

**Unless the Lord Builds the House  
Psalm 127:1-2**

Parents, several generations ago “knew” how to bring up their children. That is not to say that they did not have problems or even that they knew what they were doing.

But what it does mean is that they by and large had few misgivings and uncertainties about what they were doing and it also means that when problems did occur, they were more inclined to blame their children rather than themselves for those problems.

But then social science came to the “rescue” of those parents, who until that point did not know they needed rescuing and what did social science tell them? Social science told them what bad parents they had been. Telling them that the bed wetting, the temper tantrums, the lying, the stealing, the adolescent turmoil, and the host of other ills that may have afflicted their children were not so much their children’s fault as much as it was their fault in not having parents them correctly.

And what was the impact of all this upon those parents? They began to believe that if their children were going to turn out well they had better parent their children in the “right way.” This of course will quite naturally leads to what? Parental anxiety!

And has this parental anxiety infiltrated the church? I believe it has. I am sure that there are parents here this morning who believe that if they parent “right” their children will turn out well and if they parent “wrong” their children will not turn out well. This is an incredibly heavy burden to carry and it will invariably produce in those parents who carry that burden a significant degree of anxiety.

This morning I would want to make it clear to you that this is not a burden that God would want us to carry and this is a burden that we should not carry; for our sake, for our children’s and for the Lord’s sake.

So how can we get relieved of this burden? This is the question that I would like to answer to this morning. And in order to answer this question I would

like us to consider **Psalm 127:1-2**.

So now let me read these two verses for you. **“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.”** These words I am sure are familiar to many here this morning.

So, what was the backdrop for these words? The backdrop for these words was the building of Israel’s first temple, which was obviously a very huge undertaking of massive proportions. And who was entrusted with the building of that temple? It was Solomon, the son of King David, according to **2 Samuel 7:11**.

So let me ask you this question. Do you believe that this huge undertaking of massive proportions could have weighed heavily upon Solomon and so much so that he could have become anxious if he felt that the success of that project rested on him? Absolutely! How could it not have caused him to become anxious, if he truly felt that success of this massive project was resting on his shoulders and his shoulders alone?

But this of course is something that God would certainly not have wanted for Solomon. And this is why Psalm 127:1-2 was written. It was written so that Solomon, in understanding the lessons taught in these verses, might be relieved of the burden of feeling that the success of this temple project depended upon him.

But these lessons in **Psalm 127:1-2** were not only for Solomon but also for us. For we also like Solomon have been given the responsibility for certain huge projects that could very easily overwhelm us, if we felt that the success for those projects were resting on our shoulders and our shoulders alone.

So now let me ask you this question. If you have been blessed with children, do you believe that the project of parenting might qualify as one of those very huge projects that could very easily overwhelm to us? And I believe that the answer would have to be yes!

That could certainly very easily overwhelm us, but just like with Solomon

this certainly is not what God would want for us.

Yes it is a huge project but we do not have to be overwhelmed by it. And we will not be if we understand the lessons of **Psalm 127:1-2** just like Solomon would not have been overwhelmed with the construction of the temple if he understood the lessons of contained in **Psalm 127:1-2**.

So how many lessons are there? Psalm 127:1-2 presents three important lessons that any Christian seeking to accomplish any task, including the task of parenting, must continuously keep in mind. So, what is the first lesson?

The first lesson from Psalm 127 is a lesson about divine sovereignty (Psalm 127:1). So let us now read **Psalm 127:1** and see if this is not so. **“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.”** So within this verse, do we see a lesson about divine sovereignty? Yes, we do. But before we consider this lesson based on divine sovereignty contained within this verse, let us first of all consider what divine sovereignty means. Divine sovereignty is God’s rule over all reality.

In other words, God is the one who is in control and there is no one else who is in control other than God. Hopefully we believe this because this is exactly what the Scriptures teach.

What does **Psalm 115:3** tell us? **“But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.”** There are no limitations to what God can do. He is all-powerful. He is the Almighty One. Is He all-powerful even over the ways of man? Yes, of course!

What does **Proverbs 16:9** tell us? **“The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.”** Why is God able to do this? He is all-powerful even over the ways of man.

In other words, if the Lord does not want one of our projects or one of our endeavors to go forward, that project or that endeavor will not forward. And it also means that even if the Lord allows a project or endeavor to go forward, the blessing on that project or endeavor will totally depend upon whether or not God decides to bless that project or that endeavor.

There is only one person that is in control of whether or not something is going to happen or not happen or be blessed or not blessed, and is that us? No, it is God, for He is sovereign.

So now hopefully understanding divine sovereignty and the implications of such, let us go back to **Psalm 127:1** and isolate the lesson about divine sovereignty that the Psalmist put forward in this verse.

And what is that lesson? Those who labor in building a house or guarding a city apart from God can assured of this: that their efforts in building the house or guarding the city will be in vain. That is the lesson about God's sovereignty that is contained in **Psalm 127:1** or we could restate that lesson in this way. Because God is sovereign in all things, those who seek to accomplish something apart from God can be assured that their efforts will either produce no result or a useless result.

We in ourselves do not have the power to accomplish anything. So if anything is going to be accomplished or any useful result is going to be achieved it has to be God who brings it about, for apart from God, nothing can be accomplished or achieved for He is sovereign in all things.

So would this have been important for Solomon to keep in mind as he sought to build the temple. Absolutely! He needed to understand that apart from God's cooperation in the project that he had been given, that the success of that project would have been impossible.

And there is nothing different about us as parents. We also need to understand that apart from God's cooperation in the project we have been given as parents, that the success of this project would be totally impossible. And this should be easy for us to understand for we, as parents, do not have the power to dictate how our children will respond or ultimately turn out. This is in the hands of God. It is not in our hands.

So if you are here this morning and you are a parent and your children have turned out well or are doing well should you take the credit? And what is the answer? The answer is no! And if you are here this morning and your children have not turned out well or are not doing well should you take the blame? No!

Many Christian parents are way to quick to take the credit when their children turn out well and there are many Christian parents who are way to quick to take the blame when their children do not turn out well. The way our children turn out is not in our control. This is totally in the hands of God. And this is a lesson about God's sovereignty that we need to continuously keep in our minds lest we end up giving ourselves way too much credit or blame. And of course this is extremely humbling, but it is very good for us.

So, what is the first lesson from **Psalm 127:1-2** about? It is about divine sovereignty. So, what is the second lesson from **Psalm 127:1-2** about? The second lesson from Psalm 127 is about human responsibility (Psalm 127:1).

Though clearly, the fact of God's utter and absolute sovereignty has certainly been established in **Psalm 127:1**, it should not suggest to us that God will build a house without a human builder, or that the Lord will guard a city apart from the agency of watchmen on the walls.

Rather, it assumes that if a house is going to be built, there will be human laborers who will build it and if a city is going to be protected, there will be human watchmen who stay awake and keep guard. Or we could say it this way. Though God is sovereign and can do anything that He wants, the fact is that He has chosen to use or to employ human instruments. This is the ordinary way that God works.

Of course, we know that God could build a house or guard a city without human instrumentality, for certainly He has the power to do so. After all God created the whole universe merely by His word; so surely He could build a house without an earthly builder or guard a city without human watchmen.

But He doesn't do that. Our passage recognizes the normal means by which God works in human affairs. He works through human instruments. In the building of a house, He uses human builders; and in the guarding of a city, He employs human watchmen. We see all of this in **Psalm 127:1**.

So, what is the lesson? Though God is sovereign in all things, God's sovereignty does not eliminate human responsibility.

This is an important lesson. It could be a natural tendency on the part of

some Christians to think that because God is sovereign in respect to how our children turn out, that it really doesn't matter how well we parent or don't parent. But this would be a mistake.

In fact, God's sovereignty is what establishes our responsibility. We are responsible and accountable to God to do the work of parenting precisely because He is the sovereign creator and ruler of this universe and He has given us this work.

And because He has given us this work, we cannot take this lightly. In fact, we must commit ourselves to work very hard at it. What does **Ecclesiastes 9:10** say? **"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."** And this would include the work of parenting.

So do we need to work at parenting? Absolutely! Though God is sovereign in all things, God's sovereignty does not eliminate human responsibility. In fact, God's sovereignty is why we would work at parenting for this is a work that God has given us to do. And we need to do this work with all our might.

So as we do this work with all our might, what must we be most concerned about? Should we be most concerned that we doing everything right or should we be most concerned that we are continuously coming before God to ask Him for His help in making decisions and providing us strength in carrying them out? Clearly it is the latter.

What does **Proverbs 3:5-6** tell us? **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. (6) In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."**

Whether a parent chooses to breast feed their child or bottle feed their child, whether they feed on demand or on a schedule is not as nearly as important as whether or not these parents are leaning on the Lord when they are making their of decisions or drawing upon His strength as they seek to carry out what they believe God would have them to do.

Why? This is most important because this is what He has called us to do. He has called us in the time of our need to come to Him. Remember the command of **Hebrews 4:16**? **"Therefore let us draw with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help**

**in time of need.”** And do we need His help? Absolutely!

God has given us a great work to do when He entrusted us with children, but the burden for the success of that work should not be carried by us. We need to give that burden for the success of that work to God. And we give Him that burden for the success of that work when we come to His throne of grace asking Him for help in the time of our need and no longer rely on ourselves to carry out the responsibility of the work of parenting that God has entrusted to us.

So, what is the second lesson that we have considered from **Psalm 127:1-2** about? Though God is sovereign in all things, God’s sovereignty does not eliminate human responsibility.

So, what is the third lesson about? The third lesson from Psalm 127 is about peace (Psalm 127:2).

So now let me read for you **Psalm 127:2** and see if this is not so. **“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.”**

In this verse the Psalmist initially addressed the futility of seeking to do whatever we believe God has called us to do apart from His strength. And what did he say about this? He simply in essence said that though God may have given us a work to do, He never intended for us in our strength to do that work, for if we tried to do such a thing, by rising up early and retiring late and eating the bread of painful labors, it would all be in vain or in other words it would accomplish nothing or least nothing of lasting value.

But this would not be true of His beloved or in other words those in response to His sovereignty comes to Him for help, **“for He gives to His beloved even in His sleep.”** Or in other words, He does the work for them. And it is this assurance that will bring to the Lord’s beloved peace.

And does this include the work of parenting? Absolutely! So does this mean that your children will turn out exactly as you had always wanted them to turn out? No! Not necessarily but you can be assured that God, using the instrumentality of your parenting, will use the work of your parenting to bring blessing to yourselves, to your children, or others. Or in other words,

your parenting will not be in vain.

Can we determine how our children will turn out or how our children might be used? No! But God can determine all of those things.

So as we seek to do the work of parenting and as we seek to do it with all our might, let us be making sure that we are continuously coming before God asking Him for His help, for His guidance, and His strength so that He through us might continue to bless our parenting efforts to the praise of His glory even as we sleep.

May we by the grace of God know that, if we continue to surrender to God in all of our endeavors, we will be blessed by God and our endeavors will have lasting value in the sight of God.