

# Godly Fear and Family Life

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**Bible Verse:** Psalm 128  
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One of the passages of Scripture that I often think about when we are spending extended time in the Old Testament in the Psalms and in the 10 Commandments, I go back to Romans 15:4 and I invite you to turn there just by way of introduction or our Psalm this evening. In Romans 15:4 it says, "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It's very helpful to remember that the New Testament looks back on the Old Testament and says this was written to instruct us and that this was written to encourage us and to give us hope. That is the point that we are looking at especially here tonight as we look at our Psalm tonight, Psalm 128, and Psalm 128 is going to give us that sense of encouragement and hope and the value of being a person who fears the Lord, the value of being one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ. God does not have us follow him, God does not work in our hearts in vain. There is not an empty outcome to our walk with Christ to the pursuit of sanctification, to trusting in him. There is always a good outcome for those who fear the Lord and it's Psalm 128 tonight that reminds us of that, to encourage us, to give us hope in the midst of personal difficulties, through the difficulties of the world. This shines like a beacon in the darkness and refreshes our hearts to continue on walking with the Lord confident and trusting in him come what may.

So let's read the Psalm together, Psalm 128, you can follow along as I read it. Psalm 128 in verse 1 it says this,

1 How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways.  
2 When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you. 3 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine Within your house, Your children like olive plants Around your table. 4 Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD. 5 The LORD bless you from Zion, And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. 6 Indeed, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

Last time, we looked at Psalm 127 which spoke about the essential trust and the essential nature of having God be at work in our lives or whatever we might do would be in vain. Look back at Psalm 127 because Psalm 128 builds on this Psalm. We saw in Psalm 127 last week that it says in verse 1, "Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep." And what we saw last time was that Psalm 127 was teaching us that the hand of God is the key to success, that whatever we might seek to do in our own strength, whatever we might move out and try to accomplish, unless the Lord is with us, unless the Lord is blessing it, we do all of those things in vain. We cross referenced over to James 4 and saw a New Testament version of that. Unless God is at work in our labors, everything is vain and empty, and one of the takeaways that I hope that we had from that last time, is to have a sense that we need to be consciously dependent upon God. As we approach our days, as we approach our lives, approach our careers, approach our education, there is a sense in which we have a settled mindset of, "Lord, help me. Lord, bless me. Lord, give me strength." And that we're drawing upon the strength of God, confessing simultaneously our inability to do anything on our own, and that becomes the disposition with which we live life and Psalm 127 just puts the emphasis on the sovereignty of God in order to see success in the things that we approach in life.

Now with that, Psalm 128 comes along and puts aside that a parallel truth, not a contradictory truth, not even a truth that is in tension with that, but rather Psalm 128 draws out implications of that for us and does it by telling us this, that even as we are consciously dependent upon the Lord in whatever it is that we are attempting to do in the day or in life, that there are still spiritual responsibilities that are upon us in order to see that come to fruition, and basically the message of Psalm 128 is saying even in light of the sovereignty of God and our complete dependence upon him, there is a spiritual responsibility that we could put this way: we must fear God as we go through life, and we must obey him if we are to know the blessings that are promised. In other words, there is a corresponding responsibility on us even as we realize that we are completely dependent upon God to bless our labors, we have a responsibility to fear him, to know him, and to obey him if we're going to live in the realm of that blessing so that the sovereignty of God does not make us careless believers, it does not make us hard, cold and cynical, because, after all, God has to do it or nothing is going to take place. No, that's a totally wrong conclusion and that's a false caricature that is often hurled against Calvinists in the way that people try to criticize our teaching and to misrepresent us.

Scripture gives a wonderful balance here and before we get into a verse by verse look at Psalm 128, let me just take you back to Philippians 2 to a text that lays these things out for us in a New Testament perspective as well. Philippians 2 remembering that this is a text that is written to Christians, this is not telling us how to be justified, rather it's telling us our part in the process of sanctification and in Philippians 2, Paul had just made a magnificent exposition of the humility of Christ in the first eight verses and in verse 9 he moves onto the exaltation of Christ in Philippians 2:9. He says, "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that

at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." And going from that pinnacle of the culmination of the universe being captured in the singular exclusive glory of Jesus Christ, he draws an implication for it in terms of what it means for our lives today, very much a parallel to Psalm 127 and Psalm 128 when Paul says this, "So then, my beloved," don't you love the affection with which Scripture addresses us as believers and just realizing that this is an overflow of the benevolence of God toward us, that it would just come out that as Scripture speaks to us, as God speaks to us in his word, he's speaking to us in these terms of endearment, these terms of affection, these terms of loyal love with which he regards us? Verse 12, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling." You have a responsibility, Paul says, to pursue your sanctification in light of the glorious theme of the glory of Christ and that every knee will bow before him, the surpassing majesty of that has an impact on your heart that causes you to say, "These are such great realities, I need to live my life in light of them."

So you undertake to fulfill your responsibility and yet in verse 13 he says, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." God does his work in our sanctification and our sanctification is completely dependent upon the work of God in our hearts. At the same time, we are to devote 100% of our effort and of our heart toward pursuing that spiritual growth, to working out the implications of our salvation in a way that God is at work while we are doing that.

So this does not make us passive. The last thing that genuine salvation does is lead a man to say, "Well, let's just let go and let God," and then we just wait for God to do some kind of mystical work in our heart to motivate us to do something. No, it's not like that. God has explained in his word what we are to do, we are to pursue it with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind while simultaneously being mindful of the fact that we are reliant on God to bring any fruit from that, and as we pursue that and as our desires are shaped by the Holy Spirit, we can know that the Holy Spirit is at work in our heart and that gives us confidence of the ultimate outcome.

Well, going back to Psalm 128 now, we find that the psalmist sets forth the responsibility, is one that is at the cornerstone of our heart, the cornerstone of our approach to life. The cornerstone of our worldview is built around the fear of God and when we live life from that perspective, he makes a promise to us. You see it there in verse 1, "How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD." There is a promise of blessing on the one who lives in this way and then you go from that general promise in verse 1, "How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD," this is a comprehensive promise, then it becomes individual, it is made particular and the psalmist addresses us personally and individually with the second person singular pronoun when he says, "When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you." So you have this general promise that we can proclaim dogmatically, everyone who fears the Lord will be blessed, and then we appropriate it personally and individually and we walk in the sure confidence of what the outcome will ultimately be.

So there's this wonderful symmetry and there is this wonderful promise at work in the lives of everyone who truly belongs to Christ, everyone who truly believes in him is on the receiving end of this promise, and I think it's important for us to let that sink in, that to be a Christian, looking at it from a New Testament perspective, to be a Christian is to be in a realm of blessing, to be on the receiving end of the favor of God. As we've said multiple time from this pulpit, to the Christian we can say without qualification God is favorably disposed to you. God looks on you with favor because God sees you in Christ and God looks on his Son, looks on his righteous Son and looks on his shed blood, and then he looks on you and says, "I see you in Christ. I see you through Christ," as it were, and because Christ is God's beloved Son and we are in Christ, then we are on the receiving end of the love of God. That, beloved, means that the outcome can only be good for us. The sunshine of God is always shining on your soul even though it may seem from your perspective to be in shadows at times, God is always at work in our hearts to bless us. God is always leading us in order to bless us. We know what Romans 8:28 says, that God "causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." Well, that's just another way of saying that God is always working to bless us, and through the difficulties and the heartaches of life, through the joys and sorrows, the pain and the pleasure, through it all God has a magnificent plan that he established for each one of us before the foundation of the world and he is working it out with precision and with perfection to bless you in the end and that is the perspective through which we view all of our hardships, all of our difficulties, we view all of them from the perspective that God is using this to accomplish good in my life.

That is essential to a true trust in God is believing that he is always being good to me, he is always acting out of his love and benevolence toward me, and that whether he sends pain or whether he sends pleasure, he's working good in my life and I believe that and I'm confident in that and I trust that. That is the hallmark of a Christian's faith as he walks through life and these cheerful promises, then, refresh our hearts and give us a fresh and a renewed sense of confident devotion to pursue Christ, to walk with Christ, to be faithful to Christ knowing that there is this overriding sovereign purpose of God that is at work in our lives and that that sovereign purpose is always designed for our blessing. So as we've said many times, we put aside our suspicious thoughts toward God, "God, what are You doing? Why am I suffering like this? Why is life so difficult?" We put aside and we repent of our proclivities toward sin, our proclivities toward doubt and we say, "No, God, that is just an expression of the remnants of sin in my heart. How wrong it is of me, O God, to doubt You. How wrong is it of me, God, to pursue temptation as if it has something to offer me better than what obedience to You does."

So this goes to the very core of who we are and so we want to break this Psalm into two sections tonight, first of all, the promise of blessing in the first four verses, and then the prayer for blessing in verses 5 and 6 and that's what we're going to look at. And I just, you know, I just want to remind all of us, I want to remind myself even, that to be a Christian, to be a genuine born-again Christian is by far the noblest life that anyone could ever possibly live. To be on the object of God's electing choice before the foundation of

the world, to be the object of the saving intention of Christ when he shed his blood on the cross, to be the object of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to give us new life when we were dead in sin, for the Spirit to give us the gift of repentance and faith that we might not of our own works but through the gift of God enter into new life in Christ, these are themes that are far beyond, you know, that are infinitely beyond anything that we deserve. So for us to be included in, for us to be included in the eternal purpose of God, the eternal plan of God in a way that secures our certain blessing throughout all of eternity, that is to be in the most noble position that any man could possibly be.

Think about it from the opposite perspective, those who are not in Christ are on the receiving end of the wrath of God. They are the objects of his anger for their sin. They walk in darkness and darkness is what they will meet at the end of their life and then eternal judgment awaits them. And for us who are no more deserving than they of blessing, for us to be on the receiving end of blessing and eternal life and union with Christ and to belong to him, to have him as our good shepherd, oh beloved, don't you see it? We have been showered with blessings in a way that we will never be able to measure. Eternity itself will not be long enough for us to comprehend the height and depth, the breadth and width of the love of God which has been showered upon us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So we come to this Psalm refreshed in our memory of what Christ has done for us and purchased for us, we come with a sense of gratitude and with that sense of gratitude now we look at Psalm 128. So point number 1 here for this evening: the promise of blessing. The promise of blessing and let me just remind you that in Psalm 127:5 the Psalm ended with a promise of God's blessing, a declaration of God's blessing. Psalm 127:5 says this, look at it there with me. Solomon said, "How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate," speaking of the blessing of God that is on a man, here assuming a man who has many children to support him later in life. It ends on a theme of blessing. Well, now Psalm 128 in the way that we have received the arranged psalter, Psalm 128 picks up on that theme of blessing and begins to expand on it.

Look at Psalm 128:1 now where it says, "How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways." God as his pattern of dealing with his people over the course of time, over the course of life and certainly throughout eternity, God bestows practical divine favor on those who fear him. To state it theologically, God orders his providence so that his people are blessed by what he does over the course of time. We're on the receiving end of favorable divine providence and as a broad principle, as a general pattern of God's dealing with his people, he gives a happy life to his own. He gives a happy life to his own. And the key to Psalm 128, the key to understanding it is the way that the first four verses are bracketed, to use the technical term, the *inclusio* in the first section. It is framed by the theme of blessing so that in verse 1, look at it there, I know I've read it many times. Could you ever read God's word too much? The answer is no, you couldn't and so we'll read it again. Verse 1, "How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD." That's the opening theme of the Psalm. Now drop down to verse 4 and here's what I want you to see, "Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD."

Oh, do you see it? This is one of the beauties of Hebrew poetry is this kind of structure that guides us in our interpretation and understanding of what the primary theme of the passage is. This kind of structure says, the psalmist here is talking about the blessing that is on those who fear the Lord. That's what he's talking about and we interpret everything else in the Psalm based on that.

Now in that inclusio, there are two different words in the Hebrew that are used for blessing. In verse 1, the Hebrew word "eshet" commends the man who does certain things, and so it's a blessing and it commends the man who fears the Lord. It congratulates him. It shows the favorable position that he is in in life. In verse 4, there's a different word that is used, a close synonym with overlapping meaning but there is a distinction to it. "Barak" in verse 4 declares the blessing of God on him. And so in verse 1, this man is blessed who fears the Lord. In verse 4, God blesses the man who fears him.

And so we see this bracketing of blessing on it and so with that little bit of introduction here, with that little bit of introduction here we realize that this Psalm is talking to us about the privileged life that we have when our lives are marked by the fear of God. So when he says, "How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD," well, what does that word "fear" mean? Well, it means that we have a sober-minded respect for God. For the believer, we've defined it this way in the past: the fear of God is the wholehearted life of humble worship you render in response to his saving mercy to you. Let me say that again. This fear of God is comprehensive, in other words. There is never a moment in our lives where we are very far from this theme as believers in Christ. Salvation produces one who gratefully fears the Lord. The fear of God, as I said, to give you the definition again as you're taking notes, the fear of God is the wholehearted life of humble worship that you render in response to his saving mercy to you. It's something that encompasses every aspect of your inner man, and it is something that is operative in every moment of your life. It's wholehearted and it is a life, this is the way that we live life.

You see, God didn't save you so that religion would become one added on component of your existence here on earth while you independently pursue your own desires and your own goals and all of that separate and apart from a recognition of his sovereign rule over your life. No, when God saved you, Jesus became Lord. As some have said, if Jesus is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all. So we reject that kind of teaching that encourages people to just come to Christ as Savior and then tell them to postpone his Lordship to another time. You don't divide Christ up. You don't divide Christ up and parcel out his offices. He is Lord, he is Savior, and when a person comes to faith in Christ, he receives Christ for all that he is, not simply one aspect of what Christ does, not just one office. You receive him as prophet, priest and king. You receive Christ as the one who declares the word and the will of God to you. You receive him as prophet. You receive him as priest, as the one who mediates between sinful you and a holy God, and he is the priest that can connect you to God through his shed blood, through his righteousness. And he is king. He is Lord. He is the Sovereign over your life.

So to enter into Christ, for Christ to save you, he brings you into a union with him where he exercises all of his offices over you, prophet, priest and king, and as a result of that,

because you receive all of Christ, you could look at it this way, because you receive all of Christ, you respond with all of you. This is the essence of saving faith is that you give yourself over to Christ and you receive him for all that he is as he's presented to you in the gospel, as he is presented to you in Scripture, and you receive him without qualification, without distinction, you receive him for all that he is. Christ is indivisible that way. He is fully divine, fully human, all in one person, two natures in one person, and you receive him for the fullness of who he is. What Psalm 128 says is that the one who does that responds to him in this godly fear, this wholehearted life of humble worship so that worship is not an hour on Sunday and maybe an hour on Tuesday, it's what life is. Life itself is an act of worship toward God.

James Montgomery Boice puts it this way, "God must be taken seriously. He must not be trifled with. He must be the center of everything we are, think, or aspire to do. He must be our starting point for every project, the strength we seek for every endeavor, the One we earnestly desire to please and honor as our goal." That's the fear of God. He's our starting point. He's the reason we do what we do. He's the goal and the culmination of it all.

There is nothing in our lives that we can properly think about apart from who Christ is, what Christ has done for us, and the fact that we live our lives in fear of him. And one of the aspects of spiritual growth, one of the aspects of sanctification is, and these are just such wonderful things to talk about, I can't help but smile as I do. I mean, for us to just be together and contemplate these things is really a blessed privilege for us but this means that we view all of life through that filter. There's nothing that is apart from our love for Christ and our submission to him. Everything is determined by that and one of the aspects for new believers, one of the aspects for new believers is that you come into a growing awareness of the implications of this. You grow in your understanding and as you read Scripture, as the Spirit of God works in your life, you start to connect the dots and say, "Well, if that's true, then this must be true also." And the consequences are just unfolded to you as you go through life.

It's very exciting when this starts to click in your mind. I remember as a new believer, I journaled when I was a new believer, I don't do that anymore, but I had been a Christian for two or three months and, as you know, the Lord saved me when I was in law school, and I had gone to law school because I wanted a prestigious job, I wanted to be wealthy, and I wanted to lord it over people when I did. Very ungodly motivations that were in my life before I came to Christ. And I remember, I could pull it out of my file cabinet drawer and show you that one of the earliest things that I remember writing and I'm just going to paraphrase it for you, is that as I was growing in Christ and reading Scripture, I wrote down and I recognized that all of the motivations that had brought me to law school were over. My whole life had been radically redefined by what Christ had done in me, and I didn't know what I was going to do at the time but I knew that I could no longer live for the glory of self, I could no longer live in order to pursue those worldly attainments for my own selfish desires and honor, that all died, that all died when Christ saved me. And there was new life and my entire reason for living had been redefined by what Jesus Christ had done in saving me when he died on the cross; when the Spirit gave me new

life and the sunrise of that began to dawn in my mind, I started to realize my whole life has been redefined by something outside of me. And I didn't mind that at all, I embraced that, that's what I wanted, that's what I tried to pursue in the days that followed.

My point is that, you know, the dawning realization of that and the reality of who Christ is and what it means that he is Lord redefines everything about life for you so that you view everything in view of his Lordship. That's what it means to fear the Lord. That's an outworking of the fear of the Lord, this wholehearted life of humble worship. It's challenging. It's very wonderful. And do you know what? I think it's one of the ways that you could test your own heart to see if you're a Christian or not because to talk in terms like these to a genuine Christian, a real Christian hears that and says, "Yes! Of course! How could it be any other way? That's exactly what I want!" The desires of your heart correspond to the truth when it's presented to you.

The unbeliever, the false Christian hears things like that and resists it, doesn't like that. "No, I still want to pursue my own desires. I have my own career. I have my own goals that I need to pursue. I'm still my own man." And there's a resentment toward the Lordship of Christ that is exposed when we let Scripture talk to us this way. A true believer never resents the Lordship of Christ, he embraces and loves it. That's the *sine qua non* of his existence. That's why he lives is for Christ. The false Christian, the one who just wants appearances resents that and says with the Jews, "We will not have this man reign over us." And when the Lordship of Christ is laid before you, you're left to choose, you're left to decide, you're left to examine yourself, "Is this real in my heart? Do I love this? Do I love Him?" Or do you quietly resent it even while you're trying to keep up appearances before men? Very searching.

Well, for the one who belongs to Christ, this bracketing effect in Psalm 128 is, especially when you think about it in light of the things that we opened with about the blessings of being in Christ, you know, there's a hearty agreement, "Do you know what? I am in a blessed position here in life. Yeah, do you know what? I've got trials," you know, you say to yourself. "Life is hard but do you know what? There's something transcendent at work here, to know Christ is blessing beyond anything that this world could offer." So there's this response of wholehearted life obedience, life response, and just, you know, we're not talking about perfection, we're talking about a direction of heart where the deepest affections of your heart lie even though we stumble as we try to work it out, the deepest affections of our heart, that leads us into blessing, that leads us into an awareness that we are the privileged recipients of divine favor. God has shown favor to us and we are grateful for that and we're grateful in a way that tinges and softens our anger at what we might see going on at the world around us, we see the world through a different lens. One of the hymns that we sometimes sing, "Heave above is softer blue, earth around is sweeter green. Something lives in every hue, Christless eyes have never seen." And there's just this whole new perspective that comes so that even while we see and we find distasteful the evil that is in the world and we struggle with some of the things that our culture and our government do, we step back from it, we remember these things and those things suddenly have been put into place, we realize, "That's not what I'm living for. This world is not my home. I'm marching toward heavenly Zion, that is what matters



to me. I'm not of this world. I don't belong here. This is not my home." My citizenship is in heaven and that is a place of blessing regardless of the day-to-day difficulties that we might face.

Now this idea of practical obedience opened the entire psalter. The entire 150 Psalms opened on precisely this theme. Go back to Psalm 1. Psalm 1. It was well over seven years ago that I preached this Psalm and it's with a fond affection for it that we come back to remind ourselves of it today. This is the entry point to the entire psalter and so we see the themes of the Psalms being repeated as we go through them systematically like what we're doing. It's brilliant what God has done in giving us this book of the Bible so that Psalm 1:1 says, "How blessed," see, there it is, the theme again. "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers." The blessing of God on this man, prosperity, his life is not lived in vain. His life is not empty. Why? Because God is at work in his life to accomplish God's purpose in his life and in such a way to realize that the purpose of God is at such work in my life that the outcome will be blessing for me, that he will prosper what I do in one way or another. Not in the distorted twisted way that the Word of Faith people talk about and God wants everyone healthy and prosperous and all of that, but that my life has a purpose, my life has a meaning that has an eternal significance to it because God has saved me and God is at work in me to accomplish his purposes. If you're in Christ that's true of every one of you.

So there's this blessing of obedience, this fearing of God that looks at God from that perspective, positive view of it from that viewpoint. You can also look at it from a negative standpoint, what the fear of God causes us to turn away from. You're in the Psalms, go back just one book to the book of Job in Job 1. Remember, what we're doing here, the context if you can follow my train of thought, we're just developing what it means to fear the Lord, we're just seeing what Scripture says and how Scripture instructs us on this vital theme. We want to fear the Lord in part because we want to know his blessing. I'd rather know the blessing of God than the discipline of God, wouldn't you, Frances? You'd rather have that, right, given a choice? This is what Frances gets for sitting on the front row every time. Job 1:1 speaking about Job says he was a man who was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. Turning away from evil. Turning away from sin.

Proverbs 8:13, you don't need to turn there, I'll just read it quickly as time is getting away from us. Proverbs 8:13 says this, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate." The fear of God leads a man to turn away from sin, to reject it in his heart, and to pursue a life where he's consciously pursuing obedience and rejecting rebellion and sin.

Now again, we understand, we stumble, we all stumble in many ways but the principle, the guiding defining principle of the believing heart implanted by the Holy Spirit is one

that loves righteousness and hates sin. In the language of the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed is the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness." This is what true repentance produces is a heart that desires righteousness and desires to turn away from sin. For the true Christian, if we could be perfect in this life, the true Christian would gladly choose to be that way. So there's this sense of fearing God and the negative aspect of that is turning away from sin. True faith, true salvation results in true obedience, a lifestyle of true obedience.

Now go over to James 1. I'll stick with the script here. James 1 in verse 22 this fear of God. James 1:22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."

So we see this promise of blessing just woven throughout Scripture and this obedience of which we're talking about, this is not a proud self-righteous obedience, this is not one that boasts in how good we are. We understand, the Christian understands that if we did everything that God required, and we don't, but if we did do everything, we would still be unworthy servants only doing what we were required to do. So this is not that kind of self-righteous boasting that makes one arrogant and insufferably self-righteous, rather this is a description of true faith working itself out in love. The whole point of this Psalm is that God blesses the man who fears him like that. He favors him in life.

Go back to Psalm 128 so that in verse 2 he says, "When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you." And the Psalm as I pointed out earlier, it becomes a personal promise. This assumes a man who is not passively lazily relying on the sovereignty of God to provide for him, this Psalm assumes that the man will work to support himself and that the fruit of his hands, in other words, his labor will produce that which sustains him in life and he'll find satisfaction in eating the fruit of his labors, of enjoying the fruit of his work, and this is embedded in both the Old and New Testaments. We won't take time to look at the passages that we could look at. The point is this, is that God promises well-being to the man who fears him and labors in light of that fear, and what he says is you'll find life to be pleasing. There is joy even in your adversity because you understand that God uses even adversity to advance his purposes in your life.

So everything, it's like the spokes of a bicycle wheel, everything is connected back to this hub and everything revolves around that hub of the fear of the Lord and the confidence of the blessing that he brings. Then he goes on, finally we get to that which talks about the family which we've been addressing on Sundays and Tuesdays for a few weeks now. He goes and talks about how the blessing extends even in the family life. He says in verse 3, "Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine Within your house, Your children like olive plants Around your table." Now look and we're probably going to have...I'm glad that we've got an opportunity to emphasize family life in this section of our church life together

because, you know, the breakdown of the family in our society is so well documented that there's nothing left to say about it. What you and I need to do rather than focusing on that and the negative discouraging aspects of that, is to come back to Scripture and see what Scripture says about the family and what Scripture says about women in the home. Scripture ascribes honor to the childbearing wife. She is a blessing to her husband. She is a blessing to her family and if this is the way that God views the homemaking wife, then far from being something that should be run out of extinction in society, this is something that we in the church should recognize and honor and support and encourage and affirm, that this is a noble life for a woman to live and that this is part of the blessing of God on a family to have a wife like that within the house.

Titus 2 talks about, we just need to look at this for just a moment just to see the importance that Scripture places on this. Titus 2:3-5 says that, "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good." What are the older women in the church to do? They are to "encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored." The ministry of older women in the church, the primary responsibility assigned to them is to be alongside the younger women and to encourage them in their home life.

Now we realize, you know, that God has not brought marriage to every young woman or to every young man that desires it right now, and the Lord's grace is sufficient in these things and we don't know what the future is going to hold, but the fact that some do not have that blessing yet in their lives should not cause us to back away from declaring what the blessing of God and what the purpose of God and what the order of God is for his people. God calls women to be, when they are married to be at home working, loving their husbands, loving their children, and I'm so thankful that there's so many women like that doing that now in our church, those that have crowned their lives with that and your children have moved on and you've given your life to that. Well, you've fulfilled well the purpose of God in that season of your life and you should be encouraged by what you gave your life to even if it's something that the world does not honor and does not esteem. God esteems it highly and we do here at Truth Community Church as well.

Now he goes on and talks about children in verse 3. He says, "Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine Within your house," your wife produces the fruit of a godly life and you enjoy the blessing of that. He goes on and he makes this statement that sounds strange to our Western ears, "Your children like olive plants Around your table." Well, the olive tree was something that was highly valuable in the biblical world. They ate the fruit. They used olive oil for commercial purposes. A fruitful olive tree was a very valuable asset that generated its blessing and its productivity over a long period of time. And the interesting thing about olive trees is that they're a tree that they develop slowly over the years. They don't grow quickly and yield their fruit quickly. It takes patient work and cultivation to make them fruitful but when they start to generate their fruit, then it's abundant and there is long-term sustenance in a fruitful olive tree. Well, this metaphor speaks to the fruit of patiently raising children. In time, over a course of many years, in

time the design of God is that those children would become a multiplied fruit of the godly man, that they would extend his legacy, that they would extend his influence through what they do, and for the faith-based family, this long-term result of godly children shows the real blessing of God on their lives. Look at verse 4 with me. He says, "Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD."

So what's this blessing of God? Your labor is blessed, your family is blessed, such a good outcome invites us to walk in his ways, and it seems as though this Psalm is addressed to a younger man in the early stages of his life, starting out and receiving the promise of God to pursue what is before him in the fear of the Lord. Now let me just say a quick word here because, you know, we realize that not every child in every family turns out the way that we would want them to. We realize that some adult children bring much heartache and sorrow to the parents who loved them and nursed them and raised them and sought to do so with everything that they knew best, sought to do so in the fear of the Lord. How does that experience square with a Psalm like this? That's a pretty important question to know because, you know, for a parent who's shed tears over a wayward adult child, you know, you feel like you're on the outside looking in and you wonder, "Well, what's wrong with me? Why didn't it work out this way for me in my life?" And it's just very important to understand and to have a sense of perspective on that. This Psalm does not deny that there will be suffering and disappointments in life, other Psalms makes that point very clearly, Psalm 73 for example. Psalm 128 is talking about a general principle in the way that God acts. It's not an absolute promise with absolutely no exceptions whatsoever, that's not the point of this Psalm. It's laying down the principle that God deals favorably with his people and one of the ways that the favor shows itself is in the way that family life goes. But there are times of disappointment but that's not the point of this Psalm to talk about the apparent exceptions to the rule, this Psalm is just stating the general principle and inviting people to fear the Lord and to trust the Lord for the outcome no matter what may be the way that God works in our families.

So, look, let me state it this way. We know, some of us know by sad personal experience the fact that this isn't an absolute statement with absolutely no exceptions, right? We already understand that by experience and by other Scriptures that we could look at. What Psalm 128 is doing, Psalm 128 is balancing that practical knowledge, that practical experience in order to balance our perspective and to bring us back to this very fundamental point that cannot be denied in light of everything that we talked about earlier in the message. What is that? This Psalm is teaching us that the Lord is good to us, and the Lord does give good gifts, and even in our sorrows, we have other aspects of life where the Lord has been good to us and so Psalm 128 is laying down that principle for our encouragement that we would remember and that we would be fueled by the confidence that it is a worthwhile life to pursue the fear of the Lord whatever personal difficulties that we may experience as we go through it. So you know, look, it's a six verse Psalm. In six verses it's not meant to address every contingency, it's setting forth a principle for our encouragement and blessing.

Now at the end of those four verses then, we've seen this blessing and now that statement of the Lord's blessing upon the one who fears him leads the psalmist now to prayer and

that brings us to point 2: the prayer for blessing. And the balance between point 1 and point 2 is going to be all out of proportion here but Psalm 128 concludes with a prayer. Having declared the blessing in the first four verses, he now prays for it to be realized in verses 5 and 6. Look at it there with me. He says, "The LORD bless you from Zion, And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Indeed, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!" And the beauty of this Psalm and the genuine love for the reader that is expressed in this Psalm is just so endearing and so striking. He's said everyone who fears the Lord will be blessed. You will be blessed. And he sets forth this principle and then almost in a pastoral sense, he looks at his reader, as it were, and he says, "I want you to know this blessing. My prayer is that the Lord would work in your life so that you would know this blessing yourself." He's praying for a realization of the blessing upon the reader.

Now Zion here is another name, it's a poetic name for Jerusalem, and this was a place where God manifested his presence to his people, and so he's saying, "God, having manifested His presence in this city, I pray that from the very center of His manifest presence that you yourself would know the blessing that comes from fearing the Lord." So much so, he goes on and he says, "may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. I pray that the Lord would bless you, that the Lord would bless your family, that the Lord would bless your city." And there's just this expansive heart of prayer being expressed by the psalmist for those who were reading.

It's not only horizontal and geographic, there's a telescopic view toward it as he looks to future generations and says, "Indeed, my prayer is that you would see your children's children." To see one's grandchildren is a blessing. In addition to the affection that the grandchildren bring, beloved, and this is more the focus here in Psalm 128, grandchildren are a symbol to the godly man and a godly family, they are a symbol, they are a promise of future blessing to come, that the blessing that God has given in your life because he is unchanging is a blessing that he will perpetuate into future generations as well so that as Christians we do not have to be tortured by the thought of what's going to happen to my grandchildren in the world, what's the world going to be like when they live, you know, when they're adults, what's it going to be like? Well, that's an interesting speculative question but it's not that which should define our purpose with our view and our aspirations for them with fear and with trembling. As Christians? No. No, no, no, no. We do not think like that. We think about it from this perspective: no matter what happens in the future after I'm gone, no matter what the world is like after I'm gone, my grandchildren are going to be living under the sovereign rule of the same God who blessed me, who saved me, who showed goodness to me, and whose power in the future is going to be utterly undiminished in their adult lives just as it was in mine.

So there is this confidence in the blessing of God looking to future generations even after we're gone and so Scripture says that grandchildren are the crown of old men and this Psalm leaves us with a promise that God's blessing is so certain upon the godly man, upon the godly woman, that their influence is going to continue and extend even beyond the generation, even beyond your own generation. That's magnificent to contemplate in these frail bodies, these mortal lives that we live, this whisper of a vapor that we are, to

realize that God will so work in the lives of those who fear him as to secure influence and blessing after we're gone. We could look at Psalm 90 and see that it speaks in a similar way but we don't have time to do it. But beloved, what we see from this Psalm, we see the blessing of God, we see a prayer for the blessing of God, we see it extending beyond our own lives into realms of family and city and future influence, and what can we say to all of that except this: blessed is everyone who fears the Lord.

Let's pray together.

*Gracious God, as I look out on these dear people and think about this dear congregation, I simply ask as the psalmist did, that You would bless them from the place of Your presence. Now from the very throne room of God, Father, would You bless them in the ways in which we have spoken here this evening? Bless them in their families, young parents raising young children, adult parents, empty nest now looking out, the work basically done and trusting You for the outcome, young adults, unmarried, wishing to be married, feeling the sting of loneliness and, Father, may You bless them as well. May Your hand be greatly upon them to encourage them not to lose heart but to trust in You and to draw near to You in those times of loneliness, those times of uncertainty, to draw near to You that You would bless them in their circle of life, Father, and help them to find blessings in Christ that are easier found in the single life for a time than they are in times of marriage. But Father, at the end of the day, we just thank You for Your unending, immeasurable goodness toward Your people and we pray for those, Father, who are still walking in darkness, dead in sin, who don't even care one whit about the blessing of God. Father, we ask You by the gracious work of Your Holy Spirit to open their eyes, to convict them of sin, to lead them to Christ, to impart new life to them that they might join in this blessing of which we find ourselves so wonderfully immersed in. So Father, we commit ourselves to You. We thank You for Your goodness. We praise You for Your greatness. And Father, we depend upon Your grace. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

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