

The Successful Family

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Bible Verse: Psalm 127
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Our text tonight is going to be surprisingly personal to many of you, I know that for a fact without any fear of contradiction. Let me have you turn to Psalm 127 which is our text for this evening. I want to make some preliminary comments about it, tie it to what we said a little bit on Sunday, and then go through this text verse by verse. It's a great opportunity to encourage many of you with things from the course of life that I know that you've been through or are going through, and it is also a text that sets a course for us in terms of the way that we think long-term about families in the biblical sense.

Psalm 127, it says that it is, "A Song of Ascents, of Solomon," indicating that Solomon wrote this Psalm. Beginning in verse 1,

1 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. 2 It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep. 3 Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. 5 How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Now I think it's important to realize that the following Psalm, Psalm 128, also speaks about the family and I'd like to read that also, although we won't deal with it any further until next week. Psalm 128 says,

1 How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways.
2 When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you. 3 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine Within your house, Your children like olive plants Around your table. 4 Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD. 5 The LORD bless you from Zion, And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. 6 Indeed, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

Now there's a lot of context to what I want to say tonight and what I would just draw out from a preliminary reading of these two Psalms is that these Psalms, and the Bible itself, gives us a long-term view of family life, a long-term view of parents and children. It is comprehensive, it goes from the cradle to the grave and I think it's very important to emphasize that and I feel pleased and privileged to be able to make that point because, as I said on Sunday, I believe that much of the common teaching on family life focuses on young families with young children and trying to train them up and things of that nature, and this other side gets neglected, the cake is only half-baked if that's all that you ever say about parenting because what you see at the end of Psalm 128 is a contemplation of grandchildren in the scope of someone who fears the Lord, a wife, children, children's children, and what we're going to see in Psalm 127 is the contemplation of the relationship between adult children and their aging parents. And so this is something that is not often talked about and I think that it's going to be a time of encouragement for many of you as you reflect back on the life or on things in the past in your life or as you go through things now, and also for those of you that are a bit younger, it's going to give you a greater sense of your purpose in life and what one of the defining aspects of life is for a young person.

With that said, go back to Exodus 20. Let me just remind you of the fifth commandment in Exodus 20:12 because I think that these Psalms are building on this theme even though they don't refer to it explicitly. The fifth commandment says in Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you." On Sunday, we looked at a number of Old and New Testament texts and got a sense of the great emphasis that the Lord places on that fifth commandment and on the relationship between children and their parents, so much so that both in the Old and New Testament Scripture describes those who are chronically disobedient and defiant to their parents as being those who are worthy of death. Now that's not a message that you pick up from our culture, you know, we've grown accustomed to people that are just deliberately single parent families, they don't even think about it, there's no cause for marriage and children are born out of wedlock as a matter of routine. This is not the pattern of God and we feel the effects of straying from his path in these matters in our society, but for us as the people of God as we were just singing, we want to step back and we want to see what God says about the family unit and to approach it from that perspective.

So tonight we come to Psalm 127 in our systematic exposition of the Psalms. Let me say this as we begin, as we look at Psalm 127. This Psalm is not a prayer as we are often accustomed to in the Psalms, we're accustomed to thinking of Psalms as being prayers to God, but this is not a prayer at all, rather this is a wisdom Psalm, it is a wisdom statement about the sovereignty of God in human life, and a wisdom statement about family life. And very importantly, it is also, it's a brief Psalm, only five verses, and so this Psalm is setting forth an ideal in the wisdom tradition. It is not covering every contingency or every possible exception or difficulty that might come up from its principles, this is setting forth an ideal and God allows the rest of Scripture to fill in the details on other matters that this Psalm does not address.

So with those things in mind, we come now to the text and just to remind you, we're studying the Songs of Ascent, Psalms 120 to 134. I've said this so many times that I'm hoping that you can almost have it memorized, but the Songs of Ascent are grouped in five triads as they progress. So Psalm 120 to 122 is a triad that's joined together, and Psalm 123 to 125 and so on. The first Psalm of each triad speaks about some manner of problem; the second Psalm of the triad speaks of God's protection; the third Psalm in the triad speaks about the peace of God that flows from his protection. So Psalm 127 stands in the middle of the third triad and so we're expecting it to say something to us about the nature of the protection of God and we're not disappointed when we find that. The emphasis of Psalm 127 is this, if you're taking notes these are not our main points yet, but Psalm 127 emphasizes the fact that our protection ultimately comes from the Lord and not through our own efforts. Ultimately we are dependent upon the Lord to bless what we do, to protect us in times of danger, and we must be consciously dependent upon him as we walk through life, and that protection is grounded in the attributes of God and specifically grounded in his sovereign love for his people. God is a loyal God to his people, he is a sovereign God over all things, and that means that he has control and directive power over everything that ever happens to us.

In the past, we've defined sovereignty like this, be prepared to write fast and if you get a cramp in your hand, that's okay. We have defined sovereignty in the past like this and it's a simple definition: the doctrine of the sovereignty of God means that God has the absolute independence to do as he pleases. Continuing the definition: he controls his creation so that nothing acts outside the bounds of his eternal purpose. Everything that happens in the world is something that was preordained by God. God ordained that you would be here this evening hearing this particular message, at this particular time in world history and in your life. God appoints the beginning from the end and so everything that happens is somehow, in one way or another, advancing the purposes of God even when men in their own intentions are sinning against him. We see that most clearly at the cross where wicked men, according to their own wicked desires, offered Christ up for crucifixion, he was unjustly convicted, he was unjustly crucified, and this was all according to the unforced desires of wicked men who wanted him dead. However, that is not the only level at which these things happen, God has an overriding purpose of his own so that what men intend for evil God works out for good. God has a separate independent purpose that is working in everything that happens so that whether men are doing good or doing evil, God is working it all together to accomplish his purpose and to do good for his people in the end. That is a great source of hope for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing has happened in your life that was outside the purpose of God. Period. Full stop. Nothing has happened in your life that is outside the eternal purpose of God.

Now, yes, men have sinned against you and we've all sinned in our own ways. You haven't done my sins, I haven't done your sins, but we've all fallen short, we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God has planned for that, God has prepared for that in such a way that his purposes are still ultimately accomplished even though we fall short of his glory. And so God's sovereignty is crucial to understanding the nature of his protection. We rest in the fact that God is sovereignly at work in our lives no matter what

happens, and we have confidence and we can sleep at night with a calmness in our hearts knowing that that is the way that God operates his universe.

Now that's the doctrine of sovereignty. That leads to the doctrine of providence, the doctrine of providence and just stay with me here as we put some terms into play here. We've defined providence in the past like this, the doctrine of providence: God continually upholds his entire creation and he sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purpose. God continually upholds his entire creation and sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus direct all creatures and events to accomplish his purpose.

With those definitions in mind, there's an obvious conclusion that we reach in that and, you know, this theological truth is essential to life; you know, you can't rightly live life without having a sense of the importance of these things. The sovereignty and providence of God mean this for your life, it means that you are completely dependent upon him for the issues of life. If God is not at work in something, it's not going to come to pass and it doesn't matter how hard you try, you cannot thwart the purposes of God and you cannot achieve things apart from his blessing. And so what Psalm 127 is going to teach us is this: a household that fears God is blessed by his providence. A household that fears God is blessed by his providence. In other words, God orders his providence to bless those who trust him. Now let me just say that again, I like the way that came out. God orders his providence to bless those who trust him and immediately you're confronted with the question where is the nature of God, where is the person of God arranged in your priorities of life? If the Lord Jesus Christ is not your supreme priority, then you are not in a position to be blessed by the providence of God. This immediately sifts us over what it is that we love most and Solomon here in Psalm 127 is going to teach us that very clearly.

We're going to see it in two sections. In the first section, we're going to see God's hand in everyday life; and then, secondly, we're going to see it in the terms of God's hand in family life. God's hand in everyday life, God's hand in family life. The point of the Psalm being stated early on in the first verse as Solomon opens in the first two verses. Let's read them together.

1 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. 2 It
is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful
labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.

Or as the ESV says, "He gives to his beloved sleep," sleep itself being a gift from God.

What is Solomon saying here? What's the word of God teaching us at this point? Notice the emphasis, you can see the emphasis, it reminds you of the book of Ecclesiastes, there's an emphasis on vanity. Verse 1, "They labor in vain. The watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early." Three times in those opening two verses the word "vanity" is used to describe life apart from a conscious trust in God. You know, if you do not know Christ here this evening, whether it's you on the live stream or someone

here in the room, if you don't know Christ here this evening, if you're not consciously living for Christ, you are wasting your life, your life will have no value in the end. It does not matter what you do, your successes, your failures on a horizontal level make absolutely no difference because it's all going to be wasted, it's all going to be forgotten in the end because God is not in it therefore you are laboring in vain. And how I wish I had heard things like this earlier in my life when I was a young person and would have had opportunity to take them to heart but, you know, those things all come in time.

What we find here as we read through these two verses is that Solomon quickly in a staccato fashion, one right after another, he lists three realms that depend on the blessing of God and he says unless the Lord is blessing in these areas, it's a waste of time what is taking place. So he gives three realms where God must bless the labor. Look, first of all, it says, "Unless the LORD builds the house," then secondly, "Unless the LORD guards the city," thirdly, "It is vain for you to rise up early and to retire late," as we'll look at in a moment. He just illustrates the point with three illustrations as he talks about someone building a house in which he's going to live, someone who is guarding a city and defending it against foreign enemies, or thirdly just the day-to-day labor of earning a living, he says unless the Lord is at work in that, it's all a matter of vanity.

Now the context of this Psalm is family life as you see in the final three verses, and so it seems like as he writes about unless the Lord builds the house, he's talking about someone who is building a structure in order to house his family. In our day, most of us are not doing that with our own hands but, you know, we're out, we're looking for a place to live, we're trying to establish a home to raise our family, we're dealing with the real estate market and all of that. You know, you put in an offer, does it get accepted or not? You get your hopes up, your hopes fall down. The principle applies right in the middle of our modern context there, that unless the Lord's hand is in it, it's not going to take place. The energy is going to be wasted.

So he expands from that family unity with a house there in verse 1, he expands it out, he expands the circle out to consider an entire city. Look at it there in the middle of verse 1 when he says, "Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain." Now in those days, cities were surrounded by walls, high walls to protect against enemy attacks, and there would be a lot of energy that could be expended on the defense of a city, and what Solomon is speaking to, you know, as watchman are out and they're awake at night trying to keep an eye and guarding the city and giving warning in case anything comes up, what Solomon is saying as he speaks to nervous populations, he's saying, "You need to have a trust that goes beyond the watchman that stands on your wall. You need to trust beyond that because you need the help of the Lord for your city to be guarded. You need the protection of the Lord on your city or it's all in vain." You may remember in the Old Testament there was a time where Assyria was laying siege to the city of Jerusalem and for months, and there was starvation inside the walls, but in a single night the Lord struck down 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrian army and he immediately delivered them from the siege that was being laid upon them. So we just see the power of God in being able to protect his people, and Solomon here is telling us that unless God is involved in

what is happening, unless there is a conscious sense of dependent trust on him, it's all wasted, it's all a matter of vanity.

Then he goes on there in verse 2, he says, "It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep." Now this term "vain," I got a little bit ahead of myself and didn't define it rightly for you. It's a term that refers to emptiness. It designates anything that is unsubstantial, that is worthless. Stated differently, all of these activities which are written about in Psalm 127 are ineffective if they are undertaken without the help of the Lord. And this word for "vanity" is the same word that is used in the third commandment that forbids taking the name of the Lord in vain. Don't use God's name in an empty way. Don't text omg. Don't use God's name in a flippant way to express superficial excitement at something that just happened. God's name is not to be used that way. It is a worthless way, it is an empty way to use God's name, and your heart is supposed to be so full of reverence and fear of the Lord that you would never want to do that. And so this has a sanctifying impact on us when we understand what is being said. For Psalm 127, it's saying that the Lord's hand is essential for anything to come to pass.

Let's look at this from a couple of New Testament text perspectives. Turn to the gospel of John with me, John 15. This is very humbling. John 15:5. Speaking to his disciples the Lord Jesus Christ said, "I am the vine," John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." You are not able to do anything without the help and strength of the Lord. As you labor for Christ, as you serve Christ, everything must be energized by his power or it does not come to pass, it is an empty pursuit.

Now in a similar vein, turn over to the book of James 4 beginning in verse 13. The Bible says, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." And he's not, James here isn't talking about simply a mechanical repetition of those words, he's talking about a heart attitude that recognizes your dependence upon the Lord for anything to come to pass of value in your life. This is utterly devastating to human pride. This is utterly humbling. Scripture tells us that there is nothing that we have done, anything that we have accomplished has been because the Lord has granted blessing to us. We cannot take credit for it as though we were the independent authors of what had happened. So Scripture is telling us and warning us in this passage to have a mindset of dependence upon the Lord as we approach the different issues of life.

Now what is Solomon's point here? Go back to Psalm 127. Is Solomon rebuking us here or is he doing something else? Well, there's a clue to that at the end of verse 2 when he uses the word "beloved, He gives to His beloved even in his sleep." Solomon is writing in order to encourage believers with the love and faithfulness of God in what is being done. As he says these things about the emptiness of labor apart from trust in the Lord, as he

says these things he's doing this not to rebuke the reader in this Psalm, he's not rebuking the reader in this Psalm for a lack of trust, rather he is reminding us that it is empty to be anxious over these things. He's teaching us to do everything with a conscious dependence on the Lord and that that becomes the pathway for a peaceful life, for a restful spirit, being conscious of the sovereignty of God, the providence of God, and resting in that even in adversity recognizing that the Lord is the one who sustains us and keeps us. So the principle that Solomon is after here is not to condemn the reader but to assure him of the love and the sufficiency of God, so much so, beloved, so much so that he says that we are the objects of the faithful care of God even when we are asleep. The Lord never slumbers or sleeps, we do, and even as we are sleeping the Lord is blessing us, the Lord is watching over us, he is sustaining us both in body and spirit, and so this Psalm, beloved, is a call to us to rest in the Lord and a promise that he will provide for us as we do. Those are good words to hear after the tears that we saw at the end of Psalm 126.

Look at the end of Psalm 126 as we continue to consider these Psalms in their context. At the end of Psalm 126 he says, "Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him." Scripture speaking to the heaviness that often accompanies life, now in Psalm 127 reinforcing the promise that was embedded at the end of Psalm 126 saying that the Lord is faithful to do exactly what he says that he would do. So God intends us to rest in him, to be confident in him, so much so that every night that you lay your head on your pillow is an opportunity to renew your trust in him. "Lord, I'm laying my head down and I realize that You're giving to me even as I sleep. You are being faithful and gracious to me even now." And it's a reminder that the Lord is continually at work on behalf of his people even when we are at rest and our hands have been stilled for the evening. So there's this aspect of seeing God's hand in everyday life and the necessity of trusting him as we go through it.

Now secondly, as we come to the second section, God's hand in family life, and that's what I really want to focus on here this evening. God's hand in family life is our second point now and the connection between the first section and the second section is not immediately obvious when you give it a superficial reading. Here in the first two verses, you've seen the theme of vanity being emphasized and the necessity of conscious dependence upon the Lord. Then suddenly he moves on to what seems to be almost an unrelated topic in verse 3 when he says,

3 Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.

Well, what we're going to see is that Solomon is still talking about, he's talking about the provision of God in those first two verses, and as we go to verses 3 through 5, he is still talking about the provision of God even as he talks about family life. That is the overarching theme of the Psalm, and so at the end of verse 2 it had just been talking about the Lord, you know, how the Lord gives to his beloved, well, the theme, the link between verses 2 and verse 3 is children are a gift from the Lord. God has graciously given something to us and Scripture uses children here as an example of God's gifts to us and

the point is this, is that God protects and provides for us through our children as well as through his direct operation, and it's looking at it from the perspective of an older saint having the provision that is provided by his adult children that are around him. I know that sounds, that may seem contrary to the way that you've often heard verse 3 used, this is a verse that's used all the time. I use it, you know, when children are born, you visit in the hospital, you go there and it's a good and right way to use it. There's a broader sense in which there's a broader point that Solomon is making here and this is going to quickly become very personal for each one of us.

Solomon is looking beyond the childhood of youth, he's looking beyond childhood to the long-term blessing that children bring to their families, and you can see that as you look at verses 4 and 5 where he says,

4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth.
5 How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be
ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate.

And so Solomon takes and the Bible, you know, you have the human author and you have the divine author, God and Solomon and God spoke through Solomon in what is being said, let's just step back for a moment here and see the declaration of Scripture in the midst of the evil wicked world in which we live that butchers children on a routine basis because they are not convenient to the ones who copulated and conceived them. I said on Facebook a while back and just made this point about children born with Down syndrome and the sweetness of those children, and the sweetness of the adults that are in that condition. They are some of the sweetest people on earth and they become the objects of the forceps of an abortionist wanting to crush their skulls so that they don't become an inconvenience to the parents. This is deeply deeply wicked and the blood that is shed cries out against a nation that endorses this and embraces it. To the contrary, what Scripture says is that children are something that are given to us from God, that they are a gift. They are not a burden. They are not a problem. They are a gift that God has given to us. It is a reward that he gives to people and especially to his own people.

So this is a completely different, this is an utterly countercultural approach to things, so much so that Christian parents should be mindful of the way that they speak about their children, speak about them to others and the way that they speak to them to themselves. I realize that sometimes, you know, some people can joke about, you know, what a hassle the kids are and, you know, or things like that, but we should not speak that way. We should not speak that way about gifts that God has given to us and speak about them in negative ways as though they were a problem, as if they were a difficulty. Whatever your children are like, in one way or another they are a gift from God to you. Now they may not seem like a gift at the time but your overriding and your settled perspective should be God has given this child to me and he intends, in one manner or another, for that child to be a blessing to me, a reward to me. This is the ideal. This is what God calls us to consider children as.

So one of the things about the ministry at Truth Community Church and those of you that are newer to our body, I would encourage you to go back and listen to our messages on our philosophy of youth ministry. There are two or three messages about that. I would encourage you to go back and listen to those or read the transcripts because they're very fundamental to the entire nature of life in our church. Other churches can do it different ways and that's their business. What we do here at Truth Community Church is we view all of the children in our body, all of the children of the families in our church, they are a gift not only to the families but they are a gift to the church as well, and that means that we want as adults, we want the children to be with us. We want the children in our worship services with us. We are content and we are happy to deal with the occasional distractions of loud voices and restless children in the midst of our service. We're content to do that because we have a greater long-term perspective on what we're trying to accomplish here. We want our young children from the earliest days, we want them to know what it looks like to be in a biblical church. We want them to know adults and have cross generational relationships. We want them to absorb the word of God at the level that they can and then be able to go home and be instructed by their parents and to talk about these things with their parents. That's what we want. It is utterly contrary to our philosophy to send the children out and to separate them away where the richest nature of Christian fellowship and Christian instruction is taking place. They're a gift to be cultivated, not a distraction to be sent away, and that is just so fundamental to the philosophy of our church and so we want them with us. Our philosophy of youth ministry is that we want the youth to be a part of the ministry. It's not that complicated and I would dare to say, you know, I'll offend friends with what I'm about to say, but you can't find anything about having a separate youth ministry in the pages of Scripture. You know, there's nothing in Scripture that points that out. Now if churches want to do that, that's their business and I'm not picking a fight with them, but we've been so conditioned by children's ministry and youth ministry that we've utterly lost sight of the fact that you can't go to chapter and verse to find that anywhere in the Bible. In fact, when you listen to those messages, you'll find that the exact opposite is the case, is that Scripture presupposes the presence of children in the midst of the assembly.

That is just so very very vital and critical to understand and another aspect of that when it comes to church life, because we view them as a gift, we protect them. You know, we're very very careful, we have very strict policies in place about who can serve with children in the nursery and other things like that, you know, we screen that very tightly because we are committed to doing everything we can to protect children from predators that would be in the midst. You know, predators like to look at churches as easy targets. Well, we don't, you know, they find a hard target here and that is by design, and it's all because, it's all because we view children as a gift from the Lord to be cherished therefore we want them in the service with us, and to be protected rather than something to be exploited and used for adult purposes. So children are a gift from the Lord and that filters in not only in the way that Christian parents think about their families, it filters in the way an entire church thinks about the way that they shall deal with children and what the presence of children is.

I love the fact, I love seeing the young people interacting with you older adults. That's great and the fact that you want to do that is great and that's the way that it should be. This is what Christ did. What does Scripture say? He took the children in his arms and he blessed them and rebuked the disciples who were trying to send the children away because they were in the way of the adult things that were happening. He said, "Permit the children to come to Me and don't hinder them." And we've developed a culture in evangelicalism that does exactly that and views them as a distraction to be sent away, and then wonders why as they come into their later teen years and go off to college that they don't want anything to do with the organized church. Well, you can trace the line of that all the way back. That's a little bit of a tangent but an important one that I wanted to go into.

Let's go back to Psalm 127 here. Psalm 127. He goes on to say after saying that children are a gift, Solomon's purpose in what is said here is that he goes on to explain why children are a gift when families are functioning according to the pattern of God and he draws a comparison. He says, "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate." There's actually a war motif that is in operation here. He pictures a soldier fighting with a bow and arrow, having a quiver full of arrows with which he is able to attack the enemy and to defend himself against the enemy and he says in verse 4 that children are like that. The children that you have in your youth are like that.

Well, what could that possibly mean? What is he talking about? Well, go on and look and he says in verse 5 there at the end, he says, he refers to speaking with their enemies at the gate, and his whole point here is that children are a protection. God intends children to be a protection for their parents as their parents advance in age in life. In the warfare of the day, arrows were necessary weapons and a soldier who had many arrows was better able to defend himself in battle. The more arrows the better. You know, you had more in your artillery, so to speak, I know I'm mixing metaphors there, you had more in your artillery to defend yourself with and to prosecute, you know, the war. Well, especially in that culture, here's what he's saying, especially in that culture adult children were designed to protect their parents in their old age. They would provide and defend their parents in times of war or in times of litigation, that's the idea that's there at the end of verse 5 when he speaks of these older parents not being ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate. It's a picture of a formal setting and this is a formal setting where official business would be conducted at the gate of the city, and a man who is engaged in litigation or had a conflict, a dispute with an opponent, this would be played out at the gate of the city and this is where it would be heard like going to a courtroom here today.

The point is that a man who has supportive adult children has people on his side when he is in that position, and so he has someone to support him, someone to defend him, someone to strengthen him. You could think about the gate in biblical days like the old courthouse squares that you'll see in some of the older cities and, you know, the smaller cities in our country today. And here's the thing, now we're transitioning to a great overarching principle here and I want to use this to be of hopefully a pastoral

encouragement to you and to give some affirmation to some of you with things that for some of you are immediately the recent past. The biblical pattern, what God intends in the big picture of families is this: parents give birth to children and they raise those children and protect them through their vulnerable stages, they instruct them and nurture them in the wisdom and admonition of the Lord. That's what God intends a family to do, that the parents are there to protect the little ones, instruct them, help them, and strengthen them and prepare them for life and care for them. That's what a parent is supposed to do and we are to embrace that responsibility with joy and gladness even when we are tired after waking up for the eighth time at night for whatever interruption the child brings to us. But that's not the emphasis here in Psalm 127. You'll find that emphasis in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3 and other places of Scripture. It's not the emphasis of this Psalm. The emphasis of this Psalm is what happens on the other end of life and just as God has parents raise vulnerable young children, he intends for children to care for vulnerable old parents in their older age. And I just want to say that I have watched many of you do exactly this. It is a blessing to have seen many of you be faithful to care for your older parents even in those times where the task was thankless because their minds were gone and they didn't know what was happening, the task was thankless because there was family opposition as you did it, the task was thankless because there was no reciprocity of love coming back in response.

What I want you to see, beloved, is that when you have done this and as you are doing this, you are fulfilling a very important biblical function of the way that God intended families to operate. Vulnerable parents need the care of their adult children and, you know, and some of you have, as it were, have held their hand as you have walked them ultimately to their final resting place, and this and just to give you God's perspective on this, this is one of the most godly things that you could have ever done is to care for your parents like that. This is what God intended it to be like and then sorrow and the difficulty that attended that as you were doing this, was a measure of your godliness and of your faithfulness to God in caring for the parents that he had given to you and I commend you for that knowing that there was much hardship that attended it as you did.

Now as I said, as I said at the beginning of the message, Psalm 127 speaks in an ideal sense. This is the way that it is supposed to be. This is the way that God intends it to be and as we're having this emphasis on family as we look at honor your father and mother from Exodus 20 and we look at these Psalms here in Psalm 127 and Psalm 128, we're seeing this in an ideal way. Let me speak to the other side of it and this came up in a pastoral conversation I had even recently. Sometimes the older parents make it impossible for you to give them the care and love that they want. We have multiple illustrations of that over the course of the ministry of Truth Community Church over the years, where parents have pushed children away, parents refused the affection of their children and not only refused the affection of their children, they refused to give affection to the children because of some, you know, whatever made them mad in the past and now it's not possible and the relationship has been broken. Well, look, you know, Psalm 127 doesn't address that kind of matter and, you know, there are just going to be times where you're not able to give the love to the parents that you want to because your parents refuse to have the relationship with you. That is sad. That is broken. That is not the way

that it should be and in those times, you just look to the Lord for grace and realize that you are consciously dependent upon him and you have a heart that says, "Lord, I'm willing to do this if only they were willing but they've made it impossible for me to do this and therefore I'm just going to commit them into Your hands and trust You for the outcome of it because they won't have my love, they won't have my support." And those things happen just as often as the other things do as well, and these things, I realize these things are heart-wrenching, this is heartbreaking when this happens, and it's just a measure of how sinful and it's just a reflection of the fact that we live in a cursed world where a child's love for their parents would go unrequited. That's unthinkable to me but that's the reality that some of you live in and our church supports you and affirms you and loves you in the midst of that, and the Lord's grace is sufficient even for these kinds of things.

So what we want to see here, what we want to have as we're kind of wrapping this up here this evening, is to see the big picture, and we'll have more to say about these things in coming weeks. Trust me, we will. I've already prepared it. But to realize that Scripture when it talks about the family speaks about it in multiple places, sometimes in places that are neglected in the course of instruction. Scripture speaks about family, as I said, from cradle to grave. There is this comprehensive approach to it so that in Scripture from your childhood, through your youth, your young adult, and your older adult ages, Scripture is clarifying and defining for you the responsibilities that you have within a family relationship and your relationship with your parents. And so there's this broad biblical perspective about it and Scripture speaks with eloquence to those end of life issues that are so important. You know, and when you do what I do, you're always a pastor when you're teaching the Bible and you're teaching the Bible when you're a pastor, those two things are so interwoven, but the pastoral side here is just, you know, is just pressing on my heart as I look out upon you, you know, and some of you have just been, you know, circumstances prevent you from giving the care to your parents that you would want, to your mom or your dad. Maybe they died early. Maybe you're separated geographically and you can't provide it. Well, the Lord understands that and the Lord will bless you according to the willingness of your heart. You may not have the position to be able to do it but the Lord blesses you according to the willingness of your heart even if you're not able to do it with the hands as you would like to do.

So we step back and we look at this as a body and we recognize that those of you that are single, those of you that are, you know, maybe new to the church, I want to encourage you to, you know, as you engage in the body of Christ to realize that silently sitting around you in humility and without drawing attention to themselves are a lot of godly examples who have manifested this kind of care that we're talking about and they are giving you a pattern by which you should frame your future life in the grace of God and realizing that Christ is our ultimate example, but to recognize that and to engage in body life. Speaking of Christ, isn't this exactly what Christ did in his dying moments on the cross? He looked out at his mother and he commended his mother to the care of John and commended John to the care of his mother and he said, "Woman, behold your son." And he looked at John and he said, "Behold your mother." What was Christ doing there except fulfilling what Psalm 127 said, in his dying day caring for his mom and providing for her

in one of his last dying acts. That's how important this is that the Lord was fulfilling it even as he died on the cross for our sins.

So we look at these things, we realize our dependence upon the Lord, we realize the place of family in the order of God, we trust him for what has happened in the past, for what's happening now, and we prepare our hearts for the responsibilities and duties that he'll give us in the future. So with wonder at the marvelous design of God, with mutual love and sympathy for one another in our responsibilities in life, let's go to the Lord in prayer and commit all of these things to him.

Father, we pray that You would help us trust in You rather than to rely on our own efforts because we realize that our efforts are futile if You do not bless them. But we go further, Father, and we just thank You for the wonderful nature of Your design in family life and that those who have children are blessed by You, You have given them gifts. And I pray, Father, as we think through and as we remember the reality of these matters of caring for elderly parents and adult parents, knowing that so much heartache has attended the lives of so many under the sound of my voice, I pray that they might find a fresh comfort in knowing that this is what You would have had them do, and that the sacrifice made for sometimes unresponsive parents is one that is pleasing in Your sight, and may the smile of God be that which strengthens and encourages their heart even if there are aches in the memories that have taken place. And Father, we pray for the older saints in our midst who are approaching or are in these days of physical decline and even mental decline. We pray that You would be gracious to them in their hour and be gracious to those families that are around them that they might be godly and strengthened to serve their parents even as their parents served them in their younger days.

So we just commit all of these things to You but, Father, as we close, we would just corporately as a church look out at the, you know, over time and just the scores and scores of children that You've entrusted to our ministry. We thank You for them, Father. They are precious in our sight and more importantly, they are precious in Your sight and so we pray for them, we pray for their parents as they seek to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I pray that You would instill in the parents godly priorities that put Christ and Your people at the center of every decision that is made.

And Father, we pray for those little ones, we pray that they would grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, we pray that as a Good Shepherd You would bring those little lambs safely into the fold of your salvation and, Father, we pray that You would protect them from all evil, protect them from evil and from the evil one himself. Father, they are such targets in our society. We ask You, Father, to bless them and protect them in ways that go beyond our own natural ability to do so and that You would, Father, in years to come after many of us are gone, Father, that many of these children would be standing as godly men and women carrying on the faith, standing for Christ in the midst of a wicked world, and living lives for Your glory, manifesting the imprint of Your Spirit on their lives from their earliest ages.

Thank You for the young parents in our lives that are faithful to our church, that love their families and are seeking to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I pray, Father, that Your hand would be upon them, that You would encourage them in the sleepless nights and in the trials and anxieties that come from caring over children that are sometimes rebellious. Father, we pray for Your grace upon them all and that the coming years would unfold a particular manifestation of Your grace upon the families of Truth Community Church. Help us to be faithful to provide love and care to one another as we walk through life together. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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