

The Man The Lord Blesses

Psalm 128

Introduction: 1) In article entitled “Being a Man” (*Weekly Standard*, 4-10-06), Christina Hoff Sommers writes, “One of the least visited memorials in Washington is a waterfront statue commemorating the men who died on the *Titanic*. Seventy-four percent of the women passengers survived the April 15, 1912, calamity, while 80 percent of the men perished. Why? Because the men followed the principle “women and children first.” The monument, an 18-foot granite male figure with arms outstretched to the side, was erected by “the women of America” in 1931 to show their gratitude. The inscription reads: “To the brave men who perished in the wreck of the *Titanic*. . . . They gave their lives that women and children might be saved.” Today, almost no one remembers those men. Women no longer bring flowers to the statue on April 15 to honor their chivalry. The idea of male gallantry makes many women nervous, suggesting (as it does) that women require special protection. It implies the sexes are objectively different. It tells us that some things are best left to men. Gallantry is a virtue that dare not speak its name.”

2) Well if male gallantry makes many women nervous, those ladies need not fear. Times are tragically changing. On May 12, 2008 an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.9 on the Richter scale devastated the Sichuan region of China. At the time of this writing (6-26-08) the death toll stands at 69,181 souls. While China physically was shaken by this historic seismic event, tremors of another kind have rocked the moral foundations of the nation.

Many accounts of human heroism, sacrifice and bravery continue to pour out of that nation. In stark contrast to those heartening accounts, however, is a story of a secondary school teacher, Mr. Fan. When the earthquake struck, he told his students, “stay calm, it’s an

earthquake.” Then he proceeded to run out to safely himself, not helping his students flee with him. He didn’t even look back.

Ralph Spencer of *The Telegraph*, tells Mr. Fan’s story and allows Mr. Fan to speak for himself: “I ran towards the stairs so fast that I stumbled and fell as I went. When I reached the center of the football (field), I found I was the first to escape. None of my pupils was with me.” His explanation for his actions: “I have a very strong sense of self-preservation.”

As you can imagine many in China are outraged at his self-orientation and moral lack of concern for the welfare of his students. Providentially, his students did get out safely and none were harmed in the quake. When his students asked, “Teacher, why didn’t you bring us out?” Fan answered, “I have never been a brave man and I’m only really concerned about myself.” At the end of the Spencer article Fan said he would not even have stopped to save his own mother from the earthquake.

Fan’s actions and his very public statements about his philosophy of self-preservation continue to swirl on the web now weeks later. Even the Wall Street Journal recently reported on it. Authors continue to wrestle with the moral question of whether he should have helped his students out or not. I agree with those who find Mr. Fan’s actions cowardly. However, my question is this: is there an increase in moral indignance over Mr. Fan’s cowardly actions because he is man and not a woman? In other words, is it more grievous for a man to shirk the protection of those in need because he is male?

It would be disturbing if a woman teacher abandoned her students to save herself from harm (though hard to even imagine). But something deep inside our hearts pangs all the more, if a man is unwilling to show courage and self-sacrifice for the good of others in his care. Why is this so? I suspect it is owing to the imprint of God’s image engraved on all human hearts. It is

neither cultural, nor ethnic, nor temporal, nor learned. Rather, I would suggest that it is part of God's created order that men bear the greater responsibility to protect those in need. (author Brent Nelson, "Earthquake, Cowardice").

3) God indeed intends that men bear the greater responsibility to protect those in need and to lead those we protect, especially as it relates to the life of marriage and family. Providing an Old Testament echo of the Christ-redeemed husband in Ephesians 5:25-33, Psalm 128 provides a picture of the man the Lord blesses.

4) Psalm 128 is a wisdom psalm and a companion to Psalm 127. Together they form a beautiful duet on God's perspective on the family. As songs of ascent (Psalm 120-134) they were sung by families as they left home on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship *Yahweh* in the holy city. This particular song begins with the godly man, travels to his home, and comes to a stop with his nation. Interesting the psalm begins with a blessing and closes with a prayer.

5) Four times in the psalm we see the word "blessed" (v. 1, 2 [trans. "happy" in v. 2 in the *NKJV*], 4, 5). Utilizing two different but related Hebrew words, the psalm describes the man the Lord blesses and what some of those blessings look like.

6) Warren Wiersbe provides an insightful comment when he writes, "Like [Psalm] 127 and Jeremiah 29:4-7, this psalm deals with protection (v.1), working (v.2), the family (vv. 3-4, 6), and God's blessings on Jerusalem (v.5). While the writer includes all who fear the Lord (v.1), the psalm is addressed especially to the man of the house (v.3)" (348).

Transition: What does the psalm reveal concerning the kind of man God blesses?

I. Be clear about who you trust

128:1-2

- Psalm 128 begins on the same note as Psalm 1 and, as Van Gemeren says, "Heaps image on image and blessing on blessing" (p. 795).

- The phrase “every one” informs us that all are blessed who 1) fear the Lord and 2) walk in His ways. Verses 2ff will give special and specific attention to the man of God who so orders his life.
- “Blessed” carries the idea of “happy, fortunate.” In whom, the question begs to be asked, will the blessed man trust? The answer is Jehovah. And, just what, to be specific, will the blessed man trust for? The answer is his walk and his work.

1) **Trust the Lord in your walk**

128:1

- What does it mean to fear the Lord and walk in His ways? Psalm 1 is instructive at this point. Stating the truths of that psalm in the positive it means:

— to seek the counsel of the godly

to stand in the path of the righteous

to sit in the seat of the wise

— to delight in God’s Word

to meditate on Scripture day and night

The Mosaic background of this is located in God’s covenant promises in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30.

- In attitude and action you set an example worthy for all to follow. Dads, don’t worry that your children sometimes appear not to be listening to you. No, worry that they are always watching you because they are!
- What does it mean to walk in wisdom before the Lord as a father? Howard Hendricks who taught for more than 50 years on marriage and family at Dallas Seminary has some helpful advice in the form of some negatives and positives.

Negatives

Don't:

1. Compare one child with another.
2. Use scorn, ridicule, or humiliation—especially in areas of their weakness.
3. Threaten withdrawal of affection and love.
4. Promise with bribes and rewards.
5. Discipline when angry.
6. Expect perfection.
7. Be afraid to say “no.”

Positives

1. Help them see that disobedience is primarily against God.
2. Impart the expectancy of obedience.
3. Help the child evaluate his disobedience.
4. Allow the child to express his own viewpoint.
5. Restore fellowship after the discipline.
6. Remember: the goal of discipline is not outward conformity but inward conviction.
7. Study the Lord as an example of the greatest disciplinarian.

2) Trust the Lord in your work**128:2**

- The godly man finds his prosperity as a result of a heart for God and the work of his hands. Hard work is a given. Enjoying its fruit is a gracious gift from God.
- There is no bizarre “prosperity theology” in this verse. No heretical “name it/claim it” foolishness.
- Jesus alludes to this theme in the model prayer when He tells us to pray to the Lord, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11).
- Wonderfully the curse of Genesis 3:19 is turned to blessing in Psalm 128:2, for the man who fears the Lord and walks in His way will eat the labor of his hands.

II. Be committed to those you love**128:3-4**

- Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389) also known as Gregory the Theologian was a church father who helped defend and define biblical and orthodox Christology. He also spoke eloquently to Christian marriage calling it “true companionship.” He wrote,

“Through marriage we become one another’s hands, ears, and feet. Marriage doubles what had been weak. It is a great joy to our friends, a distress to our enemies.

Sorrows shared hurt less; joys shared are sweeter for both; wealth brings greater joy to those who are like-minded. Marriage supplies a lock of self-control over desires and sets a seal on our natural need for friendship.... It is a drink from the household spring from which strangers cannot taste.” [St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carmina* 1.2.1.262-275, in Everett Ferguson, *Inheriting Wisdom: Readings for Today From Ancient Christian Writers* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 5.]

- With the imagery of a fruitful vine and olive plants scattered all around the table the psalmist emphasizes both growth and fruitfulness for the man who fears the Lord. Interestingly the imagery and blessings of these verses are associated with the joys and blessings of the messianic era in the prophets (cf. Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10).

1) **Be a blessing to your wife**

128:3

- Because this man walks with God his wife flourishes like a fruitful vine in or beside the house. He sets her free to soar as a woman of God for the glory of God!
- Located rightly in the center of the home, she fulfills the calling of a Proverbs 31 lady because of the man of God who stands tall at her side! Fruitful and sexually charming (see Song of Solomon 7:8-12), she is unlike the unfaithful women of Proverbs 7:11 whose “feet would not stay at home.” No, she knows her man is her’s and she is his! Her attractiveness goes hand-in-hand with her faithfulness.
- Redeemed by grace from the curse of Genesis 3, her husband loves her and knows her (Eph. 5:25-33; 1 Peter 3:7), and she submits to him and respects him (Eph. 5:21-24,

33). Together they seek to educate and encourage their children (Eph. 6:1-4), and later their grandchildren to love and serve the Lord.

- Charlotte and I sought to have fun with the boys and teach them to love Jesus as they were growing up. We told our boys all we wanted was that they would grow up to love and serve Jesus. Then, they could do anything they wanted.

2) **Be a blessing to your children**

128:3-4

- A man can bless his children in many ways. He can bless them by loving Jesus and teaching them to love Jesus. He can bless them by loving his wife, by loving their mother as he promised, “til death do us part.”
- Jim Lovell is an American hero and a man’s man. He served in the Navy as a pilot and as *Time* magazine said it, his “grit and grace saved the Apollo 13 crew.” When asked in an interview what was his most powerful childhood memory he said, “The separation of my parents.”
- The failure of too many men to honor their marriage vows has cursed millions of children and left broken hearts and scattered lives across our nation. Perhaps the pain felt by so many was best captured in a copy of a letter James Dobson received from a young daughter which she had sent to her daddy.

Dear Daddy,

It’s late at night, and I’m sitting in the middle of my bed writing to you. I’ve wanted to talk with you so many times during the past few weeks. But there never seems to be any time when we’re alone.

Dad, I realize you’re dating someone else. And I know you and Mom may never get back together. That’s terribly hard to accept-especially knowing that you may never come back home or be an “everyday” dad to me and Brian again. But I want you at least to understand what’s going on in our lives.

Don’t think that Mom asked me to write this. She didn’t. She doesn’t know I’m writing, and neither does Brian. I just want to share with you what I’ve been thinking.

Dad, I feel like our family has been riding in a nice car for a long time. You know, the kind you always like to have as a company car. It's the kind that has every extra inside and not a scratch on the outside.

But over the years, the car has developed some problems. It's smoking a lot, the wheels wobble, and the seat covers are ripped. The car's been really hard to drive or ride in because of all the shaking and squeaking. But it's still a great automobile-or at least it could be. With a little work, I know it could run for years.

Since we got the car, Brian and I have been in the backseat while you and Mom have been up front. We feel really secure with you driving and Mom beside you. But last month, Mom was at the wheel.

It was nighttime, and we had just turned the corner near our house. Suddenly, we all looked up and saw another car, out of control, heading straight for us. Mom tried to swerve out of the way, but the other car smashed into us. The impact sent us flying off the road and crashing into a lamppost.

The thing is, Dad, just before we were hit, we could see that you were driving the other car. And we saw something else: Sitting next to you was another woman.

It was such a terrible accident that we were all rushed to the emergency ward. But when we asked where you were, no one knew. We're still not really sure where you are or if you were hurt or if you need help.

Mom was really hurt. She was thrown into the steering wheel and broke several ribs. One of them punctured her lungs and almost pierced her heart.

When the car wrecked, the back door smashed into Brian. He is covered with cuts from the broken glass, and he shattered his arm, which is now in a cast. But that's not the worst. He's still in so much pain and shock that he doesn't want to talk or play with anyone.

As for me, I was thrown from the car. I was stuck out in the cold for a long time with my right leg broken. As I lay there, I couldn't move and didn't know what was wrong with Mom and Brian. I was hurting so much myself that I couldn't help them.

There have been times since that night when I wondered if any of us would make it. Even though we're getting a little better, we're all still in the hospital. The doctors say I'll need a lot of therapy on my leg, and I know they can help me get better. But I wish it were you who was helping me, instead of them.

The pain is so bad, but what's even worse is that we all miss you so much. Every day we wait to see if you're going to visit us in the hospital, and every day you don't come. I know it's over. But my heart would explode with joy if somehow I could look up and see you walk into my room.

At night when the hospital is really quiet, they push Brian and me into Mom's room, and we all talk about you. We talk about how much we loved driving with you and how we wish you were with us now.

Are you all right? Are you hurting from the wreck? Do you need us like we need you? If you need me, I'm here and I love you.

[Signed]

Your daughter,
Kimberly

- The olive tree flourishes in a home with a godly dad and mom who are committed to each other. It would point to both longevity and productivity made possible because of the household of faith in which they, the children, were nurtured. They are not like the grass that withers and the flower that fades. No, these are the arrows of Psalm 127 who challenge their father's enemies in the gate! These are no mama's boys living in perpetual adolescence. These are not the boy-men of our day who play video games into their 30's (the mean age of male video game players has risen to 33 in 2005, up from 18 in 1997) and choose to live like a teenager forever. These are not the 55% of 18 to 24 year olds who are still at home with their parents. No, these are different kids, kids blessed by a man of God they love, look up to and respect.

III. Be concerned with where you live

128:5-6

The blessed life must be a life that reaches out to extend and share the blessings of God to others. This man will be concerned for his city and nation, his children and his grandchildren. He will recognize, as we must, that the family's future is bound up in health and welfare of the nation. From marriage to being grandparents in only 6 verses! Time fly's faster than any of us could possibly imagine, especially when we are young. Three generations are represented in this psalm. This is a good word for the modern church!

1) Take an interest in your nation

128:5-6

- At least 3 times in the psalms of ascent (120-134) the psalmists pray for the "shalom", the peace, of their nation (Psalm 122:6-7; 125:5). Indeed many of the psalms end with a prayer for the land and the city (14:7; 25:22; 72:18-19; 106:48; 122:6-7; 125:5; 130:7-8; 131:3; 134:3; 135:21; 148:14). This may be a concise or "Readers Digest version" of the great Aaronic benediction found in Numbers 6:24-26 which says,

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

- We should pray for our nation and her leaders (1Timothy 2). We should be active in promoting righteous and moral policies that invite the blessing of God on our land. We do not have the luxury to take a day off or sit on the sidelines as our nation plunges into moral disintegration. If good and godly men do nothing evil will prevail. With compassion and conviction, grace and courage, we who fear the Lord must speak for the Lord, recognizing our nation’s greatest need is every person’s greatest need: they need Jesus!

2) **Take an interest in your future**

128:6

- A man will be known by his children. He will be really known by his grandchildren. For both, he will seek to be a blessing fulfilling the charge given to him by God both in Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4. He will investigate the Proverbs for wisdom and guidance, never forgetting that this precious stewardship from the Lord is all too brief.
- Interestingly even some in the secular world have discovered the wisdom of building a home according to divine, biblical principles. In a study entitled “What Makes a Good Home,” the Committee on Home Responsibility of the National Conference on Juvenile Delinquency is on record with this 14-point definition:
A good home for children may be a one-room apartment, a trailer, or a twelve-room house, but it is a good home for a child if...
 1. He is loved and wanted – and knows it.
 2. He is helped to grow up by not having too much or too little done for him.

3. He has some time and some space of his own.
4. He is a part of the family, has fun with the family and belongs.
5. His early mistakes and “badness” are understood as a normal part of growing up; he is corrected without being hurt, shamed or confused. [Little sinners made in God’s image.]
6. His growing skills – walking, talking, reading, making things – are enjoyed and respected.
7. He plans with the family and is given real ways to help and feel needed throughout childhood.
8. He has freedom that fits his age and his needs; he has responsibilities that fit his age, abilities and freedom.
9. He can say what he feels and talk things out without being afraid or ashamed; he can learn through mistakes as well as successes. And his parents appreciate his successes rather than dwell upon his failures.
10. As he grows older, he knows his parents are doing the best they can; and they know the same about him.
11. He feels his parents care as much about him as they do about his brothers and sisters.
12. The family sticks together and the members help one another.
13. He is moderately and consistently disciplined from infancy, has limits set for his behavior, and is helped to take increasing responsibility for his own actions.
14. He has something to believe in and work for because his parents have lived their ideals and religious faiths.

The future of our families, the future of a nation, can be built on bedrock principles like these, principles each and every one that finds their genesis in the Word of God.

Conclusion

- Psalm 33:12 says, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” We could also say “blessed is the man whose God is the Lord.”
- Jonathan Edwards lived from 1703-58 and was and is America’s greatest theologian. God used him to launch the First Great Awakening. He would serve for a time as a missionary to American Indians and he served very briefly as president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) before dying suddenly. His writing legacy is massive and of course he is famous for his sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” But what of his family legacy? What did this man of God leave behind?

In 1900, A.E. Winship studied what happened to 1,400 descendants of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards by the year 1900. He found they included 13 college presidents, 65 professors, 100 lawyers and a dean of a law school, 30 judges, 66 physicians and a dean of a medical school, and 80 holders of public office, including three US Senators, mayors of three large cities, governors of three states, a Vice-President of the United States, and a controller of the United States Treasury. They had written over 135 books and edited eighteen journals and periodicals. Many had entered the ministry. Over 100 were missionaries and others were on mission boards. Winship wrote: “Many large banks, banking houses, and insurance companies have been directed by them. They have been owners or superintendents of large coal mines... of large iron plants and vast oil interests... and silver mines.... There is scarcely any great American industry that has not had one of this family among its chief promoters....” (Glimpses of Church History, #97).

Here indeed is a mighty example of the man the Lord blesses!