

We're continuing our study on the Psalms with Psalm 127 - one of the Psalms called a "Wisdom Psalm." These psalms address what it means to live life skillfully. They express some aspect of practical wisdom for everyday life. This is one of only two Psalms written by King David's son and successor, Solomon.

Before we look at it, I want to ask a simple question: Have you ever felt like you wasted your time and energy? Maybe you over-committed and couldn't really pull off what you thought you could? You didn't realize it until after the fact; only then do you see how you've wasted your time and energy?

I'm an expert at this. Case in point: Three years ago, I way over-committed to a number of speaking engagements. I was to fly to Knoxville, Tennessee, on a Wednesday to speak at a conference for those in sports ministry. Then on Friday, I was to fly from Knoxville to Spokane, Washington, to speak at a Men's retreat. Finally, on Saturday night, I'd fly to Phoenix, so I could speak at a Spring training chapel for the Giants. Later that day, I'd fly home. I put a lot of time and energy into planning each of those engagements. I knew it was a lot, but I thought I could pull it off.

Well, as you may have guessed, I was wrong. First, my flight to Knoxville had a layover in Chicago, which got canceled, and there was no way I could get to Knoxville in time to speak the next day. So I was a no-show. Instead, I got on a red-eye for Sacramento because there were no available flights to the Bay Area. I spent the night there, and then the next morning, rented a car and drove to the Bay Area. The next day, I flew to Spokane and spoke three times on Friday night and Saturday. Have you ever been to a retreat, and the speaker is terrible? Well, it was pretty terrible that weekend. For some reason, I just didn't connect, and I knew it. So now, I am zero for two. Saturday night, I hopped on a plane for Phoenix and arrived at midnight. The next morning, I was able to squeeze in a 15-minute chapel talk with a handful of players. By the time I got home that night, I was ready to change careers!

I flew home that day feeling like I'd wasted a lot of time and energy. Have you ever felt that? Isn't it true we're constantly weighing and measuring how we want to spend our time and our energy? When we talk about wasting our time and energy, we're talking about wasting our lives. How do we spend our lives without wasting them? It's a question worth asking.

For some, these are questions to avoid at all costs. They know if they stop for a moment and ask these questions, they'll reveal a

great hollowness at the core of their lives. So they just keep busy and avoid the hard questions. There are others who'd rather leave these questions to the philosophers. They're pragmatic people who aren't trying to avoid the truth; they just don't live life on a very reflective level.

But Solomon was a very reflective man. And in this Psalm, he reflects on this question of how a person can spend his life without wasting it. He kind of holds our hand and helps us see what's really worthy of our investment. It's a short psalm with just five verses.

**Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.
In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.
Children are a heritage from the Lord,
offspring a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one's youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court.**

This psalm has two parts: verses 1-2 establishes the basic principle by way of a contrast. Verses 3-5 offer an illustration or application of that principle. Let's begin by exploring the basic principle in verses 1-2.

The principle here is work that's done apart from God is wasted. Solomon establishes this by way of a contrast. The first part of the contrast takes up most of the space. Repeatedly, he tells us certain things are vain. When something is vain, it's basically a waste of time and energy. It's not worthy of our investment. Solomon says anything we spend our lives on, apart from God's involvement, is a waste. He talks about three different activities which people endeavor to do; things which in and of themselves aren't bad, but apart from God's involvement, they're useless.

Building a house apart from God's involvement is a waste. We've all been spending a lot of time in our homes, haven't we? When we build a house, what are we trying to do? At a basic level, a house provides shelter for our family. For many, it's much more than that. We can build a house to boost our own ego because it's in the right neighborhood. We can build a house with all the bells and whistles where friends want to come and have fun. We can build a house because that investment will fund our future retirement.

But building a house apart from God's involvement is a waste. Lynn and I live in a neighborhood where a lot of houses are bought and then torn down. You drive by a house one day, and it's gone the next. They tear it down, put the bits and pieces in a dump truck, and drive it away. I walk by and think of the family that lived there for 30 or 40 years. I think of all trips to Home Depot, the remodeling projects, and the thousands of times the lawn was mowed, and the plants were watered. Suddenly, it's gone. Unless God was somehow involved in what was happening inside that house, all the time and energy that went into it was a waste.

But that's not all. Solomon also says guarding a city is a waste if God's not in it. We're talking here about the protection of a city and the people in it. In Solomon's day, a city that wasn't guarded was easy prey. The enemy might be another nation, but we've learned recently, it might also be a virus. Before the Coronavirus, we didn't think a whole lot about the need for our cities to be guarded against attack, but now we do. For those of us who are Baby Boomers, the defining event of our growing up was the assassination of JFK. For Generation X, the defining event was the shooting at Columbine High. But for those growing up today, it will be the Coronavirus.

How can we guarantee our security? We can catch and kill international terrorists. We can heighten the security in our airports. We can take our kids out of the public schools and put them somewhere we think they'll be safe. We can pass gun control laws, or we can keep a gun under our pillow at night. We can even find a vaccine for this virus, but without the Lord's involvement, all our efforts are in vain.

Solomon gives even one more picture to drive this point home. It's as if he's been living in the Bay Area. He speaks of the vanity of rising up early and going to bed late, striving to make a living, toiling to put food on the table. I don't know if the overall cost of living was as much a problem in Palestine as it is today, but it seems they knew how a person's life could become consumed with just making a living.

There's nothing wrong with hard work. Solomon also wrote the book of Proverbs, where he encourages hard work. He calls lazy people sluggards and says we should all be more like the ants who work night and day to gather up enough food for the

winter. Solomon isn't against a little sweat. Whatever our work is, we should see it as a calling and a place where God is at work in and through us.

But there is a kind of work that precludes God's involvement. There's an attitude that says it all depends on me. There's an anxious striving that says if anything's going to happen, it's going to happen because I worked for it. At the end of the day, there may be relief, but there's no gratitude. You can be very successful in all these things — you can build a great house, you can guard your city well, you can make a lot of money, but Solomon says if you think that's all there is in making a life, it's all a waste.

Work that's done apart from God is a waste. This is the first part of the contrast. But there's also the other side found in one lonely line at the end of verse 2. Don't be deceived by that. This is the most important line in the entire Psalm. It says, "*For he grants sleep to those he loves.*" Another translation states, "*For he gives to his beloved even in his sleep.*" There's a difference. The question is, does God give sleep to his beloved, or does he give to them even while they sleep? While I wouldn't argue he gives sleep to his beloved, I believe Solomon is saying that he gives to his beloved even while they sleep.

I believe that because Solomon is reflecting on his own experience. The word translated "beloved" here is the Hebrew word *yadid*. That's important because when Solomon was born, Scripture says, "*The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah*" (2 Sam. 12:25). The name Jedidiah means, "the *yadid* of Yahweh," or "the beloved of the Lord." You see, Solomon is reflecting on his own experience. As God's beloved, something was given to Solomon in his sleep. Do you remember what happened to him as a young man? He was asleep, and God came to him during the night in a dream and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon asked for wisdom, the Lord approved of his request, and he became the wisest man to ever live. God's choicest gift was given to Solomon while he slept!

Do you see the point of the contrast now? You can work your tail off, but if God's not in it, your work is wasted. But if you're a person who knows God, if you're a person who's "beloved of the Lord," not only will your work be blessed, but he'll do more — he'll bless you and provide for you even while you sleep! Sleep is a picture of our inactivity and weakness. God's word says your work isn't everything; some of God's greatest treasures come in the midst of your inactivity. You need to work but realize God's work is more important than your work.

When God is in our work, he blesses us even in our sleep. Even before our day begins, as we sleep, God is at work. Each morning we wake up, we're entering into a work already in progress. By the way, that's what the Sabbath is all about, right? God says, take one day in seven and stop working. We say, "I can't do that,

Lord. I've got too much work to do." God says, "Let me take care of that. While you're resting, I've got things covered."

This principle applies to our ministries as well. Jesus told a parable about this. He said,

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. Mark 4:26-27

Do you see his point? The Kingdom of God grows, not through our activity, but through God's activity, which takes place while we sleep.

That also applies to our spiritual growth. Jesus says in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Choosing to abide is our work, but only God can cause us to bear fruit.

When God isn't in our work, and we think it's all about us, there are some telltale signs, such as frustration, irritation, and worry. Doors aren't opening, but you're pushing them open. You're saying things you wish you didn't say. You're cutting corners that you know you shouldn't cut. The truth gets shaded because you've decided the ends justify the means. Other priorities in your life are being compromised. You're like poor Sisyphus in Homer's *Odyssey*. His punishment in Hell consisted of rolling a massive stone up a hill, but just as he was about to heave it over the top, the weight would turn it back and down it would roll, and poor Sisyphus would strain again and again back and forth to no avail.

In contrast to that, Deut. 33:12 offers a beautiful picture of the beloved of the Lord. It says, "Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the Lord loves rests between his shoulders." The beloved of the Lord rests between the shoulders of God. He rests even as he works because he knows God is working; God is carrying him along.

When my children were small, and we'd take a long walk, they always wanted me to carry them piggyback. When I knew they were really tired and couldn't walk, I'd let them climb on my back. Once in awhile, they'd even fall asleep, but they'd make progress because they were riding on my back. Whether we're awake or asleep, whether we're working or resting, we can rest between his shoulders, and he'll carry us along.

When we put the two sides to this contrast together, it's clear — when it comes to how we spend our lives, the value of our work depends on God's involvement. If God's not in it, we can work our bodies right into the grave and have nothing of lasting value to show for it. But, if God is in it, we can even sleep and find ourselves being carried far beyond where we could go ourselves.

The second half of this Psalm is an illustration of this. Solomon wants to give us an example of how in our sleep, God gives to us something which pays great dividends. "*Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him*" (v. 3).

It's no mistake Solomon brings up the subject of children right after speaking of what God does when we sleep. Children are generally conceived as we sleep. Certainly, we play our part in that, but there are things that happen in the quiet darkness of the womb that only God can do. We don't make babies; God does. When your small child asks where babies come from, just say they come from God who makes them at night when mommy and daddy sleep.

That's why children are here called a heritage and a reward from the Lord. That word heritage is used in the Old Testament to speak of the land God promised his people as an inheritance. It was a land, which came as a result of God's promise rather than their own power and strength. Children are called a heritage not because we earned them or won them, but because God bestows them, and they're a blessing.

I know lots of people will say their children are a blessing, but in practice, you sometimes wonder if that's true, especially in this season we're in now. Some of you can probably relate to the saying, "Grandchildren are God's reward for not killing your own children." The blessing of children can look rosier in retrospect than they sometimes do in daily life. Many of you are working really hard right now to educate and entertain your kids at home. It's not easy. But know your work isn't in vain. Someday you'll look back on this time and say, "That was really hard, but it was also really good!" You see, your kids are a gift that will pay dividends far beyond what you could ever accomplish. Unlike the waste of building a house and guarding a city apart from God, this product of our sleep makes a meaningful difference for time and eternity. Look at what he says.

**Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one's youth.**

Blessed is the man

whose quiver is full of them.

They will not be put to shame

when they contend with their opponents in court.

vv. 4-5

He gives two examples of how children bless their parents. First, they're like arrows in the hands of a warrior. How is a child like an arrow? Well, we shoot them out from our home. Lynn and I have shot all three of our arrows out of our quiver. Believe me; they were a handful before they were a quiverful. And when you shoot them out, you wonder, "Have we prepared them for this?" But Solomon is saying as we shoot them out, our children are the means by which we reach out and impact the world. Through our children, we multiply our influence in the world.

I think of our three kids. Our oldest daughter is a mother of three and the wife of a college football coach. She has lived in California, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, and now Minnesota. She's impacted college students all over the country. Our youngest is also a college football coach. He's also lived all over the country and is now at BYU. Finally, my middle daughter is a mother of two with one more on the way. She's a nurse at Lucille Packard. She's impacting people who come to Stanford from all over the world with very sick children. You see, none of that we could have done ourselves.

The psalm also says children bless their parents by defending them. He says, *"They shall not be ashamed when they contend with their opponents at court."* The idea is that we can count on our children to stand up for us and even defend us before others.

This past week, a good friend of mine and others here at CPC passed away suddenly. He had just turned 62, and he and his wife were making plans for their retirement years. We are all still in shock, but when I think about Doug, I think about a man who invested in the right things. He loved Jesus, his wife, Joy, and his friends. He invested with generosity and passion in each of those things. But I think the thing he was proudest of was his three boys. Each one of them is walking with the Lord, and I know each one of them would stand up for their Dad and say he left an indelible imprint on their life.

What greater blessing could there be in life than that? Children are a gift God gives when we sleep. These gifts God gives in our sleep do more for us than anything we could do for ourselves. They bless us as they're shot into the world and have an impact far beyond what we ourselves could ever do. They bless us by defending us and making us proud in the community. Because of that, children are a worthwhile investment. They're worth the full measure of our blood, sweat, and tears. If you succeed in building a house, but fail to invest in your children, who'll come to visit you in that house when you're old? If you succeed in guarding the city, but fail to invest in your children, who'll defend you when you can't defend yourself? If you succeed in making a living, but fail to invest in your children, who'll sit around the table and enjoy the fruit of your labor?

Some of you won't have children of your own. That may be a great loss to you. But you can still invest in children. It might be step-children, a niece or a nephew, or a foster child. It might be the kid down the street. It might be spiritual children like Timothy was to Paul, who called him "my dear child in the faith."

Those children might be arrows shot out from your own life to have an even greater impact than you could have had. And, one day, maybe on the last day, these children will rise up and say, "Thank you for being consistent in your walk with the Lord. Thank you for always being there."

How do you spend your life without wasting it? Whether you are running a business, studying for finals, building a house, guarding a city, or making a living, make sure you are working together with God. Live in dependence on him. Recognize your work isn't everything. There are some things, like children, that come as gifts while we sleep. These are things to thank God for. They bless us and others far more than anything we could do ourselves. As God's gifts, they're worthy of our time and our energy.

This psalm is telling us that if you want to spend your life without wasting it, invite God to work in your work and in your sleep. Don't take yourself so seriously that you work as if it all depended on you. Commit your work to God. And don't take your own work so seriously you don't sleep or rest. God is working even when you sleep, and he does some amazing thing, like make babies! And those babies grow up to make a difference far beyond what you could ever do. So when you lay your head on your pillow at night, before you fall asleep, cast your cares on God and ask him to be at work while you sleep. When you wake up, thank him for the work he did while you were sleeping.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2020 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1446-6FC