

How to Build A Household of Faith

Psalm 127

Introduction:

1) In Western Society and Culture, the home is facing serious and sustained assault. Its very existence in a real sense is at stake.

2) In an article in the *Australian* (Aug. 18, 2006) entitled, “It’s breeding obvious, mate,” Mark Steyn writes,

“Much of western civilization does not have any future. That’s to say, we’re not just speaking philosophically, but literally. In a very short time, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and other countries we regard as part of the western tradition will cease to exist in any meaningful sense. They don’t have a future because they’ve given up breeding. Spain’s population is halving with every generation: Two grown-ups have a total of one baby. So there are half as many children as parents. And a quarter as many grandchildren as grandparents. And an eighth as many great-grandchildren as great-grandparents. And, after that there’s no point extrapolating, because you’re over the falls and it’s too late to start paddling back... Seventeen European nations are now at what demographers call “lowest-low” fertility – 1.3 births per woman, the point at which you’re so far down the death spiral you can’t pull out. In theory, those countries will find their population halving every 35 years or so. In practice, it will be quicker than that, as the savvier youngsters figure there’s no point sticking around a country that’s turned into an undertaker’s waiting room... Europeans work fewer hours than Americans, they don’t have to pay for their own health care, they don’t go to church and they don’t contribute to other civic groups, they don’t marry and they don’t have kids to take to school and basketball and the county fair.”

3) So children and family are on the way out in Europe, but, things are beginning to look bleak on this side of the Atlantic as well. The Pew Research Center reported in June, 2007 that only 41% of Americans now view having children as “very important”, to a successful marriage, down from 65% in 1990 (*World*, 7-21-07). Clearly building a household, a family, much less a

household of faith, has vanished from the radar screen of secularized Europeans and Americans who no longer value what God values. Psalm 127 has a different perspective altogether.

4) • Psalm 127 is a psalm of ascent penned by Solomon who was both a builder and a father. It is a companion to Psalm 128 as the theme of family dominates both. A man did not make the pilgrim to Jerusalem alone; his family went with him as our Lord did in Luke 2:41.

- In Jewish tradition Psalm 127 is recited as part of a thanksgiving service after childbirth.
- A wisdom psalm after the pattern of Psalm 1, Solomon challenges us to a “God-centered” focus in all aspects of human life, especially the life of the family. Thus the pilgrimage joined to Psalm 127-128 was “an exercise in house-building” (Reardon, 253).
- Psalm 127 easily divides into 2 major stanzas.

I. **Let the Lord build your house.** 127:1-2

- The words “unless” (2 times) and “vain” (3 time) drive stanza # 1.
- Themes of creating and conserving are prominent. In the areas of building, security and work only 2 possibilities are before us: either the Lord will be in our efforts and endeavors or they ultimately will be useless, in vain.
- Wiersbe, “Whether we are building structures with bricks and mortar and steel, or building lives, families and churches with truth and love, we cannot succeed without the help of the Lord. Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5) Wiersbe, 346.

1) **Without the Lord you work and watch in vain.** 127:1

- The verse is straightforward and an example of beautiful Hebrew parallelism.
Unless the Lord → builds → we labor → in vain.

Unless the Lord → guards → we stay awake → in vain.

- Build a house (home) and leave God out, you play the fool.

Build walls, set guards on them and leave God out, you play the fool.

- No home has a firm foundation without God at the center.

No city is safe from the enemy without God as its protector.

Build then both, leave God out, and then ask, “was it worth it?”

- John Piper says, “It seems to me that the point of verse one is that no matter how hard you work to achieve anything, its achievement and the fulfilling enjoyment of it depends decisively on God. If we do not trust in God with all our heart but instead rely on our own insight, then we might, if He wills, produce a monument, but in the end it will only be a monument to futility.”

- Let’s apply this to family life, something verses 3-5 develop in greater detail.

God and His guidelines for family are essential. And, they work! In an article in the *Daily Mail 24 Hours A Day*, Health Section (12/2/08) entitled, “Dad’s DO Matter: Why Children Brought Up By BOTH Parents Are Happier and More Successful.” Jenny Hope states,

“Children behave better, learn more and are better adjusted if their father is involved in their lives, a major study shows. Researchers found that a good relationship between youngsters and fathers had a positive effect that could last for two decades. In low-income homes, regular contact was also seen to lead to less juvenile crime... overall, children reap positive benefits if they have active and regular engagement with a father figure... children who had positively involved father figures were less likely to smoke and get into trouble with the police, achieved better levels of education and developed good friendships with children of both sexes. “Long-term benefits included women who had better relationships with partners and a greater sense of mental and physical well-being at the age of 33 if they had a good relationship with their father at 16. “It may seem obvious

that what's worked for centuries is good for individuals and society, but that's what we found." Studies showed the value of the father's input as a role model from babyhood to the teenage years. They found that children who lived with both a mother and father figure had fewer behavioral problems than those who lived with their mother only. Behavioral problems in boys, and psychological problems in girls, were also less frequent. Intelligence, reasoning and language were more advanced in children who had good contact with both parents. Norman Wells, of Family and Youth Concern, an independent charity, said the study showed that fathers were not an optional extra. "Fathers and mothers complement each other and together provide a richness of care within the family that you can't replicate in any other setting," he added.

2) **Without the Lord you will worry and wear out in vain.** 127:2

- If v. 1 is against overconfidence, v. 2 warns of being over worked. God is not against building a house, He is not against guarding the city, and He is not against hard work either as v. 2 makes plain. But do all this without God, and it is vain, empty, foolish.
- "To work harder is no answer... it can be a fresh enslavement" (Kidner, 441). Worry, anxiety, ulcers and panic attacks are evidences of unbelief, a lack of faith in the providence and plans of God.
- Work should be a blessing not a curse, a blessing and not a burden. In our labors there should be joy not sorrow, a sense of fulfillment and not punishment.
- Verse 2 basically says this, get up early and stay up late and work yourself to death and "eat the bread of sorrows." Or, work hard, trust God, and He will give you blessed rest. It is all a matter of who you trust, what you trust.
- I often tell people "I get to play for Jesus!" I mean it. It is true. I love Ecclesiastes 5:12, "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much. But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep."

II. Let the Lord bless your heritage. 127:3-5

- The psalmist Solomon now zeros in on the blessings of a family. His perspective is radically different than a woman named Toni Vernelli. Toni Vernelli terminated her pregnancy, and she did so in the firm belief she was helping to save the planet. At the age of 27 this young woman at the height of her reproductive years was sterilized to “protect the planet”. Incredibly, instead of mourning the loss of a family that never was, her boyfriend (now husband) presented her with a congratulations card. Toni relishes her decision with an almost religious zeal. “Having children is selfish. It’s all about maintaining your genetic line at the expense of the planet,” says Toni 35. “Every person who is born uses more food, more water, more land, more fossil fuels, more trees and produces more rubbish, more pollution, more greenhouse gases, and adds to the problem of over-population.” “The only person who understood how I felt was my first husband, who didn’t want children either. “We both passionately wanted to save the planet – not produce a new life which would only add to the problem.” “I went to my GP, but she wouldn’t even consider the idea.” “I found it insulting that she thought that just because I was a woman, I’d reach a point where an urge to breed would overcome all rational thought.” “I’ve never doubted that I made the right decision. Ed [her 2nd husband] and I married in September 2002, and have a much nicer lifestyle as a result of not having children.”
- God’s perspective is radically different, of a completely different way of thinking. It is a different worldview of a different sort. God gives the gift of children, and He gives them to be a blessing. And, it is something of an irony that one of the most

important components of human house building takes place in the bedroom! In the context of rest, sleep and trust in the Lord, children are conceived. God's great gift of children has more to do with human rest than with human work. There is no place for "planned parenthood" in this song. Children are a blessing from the Lord. Solomon notes 2 aspects of their blessedness.

1) See your children as a sign of God's blessing. 127:3

- "Heritage" (NASV, "gift")
- "From the Lord." We get what we get and who we get from Him!
- Indeed the fruit that emerges from the womb of a mother is a reward! Quietly, privately behind closed doors, God is doing His great work blessing those who trust Him with the gift of children.
- Blessed with godly children: here is true honor and wealth. Here is a building (v.1), here is security (v.1), here is something worth working for (v.2), while trusting the Lord every step of the way.
- "It is not untypical of God's gifts that first they are liabilities, or at least responsibilities, before they become obvious assets. The greater their promise, the more likely that these sons will be a handful before they are a quiverful" (Kidner, 442).

2) See your children as a source of God's protection. 127:4-5

- Using the imagery of war, the presence of children in a family is akin to an army that provide security and protection. In the early years parents protect them. In latter years, they protect us, even to the point of confronting our enemies on our behalf if necessary (v. 5!). The city gate is where important legal business took

place. A brood of godly sons to watch your back and fight beside you would be an asset indeed.

- However, early attention and involvement is essential if future rewards are to come our way. Sadly too many parents have played the fool in this regard.
- Illustration: “*Screen Kids*” – *A Generation Raised by Electronics?*(July 16, 2007). A British think-tank has sounded a warning about a generation of “screen kids” who are being raised by “electronic babysitters.” The report also warns that these children, largely parented by digital devices, are spending more and more time in their bedrooms – alone with their electronic entertainments. Britain’s National Consumer Council chief executive Ed Mayo said: “Today’s children are now ‘screen kids’. In some streets, every bedroom has a television for children and many have a computer. “With many children watching or surfing when they wake up, at breakfast, after school, during dinner and in bed before sleep, we need to ask whether the electronic screen has now become the electronic babysitter.” More troubling is the finding that children who spend so much time alone with these electronic companions have a lower opinion of their parents.
- Illustration: “*Our House or the Big House? It’s Parents or Prisons* (February 20, 2008). For a hauntingly large number of young Americans, prison has become a substitute for parents. Writing in *Policy Review*, Jennifer Roback Morse argued just a few years ago that this “apparent overstatement” is sustained by two realities. As she explains: *First, without parents -- two of them, married to each other, working together as a team -- a child is more likely to end up in the criminal justice system at some point in his life. Without parents, prison becomes*

a greater probability in the child's life. Second, if a child finds himself in the criminal justice system, either in his youth or adulthood, the prison will perform the parental function or supervising and controlling that person's behavior.

Young males raised without fathers are far more likely than their peers to be involved in anti-social behavior and far more likely to spend time in prison. For some of these young men, prison is the first place they meet an authority they cannot manipulate, a voice they cannot defy, and a consequence they cannot avoid.

Morse asserts that most people in prison are there because they did not learn self-control, personal responsibility, and the necessity of following rules. Morse then adds: *Of course, prison is a pathetic substitute for genuine parents.*

By the time the penal system steps in, the state is engaged in damage control. A child without a conscience, a child without self-control, is a lifelong problem for the rest of society.

Children attach to the rest of the human race through their first relationships with their parents. They learn reciprocity, trust, and empathy from these primal relationships. Disrupting those foundational relations has a major negative impact on children as well as on the people around them. In particular, children of single parents – or completely absent parents – are more likely to commit crimes.

Morse is so very right when she explains that “a family is a little society.” And prison cannot make up for missing or inattentive parents. When you consider the importance of the family – of intact families with both mother and father in the

home – consider this choice. It so often comes down to parents or prisons. “87% of those incarcerated in American prisons either don’t know who their father is or have not had any contact with their father’s in years.” (Herbert London, Hudson Institute).

Conclusion:

1) Children need a daddy. Interestingly this is not only true for humans, it is apparently true for elephants.

“Daddies Do Matter”:

Last night (1/20/99) *60 Minutes* featured a show about elephants. Several decades ago there was a problem with overpopulation on an African game preserve – too many elephants. Limited by the technology available at the time, the solution arrived at was to move the babies to new preserves. Everyone watched, gravely concerned, but the babies thrived.

However, unintended consequences emerged. At the new locations, a decade or so after the transfer, someone was killing off rhinoceros which are an endangered species. It turned out the killers were young male elephants. At first the game wardens couldn’t believe it, this was uncharacteristic behavior never before seen in elephants.

They deduced that the young males had grown up without fathers – without male role models. New technology had made it possible to transport into these locations some mature bull elephants. There was concern that it would be too late, that the adolescent males had to have grown up with their elders, that bringing “daddies” in now would do no good. But they tried it anyway.

It worked like a charm. The mature bulls arrived and set things straight. The young males immediately stopped their precocious, rampant sexuality, killing and violence.

The conclusion drawn on *60 Minutes* was that we had no idea that the social system of the elephants was so complex, interconnected, and so elegant. And so it goes. Daddies do matter, even in elephants. (Diane Sollee, www.smartmarriages.com).

2) Legend has it that William Tell from Bürglen was known as an expert marksman with the crossbow. During his time, the Habsburg emperors were seeking to dominate his homeland. Hermann Gessler, a newly appointed Austrian leader raised a pole in the village's central square with his hat on top and demanded that all the local townsfolk bow before it. William Tell passed by without bowing, he was arrested. He received the punishment of being forced to shoot an apple off the head of his son, Walter, or else both would be executed.

Tell had been promised freedom if he shot the apple. On November 18, 1307, Tell split the fruit with a single bolt from his crossbow, without mishap. When Gessler asked him about the purpose of the second bolt in his quiver, Tell answered that if he had ended up killing his son in that trial, he would have turned the crossbow on Gessler himself. Gessler became enraged at that comment, and had Tell bound and brought to his ship to be taken to his castle. In a storm on Lake Lucerne, Tell managed to escape. On land, he went to Küssnacht, and when Gessler arrived, Tell shot and killed him with a crossbow.

Tell's defiance of Gessler sparked a rebellion leading to the formation of the Swiss Confederation.

Tell fought in the Battle of Morgarten in 1315. He died in 1354 while trying to save a child from drowning in the Schächenbach, an alpine river in Uri. Men like William Tell are hard to find.

Men like William Tell are needed to build a household of faith.