

God does not over promise and under deliver

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 May 2021

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] In the future, at some point in the future, I'm intending to do a series on imitation. Throughout the New Testament and the Old Testament, we're encouraged to imitate, of course, imitate the right things.

And this passage this morning naturally falls into imitation. It also, believe it or not, because it is a psalm, the message they'll be preaching is from the psalms.

Obviously, as you know, the songs of ascent fall within the conflict period as well. So this is taken from Philippians 3, verse 17 to 21.

And it says, Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many of whom I have often told you, and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross.

Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

[1 : 33] Let me pray for the children. Gracious God and Father, I ask that you would bless and keep these children in Christ Jesus. That, Father God, that as they grow up here, that they would be nurtured, and they would imitate their leaders and their parents who follow Christ.

That, Father God, that as they hear your words, that they would be transformed. They would repent and believe all the time, and not just once. That, Father, that their faith in you would be strong each and every day.

So, Father, I ask that with the small seeds, but very important seeds that are sown now in Sunday school, that you would bless these children in Jesus' name. Amen. So, if you just stay as you are, and Gordon will direct the children out.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

[3 : 28] Psalm 128. Psalm 128. This psalm falls within the Song of Ascents.

And you'll remember that in the Bible studies on a Wednesday night, we covered a number of the Song of Ascents psalms.

Get it out. And this is one that fits right within it. So, Psalm 128. Now hear God's word. Blessed is the Lord.

Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways. You shall eat the fruit of the labor of the Lord, and it shall be blessed.

And it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house. Your children will be like olive shoots around the table.

[4 : 31] Behold, thus shall a man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel. I'd like us to pray again that for the people within this fellowship, before we come back to this word, I wanted to read it first to give us content for our prayers.

In fact, I don't know about you. I find it very difficult to pray without reading God's word first. I mean, I can pray for people without reading God's word, but I always think it's better to fill your tank, so to speak, and then pray out of that fullness of God's word and spirit, because the spirit and the word always cooperate with each other.

They are never in conflict. And so we're called to be being filled by the spirit. And of course, if we're filling ourselves with the word, this is a complementary and a cooperative action.

Let's pray for the fellowship. Father God, we recognize that the greatest blessing of all for any fellowship is to see our children's children enjoying the blessing.

[6 : 05] We recognize, Father God, that it is one thing for us to enjoy the blessing as a fellowship. It is another thing to hope and pray that our children's and their children would enjoy the blessing, the same blessing.

That, Father God, we would long for a generational faithfulness to be present within your church.

We would long, Father God, for the fear of the Lord also to be present within your church.

We ask, Father God, that as we read in Psalm 127, where roles are reversed, where the parents look after the children, and then in time the children come to look after their parents.

We pray, Father God, that that would be true in all churches. We pray for that kind of blessing. And we're not going to stop short of asking for that. For, Father God, that is what you have promised.

We ask, Father God, that you would recognize, that we would recognize that you place the family as the key role within the community. We would also recognize, Father God, or ask to recognize that as you bless the family, it blesses the congregation.

[7 : 12] And so we look to you today, Father God, for those who are on their own and perhaps don't have family, that we would be a family to them, and that we would be able to look after them.

That, Father God, if they don't have parents, or if they are old and they don't have children, that we would be those parents or children to those people.

So this is the kind of blessing we ask for in light of this psalm. And we ask for it, Father God, for the blessing of your people. And that as you build your church in this way, the way that you have promised to, the way that you promised to build the nation of Israel in that way, we look to you, Father God, and all hope for the success of all future generations, including our own.

And we ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. If you were to read the Proverbs, or any of the Proverbs, one of the key distinctions that you find within the home is the type of things that can add blessing to a home and the type of things that can't.

Money can put food on the table, but money cannot put fellowship around the table. Now, you can have fellowship around the table and money that puts food on the table.

[8 : 38] But Proverbs wants us to be able to see the place where the blessing is to be found rather than something that can be produced by the work or the labor or the money.

I'm not going to go into this too deeply, but when you read about wives and husbands and children, I can tell you ample stories, but my role is not to tell stories.

I'm not here to tell stories. I'm here to tell you what the Word of God says. But sometimes stories illustrate, sometimes they distract. I can tell you of one woman who I know very well, a lot older than me, and her father loved her with money.

Didn't actually love her, but loved her with money. Anything that she wanted, she had, but she had it with money. Anytime he couldn't spend time with her, he gave her money.

Sometimes a man may think that the only way to keep a wife happy is not actually to fear the Lord, as he should do, but actually take her on holiday or take her out for a meal or do many of these other things.

[9 : 51] That may temporarily please his wife, but it does not produce the fruitfulness as we see here in this psalm. So men, listen.

Also, fathers have got a big responsibility here because the knock-on effect to children implies the same way. The father cannot sit around the table and complain about how hard he's been working in order to put the food there.

He's forgetting that God put the food there. If he doesn't pray that God bought the food as well as provided for it, then he's not praying correctly.

Or else the children will get a wrong idea not only of their father, but also of the Lord who provides. So there are, money plays a role, hard work plays a role, but these things are not the cause of blessings.

They're not the cause of a fruitful wife, a fruitful marriage, a fruitful labor, fruitful land, or even fruitful children. And if we think covenantally as we should, and we think about the beauty of God blessing successive generations, then we begin to understand how a nation prospers and how a church is built.

[11 : 11] But you'll also notice that within covenants, there are covenantal conditions. Now I want to state this clearly and carefully so that you do not assume that I am saying something that I am

not saying.

When it says here, in verse 1 and verse 4, the covenantal conditions for the blessing that exists, it is not referring to your salvation.

It is not, this is not dependent on your salvation or have anything to do with your salvation. Rather, this is more to do with your life before God. Because we know that salvation, or rather in salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ fulfills every condition that needs to be met in order for us to be saved.

The sacrifice is made by Christ. That's a condition for the forgiveness of sins. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Well, that condition had to be met.

It could not be met by you. It had to be met by Christ. It was met by Christ. And when that condition was met, you are forgiven. Someone had to lay down that offering and present it before God.

[12:26] Well, that again was Christ because he is the priest who lays down his own life as the offering, the sacrificial offering before God that leads to the atonement of sins, your forgiveness.

So, am I clear? That the covenantal conditions requiring your salvation are all fulfilled by Christ. But within relationship with God, there are conditions which God expects you to fulfill in order for blessings to be given.

That's grace. So that's not grace. Grace should mean that I should receive it and do nothing. Well, grace has enabled you to live the life that God has given you.

And within that life, there are rules. There are not so much rules, but a heart change that causes you to desire God's way rather than any other way.

So when you look at your wife and you realize that God says the way to treat a wife is not to treat her to holidays or, well, you can treat her to holidays. I'm not saying you shouldn't. Not to treat her to holidays, not buy her fancy clothes or take her to fancy restaurants.

[13:37] If you want a fruitful and faithful wife, then none of those things are going to produce that. The fear of the Lord will, but none of those things.

Now, of course, the wife is not independent in this respect because she also has to fear the Lord.

You know, marriage involves two people, even though those two people are referred to as one.

You only have to look at the long history of certain marriages to see where this doesn't work. You take John Wesley, for instance, who was convinced by his brother to marry the wrong woman, and she most definitely was the wrong woman.

If you ever want to argue the case, is it possible to marry the wrong woman? Look in history. It doesn't change anything when it comes to obligations, but she used to drag him around the house by his hair.

Now, I didn't think it was that bad until I got married. It's like, comb it all back. I'm joking.

[14:38] My wife doesn't drag me around the house by the hair. Too heavy. That's humor within the marriage.

So what does this psalm have to say? Well, it says this, that God never, ever overpromises and underdelivers. God never overpromises and underdelivers.

And yet it is tempting to believe, given the way your lives turn out, that that is exactly how it feels.

That God does actually overpromise and underdeliver.

But that is clearly not the case. Now, if you go back to Psalm 126, we see that there is a different emotions with sowing and reaping.

Those who sow in tears will reap in joy. Is the father to put the seed into his children's mouths who are hungry? Or is he to put that seed into the ground in hope of a harvest so that he can feed them for a long term?

[15:49] It looks as if everything depends on the seed for the success of his family. But actually, it depends on the Lord because the Lord is the one who controls the productivity of that seed.

The man has to decide, though. He has to decide, do I feed my children or do I think that they can go with less for six months and then have a harvest by sowing these valuable and precious seeds into the ground?

Fathers and mothers, they have to make very difficult decisions. And they have to make those decisions in faith in God and in hope and in many other things. Then in Psalm 127, we read that unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

And this causes us as followers of Christ a very difficult conundrum. And that is, how much of my effort counts and how much of it is God's blessing?

In other words, where do the two meet? How much am I responsible for? And how much is God responsible for? Now, if you look at it in those terms, you're understanding your relationship with God wrong.

[16:57] because this isn't about contributing parties. It's though I do a bit, God does a bit, I do a bit, God does a bit. It's not until you get to Psalm 128 do you get the explanation of Psalm 127, which is how much of my effort in God's responsibility or God's blessing, how do they come together in a way where we are blessed, where the family is blessed.

Well, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. The psalmist understands completely that what we need is not lots of effort, but lots of blessing.

What we need in the church is not lots of effort, but lots of blessing. And therefore, it is absolutely crucial that the church understands that you don't think about what more can we do.

but rather, how do we obtain the blessing of God? Because unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

So it's not about doing this and doing that and changing things and let's come up with a new method and a new module and a new way forward. It's not about that. It's rather about understanding these covenantal obligations which begins with the fear of the Lord.

[18:23] So if you'd like to turn to verse 1, notice what it states. It states the blessing and why the blessing is given. Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord and who walks in his ways.

Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord and who walks in his ways. There's the blessing, the reason for the blessing. The blessed one is the one who fears the Lord and therefore he is wise. I'll get onto that in a moment. And walks in his ways which is just another way of saying being obedient to what God says. If God says go this way, you say yes. You're walking in his ways because you're obedient to his word.

Then in verses 2 and 3 we have how the blessing will be visible. So this is where God doesn't over promise and under deliver.

This is what you're expected to see when the Lord blesses you. And he says the blessing will fall upon the land. It will fall upon your labor. The land will be productive and your labor will be productive.

[19:33] Then in verse 3 your wife will be a fruitful vine not because you give her holidays or you take her out to nice restaurants or you buy her nice clothes but rather because you fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

In other words your relationship with God, men if you're married with your wife is that your relationship with God will affect your relationship with your wife. It will actually affect the type of wife that you have.

There's no getting around this. This is why men, if you're ever wondering why God is not answering your prayers the first place to start is whether or not you're treating your wife properly. Go read Peter.

Because men if you're not treating your wife properly God will not answer your prayers. You need to understand that. Us men have a hard time.

In Proverbs 31 we read that the type of wife that is produced with the blessing of the Lord. I won't ask you to turn there now but she's a hard worker she's able to engage in business she's able to run the home she's able to do multiple things that the man is never mentioned to do.

[20:44] In other words compared to the man she's superwoman. Now I don't need any woman to tell me that women can multitask. I don't need any of you to tell me that unless I've gone through labour pains and childbearing that I don't know what pain is like.

I appreciate that. I really do appreciate that. And that is absolutely true. But there's also a level of responsibility that the man carries that you never will.

And that pressure is great. Incredibly great. So I'm not saying by focusing on the man that the woman doesn't matter. I'm simply saying that you have complementary strengths and complementary responsibilities.

and the blessed woman in Psalm 31 is the woman who is nothing to be embarrassed about a woman who's smarter than you. In fact I would recommend you find a woman if you're going to marry who's smarter than you.

I did. I knew what I was doing. I was smart enough to know that the way to advance in this world was to marry a woman smarter than me. Okay? Makes sense. Okay?

[21 : 58] Then it goes on to say that of course your home is blessed because the children obviously come from the mother. And so in short the summary of blessing is on land, work, marriage, and family.

Land, work, wife, marriage, family. So God's, this is God's word saying everything will be blessed. It doesn't mean that there's not going to be struggles there but it means that you are to recognize where the blessing comes.

Verse 4 restates the covenantal obligation. So when we read in verse 4 here, behold, thus shall a man be blessed who fears the Lord.

So again, the man is not allowed to think in any other terms than the way to bless his wife is to fear the Lord and walk in his ways. If he wants to bless his children he is to fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

If he wants his work to be blessed he is to fear the Lord and work in his ways. He's not to try harder at work trying to impress a boss. There's nothing wrong with that. He's not to try and do certain things with his wife that she might like that corresponds to her desires and may allow clothes, a holiday, whatever they may be.

[23 : 12] Even, even can you just not argue with me or can you just speak nicely, right? These things are, these things ought to be so but the blessing doesn't come from those things.

those things are required of men but the blessing doesn't come from them. I want you to understand that. The blessing comes from you men fearing the Lord and walking in his ways.

That then has a knock on effect to your children because now a fruitful wife which is a faithful wife has children and of course the faith that the Lord blesses the home with the children.

You then have a natural mission field and the reason that is a natural mission field that God gives to you is because there is no greater blessing verses 5 and 6 than seeing your children's children continuing in the way of the fear of the Lord and walking in his ways and enjoying the blessings.

That's what this psalm is saying. That the greatest blessing of all especially to parents and grandparents is to see your grandchildren enjoying the blessing of the Lord.

[24 : 21] How you know as parents as well as I know as a parent that you would take on board in your life anything to stop your children going through it.

And when it comes to your grandchildren you would do exactly the same. And the reason you do that is because you understand this kind of generational blessing that you want to pass on.

And that's exactly what God is saying here. So understand God does not over promise and under deliver. So what does it look like he does sometimes?

I mean that's the tension right? Because not everyone's family looks like this. I'm a first generation Christian. You may be a second generation Christian.

My wife is a second generation Christian. In fact even a third generation Christian. Because her father's and mother's parents were Christians or mum was and her well in this case now her grandparents are both saved.

[25 : 27] Her grandma's gone to love. Her parents are Christians and she's a Christian. Third generation Christian. I'm a first generation Christian because my mum got saved after me. There is no Christianity.

My nan, yes, old story, you grow up in the church, commit your life to the Lord and then of course life gets very hard. You marry the wrong man and life is very, very difficult and life is ruined but she's faithful to her family.

And now of course you begin to see well is the Lord, can the Lord turn things around? Blessing. How does it work? You need to understand that there is nothing, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor and vain.

You need to understand that what you do, if it doesn't have the Lord's blessing, doesn't come to anything. It's not that it's worthless, but it doesn't come to the blessings that God promises.

Therefore you can work extremely hard and get extremely fed up with God while nothing's turning out the way that you want it to. You're a bit like the elder brother in Luke 15.

[26 : 31] Have I not served you all these years? Have I not done this? Have I not done that? Where's mine? Well, that's a relationship issue, that's not a work issue.

The problem was not in the fact that he did all that hard work, the problem was in the fact that he didn't have the relationship with the father that he ought to have, or rather his relationship with his father was works-based, reward-based, I'll do this, you do that, rather than one that fears the father

and walks in his ways.

With the psalmist giving us a psalm like this, he's trying to encourage the nation of Israel in particular that always thinks generationally. You must understand that when God promises to Israel that he will bless a thousand generations, Israel are not thinking about what they're going to do next year.

They're thinking long-term. This is how God always wants his people to think. In other words, I need to be thinking now about praying for the wives and husbands of my children and their children. I need to pray that ahead. Because that's how God encourages us to think, generationally, covenantally, not just, let's just get through today.

[27 : 52] We don't worry about tomorrow, but we certainly pray for it. We don't worry about the future, but we certainly pray for it. And of course, every now and then pressure gets tough. Men feel it. Men are given broad shoulders to carry the weight, so we shouldn't complain, but the weight can be tough at times.

And now, what this psalm does here is it explains the relationship between effort and God's blessing. And you see in verse 1 and verse 4 that it's not placed on effort, it's placed on relationship. The man who has blessed labor and blessed land and a blessed wife and a blessed marriage and a blessed home and blessed children and what have you, is not one who's necessarily working hard in those areas and then saying to God, look how well I've done.

No, all of those areas are blessed as a byproduct of fearing the Lord and obeying him. It is his relationship with God that now determines everything else.

It determines his relationship to his work, it determines his relationship to his wife, it determines his relationship within the marriage and within the family and ultimately the future generations.

[29 : 10] Men, you need to really pay attention here. Why? Because this is how God builds a nation. This is how God builds a church. Because God doesn't over promise and under deliver.

God is not God's wisdom. Well, you'll notice that the psalm never speaks of wisdom, but wisdom is implied by the sheer fact that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

The reason this man is blessed is partly due to the fact that he has received wisdom from the Lord. He knows the type of commitments he now has to make to work.

He knows the type of commitments he now has to make towards his wife. He now knows the type of commitments he knows how to make towards his children. And because no one's wife is the same as anyone else's wife, and because no one's children is ever the same as any other's children, you need wisdom because you can't copy another family identically because your children are not identical.

And so what works for one child, even within the same family, may not work for another child within the same family. like when we did toilet training for some of our children, some of them were so clever that they learned that if they got a sweet every time they peed, that they then began to pee on demand to get more sweets.

[30 : 41] I'll let you figure out which one of the five that was. What you begin to realize is that the man who fears the Lord is then given wisdom, Proverbs 1, the fear of the Lord is beginning of wisdom.

He needs that wisdom to know how to make the right kind of commitments because only by making the right kind of commitments and not backing out of them does he then learn how to make the kind of decisions that need to be made within the family, within work, within the home.

This is why men who hate their job continuing it because they have a wife and children to support. That's a godly man. He doesn't have to enjoy his work, but if God is blessing him through that and God is feeding his family through that and he is feeding his children through that, then you keep your job however much you don't like it.

You need to recognize that that's how God's blessing you. And these are the type of things. So this is how commitment works, through wisdom. I may not like it, but now I recognize that this is how God is blessing me.

And God could be shaping me through it and whatever the other reasons may be. So the blessings of the Lord come upon the people of the Lord who fear him and walk in his ways.

[31 : 59] And because of this, the psalmist does something that none of us likes. Now it's implied, but it's not, it's there. If it is the case that the fear of the Lord and walking in his ways leads to blessing, blessing, then it is also true that those who do not fear the Lord and do not walk in his ways are not blessed in this way.

The opposite is also true. And now the reason some people don't like this is because it begins to explain whys. Why is my marriage falling apart?

Why is my wife, am I having difficulties with my wife? Why is my relationship with my children strained? Why am I having difficulties at work? If it is the case that the Lord's blessing is upon work, wife, marriage, family, children, for those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways, then it's obviously the case that those who do not fear the Lord and walk in his ways, as God states in his word, then the blessing doesn't overflow into work, family, marriage, children, what have you.

And so questions about why are now easy to be answered? You don't start with your work, you don't start, you then don't start pointing fingers. The first finger to be pointed, if you're going to be pointed at anyone, is the man.

Because it says here that the fear of the Lord, those who walk in the fear of the Lord and walk in his ways, will have a blessed wife, a blessed land, a blessed marriage, blessed children, what have you.

[33 : 39] If those things are not there, men, you need to understand that you shouldn't be pointing your finger at your wife as the source of the problem, or your children as the source of the problem, or your work is the source of the problem.

You need to point it at yourself and your relationship before God. Wise, Proverbs 31, you also need to do the same, but this psalm focuses on the man.

And therefore, when some things seem common, they're not always normal, and when some things are normal, they are not always common, and I'll try and explain this in a moment.

In other words, if a blessing is connected to the fear of the Lord and walking in his ways, then there is no blessing connected to those or for those who do not walk in the fear of the Lord and walk in his ways.

Well, then the prayer. In verses 5 and 6, the psalmist encourages us to pray for the whole nation.

[34 : 44] Or rather, his prayer is that if he knows that families are blessed, then nations are blessed. The nation of Israel will be blessed. He also knows that if we take this into the church, that if families are blessed, then the church will be blessed.

But the trouble is for the church now, part of the church, partly due because people move away. Not in all cases. I can point you to some churches even within the United Kingdom, more so in America, even more perhaps in Europe in some cases, where you see generational faithfulness.

Grandchildren go to the same church as their grandparents. And even great-grandchildren when the parents are still there, that generational faithfulness. So partly it's to do with culture and some of it is to do with the fact that churches don't think covenantally or they don't think generationally.

And so we don't retain or hold on to the generational faithfulness. But this psalmist understands that the greatest blessing upon the church is how God builds it or how God builds the nation of Israel.

That he keeps successive generations faithful to him. And that is, one generation fears the Lord and walks in his ways and then imitates that to the next generation coming up, who then imitates that and instructs the next generation coming up.

[36 : 11] You then have a very strong nation. You have strong families and then you have a strong nation. In the same way, you have a strong church through generational faithfulness. But that generational faithfulness, I want you to understand, starts with fearing the Lord and walking in his ways.

And the psalmist is saying that God is not over-promising and then he's under-delivering. God does not over-promise and under-deliver.

So here's the exhortation. Here's where we end. Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord. Promise? Or a maybe?

Are you really saying in your heart that God expects me to keep his promises but he doesn't have to keep his own? Is that what you believe?

That God expects you to keep his word but he doesn't have to keep his own? If God has said blessed is everyone who fears the Lord and walks in his ways, doesn't God have to keep that?

[37 : 21] Doesn't God actually keep that because he's God and faithful and true and just? So if the reason for it not happening isn't in God, because God is going to keep his word because he's faithful and just, then we recognize that it's with the man in particular here.

I'm not going to concentrate on the rest of us, just the man because that's where it's placed, who's not fearing the Lord or walking in his ways. And therefore, there are many families and many books

that have been written that explain things that are common as though they are normal. Marriages are breaking down, it's normal. No, no, it's common, it's not normal. Children are growing up and when they get the teenagers, they depart from the faith and they go and live wild lives. It's common, but it's not normal and neither is it to be expected. Well, I can't keep a job down and I don't want to do this job, I don't want to do that.

Is that common? Yeah, it's common but it's not normal. And what has happened, especially when you read a lot of literature on generational faithfulness, which there isn't much about, but when you read literature on family especially, most of those books put things in the categories of normal when they actually belong in the category of common.

[38 : 51] And when you put it in the category of normal, it's almost well I can expect this to happen. This is an expectancy. I'm now expecting this to happen as my children get older.

I'm now expecting after seven years to get a seven year itch within my marriage. Because everyone else does. It's normal. No, it's common. And the reason it's common rather than normal is because of how this psalm explains the blessing of the Lord.

It's common because not everyone fears the Lord and walks in his ways. But it's not normal. But when you come to accept something common as normal, you then come to expect it to happen, even when it can be prevented.

And this is what this psalm is saying. So God, God does not over-promise and under-deliver. And God does not expect you to keep his own word and for him not to keep his own.

God does expect you to keep his word, but you also need to believe and understand that God keeps his own. And if you ever, ever in your heart believe that that tension, that immediate tension of God is expecting me to keep his word, but he's not keeping his own, I don't think the finger can be pointed at God because God has made a promise and God promises and God keeps his promises.

[40 : 21] Amen. We're going to come to our final hymn before we come to the blessing. team. Thank you.