

Psalm 127: Setting Our Priorities: the Importance of Putting the Lord First.

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. Psalms 127:1 (NASB)¹

This psalm is one of two ascribed to Solomon, the other being Psalm 72. Solomon was the grand architect of the greatest of Temples – a thought not to be lost when studying this psalm. There is a direct relationship between the LORD’s involvement in any endeavor and those who carry that work out:

Unless the LORD...	
Builds	the labor is in vain
Protects	watchman’s alertness is in vain

This relationship must be there or the endeavor will be “vain” – a word that Solomon used elsewhere in his book of Proverbs – meaning empty without meaning or purpose and will ultimately fail. This is no small matter for this dynamic relationship form the basis for entire families, endeavors and even nations. We must grasp this importance or we will flounder in any venture we would propose to take.

The Basis for correct priorities.

“Unless the LORD builds...” *Qal, imperf.. Of bana = to construct a thing out of materials.* In Genesis 2:22 the LORD *fashioned* the woman out of Adam’s rib; in 4:17 Cain *built* a city which he called Enoch, after his son. In 16:2 Sarai told Abraham to have relations with Hagar so that she might *obtain* or build up children through her.² In Proverbs 14:1 a wise woman *builds* her house but a foolish woman tears it down with her own hands – a clear reference to the household including the husband and her children – indeed the whole legacy of that household.

The Qal mood means that the LORD must be the builder or protector. The imperfect tense means that it is an action that is never finished. Let’s look at the big picture: none of us are masters of our own destinies. We depend on a lot of details external to our abilities, our actions to succeed in our plans and ultimate success. We must be at the right place at the right time, we must have equipped ourselves with the right skills and have the right “pedigree” as far as our education, training and experience to land that “perfect” job. We must make the right decisions at the right time

¹ Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960,1962,1963,1968,1971,1972,1973,1975,1977,1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

² See commentary from THE COMPLETE BIBLICAL LIBRARY, *aleph - beth* volume, page 533,

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in order to set up the series of circumstances that will lead us to success in life. But most of all the key ingredient to our success is that the LORD do the building He is the Craftsman. He must place us in the right place at the right time – He must equip us with the right skill set – He must arrange the countless of details that surround us for us to succeed or we will utterly fail – period.

For the LORD to protect means to guard a city or a home. Again we have the Qal, Imperfect meaning that the LORD does the guarding – the Lord does this continuously.

Let's illustrate these points from two areas of our lives – the workplace and our families.

A Lesson Drawn from the Workplace.

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. Psalms 127:2 (NASB)

The workaholic is an example of our lesson. I must qualify this idea – workaholic. It is necessary to work hard to provide for the family It is good to have ambitions. It is good to be diligent at our jobs but if the focus is *the job* at the expense of our relationship with the LORD and (may I add) our families, the work experience becomes a destructive exercise. That is not to say that we should sleep in and arrive at work late thereby making it necessary for us to “make up the time” by leaving early – as the saying goes but the exercise of long hours without placing the Lord at the head of our job experience is destructive – it will wreck our health, our family and ultimately we will fail at the workplace.

Eating the bread of painful labors may be best explained by the Amplified translation: when the LORD is not our “boss” our job becomes *anxious toil*. The image here is to spend a long day at a frustrating job and then come home to supper and carry that anxiety to the supper table. Now I am not suggesting that all work will be a picnic – indeed, there will be times when we are exhausted at the end of the day from our work. But see how easy it would be for this to become an empty experience *if the LORD is not the master of our lives!*

The image in the latter portion of our passage is that of a loving parent who tucks the beloved child in bed at the end of the day and all the while is mindful of caring for the child for the next day and for the rest of his life! This must resonant with all of us either from the parent's point of view or from our experience as a child as we get older – how lovingly our parents provided for us so that we would be built up and protected.

A Lesson Drawn from the Family Setting – Our Children.

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. Psalms 127:3-5 (NASB95)**

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I must draw from Holman for my next point.³ The family was originally instituted by the LORD and should be maintained by Him. If not we will see the tearing down of the home (see again Proverbs 14:1). There is blessing from children in a home but there is also responsibility.

- Children are a gift from the LORD and as such parents should consider themselves stewards of these precious lives. If we as parents accept this stewardship – we will receive a reward-filled life.
- A good view of this stewardship is that children are as arrows in the hands of the warrior.
 - **Arrows must be properly shaped by a craftsman.** Parenthood is not a casual thing. There are parenting skills that need to be developed and those skills come best from biblical instruction. The lives of children must be shaped by the parent in such a way that they will carry on honoring the LORD after the parent is gone. In this sense the children are a heritage of the LORD.
 - **Arrows must be directed.** A well crafted arrow must also be properly and skillfully aimed. I'm almost lifting this section verbatim from Holman but I cannot improve on what is being said. Children must be trained at an early age to put the LORD first in their lives. I think it has been the greatest of privileges for us as parents to lead our children to the LORD. After that, we must make decisions to expose them to proper biblical instruction - both in the home and at a local Christian assembly. Solomon said it right: "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it."⁴ "Old" here is not old in the sense of great age but more like "mature." So we have the promise that if we train our children when they mature, they will stay with the LORD – an important concept in maintaining a family heritage.
 - **Arrows must be released.** Both parents and children must know that it is a good thing to release a child (mature, young adult) into the world knowing that the LORD is building and protecting that young life (don't forget the *qal, imperfect* of the action here). There is a sense when we dedicate our children while they are babies to the LORD but there is another sense when we release them to the LORD for a safe, fruitful life.

These examples serve us well in our own lives of putting the LORD first and how that He rewards us for having the correct priorities.

³ HOLMAN OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARY, Psalm 76 - 150.

⁴ Proverbs 22:6 (NASB)