



## Children's Ministry Day Sermon

Open your Bible to the Book of Psalms. We are going to look at Psalm 127 today.

As you are finding Psalm 127, think about something that makes you happy. I mean *really* happy. Is it a gift you received for a birthday or Christmas? Or maybe it's a memory of spending time with family or friends. It could even be a random act of kindness. Whatever came to your mind, for most people, we are able to identify something in our lives that brings us great joy.

Have you ever been to a hospital nursery and seen newborn babies lying next to each other? For many of us, a sight like this fills us with great joy. Or have you held a newborn baby in your arms? What joy! Today we want to talk about one of the gifts God has given to us that is designed to bring great joy and happiness into our lives.

Let's read Psalm 127 together.

Spoiler alert: this gift God has given to bring joy into our lives is *children*. Psalm 127 gives us a visual of this good gift by comparing it to building a house. This psalm frames, pun intended, the construction of families and how God designed families to function for His glory and our good. As we talk today about the wonderful gift children are meant to be, we are going to see 5 "building blocks" which need to be in place as God builds our "house."

### **Building Block 1 - Recognize God as the Master Builder**

Look at Psalm 127:1. "Unless the Lord builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain." When looking at Psalm 127 as a whole—all 5 verses—we see that we best understand this idea of "house" as "household" or "family".

The psalmist wrote that anyone trying to build his own house is doing so in vain, or in other words it is useless. Why do you think the psalmist said this? To answer, let's go back to the beginning of the story—in Genesis. Let's look at a few verses from Genesis chapter 1.

Read Genesis 1:1,26-28,31.

From the opening chapter of the Bible, we see that God created everything, including the family. This means that families were part of God's design from the beginning of creation. And it was, as God Himself declared, good.

Families today often look different from one another, just like houses look different from others. Some families have one parent, some have foster parents. Some families have many children while others grieve the loss of children who were never born. In all of these varying dynamics, we recognize the brokenness of our world and celebrate the redemption of diversity. God is still the Master Builder of families, in every shape and size. He desires for all families, including yours, to bring Him glory, and He has a plan and purpose for your family. Our families have a hope of full redemption one day that will be revealed when Jesus makes all things new. (See Romans 8:18-25, Revelation 21:1-5.)

This leads us to understand that building our families, not just numerically, but also how we interact with and lead children is as much a spiritual endeavor as it is a physical one. Authentic spiritual growth can only be made with God leading the way. Any effort on our own—apart from God—will not make much, if any, lasting progress.

Since the family was part of God's original design, we recognize His authority over it. God has many things to say about how family members interact with one another.

Read Colossians 3:18-21.

Note 4 main instructions for families in these verses:

- Wives, submit to husbands.
- Husbands, love your wives.
- Children, obey your parents.
- Fathers, don't exasperate your children.

When we see these instructions in light of Colossians 3:23, we realize that each of these instructions are understood as "from the heart, as something done for the Lord, not for people." God has a design and order for how family members relate to one another. As we start to understand this spiritual component of our families, recognize that investing in our families through Bible reading, Bible study, and praying together is vitally important.

All of us were created for and need relationships and community. This is why our church family is important. We connect to and relate to one another as a family as we serve each other as one body and we carry one another's burdens. (See Ephesians 4:11-16, Galatians 5:13, and Galatians 6:2.) Jesus said "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (See Matthew 12:46-50.)

As the Master Builder of our families, let's trust in God's design and submit to His leadership and authority as Creator of all things.

## **Building Block 2 - Rest on Christ as the Cornerstone of all wisdom**

Back to Psalm 127. Let's look again at verses 1-2.

Notice the end of verse 2 says, "[the Lord] gives sleep to the one he loves." Consider the contrast in verse 2: Getting up early, staying up late, working yourself tirelessly is all in vain and ends in restlessness when relying on your own strength; but when God is doing the work (verse 1), we are able to find rest, even amidst a busy life.

Those of us who are parents know that parenting can be exhausting, especially when trying to do so in our own strength. Late nights, early mornings, long days, and busy schedules can wear us down physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. By extension, those of us who serve in ministry with children know that ministry with children can be equally exhausting, though in shorter bursts than in parenting.

*[Insert personal story of the value of personal rest]*

The psalmist does not seem to be saying that it is "in vain" simply to work hard or that there will not be seasons of life when more work is required of us. The declaration here seems to be that there is a restlessness we experience when trying—in vain—to do the necessary work of cultivating spiritual growth in our own strength. When we stop working in our own strength and allow God to work in us, through us, and for us, we are able to rest in His strength.

Read Genesis 2:1-3.

God designed rest into creation. We need rest. All the work we do in family life will be given deeper meaning if we submit to God's design. We can also trust God to give us rest and recovery if we follow His plan.

This type of rest is found in Jesus alone, as the cornerstone of our faith. Consider what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30.

Read Matthew 11:28-30.

First what is Jesus *NOT* saying?

- Jesus isn't saying life will be one big nap or that we will be able to stay in bed and binge watch our favorite show 24 hours a day / 7 days a week. That's not the type of rest Jesus is talking about.
- Jesus isn't saying that life will be easy and we will never have troubles or face challenges in our lives.

So what *is* Jesus saying?

- He is telling us that He will give us the rejuvenating kind of spiritual rest we need to continue living in a way that honors Him.
- He is saying that He will give us the wisdom (James 1) and peace (Philippians 4:6-9) that we need to deal with the challenges of life.

"[The Lord] gives sleep to the one he loves." (Psalm 127:2) Physical rest is important, but we must find true spiritual rest in Jesus. When we follow God's plan for our family and allow Jesus to have lordship over it, we will rest well knowing that God is doing the work of building our families by His design and that whatever we strive towards for His glory is not in vain.

### **Building Block 3 - Remember children are gifts from God**

Think about these 2 questions:

What is the best gift you have ever received?

What is the best gift you have ever given?

Receiving gifts is a heart-warming experience. Almost everyone enjoys receiving gifts. Many of us also enjoy giving gifts. When we give gifts, there is a distinct joy when we are able to see that gift appreciated and valued. God has given very special gifts to us—children. How does God see these gifts? To answer, let's again return to Genesis.

Read Genesis 1:26-28.

God commanded Adam and Eve to "Be fruitful and multiply," that is, to have children. Children have been part of God's design for families from the very beginning, prior to sin's entrance into the world. From the end of Genesis 1, we know that God saw His design—children included—as "good indeed."

In Mark 10, we get another glimpse into how Jesus sees children.

Read Mark 10:13-16.

Notice in verse 16: Jesus took the children in His arms. What a picture! Jesus didn't stop at just telling the disciples to let the children come, He embraced them. While very simple, the old song "Jesus Loves the Little Children" displays a great foundational truth.

Read James 1:5,17-18.

Since children are part of God's good design, we should rightly view children as gifts to be valued. James 1 shows us the generosity of God in giving wisdom and truth. In His generosity, all God gives is good. We can trust that children, as gifts from God, are good and meant for good in our lives.

Read Psalm 127:3,5.

Psalm 127 reinforces the idea of children being good gifts from God by calling children a heritage and a reward, and that they are designed to bring happiness and joy to the lives of both their parents and others around them, especially in the community of faith.

We know this can be quite a perspective change from what we hear in our culture. Too often children are seen as inconveniences or obstacles to adult happiness. The biblical testimony is that children are gifts from God to be loved and valued and are designed to bring meaning and even happiness into our lives.

As churches, we recognize the value of children as well. When we plan our budget each year, we set aside funds for curriculum, programs, and events geared towards children. We strive for clean, safe, age-appropriate spaces in our facility.

How do we value our children? In what ways do we demonstrate that these children are precious gifts from God?

*[Insert an example to highlight part of your children's ministry. i.e. a child's testimony, a ministry volunteer testimony, etc.]*

Children are special gifts from God. He loves and values them, and we should too. Children are part of God's good design meant to bring joy, happiness, and meaning into our lives.

#### **Building Block 4 - Realign your parenting posture toward biblical responsibilities**

Imagine if we all made paper airplanes. Then I provided blindfolds and everyone covered their eyes. Then I instructed you all to try to land your paper airplanes on the stage. Most of the airplanes probably wouldn't make it. But if we tried the same thing without blindfolds, I would expect that many more of you would be able to get your paper airplanes to the stage. Why? Because hitting a target you can see is much more likely than hitting one you cannot see. Parenting, and leading children in any way, without a target is like throwing a paper airplane with a blindfold. The plane will land somewhere, but will it land where it needs to be?

Psalm 127:1-2 reminds us that building a family is God's work and that means there is a spiritual component to it, as well as physical. Verse 3 reminds us that children are a reward, or a gift, from the Lord. As we begin to take children seriously as gifts from God, we would rightly understand that He wants us to steward these gifts according to His plan.

Read Psalm 127:4.

Psalm 127:4 speaks of children as arrows. Arrows have one purpose—to be launched. While arrows that remain in the quiver may give a warrior comfort heading into battle, arrows that remain in the quiver are quite useless. In a similar way, we must prepare our children to be launched out into the world. Help them find their way, by pointing them to Jesus and discipling them toward godliness. In all likelihood, children will leave our homes; our job as parents is to point them in the right direction and prepare them for what's ahead. This means we need to be intentional and strategic with our time together.

Take heart, parents. You are not alone. It is our responsibility, as your church family, to come alongside you to encourage you, to equip you, and to help you engage your family in gospel conversations. We are in this with you. The programming and events of our children's ministry are strategically designed to help carry the burden of parenting through equipping and encouraging one another and in the spiritual development of the children and future generations of our church. (See Psalm 78.)

Read Proverbs 22:6.

Proverbs 22:6 has often been understood as “make sure your child is in church every week, pray before meals, and he or she will grow up to be a good Christian” or something similar. As part of Wisdom Literature, this verse is not primarily teaching about the outcome of a child's life, or to extend the archery analogy, which target a child will hit, but rather it is giving wisdom for the posture of leading children. In other words, wise parents study their children to understand how God has designed them and strive to use God's unique design to point their children towards Jesus and a life that honors God. This takes strategy and intentionality to make the best use of our time.

Our church extends this application to include the volunteers for our children's ministry. We strive to train and equip our volunteers to minister, not just to “children” as a group, but to each child. Part of our strategy is to point children to Jesus every chance we have.

As parents and leaders of children, we must know the target which we intend to launch our children towards. So at what target should we be pointing our children?

Read Matthew 28:18-20, 2 Peter 1:3

As followers of Jesus, our primary mission is to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Our parenting is not exempt from this mission. In fact as parents, our baseline mission field is our homes.

As a church we recognize the primary spiritual influencers of children are their parents. Our children's ministry seeks to come alongside parents to support what is being done in the home and to point children to Jesus as often as possible. Many of you serve on Sunday mornings, mid-week, VBS, and at other times in our children's ministry. We all work together toward the target of helping kids know Jesus' great love for them and then receiving Jesus.

Peter tells us that we've been given everything we require for life and godliness. In other words, our personal target in life is godliness, and God has equipped us with all we need to get there. As parents and leaders of children seeking to lead our children to faith in Jesus—to become disciples of Jesus—our children's target becomes godliness as well.

### **Session 5: Building Block 5 - Respond with a strategy for heart transformation**

God is in the business of heart transformation through the gospel of Jesus Christ. As followers of Jesus, this is our primary mission as well. Let's conclude our time together by focusing on our primary responsibility regarding children, both as parents and as a church: leading our children toward heart transformation by the gospel.

Read Romans 1:16

As we considered the biblical responsibilities of parenting in our last Building Block, we want to draw out, very specifically, that these responsibilities should lead us to focus on true heart transformation in our children, and this work is more than just seeking to modify a child's behavior. It is deeply rooted in the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation and through which God changes hearts.

Read Romans 10:9-10.

Believing something "in your heart" is quite different than believing something just in your head. Have you ever said something like this to your children?

"You know better than leaving your clothes on the floor."

Most of us probably have. In most cases, the child knows in his head he isn't supposed to leave his clothes on the floor, but he doesn't really know, or believe, it in his heart. If he did, it would change his behavior, right? When we really believe something in our hearts, it changes us. We think, speak, and act differently. This is similar to what Paul is getting at in Romans 10:9-10 when he wrote about believing in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead and that believing results in righteousness, that is to say the result is trusting in Jesus' righteousness.



Read Psalm 127:1-5.

While knowing your target as we discussed in Building Block 4 is a needed step to getting there, this does not mean it will be an easy path nor is it guaranteed. Remember it is God's job to do the work. Salvation is a work that only He can do. We can find rest in His sovereignty. We must position ourselves with a posture of humility, recognizing God's role, while at the same time, making the most of our time and stewarding our children well as gifts from Him and pointing them towards heart transformation and godliness.

Now let's bring this "home." How should these 5 Building Blocks make a difference in our everyday lives and in the ministries of our church?

### **1. Walk by the Spirit**

Paul challenged the church in Galatia to walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25) This means to submit daily, even moment-by-moment, to God's authority and leadership. We can only do this if we are investing in our own personal relationship with Jesus. We spend time reading and studying God's Word. We spend time in prayer. We exercise our spiritual gifts in serving the church. When we are living our lives this way, we are doing so in God's strength, and we can trust our work is not "in vain." (Psalm 127:1-2)

Both our biological families as well as our spiritual family depend on this. We each must pursue righteousness through faith in Jesus. (See 1 Timothy 6:11.) One of the primary practical ways for us to find balance in the tension of God's responsibility and our stewardship of the children in our lives is through faithfully and regularly praying for them. Remember to pray often for your spouse and your children. Pray for the leaders of our children's ministry who work together toward leading children to faith.

### **2. Do *something* spiritual at home with your family.**

Parents, maybe you are thinking "I don't know how to lead my family in a Bible study." Your church is here to help you. We can help you find good resources to guide you. Make a goal of spending 10 minutes one day this week with your family. It can be in the morning, in the evening, or whenever you can find the time. Put it on your calendar. Set an alert. Just get started. It doesn't have to be "perfect" but it does have to be on purpose.

Things to include:

- Bible reading-It can be just a few verses.
- Discussion-Ask what these verses meant to the original audience.
- Application-What is applicable for today?
- Prayer-Spend time praying together.



Church family, let's commit to pray for parents and children's ministry volunteers often. Maybe adopt a family or area of our children's ministry to pray for and encourage regularly. Maybe you can mentor a young mom or dad through text messages or meeting for coffee. We are one body and carry the responsibility together.

### **3. Look for little moments in everyday life.**

Preparing our children to be launched out into the world is more than a once-a-week family devotion or Bible study. It also has to be more than a once-a-week Sunday School class or Kids Worship time. Kids learn by doing and through repetition. Consider how we, as a church family, can help them see how God is working in everyday life.

Parents, here are a few ideas for you:

- Look for times in your daily routine to talk about God's grace and mercy
- Use times of correction to discuss God's grace in your life
- Use times of joy to discuss God's goodness

Church family, seeing for little moments for you might look like jotting down examples from your week and sharing them as you serve in a children's area. Even this simple act will help you in your faith journey as you grow in trusting and thankfulness to God.

### **4. Serve in children's ministry**

As mentioned before, whether you are a parent or not, we recognize that God values children and has given them to our church as a gift. There is always room for more volunteers in our children's ministry and ministering to parents. There are a variety of ways you can be involved. We need you. Our children need godly men and women investing in their faith journey. How can you be involved in encouraging parents and pointing kids to Jesus?

As we conclude, let's end with these thoughts from Psalm 78:1-7:

"My people, hear my instruction; listen to the words from my mouth. I will declare wise sayings; I will speak mysteries from the past — things we have heard and known and that our ancestors have passed down to us. We will not hide them from their children, but will tell a future generation the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, his might, and the wondrous works he has performed. He established a testimony in Jacob and set up a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children so that a future generation — children yet to be born — might know. They were to rise and tell their children so that they might put their confidence in God and not forget God's works, but keep his commands."

May we continue to be a church who invests in children "so that they might put their confidence in God..."

Let's pray.