

Psalm 127 | “The Indispensability of the Lord”
Preached on December 29, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 127, for we are continuing our study through the ‘songs of ascents’ found in the book of Psalms. *[pause]*

These are the songs that the Israelites are said to have sung as they traveled to the annual feasts in Jerusalem, and so here we are in Psalm 127.

And let’s begin this morning by reading the psalm, so I’ll READ it, if you would like to please follow along. *[READ]*

This psalm talks about two very important things in our lives: work and family. *[pause]*

If you think about it, work and family take up a large part of our lives, don’t they? *[pause]*

Take work, for example...

I read one stat that said that we spend almost one-third of our lives at work. *[pause]*

Now some of us would rather not work so much, but we need to in order to provide for our needs.

Therefore, we know that work is important, but we also know that the work done around our homes is important, too, for just imagine if you never washed the dishes, cleaned, or did the laundry. *[pause]*

We need to work. *[pauseeee]*

You see, work is important, but so is family. *[pause]*

We spend a lot of time with family, and for good reason!

We *should* spend lots of time with family. *[pauseeee]*

Family is also important—we know this.

That’s why we carve out time during the holidays, or we plan family reunions. *[pauseeee]*

Family is important, and many who have messy family lives feel the burden of the messiness so much *because* family is so important. *[pauseeee]*

That leads me into something else about work and family...

These two areas that take up so much of our time and are so important, are also two main areas where *a lot of problems arise*. *[pause]*

Let’s say that you see someone who is troubled.

You go up to them, and care about them, so you say, “I see that something is bothering you, is there anything I can do?” *[pause]*

What are some of the likely things that will be bothering them?

It’s most likely something related to work or family. *[pause]*

In regards to work, maybe it’s because they didn’t get the promotion that they worked hard for, or are not being appreciated at work. *[pause]*

Maybe it’s that they have some sort of conflict with a co-worker or are extra stressed at their job. *[pauseeee]*

In regards to family, maybe their marriage is in a bad place, maybe they are being cut off by a son or daughter.

Maybe their mom or dad said something that hurt their feelings, or maybe it’s a wayward child, or a toddler, who won’t stop throwing tantrums. *[pause]*

You see, work and family may not cover *all* of the problems that we face, but they sure do cover *a lot of them*. *[pauseeee]*

Think of *your* current problems, how many of them could fit under the topics of work or family?

Most likely a good amount of them, if not all of them. *[pause]*

Well in this psalm, it talks about both work and family.

And, of course, this psalm doesn't include every answer to our problems in regards to these two things, but it will show us some foundational things about work and family. *[pause]*

Mainly, it will show us where our mindset should be when it comes to work and when it comes to family—how should we view them?

And in so doing, it will lead us to a place of peace and rest, instead of a place of anxiety, frenzy, and turmoil that often characterizes people when it comes to work and family. *[pauseeee]*

Now when we look at this psalm, it’s very clearly broken into the two sections...

Verses 1–2 are all about work, and verses 3–5 are all about family, so let’s look at the first section first, and what it teaches us is that...

I. Unless the Lord works, our work is in vain.

Just look at the first two verses, and this becomes very plain...

It says, “*Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.* *[pause]*”

Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. [pause]

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.” [pause]

The psalmist is making it crystal clear that when it comes to our work, the Lord is indispensable. [pauseeee]

Think about things that are indispensable, where if you didn't have them, things wouldn't work...

An engine is indispensable for a car, for what good is a car that has no engine? It wouldn't go anywhere. [pause]

A train with no tracks to ride on would be a train built in vain, for it can't move, and a plant with no soil will only shrivel up and die.

So also, we must understand that when it comes to our work and our effort, if we don't have the Lord, it's all in vain. [pauseeee]

The psalmist says here that unless the Lord builds or watches, our building and watching is in vain....

It is worthless, pointless, futile. [pauseeee]

People who may build a house think that they are in control, for they think, “Look at what we did!”

But wouldn't it all be in vain, if a tornado came through and wiped it out? [pause]

The watchman may say, “I slept all day, so I'm alert, I have food and drink to keep me awake, and my eyes are ready to see whatever may come.”

But if a huge unforeseen enemy attacks quickly, it will be all in vain. [pause]

The Lord must build the house and watch over the city—He must work.

He's the indispensable component, for He is in control of all things. [pauseeee]

When we build, watch, and work, we must remember that it's not just us building, watching, or working, but there's an unseen Worker, who is essential, and who must not be disregarded.

And the whole endeavor actually rises and falls on His work, not ours. [pauseeee]

Have you ever worked at a workplace where the company sort of fell apart whenever a certain worker wasn't there, but ran like a well-oiled machine when he or she was there?

That's the idea, but in a much more extreme way—it all falls apart without the Lord. [pauseeee]

Now no one raises their hand to go and do a job that will be a waste of time, effort, and energy, yet when we try to work without the Lord, we are doing just that. *[pause]*

From beginning to end the Lord must work!

He must give us the energy to work, He must bless our work, and He must be the One who makes our work successful. *[pauseeeee]*

Too often we rely upon our own efforts to produce results...

We think, “*I did that, it was because of my efforts. I was the factor.*” *[pause]*

We pat ourselves on the back.

We like that feeling of independence, and of a job well done by us, as we stand back and relish the work that we consider we did “all by ourselves” (or so we think). *[pauseee]*

We marvel at stories of people who seem to be “self-made men”, but do we realize that there are no “self-made men”? *[pause]*

Who do you think gave them the life, the gifts, the brains, the resources?

Where’s God in the equation of self-made men? *[pauseeee]*

Guess what God does to so-called self made men? He humbles them. *[pause]*

Remember Nebuchadnezzar, who said, “Is not this great Babylon, which *I have built* by my mighty power...?”¹

And what happened right after he said those foolish, ignorant words?

God humbled him by making him live like a beast in order to help him see that all that he accomplished was from the Lord. *[pauseeeeeee]*

May we never be like Nebuchadnezzar!

May we never think, “Look at what *I* have built,” for when you say or think those words, watch out! *[pauseeeeeee]*

You see, the psalmist shows us that sometimes in our self-reliance we can think, “I can build it, and be settled. I can protect it, and be safe. I can work hard, and be stable financially.” *[pause]*

We try to work hard and produce results in our own power, but it’s a fool’s errand.

Our independent efforts are no good—we must get that drilled down into our hearts and minds. *[pauseeee]*

¹ Daniel 4:30 (italics is mine).

Self-reliance and independence are really symptoms of a man-centered view of life, rather than a God-centered view of life...

It's like they take God out of the picture all together, when He can never be taken out, and is actually the very reason why things work. *[pause]*

It's like if someone continually worked on a car, but only focused on the body of the car, and never on the engine. *[pause]*

The outside of the car looked amazing, but it kept breaking down, and they could never understand what went wrong.

It's because they are neglecting the primary component! *[pause]*

So also, self-reliance ignores the primary component of life—the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

This self-reliance can be seen even in the amount of hours we put in, for look at verse 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.” *[pauseeee]*

Now this verse isn't necessarily saying that working long hours is wrong, but it's more so condemning the working of long hours in “frantic activity,”² as one commentator put it. *[pause]*

It's this image of a person living in anxiety, frenzy, and turmoil thinking...

“Oh no, if I don't keep getting up early and staying up late, I will never provide for my needs,” and just continually doing that day-in and day-out. *[pause]*

It's someone who is never at rest, but lives in continual restlessness and anguishing toil to provide for their needs. *[pause]*

What a horrible, miserable way to live!

They may eat bread, but it's “the bread of anxious toil.” *[pause]*

What a weight!

Someone who lives this way is living with a man-centered, God-devoid view of life. *[pause]*

They think, “It's all up to me.” *[pause]*

But if you live that way, you will not be at rest or at peace. *[pauseeee]*

Now it's not necessarily wrong to work long hours at times, but you must consider *why* you do so. *[pause]*

² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 16, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 479.

Is it because you think that it's all up to you, and God is pushed out of the picture? *[pause]*

Do you do it in a frenzy, or just at times when it is necessary, but still relying upon God to ultimately provide? *[pauseeee]*

You see, when someone thinks, "It's all up to me," they think they are sustaining their lives, but is that kind of frantic, anxious living really sustainable? *[pauseeee]*

When someone does this they think that it will result in rest and peace later on, but it doesn't—it's in vain that you do this, the psalmist tells us.

So don't burn yourself out thinking that you can do it all in self-reliance, for it won't provide what you are trying to provide. *[pauseeee]*

In each of these things: producing, protecting, and providing, a person is looking for *peace and security*, but without God, they will not have it.

So also today, many people are building, protecting, and working like crazy to gain peace and security, but they never seem to attain it...

And it's because they do so without regard to the Lord. *[pauseeeee]*

When someone builds a house without the Lord, will it be built? *[pause]*

If it's built, will it last? *[pause]*

And even if it lasts, will it actually function as a *home*? *[pauseeee]*

When a person guards in order to protect what they have, is it actually going to be protected?

All it takes is something unforeseen to happen, and it's all for naught. *[pause]*

When a person works like crazy in an anxious frenzy in order to provide for their family, are they really providing what their family needs, if they are never around? *[pause]*

And even when they are around, they are never at peace, but thinking about work. *[pauseeeee]*

Unless the Lord works, your work will be in vain. *[pauseeeeeee]*

So then what are we supposed to do instead?

What can free us from this self-reliant, restless effort that is all in vain?...

We are to work hard and rest in the Lord—that is, we are to live in God-reliance, not self-reliance. *[pauseeeee]*

Now let me be clear, the psalmist isn't saying that we do not do any work at all, but rather, we *do* work...

We still have to build the house, watch, and work. *[pause]*

The verse didn't say that God builds the house, while we sit on the side drinking lemonade and cheering Him on.

No, it says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who *build it* labor in vain." *[pause]*

So we build, we labor—yes, yes—but we must live in reliance upon Him to be the ultimate and essential builder. *[pauseeee]*

Many people try to resolve the God and human tension of whether it's God working or us, by going one way or the other, but it's both...

We work, and He works. *[pause]*

So yes, we must still 'work', but it's 'God-reliant work'. *[pause]*

We should produce, protect, and provide with an awareness that it's all vain, pointless, and worthless without Him. *[pause]*

We should be like Moses, who said, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here."³ *[pause]*

We should continually think, "I need the Lord, or else this is pointless!" *[pauseeeee]*

So we work hard, relying upon God for the strength and for the results, and in doing so, our efforts become "God-dependent efforts." *[pause]*

They are efforts, yes, but they are efforts in reliance upon the Lord, who gives me what I need. *[pauseeeeeee]*

Now some people may take these verses and run with them by just stamping a "God-stamp" onto their projects and companies, and expecting God to bless them.

But that's not it, for there must be actual *reliance* upon Him.

And when I rely upon Him, I can rest in His grace, in His working, and in His providence, knowing that He is the best Worker there is! *[pauseeee]*

I must bow the knee to the truth that unless the Lord works, my work is in vain, and when you do that, it frees you up! *[pause]*

It gives you peace, rest, and security—all of the things that you were looking for! *[pause]*

The psalmist says, "he gives to his beloved sleep."

³ Exodus 33:15.

So there is rest available for those who work hard, and trust God with it. *[pause]*

You can put in a good day's work in reliance upon God, and then stop, and go to sleep in peace, knowing that God's got this. *[pause]*

I can live a life of peace and rest, even amidst the labor, because I can remember that I don't have to be Superman, but I can work hard and trust God with the results. *[pauseeeee]*

So before you go to work and as you go through the work day, say, "Lord, I can't do this without you. Please help me."

And then when you get home, you can rest and say, "Lord, I'm trusting you with the results. I'm giving them to you." *[pause]*

That's the mentality that the psalmist is calling us to. *[pauseeeee]*

From this psalm, we have seen that God is necessary for our work, but in the second half of the psalm, we see something about family...

We see that...

II. Unless the Lord blesses, we will not have the blessing of children.

In our culture, children are devalued. *[pause]*

The clearest indication of this is the prevalence of abortion, where children are seen as dispensable, if you don't want them.

So the blessing of children is now seen as a curse, and what a sad thing that is! *[pauseeee]*

Just look at this psalm and see how distinctly *opposite* it is compared to how our culture views children. *[pause]*

Listen to what the verses say, starting in verse 3, "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward." *[pause]*

In our culture, are children really seen as a "heritage" and a "reward"? *[pause]*

They are not seen as an inheritance, but an inconvenience to many.

They are not seen as a reward, but as a bad hand dealt to them. *[pauseeeee]*

What about verse 4, which says, "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth." *[pause]*

Are children seen that way today by many people? *[pause]*

Not in our culture, for they are not seen as arrows in your hands, but as *chains* around your hands. *[pause]*

Just this past week, I read comments on a social media post about having children, and some said that they didn't want them because they would be chained down. *[pause]*

See the big difference in the view of children from the Bible compared to today? *[pauseeee]*

Go on to verse 5, which says, "Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!" *[pause]*

Is a life filled with many children seen as a blessed life? Not too many people. *[pauseeee]*

I brought this up in a previous sermon before, but it's so fitting for this passage that I want to share it again...⁴

There's actually a growing consensus that the childless life is better and brings you more joy. *[pause]*

TIME magazine ran a cover story in 2013, which said on the front page, "The Childfree Life: When having it all means not having children."⁵ *[pause]*

In it, one woman described her childfree life as fulfilling, for she liked the way her life was. *[pause]*

Another pointed to all the things she could do like "buy unnecessary beautiful object[s]" and "sleep in".

And another woman called child-rearing, "glamorous martyrdom". *[pauseeee]*

The contrast couldn't be more clear between that view and the Bible's view of having children.

One sees them as a blessing and a benefit, the other sees them as a hindrance to blessing and benefit.

But God tells us here that children *are* a blessing, do you believe that? *[pause]*

He gives them to us, they are seen as a heritage and a reward, and the man with many children is called 'blessed'. *[pause]*

So according to the Bible, children are *valuable*. *[pause]*

In verse 3, the psalmist calls them an "inheritance".

That is, children are a precious gift from God given to a husband and a wife.

⁴ This small segment is from a sermon titled, "The Value of Marriage & Children," preached on February 4, 2024, out of Matthew 19:1–15.

⁵ <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,2148636,00.html>.

So we must remember that children do not ultimately come from the parents, though of course, they play a part, but children ultimately come as a gift from God. *[pause]*

God must work in order for a man and a woman to have a child—He opens and closes the womb. *[pauseeee]*

The first child ever born in the world is Cain, and what does Eve say after his birth?...

She says, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.’⁶ *[pause]*

And then after Cain kills Abel, Eve gives birth to Seth, and she says, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel.”⁷ *[pause]*

Eve knew that God had to work, or her children would have never come into the world—it was God who let her conceive. *[pauseeee]*

God gives and gifts children to parents as an inheritance.

We need the Lord to provide the blessing of children, for He is in control of giving life. *[pauseee]*

So we see that God is the ultimate Blesser, for He showers down blessings upon us, even though we don’t deserve them.

And one such blessing is the blessing of children, who He gives to people. *[pauseeee]*

Now I know that there are some people, maybe even some people in this room, who see children as a blessing, but have been unable to have children. *[pause]*

I’m sure the pain is so hard for you, for you desire something good, yet God has not gifted you with children of your own. *[pause]*

I can’t even imagine the sorrow you may feel, but in that, remember that in the Lord’s good and wise will, He has a purpose. *[pause]*

Are you still willing to trust Him, even if His answer is ‘No’? *[pauseee]*

Remember that the Lord knows, He’s in control, and He’s always good.

God makes no mistakes, He is never not good, but always good and wise. *[pause]*

He may not bless in that area, but may it be that He wants to bless you in another area? *[pauseeee]*

I’ve heard some amazing stories of people who couldn’t have children for years, but then all of a sudden, God provides, and it just shows His greatness. *[pause]*

⁶ Genesis 4:1.

⁷ Genesis 4:25.

I've heard of people who haven't been able to have biological children, but they foster and adopt, and it's an amazing reflection of how God adopts us as His own.

Those children who are fostered or adopted get to live in a home that absolutely loves them and blesses them, when they had no one else. *[pauseeee]*

Remember the story of Abraham and Sarah, who didn't have children until they were super old.

It wasn't because God hated Abraham, so don't see it that way, but see it as God's good and wise purpose that may not make sense right now...

But someday you will see what He has done and marvel at His glory, how He grew your faith, and how He impacted others through it. *[pauseeeee]*

Children are a blessing, and that blessing comes from the Lord. *[pause]*

It doesn't say: blessed is the man with riches, possessions, or fame, but *children*.

Talk about a truth that's counter-cultural in our day! *[pause]*

While our culture proclaims that blessing is found in status, money, fame, stuff, and all that—we proclaim what God says, which is that blessing is found in having children. *[pauseeee]*

You see, our world pushes children to the side in order to get status, money, fame, and possessions.

But we are to push status, money, fame, and possessions to the side because the blessing of children is more important. *[pauseeeee]*

So how can they help and benefit us?...

Verse 4 here tells us that children are like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so to not have them is like a man being defenseless and incapable.

But with children, verse 5 says, "He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate." *[pauseee]*

The gate of the city was the place that they settled disputes and where judgments were rendered,⁸ so it means that a man with many children won't be put to shame when he has to go up against an enemy in a dispute. *[pause]*

Why?

⁸ Nancy deClaissé-Walford, "The Songs of the Ascents: Psalms," in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 919.

Guess who he has standing behind him and ready to speak up and support his cause? A bunch of grown sons. *[pauseeee]*

You see, when we have children, they grow up and are able to provide us security, protection, help, and support. *[pause]*

I've seen so many older people in this church, who are blessed because in their old age, they are taken such good care of by their children.

And now their children have grown up, have their own children, who are godly, and it has become a lasting legacy to what God can do when we trust Him and value the blessing of children. *[pauseeeee]*

We must always remember that unless the Lord blesses, we will not have the blessing of children...

He must work, He must provide, He must bless.

So we rely upon Him to do what He does, knowing that everything comes from Him. *[pause]*

From our work to our family to all things...

We need the Lord for everything!

One commentator tells of this “Latin motto [that] says, ‘Nisi Dominus Frusta’. *[pause]*

It comes from the first words of this psalm and means ‘Without the Lord, Frustration.’ *[pause]*

It is the motto of the city of Edinburgh, Scotland, appearing on its crest, and is affixed to the city’s official documents.

[And] it could be attached to the lives of many who are trying to live their lives without the Almighty.”⁹ [pauseeee]

Our culture is a self-reliant, workaholic culture with a low view of the family, who is never at rest nor at peace.

And no wonder—“without the Lord, frustration.” *[pause]*

They are seeking to produce, protect, and provide, but all of their work doesn’t produce peace and rest.

But if you go on in God-dependent effort, then you can work hard and find rest at the same time. *[pauseeee]*

⁹ Boice, found at: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/psalm-127/>.

As we enter a new year, we need to be reminded of these things, whether it comes to our job or our family, but also whether it comes to our church, too. *[pausee]*

Unless the Lord goes with us, our going through the next year will be in vain. *[pause]*

Unless the Lord works, all of our efforts as a church will be worthless in 2025. *[pause]*

Unless the Lord blesses, our church family will not grow next year. *[pause]*

So may we as individuals and as a church always remember that we need the Lord for everything, and that without Him, we can do nothing. *[pauseee]*

The Lord is the ultimate Worker, and we are the recipients of His powerful working and grace, for unless the Lord saved us, we would not be saved. *[pause]*

All of our good works were in vain, for they couldn't save us, so Christ had to work.

God had to be the One to build the house of David and to bring Christ into the world.

He had to live the perfect life, take our place on the Cross, die for us, and then rise again. *[pauseee]*

Christ and His work are indispensable, for only through Him can we be saved.

And now once we turn from our sins and trust in Him, He is indispensable even after salvation, for He empowers us to bear fruit. *[pause]*

Jesus says in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me *you can do nothing.*" *[pausee]*

He has worked to save us, He empowers our efforts, and blesses us with a family of brothers and sisters in the church.

What more could we ask for? *[pause]*

What an indispensable, powerful, gracious Lord that we serve—will you rely upon Him as you step into this new year?