

October 4, 2020

“The Blessing of God on the Work of Man”
Psalm 127

FCF: How to work

PROPOSITION: (anchor) It is good to have work to do.
(magnet) But we must pursue it God’s way.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

To be a disciple of Jesus means we have heard His call, repented, believe the gospel and follow Him. We acknowledge Him as King and we have stepped off of His throne and submitted to His rule in all of life - from cradle to grave, dawn to dusk, in the private and public spheres. To sum up a hymn, “All (our) thoughts and words and doings, all (our) days and all (our) hours.” This includes our work. For our work matters to God - not just what we do but how we do it.

Which brings us to our text, Psalm 127, another of the Songs of Ascent. The journey of pilgrims to the Temple would have been occasion to reflect on God’s provision and their work.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Psalm 127](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

It is good to have work to do. From the beginning, in the Garden before the Fall, Adam and Eve were told to steward the earth and to get to work. Beyond and before even that, we were made in the image of a God who works. Metaphors for God in the Scriptures include a gardener, shepherd, potter, physician, teacher, vine-dresser, and metal worker. It’s worth noting that Jesus worked. This is obvious in His upbringing as a carpenter and His labors with the disciples.

The point is we were made to work. And God values our work - no matter the field, the profession or position. The value of our work does not hinge on the amount it frees us to give to the church or the opportunities it gives us to witness. As Martin Luther said ([READ quote](#)):

The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.

Our work is simply good in God’s sight. So it is good for us to have work to do. That said, we must pursue it God’s way. That’s the message of Psalm 127, a message we need to hear and take to heart ourselves. Again, it is good to have work to do. But we must pursue it God’s way.

How is that seen here? With two starkly different points. First, in the uselessness of our efforts without the work of God. Second, in the fruitfulness of our efforts with the work of God.

I. THE USELESSNESS OF OUR EFFORTS

First, the uselessness of our efforts without the work of God ([READ Psalm 127:1-2](#)). The psalm begins with a warning that speaks strongly against our proud and anxious striving.

A) Our Tendency

1. Our proud assumption

Think about our tendency. Our proud assumption, the place where we begin, is that everything hinges on us. Whether it’s the labor of building or the watch of guarding, it all depends upon us.

2. Our anxious toil

So there is our proud assumption. And, flowing from that, our anxious toil. We are unable to rest, to be still. We are given to constant toiling. We are unwilling to heed the call of Sabbath - spurning God's call to cease from our normal labors one day in seven, turning from what would free us from the trap of making idols of our work or the fruit of our work. And so joy is lost.

Illustration:

We are like a hummingbird, eating to live and living to eat. The hummingbird is capable of fantastic flight maneuvers and its average wingbeat is 25 beats/second. During fast flight, that jumps to 80 beats/second. During courtship, it can reach 200 beats/second. These little birds may perch to rest or roost but they move only by flight. And they have a stunning metabolism. A normal man eats 2.5 pounds of food/day. But if his energy output was that of a hummingbird, he would have to eat 370 pounds of boiled potatoes a day. Eating to live and living to eat.

Hummingbirds are made to live at that pace. That's their design. But not human beings.

B) The Reality

1. The rule of God

So here we shift from our tendency to the reality, a reality that includes the rule and rest of God. In terms of the rule of God, ultimately, He has to be the One doing the building of the house and the watching over the city. And, without that, our labor is vain, utterly worthless and futile.

2. The rest of God

We must reckon with the rule of God. And then the rest of God, the rest He alone provides. The fulfillment and satisfaction we seek in our work is found in Him. Which He gives us as a gift.

Again, there is a uselessness to our efforts without the work of God.

Application:

Oh, the questions we need to ask of ourselves. "Why are we working so hard? What are we chasing? Where is our hope and trust?" And "Where is your identity? Your security?" Or "What would happen if you lost your job or had to step away from it? Could you bear that?"

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II. THE FRUITFULNESS OF OUR EFFORTS

Moving from the warning, we come then to this positive example, from the uselessness of our efforts without God to the fruitfulness of our efforts with God (**READ Psalm 127:3-5**).

A) God's Generosity

1. Children - as arrows

It starts with God's generosity. Everything does. And the case study here is the gift of children, standing opposed to the self-sufficient striving in the first part of the psalm. Note the images we see. First, that of a battlefield. Archers were vital to an army. And arrows vital to the archer.

2. Children - at the gate

Then we read of the city gate. This was the town hall and courthouse where transactions were witnessed and cases decided. And in such a place, such a man would not have to stand alone.

B) Our Responsibility

So everything begins with God's generosity. But that does not rule out our responsibility.

1. To be grateful

We are to be grateful. Back to the case study, children are a heritage and reward. Such a man is truly blessed. Children are to be seen as a good thing, something to be treasured and a gift for which we are to be thankful. Which is certainly a message that needs to be repeated in our day.

2. To be engaged

So we are to be grateful. But also engaged. We are not to be as a restless hummingbird. Nor are we to count on the stork. This man "fills his quiver". For children to come into this world involves the husband and wife doing something to bring them in and to raise them up. Life is not a spectator sport. Not in the home or anywhere else - including how we approach our work.

Again, the idea being that there is a fruitfulness to our efforts with the work of God.

Application:

The first point demands our reliance. But the second point demands our diligence. This is no "Let go and let God." This is more like a "Pray and get going." It's both at the same time.

This is why it is right to speak of a Christian work ethic. It is a standard that calls not just for honest dealings but steady labor. It is one that rules out all dishonesty, stealing, and laziness.

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CONCLUSION:

Clearly, there is a balance being called for. The Lord calls us to diligence and reliance - a diligent reliance, true labor but in His strength. This is what Francis Schaeffer referred to in his book, *True Spirituality*, as "active passivity". He uses Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an example. The angel came to her and said she would, even as a virgin, give birth to the Messiah. She had three options, three different possible ways of responding here. First, she can say, "No! Leave me alone." There would be no blessing in that at all. Second, she could say, "Great! I'll get right on that." That would end in failure. Or, third, she could say as she did, "I am a servant of the Lord; may it be to me according to your word." That humble willingness was the only way.

Reflecting on that response, Schaeffer puts it this way in his book ([READ quote](#)):

We are in the same situation in that we have these great and thrilling promises we have been considering, and we are neither to think of ourselves as totally passive, as though we had no part in this, as though God had stopped dealing with us in the here and now as men; nor are we to think we can do it ourselves.

This is active passivity, a diligent reliance. It is real labor in the Lord's strength. And this is true for every Christian, for every one of us, in every area, including our daily ordinary callings.

That's Psalm 127. It is good to have work to do. But we must pursue it God's way.

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