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(Psa 127:2 NKJV) It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.

(Psa 127:3 NKJV) Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.

(Psa 127:4 NKJV) Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth.

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The Architect of Parenting

(Psa 127:1 NKJV) Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.

When it comes to the family and parenting, we need to realize that God is the Master Architect and instructions about family life, including marriage and child-rearing can be found in His Holy Word, the Bible. We run into all sorts of problems when we don't follow God's design and pattern for marriage and the family that's found in Scripture.

If you've ever tried to put something together without following the directions, you know what I'm talking about. I remember the time my son and I put together an 8'x8' tool shed. You had to purchase the floor separately and so I made the decision to save some money and design my own floor.

I thought to myself, "Since the barn is going to be 8' x 8' all I need to do is build an eight foot square floor" and that's exactly what I did. What I didn't do was subtract the thickness of the walls which would have made the floor around 7.5' square—so my floor was larger than the inside of the shed and we had to force the bottom of the shed to fit over the floor we made.

The shed we built was not the shed on the picture of the box the parts came in. It leaned; the doors did not fit squarely so bees and wasps and mice got it. Water leaked in and over time the floor began to sag and rot.

This is exactly what happens as some try to raise their kids. God has a "picture" of what the family should look like. Many do what I did with the shed: They try to build their family without paying attention to the directions, "God's Holy Word." When you do this your family doesn't look like the picture. It is out of balance. All kinds of things creep their way in—the foundation begins to sift and rot away.

There is a Bible verse in John 15:5 where Jesus says, "*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*"

We need Jesus for everything—without Him we are nothing and can do nothing. The Psalmist says in verse 1, "*Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it...*"

A few days ago I got an email from a relative entitled, *How do these people survive?* It goes on to tell the stories of events that occurred in the lives of some people that make us wonder and ask ourselves, “How do they survive”?

The first story is about someone going to McDonald's. Looking at the menu they learn that you could order 6, 9 or 12 Chicken McNuggets. They asked for a half dozen nuggets. “We don't have half dozen nuggets” said the teenager at the counter. “You don't!” said the customer. “That's right, we only have 6, 9 or 12” wait the teenager. So the customer went on ahead and ordered “six” McNuggets.

Another story told of someone checking out at the local Wal-Mart with just a few items. They picked up one of those 'dividers' that are kept near the cash register. The customer places the divider between her things and the next customer's items so they wouldn't get mixed up. After the girl had scanned all of first customer's items, she picked up the divider, looking everywhere for the barcode so she could scan it. Not finding the barcode, she asked the customer, “Do you know how much this is?” The customer said to her “I've changed my mind; I don't think I'll buy that today.” The cashier said 'OK,' and had no clue to what had just happened.

A woman at work was seen putting a credit card into her floppy drive and pulling it out very quickly. When someone inquired as to what she was doing, she said she was shopping on the Internet and they kept asking for a credit card number, so she was using the ATM 'thingy.'

One more... A distraught mother calls 911 and asks the dispatcher if she needs to take her kid to the emergency room; Her child had just eaten ants. The dispatcher tells her to give the kid some Benadryl and he should be fine. The mother says, “Whew! ‘Cause I just gave him some ant killer...” Dispatcher: “Rush him to emergency!”

After hearing these stories we are tempted to wonder how these people survive. But this is how we appear to God when we try to do “family” without His blueprint, the Bible.

The Psalmist says at the end of verse 1, “*Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.*”

The Lord is the One who wants to watch over and protect and provide for the spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing of our families. Don't tell Him to step aside and try to do this yourself. You've heard the warning on TV, “Don't try this at home.” Don't try to “do family” on your own—you and I need the Lord!

God is the Architect of the family. He is the Designer of the family. He knows how it all is supposed to work so it behooves parents to read His manual.

The Priority of Parenting

Observing the priority of parenting means knowing what your child really needs to grow and mature and be successful in life. It is being able to sift through what the world claims is important and reality.

Observing the priority of parenting is knowing the difference between a “want” and a “need” for your family. God says that He will supply all our needs and give us the desires of our hearts but sometimes we want the “wants” before the “needs” have been met. Out priorities are out of order.

Many parents go through worry and anxiety and stress as they attempt to raise their children while ignoring the blueprints for the family written by the Master Architect, God. In verse two of Psalm 127, Solomon writes:

(Psa 127:2 NKJV) It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.

Solomon is saying that God gives “sleep” to those that He loves. But how many of us are losing sleep because of stress and worry. If it wasn’t for over counter drugs some of us would never get any sleep.

Solomon is telling us that if we do it God’s way, He will give us sweet sleep. Much of the anxiety and stress that people experience with regard to the family is because God isn’t building their families, they are.

In Psalm 127:2 Solomon speaks to the parent who takes matters into his or her own hands when it comes to their family. Solomon says, “It won’t work;” he says, “It’s vain;” In other words, your activity is meaningless—like running on a treadmill and going nowhere.

He says, “*It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows...*” He is speaking to the mother or father who rises up early and gets to sleep late because you are working two and three jobs.

Yes you are putting food on the table but at what expense? Many parents are working their fingers to the bone to “keep up with the Joneses.” They see all the stuff on TV and feel the need to cater to their kids every whim. Or, they cater to their own pride thinking, “*If Mary’s child gets one of the xBoxes, I got to get my child one or something better.*”

Let me tell you something, if you do this long enough –you’re going to hurt yourself. This kind of thinking and behavior will drain you physically, emotionally and even spiritually.

Not only will you hurt yourself, you are setting your child up for failure. We look down on the lifestyles of “the rich and the famous” and how many of their spoil brats grow up with a “silver spoon” in their mouths.

But we do the same things as they—they may have cash to spend on their kids and we use plastic cash. They feed their children with a silver spoon and we feed ours with a plastic spoon.

When it all boils down, it doesn’t matter what kind of spoon you use to spoil your child, if you aren’t feeding them the truth of God’s Word.

We’ve looked at the Architect of Parenting, The Priority of Parenting now let’s look briefly at the *Proliferation of Parenting*.

The Reproduction of Parenting

(Psa 127:3 NKJV) *Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.*

The word “heritage” or “gift” comes from the Hebrew word **nachalah**, nakh-al-aw that means “possession”, “property”, or “portion”. So in one sense one could conclude that children are God’s possession; they are God’s property.

The Believer’s Study Bible says,

“Children must always be looked upon as belonging to the Lord. They are a sacred trust, a holy heritage. The rabbis of old declared that a child has three parents: God, his father, and his mother (cf. Gen. 20:17, 18; 30:1, 2). Parents, then, are held accountable unto God for their stewardship of parenthood.”

The Hebrew word not only means “property”, it means *inheritance* or *gift*. This means that we could also conclude that while children belong to the Lord He also give them to parents as *gifts*. Putting these two definitions together helps us to conclude that Solomon is teaching us that God gives children to parents as His property to be cared for. A word to describe this concept is *stewardship*.

Children are a gift from God; they are God’s property! Parents are only stewards or managers given an assignment by their Lord to care for His property in such a way that He gets the most return or dividends from His investment.

Proliferation means *reproduction*. As parents, we reproduce our values and morals in our children without even trying.

Have you ever heard the saying, “What parents do in moderation, children do in excess?” This means that what you do on occasion as far as your behavior is concerned, your children will do excessively. It’s the old adage, “You give them an inch and they’ll take a yard.”

You see, one day your children will be adults and the decisions they make at that time will be based on their own value system, not yours—but your value systems—your priorities will lay the foundation for what they hold precious and what they view with contempt.

If you’ve shown your kids that worship and church attendance is not important but sleeping in or going to work on Sundays is important to you, your children will follow your example—but with more vigor.

If you are just a “social drinker” as some call it, your children are being set up to not only drink but to indulge in other forms of drug use.

If you’ve been in living in what is sometimes called a “common law” marriage—shacking up—living together or whatever you want to call it—there is a high probability your children will do the same but with more intensity because they now have justification.

The “what parents do in moderation, children do in excess” principal comes into play when it comes to foul language, eating habits, work-a-holism and materialism—what you do in moderation, your children will do in excess. “Whatever patterns of worship you’ve established for yourself, you’ve established for your children. And they will likely establish it for their children.” (MacArthur)

Having seven daughters, I've seen them put on their mother's clothes, shoes, jewelry and makeup. They have even tried to fit into my shoes. They like to use my tee-shirts as pajamas.

When my son was younger he would put on my clothes and shoes as well as wear my cologne—he went into the Marine Corps and came out with an interest in Law Enforcement and ended up working in the Information Technology industry like his dad.

I watch my kids and see them growing up, getting married and giving my wife and I some wonderful grandchildren. Some of our kids have gotten their college degrees or are working on them. They are supporting themselves and not expecting handouts from anyone. They are keeping themselves out of trouble—no skirmishes with the law—being productive members of society.

All of these things make Debbie and me happy but what really brings joy into our hearts is something that the Apostle John addresses in his third epistle:

(3 John 1:4 NKJV) I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

To "walk in truth" (lit. "Walking about in the sphere of the truth") implies a course of conduct or life. In other words, these Christian brothers and sisters John was writing about were "living in the truth."

You see, the Apostle John knew that there is nothing more important in life than bringing glory to God.

When one walks in truth or lives in the arena of truth, they are doing the things that please God—they are becoming the kind of people that please God.

When a parent has proliferated or reproduced in their child the character of Christ, then they have fulfilled God's calling on their life as a parent. You see, Christ-like character can only be realized through a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

If your child was successful in life but was without a relationship with Christ he or she is lost and Jesus says in Matthew 16:26, *"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

What are you reproducing in your child? Your #1 purpose as a parent is not to make sure your child is fed, clothed and sheltered. Your #1 calling as a parent is to prepare your child for eternity and the only way your child can go to heaven is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

They can become a doctor, lawyer, pro-athlete or Hollywood celebrity bringing in millions of dollars each year but if they die without Jesus Christ; if they pass from this life not being forgiven of their sins, they are lost for eternity.

As a parent, God has called you to lay the spiritual foundation for your child. You lay this foundation by living a godly life before them and by opening your mouth and extolling the virtues of following Jesus Christ.

We've looked at the Architect of Parenting, The Priority of Parenting, The Proliferation of Parenting, lastly let's look at *The Pleasures of Parenting*.

The Pleasures of Parenting

(Psa 127:4 NKJV) Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth.

(Psa 127:5 NKJV) Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Let's focus in on the word "gate" at the end of verse five. What does Solomon mean when he uses the expression, "the gate?"

The gate was a place where men would commonly meet and engage in conversation or discuss business matters with one another. Even legal matters were decided at "the gate."

Today, one of more commonly recognized "gates" is the barbershop. We all know that the barbershop is more than a place to get your hair cut; it has become a meeting place for males and more recently for females with the addition of the nail salon. At the barbershop there is discussion and debate—it is the place where one can come for affirmation, encouragement and counseling.

When I was growing up as an elementary school-aged boy our "gate" was at the end of Longwood street—we called it the "Dead End." If you drive down into some of the more congested areas of the city you will find "gates" on every corner or sometimes on the steps of a vacant house.

In the Hebrew culture of Solomon's time, the "gate" was a combination of the barbershop, lounge, church and courtroom. The city gate functioned as a forum for public business. It was the place in the city where the elders sat to judge and discuss local affairs.

Lot spent much time at the gate in Sodom. In Genesis chapter 19 when the two angels came looking for Lot they found him sitting in the gate of Sodom.

The husband of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 spent time at the gate. Proverbs 31:23 says, "*Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.*" The point this proverb is making is that a wife can impact her husband's standing in the community, bringing him honor, shame or pity.

We find reference to the "gate" in our text:

(Psa 127:5 NKJV) Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Let's define a word here...the word "quiver." The definition most of us are familiar with for quiver is "to shake" or "to tremble." But that is not that word here. The word quiver refers to an "arrow case"—a long narrow case for holding arrows.

Solomon is saying, "Happy is the man who has his arrow case full of arrows." So Solomon is referring to fathers of large families, who were well known and had great prestige in the community. These were the men who were well respected at the city gate. These are the men who as Solomon put it, "*shall not be ashamed.*"

Solomon also has said, *“Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them...”* “Happy” is the Hebrew word, *'esher*, eh'-sher; which means, *blessed!* This word is actually in its plural form, describing the fullness of the blessings that come to the person who has many children.

Solomon is saying that a *whole lot* of blessings come with a *whole lot* of children who have been launched on a course that brings honor and glory to God. This begs the question, “Where are you shooting your arrows?”

Solomon continues in verse five with the words, *“They shall not be ashamed.”*

Several years ago I was at an optical center picking up a lens for the glasses of one of my daughters but the shop had misplaced it and the clerk was going through their files. In a loud voice she began to do a roll call of all the people that were covered by my insurance policy and people's heads began to look around.

About a week later I took two of my daughters to the dentist. This was a new dentist for us and I was making appointments for the family when the receptionist made a remark about *all* the people that were in my family.

But when Solomon uses the words, *“They shall not be ashamed,”* he wasn't taking about feelings of embarrassment or shame that may come when people look down on you for having a large family.

In Solomon's time, people mostly farmed to survive. The more children you had...the more workers you didn't have to pay because your children were the workers. The large family was the prosperous family. The fewer children you had, the poorer you were assumed to be.

When it came to defending your land or property, the more children you had the better. Solomon said, *“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior...”*

When Solomon uses the words, *“They shall not be ashamed,”* he was referring to the shame that comes when you have to depend upon someone other than a family member to care for you when you are in need. It is the shame that is experienced by someone who tries to survive on handouts or has to beg for his or her next meal.

A family full of children was a sign of prosperity. The children born in a man's youth are strong and well established by the time he has reached old age—they become his warriors and defenders. Having a quiver full of children who would look after the aged man and his wife was a good thing.

During the time of the writing of this psalm, widows were vulnerable and in need of greater protection that the average person since they had no one (but God) to safeguard their interests (Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; Ps. 94:6; Isa. 1:23).

Today the widows and the elderly are in big trouble if they have no children willing to care for them. But the parents of children who fear the Lord and honor their parents (Ephesians 6) will see to it that their parents are properly cared for in their golden years—even if they must do it themselves.

As a mother or father with children who live for and honor and fear the Lord, you can go to the gate and not be ashamed. You won't have to worry about whether people or a government program will have pity on you and give you enough in their handout so you could survive.

Is this the kind of family that you are shooting for? Are these the kind of children you are trying to raise? Well, it's going to take some time--its going to take some of your time. Not the childcare worker's time--your time! Not the school's time—your time! Not grandma or grandpa's time but your time!

Running them around to football and soccer practice, dance class and music lessons may help them with the social and scholastic graces and their physically agility but won't do much for them spiritually.

Getting involved in the PSTA and the neighborhood recreation center may be beneficial; none of these have any eternal significance. Your child can become another Michael Jordan or Pavarotti but they will still have a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

The enemy is deceitful. He will trick parents into moving away from the Scriptural priorities of parenting outlined in Scripture—such priorities as laid out in Deuteronomy chapter six:

(Deu 6:4 NKJV) "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

(Deu 6:5 NKJV) "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

(Deu 6:6 NKJV) "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

(Deu 6:7 NKJV) "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

(Deu 6:8 NKJV) "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

(Deu 6:9 NKJV) "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Notice that this passage of Scriptures doesn't say anything about putting food in their stomach, clothes on their back and a roof over their head. It rightly assumes that God will take care of those things--in fact, God has already said that He would do it.

This passage doesn't say anything about putting your child on the path for a sports scholarship or getting them into a prestigious university.

In Deuteronomy chapter six God is laying down the responsibilities of the parents to the children that He has entrusted to them—you are to acquaint your child with the Word of God and introduce them to Jesus Christ so that they might trust and follow Him as their Master and the Forgiver of their sins.

Solomon wrote in Psalm 127:5, *"Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate."*

Obviously some were ashamed in the gate. Some were ashamed because they didn't have perpetuity through their children. Perhaps other parents were ashamed because their kids were the *gossip* of the gate. Their kids were the renegades of the town and were always on the front page of the newspaper.

Psalm 127 lets us know that there are pleasures in parenting. Yes, there is pain, but there also is the joy and happiness that comes from knowing that you have raised your children to know the Lord. There is joy and happiness from knowing that your children are living for Jesus.

There is happiness and joy that comes when your children honor you and grow to become adults that are living for the Lord and raising their children to know and to live for Christ.

There is the happiness that comes from knowing that you and your offspring will be with each other throughout eternity because they are saved and you are saved by the blood of Christ.

Let me conclude by saying that God is not saying in this psalm that only “large families” are "happy" families. I believe that His conclusion ought to be taken in the context of the entire psalm.

- The "happy" family is the one where God is the Architect and is Himself building the family.
- The "happy" family is the one where the parents have their priorities set and are dependent upon the Lord to supply their needs as they do *family* His way.
- The "happy" family is where the mother finds fulfillment in raising her children and reproducing in them the character of Christ thus aiding their father in launching arrows that will impact the culture for Christ.
 - If you are a single parent—you can still have a “happy” family though it may not be God’s design. God is gracious and has promised to be “a Father of the fatherless.” As a single mom you go ahead and reproduce in your child the character of Christ—you go ahead and launch those arrows toward their destiny in Christ.
- The "happy" family is the one where children are the future provision for their parent's need in their old age.
- The "happy" family is the one where children bring pleasure to the parents in the gate. It is where everyone in the family is watching each other's backs for the sake of the family and of Christ.

Let us pray.