

House Builder

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's great to be together today and I wonder if you would take out your Bible, please, and open to Psalm 127 on page 548. Boys and girls, you can come and tell me if your mum and dad doesn't have their Bible open afterwards.

And if you don't have a Bible open and you have a spare hand, I wonder if you'd take the prayer book and open it to page 656 near the back. We're going to pray that prayer at the end of the sermon, if I get to the end of the sermon.

So, lots of hands doing lots of things. The Bible's the most important one at this point because you can check if the preacher is telling the truth.

Psalm 127. Did you know that the line at the top of the psalm is part of the original text? So we know a song of ascents of Solomon.

This psalm 127 was written by the smartest, cleverest, richest, wisest, most successful man of his day, King Solomon.

[1 : 1 0] He was so smart, he was so kind, he was so wise that the Queen of Sheba, who was also pretty smart, went up to see him because she couldn't quite believe that he was so good from a distance.

And the Bible tells us that when she saw how lovely he was and how people loved him so much and how cleverly he did things and all the gold that he had and the buildings that he'd built and the city that he'd built, she was breathless.

Took a breath away. But with all his success and brilliance and money, it all comes down to this. Look at the first two verses. Solomon says, Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stay awake in vain.

It is in vain. You rise up early and go to bed late, eating the bread of anxious toil, for he gives his beloved sleep. That is pretty devastating, isn't it?

And I think this is something that we find very difficult to believe. What Solomon is saying is there are two kinds of people, there are two kinds of lives. You can live a life with God, where you let God build and God watch and you let God work.

[2 : 3 4] Or there's another kind of life where you build and you work and you watch apart from God, you leave God out of the picture. And he says, everything you do in that life is in vain.

It's useless. Isn't that devastating? Let's look at those two kinds of lives. The first life is the life apart from God.

And I think it's very clear that the king wants us to get this very clear because three times he uses this word, vain, vain, vain. He says, unless God is directly involved in what you're doing and in your life, all our building and all our labour is in vain.

Staying up late at night, getting up early in the morning to work without God is in vain. It's obviously true that there's a way of living where we can build and work with God.

But if we build without God, apart from God, leaving him out of the picture, it is vain because God is not doing it. And I want to tell you, those of you who are young here today, that is incredibly insulting to our pride and human ego.

[3 : 48] We think we are very clever and we think that the things that we do are important because we are doing them. But if this psalm is right, it means you can build the biggest building in the world.

You can build the most fabulous city in the world. You can be part of the most famous and successful and wealthy family in the world. But apart from God, it is all vain.

Empty, useless. The word means deceptive. It deceives. And the reason it's deceptive is because from the outside, the tallest building in the world looks fantastic.

Fame and money and all those things look so good. And it looks like things succeed apart from God. And the psalm says, yes, that's true. Lots of tall buildings will get built.

Lots of great cities will be built. But in the end, they will ultimately be in vain. If you build without God, it says in verse 2, you will eat the bread of anxious toil.

[4 : 50] It might be the finest whole grain artisan bread. It might be gourmet dressed and served at the finest restaurant in Vancouver.

But it's still the bread of anxious toil if it is eaten and built apart from God. Very important. You can build your life and make yourself wealthy and famous and successful.

You can be beautiful, attractive and admired by everyone. But apart from God, it will be in vain. You can go to university and you can study political theory. And you can read the works, the brilliant works of Plato and Machiavelli and Marx, who develop wonderful theories about what makes a terrific city and what makes a great society and how you form a government to make the best city in the world.

But if this psalm is right, apart from God, it is all in vain. Apart from God's blessing, no city ever works. Apart from his grace, no family ever works.

And that's why it helps to explain why the world is so troubled and confused and sad. Because all our attempts to bring order and justice into the world apart from God, in the end, cannot change hearts and therefore are in vain.

[6 : 12] It's pretty devastating, isn't it? And that is life apart from God. I want to move to the other side, the second life. And that is life with God. The most amazing thing about this psalm is not that without God our lives are in vain, but it is this, that God himself is willing to work in our lives and in our circumstances.

He's willing to build the house with us. He's willing to watch over the city with us. Not just religious activities that we do together here, but the building of our families.

And Solomon tells us that God builds and God watches and he builds them through us. And what does that look like? Well, just look down at verse 2 at that last phrase.

It says, he gives to his beloved sleep. Well, that's not really what it says. It says, he gives to those he loves in sleeping.

It's not that Christian people sleep very well. You'll be very pleased to know. What it means is that if we trust God to be working, we know that even when we sleep, he is at work.

[7 : 26] That we're not going to get God to act by being anxious or worried or creating some strategy for God to fit into. He works purely because of this.

He loves us. And that the life lived for God is a life lived based on the fact that I know God loves me. He loves me. He loves me.

I'm not working. I'm not living. I'm not trying hard so as to get God to love me. I know God loves me and therefore I work hard for him and I've been accepted by the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I think that is very, very encouraging. It means that if I succeed, if I do well, that has come from God.

And it means if I fail, it might be disappointing, but I'm not going to go into despair because God loves me even when I fail. Now, very important lesson for all of us to learn.

[8 : 28] You see, here are two different people, two different kinds of lives. One built on God, one built without God. From the outside, they look very much the same.

Both of them are working hard. Both of them are staying up late. Both of them are getting up early in the morning. Both of them are building and laboring and working. The difference is this, that the person who is building her life on God knows that God loves her and everything that she does grows out of the fact that God loves her.

And every new project and everything that she does, she begins with prayer and it's offered to God for the glory of God. The other person just works hard.

If God's love is a gift of his grace, it means that we can rely on him. Now, I think this is very hard for us to believe this morning. Very difficult. It's impossible for us, I think, to believe that everything done apart from God is in vain and that we are loved beyond imagining and that God is very interested in the private circumstances of our lives.

So what Solomon does in verse 3 is he gets personal and he moves from our public lives into our families and into our homes. And if you've got a Bible there, let us read verses 3 to 5 together, shall we?

[9 : 47] Lo, sons are a heritage from the Lord. The fruit of the room a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth.

Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the game. This is wonderful stuff, you see, because children and how families work are a perfect illustration of the way God works in the world.

Children, and those of us who are parents know this very well, children are given to us by God to show us we are not in control. Children are not the result of some designer fertility technology.

They are from the Lord. And they are like arrows, says the psalm. Think about this. It's not that you use your children to shoot people with. It's not like if you have 10 or 12 children you're a very scary person.

That's not the analogy at all. The analogy is this. That from the moment the arrow leaves the hand of the warrior, he cannot touch it, he cannot control it.

[10 : 56] And that is what it feels like to have children. That's what I think.

You have some say in the general direction of where the arrow goes. But once it's fired, as it were, you need to trust where it will go. That's what he's talking about.

That's why at the beginning of verse 5, the word happy is not happy, it's the word blessed. Remember Psalm 1 says, blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

It's not happy as though the more children you have, the happier you will be and the less worries you have. Someone could argue the opposite was probably true, but I would not do that.

What it is saying is that every new circumstance in your family life is an opportunity to enter into the work of God and to have God work in your life. That is what families are for.

[11 : 58] Let me say it this way. If you follow Jesus Christ, your marriage is an arena for God to work in. If you are a single person, your singleness is just as much a place for the love of God to be worked out as your work or as marriage or as your family life.

We are either living our marriages for God or living out our singleness based on his love as the place of his glory or we're not. And if we're not, then our singleness and our marriage is in vain.

And for those of us who are parents, if you look at these words, you can see that our children have been loaned to us by God. It's not we give them our inheritance, it's that God gives them to us as our inheritance and he loves them more than you and I can imagine and we are to pray for them and to be an example to them of humility and of purity and of generosity because we know we are not in control and we know that ultimately the only things in the lives of our children that are going to last are the things that God does in their lives.

See, the last verse, again, it's not very clear here. When it says, he shall not be put to shame, it's actually plural in the original. They shall not be put to shame when they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Speaking about the children. It's not the picture, you know, you read this psalm and at first it feels a bit like the mafia. You know, I have a lot of sons at the gate.

[13 : 39] You want some respect at the gate? You know, that's not what it's talking about at all. It's talking about this. If we build our families and we seek to commit our children and our families in the presence of God and building them on the foundation of his love, and if God is working in our families to create people who are also living out of the love of God lives that are humble and clean and generous, they will not be ashamed when they face adversity.

Very interesting. The psalm says that our family lives and our private lives are the place either of shame or of blessing. Shame built apart from God, shamed of Christ.

Blessing allowing God to build. I want to speak to the boys and girls for just a moment. Boys and girls, you've been sitting here and there are a lot of things that I've said you don't understand.

That's okay. There are a lot of things that I've said that I don't fully understand. Tell you the truth. What's happened in our family is that our boys take us to see films now and increasingly, Mrs. Short and I don't understand them and we ask for explanations later.

And that's the way it ought to be in church. You should be here with your mum and dad during the summer and ask for explanations later. But here is what I want to say to you. I want to tell you the best gift that you could ever give to your mum and to your dad.

[15 : 08] It's this, that you come to know how much God loves you and that you build your life and you try to understand how to love God. That's what will please your parents most.

That's what should please your parents most. That you run hard after Jesus. That is what your parents should want more than anything else. And if you are a parent, this is a great encouragement, this psalm, to have godly desires for your children.

What is it that we are praying for and working for and desiring in our children? Is it that they be intelligent and popular and successful and musically accomplished and wealthy and athletic?

Is it that they not be too different from their non-Christian friends, not too religious, not too godly? You can build a family that is successful, that has everything the world desires, but if this psalm is true, it can be completely in vain.

We need to pray for one another and for our children. We need to have a place in the children's ministry so that we can be formed and we can form one another based on the love of God and can live towards the love of God.

[16 : 22] That is what the psalm is saying to us. And I want to finish by saying it's very sobering to realise that King Solomon, who wrote this psalm, did not follow his own words to the end of his life.

When he was an old man, he turned away from these words and he stopped building on God and allowing God to build and he followed other gods. So I want to say this morning, I think there are two actions.

There are two things that we need to do, two things this psalm calls on us to do. And the first is to repent. We need to repent of thinking that life has meaning and success building apart from God.

We need to repent of leaving God out of our actions and our decisions, making actions and decisions, say, in the workplace that have nothing to do with prayer and generosity but have to do with what looks right in the world.

We have to repent of thinking that we can build a better life apart from God, that I can't really trust him and I can't really trust his promises, that I need to take things into my own hands for my own sake.

[17 : 35] I need to control things because God doesn't seem to be giving me what I want and we start to build and watch and work apart from him. We need to repent of that and we need to repent of giving into the temptation to despair, of thinking that if I live for the Lord Jesus Christ, my life isn't worth, it isn't valued, it isn't meaningful.

We need to repent of that as well. That's the first thing. And the second thing is we need to trust God. The God who made us is the God who loves us and he's not some distant, impersonal force.

He's not impressed by our goodness, but he has made us for meaningful work. He's placed us in families and he's called on us to build and he builds and he is actively engaged in our lives even when we sleep, quietly, silently, establishing the work of our hands, not because we deserve it, not because we're particularly clever, but simply because he loves us.

We've gathered this morning for a communion service to be reminded something of what it cost God to love us in sending his son to die in our place and to rise again from the dead.

And when Jesus was here, he said, I am the cornerstone, rejected by the world, seen as vain by the world, but to God, chosen and precious.

[19 : 12] And now all that God is doing in this world is built on him, on Jesus Christ. It means that he is the key to life and he is the Lord of life and that our lives take their shape and direction from him.

The only things that are going to stand at the end of our lives are those things built on him. The only things that will stand at the end of the world are those things built on him.

And the question for us this morning is, can we trust him? Can we trust him? What a tragedy to live a life which is outwardly successful without God.

Not based on the one thing that will last into this next world. Not based on his constant, refreshing love. We can trust him.

And I want to invite you this morning to trust him, to take those things in your life that you feel you can't trust him with. Even those things that are most painful. We must trust him with our gains and successes and we must trust him with our losses and difficulties as well.

[20 : 22] We can trust him in our family lives, with our future. We can entrust our marriages to him. We can entrust our retirements to him.

You know, the best thing that we can do for this city of Vancouver is to gather together to hear his word and to build our lives on the Lord Jesus Christ. Because if God freely loves us, if he is building in our lives for his purposes, the way to see his hand at work is to begin and end everything in prayer and to look to him and to trust him.

My beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. So as we come forward for communion today and as we go out into this lovely day together, repent and trust.

Now I wonder if you would take the prayer book on page 656. I can't think of a prayer that better summarises what we've been saying.

And the word at the beginning is the word prevent. And that means we're asking God to go ahead of us, to go before us and to prepare the way for us.

[21 : 42] It doesn't mean stopping anything. So let's kneel together and before Bill comes and leads us in prayer, let's pray this prayer together.

Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour and further us with thy continual help that in all our works begun, continue and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy name.

And finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord.