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BLUEPRINT FOR A SATISFYING HOME

Part 2, Psalm 128

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Psalms: Lesson 23

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Let's suppose you wanted to build a house. You don't know much about building, but you know that you need cement, lumber, nails, and plumbing and electrical materials. So you go to the building supply store and buy a bunch of those items and take them to your property. You start sawing and nailing boards together, and stringing the electrical wires around and putting pipes here and there for plumbing. If your finished product was anything more than a ramshackle lean-to, you would be lucky.

What you lack is a plan or blueprint. If you want to build a house, you need a blueprint which shows the design and necessary materials. No one in their right mind would consider building a house without a blueprint.

Everyone would agree that the structure called a house is not nearly as important as the relationships called a home. And yet while we wouldn't think of building a house without a blueprint, many go about building their homes with no idea of God's plan. It doesn't make sense. And the result, all too often, is a ramshackle, lean-to family life.

Psalms 127 & 128 show us God's blueprint for building a satisfying home. Taken together, the two psalms may be seen as four stages in the development of a family:

127:1-2, Inception of home—"Foundation."

127:3-5, Expansion of home—"Building on foundation."

128:1-4, Child-rearing years—"Building material."

128:5-6, Empty nest years—"Finished product."

Psalm 127 says: A satisfying home is based on God's blessing. Psalm 128 goes a step further:

God's blessing in the family is based on the fear of the Lord.
Thus, a satisfying home is based upon the fear of the Lord.

Psalm 128 is showing us an ideal, but we don't live in an ideal world. Some homes have already been split apart by divorce and a single mom is trying to hold everything together. Others are in mixed marriages, where the husband is hostile or indifferent to the gospel and the wife is trying to provide spiritual training for her children. If your family is far from the ideal, don't despair. It doesn't mean that God won't bless you. Whatever your situation, God wants you to fear Him and walk in His ways. But just because we can't totally follow the ideal, let's not scrap the plan.

Like throwing a pebble in a placid lake, Psalm 128 begins with a godly man as the head of the home, ripples out to his wife, then to the children, and finally shows the effect of this godly home on the nation. I'm going to follow that progression in teaching the psalm:

1. A godly man is to lead his family in fearing the Lord (vv. 1-2, 4).

You've probably noticed that God did not inspire the psalmist along politically correct lines! In our American society, seeing the man as the head of the family is not the "correct" thing. Even many Christians have opted for an "egalitarian" marriage. But in both the Old and New Testaments, God's directives for the family invariably are given to the man as the spiritual leader. And so, this psalm is addressed to the man of the family (v. 3, "your wife," etc.).

How do you lead your family spiritually? There's some good news and some bad news. The good news is, it's easy to lead: Kids follow your example. But that's also the bad news. We can't escape being examples to our children, either for good or for bad. Do we live out our Christianity in our attitudes, words, and actions in the home? Do our kids see the fruit of the Spirit in us, especially when we're under pressure? A great deal of what our kids learn about everyday life comes from watching our example as dads. Scary, isn't it!

A study once disclosed that if both parents attend church regularly, 72 percent of their children remain faithful. If only the dad attends regularly, it drops to 55 percent. If only mom comes, it plummets to 15 percent. If neither parent attends, but they just send the kids, only 6 percent remain faithful ("Pulpit Helps,"

6/81). Of course, God can overcome the percentages as we seek Him, so a single mom shouldn't lose hope. But it does show the important influence of godly fathers on their kids.

A godly man will lead his family in fearing the Lord. The fear of the Lord is a dominant theme throughout the Bible, and yet I fear that we have lost it in our upbeat, feel-good, American Christianity. What is *the fear of the Lord*? I define it as *a healthy respect and reverence for God stemming from the knowledge of God and resulting in obedience to God*. Thus it is an attitude (respect and reverence) that results in an action (obedience).

The fear of the Lord stems from *knowing Him*. We may fear some things, like future events, because we don't know them. Some people may fear God in an unhealthy sense that causes them to avoid Him because they don't know Him. But we fear other things because we do know them. I fear my power saw because I know the terrible damage it can cause if I carelessly get my hand caught in the blade. That fear doesn't cause me to avoid my saw, but rather to treat it with proper respect.

The proper fear of the Lord stems from understanding something of His greatness, power, and absolute holiness. Our God is the eternal God who spoke the vastness of the universe into existence. Modern science can't fathom the awesome enormity of our universe. In fact, we can't even figure out many of the simple functions of the human body which, as David wrote (Ps. 139:14), is fearfully and wonderfully made. We can't keep our bodies from getting sick, growing old, and dying. We can't create or explain the essence of life.

Yet proud, rebellious man shrugs off God by saying that it all happened by sheer chance plus time! How stupid! Surely, "there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Ps. 36:1; Rom. 3:18). If we see God's greatness and power in what He has made, we will fear Him.

We especially should fear Him when we realize that this great and powerful Creator is also absolutely holy and that we have violated His holy standards. Every time in the Bible a man, even a *righteous* man, gets a glimpse of God in the splendor of His holiness, he is stricken with fear. None of us could even dare to draw near to this holy, powerful God if He had not also revealed Himself as a

God of love, who mercifully made provision for our sins in the death of Christ. Now He invites us to draw near, but we must always do so with reverence and awe. The fear of the Lord stems from the knowledge of Him.

The fear of the Lord results in *obedience to Him*. The man who fears God “walks in His ways” (v. 1b). Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.” Some Christians say, “That’s too negative. God is my loving Father, so I don’t like to think in terms of fearing Him. I just like to think about His love.” But in 2 Corinthians 7:1, just after stating that God is our Father and we are His sons and daughters, Paul concludes, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

If we’re growing in the knowledge of God, we’ll be growing in the fear of God. To grow in the fear of God means to grow in holiness and to flee from evil. When we’re tempted to sin, even if no one else is watching, we will remember that God is always watching. Joseph’s brothers had sold him into slavery in Egypt. He was far from his family, in a pagan land. He was alone in the house with a wealthy woman who tried to seduce him. He easily could have rationalized, “I’ll never get a wife here as a slave in Egypt. I have needs. Besides, who will know if I go to bed with her?” But instead, because he feared God who sees into every bedroom, Joseph replied to her, “How could I do this great evil, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9). Fearing God will cause us to walk in His ways as revealed in His Word.

In terms of home life, a man who fears God will not use His name in vain. He will not joke about God or be flippant toward God or His Word. He will rid his home of any trashy magazines. He will not watch trashy TV shows or videos. Positively, he will take the initiative in leading his family in reading God’s Word, in prayer, and in a commitment to church life and ministry.

The fear of God is a practical thing that affects all of life. The man who fears God will “eat of the labor of [his] hands” (v. 2). He is a *hard worker*, whether on his job or at home. I’m not talking about overwork, but rather about an attitude toward work. The man who fears God is not lazy. By his example and attitude he shows his children the positive value of work and motivates them

to use their lives productively. In my opinion, if you spend hours each week in front of the TV set, you communicate something negative to your kids. I'm not against some TV watching, if a program is wholesome. But there are far more productive ways to spend leisure time. A man who fears God will use his time productively.

The fear of God also affects our *emotional state* and *attitude* toward life: "You will be happy and it will be well with you" (v. 2b). The man who fears God is content. He isn't griping about how hard life is or complaining about all the bad breaks he has received. He isn't grumbling about how hard he has worked. He is happy. It is well with him. He's a cheerful, pleasant man to live with. The key to his happiness is given twice, so we won't miss it: He fears the Lord and walks in His ways (vv. 1, 4). This man's happiness doesn't come from circumstances; his joy is in the Lord.

A little girl was out in the yard where her dad was working after a rainstorm. She stepped exactly where he stepped and called out to him, "Daddy, if you don't get mud on your feet, I won't get any mud on me!" A dad and his son were climbing a mountain and came to a difficult part. The dad stopped to consider the best route up. Behind him, his son called out, "Choose the best path, Dad! I'm coming right behind you!"

We lead our families by example, men! At the heart of our example, we need to be growing in the fear of the Lord. It's a process, but my question is, Are you involved in the process? You need daily to be growing in your knowledge of God through His Word and seeking to make His ways your ways. A man who fears God is at the center of God's blueprint for a satisfying family.

The second part of the blueprint is ...

2. A godly woman will be fruitful and faithful in the home (v. 3a).

She is described as "a fruitful vine within your house." *Fruitfulness* is the main thought in the figure of the vine. The main purpose of a grapevine is to bear fruit. There are probably two senses of fruitfulness referred to here: childbearing and productivity. The Hebrews saw children as a blessing from God (Ps. 127:3); barrenness was seen as a curse. Our culture views having many children

as a curse! I've talked to women with large families who say that strangers have looked at them with pity and said, "You poor thing!" While I can't go into the reasons for lack of time, I think there is a biblical case for limiting our family size through birth control, if our motives are right. But we should view every child God gives as a blessing from Him.

This godly wife's fruitfulness refers not only to bearing children, but also to her productivity. A fruitful vine in that hot Mid-Eastern climate produces something refreshing and nourishing for others. A godly wife and mother will not be a lazy, self-centered, aimless woman who spends her days in front of the TV set, watching quiz shows and soap operas. She will be industrious and productive, laboring to provide a satisfying and nourishing home life for her family (Prov. 31:10-31). If you haven't read Edith Schaeffer's *Hidden Art*, I commend it to you as an example of how a wife can be creative in making the home a refreshing place for her family.

The fruitful vine points to the joy this woman brings to her family. The fruit of the vine in the Bible is associated with joy and gladness (Jud. 9:13; Ps. 104:15). You may not have thought of gladness and godliness as compatible, but they are. The real truth is that it is only the godly person who can enjoy life. A godly mother will make sure that her home is an enjoyable place to be.

The figure of a fruitful vine also suggests that the godly wife will make not only her home, but also herself, attractive to her husband. The Song of Solomon 7:8 (the R-rated portion of the Bible) graphically describes the wife as a vine whose clusters satisfy her husband. The Bible extols physical love within marriage. You may not have thought of that as a part of godliness, but it is!

This godly woman is not only fruitful; also, she is *faithful* in the home: "within your house." The Hebrew word for "within" is a strong word meaning the innermost part. It stands in marked contrast to the promiscuous wife in Proverbs 7:11 who "is boisterous and rebellious; her feet do not remain at home." A godly wife and mother has a commitment to her family as seen by the fact that she is "within" the house. In the words of Paul, she is a "worker at home" (Titus 2:5).

I'm troubled by the number of Christian mothers who have abandoned the home for a career. I realize that sometimes it is necessary. I sympathize with single moms who have to work and make a home for their children. May God be gracious to each one! But I'm grieved when mothers work to provide the family with more affluence than it needs or to provide the woman with the "fulfillment" she supposedly needs and can get from a career. During the formative early years of a child's life, I cannot fathom why a Christian couple would choose to allow a day care center to shape their children's attitudes and values. A godly mother is faithful in her home, with a commitment to her home above her career or above the desire for a higher standard of living.

Thus a satisfying home will have a man who leads his family in the fear of the Lord and a woman who is fruitful and faithful in the home. But there is a third part of the blueprint:

3. Growing, fruitful children will carry on the godly legacy of the home (v. 3b).

The blueprint for a satisfying home includes children described as "olive plants" around the table. These are not mature trees, but little shoots that grow up around a mature olive tree. They will someday replace the parent tree, continuing to bear fruit after it is gone.

There are two implications here: *First, the children are developing, not perfect.* They have potential for fruitfulness, but they are not there yet. They need time to develop and mature in the nourishing soil of this God-fearing home. They need to be allowed to make mistakes without rejection. They need to be allowed to develop according to their unique, God-given "bents" and desires.

Christian parents often err because they have high standards for their kids (which is good), but they demand perfection and don't give the kids room to grow. Sometimes we want our kids to be perfect because it makes us look good as Christian parents. But none of us are perfect parents and we don't have perfect kids. We ought to be growing together as a family in the Lord's ways.

The second implication of the "olive plant" is: *Our children require nurture, care, and patience.* A tree doesn't bear fruit overnight. It takes a lot of tender loving care, protection, weeding, watering, and

feeding (and prayer!) before there is fruit. That's the picture here, of the children being nurtured towards fruitfulness as they mature in years. I believe that the teen-age years, instead of being dreaded, can be the beginning of fruitfulness in the olive plants that God has entrusted to us, if we will give them proper nurture, care, and patience in a climate of grace.

Thus God's blueprint begins with a God-fearing man, ripples out to a fruitful, faithful woman, ripples still further to growing and eventually fruitful children. What is the end result of this process?

4. Personal and national well-being are the result of homes where God is feared (vv. 5-6).

Personal well-being is described in verses 5a & 6a; national well-being in verses 5b & 6b. The man pictured here is a happy old man, enjoying God's blessing as he sees his grandchildren following the Lord. A man who pursues financial success to the disregard of his home will end up with poverty in his soul. A man who follows God's blueprint for the home will end up with prosperity in his soul.

And the family is the building block of the nation. The turmoil in our nation today can be traced to the turmoil in our homes. If we want to see our nation turned around, we must start within our homes. We must follow God's blueprint by becoming men and women who fear the Lord and walk in his ways, teaching our children by our example and words to grow up in the fear of the Lord.

A study of two families revealed some startling results. One family descended from Max Jukes, who did not follow the Lord, nor did his wife. Among the over 1,200 descendants studied, 310 were professional vagrants; 440 were physically wrecked by lives of debauchery and uncleanness; 130 went to the penitentiary for an average of 13 years each (7 were murderers); 100 were alcoholics; 60 were habitual thieves; 190 were prostitutes. Of the 20 who learned a trade, 10 learned it in a state prison. Collectively, they cost the state of New York over a million dollars.

The second family studied was that of Jonathan Edwards, the New England preacher, and his godly wife, Sarah. Among his descendants, 300 became pastors, missionaries, and theological professors; over 100 became college professors; over 100 became law-

yers, including 30 judges; over 60 became physicians; over 60 authored good books; 14 became presidents of universities; 3 became United States congressmen; and one, although he was a black sheep spiritually, became the Vice President of the United States (Aaron Burr, Jr., Edwards' grandson).

Conclusion

J. Allen Blair (in "Discovery Digest", July, 1979) wrote,

During the past 10 years an army of over 30 million people have come to the United States. Because they have arrived one by one, appearing innocent and harmless, we have not suspected their potential power. Someday soon, however, we shall awaken to the fact that this army has taken over our nation. They will publish our papers, operate our radio and television stations, control our churches, and teach in our schools. They will capture Washington and dominate the federal government, as well as the administration of each state. They will take over business and industry, including the control of atomic energy. Complete authority will be in their hands. All that will remain for the rest of us will be to submit and die. This army, of course, is an army of children. We have the power to decide whether these future conquerors of our country are to be pagan or Christian.

The outcome depends upon our following God's blueprint, given in Psalms 127 and 128: A satisfying home is based on God's blessing. God's blessing is based on the fear of the Lord. Is your home being built on the fear of the Lord?

Discussion questions

1. How can a man who has blown it with his family recover? What is the key ingredient in becoming a God-fearing man?
2. Must a Christian woman find fulfillment in the home? Can't she also have a career?
3. How do parents avoid perfectionism but maintain high standards?

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