

Psalm 127: “Ready to Launch” // *God and the Rest of the Week 1* (Jan. 4-5, 2014)

Series intro:

“God and the rest of the week.” Family; work; time management. We ghetto God into a couple of hours on the weekend. Most of Jesus’ parables had a workplace context; 39 of 40 miracles took place in the marketplace! Kuyper: Not one square inch... God and the rest of the week!

Intro:

First message is on family.

- “But I’m single.” Raising up the next generation is not just something God gave to parents, but to the Christian community.
- In reality, the family of God supersedes even our biological families.
- You see, I’m a part of 2 families:
 - Biological family (we all have the last name, Greear).
 - And an eternal family, and we are united by the name of Jesus, with his blood and Spirit running in us.
- So, even if you’re single, a lot in here for you... if you disagree... well, you’re stuck now and the next few weeks I’ll be talking about work and time management.
- But seriously—thinking about family, or our future family, or our responsibility to the next generation, is the responsibility of all of us!

Psalm 127, if you have a Bible. A few of our pastors and me have been working on a family resource for Lifeway called, “Ready to launch,” based on this psalm—it will be ready to release this summer, but I wanted to share with you some of the ideas already.

One last disclaimer: Whenever you teach on something, people assume you are the expert, or at least assume that you assume you are the expert. Neither is true in my case.

- In fact, the longer I parent, the less confident I become in my qualifications as a parent. The way I've said it is, “When I first got in the ministry, I had no kids and but 4 great insights on parenting. Now, I have 4 kids and 0 great insights on parenting.
- So, we'll do our best to let the Scriptures speak, which is wisdom and power from God to us.

Psalm 127

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.

2 It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,

eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

3 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
the fruit of the womb a reward.

4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior

are the children of one's youth.
5 Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!

Look first at the phrase in vs. 1, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain..." In order for a house to endure, God has to build it.

First principle:

1. Love is not enough

Many parents have what I would call the "Beatles philosophy of parenting": "All you need is love."

- That's definitely the most common wisdom today... but I know parents who love their kids off the charts, but they are terrible parents. And their kids reflect that.
- I'm not downplaying love, of course, just telling you that there's more to it.
- You need the *heart* of God, yes, but you also need the *mind* of God.

Have you taken this seriously? Have you set about to learn God's ways in rearing a child?

Men, I'd like to talk to you specifically about this. Men, did you know that most (if not all) of the explicit parenting passages in the Bible are written to men? Ephesians 6; the whole book of Proverbs).

- Yet, WHAT PERCENTAGE BOOKS ON PARENTING TODAY WRITTEN TO WOMEN? How much study have you, as a man, done?
- Many of you guys show *no* initiative in your family. You read up, prepare for your job, but your family is on autopilot. If you showed the same initiative in your job you do in your family, you would be fired!
- I've said this before, but most guys feel like they are good dads if they provide food and shelter for their families. That's the standard. "*Possums give their offspring food and shelter, is that the bar we want for manhood?*"¹
- Men, our family is our first responsibility before God; our weightiest job; our most important mission field.

2. God grows our children in the twin 'gardens' of family and church

To whom is Psalm 127 written? Obviously, parents. But do you see up at the beginning it says, "*A psalm of Solomon. A song of ascents*"? That means it was used by pilgrims as they ascended Jerusalem every year at their annual pilgrimage. Not just married with kids pilgrims, but all pilgrims.

Reggie Joiner points out that almost all of the great parenting passages are addressed to the community, not just to the parents! DEUT 6: JOINER) That's intentional.

God has 2 "gardens" in which he grows the child.

- Home: The home is the primary place your kids will learn the gospel. Gospel lab.
 - **Word:**
 - *Deut 6: teaching our kids the word. Applying to various situations: in brokenness; pain; speaking grace and forgiveness; pointing to the glory of God above idols.*
 - *We, as a church, have about 104 hours a year with your kids; you (as parents) have 8,736 hours a year.*
 - *Will your kids know the gospel by the end of this year?*
 - *Write out your testimony and share it with them.*

¹ Thanks to John Bryson for this great line!

- **Deed:** The home is the place where kids will see the gospel lived out!
 - *"Effective teaching involves explaining to our children what they are already observing in our lives by example." -C.J. Mahaney*
 - Deeply convicting for me: my kids will learn to believe the gospel less by how well I articulate it and more by how I treat Veronica. Do they see the unconditional love, the graciousness, the faithfulness that I tell them about God. What are your kids learning about the gospel from your marriage?
 - The home is where I teach them what sin is, and who God is.
 - **Apologizing often.** They need to see I'm not perfect, because they are not perfect. It is more important they meet my Savior than admire my righteousness. A perfect example will crush them; a tender Savior will save them.
 - Some of you are worried that your family is not perfect. "Stock family syndrome."
 - Big deal. Observation: Stories of family in the Bible are way screwed up.
 - If God was writing a beautiful story in their dysfunction, he can tell a beautiful gospel story in yours.
- **Church:**
 - Joiner: A kid needs a 2nd family.
 - Kid should have mentors beside parents. We have developed strategic relationships with other parents to give them other people who speak into their lives. Examples:
 - Babysitters who share testimony and have gone to the mission field.
 - E.g. Taking kids out when they turn 5. Writing letters. At age 13 do a "coming of age" camping trip and giving advice around the campfire.
 - We've asked God for at least 1 good Christian friend.
 - Prov 13:25. Your friends are your future you!

Practical: prioritize relationships both places!

- **Prioritize relationships in the home:**
 - Be there. The goal of most Americans: Experience rich, relationship poor. We want our kids to succeed! Taking them to all manner of sports. I would suggest we reverse that phrase. Our goal should be to make them relationship rich, even if it means they are experience poor. Who they become is more important than what they do. Who they are is determined by the quality of their relationships! So be relationship rich, experience poor!
 - Family dinners: This is the one area in which there is no diminishing returns!
 - Being very present, so that as conversation naturally happens and when areas which the gospel can speak into are revealed, you are in a place to naturally speak that word into their lives.
 - Very little of our teaching happens on schedule. I gave that whole bit about the family altar; a lot of times it is a bunch of one-word answers. But car rides... down time... Deut 6, "When you rise up, walk in the way..."
 - One of the reasons we've chosen to have Veronica home as much as possible is that when
 - Dads, just being present!
 - Best advice from Larry Osborne: your kids need a dad, not a pastor. A pastor tells them where they are wrong; the dad is the one at their games cheering the loudest.
 - For you: kids need a dad more than a coach, a teacher, a college prep specialist.
 - Dads, date your daughters. Don't start when they are 15 and all goth because it will be weird then... let it be something that for as far back as they can remember, you have done!
- **Prioritize relationships in the church!**

- They will be a visitor somewhere, and a part of the community somewhere else. Make their community the church.
- *Your friends are your future you!*
- You've got to decide what is most important about your kid: who they are, or what they do? What is success? Getting into college on a baseball scholarship, or becoming men and women who love Jesus and serve the mission? Not that they are at odds, but what you value you'll place priority.
- And I can tell by many of your behavior that you put much more value on getting your kids ahead with the world than you do taking them deep into God.
- Our family ministry plan

3. God gives us our kids so that we can prepare them for his mission

"Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. 5 Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!"

- What is the purpose of an arrow?
- **Jim Elliot**, who left a very promising career in the United States to serve as a missionary in South America, said to his parents when he made the decision:
 - "I do not wonder that you were saddened at the word of my going to South America... but remember how the Psalmist described children? He said that they were as an heritage from the Lord, and that every man should be happy who had his quiver full of them. And what is a quiver full of but arrows? And what are arrows for but to shoot? So, with the strong arms of prayer, draw the bowstring back and let the arrows fly—all of them, straight at the Enemy's hosts.

'Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious, Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way, Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious, And all thou spendest Jesus will repay.'"

- Parents, you must ask: "Why did God give me these kids?" The purpose is to let them go, and that has to always be in mind. (Don't *just* think of this in terms of international missions... we must focus them outward, preparing to launch them out into God's mission on earth, whatever role he's given them to play in it.
 - We live in a safety-obsessed culture!
 - Some of that is good...
 - JOINER.
 - *"We're fine if our children never climb a mountain as long as it guarantees they never get hurt. But what if your children were made for the mountains?"*
 - *"The ultimate mission of the family is not to protect your children from all harm but to mobilize them for the mission of God."*
 - *"It is possible to hold on to our kids so tightly that we forget the ultimate goal of parenting is to let go."*
 - Engagement in the mission early is key to their development. When God designed a kid to be an arrow, and instead you treat him like a piece of furniture you plan to keep in your house, or like a remote control that would make your life easier, you are not only stunting their development but discouraging them from finding God altogether.
 - Joiner ill: **"Tell a better story."** (story of bored girl turned on to faith when her family became involved in an orphanage).
 - Joiner: *"When there is nothing challenging or adventurous about your style of faith, you begin to drift toward other things that seem more interesting and meaningful."*

- Our opps:
 - ServeRDU as a family
 - Route 56 mission trip
 - Compassion child
 - 11th and 12th grade mission opp
 - lead in student ministry!
 - We keep our kids involved in lives of people who are going (college students: good question when interviewing babysitter--can you share your testimony? do you have plans to put your at jeopardy for the sake of the gospel?)

- This principle of preparing arrows and sending them out applies beyond international missions, but I do want to bring you back to that because it is ultimate vision of this passage, and the dream of this church.
 - Are you hands “off of” your kids enough to send them out wherever God calls them? In order to let the arrow fly, you have to let it go!
 - I know of so, so many college students who sense a genuine call to the mission field but their parents either forbid or make it extremely difficult for them. God, let that never be true of a family here at the Summit Church.
 - Summit, God gave us our children for the Great Commission. Our goal: send out 5K. Many of them are yours, and they are right now in the nursery.
 - Varsity: Adoniram Judson to Mr. Hasseltine (Me, Veronica, Ryah, Adon,)... are you ready to receive a letter like this? *“I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world... Whether you can consent to her departure to (foreign, dangerous) lands, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life? Whether you can consent to her exposure to... every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death? Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion (heaven) and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall resound to her Savior from (lost nations) saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?”*

- **Last comment on this before I go to our final point: “Like arrows in the hand of a mighty warrior, blessed is the man who has his quiver full of them.”**
 - There is no right number for “size of family that pleases God;” each of us find ourselves in different circumstances and we have to depend on the leadership of the Holy Spirit in this. And so I’d never set myself up as your judge, and you shouldn’t let anyone else set themselves up as that for you, either. **But I do want to say that we have a culture that has increasingly prioritized small families because children are seen, for the most part, as a burden, a mostly unhelpful encumbrance to the American dream:** financially. Travel. Private school. Dress. Go to movies. “Don’t have many kids, if any; they will mess up your life!” I know many couples who wait years and years before having kids because they don’t want the child to get in the way of their yuppie life. I’ve heard them say, “Well, I just want to enjoy my wife/husband for a while before we get into kids.” (I hear some of these people talk and realize they don’t want a child, they want an accessory, because life is all about them, and they are constantly evaluating how a child can add to or will take away from their self-centered life.)
 - First, I know *so much more* of Veronica now that we have kids.
 - Second, the primary purpose of kids is not to accessorize your life. If u are a disciple of Jesus, your whole life is not about you, it’s about Jesus’ mission, and that certainly applies to your family life, too!
 - Ex. Our decision at 3.

- Can't have them?
 - Adopt. Foster.
 - Or be involved in our church's min to kids. Remember, made this point earlier, the biological family is simply there as a representation of the eternal family, the church, which is the utmost...
 - Be a mentor

4. God knows you need his help

- 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. 2 It is in vain that *you* rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.
- What's being taught here? Many bear the strain of building the city. Sleep? But if you are sleeping, who is watching over the city? If you're not up at the wee hours, who is making the crops grow? *God is.*
- One area that changes when you become a parent: lose sleep. We see your bloodshot eyes. Feeding. Late night emergencies. There's two different types of sleeplessness. You've got emergencies that you have to stay up for, but then you have the strain of carrying the load. The strain of bearing the family. *You don't have to bear that strain: God does.*
- There is a trust we can place in God, that he cares more about our children growing up right than even we do, so we can work our hardest, and then go to sleep entrusting God with the "city" of our family.
 - 1 Peter: God *himself* will lift you up! (AGM 2013)
 - We need not perfect parenting techniques, but the grace of God.
 - Practical: Developing a prayer list for your kids. Do you have one?
 - Open up Psalm 127 and ask God how he wants you to build your kids? Partner with him. LISTENING PRAYER!
 - Let him bear that strain, and trust him to guide you as you pray and parent!) (*Out of that prayer time comes things I tell my kids about what I see God doing in them and having for them in the future!*)

(Music)

A FEW THOUGHTS IN CONCLUSION:

- "In a 2003 survey, 85 percent of Christian parents admitted that they were responsible for their child's spiritual development. Yet, even as these parents outwardly admitted this responsibility, the vast majority were not personally engaging in any activities that might guide their children to spiritual maturity, except for the fact that two-thirds of these parents did regularly take their children to church."²
 - We're here to help! Family ministry plan.
 - Talk to our reps at each campus.
 - Have a mission statement as a family???
- Get involved in student ministry.
- Be intentional in each other's lives! (in my small group: prayer list for each other's kids)
- Finally, there is nothing like kids that make you think about your own relationship with God. You are responsible for them! This is good.
 - Do you know the gospel? If you don't, they won't. Is God the clear priority? If he's not in your life, he won't be in theirs.
 - Sins in us are reflected in them
 - Our priorities become their priorities

² Perspectives on Family Ministry, Timothy Paul Jones, p. 22-23

- Our idols become their idols
- Are you prioritizing God's purposes in your life and theirs? Who they become is more important than what they do. Who they are is determined by the quality of their relationships! So pursue that relationship.

Bullpen:

Concluding thought: *If this message inspires you to have kids, and, you know, if you go home and conceive a child this weekend because of this sermon, and it's a boy, you might consider "J.D." for his name. If it's a girl, "J.D.ette" is a personal favorite.*

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- (Beginning with the end in mind?)

Veronica: Think of the end! Psalm 90:12

- First is for your endurance as parents: Stanley: Later = longer. Raise the kind of kids whom you will love to be around.
- J.D., to that end: It doesn't really matter what your kids know if they don't know what really matters.
 - (Often, sadly, we care more where they go to college than where they spend eternity)
 - Academic or athletic achievement for character development

At this church, we want to give you a few tools, and point you to some others, to help you put God's purposes for parenting into practice. I know many parents who really want this. They are like, "Show me!"

- **Summarize:** "In a 2003 survey, 85 percent of Christian parents admitted that they were responsible for their child's spiritual development. Yet, even as these parents outwardly admitted this responsibility, the vast majority were not personally engaging in any activities that might guide their children to spiritual maturity, except for the fact that two-thirds of these parents did regularly take their children to church." (Perspectives on Family Ministry, Timothy Paul Jones, p. 22-23)

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3 Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.

4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children^[a] of one's youth.

5 Blessed is the man

who fills his quiver with them!

He shall not be put to shame

when he speaks with his enemies in the gate

- Prioritizing your marriage: God put a husband/wife in Garden, not a parent child.
 - The quality of your marriage is one of the biggest determinants in the health of your kid
 - Marriage is the centerpiece of the home