

Psalm 127 – Study Guide¹

Psalm 127 comes at a most appropriate time in our study of the Psalms. A season in which our country has set aside time to return corporate thanksgiving for God's kind gifts and blessings to us as a nation, as families, and as individuals. So, while not among the many psalms of thanksgiving, Psalm 127 is nevertheless a means of provoking thanksgiving that The LORD is pleased to deliver our efforts from vanity, that he is pleased to bless the works of our hands, he is pleased to protect those who are his, he is pleased to provide his kind gift of rest, and finally he is gracious in providing the reward of children.

Structure and Outlines

David Crowe

127:1-2 Vain Works Without The LORD

127:1	Building in Vain Without The LORD
127:1	Protection in Vain Without The LORD
127:2	Laboring in Vain Without The LORD

127:3-5 The Blessing of Children

127:3	Children are a Gift/Reward from The LORD
127:4-5	Children are a Blessing in One's Youth
127:5	Children Provide their Father a Good Standing

ESV Study Bible²

127:1-2 All Efforts in Vain without the Lord.

127:3-5 The Blessedness of Children.

Arnold Rhodes³

127:1-2 Wisdom for the Laborer.

127:3-5 Wisdom for the Homemaker.

John MacArthur⁴

I. God's Sovereignty in Everyday Life (127:1-2)

II. God's Sovereignty in Family Life (127:3-5)

Steven Lawson⁵

127:1a	The Builder of the Home.
127:1b	The Protector of the Home.
127:2	The Provider of the Home.
127:3-5	The Rewarder of the Home.

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School

ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Hereafter: ESV SB) Pgs.1106-1107

³ The Layman's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Volume 9. Arnold B. Rhodes. John Knox Press, 1966 (Hereafter: Rhodes), Pg.171

⁴ The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg.859

⁵ Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150, Volume 12. Steven J. Lawson. B&H Publishing Group, 2006 (Hereafter: Lawson), Pgs.287-288

A Futility and Blessing (vv.1-2)

B God's Blessing on the Family (vv.3-5)

Structure

The most prominent structural matter is the discussion regarding Psalm 127's continuity and discontinuity between verses one through two and three through five because of the apparent shift in the subject matters and their respective intensity of focus. Some speculate whether or not the two portions were not and should not be two separate psalms. The proper conclusion is to recognize that Psalm 127 is a single unit and that there is greater continuity than discontinuity.

Throughout, it is to The LORD that one must look to secure value, purpose, and blessing for their work and rest. It is also The LORD who provides one of the chief blessings of the family unit, namely children who are a joy in their own right, but also an invaluable asset as one transitions to their more senior years of life.

James Boice also makes an argument for the continuity of the psalm by stating that work, city, and family would have been viewed with complete continuity in the psalm's historical context.⁷

Header

Psalm 127 is one of the fifteen song of ascents (Psalms 120-134). Of the song of ascents four are credited to David, one to Solomon, and the other ten have an unknown author. Generally speaking the songs of ascents are psalms that were likely sung or recited in procession to Jerusalem, the beloved city of God, and a city on a hill. This, like much liturgy, is a structured form of worship where truth was recited first to The LORD and also to one another.

Psalm 127 constitutes one of the only two psalms attributed to Solomon (Psalm 72 and 127). With Solomonic authorship the psalm has a tragic/warning component as Solomon ultimately personally failed to heed his articulated wisdom. This, however, does not diminish its truthfulness or beauty. Within it are realities that should provoke us to not only speak truthfully, but live in view of said truth and finish our races enjoying its blessings and not its admonitions.

127:1-2 Vain Works Without The LORD

127:1 Building in Vain Without The LORD

Immediately the psalm begins with a qualifying statement: "unless/then." If The LORD does not build the house, then the builders labor in vain.

How does The LORD build a house? The LORD builds a house through and with his people. The LORD does not choose to assemble brick and mortar, but if he is not the source of the success and action then those who do lay brick and mortar are wasting their time. In true Solomonic fashion he states that action detached from The LORD is a chasing after the wind.

While some argue that with the Solomonic authorship that the "house" here is possibly a reference to the Temple, the context would appear to be more proverbial in nature and speaking of building a residential house and possibly even building one's family. So, to clarify what is and is not being stated here: the reference to house in the passage does not appear to be the Temple, but it does appear to be either a metaphorical reference to the building of a house or the building of one's family – possibly a dual reference using both potential meanings.

⁶ The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Psalms, Volume 5. Willem A. VanGemenen. Zondervan, 2008 (Hereafter: VanGemenen), Pg.912

⁷ An Expositional Commentary: Psalms, Volume 2. James Montgomery Boice. Baker Books, 1996 (Hereafter: Boice), Pg.1120

Willem VanGemeran concurs that house could be an actual physical structure or the building of a family as the term “house” was frequently referred to in connection to one’s posterity and the second half of the psalm gives primary attention to this precise subject.⁸

Some examples of “House” being used as reference to one’s family and future posterity:

Family Units constituting the nation of Israel and the family of Aaron (the priestly line):

"The LORD has remembered us; he will bless us; he will bless *the house of Israel*; he will bless *the house of Aaron*; he will bless those who fear the LORD, both the small and the great." Psalm 115:12-13

Family Units within the Tribe of Levi:

"All those who were listed of *the Levites*, whom Moses and Aaron and the chiefs of Israel listed, by their clans and *their fathers' houses*, from thirty years old up to fifty years old, everyone who could come to do the service of ministry and the service of bearing burdens in the tent of meeting...." Numbers 4:46-47

Family Unit of Joshua:

"Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and *my house*, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:14-15

Family Unit of David:

"And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will *make you a house*." 2 Samuel 7:10-11

"And *your house* and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." 2 Samuel 7:16

How does one know or discern that the house is being built by The LORD? One’s house is being built by The LORD when the labor is done in accordance to the revealed will of God and when the heart of the laborer is submitted in faith to God – looking to The LORD for their strength, help, and blessing. It is not that there is a lack of personal laborers when The LORD himself builds a house, as his participation redeems it from vanity - but not at the exclusion of their participation.

Regarding the primary emphasis of the building: I am persuaded that the language of the psalm is clearly communicating a physical structure over the building of a family and their posterity, though that is clearly where the psalm will eventually go in its later half. It appears that this is articulating the physical structures of man and the supernatural building of God. Just as men "build up Jerusalem/Zion," but it is The LORD's building them up that makes them strong, that makes their cries to be heard, and that secures his personal favor and care upon them, the same is true here.⁹ There are two complimentary buildings that are to be occurring, but if the building process lacks The LORD's supernatural participation then the natural building is in vain, a waste, a chasing after the wind.

Work, labor, and toil constitute a strong theme in Ecclesiastes, also authored by Solomon, and there the emphasis is frequently on the emptiness of one's toil whereas here in Psalm 127 the presumption and understanding is more directly on the value of the work with the warning that forfeiting The LORD in the work will rob the outcome of value.

Regarding the weight of the argument of the potential vanity when one fails to include The LORD in their labor, it is important to note that the words “in vain” appear in the emphatic position in their Hebrew reading – placing clear emphasis on them and their thematic role.¹⁰

⁸ VanGemeran, Pg.913

⁹ **The LORD builds up Zion, makes her strong, hears their cries, sets his favor there... Psalm 102:16**

The LORD builds up Jerusalem, makes her strong, hears their cries, sets his favor there... Psalm 147:2

¹⁰ Lawson, Pg.287

127:1 Protection in Vain Without The LORD

In the second half of verse one there is another qualifying statement: "unless/then." If The LORD does not watch over the city, then the watchman stays awake in vain.

Not unlike the The LORD building the house, The LORD does not personally take post and stand guard. Rather, if The LORD is not the source of the city's protection, then those who do take post and stand guard are wasting their time. So how does The LORD watch over a city? He providentially directs the affairs of men and he is pleased to conduct himself in relation to the prayers of the beloved and their entrusting themselves first and foremost to him over against strength, weapons, horses, chariots, and alliances.

A magnificent example of what this looks like would be from 1 Samuel 17.

"Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but *I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel*, whom you have defied. This day *the LORD will deliver you into my hand*, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that *the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand.*'" 1 Samuel 17:45-47

The reference to the city does not appear to have a precise city in mind, including Jerusalem. Though it certainly would apply to Jerusalem, the reference is more universal in principle. Several cities, particularly larger or more consequential cities that were walled for protection, would have a watchman whose charge it would be to endure the long hours of the night in careful observation of enemy threats and to make the city aware of possible conflict. These hours alone while the majority of the people rested would be an absolute waste if the confidence was in the watchman alone, no matter how vigilant he may be in his duties.

Sidebar: The LORD Who Keeps, Guards, Watches Over His People

The LORD is faithful to keep his people. It is a dishonorable tragedy when this is neither believed or received for the comfort that it provides. While these are demonstrations of The LORD's kind keeping of Israel, he is no less consistent or faithful to his beloved now.

Exodus 23:20	The LORD dispatched an angel to <i>guard/keep</i> Israel on their way to their promised land.
Numbers 6:20	An element of the Aaronic Blessing, "The LORD bless you and <i>keep</i> you...."
Deuteronomy 7:8,12	The LORD is faithful to <i>keep</i> his covenant with his people.
1 Samuel 2:9	Hannah's prayer included, "He will <i>guard</i> the feet of his faithful ones..."
1 Samuel 30:23	David testifies that The LORD had <i>preserved</i> him and his men in battle and general care.
2 Samuel 23:5	David testifies to the <i>secure</i> and everlasting covenant The LORD made with his house.
1 Kings 8:23-25	Solomon testifies to the both The LORD <i>keeping</i> covenant with Israel and <i>keeping</i> promise to the house of David.
Nehemiah 1:5, 9:32	Nehemiah testifies to The LORD's covenant fidelity, to the truth that he <i>keeps</i> covenant and steadfast love.
Psalms 12:7	The LORD <i>keeps</i> the godly ones.
Psalms 16:1	David pleads that The LORD in whom he has taken refuge would <i>preserve</i> him.
Psalms 17:8	David pleads that The LORD would <i>keep</i> him and preserve him from enemies.
Psalms 25:20	David pleads that The LORD would <i>guard</i> him and preserve him from enemies.
Psalms 34:20	David testifies to The LORD's preservation care in <i>keeping/guarding</i> even his bones amidst affliction.
Psalms 37:28	David testifies that The LORD <i>preserves</i> his own.
Psalms 41:2	David testifies that The LORD <i>protects</i> his faithful man.
Psalms 91:11	The LORD commands his angels to <i>guard</i> his beloved.
Psalms 97:10	The LORD <i>preserves</i> the lives of his saints.
Psalms 116:6	The LORD <i>preserves</i> the simple.
Psalms 121:3-5	The LORD who <i>keeps</i> Israel will not slumber or sleep.
Psalms 121:7-8	The LORD <i>keeps</i> comprehensively keeps his people.

Psalm 140:4	David pleads that The LORD would <i>guard</i> him from wicked men.
Psalm 141:9	David pleads that The LORD would <i>guard</i> him from wicked men.
Psalm 145:20	David testifies that The LORD <i>preserves</i> all who love him.
Psalm 146:6	The LORD <i>keeps</i> faith forever.
Psalm 146:9	The LORD <i>watches</i> over the sojourners.
Proverbs 2:8	The LORD <i>guards</i> the path of justice and <i>watches</i> over the way of his saints.
Daniel 9:4	Daniel affirms in prayer that The LORD <i>keeps</i> covenant and steadfast love with his people.

Unless The LORD... it will be a labor in vain.

Unless The LORD... it will be a restless night in vain.

The argument is not against vigilant work or protection, but that it is framed in a trust in God who is ultimately the means of genuine success. To this point another image that expresses these truths would be the book of Nehemiah... we see a very tangible application here with the men laboring hard, but with their weapon on their person. They were prepared to transition from builder to soldier, but all the while the work was wholly dependent on The LORD, consistently beseeching him, pleading with him, entrusting themselves to him.

127:2 Laboring in Vain Without The LORD

In verse two there is no qualification, just a direct statement that one's conduct is vain when they fail to properly appreciate God's good gifts. Here the emphasis appears to be challenging labor and that what would appear to reap a strong or at least respectable result will not bring the desired results, at least when it is done in a failed understanding of The LORD's magnificent care for his beloved through or during rest.

It appears that rising up early and going late to rest leaves little time for rest and a disproportionate time on work, which is a tragedy when The LORD is pleased to bless his beloved with rest. Further, this robust work ethic is improperly rooted here even if it was thought to be framed in faithfulness over personal ambition as it fails to recognize The LORD's capacity and delight in caring for those who are not attempting to self-accomplish his blessings for themselves. The work has become tainted by the lack of finding help/comfort in The LORD which is magnificently displayed in rest and has been wonderfully described as follows: "...without restless self-activity, in a state of self-forgetful renunciation, and modest, calm surrender to Him."¹¹

Those so inclined to remain restless find themselves feasting not on refreshment and kind blessing, but on the bread of anxious toil, "bread that is procured with toil and trouble...."¹² "Food earned with painful labor."¹³

Now here we have a qualifier, for or because "The LORD gives to his beloved sleep." The reason that such conduct is vanity is that The LORD gives to his beloved sleep. Further, it would appear that God's good gift of rest is being spurned and this out of anxiety over one's work – anxiety birthed from a failure to entrust their work to The LORD.

Of immediate recollection should be the very advantage of the watchman as they provide for a context of rest for the people. Others can yield their bodies to rest knowing the watchman was at his post. The beloved must now understand that *The LORD is unfailingly at his post* and he beckons those *who are his* to rest.

¹¹ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 5 – Psalms. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pg.770

¹² Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.770

¹³ MacArthur, Pg.859

Now, one must maintain a biblical balance in all such matters and recognize that there is an obvious expectation to work! Enjoying the rest provided by The LORD is not an invitation to improperly indulge in rest as no good gift was meant to be disproportionately and selfishly abused.

Proverbs 6:9-11 "In all *toil* there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty." Proverbs 14:23 as well has a clear admonition to not simply sleep through life! "How long will lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your *sleep*? A little *sleep*, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man."

Proverbs 20:13 "Love not *sleep*, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread."

The kind grace of rest is also reflected in the Creation account where The LORD elected to rest as an example for his creation, a principle that was later codified in the Law (Sabbath).

"The blessing of God on the labor of the godly is such that his own are provided with all they need and can rest without anguish. Anguish is that experience by which work is turned into toil. Human labor under the sun becomes toil when God's blessing is absent."¹⁴

Another demonstration of this principle, though not a direct application is a historical scenario from the Gospel account. Here I am very sympathetic toward the one corrected as I too have personally struggled greatly with rest. I am persuaded that I have to work much to accomplish my objectives and to do what I believe that I have been entrusted to do... I also do not work as efficiently as others seem to, but there is a gracious gift in rest and it is both unwise and unacceptable to reject it. The said example is that of Mary and Martha – Martha, who was at least in this moment, was struggling to find rest in the better portion.

"Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.'" Luke 10:38-42

By way of summary for this half of Psalm 127 John MacArthur draws out that with each of these elements/areas (building, protection, and labor) that, "...the sovereign intention of God is far more crucial to the outcome than man's efforts."¹⁵

127:3-5 The Blessing of Children

127:3 Children are a Gift/Reward from The LORD

The term "behold" seems to set off a notable transition for the psalm, and whereas there was potential vanity in the prior elements of life addressed before the emphasis, now is an exhortation toward the blessing of children, themselves a heritage or gift from The LORD. As stated in the Structure section the psalm continues with this emphasis on the blessing of children through the remainder of the text.

A heritage is a gift passed on by relationship of giver and receiver, passed along within families to preserve name and ownership and to serve as a general blessing. This is the function of children, particularly male heirs, which contextually is the primary emphasis within the psalm, and children are received from the hand of God. This element perhaps serves as one of the most plain points of continuity within the psalm too. As demonstrated in verses one and two it is from The LORD that a house built, a city watched over, rest is enjoyed, and now that children are given by inheritance.

¹⁴ VanGemeran, Pg.913

¹⁵ MacArthur, Pg.859

In view of the continuity there is also the small measure of discontinuity too, primarily in the emphasis placed on this final grace from The LORD. Though as with other prior elements addressed this is a blessing that is both joyful and, as will be made increasingly plain, is quite practical.

Willem VanGemeren sees additional continuity by way of parallels within the psalm, and though I am not wholly persuaded of the conclusion I believe it merits attention. The first parallel is in the building of the house and the building of the family in verses one and three. The second parallel is in the protection of the city and the protection of the family in verses one and four through five.¹⁶

While not a common way to refer to children in contemporary society, it was a consistent biblical pattern to refer to children as the fruit of the womb; and while there is not a special merit to this expression in and of itself, it articulates the natural and joyful expectation of having children. It is understood that when healthy, an apple tree will produce apples and a pear tree pears, so lies the expectation and hope of the womb of the bride. Children were understood and identified as the fruit of the womb and a reward.

Deuteronomy 7:13	"He will also bless the <i>fruit of your womb</i> and the fruit of your ground...."
Deuteronomy 28:4	"Blessed shall be the <i>fruit of your womb</i> and the fruit of your ground..."
Deuteronomy 28:11	"And The LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the <i>fruit of your womb</i> and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground...."
Deuteronomy 30:9	"The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the <i>fruit of your womb</i> and in the fruit of your cattle and the in the fruit of your ground. For The LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers...."
Psalms 132:11	"The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: 'One of the <i>sons of your body/fruits of the womb</i> I will set on your throne.'"
Micah 6:7	Children referenced again as the <i>fruit of my body</i> .

Sidebar: The Pain Of A Gift Withheld

Children are referred to as the *fruit of the womb* as far back as Jacob and his family in the Genesis account and in this context, it is explicitly recognized that it is God who gives and withholds this gift.¹⁷

In view of this, what about the enduring pain and loss of the barren woman?¹⁸ This is hard... but we must recognize one's lack of enjoyment of a kind blessing must not diminish its great reward, and for those who do enjoy such blessing it is in proportion to one's joy that another grieves, a profound and weighty grief. It is not a reflection of The LORD's insufficiency, but that there is pain in this fallen world.

However, one must also maintain proper perspective when remembering the stories of so many of the barren women of the Scriptures: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth. Their pain and burden was not overlooked, and The LORD was clearly working through these struggles. This does not mean that all barren women who are walking in faith and obedience can expect an exceptional conception at an unexpected season of life, but that The LORD opens and closes the womb and that he does this with a view to his glory and our good. Sometimes his glory and our good meet at the crossroads of enduring heartache, but they are no less present.

In view of the fact that the psalm's author is Solomon, a member of Israel and of the house of David, there are possible overtones of the Abrahamic Covenant expressed here too.¹⁹

¹⁶ VanGemeren, Pg.914

¹⁷ "Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?'" Genesis 30:2

¹⁸ Barren women can include women who have never been able to conceive and secondary bareness includes those who have had limited capacity to conceive, but who later are unable to conceive or carry to term.

¹⁹ MacArthur, Pg.859

The LORD states to Abram, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your *reward* shall be very great." Genesis 15:1. Note that while in this overall context the various elements of the blessing are addressed, in the most immediate context of the reference to reward Abram addresses his lack of children, a lack of posterity. The LORD in turn shares of Abram's future abundant posterity. A reward from The LORD if you will.

127:4-5 Children are a Blessing in One's Youth

Here Solomon has provided a simile of a well-supplied warrior and a father with sons.²⁰ It is understood that a warrior with a handful of arrows would be in a place of advantage and with greater chance of success, just as arrows would have been the tool of the warrior's craft for combat. Of a like advantage is a father with sons as his name would continue, his family house would endure, and he will have resources that will serve him well in his later years. This expressed advantage later in life is also because he has been blessed with sons while still a younger man himself. Just as it was natural to expectantly hope for children in one's youth so also would a man and his family in this historical context hope to have sons in his younger years. Again, children were seen as imperative for the family's posterity, and even if delaying child bearing were a luxury it is not likely that it would have been capitalized on by people in this time.

The NET Bible, like others, emphasized that there is something specifically to sons of one's youth as they would be young men, even men with their own children when their own father is older. The sons would in turn serve as a blessing particularly in the measure of security for their father and their community.²¹

Solomon has walked us from deliverance from vanity to heritage and reward to blessing of a man with a plurality of children.

Transitioning to verse five the image of the warrior with his arrows continues and here communicates that the man who is blessed is the man with a full quiver of arrows or who has a plurality of children, particularly sons.

Note, that not unlike the builders and the watchman there is action by both The LORD and men. Though a heritage and reward, it appears that man is understood as taking action here - filling his quiver or his home with children. Further, it is this father that enjoys the magnificent condition of being counted as 'blessed.'

Blessed or happy! This is the magnificent and desired disposition articulated throughout the psalms and a wonderful company to be found in too! Such is the disposition of the man with a plurality of children.

Psalms 1:1-2	Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of The LORD...
Psalms 2:12	"Blessed are all who take refuge in [the Son]."
Psalms 32:1-2	"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom The LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."
Psalms 33:12	"Blessed is the nation whose God is The LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!"
Psalms 34:8	"Blessed is the man who takes refuge in [The LORD]!"
Psalms 40:4	"Blessed is the man who makes The LORD his trust...."
Psalms 41:1	"Blessed is the one who considers the poor!"
Psalms 65:4	"Blessed is the one who you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts!"
Psalms 84:4	"Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!"
Psalms 84:5	"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion."
Psalms 84:12	"O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!"
Psalms 89:15	"Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your face...."
Psalms 94:12	"Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law...."
Psalms 106:3	"Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!"
Psalms 112:1	"Blessed is the man who fears The LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!"

²⁰ We can reasonably round out this statement to say "a parent with children" but original context demands this word choice first.

²¹ NET Bible, accessed at: lumina.bible.org/bible (Hereafter: NET Bible), 127:4 (note 10)

Psalm 119:1 "Blessed is the man who fears The LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!"
 Psalm 128:1 "Blessed is everyone who fears The LORD, who walks in his ways!"
 Psalm 144:15 "Blessed are the people whose God is The LORD!"

127:5 Children Provide their Father a Good Standing

This blessed man who has a plurality of children in his youth will not be shamed in the city gates. To be shamed would be to be legally defeated and embarrassed.²²

The city gates were a point of necessary protection by the watchman and others as the gates gave access to the city itself. However, the gates were also an important place for consequential meetings and the assembling of the elders. It was here that the legal and economic issues of the community would be resolved.²³ In view of this there is an overwhelming consensus that, as MacArthur argues, children offered a buffer of defense in combat and/or litigation.²⁴ This is also why it was a blessing for a man to have children, and sons in particular, in his youth so that as his own strength reduced they would be in a place to stand by him and serve as a help in areas of strength as well as overall support in matters of litigation or dispute.

The city gates, a valuable place to have the strength of one's sons.

Genesis 19:1	Lot was actively present at the gate of Sodom (intercepting the innocent guests).
Genesis 23:10,18	Abraham conducted official trade/land acquisition in the city gate among witnesses.
Deuteronomy 21:19, 22:15, 25:7	The city gate was where it was expected that the elders of the city would be and where they would render just judgment.
Joshua 20:4	The city gate was where it was expected that the elders of the city would be and where they would render just judgment.
Ruth 4	The city gate was where it was expected that the elders of the city would be and where they would render just judgment including in an agreed contractual allowance of the Law regarding a kinsman redeemer.
Proverbs 31:23, 31	The virtuous woman's husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders and she herself is praised in the gates for her works.
Jeremiah 39:3	Babylonian officials coming to and congregating in the gate.
Zechariah 8:16	The call to render proper justice in the gates.

Conclusion

While a beloved psalm, it may be challenging to hear such a pronounced emphasis on having children and what would appear, in our contemporary context, to be a disproportionate emphasis on sons rather than daughters. However, to be clear the responsibility of any fair treatment of the text is to let the text speak and speak in its original (and historical) context. This can make for harder reading at times, but this does not diminish the fact that these challenging elements are the Scriptures. It would also serve us well to remember that there are elements that are culturally different than our own circumstances, so we must very carefully discern what, if any, transferrable principles might be drawn out without compromising original intent and message. Further, we must be careful to take note that the Scriptures do not diminish the role of women, but consistently esteem them in ways that demonstrate God's heart for women who are not only in Psalm 127 to make male children. They have a magnificent role even here as the blessing of children are the fruit of their womb! There are different roles for men and women that supersede cultural boundaries, but this in no way diminishes anyone and it is a sign of being weak in the Scriptures to conclude otherwise.

²² NET Bible, 127:5 (note 11)

²³ NET Bible, 127:3 (note 9)

²⁴ MacArthur, Pg.859

Now, while I am persuaded that sufficient principles of application have been drawn out and are plainly present with the elements of verses one and two, I would like to finish with a form of application for verses three through five. It is not an application that will be available for everyone, but it is worthy of a measure of attention.

I have had the privilege of being exposed to and knowing a variety of families who walk well with the Lord and genuinely seek to be faithful as a family unit. The overwhelming majority of these family units have been of a traditional makeup, usually one to four children. However, I have also known a handful of families with a large range of children – six to even twelve children, and they would speak to being genuinely and even abundantly blessed. Some families are this large from conviction, some from preference, and some from providence.

I recall one such family in which the father took the principles of the conclusion of Psalm 127 quite directly. He had numerous children when I knew him and likely continued having more after our geographical paths parted. I recall on one occasion him explaining some of the financial ramifications to having so many children, and he stated that he has taken care of all of his children and he fully expects that in his later years that they too will take care of him. In other words, his retirement plan was his children (boys and girls). He expected the children of his youth to take care of him and his wife in their later years.

A second family that comes to mind is one of the finest families that I have and likely will ever know. Their abundant household comes from a mixture of conviction and preference and they have many daughters and sons. I am not sure of their expectations for care in later years, but what I have and anticipate continuing to watch in the years to come is that they are potentially doing the most radical and challenging form of discipleship. They are teaching and demonstrating Christ in every nuance of life, and therefore they are potentially sending out men and women in multitudes that they have and will in some form continue to disciple from birth. That is a magnificent kingdom strategy and these children will certainly continue to bring public honor to their father and mother! I would gladly have these children as my advocates. A final family is one that is not quite as radically large, but has been expanded by sacrificial adoption. Interestingly, the children of this couple's youth have grown and some have many children of their own. However, the way that this couple's quiver continued to be filled was not only through children and grandchildren, but through adoption in the years well beyond their youth. This was birthed from a conviction to rescue and to be a means of grace to children who desperately just needed a family, but who have been welcomed into a Christ adoring family.

These life illustrations are not for everyone and we need wisdom when walking these paths, but they are blessed paths and worthy of rejoicing in as God has graciously provided blessings through various means and placed arrows in faithful warriors' hands.

We began with thanksgiving and we conclude with thanksgiving. We give thanks for the kindness and graces we enjoy and also with the kindness and graces others enjoy as well.