

Psalm 127 — Don't Waste Your Life

July 31, 2016

If you are a visitor, it is great to have you at CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. This is the last message in our summer series on the Psalms. Next week begins our August teaching series called #Trending. We are looking at hot topics in that hot month. Next week begins with biblical masculinity and femininity. The following week is our combined campus worship service in Milford at Florence Park. That is the CrossWinds summer family reunion. It is a great time to rub shoulders with members of our Spencer campus. Don't miss the corn roast, the food, the games and the worship. It will be great.

The following week I will teach the second part of the biblical masculinity and femininity.

We aren't there yet. Today we finish our series in the Psalms.

Some of you know we are building a house. I didn't realize how much work went into building a house. A few weeks ago, with the help of a friend, I did the hard work of building a landscaping block retaining wall for a window well. Those blocks are heavy. It is hard work putting them in the back of the truck, hauling them to the job site then cutting them and placing them in a big hole in the ground. The sun was blazing hot. The blocks were heavy. Thankfully, I had some help from friends. Just as I was about to finish the retaining wall, it fell over. That was a depressing moment. The next day, before I repaired it, I counted the blocks and realized I didn't have enough blocks to finish the rest of the window wells. I went to buy more and learned they don't make that style of block anymore. I had to pull all of the blocks out of the hole and figure out a new way to

make window wells. All the hard work and sweat I poured into that block wall for a week in the July sun was wasted. I was frustrated. I was grumpy. Would any of you feel the same way?

None of us like to waste our time. None of us like working hard on purposeless tasks that amount to nothing. If you want to make sure you invest your life into work that matters, you came on the right Sunday. Psalm 127 was written to help us avoid wasting our lives.

This little five-verse Psalm was written to help us settle back for a little self-examination. It was written to help ensure we are investing our lives into things that matter, not just sweating up a storm as we pointlessly take cinder blocks in and out of a hole in the ground.

Psalm 127 was written by Solomon. It is broken into two sections. The first two verses give us a principle. The third to the fifth verse shows us what this principle looks like in action. The first two verses give us this life principle by way of contrast. It tells us there are things we do in life that are a waste of time and energy while there are other things that are worthy investments of our lives both for now and eternity. Let me show you.

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. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil... Psalm 127:1–2 (ESV)

If you mark your Bibles, it would be a good idea to underline the word *vain*. It occurs three times in these two verses. Vain means empty, worthless, useless. The repetition of this word is a pointer showing us this is what the Psalmist wanted us to remember.

I want us to notice what kind of activity the Psalmist said is vain. He was not talking about sinful activity. He was talking about the normal activities of day-to-day living. He said we can pour ourselves into the normal day-to-day activities of life, but if God isn't committed to the success of what we are doing, it will end up being nothing more than a waste of our time and energy.

We may build a house. I now know firsthand how much time and energy it takes to build a house, but if God isn't behind that project, it will be a lot of work but it won't make a lasting difference. We may stand guard over a city, fighting to stay away during the night but if God isn't behind our work, it will all be a waste of our time and effort that will make no difference in eternity. We may spend our entire lives getting up early and staying up late working our fingers to the bone, but when we get to the end of our lives, if we have given ourselves to projects that God isn't behind, we will have given our entire lives to something that won't make a lasting difference in this world. Our lives were spent in vain.

Solomon tells us we need to carefully budget the limited amount of time and energy we have in our lives so we can wisely invest our lives for the greatest possible eternal impact.

Our home is unique. We have three generations living under one roof. The youngest generation is my children. The world is their oyster. They have seemingly limitless energy and enthusiasm. They work outside and never seem to tire, as long as we keep them fed. As far as they are concerned there are many years in front of them. They aren't thinking about the future. They think they will last forever. On the other side of the spectrum is my father. He is 83. After

mom died of cancer, he came to live with us. He reminds us that he doesn't have lots of time. Many of his friends are now home with Jesus. Unlike my children, his energy is very limited. He sleeps more, rests more and does less. There is a limited amount of time and energy left in his life. Cindy and I are in the middle, holding the whole thing together. We are the bridge generation. We always thought of retirement as something in the distant future. Now we have friends retiring. We are starting to measure life by the number of years we have left, not just the number of years we have been alive.

I say this simply to point out that the older we become the more we realize how important it is to spend the limited amount of time and energy we have in life on projects where God is committed to their success. Since life is short, it is important to not waste life but work on projects where God is committed to their success.

The issue is not whether we should build a house but is God behind the building of the house? Is the house to minister to people? Is the house to care for others and show better hospitality or is the house just about our glory and fame? We need to ask why we are building our houses. It is the same with our businesses. Why are we building them? Is it about better providing for our employees? Is it about better serving customers in the name of Jesus? Is it so we can be more generous with our resources or is it just about exalting our glory and stroking our egos?

It is not that specific projects in life are right and others are wrong but why are we doing the projects we have in our lives? Are they for God's glory or our

own? If they are just for our glory, all the work we pour into them is done in vain. If God is not committed to the success of our life projects then all of our energy is expended in vain.

The other side of the principle are the projects God does stand behind.

...for he gives to his beloved sleep. Psalm 127:1–2 (ESV)

There is interesting stuff taking place in the Hebrew that doesn't come through in the ESV. The NIV translation clues us in on the Hebrew with a footnote. In the Hebrew, the word *sleep* can be understood as either a noun or an adverb. I think it should be considered an adverb. This makes the NIV alternate translation shows how this verse could be translated. Here is the NIV alternate translation.

...for while they are sleeping he provides for those he loves. Psalm 127:2 (NIV alternate translation)

I think this is the right translation. Why? It completes the contrast. While some people are working hard, their lives are make no lasting difference because they are not giving themselves to God's projects. On the other hand, for those God loves, who are working on God's projects, God is carrying the projects of their lives forward even while they are sleeping because they are doing with their lives what God wants them doing.

There are a few more subtle but powerful things happening in the Hebrew of this verse. It says God gives to his beloved while he sleeps. The word beloved in Hebrews is the word *yadid*. Do you remember the name God gave Solomon when he was born?

Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him

and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord. 2 Samuel 12:24–25 (ESV)

God named Solomon his *yadid*, his beloved. Do you remember what happened to Solomon when he was sleeping? In 1 Kings 3 we read of God appearing to Solomon in a dream while he was sleeping. God gave Solomon a chance to grant any wish. Solomon asked for wisdom to rule the people so he could do a good job at his God-assigned task of ruling the people. God gave him this great gift of wisdom while he was doing nothing but sleeping.

This Psalm is not just an autobiographical description of Solomon's life. Solomon was applying what he learned to our lives. God gives some of his best gifts to those he loves and those who are about God's projects while they are sleeping. Not only does God get behind the projects he is committed to in our lives, but even when we are sleeping and there is nothing we can do, he moves them forward. God carries them forward for us. If we trace our fingers through the Bible and study the phrase "the beloved of the Lord" what we find is God consistently carries forward his projects in the lives of those he loves.

Of Benjamin he said, "The beloved of the Lord dwells in safety. The High God surrounds him all day long, and dwells between his shoulders." Deuteronomy 33:12 (ESV)

Do you catch the picture? Those the Lord loves ride piggyback on the shoulders of God. It is as if a son and a father are on a long journey together. They are both traveling the same direction. The son gets tired so his father picks him up and puts him on his shoulders. While his son is sleeping with his head on his father's shoulders and his arms wrapped around his neck, he is making

progress. He was traveling in the same direction his father wanted him to go so now his father is carrying him.

This is what the Psalmist had in mind when he said that God gives to his beloved even in his sleep. The contrast is not between someone who works hard and someone who does nothing. The contrast starts with someone who works hard, but he or she is not in a relationship with God. He spends his life on pointless tasks that make no eternal difference versus those who are loved by God and are investing their lives in projects where God is committed to see success. They are investing their lives in things of lasting value. They know they are heading in the direction God wants them to go because even when they are sleeping God is carrying the work of their lives forward.

Let me give this to you in a modern image. I haven't ridden in a hot air balloon but I hear they are amazing. They tell me that when you are in a hot air balloon, even though the ground is flying by underneath you at 20-40 miles per hour, you feel no wind. As far as you are concerned, you are at rest and completely still. The reason you don't feel wind is because you are carried by the wind. While you are standing still, the wind does the work for you.

This is what Solomon had in mind. When we are loved by God through Jesus and we are giving our time and energy to projects God is behind in our lives, we will find those projects making progress even while we are sleeping because it is not just us carrying them to completion. God is carrying them with us.

The principle is clear. We want to be in a relationship with God so, like Solomon, we are the beloved of God. In addition, we want to make sure we are pouring the limited amount of time and energy of our lives into projects where God is committed to their success. We don't want to spend our lives and energy in vain. We want to work with God on things where God is committed to the success of what we are doing.

I wish I could give you an easy formula to tell you which projects God is committed to in your life and which ones he is not. I know projects for our glory and fame are not God projects. Caring for others and honoring Christ are projects God is behind.

While Solomon doesn't give us a simple formula to discern the God projects of our lives, he gives us an example of a guaranteed God project that is already in many of our lives: Having and raising children.

**Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.
Psalm 127:3 (ESV)**

Having and raising children is precisely the kind of project this Psalm was talking about from the outset. Our children are not our projects. They are projects God assigned to us. Notice the subtle poetic connection between how we conceive children — in our sleep — and how God gives to his beloved even while they sleep. Children are a product of that portion of our lives when we do absolutely nothing, yet this is when God gives us some of his best blessings. If we have children, none of our children are a mistake or an accident. They are projects assigned to us by God into which we should invest our lives. All the time, energy and sacrifices we make to raise our children and teach them about Jesus

is never wasted. Raising our children to love Jesus is a part of our lives where God will help us. God is committed to helping you raise your children for Jesus. Children are God projects that will pay eternal dividends

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Psalm 127:4 (ESV)

Children are one of the best investments we can make of our time and energy for this life and for eternity. Solomon says children are like arrows. They are parental projectiles. Just like an arrow leaves the bow and makes an impact at a place and time the warrior cannot be, so our children leave our homes and make impacts at places and times we cannot go to. Children are the means by which we reach out and make an impact on time and eternity. The impact of our lives is multiplied through our children.

I was thinking of my own ministry with you. I am pastoring a congregation in a city my parents never visited. A large part of the benefit you receive from my leadership and preaching at CrossWinds is the result of what my mother and father invested in me when I grew up at 281 Runnymede Parkway, New Providence, NJ. My mother and father are ministering today in this community through my life. Last year, after my mother passed away, I went back to my parents' home in Pennsylvania and packed up their belongings to move them to Iowa where my father lives with us. I packed up notebook after notebook of my mother's prayer journals and Bible study notes. In page after page she prayed for me. I know I am the product of her prayers and discipleship. My grandmother, my aunt and my father helped me foot the bill for my graduate and doctoral work. The investment of their money, their encouragement and their time helped equip

me to be shot out of my parent's home. I landed in Spirit Lake where I am able to do spiritual good for Jesus at a place and time my parents and extended family could not reach.

Parents, when you invest in raising your children for Jesus, it is a great sacrifice but it is worth every bit of it as all your efforts will pay dividends at a place you cannot be and among people you do not know. You will make a difference for eternity with your children.

Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! Psalm 127:5 (ESV)

Solomon reminded us that since investing our time, money and lives into raising our children for Jesus is one of the best things we can do with our lives, don't be afraid to have children. Fill your quiver with kids! Many people think one child is enough. Some people think two children will tap you out. We live in an anti-child culture. Solomon doesn't give us a specific number but he encourages us to fill our quiver with kids. Don't be afraid of having a big family. God's Word applauds a big family.

How many kids should a family have? I don't know. I do know that you should have your quiver full. If you are a young couple, maybe God is challenging you to have more children. More children will mean more of an impact for Christ. It will mean more arrows shot out of your home. I know some of you are afraid of children because you are afraid you can't afford them. I have never met a Christian couple raising kids for Jesus where the kids starved to death. Life may be lean. The sacrifices may be large but they are worth it. You also need to remember that raising children is not just a project we do. It is a project which God is committed. He promises to carry us along and help us with

raising our kids. When you are at the end of your wit and the end of your resources, since children are a God project, rest assured God will carry you through those thin times. Even when you are sleeping God helps you raise your kids.

**He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.
Psalm 127:5 (ESV)**

What is Solomon talking about in this final line? The picture is of a father or a mother that fall on hard times. They have an enemy that rises against them, and it threatens their life and their livelihood. They are powerless to defend themselves. They are at the doorsteps of tragedy.

Today that may be a father that gets sick and has a hard time providing for his family. It may be a mother who gets old and is diagnosed with cancer. When a mom or dad are old or weak or facing a crisis in her or his life, the godly children they invested their lives in will rise up and come to their rescue. The arrows mom and dad shot out of their home will boomerang back. When you can no longer care for yourself, your children will come to your rescue and care for you. All the time, energy and sacrifice you put into raising your children for Jesus and sacrificing for your children will be more than repaid as your children provide the kind of love and care than money cannot provide.

Sacrificing your lives to raise your children for Jesus is a project God is behind. He is committed to your success. Your children will grow up and make an impact for Jesus at a place and time you could never go to. Though the investment you make in the lives of your children more will be done for Christ than you could ever do. The more children you have the greater the impact your

family will have for Christ around the world. When you are weak and vulnerable, it is your children that will rise up and come to your rescue to care for you in your time of need in a way that is better than money can provide.

You see, all the sacrifices you make to have children and raise those children for Jesus are worth it because God was committed to your success. All your efforts to raise your children were not in vain.



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