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BLUEPRINT FOR A SATISFYING HOME

Part 1, Psalm 127

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Psalms: Lesson 22

Blueprint For A Satisfying Home Part One: Psalm 127

An ad in the Lawrence, Kansas, *Journal-World* proclaimed, "We will oil your sewing machine and adjust the tension in your home for only \$1" (*Reader's Digest* [5/85], p. 190.) If only it were possible--to adjust the tension in our homes for only \$1! Most of us would pay \$1,000 if it would truly adjust the tension in our homes!

After watching a TV presentation about rebellious youth, a husband said to his wife "What a mess! Where did our generation go wrong?" The wife calmly answered, "We had children!"

But that, of course, is not the heart of the problem. The real problem is, "Our generation had children, but we failed to follow God's blueprint for a satisfying home."

Two short companion psalms--127 and 128--give us that blueprint. These psalms are part of fifteen psalms (120-134), each titled, "A Song of Ascents." They were probably sung as the pilgrims journeyed up to Jerusalem for the yearly feasts. These two psalms show the importance to the nation Israel of godliness in the home. Each psalm oozes with the theme of a man satisfied with his family.

Psalm 127 tells us: A satisfying home is based upon God's blessing. Psalm 128 goes a step further: God's blessing is based on the fear of the Lord. Thus we may conclude: A satisfying home is based on the fear of the Lord.

These two psalms can be viewed as four stages in the development of a family (adapted from Chuck Swindoll, *You and Your Child* [Thomas Nelson], p. 50):

Psalm 127:1-2--Inception of home--Family founding

127:3-5--Expansion of home--Child-bearing years

Psalm 128:1-4--Child-rearing years

128:5-6--Empty nest years

I realize that I'm speaking to a number of hurting parents. Your children rebelled against God and caused you a lot of pain. A preacher always has to walk the fine line of comforting the disturbed and yet disturbing the comfortable. I don't want to disturb the disturbed!

So let me say at the outset to any hurting parents: You need to deal with any true guilt and put away any false guilt. If you are aware of sin and failure on your part in raising your children, then you have true guilt. You need to confess that sin to God and appropriate His forgiveness. You also need to confess your sin to your children and seek their forgiveness. You will not be a fruitful Christian until you deal with true guilt God's way.

At the same time, many parents of wayward children are racked with false guilt. You weren't perfect parents--no one is--but you walked with God and sought His wisdom in raising your children, but they chose to rebel anyway. You need to realize that if you have dealt with your failures before the Lord, any remaining guilt is not from Him, but from the accuser of the saints, the devil (Rev. 12:10). Your children grew up and made some bad choices. You still grieve for them, but you shouldn't feel responsible for their sin. God doesn't want you crippled with false guilt. Resist the devil and get on with what God wants you to do for Him.

I also realize that the subject of family life doesn't directly apply to everyone here. You may be single and not have your own family. You may be divorced and feel like you've failed because your family is shattered beyond recovery. Maybe your family is already raised and gone. Perhaps you're married without children. I cannot apply these things to every possible category represented here today.

Having said that, it's obvious that the family in America is in serious trouble. The answers we need are in Scripture, which is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, so that we may be equipped for every good work. Whatever your current situation, ask God to apply this psalm to your heart, to equip you as you serve Him. Psalm 127 says:

A satisfying home depends on God's blessing
and enjoys the blessing of godly children.

1. A satisfying home depends on God's blessing (vv. 1-2).

Before he narrows it down specifically to the home (v. 3), Solomon, the author, begins with a broader principle: *Anything you do--whether building a house, guarding a city, or working in your job--is worthless unless the Lord is in it.* Twice he repeats the phrase, "unless the Lord," and three times he hammers us with the word "vain" to make the point that the only possibilities are: the Lord blesses or your efforts are in vain.

Why does he make this point? Because we all have a sinful propensity to see ourselves and our efforts as primary and to relegate God to a secondary role in what we do. We take the major credit for our accomplishments and give God a polite tip of the hat, thus robbing Him of His glory. Since we don't see our total need for God we fail to render proper thanks to Him for what He has done.

This foundational principle means that the most important factor on the home front is not having the latest techniques from the most recent books or seminars. The most crucial factor in building a satisfying home life is that you walk in genuine humility before the Lord, casting yourself upon His grace in faith and prayer.

You can work hard at building your family, you can be diligent to guard your kids from harm, you can make sacrifices to provide what they need. But if God's blessing is not upon your home, you're wasting your time. A satisfying home must be built by acknowledging your own inability and by daily seeking God's gracious blessing.

Do you recognize your absolute need for God's blessing on your family? If you do, it will be reflected in frequent, fervent prayer for your kids and yourself. A German proverb puts it, "Many children make many prayers, and many prayers bring much blessing" (cited in C. H. Spurgeon, *A Treasury of David* [Baker], VII:40).

One time years ago our family was shopping and we ran into a good friend and his wife who were mentors to me in my younger years. When I was single I once lived with their family for three months. He travels around the world teaching family life seminars.

As he and I talked while our wives shopped, the subject of rearing a family came up. He remarked, "The older I get, the more I realize that the key to raising children is praying for them every day."

It's ironic that Solomon, failed to apply his own words. His own home lacked God's blessing because he multiplied wives in violation of Scripture and they led him away from God. His son and successor to the throne, Rehoboam, rejected wisdom and split the kingdom. But even though Solomon didn't live by his own words, they're true. May we learn from him and avoid his mistakes! Above all else, seek God's blessing on your family!

From verses 1 & 2 we can draw three principles about seeking God's blessing in our families:

- A. Seeking God's blessing means understanding the principle of God's grace.

That is the point of verse 2. The verse comes out of Solomon's experience. Solomon had another name, Jedidiah, which means, "Beloved of the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:25). One night while he was sleeping, God appeared in a dream and told Solomon that He would give him whatever he wished. Solomon asked God for wisdom, and God was pleased to give Solomon not only wisdom, but also riches and honor. "Then Solomon awoke, and ... it was a dream" (1 Kings 3:1-15). God gave to His beloved (Jedidiah) in his sleep. He didn't deserve it or work for it. God just gave because of His grace.

God's grace should permeate Christian homes. Don't confuse grace with hang-loose living or with not having righteous standards. God is gracious and yet maintains His standards. Understanding grace produces humility. The dad who understands grace realizes that he deserves God's judgment because of his sin, but that God has shown him mercy through the cross. This means that he confesses his sins to his wife and kids and asks their forgiveness.

When his kids are wrong, instead of coming down on them in self-righteous judgment, he can come alongside them in a humble way to give them help. That kind of humility stemming from an understanding of God's grace opens communication, whereas pride and the hypocrisy of not admitting our own sinfulness hinders relationships. Kids smell hypocrisy from a mile away, and it makes

them want to run from us and from our God. But grace is attractive.

- B. Seeking God's blessing means understanding the balance between faith and works.

Solomon is not advocating that the builders stop building, the watchmen stop watching, and the workers stop working and let God do it all. They build, they watch, and they work, but they trust God to build, watch, and work, too. God's blessing depends on a balance between working and trusting. It is not either-or; it is both-and.

I once talked with man who had a serious problem in his home. I asked, "What are you doing about it?" With a silly grin, he responded, "I'm just trusting the Lord!" I knew him well enough to know that that meant, "I'm not doing anything." A lot of times, "just trusting the Lord" is nothing but an excuse for being passive and avoiding problems.

On the other extreme, it is just as wrong to strive and do everything possible and yet not trust the Lord. If we want God's blessing in our homes, we need to work hard at building our families and, at the same time, depend wholeheartedly on the Lord. Faith and works are compatible, not exclusive.

- C. Seeking God's blessing means understanding the balance between career and home life.

It is vain to pour yourself into your job from early morning until late night with the excuse, "I've got to provide for my family," or, "I need to pursue my career." Too many parents, even Christian parents, put their careers ahead of their children. But no one ever hits 65 and says, "I wish I had spent more time on my career." Many sadly say, "I wish I had taken the time to be there when my kids needed me."

The great pioneer missionary, David Livingstone, wrote to a friend, "I hope you are playing with your children In looking back ... I have one regret, and that is that I did not feel it my duty to play with my children as much as to teach the [natives]. I worked very hard at that, and was tired out at night. Now I have none to play with. So, my good friend, play while you may. They will soon be no longer bairns" (George Seaver, *David Livingstone* [Harper &

Brothers], p. 527). Seeking God's blessing on your family life means understanding the balance between your job and your home life.

So verses 1 & 2 show that a satisfying home life depends on God's blessing and that seeking God's blessing means understanding the principle of grace, the balance between faith and works, and the balance between career and family life.

2. A satisfying home enjoys the blessing of godly children (vv. 3-5).

As Derek Kidner observes (Psalms [IVP], 2:441), these verses say nothing about wealth or position; an upstanding family is wealth and honor enough. Another has said, "A happy family is but an earlier heaven" (Sir John Bowring, *Reader's Digest* [4/83]). Spurgeon (*ibid.*) tells of a daughter who said to her father as she knelt by his death bed, "There is no greater blessing than for children to have godly parents." "And the next," said the dying father, with a beam of gratitude, "for parents to have godly children." How can we secure the blessing of godly children?

A. Enjoying the blessing of godly children requires having the proper attitude toward children.

Children are called a "gift," a "reward," and, indirectly (v. 5), a "blessing." They are not burdens or interruptions to our pursuit of our self-centered goals. We need to treasure our children as we would a precious gift from a wealthy friend, because that is what they are. If children are gifts from God, two applications follow:

(1) Communicate verbally to your children how precious they are to you. Let them know in words that they are God's special gift to you. You don't do this to "build their self-esteem," an unbiblical concept that has come to us from psychology. You do it to instill in them the realization that they were created by a loving, sovereign God for His sovereign purpose. Since my kids were infants, I've told them repeatedly, "You're such a blessing! I'm so glad God gave you to us!" Children need to hear that verbally from both parents, but especially from their dads.

(2) Communicate non-verbally to your children how precious they are to you. One of the key ways to do this is to spend time with them. That says, louder than words, "You're more important

to me than my job or my other interests.” Kids often interpret an absent father as rejection, even if he thinks that his absence is a sacrifice he’s making to provide for them. A child who feels rejected will often grow angry and bitter.

Edith Schaeffer (*What is a Family?* [Revell], pp. 250-251) tells of a time when her husband, Fran, was having a rather heated discussion with their then 15-year-old son, Franky. Suddenly it occurred to Fran that he had not spent enough time with Franky. Furthermore, he decided that it would not do to wait until it was convenient, but to do it right away. So he canceled all his appointments for ten days and took his son to Florence and Venice to tour the great museums and to spend time talking alone on a number of subjects.

Franky’s response was, “But, Dad, would you cancel everything you were going to do in your work for a whole ten days just to go with me?” It turned their relationship around. Edith comments, “Giving a piece of time is much more of a gift in a human relationship within a family than giving a sum of money.” Children are God’s gifts. Let them know it both verbally and by spending time with them.

- B. Enjoying the blessing of godly children requires taking the proper action with them.

Solomon compares children to “arrows in the hand of a warrior” (v. 4). The simile suggests two actions:

(1) Arrows must be shaped and sharpened. In Solomon’s day, you didn’t go down to the local sporting goods store and buy arrows. Neither did you find them lying around on the ground. Sticks aren’t arrows by nature. They had to be carefully shaped and sharpened. Children are the same.

This implies work. Derek Kidner insightfully writes, “... It is not untypical of God’s gifts that first they are 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 *quiverful*” (p. 442). Children don’t grow into straight, sharp arrows by being left to themselves or to the TV set. It takes diligent effort on the part of a wise father to bring them up in the training of the Lord.

(2) Arrows must be aimed and released. Arrows left in the quiver or shot haphazardly in any which direction are not much good. In fact, they can be the cause of great harm if they are not aimed carefully. This implies skill and direction. The archer must know his target and have sufficient skill to fire his arrows into it. The point of rearing children is not to keep them for ourselves. Many parents lose their kids because they try to hang on to them. Our goal is to aim them at the target--Satan's kingdom of darkness--and release them as burning arrows for Jesus.

You need to instill in your kids from an early age a burden for world missions. There's a cost involved. They may leave you and go to some far corner of the world. You may not get to see your grandkids grow up. You may be separated from your kids. Jim Elliot, who gave his life trying to take the gospel to the unreached tribes of South America, was feeling pressure from his Christian parents to stay in the United States. He wrote to them,

Grieve not, then, if your sons seem to desert you. Remember how the Psalmist described children? He said that they were as an heritage from the Lord, and that every man should be happy who had his quiver full of them. And what is a quiver full of but arrows? And what are arrows for but to shoot? So, with the strong arms of prayer, draw the bowstring back and let the arrows fly--all of them, straight at the Enemy's hosts. (Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty* [Zondervan], p. 132.)

If we regard our children with the proper attitude and raise them with the proper actions, then:

- C. Enjoying the blessing of godly children results in a strong witness for Christ.

A father who has his quiver full of straight, sharp arrows, ready to send into the heart of the enemy, will not be ashamed when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. The city gate was the place where Hebrew men gathered to conduct business and carry out justice. The idea here is that a man with exemplary children will not be ridiculed by his opponents because his children will be a living testimony of the man's uprightness and integrity.

Applying this to our day, a satisfying home is a powerful source of witness for Jesus Christ. In a day such as ours, when

teenage rebellion and fragmented relationships in the home are the norm rather than the exception, a home where the children are valued as God's gifts, where God's grace is an operational principle and the blessing of God is obvious, will be a beacon shining in the darkness. It is a tremendous blessing to me when my high school daughters come home and tell me how they were able to talk about Jesus to a friend at school. With the apostle John I can say, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (3 John 4).

Conclusion

Someone wisely wrote, "No culture has ever been able to provide a better shipyard for building stormproof vessels for the journey of man from the cradle to the grave than the individual nourished in a loving family" (Laurens van der Post and Jane Taylor, *Testament to the Bushmen*, in *Reader's Digest* [11/86], p. 76). I would add, "... with God's blessing!"

I hope you're seeking God's blessing above all else for your family and that He will graciously give you the enjoyment of godly children, for His glory.

Discussion Questions

1. How should parents balance grace with discipline in child-rearing?
2. How important is technique in child-rearing? Is "trusting the Lord" enough?
3. Can parents who do everything right still have prodigal children? Give biblical support.

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