

The Building of God's People and a Society that Honors Him

Please take God's Holy Word and turn to Psalm 127. In 2 weeks we will have a special service to *dedicate* this building to Christ's kingdom use, but today we *inaugurate* this building with our first worship service, and Psalm 127 is the text I've chosen for today's inauguration. When Dwight D. Eisenhower 60 years ago this past week had his 1st inauguration as president of the United States, as he took his Oath of Office, the president chose the text of Psalm 127:1, and read it from the West Point Bible. The whole chapter of Psalm 127 is fitting on this occasion of inauguration of a building, 1st Sunday service. It's also timely as a church and as families and as a nation – this is an urgent timeless message to hear and to heed.

The heading of Psalm 127, which is part of the ancient Hebrew text, says this song was written by Solomon as one of the Songs of Ascent, probably one of the psalms Jews in Bible times would sing or recite as they approached the house of God. This is God's Word:

Ps. 127:1 *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.* ² *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.* ³ *Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.* ⁴ *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth.* ⁵ *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.*

OUTLINE: 1. Building a House or Society (v. 1-2)

2. Building a Family Within It (v. 2-5)

The historical context and background of this psalm by Solomon may be the time when the house of God was first built, which v. 1 mentions. The Hebrew words for "house" and "build" in v. 1 are in other places used of the temple built and dedicated under Solomon as the house of the Lord. In NT language, "the house of God" is the church where we assemble together as Christians (see Heb. 10:21-25, 1 Tim. 3:15). The originally context of this psalm may have been the house of the LORD in Israel where God's people gathered to worship, but there can be application to us as a church this day.

[the church is God's new house and society in Ephesians 2]

There have been many laborers working on building this house of the Lord we worship in today, and their labors were not in vain. It has been evident to many involved in this building project that the Lord has been building, not just man (more on that in two weeks).

We have seen the Lord's hand and blessing upon us so clearly, not just in physical things, but in spiritual things, and we'll also share more on that in our dedication service in a couple weeks. But v. 1 acknowledges that we need to continually acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty and sustaining blessing we need because unless God continues to guide and guard this place with His blessing, we'll be working and watching in vain, no matter how great his building is.

Men can work in construction to build a structure, which can be a wonderful setting for a church to gather in a house of worship, but Christ is the ultimate "*master builder*" in 1 Corinthians 3:10 and in v. 9 of that chapter, Paul says "*we are ... God's building.*" Jesus is the One who ultimately spiritually says "*I will build My church*" in Matthew 16:18. Earlier in Matthew's gospel He warned against trying to build a house on any other foundation than Christ, as all other ground is sinking sand (Matt 7:26-27). We need to build on the rock by hearing Christ's Words and applying them (7:24-25). Otherwise in the words of Psalm 127:1, our labor will be in vain, and rain, wind, and storm will bring us down like a house of cards.

[*gospel appeal to sinners*]

It's possible to have a beautiful building that God's glory is not in, as the second temple of the Jews was in the days of Jesus, but our prayer is that God's glory and presence would be here in a special way, so that we do not labor in vain. Hebrews 3:4 says "*every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.*" We praise God that He has been the Builder (capital "B") of this house, through human builders, and we pray Christ will continue to build here spiritually His church that even the gates of Hades can't stop.

Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build ...

The principle of v. 1 may not be limited to a house of worship, but could include any house or building that laborers might build; v. 1 also mentions a "watchman" (like on a wall) and mentions a "city," so the principle of v. 1 could apply to a city, society, or even nation

Since 1647, the city of Edinburgh, Scotland, has had this verse on its motto and seal, with the Latin phrase from v. 1 "*Nisi Dominus Frusta,*" which means "except the Lord, in vain [or 'frustration']."¹ Those words are a banner over the top of an anchor on the official seal of the arms of the city of Edinburgh, which is part of the crest and official documents of that city, part of its heritage and history. Sadly Scotland has largely turned away from God, fulfilling v. 1.

In the building of various cities and states in our own nation, this verse has been part of their founding. Some of America's founding fathers and those who established its governments and cities saw Psalm 127 as one of the key texts in their writings and journals for the key as to whether their new society would stand or fall. I read awhile back that a number of the States and cities in their original constitutions or documents cited or quoted the text of Psalm 127:1.

Even Benjamin Franklin, whose views of Scripture were not what we would classify as evangelical Christian, he acknowledged and quoted what many who like to quote him today refuse to, Ps 127:1. Benjamin Franklin at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, when they were deadlocked and at an impasse, he urged the government to stop and pray for God's help, which became a tradition centuries after to begin sessions with prayer. Franklin said in a speech these words urging prayer toward creating a United States constitution:

"I have lived a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proof I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it possible that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that '*Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.*' I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall proceed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."²

I'm not assuming Franklin or all the men there were born-again or evangelical, but Franklin spoke better than what most evangelicals today often say, and certainly better than the secularists who love Franklin but hate anyone who talks like Franklin actually did there. Franklin didn't have some things right about Scripture, but even he knew Ps 127 and the vanity of a godless building project like Babel

Listen to that story in Genesis 11: ⁴ *They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name ..."* [notice no reference to the Lord in their labors, it's secular kingdom building] ⁵ *The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.* ⁶ *The LORD said ...* ⁷ *"Come, let Us [speaking to God the Son and Spirit] go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech."* ⁸ *So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.* ⁹ *Therefore its name was called Babel ...*

"Babel," meant "confusion," and it became the symbol of man's confused frustration in trying to build the city of man without the help of God. Franklin insightfully connected that with Psalm 127:1 " *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.*" The city of Babel was in vain because the Lord was not in it, and so its building did not last, despite its watchmen and workers.

Man's kingdom building will never reach heaven or make a great name for himself. Man needs to acknowledge Psalm 127:1 and pray: *Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your Name. Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

The kingdom of heaven needs to come to earth, and King Jesus is the Lord we must look to, if a church, kingdom, city or society will last with God's blessing. Otherwise the efforts of the founders and builders and leaders will prove in vain, and the armed forces who guard our cities and have fought for our liberties will be in vain to stop the onslaught of the enemy and demise of society and family.

I mentioned earlier that one of the past presidents of this nation had Ps 127:1 as part of his swearing in, acknowledging his need of the help of the Lord in the White House, so he would not labor in vain. As recently as 1995 in West Virginia, this verse was cited by their State governor in a proclamation signed by him with these words: "

WHEREAS, Psalm 127:1 warns, Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain; and

WHEREAS, Thanksgiving week is an appropriate time to center attention on thanks to Almighty God for His great and good Providence and for the Christian faith, which is a foundation of American history;

NOW, THEREFORE, Be it Resolved that I, Gaston Caperton, Governor of the State of West Virginia, do hereby proclaim November 19, 1995, through November 25, 1995, as: "CHRISTIAN HERITAGE WEEK"

... By the Governor [and] Ken Hechler, Secretary of State. Similar proclamations in 1993, 1994, and 1995 were made by the state governors and secretaries of state in Virginia, Delaware, Wisconsin, Tennessee, and Alabama, for Christian Heritage week.³ What's interesting in Ps 127:3 is "heritage" is used for children. *That takes us from point #1, building a city to #2: building a family*

Most of us can't build a city, but we can build families within one. My Bible describes children as a "gift" in v. 3, but a footnote says "or heritage." "Heritage" is usually something from the past that parents or prior generations give to children of future generations, but this verse says children themselves are "a heritage of the Lord." Usually that word is translated "inheritance" in the Bible, and is the idea of rich blessings or possessions that parents have and give to their children, but v. 3 says *children are an inheritance of the Lord*

Parents who may not have much of earthly possessions, in biblical perspective, they are to count their children as their richest blessing from God. A father said 'I'm not rich in much, but I am in children.' The rest of v. 3-5 talk about children; this psalm is about the family

We haven't talked about v. 2 yet but I bring v. 3 up here to say that we don't want to limit v. 1 to just *physical* buildings, whether city or state (included in v. 1), or spiritually a house of God (implied in v. 1, an important part of Solomon's life). The principle of v. 1 is for all of life, but in the context of the rest of the psalm, especially this principle is applied within family. The family theme continues into Psalm 128, v. 3: *Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine Within your **house**, Your children like olive plants Around your table.*

It's a beautiful image of spiritual growth as your family sits around the table and a godly father leads his family in worship. In NT terms, the "fruitful vine" idea is one who abides in the Vine as Jesus described Himself, and bears much fruit "*within your house*," Ps 128:3 says. Gal. 5:22: "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*"
[this is the fruit a godly parent longs to see growing in a home]

The words of Jesus in John 15 I think also tie in with Psalm 127:1: Jn 15:4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me."⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for **apart from Me you can do nothing** [so much for free will or fleshly effort on our own] ..."¹⁶ "**You did not choose Me** but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain ...

There's the sovereignty of the Lord, not only in choosing us, but in using us, using His chosen ones who abide in Him, in communion with and reliance upon Christ. 'Apart from me you can do nothing' = 'nothing of spiritual value, no spiritual fruit that remains or lasts.'

Psalm 127:1 seems to be an OT equivalent to that same teaching: *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.* ² *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.* [other translations make sleep itself what God gives. Both are true, rest is a gift for those who rest in the Lord, and it's also true that God can give and bless us even while we're fast asleep]

Jesus said in Mark 4: *'The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself'* (v. 26-29). Kingdom work isn't "let go and let God," it's working hard while trusting God. God never slumbers and never sleeps and is working while we sleep, and says to us *"Be still and know that I am God."* God is God and we are not. One of the ways we can acknowledge that at night is to cast our anxieties on Him who cares for us (1 Peter 5:7), to roll them off of us and onto the Lord we trust (Ps 37:5 NKJV footnote).

[note: "beloved" in v. 2 was a Hebrew name of Solomon]

Ps 127:2 is saying essentially "don't burn the candles at both ends and be a workaholic." Jesus said, *"what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"* (Mk 8:36 NKJV). There's an implied word to fathers here as well, bread-winners who labor painfully, sometimes staying up late and rising early: Do not work so hard to gain economically that you neglect your family. It is no profit to buy toys and the American dream and lose your kids. Nothing wrong with rising early to spend time with God, in fact in other psalms, there is mention of that, but the context here is rising early to work, work, work, rather than pray in dependence on God.

In v. 1-2 Solomon uses the word 'vain' 3x and it's hard not to think of another time he used that root word 3x: *"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils ..."* (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 NKJV). Apart from God, all is vain, vanity, futile, emptiness, meaningless, profit-less, worthless. Solomon, the same author, is saying much the same thing in Psalm 127:1-2 for any labor or toil or effort of man who is not acknowledging the Lord, not asking the Lord for help in it, or not abiding in the Lord.

This was convicting to me when I first studied this in seminary and it hit me even as I was laboring to write an exegetical paper on this psalm, my prayerlessness may make it all emptiness or profit-less.

It's a challenge in the busy-ness of ministry to make sure I'm not doing the work of God in the strength of man, or it will be futile, in vain. Even as I pour 20+ hours into a sermon, it won't produce the lasting fruit that remains, if the Lord is not building the sermon. It is not just secular or worldly pursuits in v. 1-2, any labor or toil.

This principle can apply in many ways, the focus here is the family
[men, come Saturday men's breakfast for more on prayer]

I'm convicted of my need to pray more for my family and wife as I work with her to build a house, so I don't watch and guard in vain. To "build a house" in OT language was not limited to construction teams or men working. Proverbs 14:1 says "*the wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands.*" That is not saying a woman is literally a mason or brick-worker building her house instead of her husband, or breaking down her house with her bare hands - it's talking about the power a woman can have to make *a home* and the power she has to destroy a home (Prov 14:1).

As a wife and her husband work hard to build a house, a home that honors God, we must, and you must, keep God central in the home. Instead of stressing about your children ask God's blessing on them

Verse 2 in the ESV says: "*It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil*" (some of the others say something like sorrow/painful toil). The ESV gives the idea of being deeply anxious, laboring stressfully – what drives you to get up early or stay up late is stress, anxiety, or fear of something. To "eat the bread of" may be the concept of being consumed by, daily, being anxious about literal bread or food, finances, life. Jesus said
'do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or drink ... which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his life...? [the reality is medically, anxiety can even shorten a life]... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself...' (Matt. 6:25, 27, 33-34)

If we trust in the Lord, God gives us rest, sleep, or gives in sleep. If the end of v. 2 is emphasizing sleep of as a gift from God for one who works and trusts God, it sounds like the same author Solomon in Ecclesiastes 5:12 (NKJV) '*The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.*' The rich man stays up anxiously worried about his abundance, but God gives sweet sleep to those who work hard, seek first God's kingdom, and aren't anxious about tomorrow.

There are many things we can be anxious about, but the Scripture says "*do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God that transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:6-7). God is the One who guards in Ps 127:1, and gives to us peace and sleep as we learn to roll over our anxieties to Him in prayer, giving thanks.

Some don't worry about possessions, they worry about uncertainty or the unknown. Others worry about what people think about them. John Piper writes we can either be 'worrying about what men will think of us—and so eat the bread of anxious toil. Or we can [live] with serenity in our hearts, as serving Christ and not men - and so eat the bread of peace ... Don't rise early and go late to rest out of anxiety, out of fear and fretfulness. [He cautions if you work long hours at times] ... take heed lest you are really deceiving yourself, and in fact are being driven by anxiety, or by her twin sister, selfish-ambition. Christians will work hard, but they will work more for the joy of all the good their work can bring to others than they will out of fear at what men will think if they fail. So,

Be diligent as God may lead And eat the bread you earn,
But fret not over what you need And let not worry burn.⁴

There is no rest for the wicked, but there is in trusting the Lord who says "Come unto me" in Matthew 11 "and you will find rest for your souls." 17 centuries ago Augustine said in his *Confessions* 'O Lord ... our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.'

For those who rest in the Lord in faith, God gives the gift of sleep. The other translation of v. 2 would be that He gives to His beloved "*in their sleep*" – in other words, even while they are sleeping God is graciously taking care of them and providing all they need. If this is what Solomon had in mind, he may be thinking back to the time when God asked what he wanted, Solomon said wisdom, then God gave to him riches and many gifts while he was asleep. And the greatest gift to a married couple who sleep together is in v. 3: *children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.*

As the married couple sleeps, the Lord is forming the fruit of the womb as a reward, as a gift to those He loves. Not something they earn, but a gracious reward, His greatest gift besides God's Son (who is called "the Beloved" in Ephesians 1:6), the 2nd greatest gift to beloved children of God is giving them sons or daughters.

There's no greater joy than to see children live in truth (3 John 3). In Jewish tradition, Psalm 127 is recited as part of a thanksgiving service after childbirth. Their Jewish heritage helped them to see that children *are a heritage*. Inheritance was huge in the OT, as the gift from God, which He owned as His possession and it was God's prerogative to decide what was allotted to His people. Verse 3 says children are an inheritance from the Lord. They belong to God, He owns every person and decides who goes to whom as a gift of God.

Instead of the usual idea, children inheriting land, riches, blessings from their parents, this verse says children *are riches and blessings to their parents*. In biblical worldview, kids are not interruptions to the lives of more important adults, they are God's inheritance to us, and are no less important to God. Children are not to be viewed as a hassle, but as a heritage from the Lord. Kids don't get in the way, they're a *gift* of God. They are not a burden, but a blessing of God.

Verse 3 says children are a gift or heritage or inheritance from God and it says *"the fruit of the womb is a reward."* That same phrase is used in Luke 1:42, where we read Elizabeth *"cried out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!'⁴³ And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? ⁴⁴ ...when the sound of your greeting...reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy."*

I want to talk about that passage in the message tonight more, because it makes clear "the fruit of the womb" is when children are conceived, even days after conception; embryos are persons at that point while they are unborn. They're not a piece of 'tissue' or just a part of a woman's body, they are a precious blessing of life whom God chooses to give at conception, that moms aren't to turn against (what the world calls a "fetus," Luke 1 calls a "fruit of the womb")

It's not the 'right' of a woman to terminate or not, a child conceived is a reward to a woman from God. Even when a child is conceived into situations where the young mom may not be able to raise that child, God can give that gift to another mom who longs to adopt. The one giving the inheritance is the one who has the right to choose who to give the inheritance to, and in v. 3 of this psalm it's God who gives this inheritance of children as He Himself chooses

Have you noticed the liberal's vocabulary has shifted from "pro-choice" to "rights" to more recently, "reproductive healthcare"?

In the *Orlando Sentinel* after Mr. Obama was re-elected, an area abortion clinic director praised the Democratic Platform for being defenders of 'women's health,' as if pregnancy is a kind of disease.⁵

Nothing could be further from the scriptural view of pregnancy as a divine blessing not a disease. The unborn fruit of the womb is an inheritance to a parent, not to be viewed as an inconvenience to a parent. Parents aren't to choose whether they want to terminate a pregnancy, they're to cherish and treasure this child in the womb, and take responsibility for this gift, and others can if they can't.

This past week marked the 40th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, and I want to look tonight further at the horror of abortion and our hope for its abolition, even as slavery was abolished in a nation equally divided on that issue in the 19th century. I was born 2 years after abortion on demand was legalized in our country, and a third of my generation is dead as a result of what Supreme Court judges made law then, but I want us to consider tonight what the higher Judge of the universe say in His Law. There's also some encouraging signs I see in my own generation that the tide may be turning, in changing *convictions*, increasing state-level *restrictions*, and if we don't give up but keep praying and proclaiming what the Scripture says, I'm hopeful we'll see the *abolition* of murdering the fruit of the womb.

TIME Magazine cover story earlier this month: "40 Years Ago, Abortion-Rights Activists Won an Epic Victory ... They've Been Losing Every Since." If you care about this issue, please y'all come back tonight. If you care about what Ps 127:3 says, come back. If you want some encouragement in our world that politically often seems discouraging and all bad news, you need to hear good news. Tonight will be our first ever evening service in this new building, be excited, be encouraged for life and truth and complete this study

But it's not just a "pro-choice" culture we have to fight against, we need to get back to this biblical worldview in churches, families. It is not enough to *call ourselves* pro-life or even *vote* pro-life, we are to be *pro-children*, celebrating them, cultivating this culture of life. Psalm 127 is foundational to build a house, church, society, nation upon. Our nation is weak, our society is crumbling, because many families, even many Christians, think and live contrary to Ps 127:

- People don't see having many children as a blessing (v. 3)
- Parents don't see children as a responsibility to aim (v. 4)
- Children don't care for their parents or defend their faith (v. 5)

1st, people don't see having many children as a blessing (v.3)

I heard recently that in San Francisco, not too far from here, people have more dogs than children. China has a "1 child policy" but in America, an *unofficial* 1.8 child policy is average actual practice.⁶

In 1860 American mothers bore an average of 5.2 children. And in 1964, the average woman still bore 3.5 children (even as feminism was on the rise), and in the 70s radical feminism succeeded in the historic and horrific legalization of abortion on demand, reframing the whole concept of children as a "choice." Then the next decade, by 1988, the average number of children a mother would carry to birth was 1.93 (I presume it's still somewhere in the 1.something range, because the immigrants to America have kept the rate from plunging as low as other western countries that range 1.1-1.5). It is a radical shift from the biblical worldview of Psalm 127 that isn't just manifested in abortion, but in even believer's *attitudes to kids*.

From the beginning God blessed Adam and Noah and Israel and His people with fruitfulness, and multiplying children, and here in verse 5 it says "*blessed is a man whose quiver is full of them.*" The world today thinks the opposite: burdened is the dad or mom who has his hands full of children. Follow a mother with multiple little kids into a store or into some churches and listen to how many say "ohhh, you've got your hands full!" (my wife with our five counted over ten comments on one WalMart trip). I read one mom say she replies back, "if you think my hands are full, you should see my heart, how full it is with love for them." I actually had 2 different Christians tell me they thought I shouldn't adopt, as we had 4 kids.

[I can't imagine the blessing I'd miss if we didn't adopt #5]

One pastor explains his experience: 'people-watchers can enjoy the reaction when a couple announces, "We are pregnant again." If they herald a second child, faces beam approval and arms extend affection. The display shows that we no longer take the multiple-child family for granted. A second child is an event. It creates another ideal family: mother, father and two children. But the body language changes for subsequent pregnancies. In my circles, body language suggests that three children are a sign of faith; four, a sign of bravura; five, extravagance; and six, lunacy.'⁷

Another pastor said the common Christian attitude in his circles is "a boy for me and a girl for you and praise the Lord with kids we're through." But he says there's an unwritten rule where you can have a 3rd child if the first 2 were the same gender (ex: go for a boy).⁸

1st problem: People don't see many children as a blessing (v. 3)

2nd: Parents don't see children as a responsibility to aim (v. 4)

⁴ *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth.* ⁵ *How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them ...*

One of the reasons Muslims and Mormons are growing at greater rates than us is they actually take the Bible more seriously than us Christians here, believing children are a gift, arrows to be shot out. So while much of Europe's birthrate is far below the replacement rate of 2.1 (required to continue a society, and only a tiny fraction of their few children are being taught or sent out with any biblical faith), Muslim immigrants, however, in Europe are having 5, 6, 7 children per family, and they take very serious their responsibility to train their children in their faith and aim them as arrows sent out

But let's bring it closer to home with Christian families in America. The statistics of the latest generation in their 20s and 30s is some 75-88% of them are leaving the Christianity they were raised with when they leave the home. Let's take the lower number 75% just as an example, and let's take the Southern Baptists, largest American denomination, as a representative case study of U.S. evangelicals.

The average SBC family has 1.9 kids (this data is a few years old, but we'll go with it for the sake of this example). As 3 out of 4 kids do not continue in churches by their freshman year of college, that means out of every 2 families, only 1 or less total kids remain in the faith when they leave home. So for every 4 adults now in the faith, only 1 of the next generation is continuing in the faith. So a simple calculation is that as this generation grows up in the SBC, the largest denomination at 16 million, it will go down to 4 million and then the next generation into the hundreds of thousands, even accounting for conversion growth, which is not great in the West. Other faiths are out-populating Christians, passing on faith better.

I can't change the whole world but we do need to change where our thinking is conformed to this world and be transformed (Rom. 12). We need to recover Ps 127: children as blessing *and responsibility*. Not every parent needs to be Jim-Bob and Michelle Duggard of '19 and Counting'; v. 5 doesn't say how many make a full quiver and I think different parents different sized quivers (not 1 size fits all). What I want us to see is v. 4 isn't whipping out babies, it's about a warfare mentality of mom and dad raising up youth to be arrows shot out into the future to make a mark on the world for the Lord.

Too many children are sent out aimless in life by parents that seem oblivious to the spiritual warfare out there, and kids go down. If I understand this rightly, as I see the warfare raging in our world, I'm not to think "oh, I wouldn't want to bring kids into a world like this," no, I should think, "in a world like this, I better raise up kids who are well trained and aimed to be shot into enemy territory. I better get serious about forming children to advance the kingdom, preparing with everything I have in my arsenal to make their mark"

If I understand this right, the goal of parenting is not to keep kids in the safety of the quiver, to keep them completely insulated from the world until they leave my home and care. I need to take them out for practice first, taking them in hand, control their flight, ready them for it, and to prepare them for the warfare they are going to face in the future. Then when the bow is bent and they go out, they will speed forward and not fall because they're not used to the air of battle. As parents we need to help kids aim at the right targets. Making an arrow takes time, and other soldiers can help us by the experience they have in molding and shaping, preparing, training, and aiming our children. Men, join us for Saturday studies on this.

1st problem: People don't see many children as a blessing (v. 3)

2nd one: Parents don't see children as a responsibility to aim (v. 4)

3rd: Children don't care for their parents or defend their faith (v. 5)

⁵ *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.*

A man who "fills his quiver" with children (ESV) has much in his arsenal for defense when he is older and they are grown. If one of his arrows goes astray, there are still others he can draw upon for help. Arrows in Solomon's day were used both for offense and for defense, and a good example of sons who defended, protected and provided for their father in his old age are Jacob's 12 sons. His 12 boys growing up were a handful, but became a quiver-full later on.

'God's original universal healthcare and eldercare plan was children so that when you get old and decrepit there's some young people around that like you and care about you to take care of you'⁹

Taking care of parents is another thing our society has gone away from, to its demise, and it has affected even those who believe the Scriptures. Jesus rebuked the Scripture-memorizing Pharisees for not honoring father and mother and caring for them in their old age

When a parent has formed children to be arrows sent out into the enemy's territory, the last part of v. 5 says they won't be ashamed as they speak with enemies in the gate, i.e., out in the world. In the NT, Romans speaks of enemies of the gospel (11:28) but believers who are arrows say to them '*I am not ashamed of the gospel*' (1:16)

Jim Elliot wrote to his parents at age 22 of his desire to go forth to the Ecuador jungles: 'Remember how the Psalmist described children? He said that they were as an heritage from the Lord, and that every man should be happy who had his quiver full of them ... with the strong arms of prayer, draw the bowstring back and let the arrows fly - all of them, straight at the Enemy's hosts.

"Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious,
Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way,
Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious,
And all thou spendest Jesus will repay."¹⁰

May this place be a house where quivers full of warriors are raised for the Lord's kingdom. May this house be a place where we equip youth to apologetics, to defend the faith of their fathers as their own faith. May this house be a launching pad that arrows are shot from around the world to different countries in missions and to all spheres of life in our own country as well. May we say with the warrior Joshua, *as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.*

¹ <http://www.geo.ed.ac.uk/home/tour/edincrest.html>

² As cited by James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, Vol. 3, p. 1118.

³ As cited by William J. Federer, *Great Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases, and Quotations Influencing Early and Modern World History Referenced According to Their Sources in Literature, Memoirs, Letters, Governmental Documents, Speeches, Charters, Court Decisions and Constitutions* (St. Louis, MO: AmeriSearch, 2001).

⁴ John Piper, sermon on Psalm 127 (www.desiringgod.org)

⁵ R.C. Sproul, with John MacArthur, on "Renewing Your Mind" radio program, aired 1/21/2013 ("Abortion and the Campaign for Immorality, Pt 1)

⁶ The 2011 data for the United States is exactly 1.89 according to the National Vital Statistics System analysis in October 2012 of births per 100,000 women. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_United_States#cite_note-10

⁷ Daniel Doriani, "Birth Dearth or 'Bring on the Babies': Biblical Perspectives on Family Planning," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 12/1 (Fall 1993), p. 24.

⁸ Voddie Baucham, "The Centrality of the Home in the Discipleship of the Next Generation," <http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/5209234630.pdf>

⁹ http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Psalms/Psalms%20Book%20Five/03.04.2012_Dr_Ligon_Duncan_Apart_From_the_Lord_Our_Lives_are_Pointless_Restless_and_Fruitless_Psalm_127.html

¹⁰ Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot*, [New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers: 1958] p. 132; hymn quote from "Oh, Zion Haste"