

# Unless the Lord Provides

I want to set the scene for you today, and I need your help with this.

We’re going to do a little visualization exercise. Close your eyes for a moment, I want you stop and I want you to let what I’m reading to you fill your mind.

**Psalms 120:6–7 (ESV)** — **6** Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace. **7** I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war!

**Psalms 121:1–2 (ESV)** — **1** I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? **2** My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

**Psalms 122:3–5 (ESV)** — **3** Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together, **4** to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. **5** There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.

**Psalms 124:2–5 (ESV)** — **2** if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, **3** then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; **4** then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; **5** then over us would have gone the raging waters.

**Psalms 130:1–2 (ESV)** — **1** Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! **2** O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

**Psalms 134:1–2 (ESV)** — **1** Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord! **2** Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!

Okay, with your mind full of this imagery, open your eyes. Today we’re studying from the book of Psalms, which is a collection of different songs and poems from throughout Israel’s history and these songs are of all different kinds. Like worship songs, laments, wisdom poetry, and so forth. Many different people from many different times all composed the original songs and poems, we’ll call them the authors or writers, and then some person or group of people at a later time, we’ll call them the organizers or collectors, collected the Psalms together into one collection that is formatted in 5 sections or books.

Like the difference between a songwriter that writes a hymn and the publishing company that produces a hymnal.

Everything we just read came from the Psalms, but if you have your Bible in front of you then you have probably noticed that nothing we just read comes from the Psalm we’re studying today, Psalm 127. This Psalm today, Psalm 127, fits into the 5<sup>th</sup> section or 5<sup>th</sup> book of Psalms, which is the longest and most varied book with 45 Psalms from Psalm 107-151.<sup>1</sup>

While you will still find all the same types of Psalms in book 5 as you do in the other four, like praise Psalms, Laments, wisdom Psalms, etc., book 5 trends towards Psalms of worship for the king Messiah.

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<sup>1</sup> Book Five comprises forty-four psalms (forty-five including Psalm 151, which will also be discussed) and so is the longest book in the Psalter. It is also the most diverse. As with Book Four, there are fewer superscriptions (especially in the Hebrew), so the final arrangement is again more thematic. [Susan Gillingham, [Psalms through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 73–151](#), ed. John Sawyer et al., vol. 3, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Hoboken, NJ; West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2022), 159.]

So, what are those verses from, how did all of that set the scene for today. Our visualization exercise was setting the stage for the Songs of Ascent. Within book 5, there is a special collection of Psalms known as the Songs of Ascent. This collection contains 15 Psalms from 120 through 134, and so doing the math this Psalm isn't just part of the Songs of Ascent, it's actually in the dead middle of the section. Each thing I read you a moment ago comes from one of the other Songs of Ascent. I hoped that through this exercise you would start to see some themes and patterns that are common in the Songs of Ascent. The fact that they're grouped together means they likely had common purpose or usage in mind when the collectors of the Psalms labeled them this way.

The Bible doesn't give us any explicit examples or definitions of what sets these Psalms apart, but from their content it's obvious that every one of these Psalms is meant to bring to mind this feeling of ascent, of raising your eyes up out of your murky circumstances and fixing your eyes on the king on his throne in Jerusalem whose power and mercy is extending down to you in rescue.

Now we read Psalm 127 a moment ago, and I would be shocked if you heard “it is vain to rise up early and go late to rest” and “children are a heritage from the Lord” and then your mind just fills with powerful imagery of God in on his throne. Honestly, with the context of the other Psalms, doesn't Psalm 127 seem almost, I don't know, out of place? To make matters even more confusing, reading Psalm 127 almost feels like two entirely different songs written about different topics. It feels like this incohesive, random allotment of construction advice, advice on your sleep schedule, and then it starts comparing having children to owning weaponry? The first section, verses 1-2, seems completely detached from verses 3-5.

Because the Songs of Ascent often speak to God's dependableness and faithfulness to rescue and prosper His people. It might seem odd to find right in the middle of this collection this seemingly random wisdom from Psalm 127, but as we study the Psalm together, I think you'll see that God knew what He was doing when He inspired this collection of Songs together in His Word. It's that really unexpected nature to Psalm 127 that I love about it. We should come to this Psalm with this grand feeling of expectation that we're going to find a powerful message about God's protection and provision and the defeat of our enemies and God pouring out His blessing for His holy ones and the sovereign might of our King Messiah, Jesus.

The superscript tells us this is a Psalm written by Solomon, which is pretty rare, in fact only one other Psalm in the book is attributed to Solomon, even though he wrote most of the wisdom literature in the Bible. Only two Psalms. This make sense, then, that people categories this Psalm as a “praise” or “lament” type of Psalm but as a “wisdom” type Psalm. It reads very much like a passage Solomon would have written in Proverbs.

Psalms can't be studied like a historical book or a New Testament Epistle, the meaning must come from the Psalm itself, not its history, like all poetry, the history can inform the meaning but it can't be the meaning, but I do think that some of Solomon's experience that we see in the Bible will help enhance for us what we can take away from this short, 5 verse Psalm.

Read verse 1 together with me.

**Psalms 127:1 (ESV)** — 1 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.

This is a common type of Hebrew poetry.

You and I are used to a style of western poetry which makes the poem distinct because the sounds of the words rhyme, they're similar but distinct.

“Row, row, row your boat, Gently down the stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, Life is but a dream.”

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you are.”

But this type of poetry in Psalm 127 is different, instead of similar but distinct sounds, it uses similar but distinct meanings. There are examples of this all over the Bible, especially in the wisdom literature like Proverbs.

**Proverbs 1:25–26 (ESV) — 25** because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, **26** I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you,

You can hear the purposeful repetition with slight shifts of wording and emphasis, and this is poetry. Interestingly, this poetry that’s in the Bible is unlike our type of rhyming poetry because it transcends language barriers. God is His wisdom has given us a form of poetry that any of His children can enjoy no matter where or when they study it.

**Psalm 127 is in book five of the Psalms, it is in the middle of the Songs of Ascent, it is written by Solomon and poetically repeats meaning with slight alteration**

The first half of the verse says “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it.” Let’s break this down and understand it. We could start with a hyper-literal meaning and say “well God has to personally come down and put down the foundation and hammer the nails to build the house or else nothing will be built.” But obviously we look around at the world around us and very few buildings that I know of had the physical presence of God directly involved in the building process. But there is a literal meaning we can understand first and then expound on the general meaning.

It’s telling us that doesn’t matter how many people you set to building a house or how long they take or what materials they use, because if God himself is not in support of your building, then the house will fall. This is actually saying a lot! If you think about all the work and effort and planning that goes into building a house, to say it’s all vanity or pointless if God is not behind it is a powerful statement.

We can generalize this point, our accomplishments, our achievements are only possible where God supports us.

**Accomplishment is vain unless the Lord provides**

This is because God is **sovereign**, He set the foundations of the world in motion, He will reign over his creation for eternity and He does whatever He pleases. Earlier in the book of Psalms, Psalm 115:3 phrased it

**Psalm 115:3 (ESV) — 3** Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

This is of course true for a building project, but also for our other goals and achievements.

Let’s fill in the words of the Psalm with your own. Try it out with whoever you’re sitting next to. We’re going to do a Psalm MadLib™.

Unless the Lord [accomplishment] then the [person accomplishing] [work to accomplish] in vain

Maybe you’re trying to achieve some sort of education

“Unless the Lord answers passes the test, the students take the course in vain”

Perhaps you’re just trying to meet your goals at work

“Unless the Lord seals the deal, the salesman makes phone calls in vain”

Could this ring true for self-improvement, improving our strength?

“Unless the Lord squats the weight, the bodybuilder does reps in vain”

We’re recognizing that our own efforts, talents and skills do not stand independent from God’s sovereign decisions and control.

King Solomon knows this point better than anyone. Solomon was a man famous for the most prosperous, peaceful time in the history of Israel, amassing what was probably the most impressive collection of wealth in history (and definitely a few too many women along with it). Solomon was declared by God to be the wisest man to have ever lived. Solomon was inspired to write the finest wisdom literature in scripture.

Yet still, Solomon’s most famous action, believe it or not, was building a house (for God). Solomon oversaw the construction of Solomon’s Temple, one of the most magnificent buildings ever made, which housed the very glory of God. But Solomon is recognizing in this Psalm that it was not his wisdom or wealth or grandeur that made this building come about, no it was the Lord’s doing. Solomon was not even the one who first had the idea to build a temple, instead it was his father, King David. David decided to build this temple and began accumulating supplies for it, but much like our verses here tell us, it was all in vain for God had different ideas.

**1 Kings 5:3–5 (ESV) — 3** “You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. **4** But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side. There is neither adversary nor misfortune. **5** And so I intend to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD said to David my father, ‘Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.’

Consider that the man who God used to write down Psalm 127 and tell us the vanity of accomplishments without Him was not some farmer who watched his barn fall over too many times. This man ruled a nation, commanded armies and built one of the most impressive and beautiful structures in history. He saw daily that apart from God’s sovereign will, nothing will come of all of our efforts and striving. Likewise, he saw that once we’re walking in God’s direction, we can be part of incredible accomplishments and miracles beyond our expectations.

The first half of the verse addresses our accomplishments. Once we’ve achieved our desires, where does the mind go next? “How do I make sure I don’t lose all of this!” That’s the other half of this verse, the back-half of the poetry. “Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain.”

Here again we see the repetition of our theme of vanity outside of God’s will in his sovereignty. Just like before we have to understand the literal meaning so that we can generalize it.

A city guard must stay awake and alert, it’s their job to watch for enemies who are trying to sneak by them. It’s their job to alert the town to an attack or an intruder. Even the guardsman standing alert all night can’t stand against God should He desire the city be taken.

More generally we have to recognize that even our greatest effort is insufficient to protect and maintain the safety and security of what we care about. You can’t achieve something in the first place without God and you can’t hold on to it without God.

### **Preservation is vain unless the Lord provides**

This is true for buildings we build, families we build, organizations or ministries that we build. That is something that our world doesn’t like to hear, especially here in the great, independent state of Texas. Anytime we’re faced with the fact from scripture that God above has all control and that means that you and I are not as self-sufficient and independent as we like to think, it has a tendency to make us angry.

I get it. I'm a pretty new parent, and the idea that something could happen to my family, is terrifying! I know how scary it is to truly acknowledge that I am not sufficient to guard and protect the things I love in my life on my own. But I also recognize as a new parent that being insufficient only hurts me if I'm trying to do things on my own, because I have a Heavenly Father who is sufficient and does have the control that I lack.

Have you ever seen a toddler trying as hard as they can to push open a door when they can't reach the handle? What happens to that toddler's demeanor when they realize they can't get the door open and they want the door open? They get mad. It's really hard not to find it funny. They're just standing there, pushing harder and harder and getting frustrated and you're just standing behind them, like “buddy that's a little beyond you. It's not even a push door. Don't get mad, just let me open the door. You trying to open the door just means you're actually in the way of me opening the door! Then God whispers in your ear and is like “that toddler is you.”

Let's stop for a moment to appreciate what verse 1 says in totality. All of our efforts and all of our striving, our accomplishments, our goals, our 5 year plans, our degree plans, our career paths, our retirement plans, our insurance policies, our training regiments, they're all vain unless the Lord is there with us.

I need your attention here, because I think when we hear “Unless the Lord build the house, we labor in vain”, we may accidentally change that statement in our head without realizing it. When we have our plans and our goals and suddenly, we're confronted with this idea that all of these efforts might be for nothing in light of God's sovereignty, that scares us and we try and think how we can adjust our plans so that God will still make them happen.

We're tempted to change it to “Unless the builder has really Godly character”, or “Unless the builder devotes the house to godly purposes”, or “Unless the builder pleases God with all their good works.” We start to substitute having godly character or godly intentions for actually following God's will.

Consider these examples from scripture, two ungodly men in the Bible, King Nebuchadnezzar and Haman, both tried to crush and oppress God's people, the Israelites, and God allowed one man to succeed and the other to fail, because in each case the circumstances best fit His will.

So, it's not based on the character of the builder, but on God who builds.

Or consider the Apostle Paul in all of his ministry. His intentions were always to spread the Gospel of Jesus across all the Gentile nations, obeying Jesus's call, yet while God awarded him great success and miracles at times, Paul also mentions times that the Holy Spirit forbade him from certain ministry, or times when he was prevented from traveling and preaching where he intended.

So, it's not based on the good intentions or ministry of the builder, but on God who builds. Ultimately what we must learn is that the will of the sovereign Lord will be done.

So you may be asking yourself, does that mean all of my efforts or intentions are meaningless and I should just give up trying since I'll never know if I will end up being in the will of God? Not at all, just because our efforts or intentions do not overcome God's will, doesn't mean they're useless, in fact it means you're asking the wrong question.

The question is not “what can I do to make sure my efforts and plans bring about success” but is instead “what can I do to ensure my efforts and plans best align with God's will so then I know they will succeed.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On one hand there is vanity. What is true about building and guarding is true about all work. It is vain if it is not accompanied by Yhwh's involvement; it may unaccountably achieve nothing. On the other hand, if we recognize that Yhwh not only needs to be

This should come as a grace and a relief to you! Rather than working and planning and striving and fighting for our plans to succeed, we need only to align our plans with the Lord's and we will find the success that only He can guarantee!

But of course, that's a lot easier said than done. How can I be so sure what God's will is? You and I can seek His will through careful study and obedience to His word and through prayer. That prideful, independent flesh of ours hates that answer. We want clear action plans from God on how to achieve what we want to achieve.

“I want to get married, why won't God show me how to do that.”

“I want my business to take off, why won't God just show me what to do next.”

We say we understand God is sovereign and we're just wanting to follow His plan, we say we're willing to do anything He asks of us. Do we come to His word, read what it says and obey it, patiently waiting on Him to provide what we need? Do we see the sin in our lives the way that God does, confess it and repent from it? Do we let His word transform our hearts to produce the fruit of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control?

Would we rather God drop a day planner in our laps detailing all the things we have to do 6:00am to 9:00pm to be successful and achieve what we want? If that latter option seems preferable to you than some patient Bible Study and prayer, you don't know your savior as well as you think you do.

**Matthew 11:28–30 (ESV) — 28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

There are plenty of wrong ways to seek after God's will and there are a few right ways. If you're the kind of Christian that is desperate to know God's will, you might have started turning to look for signs or coincidences in your life that point you one way or another. God can certainly use our circumstances and the situations around us to teach us His will, but this is a dangerous path to take, and I've personally seen Christians make mistakes and step right into sin with an overeager desire to interpret coincidences around them as God's divine communication.

I'd like to offer up a godly example of seeking God's will that came from a church member which I heard just this past weekend at our Men's Retreat. This man had to make an extremely big decision around changing careers and moving his family and so he was desperately wanting to know God's will for him. He did three things that helped him confirm in his heart what God was asking him to do, and I think all three of these things are wise, biblical examples anyone can use.

First, he periodically fasted during the week he was making his decision. Fasting is a biblical way to turn down the influence of your sinful flesh and practice self-control over your body.

Second, he sought the Lord through daily time in His word along with prayer.

Thirdly, he did all of this in community. Alongside himself, his wife and their church smallgroup were also praying, fasting and seeking God's will.

At the end of their week, God had brought them to a decision that was both clear to the man and confirmed through his church community. I'm thankful to God for bringing me this awesome example of seeking His will just in time for our study tonight.



Here we are, one verse into the Psalm, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it, unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain.” Yet we’re given this beautiful picture of resting in God over striving in vanity.

Surely, I’m reading too much into this, surely the intent of this verse could not drive us to this totality of God’s sovereignty leading to a mindset shift towards resting in God’s plan instead of striving in our own efforts. It’s such an intense and specific explanation for such a poetic verse...

No, this is exactly what is being communicated in this verse. Remember this a Song of Ascent, pointing to the faithful provision of God on his throne Remember this is a song from Solomon, a man who achieved more than all of us in this room combined because God willed it to be so. Most importantly, if you’re still not content, look at verse 2.

**Psalms 127:2 (ESV)** — 2 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.

When it says “Rise up early” here, it’s exactly what it sounds like. Next the phrase here for “going late to rest” is literally “sitting up late.” When you combine the two, it suggests squeezing as much time out of the day as possible to get as much done as we can, working our very hardest.<sup>3</sup> I hope I don’t need to tell you that this is the mindset you get when you listen to the world, especially here in our culture. Efficiency and achievement and productivity are everything. Your worth is measured in your achievement.

We’d call this type of attitude “the grind.” Let it be said here from scripture, “the grind” is vanity. This type of lifestyle leads only to eating the “the bread of anxious toil.”

This phrase “the bread of anxious toil” is endlessly fascinating to me, especially when you read what Solomon has to say about labor and toil in his other wisdom literature. What scripture says through Solomon in Ecclesiastes is that our toil can be vain or our toil can be good and it depends not on how hard we work but on what we rely on for our provision and our joy.

**Ecclesiastes 2:22–25 (ESV)** — 22 What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? 23 For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. 24 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

Do you see the exact same type of wisdom laid out in Psalm 127. The problem is not whether or not someone is working or toiling, the problem occurs in both Psalm 127 and Ecclesiastes 2 when a person toils based on their own efforts without resting in the Lord.<sup>4</sup> When that person “rises up early” or “goes late to rest” or “even in the night his heart does not rest”, that is when the work is vanity. When that person’s work is “striving” and “vexation”, when that person’s days are “full of sorrow”, when that person “eats the bread of **anxious** toil” that is when their work is vain.

But when the person stops and acknowledges their dependence on God’s provision, they stop finding anxiety in their toil and they start finding enjoyment in their toil knowing that it is good work from the hand of God. What do that good work and good toil produce?... Rest for God’s beloved.

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<sup>3</sup> The MT has “making late to sit” or “sit up late.” Paralleled with the first idea of rising early, the two lines seem to refer to lengthening the day artificially. [Allen P Ross, *A Commentary of the Psalms*, vol. 3, Kregel 2016, 675]

<sup>4</sup> Anguish is that experience by which work is turned into toil. Human labor under the sun becomes toil when God’s blessing is absent. [Tremper Longman III; David E. Garland; Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revised Edition*, Vol. 5, (Zondervan, 2008) 913]

There are some translation arguments back and forth on verse 2 about whether or not we should say “He gives to his beloved even in his sleep” meaning God provides for His beloved even while He is at rest or “He gives to His beloved his sleep” meaning that the rest itself is what God is providing.

It’s a bit of a distinction without a difference because God can both provide rest and provide for you while you rest. But I think it’s clear that Solomon’s intention in this line is not that we should look for God to grant us food and wealth and things *while* we just sleep but he’s contrasting the person who wakes up early and stays up late relying on their own provision with the Lord’s beloved to whom He grants rest and sleep.

Sometimes resting in the Lord’s provision looks like working hard at the job He’s provided you but also sometimes resting in the Lord’s provision is learning how to pray “thank you” when God gives you an opportunity to nap. That rest itself is a gift from God.

This is where I get to be a bit personal with you, this is hard to live out, and I’ve seen it be an especially hard truth for people doing ministry. Here’s an honest experience I actually had.

I got up at sunrise, got ready for the day, fought traffic on the way to work, sat in endless meetings, fought traffic on the way home, started watching my daughter, started cleaning the bathrooms while she’s hanging in that little baby bjorn on my chest, took her and the dog’s on a walk (two for one), have family dinner, clean the kitchen, put the baby to bed, the sun is down, spend an hour talking with my wife, I’m exhausted, all I want to do is sleep, but I have preaching in Psalms to prepare so it’s time to grind. “Let’s get this bread.” “Good things come to those who hustle.”

Then I sit down and I pray and I read Psalm 127 and I read “It is vain to rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to His beloved sleep” and I’m faced with a decision. Am I going to maximize my efficiency, push through and stay up another 2-3 hours writing a sermon telling you how sitting up late is vanity, or am I going to humble my heart and accept that God will provide to me the time I need to do the ministry He’s called me to but right now He has gifted me my rest after a hard day and I should take that rest.

**God grants rest to His beloved, not vain toil (alt. the grind if we were born after 1990)**

The point is not to become a sluggard, Solomon has plenty to say about that in Proverbs, no the point is to say that if we accept that our accomplishments and protections do not come from our own efforts or plans or intentions, but on God alone, we must also accept that our provision and rest don’t come from what we achieve in our own anxious striving, but these things also come from God alone. God gives rest to His beloved.<sup>56</sup>

This is yet another place where learning that Solomon is the one writing this Psalm gives us great insight, because we learn from the book of 2 Samuel in chapter 12 that right when Solomon was born it says “the Lord loved him and sent a message by Nathan the prophet and so he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord.”

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<sup>5</sup> A long, industrious day is not wrong. In fact, this 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 worry without trusting the LORD and it is futile. [Allen P Ross, *A Commentary of the Psalms*, vol. 3, Kregel 2016, 683]

<sup>6</sup> Vs 1–2 seem to suggest ‘Leave it all to God; let go and let God’, and enjoy a restful life. But in the Bible, the opposite of rest is not work but restlessness [J. A. Motyer, “*The Psalms*,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 574.]



Solomon has this alternative name, Jedidiah, And wouldn't you know it, Jedidiah means “The Lord's beloved.” Solomon is inserting himself here, he's the one receiving rest.<sup>7</sup>

Solomon didn't just receive rest from the Lord through kicking up his feet after a tough day of work while one of his 700 wives got him a beer, no, Solomon himself describes how the Lord brought him rest. It was by bringing all of his enemies under his feet. God brought rest to Solomon by bringing peace and prosperity to the entire nation of Israel during his entire reign as king, and Solomon knows who to credit for that, he knows that his rest was granted to him by God not because he worked harder than anyone else but because he is beloved by the God who reigns over the whole earth.

All of that in the first two verses of our Psalm today, and that's probably not even the half of the Psalm that you'd heard before you came in here.

You probably haven't read Psalm 127 as a Psalm testifying to God's sovereignty over our lives, no you've probably heard the second half of the Psalm.

**Psalm 127:3–5 (ESV)** — **3** Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. **4** Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. **5** 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 much truth is spoken in these 3 verses so plainly, and yet look at the potential to radically change how we view the world. The Bible clearly states that having children and growing a family is a good and desirable thing, it is a blessing from the Lord.

I know for many people in this church it seems like this is a concept Messiah Bible Church doesn't struggle with. What was it Pastor Tony said during our annual meeting? “Basically every woman at this church with the ability to have children is pregnant,” but the enemy's voice and the world's voice can be loud, so let me just set the record straight.

The world wants to present having kids as a hinderance to your life, giving up on your dreams, hindering your career or travel plans, ruining your friendships and sleep schedule. Some have even gone so far as to present having kids as a moral failing, saying that the bringing new life to experience the pain or injustices of this world is not fair, or saying that the world is deteriorating and new life is detrimental somehow.

Like with most messages the world wants to send you, it's all lies and it stands in stark contrast to God's message through his scripture. Children are a gift and a blessing. The role of parenting, to guide and shepherd a child towards God through their lives is absolutely challenging and will require sacrifice, but it is just as rewarding as it is challenging. This world is absolutely deteriorating, that is true. It is absolutely a place where injustice reigns and problems multiply, but the Bible's call for a parent is not to convince their children to make this world a better place, it's a call for parents to direct their children to a God who will solve the world's problem in the future and who has already solved the problem of sin in our hearts.

The nation of Israel wouldn't need to be convinced that children are a blessing, remember that their father Abraham entered into a covenant with God, starting their entire nation based on the abundant blessings of a child provided to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Those who wrote and sang this song would have a clear picture that children are a blessing, something we often forget in our modern times. Children are described poetically as a heritage and a reward<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The mention of “his beloved” may reflect the name the LORD gave to Solomon, Jedidiah, which means “truly beloved of the LORD” [Allen P Ross, *A Commentary of the Psalms*, vol. 3, Kregel 2016, 677]

<sup>8</sup> Usage of this word “inheritance” gives the picture of something left to an heir, or something that was an allotment given to another person as a possession and trust (sometimes left in trust). [Allen P Ross, *A Commentary of the Psalms*, vol. 3, Kregel 2016, 686]

Just like verses 1 and 2 and just like Abraham’s story, we need to acknowledge that we are not in as much control as we like to think, but instead it is up to God to grow our family. The terminology of heritage and reward here are meant to emphasize the blessing that God brings, not to imply that a lack of children means you haven’t measured up to some standard. Remember what we’ve already learned in verses 1 and 2, that it depends not on the character or the motivation of the builder but on the God who builds, and this is just as true for building a family.

The children of one’s youth are described as being like arrows in the hand of a warrior. On the one hand this is that poetic repetition of meaning, but on the other hand it helps elaborate how exactly children are a blessing. It’s important to see what the Psalm is saying because those lies from the world would point to all the difficulties, costs and missed opportunities that come from children, so what blessings do the scriptures promise?

Consider a warrior, someone who attacks and defends, but without any ammunition for their weapon, they are arrow-less. That warrior is vulnerable and ineffective. Even with the warrior’s experience and training, ultimately, they are not able to stop an enemy that intends them harm.

On the other hand, a warrior with arrows in his quiver is not someone you want to approach. Even a band of 50 thugs that want to rush this warrior would hesitate if he was well armed. The warrior is well equipped both to accomplish his mission and to defend himself from his enemies.

Likewise, the “children of one’s youth”, meaning the children you have spent your best years protecting and training and growing and teaching, will in turn be to you protection and provision. See, this is where we see the connecting point between the two halves of our Psalm.

Solomon is not suddenly shifting from a conversation about God’s sovereignty to some new conversation about parenthood. Instead, he is turning to the ultimate example of God’s sovereignty in our accomplishments and our provision. What better example of God’s sovereignty and provision than growing a family? We have already established that you and I have a lot less control over having children and raising children than we would like to have, and those children are a perfect example of God’s provision for you.

### **Children are a blessing and an example of God’s sovereign provision**

Children providing for and protecting their parents is not a constant truth in every circumstance, but it is an undeniable pattern God has built into humanity. While this was especially true in Solomon’s time, it remains true today. As much as we have tried to secure independence through retirement plans and social services, it remains true at a fundamental level that like Tony says, “we’re all gonna die soon” and as we get closer to that point, every person will become more vulnerable and need more help.

Every person’s situation is different but we have to acknowledge that a family full of children is an excellent and natural protection for parents as they age. The final verses speak to this protection.

Different versions read verse 5 as either “blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them” or “blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them.”

I remember reading a book in high school where pastor Voddie Baucham vehemently argued for about 2 pages that the proper interpretation was the one encouraging action! That really, this verse is a call to intentionally have lots of kids

I respect that viewpoint, and in fact I agree with it, young people should be intentional about starting families. But I do feel it’s important to recognize that every other verse of this chapter has spoken to the fact that our intentions and our plans lead only to vanity unless the sovereign Lord blesses us with success. So however you

choose to read this verse, the point is clear, a parent with many children is blessed by God with provision and protection the same way a well-equipped warrior is.

This final mention of the father in the song unashamedly speaking with his enemies in the gate at first seems like a continuation of the warrior metaphor, but in reality, it is a much more literal statement than that. We see throughout scripture and through historical records of these times that a city gate was primarily used not just to defend a city but it was the chosen place for business and legal meetings.<sup>9</sup>

City chiefs and judges sit in the city gate and handle the legal matters brought to them there. It was busy place with lots of foot traffic and also allowed foreigners to bring legal issues to the leaders without granting those foreigners full access to the undefended interior of the city. So, when the song declares that the man with many children would not be ashamed by his enemies at the gates, we see another beautiful picture of provision by God through children. When a person is under a legal attack, defending their reputation, fighting off lies and slander, there is no better defense on your side than a family full of loving children ready to protect and provide for you.

As this Psalm comes to its end, we see that it is not a mismatched collection of advice about resting and about the benefits of children, but it is instead a beautiful, poetic statement glorifying God’s sovereignty and provision for his people paired with the ultimate example of God’s sovereign provision to a family through children.

Now that we understand this Psalm and where it fits within the Songs of Ascent and where it fits in the greater testimony of the book of Psalms, it leads us with one more question:

How do we become the beloved of God whom He gives sleep? How do we, all of us, including those who haven’t been gifted children, find that provision that only God in His sovereignty can give?

Can I share something unbelievable with you? You and I probably won’t ever rule the most prosperous and peaceful nation in history like Solomon, but would you believe me if I told you that God has an open invitation today to become one of His beloved and it comes with an even greater prosperity and rest than king Solomon knew, and just like we’ve already learned, this doesn’t depend on your efforts or on your intentions or on your abilities or on your past performance or mistakes, but it depends only on God who is sovereign.

In 1<sup>st</sup> John 4 we learn about this impossible, unbelievable invitation.

**1 John 4:9–10 (ESV) — 9** In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. **10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Notice it was not our efforts or our love that brought Jesus to us but it was God’s love that sent him to us. How do we become one of these “loved” or “beloved” of God?

**1 John 4:13–15 (ESV) — 13** By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **15** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

The moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ as our propitiation for our sin and confess that He is the Son of God, that He is our savior, at that moment we receive the Holy Spirit as an undeniable mark of God’s love for

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<sup>9</sup> Sons help defend the family for they are like weapons (arrows) in the hands of a mighty man. Sons are capable of defending the family in civil cases (at the gate civil cases were discussed and decided).<sup>11</sup> [Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 885.]

us. From that moment forward we can say we are beloved by God and we can recognize that God has given us rest. God has gifted us Jesus’s perfect righteousness instead of our sinfulness and we can rest in that forever.

If this is news to you, if this is the first time you’ve understood that God is sovereign and that you need His solution to your sin through the payment of Jesus on the cross, then take that step. Confess right now that Jesus is Lord and find a rest in Him that is eternal, and if this isn’t news to you, if you’ve already found your rest in Jesus for your salvation, don’t make the mistake of going back to anxious toil as you work to please your savior.

You don’t start with rest in Jesus and finish with your own efforts. Jesus will save you and cleanse you and then through the Holy Spirit He will transform you and guide you in the good works that He has prepared for you. Remember the words of Jesus we read earlier in Matthew “You will find rest for your souls, my burden is easy and my yolk is light.” We must continue to rest in Jesus after our salvation moment so we can learn what the sovereign will of God is and do it through His power, not our own.

Faith in Jesus will bring us eternal rest, but what about the special type of provision mentioned in Psalm 127 that comes through a family full of children. Of course, every truth we learned from the Psalm is still true, having children is a wonderful gift and an example of divine provision and protection, but, I also know that while this is true and evident from scripture, it can be a truth that’s painful rather than comforting if you’re someone who wants that blessing of children and God has withheld that opportunity.

It can drive you to feeling the way Andrew described in our study of the lament Psalm 88, you cry out to God and God responds with silence. Many people want children but are denied them by God. For some, God has closed that door completely through physical restrictions or through denying a marriage. For others, that opportunity might still be possible but for some reason we don’t know, God is withholding His blessing and it feels more like a curse.

In these situations, it can seem hollow or empty to hear about God’s provision or His faithfulness or His sovereignty. That faith becomes harder and harder to come by as your desire for parenthood is denied. I want those in that situation to hear God is sovereign, yes, but He also hears the cries and prayers of His people and He is also good. Do not give up hope in your God who is longsuffering, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and who planned for your rest and your salvation thousands of years before you were ever born. Many faithful believers in scripture have had their cries for children answered, sometimes after many years.

But for those who God chooses to remain childless, He has not forgotten you and He will not leave you without the provision you need. Jesus in Matthew 19 and Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 make it clear that some are called to a life of singleness, and that this calling is one to be celebrated because it means a person can devote themselves fully to the Lord’s work without the concern or distraction of a family. Also in Matthew 19, Jesus reassures His disciples that whatever opportunity for family they have walked away from in service to Him they will receive back a hundred-fold.

Through this crazy, messy, wonderful, irritating, loving family that God has created called the church, we have all the joy and provision we could ever need. If you have a burning desire for the type of connection, relationship and mentorship that raising children brings but God hasn’t given you that gift, let me encourage you to dive in to a discipleship relationship. There are spiritually hungry children, teenagers and young men and women in the church that God has called you to minister to. Have you answered His call to make disciples?

If you’ve never considered it this way, it might come as a shock to you, but when a Christian’s worldview is focused on eternity, they recognize that discipleship leads to a totally unique relationship unlike anything else

that lasts even longer than parenthood does. I only get to be dad for as long as I’m alive. But even after thousands of years in God’s presence in heaven, I will still be the person He used to disciple and teach some of the people up in heaven with me. This is why Tony loves to remind us that God has no grandchildren and that you are a discipler even to your own children, pointing them to their savior Jesus, personally.

Remember this church, Psalm 127 absolutely speaks to the blessing children are, but really our worship should be drawn to the God who is sovereign above all and who is at work providing for us in all things.

**Accomplishment is vain unless the Lord provides**

**Preservation is vain unless the Lord provides**

**God grants rest to His beloved, not vain toil (alt. the grind if were born after 1990)**

**Children are a blessing and an example of God’s sovereign provision**

AND

**To sinners, Jesus provides through rest and family**

Amen, pray with me.