

Guest Speaker Ben Finch!

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Date: 01 September 2019

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! No, thanks. It's exciting to have the opportunity to teach here.

I'm so thankful for what God's doing in this church. And so this morning, we're going to spend some time in Psalm 127, so you're welcome to turn there. But as we do, some things kind of come to mind to me as we explore this.

And have you ever had the thought that there simply isn't enough time in the day to get all I need to do? Amen.

Well, if so, this psalm is for you. Have you ever been anxious about your work or providing for your family? Do you find yourself sometimes crippled by anxiety? Have you been tempted to take on more than you can handle or even to live beyond your means?

[1 : 16] If so, this psalm is for you. Do you feel weary by the repetition and paces of life? Work, eat, sleep, repeat. Work, eat, sleep, repeat.

If so, this psalm is for you. Are you sometimes disappointed in God? Has life played out differently than you have imagined? If so, this psalm is for you and God wants to speak to you today and to me.

Let's read this together. Or I'll read it. Psalm 127. It says this. 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 a reward. And 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.

[2 : 27] He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. You know, isn't it so true that we spend so much of our time working a job, fixing meals, raising kids, serving our spouses and community, preparing for the future, planning, and etc.

Well, Psalm 127 is a psalm about God's providence in these areas. It's about God's work in the domestic family activities that we live.

And this psalm, I find, is God-saturated. It's filled with hope. It's filled with God. And the Lord wants to give you hope about your everyday lives.

This passage primarily focuses on two activities we see in those first two verses that seem to most occupy our time and energy, and that would be building and preserving.

Thus, I find it extremely practical. If we're going to spend that much time doing these things, and God would speak to it, that's what we're going to focus on today. So we'll break it up into two parts.

[3 : 33] Number one would be, and this is verses one and two, but how not to build, preserve your life. How not to build and preserve your life. And then verses three through five, I think we see the faithfulness of God to build and preserve our lives.

So I think in viewing it this way, we'll see the difference between our actions apart from the Lord versus God's actions on our behalf. So I'm kind of a nerd when it comes to, I like to tell people where we're going, how we're getting there.

So I have kind of what I think is the central message of this passage, and it would be this. Apart from the Lord's work, our labor is vain. And secondly, prosperity and security are God's gifts to those the Lord loves.

I got that? Is it up there? Okay, great. Perfect. So that's, I think, our main takeaway. So number one, how not to build and preserve your life.

So I'm going to read these verse two verses again. It says, 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. [4 : 49] 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. I think there's a great story that illustrates this that I'd love to share with you.

It's the story of the fisherman and the American businessman. An American investment banker was at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large fish. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took him to catch them. The Mexican fisherman replied, only a little while.

The American then asked why he didn't stay out longer and catch more fish. The Mexican said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs. And then the American asked, but what do you do with the rest of your time?

The fisherman replied, well, I sleep late. I fish a little, play with my children, take siestas with my wife, Maria. Stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos. [5 : 53] I have a full and busy life. The American scoffed, well, I'm a Harvard MBA and I can help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds buy a bigger boat.

With the proceeds from the bigger boat, you could buy several boats. Eventually, you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to the middleman, you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery.

You would control the product, processing and distribution. But you would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, and then to LA, and then to New York City, where you will run your expanding enterprise.

The Mexican fisherman asked, but how long will all this take? Well, you know, probably 15 to 20 years, he replied. Well, but then what, asked the Mexican.

Oh, the American laughed and said, well, that's the best part. When the time is right, you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You would make millions. Millions?

[6 : 58] Then what? The American said, oh, then you would retire. You'd move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late. You'd fish a little, play with your kids, take siestas with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos.

I love that. I think that illustration perfectly sums up the heart of the person who labors in vain. It's as though we don't always see the end.

We're not forward-looking enough to consider where our efforts might lead us if left to ourselves. Verse 1, we see the phrase, unless the Lord. It's mentioned twice. It's as though the psalmist would say to us, hey, unless the Lord is involved, these activities are empty.

They're meaningless. No matter what your skill, your strength, your industry, all will be in vain unless God assists. Though we appear to see the fruit from our effort sometimes, it's as though it's an illusion or a mirage unless Christ be involved.

We're dependent upon God for life, for health, for strength, for practical wisdom, for an ability to continue in our work. And we're dependent upon God for our success in it. What may be glorious, beautiful, and grand will soon decay or rust.

[8 : 23] It's like the new house that Joy and I just built. It won't last forever, right? Dust will fall. Grass will grow and overtake. Wood will rot.

Boards will break. And life will move on. Verse 1, we see there again, it gives us the picture of building a house. It's a very practical thing.

And then at the end of that verse, it gives us the picture of protecting and preserving a city. These are active things, right? These are, this picture shows us it's not a lack of doing things.

So right here I say, in no way do I think the psalmist is telling us to cease from building or from watching or that we should neglect our duty, right? That's not what he's saying. He's not telling you to be lazy in your work or to become apathetic.

This doesn't mean we should show our trust in God by doing nothing. As one theologian said, the Holy Spirit is not the patron of lazy men.

[9 : 27] Amen. Rather, he supposes we do all that we can do. And Oliver Cromwell was a famous British military leader who said, trust in God and keep your powder dry.

He forbids us to fix our trust on what we have done. It's as though he's saying, work with your full capacity as you trust in God.

But still work hard as you trust in God. All of our effort will be in vain unless God puts forward his power and gives our effort meaning. One of my favorite pastors, Charles Spurgeon, he said this. He said, trowel and hammer, saw and plane are instruments of vanity unless the Lord be the master builder. Now most of us are not working with trowel and hammer very often.

So I thought I would contextualize it a little bit. We might say this. Machine and automobile. iMac and camera. Scalpel and laser.

[10 : 29] Pot and pan. Excavator and dump truck. Pen and paper. All of these things are instruments of vanity unless the Lord gives grace.

St. Augustine once said, pray as though everything depended upon God, but work as though everything depends on you. There's a quote I wanted to share. I thought it was a little too beefy just to hear, but we'll have it up here.

It says, It's a lot to digest, but essentially we're saying, look, use all your might, all your skill, all your talent, yet trust the results to God.

Seeking security for something God does not protect is powerless. How many times do we see in the Old Testament where if God did not protect his people from invading armies, all their fortifications and defenses were of no avail.

It didn't matter what they did. After all the care for their own preservation which people can employ, our safety depends wholly upon God. So true security comes from God.

[11 : 52] Now, in verse 2 we see here, it's kind of like an artificial desire to lengthen our days, right? So as we read it again, verse 2 it says, It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for he gives his beloved sleep.

There's a story of a European missionary in Africa that I think is really helpful. The story goes like this. European missionaries serving in Africa a century ago hired local villagers as villagers, as guides or porters, people who carry things to help carry supplies to a distant station.

The guides went at a slower pace than the missionaries desired, so after the first two days they pushed them to go faster. On day three of the trek, the group went twice as fast as day two, and around the campfire that evening the missionaries congratulated themselves for their leadership abilities.

But on day four, those carriers would not budge. What's wrong? asked the missionary. Well, we can't go any further today, replied the villager spokesman.

Well, why not? Everybody seems to be doing fine. Yes, said the man, but we must wait here for our souls to catch up with our bodies. I don't know about you, but I can so relate to that.

[13 : 13] How many times do I find myself wearing myself out trying to gain more hours in a day? Or more riches, or more accumulations? I'm always working for something. I want more accomplishment. We're constantly available, right?

Our souls haven't caught up with our bodies. Most days, I try to maximize every minute of my waking hours and even find myself tolling from early till late.

It's as though I pride myself on the hustle, right? That sounds really good. But in what ways do we try to lengthen our days? Well, if you think about it, up into the 19th century, the only source of light besides the sun was flame or candle or torch.

Now there are lights in our homes that may stay on for 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And the constant glow of our iPhones remind us of our fear of missing out.

I think the Amish may be on to something. Now, don't get me wrong. There are sufficient cases where in godly pursuits, people lengthen their day. Either by getting up a great while before dawn to pray or by having God prolong the day.

[14 : 22] Yet this picture is one of someone laboring with anxieties and painful toil to be able to acquire more. So they're giving themselves out to get more.

The artificial lengthening of the day in anxiety is in vain, is what the psalmist is telling us. Alan Ross states, and we have a quote here, he says, A long, industrious day is not wrong.

In fact, it is held up as profitable in wisdom literature. But if the food is produced through tiring labor, anxiety, and stress, and the family eats of food so produced, it is a life of fear and worrying without

trusting the Lord, and it's futile.

More than that, it is lethal physically and emotionally. For such anxiety kills the body just as easily as it kills the spirit.

You know, in so many ways, I feel like my life can characterize that. How about you? I think today the Lord wants to release you from this anxiety.

[15:30] The constant tolling He wants to end. Isn't it true that we can often have an inflated view of our own importance as though everybody needs us, right? Well, our identity isn't found in accomplishments, our vocation, or our work.

There's an article that came out called Millennials Want to Be Rich More Than Anything. Since 1966, the Higher Education Research Institute has been conducting a study of first-year college students to determine their personal goals and values.

This collection of data has offered researchers chance to see how priorities change over the years, revealing striking generational differences in the results. So since 1989, being very well off financially, a.k.a. being rich, has consistently ranked number one as the biggest goal.

What's interesting, upon further study, it says, researchers are saying perhaps the real goal is actually not being well off, but appearing well off. When financial independence seems out of reach, young people are willing to settle for looking or feeling rich rather than actually being rich.

It's as though in our striving, we're trying to impress people we don't even know. Contrary to popular belief, we do not need to be well respected. We do not need to be promoted or honored.

[16:57] We don't need to be comfortable or rewarded for our efforts or recognized for our accomplishments. We don't need others to understand our work and approve of it. Be free from these expectations and trust the Lord.

Do what you ought to do, and the Lord will take care of that which you cannot do. It's enough to just be faithful. It's not God's design that you become slothful or that you would have no ambition or to be idle, rather that you would offer your work to God and ask that he would bless it.

So pray and call upon his name. As we've said, work hard and trust the Lord. There are a few Proverbs that come to mind that I thought are really helpful for this. Proverbs 23 says, Do not toil to acquire wealth.

Be discerning enough to desist. Proverbs 10 says, The blessing of the Lord makes rich and adds no sorrow with it. Proverbs 8 says, Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness and the paths of justice, granting an inheritance to those who love me, and filling their treasures.

[18:07] So to summarize that first kind of point here, verses 1 and 2, we see how not to build and preserve our lives. We don't build and preserve our lives through toiling and anxiety, but by trusting God, we work diligently.

Now the second point, the faithfulness of God to build and preserve. I kind of include the last little part of verse 2. It says, For he gives to his beloved sleep. I think that's the beginning of how God provides this.

But in verse 3, it says, Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, 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 gate. So the first thing I would say is that God gives sleep. Amen. I love sleep. It may be my favorite thing to do.

And eating, of course. So this goes all hand in hand. I read one quote that said, The world would give its favorites power, wealth, and distinction, but God gives sleep.

[19:15] Sleep here is in contrast to what we've seen above, the toil and the anxiety. The sleep is supposed to contrast our frantic activity. The psalmist wants us to know that a life dependent upon the Lord is secure and satisfying, and it is filled with contentment.

I've got to share this story, man. I was so affected by this. Charles Spurgeon had this dream I want to share with you. He says this, We don't speak like that today.

So he gives his beloved sleep, is what he kept kind of thinking through. And in my reverie, or in my daydreams, as I was on the border of the land of dreams, I thought I was in a castle.

Around this massive walls there ran a great moat. Watchmen pace the walls both day and night. It was a fine old fortress, and it was intimidating to those who saw it.

But I was not happy in it. I thought I lay upon a couch, but scarcely had I closed my eyes I heard a trumpet, Arm yourself! Arm yourself! And when the danger was overpassed, I lay myself down again, and I heard it again, Arm yourself! Arm yourself!

[20 : 33] Once more it sounded, and again I started up. But I could never rest. I thought I had my armor on and moved about perpetually clad in armor, rushing each hour to the castle top, aroused by some fresh alarm.

At one time a few was coming from the west, and a few was coming from the east. I thought I had a treasure somewhere down deep into the deep part of the castle, and all my care was to guard it. I dreaded, I feared, I trembled lest it should be taken from me. I awoke, and I thought I would not live in such a tower as that, for all its grandeur. It was a castle of discontent.

It was the castle of ambition, and man never rests in that castle. It is always, Arm yourself! Arm yourself!

There's an enemy here, or an enemy there. His dear love treasure must be guarded. Sleep never crossed the drawbridge of the castle of discontent.

[21 : 33] But then he decided he would supplement it with another daydream. He was in a cottage. It was in what poets call a beautiful and pleasant place.

I had no treasure in the world except one sparkling jewel that was on my chest, and I thought I would put my hand on that, and when I did, I went to sleep. I didn't wait till morning light.

The treasure was a quiet conscience of the love of God. It was the peace that passes understanding. And I slept, because I slept in the house of contentment, and I was satisfied with what I had.

So he says, go away, overreaching penny pinchers. Go away, grasping, ambition men. I envy not your life. The sleep of important people is often broken.

The dream of the penny pitcher is always evil. The sleep of the man who loves game is never hardy. But God gives, by contentment, his beloved sleep.

[22 : 34] And I just love that picture. I love, I love the picture of a content person. And I feel myself in such contrast so often.

Those who live independently of the Lord and who labor under their own strength have futile lives as far as God is concerned. That's what this verse is teaching us. There's a quote by Ross that'll come up here on the screen.

It says, the word sleep would be symbolic, referring both to literal sleep and to what sleep represents. Rising in the security, confidence, and satisfaction of knowing that one's life is in God's hands.

Those who place their complete trust in the Lord may rest assured that he knows their needs and he will provide for them. And that agonizing and laboring in fear and anxiety will not get any more done than what God chooses to give.

The life of faith is a life that rests in him. It may be diligent and industrious, but it will be free of restless anxieties. Can you see how God's calling us to contentment and to release our anxieties onto him?

[23 : 47] The psalmist is exhorting you to give over your undue and anxious labor. When the night comes, guys, go to sleep. Let the Lord give to you in sleep.

He can accomplish more in sleep than you can in your toil. Enjoy the contentment that comes through sleeping. Verses 3 through 5 here, we see, I kind of, you know, to be honest with you, I had a hard time thinking of how this fit into this whole psalm.

Most, so many commentators think, you know, you have verses 1 and 2 and then it almost feels like a different psalm. So, verses 1 and 2 speak of our actions, how we build and preserve out of anxiety.

But after study, I realized that verses 3 through 5 seem to point to an example of how God builds and how God preserves. These verses point to another mode of building a house, namely by giving us descendants to keep our name and family alive upon the earth.

God is building a family. God is building a legacy. The second half of the psalm shifts to focus on children as the prime example of the Lord's provision. Although our translation reads, Behold, it seems that indeed might actually be a better fit.

[25 : 04] Indeed, children are a heritage of the Lord. And see, you see in here, he uses two metaphors. He says, number one, children are an inheritance. I would love a big inheritance,

wouldn't you?

An inheritance brings with it great opportunity. But it also requires responsibility. On the one hand, you get a gift. But on the other hand, you have to develop and improve and enjoy it.

So children are a gift from God, but a gift that requires care and development if the child is to grow up righteous and wise. Amen? Responsibilities of parents as well as the value of the child so much depends upon our effort.

And so much of our time is spent on raising children, right? Secondly, it says that children are a payment. Children are a joyful benefit of marriage.

The Israelites saw children as the greatest enrichment God could give their married lives. And in the ancient world where life was fragile and infant mortality high, a child who lived and flourished was something for which parents would praise God.

[26 : 13] And we would never neglect or abuse such a gift as that. But our culture doesn't always see it that way, does it? I oftentimes when I'm asked if I have kids, you know, I almost pause a little bit and I'll say, yeah, I have four.

And I think they're stunned mainly because I look so young. But then they always say, did you plan that? And I'm like, of course I did not plan that.

And I joke. But, well, we really didn't, but I'm thankful. But I always, in my mind, I say, well, the Lord's, the Lord planned it. Right?

The Lord did plan it. And there's a German proverb that says, many children make many prayers and many prayers bring much blessing. So God's trying to develop my prayer life, apparently.

According to Seattle Magazine, I found this article really interesting.

But it says this, the title is, it's cats, it's dogs, and kids in that order. There are now more dogs in Seattle than children, and it's not even close.

[27 : 23] About 153,000 to 107,000 kids. I mean, this seems way backward, right? I mean, who even really likes cats? But, I'm kidding.

I'll get hate mail after this. Yeah. We'll see about that. So, this psalm reminds us, though, that children are not a fruit of chance.

But that God, as it seems good to him, distributes every man his share of them. Those who become fathers, God has given an honor to that. Children are a gift, and much like marriage, God uses children to remind you how much life is not about you.

frankly, children reveal your selfishness. One thing I'm learning as I get older is that, is that life is increasingly revolving around me less.

As much as I want. I mean, it's my birthday month, but nobody cares. Right? Nobody cares anymore. The, the beauty and frailty of having four kids and watching them grow up is that you gradually become Brennan's dad.

[28 : 37] Right? Or Knox's dad or Molly or Sawyer's dad rather than Ben Finch. Right? It can sober you as you realize that what you're creating is and should be so much bigger than you.

Life becomes less about you. And I think, in so doing, we shouldn't be, shouldn't be reckless or careless in our desire to provide for our family.

We ought to look for the continuance of God's grace to help. If he saw fit to give you four kids, he'll provide for four kids. And more so. Yet, the last two verses of this speak of God's way of preserving us.

Verse four, it says, like hands in the air, sorry, like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth and blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them.

He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. So just as a warrior would feel safe with many arrows at his disposal, so would the parent who had children who could defend the honor of his family.

[29 : 44] Children are our defense. They're our future. They stand between us and others in our vulnerable monuments. I remember Joy used to be scared to stay at home by ourselves, but once we had kids, it was like, there was a safety there that was unexplained.

Joseph Carroll said, to have many children about us is better than to have much wealth about us. Well, this church doesn't have much wealth, but we got a bunch of kids, don't we? Some might say we're rich in nothing but children, and that's okay.

Yet children are always a source of joy to their parents. It is a wonderful responsibility. Much of the anxiety we face has to do with the stress that comes from raising children, and you could say amen

from that.

There's a quote I wanted to share. It says this, It is not untypical of God's gifts that they are first liabilities, or at least responsibilities, before they become obvious assets.

The greater their promise, the more likely that these sons will be a handful before they are a quiver full. There's you some hope, folks. I shared that quote with Joy earlier this week.

[30 : 57] I'm like, man, the promise is huge, babe. So, take the weight off your back, Atlas. You can't raise kids by yourself.

This is meant to serve as a contrast to what our building and preserving looks like. God, in these verses, seems to be giving us a reminder that the Lord builds a family, and the Lord watches over the city.

He builds and He preserves our legacy. After all the striving we see in the above verses, God is saying, an upstanding family is wealth enough.

Man builds for glory and security, yet God gives quietly in our sleep. He's less concerned about your monetary wealth and position and more concerned with your trusting in Him.

Now, as we're wrapping up here, I would be remiss not to speak to those who desire children but yet do not have any. And there are those who desire a spouse and do not have one.

[31 : 59] Well, I think this hope, this psalm would give you hope as well. I think that God is reminding you today that you can trust Him with the way He rewards.

He sees you. He knows you. This passage is about more than having children of your own or a spouse of your own.

I have a dear friend here today who God called to lead a unique life. He's never been married, has no children.

I put in here that we know of. Huh, I'm just kidding. Yet, uh, I'm totally kidding. I had to provide a little humor here. Whew. Yet He has been a faithful spiritual father to many.

I've often wondered how different my life would have panned out without His godly influence. And I'm just one example of many. And in so many ways, He has a greater heritage and leaves a legacy of faith because He leaves it in me and my children and my wife.

[33 : 08] The length of His heritage is long. Don't waste your singleness. Don't waste your time before you have children. God's got so much in store for you.

Don't waste it. So what is this life about? Well, Psalm 21 says that we spend so much of our life preoccupied with building and preserving.

Through this psalm, God is reminding us that we are under God's providence. Most of the believer's life is lived without visions and revelations or words from heaven.

We spend much of our time trying to live wisely and righteously, trusting in the Lord's provision and guidance. So whatever one does in life, it needs to be done by faith. And we should want to bring glory to God's name.

So don't let your motive be anxiety. Trust in the Lord's work in your life so that your labor will be meaningful. All of life is to point to Jesus.

[34 : 10] For those who are in Christ, God is building a family and preserving a heritage that is not by flesh and blood, but through the gospel we are united to Christ.

We will one day spend eternity with Him and His presence. Praise the Lord. I thought the most appropriate way to end today would be to share a psalm with you that I go to often in my anxiety. And you'll see it up here in Psalm 121. It says, I lift my eyes up to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not strike you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life. And here we focus, the Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

[35 : 23] Amen. Let's pray together. Amen. Lord, we spend so much of our time in the routines of life as we work, as we go forward building homes, building careers, building families, building identities, building reputation.

We're in constant pursuit of these things, Lord, it seems. We're always trying to protect what we have, it seems. But Lord, you have called us today to trust in you, that you are building something bigger than us.

You're building more than my family. You're building a legacy. You're building a family of faith. And so, Lord, help us trust you. May we rest as parents.

May we rest as single people. May we rest as couples. May we trust you to provide for our needs. And Lord, would you grow us. Thank you for this time.

We look to Christ above all things. Lord, may our treasure be Jesus Christ. May we remember the depths of which you have forgiven us.

[36 : 54] The depths of which you've reached down to love us. And may we love much. May we forgive much. And so, God, thank you for this time.

Thank you for this church who would be here, who would show up. Lord, thank you for the opportunity to share today. We trust your word. God, may we leave singing with joy and being satisfied and content in the Lord, I pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.