 : 59] What Psalm 127 is going to teach us is worship God Monday to Saturday too, not just Sunday. Worship God Monday to Saturday too.

And then there's two ways we're going to see how to worship God Monday to Saturday. First, by worshiping God in our work, and then by worshiping God in our relationships.

So, worship God on Monday to Saturday too, and our first point, worship God in your work. So, worship God in your work. We see this in verses 1 and 2.

Let's read them again. 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. You can see these verses mention building a house and being a watchman over the city.

[5 : 15] So, when we say worship God in your work, you can see that building a house, being a watchman, these are jobs. So, we're talking about our 9 to 5 jobs, right?

Like how we make our money. Well, look at the last sentence there. It's in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil.

This expands our definition of work to whatever it is we're doing from sunup to sundown. So, when we say worship God in your work, we're talking about school.

We're talking about raising kids. We're talking about yard work. And yes, also your 9 to 5 job. Now, do you see this word vain popping up over and over?

It means useless or something being not helpful. So, it's useless or not helpful to build a house, guard a city, or work all day unless God gives the success.

[6 : 23] In this broad definition of work, everything we do from sunup to sundown, human effort can only go so far. God must be central in all that we do.

And this relates to us worshipping God because a big part of worship is understanding who we are and understanding who God is.

Understanding it's God who gives success in all we do is one of the reasons for our worship. Let me put it this way. How could we truly worship God on Sunday if we don't even think we need Him Monday through Saturday?

So, the question for us is, do we see God as the one who gives us success in our work, or do we see ourselves as the greatest in our own lives?

In 1964, the boxing heavyweight champion of the world was Sonny Liston. From everything I've read, it sounds like he very much deserved that title.

[7 : 42] I'm not much of a boxing fan, but go along with me. It sounds like Sonny Liston had a super scary punch.

He was a super scary fighter to get into the ring with. Yeah, this punch was amazing. And Liston had used his big punch to defeat eight of the top ten contenders in the world, knocking out seven of them.

Next on the list to knock out was an upstart boxer named Cassius Clay. When Clay had moved up in the ranks enough and got the chance to fight Liston, nobody thought Clay had a chance at all to beat Liston.

Clay had struggled in his last couple of fights, and his style of fighting, it was different than Liston's. Clay was more finesse, less power, just the opposite of Liston.

But Clay was not intimidated. And interestingly, he was very optimistic about his chances of winning, and even taunted Liston, quite bold for an underdog.

[8 : 53] An underdog he was. Clay went into the fight, and the betting was 8-1 that he would lose. But in one of the most memorable boxing matches ever, Clay, in the seventh round, defeated Liston in a historic upset.

A tremendous achievement. And in the aftermath of the fight, the words that Clay had uttered, Cassius Clay, who later changed his name to Muhammad Ali, the words that Clay had uttered, rang out around the world, I am the greatest.

So my question for you is in what areas of your life, in what areas of all the work you do, are you saying, I am the greatest?

If you say, in school, if you get your test back, and you see you got a good grade, on the outside, you're pretty humble, but on the inside, are you a little bit like, I'm pretty smart?

Or if at your job, there's a long-term project you've been working on, it's taken up so much energy, and finally, at near its completion, it actually looks like all this work you've been doing might be worthwhile.

[10 : 23] And your boss is even starting to notice. Do you smile a bit to yourself and say, I got this. Or if your kids are starting to obey pretty well, these little kids were growing up, maybe your kids are all grown up, and they're following Jesus.

Praise be to God. In your quiet moments, are you thinking a little bit to yourself, that's my influence. That's my influence in their lives.

Or maybe there's been a couple of people in your life that haven't been getting along with each other, and it's been a prayer point for you. You're not liking seeing all this arguing. You're working at getting these two to reconcile, and finally, amazingly, they get together face to face.

They really do feel remorse. And they really do forgive each other. Afterwards, do you reflect on that reconciliation and think, man, if I hadn't put in all that effort, they'd be still fighting with each other?

Or maybe you've got some personal goals for health and diet. It's such a struggle. Day in, day out. But at last, you're starting to see some progress.

[11 : 53] Your body's even starting to feel a little bit better. The doctor is even praising your efforts. Deep down, do you kind of agree with what our culture says?

If you put in the work, you deserve the reward. Let's hear verse 1 again. 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. This verse cuts to the core of our pride. That we want to give ourselves the glory in our work.

And it cuts to the core of our work-obsessed American culture that rewards individual achievement for individual effort. Whatever our hearts may simply try to point us to, or however our culture tries to persuade us, it is God we must worship in our work, not ourselves.

God alone gives or doesn't give success in our work. And our reward is enjoying our Creator and the work He's given us.

[13 : 10] Not getting caught up in who deserves whatever benefit God might give because of the efforts in our work. Now, some of you might have heard that bit about getting the test back and seeing the good grade and thought, nope, I don't have to worry about that.

Or all those other areas of your life that I mentioned. Because maybe you're not an overachiever. Maybe you're more predisposed to have a cloudy outlook on life.

You felt like your experience has taught you what sort of person you are and what sort of person you aren't. Your experience has taught you you're not that person who has all the friends.

You're not that person who gets the good job. You don't have all the right answers. You can't just set your mind to do something and do it.

Maybe you feel like you're a failure most of the time. But I want to caution you that that same attitude that declares about ourselves I am the greatest can also be the same attitude that says about ourselves I'm the worst.

[14 : 42] The problem again is that we're claiming responsibility for the outcome. So for instance praying to get those two friends to reconcile and then getting them together instead of a happy ending they're still mad at each other.

If your response is I'm such a failure that response could be the same God dishonoring attitude we're talking about here.

Remember it's God who builds the house. It's God who guards the city. God may be using your failures to teach you something about himself to grow you in him.

Okay some of you are hearing all this about worshiping God in your work and you might have a question. You might be thinking so okay let me put this together if it's God who gives or doesn't give success in everything I do should I even try?

Like is it even worth it for me to try if God already is going to determine whether I'm successful or not? To answer that I'm going to have us go to another passage in the Bible.

[16 : 02] So if you could keep your finger in Psalm 127 and turn to the New Testament to Philippians chapter 3 verse 12. Philippians chapter 3 verse 12.

If you're using one of those Bibles in the back it's on page 571. This is a letter to a church in a town in present day Greece written shortly after Jesus lived.

The author is Paul a disciple of Jesus who started churches throughout the Roman Empire. In the preceding verses Paul is telling a bit of the story of how he came to believe in Jesus and now how much he treasures his relationship with him and he's also looking forward to eternal life with God in heaven.

So starting in verse 12 Paul says not that I've already obtained this that is the fullness of the Christian life not that I've already obtained this or I'm already perfect but I press on to make it that is perfection I press on to make perfection my own because Jesus Christ has made me his own.

Brothers I do not consider that I have made it my own but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[17 : 48] Paul knowing that it's God who gives success in everything he does continues working toward the perfection that he'll have once he's in heaven.

Paul strives presses on towards his goal and most importantly we see the why here it's because of Paul's love for God in Christ Jesus so that question if it's God who gives or doesn't give success in

all I do should I even try Paul's answer is yes keep pressing on and the reason is because of your whole hearted love and devotion for God because of what he's done for you in Christ Jesus but that begs the question because some of us here today might not be Christians might not have put our faith in Jesus in his life death and resurrection so we can be forgiven of all our sins past present and future that's the good news or the gospel of the

Christian message we've read verse one in psalm 127 already a couple times that if God doesn't build the house the builder of works in vain God has built the house God has made the way for us to come back to him to have a relationship with him now and forever in heaven and that house is belief in Jesus as the one to save us from our sins by dying for us taking our place in the cross believing in Jesus is something you can do even today I'll be at that back table after the service and I or someone else would love to chat with you about where you're at on your faith journey in Jesus okay now flipping back in our Bibles to Psalm 127 thanks for taking that jaunt with me going back to Psalm 127 there's one last area

I want to mention about worshiping God in our work it's an area we might not be on our guard against because it happens in our spiritual lives you see we often forget that God gives again God gives a success so God is ultimately in control of even people's hearts both in coming to faith in Jesus and in their spiritual growth so in our church life if I can call it that we set up outreach events and we despair when not as many people come as we'd like or we put in so much work to disciple someone and it just looks like there's so little fruit I urge you don't give in to temptation to see these as failures just be faithful to serve and then to keep on serving what God does with our service is his choice on the other hand if the numbers in our church are increasing or some programs we're doing are changing lives other church leaders might even want to mimic whatever it is we're doing so they too can see people come to Jesus in those times the temptation is to believe that it's us that it's something we did that's ultimately giving success but just as in everything else in our lives the success of our work in the church or maybe

I should say our spiritual work the success in our spiritual work is not up to us we pray for lives to be changed because of our best efforts and we also pray that we dare not take the credit for any success that God might give okay so that's the first point worship God in your work remember overall we're talking about worshiping God Monday to Saturday too so again first point worship God in your work our second point is worship God in your relationships worship God in your relationships this second point is found in the remainder of the psalm verses 3-5 let's read these verses again children are a heritage from the

[23 : 02] Lord the fruits of the womb a reward Lord 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 at the gate the main idea in these verses is that children are a blessing you see in verse 3 children are called an inheritance or a gift that's that word heritage there children are called a reward and then there's a metaphor that goes through verses 4 and 5 how children are like arrows and they will be helpful during hard times in the parents lives you see those hard times in verse 5 with enemies at the gate the gate was the part of the city where legal disputes took place like a courtroom so don't get a mental picture like there's an invading army coming and yelling and taunting something happening at the gate you know there's a battle going on or something but rather the enemies at the gate are fellow

Israelites some kind of argument has escalated become a legal matter and the parents children come to the gate to support their parents so said in a few different ways children are a blessing some of you might have heard these verses quoted to encourage parents to have many children let's dive into that first you see in verse 5 blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them so the metaphor here is again children are like arrows and filling your arrow holder your quiver is a way that God blesses so as some see this the more arrows in your quiver the more God has blessed you so have lots of kids that's kind of how the reasoning goes alright let's talk a bit about the setting in ancient

Israel when this psalm was written in ancient Israel there was no health insurance there was no life insurance there was no retirement plans no retirement homes everything including your financial well-being everything was about relationships and it zeroed in on family relationships so if you had children who would provide for you take care of you love you honor you in your old age what a blessing that was the good life in ancient Israel not driving around in an RV seeing national parks like we like to do but seeing the fruit of all your relationship investment through the years come to

bear as your children grandchildren and neighbors are loving and serving the one true God in peace with him and in peace with each other that's the good life what a blessing so stay in there in your imagination to that kind of life you can see in ancient Israel having many children was a blessing from God the challenge is how to apply this truth in a different culture in a different time it's us what is God telling us in our culture thousands of years after this psalm was written our first clue as we're kind of thinking through this is how infrequently this topic of how many children to have how infrequently this topic comes up in the Bible it's just not a topic we see a lot it seems as though the Bible doesn't see this question as something within human control which leads to the second clue the second clue actually comes out of the first point which we've already been talking about as

God gives the success in our work it's also God who gives children ultimately we don't decide if and how many children we might have so if God gives children and how many ever they are those children are a blessing any amount of human control there is in having kids if indeed there is any will fall into the what I'm calling wisdom needed category where godly counsel and prayer are necessary so hopefully I gave you enough of a non-answer there as we're talking about children being a blessing there's something in our culture that we can't ignore it's a topic that's very political dividing many in our country today even as people near and dear to us have had to deal with the personal effects of it you might have already guessed what it is it's abortion

[28 : 59] I don't want to bring up the topic to remind anyone of past wounds or to give us all something to argue about that's not the point rather what I want to say is often our discussions of abortion miss God's point of view he's telling us very clearly here in Psalm 127 that children are a blessing they're a gift from him our culture doesn't see God as creator our culture often sees children as a hindrance rather than a gift in general our consumerism like our need to have stuff and want more stuff and new stuff it preys on our extreme selfishness which then leads to a lack of serving and serving is what's needed for the love and care of children so obviously in these ways and more our culture's views differ from

God's perspective what we mustn't do as we consider and discuss this kind of explosive topic is to confuse how our culture views children and how God sees them there's also a more subtle way in our culture that we don't see children as a blessing and I kind of hinted at it just a bit there ago it's this children are often seen as a hindrance or a barrier to being able to get to do the things we really want to do going and hanging out with our friends having a job being able to spend time in our hobbies traveling sometimes our words and our emotions betray us when we sigh and we complain that we can't do what we want anymore because we have kids and it's not just parents that can have this attitude

I pray that the next time we hear a crying baby on an airplane or in a church service we praise God for the gifts he's given us this way of thinking about children as a hindrance it even seeps its way into the church Heather and I noticed this overseas when many missionary families saw their real ministry as happening only inside the church to the point that children were often seen as an obstacle to doing ministry and I'm sad to say it wasn't just a one time occurrence I'd say it really looked like that was kind of MO like how many families operated again

I pray may it not be in or outside the church children are not a hindrance children are a blessing so that's the direct kind of application just about children but let's expand this application to all of our relationships children being a blessing is a snapshot it's a picture of all the relationships in our lives just like God puts us each into a family God has also surrounded us with people at church work school extended family and those people are a blessing as well the people God has put into our lives they're not hindrances they're not mistakes they're not something or someone we need to figure out how to avoid but

God has actually blessed us by putting those people in our lives do we believe that do we live it out God has blessed me by putting each of you in this church God has blessed you by putting those students at your school or those other kids on your team or in your group and yes all those maybe difficult relationships in your family God has blessed you by putting those people in your family and about all those difficult relationships in our families or otherwise just like in our first point earlier where I said God might be using the failures in our work to teach us something about him or grow us the same can apply here the question we need to be asking in those difficult relationships is what is

[34 : 46] God trying to teach me what's he trying to show me through this difficult relationship how is he trying to grow me so the tricky part in our relationships and especially the difficult ones is to see that God has blessed us with our relationships I know it's a bit cliché but that question everyone asks themselves on their deathbed you know if we're paying attention to all the TV shows that deathbed question of what have I done with my life you know everyone asks that question on TV right that deathbed question it's not going to be about how well we did in our job or how much money we accumulated it's going to be about relationships it's going to be about people do you see the relationships God has given you as blessings and do you invest heavily!

in those relationships do you worship God in your relationships I mentioned earlier about those ancient Israelite parents looking back on their lives after a lifetime of investment in children and grandchildren and neighbors and now there's those who are living in peace with God and with each other may that lifelong goal be ours as well parents and those who aren't parents may we even today reflect on the relationships that God has given us do we see them as blessings from God are we worshipping God in our relationships the story of Dr.

Jekyll and Mr. Hyde does not have a happy ending I won't give it away but I'll tell you a little bit I won't give away the ending though there's a potion each personality or person uses to convert or make themselves into the other one Dr.

Jekyll into Mr. Hyde he uses a potion and then Mr. Hyde uses a potion to make him into Dr. Jekyll but as you would guess the potion begins to run out and one of the personalities begins to take over the same is true with us we're either going to become more of the people God intends us to be or we're going to say no to his transforming work in our lives we're going to say no from the very first when he tugs on our hearts to believe in Jesus we're going to say no to later as he's calling us to lovingly devotedly follow him more closely so we're either going to go towards him that choice that divide in the pathway becomes evident in who we are on Sunday versus who we are Monday to Saturday Psalm 127 is about worshipping God Monday to Saturday to not just Sunday this psalm is a part of a series of psalms that were most likely sung by the Israelites as they're on their way to worship God in Jerusalem but in our psalm today the topics weren't about what songs to sing or reading the Bible or prayer certainly those are important and worthy of consideration but the topics in our psalm today were everyday things our work our relationships think about it on their way to worship God in Jerusalem as the Israelites heard and joined in this song on their minds was their lives back home our lives away from church are an important part of our worship worship

[39 : 14] God Monday to Saturday too and as we worship God in our work and as we worship God in our relationships day by day week day by week day he transforms us more and more into the sons and daughters of the king he wants us to be join me in prayer Lord God we thank you for all that you have done for us from the beginning when you tugged on our hearts maybe when we were even little kids to follow you to believe in Jesus and even today as you're calling on us to follow you more closely we pray that we would have hearts that are soft not hard but ready to hear and do your will thank you for this chance to hear from your word to us you didn't just leave us without guidance and wisdom but you've given us your word and most importantly your word as

Jesus yourself in the flesh to live and die for us we thank you this morning and it's in Jesus name we pray amen■