

VISIONARY FATHERHOOD PRINCIPLES FROM PSALM 127

*Scott M. Head
Elder, Grace Family Church
Email pastorhead@gracefamilyinfo.org*

A Godly father has a critical role in the sweeping story of history. He is critical to the right administration of God's dominion and to the building of the Kingdom of God. This is a large task, and one that so easily is missed because it sounds lofty and big, theological even. It is a statement that is not part of our day-by-day vocabulary and rarely spoken of today from many pulpits. Again, Godly fatherhood is critical to the right administration of God's dominion and to the building of the Kingdom of God.

Why should we continually remind ourselves of the big-picture concepts of scripture such as dominion and the Kingdom of God? I propose this answer: once we are saved and are actively fulfilling our chief purpose as believers in Jesus Christ, we have two overarching direct assignments from the Lord that both compliment our personal worship and our devotion to God. These direct assignments are dominion taking (Genesis 1:26-28) and disciple making (Matthew 28:18-20). These assignments are broad in their scope - they encompass everything, and provide for us a framework, or a context, by which we do all the various disciplines, tasks, commands and acts of service that make up the Christian life. Let me illustrate. We are told by the commands of God to avoid stealing and coveting and murder and the like - all of these are direct but specific commands. If we had to categorize these commands, or assign them a class or name them, we could say these are moral commands that project God's view of social order upon society. This is a function of taking dominion, or extending God's laws and precepts into the culture around us as agents of His reign. All moral commands fall under the class that we might call "dominion", for they actively 'subdue the earth' according to God's will. We also have commands that are discipleship commands, or principles of scripture and teachings from the Word that we might class under the banner of disciple making. These could be commands such as "teach them to your children" or "pray for one another" or "preach the Word", or even "husbands love your wives", "children obey your parents", or "teach them to obey all that I have commanded you". These are direct commands that are aimed at making disciples, changing hearts, influencing people to call them to repentance and faith, and making known to others God's will. While making disciples would also be an act of dominion, as an assignment it is directed to people. These assignments from God are interwoven and inseparable, but God has given them both. Taken together, doing these commands is building the Kingdom of God.

So the right administration of God's earth and the building of the Kingdom of God through disciple making are big concepts with sweeping reach. They cover everything and all men, from the very first man to the very last man in history. These assignments sound grand and lofty, but fathers, these are YOUR assignments.

How is the father, or fatherhood in general, relative to such grand concepts? How does a father accomplish such majestic sounding objectives? With such grand concepts, a father needs a large vision and divine help. He must be a visionary. He must be a man who understands his place in redemptive history and how he will participate in it, change it, affect it. He must look beyond himself and consider his influence well into the future, because he has been assigned such a visionary role.

How do we do this? How can a man be concerned for more than his immediate circumstances and maybe those of his wife and kids?

Scripture gives us ample examples of how to do this, both in specific commands like [Ephesians 6:4](#) "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" and in more sweeping commands such as the familiar Psalm 78:5-7 where the spirit teaches us that "He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;" While the Ephesians command is practical advice for here and now, the command in the Psalm reaches to our children's children and beyond in its scope. All throughout scripture we find both direct, practical, immediate and specific commands such as in the Proverbs, and vast commands that seem to be more than one man can accomplish, much less even consider. But we are commanded no less to do these things.

Here's one of our greatest problems as Christian fathers today - we are shortsighted. We ask "how is it that my little family, my fathering and my seemingly insignificant place in the sweep of history is of any account?" "I'm just a guy scrapin' by," we often think. This kind of thinking is what kills our drive and effectiveness. After all, if we fathers are doing nothing more than trying to make it to retirement so we can fritter away our days in leisure, what kind of significance is that? After we're gone, what was it all for? How does that motivate a father to Godliness and important, Kingdom things?

It doesn't.

If all we are here for is to give our kids all the things we never had, besides being an un-Biblical cultural maxim, that attitude is narrowly focused only upon the here and now. Ultimately, who really cares if our kids have all the things we never had if they land themselves in hell because they do not love the Lord with all their heart, mind, strength and soul? You see, we have more important matters as fathers than our careers, retirement, our hobbies and making sure we get the kids out of the house. That thinking is an atrophied and stunted view of Christian manhood, and we need to dump it.

So what is the alternative? How do we, little men with families in little houses on the fringes of a modern city of millions, go about taking dominion for the Kingdom of God and making disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey God's commands? How do we rise above the daily concerns of child raising, bills, home repair, yard work and work deadlines?

The answer is by embracing the small things. In seeming conflict with my premise of being visionary and grand in our view of spiritual things, its the doing of small things with the context of the larger goals that make it all work. God in His wisdom has providentially arranged things so that His Kingdom operates from the ground up, from the small to the large.

Here's a simplistic illustration. God's administration of His Kingdom is like an upside down pyramid or a triangle with its base at the top and the point at the bottom. Its the small things at the bottom that are our immediate concern, like you and I, our fathering, our teaching, our ethical behavior in the civil sphere, our marriages, our church, our families. This is where we spend our daily lives, down here at the point. All of these concerns and actions and thoughts down at the bottom of the triangle are small manifestations of obedience to God that, taken individually, are of little account. But taken cumulatively, as they build upward upon one another they accumulate, these little things have influence and affect, so as to encourage the expansion and increas of the Kingdom of God. God always administers His Kingdom by asking individuals, you and I, and our families, to be faithful in the small things. By DOING the commands of God in our daily lives, in our families and church, in the small things, we effect not only the immediate conditions of our lives, families and churches, but these have even greater implications. We effect culture, generations and ultimately the Kingdom.

Now this is really nothing new or unique to the Kingdom, we see it in operation in most structures. Small things accumulate to establish larger things. The sum is greater than its parts, so they say. I maintain that it is because men, men's actions, men's organizing, nature itself, and all its systems, reflect the wisdom of their creator. One would expect to find the Kingdom of God reflected in His creation, yet we men are so prone to throw it off and live contrary to it. We desire autonomy. We desire to focus on ourselves in the here and now, pridefully doing and thinking for our own immediate benefit, and we deny that we are doing all these things for that self-centered purpose. Sadly, many who pour themselves into their children are doing so merely to make their own lives easier, or to affirm themselves as exemplary fathers in the eyes of men by "giving their kids all the things they never had" with scarcely a thought about their influence upon their children's eternal state.

Christianity is not like that. Individual obedience to God and submission to His precepts places us under him, subject to Him. It takes our focus off of ourself, and makes our autonomy sin. Christian fathers can no longer focus on temporal, immediate things without subjecting those things to the will of God and viewing them in light of the purposes and plan of God. The thoughts and concerns and tasks of men that seem insignificant are of utmost importance, they have great and far reaching effect and must never be viewed in light of a mere personal, here and now sphere of influence. Dads, your tasks as a father are far reaching in their influence, much farther reaching and more profound than our culture admits.

THIS is the reason we need to be focused on the big picture. Fathers must be visionaries able to inspire their children to such a view of submission to God. When our place in God's economy and His plan of redemptive history are understood and embraced by fathers and families, watch out. THAT's something worth working for. That is something we can get on board with. Give your children a vision for their place in the God's world, in God's history. Give them a vision of how their own obedi-

ence to God and their obedience to their parents, though seemingly a small thing, affects the big picture, takes dominion and builds the Kingdom. Give them that, and they have something they can sink their teeth into. That is true significance, not vanity. That is true purpose, not a life of useless pursuits. Inspire them with God's purposes and plans, and they will know their place in the world. They will not drift aimlessly when fathers cast a vision with a soundly Kingdom-oriented purpose.

Now, let's look at Psalm 127, the "Builder's Psalm". Here we find practical advice for the immediate concerns of the here and now, and we find much greater implications that help us focus on how we link the immediate concerns of our daily, in and out, seemingly insignificant toils of fatherhood with the greater vision. Often, we look at this Psalm in the plain and obvious meaning, which is indeed good and beneficial to us. There is much more here than meets the eye though and its both the obvious and the greater implications of this short Psalm that I want to look at. This is an excellent Psalm for fathers. For it addresses so many of the concerns we men have regarding our family. As we read it, notice how the heart of the author is fixed upon God.

127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.

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

2 It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

3 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
the fruit of the womb a reward.

4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.

5 Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Let me here cast a vision for fatherhood that should be part of every Christian man's meditations. Listen carefully as we step through this psalm, you will want to follow or you will miss the greater picture. Verses 1 and 2 fit together as a unit. While this Psalm doesn't necessarily follow the clean patterns we often find in other Hebrew poetry and musical verse, it is clearly sectioned in terms of its content. The addition of verse numbers are not original, as you know, so we can't necessarily rely on them to tell us where the sections are. Verses one and two are the first section:

127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.

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

2 It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

The general subject of this section is the sovereignty of God in our lives with Him as the focus of our worldly efforts, that apart from Him our efforts are vain or useless. I believe we see this principle in all of scripture and indeed Isaiah 64 says that our righteous deeds are like a filthy rags if we do not belong to God. But can you see the examples that are given by the Psalmist to make the point. Herein lies encouragement. The examples given are the house in verse 1, the city in verse 1, and our labors (toil) in verse 2. Three spheres of influence that a man, a father, is generally most anxious about. Is that not true? What do men worry most about? Their family, their security in general, and their provision, or money. So this Psalm can be great encouragement to you, fathers!

Examine the first two verses:

127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.

Here we have a familiar statement we have all heard, and for us fathers, in the role of leadership in our house, it is especially important that we grasp the meaning of this idea of 'building houses'. Now the purpose of this psalm is given in the introduction of the Psalm, it is a song of ascents and purposely written for pilgrims who come to the temple. Its focus is on God and the word "house" in this psalm is certainly linked to the building of Solomon's temple. The praising of children as a heritage and blessing are also key, since, if David is the author, it is a praise toward God that David's son would be the one blessed with the building of the temple. If Solomon is the author (for there is some debate), it is likewise similar praise, that God provides a heritage for the father by which the son (that is Solomon) receives his father's vision and heartfelt desire to build the temple with God's direction and provision. God established the temple of Solomon, and directed its construction and establishment, for which both David and Solomon give great praise. Note here about this psalm that the very builder of the Temple teaches us that he presumed no success in building without the help of the Lord.

But what do we learn further about building in this Psalm? For the principles are not given to us in scripture for no reason, or merely as an anecdotal record of a historical event. The psalm is there for our edification and training in righteousness. So we ask ourselves, what can we learn from this house building? It is a fact that in Hebrew, "ben", which means a son, and "bath", a daughter, and "beith", a house, come from the same root word "banah", which means to build. Keep this in mind as we ask ourselves "What is a house?" Is it a mere building? Is it our family? Can we relate this Psalm to an abstract concept or is it something literal, or both? If we look in the context of the verse we see it can clearly apply in principle to more than a mere stone and wood structure, though certainly we

would say that God ought to be sovereign over even building construction. I think there is more here, because the verse speaks of children, which implies the family, and in much of scripture the concept of house is used to describe groups of people. You have read of "the house of David" or the "house of Judah". I think we can be well within the intent of this word to treat in in a like manner, considering its root. The word "House" means an extended family through the generations, like a dynasty or an ancestry. Because it is speaking in terms of children later in the Psalm, and certainly eludes to father David and son Solomon, it is clear that this psalm carries with it the idea of building the patriarchal structure of the family including children, grandchildren and so on.

Unless the Lord builds that house, the process of assembling, training and teaching and equipping that family is vanity. It is useless labor. What this is teaching us is that unless you, dads, actively submit yourself to the Will and Word of God in raising children and being a good husband, your labor is in vain. How grateful I am to be among a bunch of fathers who take this principle serious, who have looked to God's Word to teach them how to love and nurture their children.

The second part of verse 2:

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

Here is security, the picture is of a walled fortress so familiar to the people of King David's time. The city had high walls, often two or three sets of walls, and upon the ramparts of these walls, the security force walked. So the verse is telling us that the watchmen, who's job it is to keep vigilant and alert to threats coming against the city, are working in vain unless the city itself is given over to God for its ultimate security. Now is this a literal city? In one sense yes, it can be a literal city, Jerusalem in fact, but if we take it the context of the overall verse, in the sense of a patriarchal house, we see the larger idea that only God's protecting oversight upon the extended family provides sure security. As fathers, our house, and yes even our extended family, must be exhorted and taught the truth of God's Word, otherwise all their watchmen, security systems, insurance policies, back up plans, lofty education, jobs and careers - in other words all those earthly things to which we look for our earthly security, are all useless!

Are you actively teaching and training your children to place their security solely in the hands the Lord? Or are you teaching them to place their hopes in high paying careers, fall-back plans, lofty academic degrees and the devices of mere men? Surely these are all good things when employed lawfully and with the blessing of God, but first and foremost is the trusting faith that it is God's securing hand upon His people that preserves, not the vain efforts of men.

You may have heard the expression "God helps those that help themselves"? This is not scriptural and is utterly man-focused and false. God is described in many ways but among them He is a helper of the helpless, a father of the fatherless, a defender of the weak and an advocate of the broken. How can these help themselves? No, friends, God helps those who are broken before Him in their spirit and are trusting in Him alone for all their needs. It is THIS man that labors and works to provide security for his family that will not labor in vain.

You see, both verse one and two are focused on our attitude of dependence and trust in God alone, rather than our own labors. This is the precious faith we need to be passing down to our children. This is life and life abundantly. This is joy and peace.

Now, look in verse two. Here is the man who works 90 hours a week...

2 It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Here is the picture of men you know. Maybe you are one of these men, or used to be. This is the man who is always throwing himself into his work, but doing so from his own strength and effort. This is the man who has "anxious toil", and gains no peace or satisfaction from it. This is the man who, on his death bed, laments that he only wished he had spent less time at the office and more time with his family. Think about it, have you ever heard of a man who, on his death bed or in his later years, said "how I wish I had gone for that Ph.D and spent more time at the office, then I would have made it". No, for once the days are up and the Lord requires an account of that man, all his labors are in vain unless they were for His Lord. Instead, a man who toils in anxiety on his own, apart from God's principles, laments that he has nothing of lasting and eternal value to show for himself.

This is the realm of economics and finance, the sphere of money and provision, wages and gain. And what man does not lay awake at night with anxiety wondering how he will provide for his family? Well, the man who trusts in the Lord, that's who. He sleeps at night soundly with peace. Imagine those who built the temple, of whom the author of this Psalm would clearly be alluding to, see what we can learn...

Let me illustrate with a quote about this text from Samuel Eyles Pierce, a London pastor and theologian from the late 1700s

The Lord's Temple was built without any looking unto or dependence on man; all human wisdom and confidence was rejected on the whole; the plan was given by the Lord God himself; the model of it was in Solomon's possession; nothing was left to the wit or wisdom of men; there was no reason to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows, whilst engaged in the good work; no, I should conceive it was a season of grace to such as were employed in the building; somewhat like what it was with you and me when engaged in God's holy ordinances. I should conceive the minds of the workmen at perfect peace, their conversation together much (focused) on the grand subject of the Temple, and its intention as referring to the glorious Messiah... I should conceive their minds were wholly free from all worrisome cares. They did not rise early without being refreshed in body and mind; they did not sit up late as though they were in need; they were not careful how they should provide for their families; they were, as the beloved of the Lord, perfectly contented; they enjoyed sweet sleep and refreshment by it, this was from the Lord; he giveth his beloved ones sleep.

Fathers, this is how we are to be working. Wholly trusting in the Lord's provision and oversight, employed in His service, and raising up our children to do likewise. In this we must be careful to place our efforts on the chief priority - the spiritual state of our children, their spiritual training. For without a firm and established trust in God alone, their labors will be in vain, useless for anything but generating anxious sleep and regretful laments.

Now, let's quickly link the grand beauty of this Psalm to the father's vision. I love this part, it truly takes our understanding of the economy of God's Kingdom to a whole new level.

In verse three we see the specific reference to children

3 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
the fruit of the womb a reward.

4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.

5 Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Now what I want you to see is the poetic link between the sections of this overall Psalm. We said that Psalmist used three spheres of influence to demonstrate a total reliance upon God - the house in verse 1, the city in verse 1, and our labors or economics in verse 2. I propose to you that verse 3, 4 and 5 follow the same pattern. In verse 3 we see that children are a heritage, establishing the house that we found in verse 1, or the dynasty for generations, and that the Lord builds that house. Here we see one grand way He builds it - by giving children!

In verse 4 we see that Children are like arrows of the warrior's arsenal, who will be like those in verse 1 who watch over the city, but under God's care these warriors do not watch in vain. Indeed our children extend the dominion of God into the civil and cultural sphere of the city. That's grand, that's big! The link between verse one's watchers on the wall and verse four's warriors is clear direction for the father's task - his children must be honed and trained, carefully prepared to be sent out to secure the land and exercise God's rule over it. Are you up to that task, or would you rather watch Monday Night Football and send your kids off to play video games?

And finally verse 5:

5 Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Here we have a link to verse 2, the economic and labor sphere of influence. He who has anxious toil in verse two and does not have peaceful sleep labors in vain - and it follows that he WILL be shamed in the city gate. What are the city gates in ancient days? Are they not the focal point of trade and economy? Everything of any importance that occurred in that city happened at the city gate. But toiling in vain without submission to the Lord's rule over your actions and your labor will bring failure and shame. Those who trust in Him are never put to shame, they will be honored in the sphere of labor, they will reap the fruits of their labor and sleep soundly in the great blessing of peace. And dads, get this - the more children you have, the more blessings you have, because your house is extended, your dynasty is expanded. The economic and labor potential of your house is enlarged. This is dominion and it is blessed by God when it is sought rightly.

In this economic sphere, both fathers and children MUST derive their worth and value by God's standard, not by a human measuring rod or something temporal that is passing away like a career or success or the honor of men. The Biblical father understands that his worth and the worth of his children is not calculated from his savings account or his rank in the corporate world.

His value is not pinned to how educated he is, how many letters are tacked onto the end of his name, or how many diplomas are on his wall. His value is in his identity as a God-fearing man who is trusting only in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and he operates under the provision of God, not paychecks and dividends. His priority is to pass that operational structure, that Christian worldview, to his faithful children. In the economic sphere, yes, we work and work hard, but we work as unto the Lord, who's stores and provisions are sure and bottomless.

Men, brothers... if your worth is defined by anything other than Christ-imputed righteousness, and if you consider yourself anything other than a redeemed sinner before a gracious and merciful God, then may I suggest you to take drastic measures to correct that.

Let me repeat that - if your worth is defined by anything other than Christ-imputed righteousness - a total dependence upon the work of Jesus on your behalf - and if you consider yourself anything other than a redeemed sinner before a gracious and merciful God, then may I suggest you to take any means possible to correct that.

If it means quitting a career, moving, changing jobs, laying aside hobbies, or living lower on the food chain, then joyfully do so. If you are a Christian, your God is your priority, your worth is seen in light of His will, and your God-given children are the only lasting earthly dividends of your labor.

Dads, what are you teaching your children about children? Are you teaching them that kids are a burden? That a family can't sustain or afford to have more than 1.2 children?

Look at the fallout of worldly, fruitless thinking: In Europe, once the bastion of Christianity, they have entire nations who are losing their heritage, their labor, their culture, because men view children as a curse instead of a blessing. Did you know that in 50 years, France will be a Muslim nation and the Land of Charlemagne, the Huguenots and John Calvin will have frittered away its legacy because of vain toil, fruitless labor, and a revolutionary view of children brought on by humanist fools

like Robespierre. Simply put, France is not having enough children to replace those who die, but the Muslims in France are.

50 years! And apart from a work of God, France will be a Muslim nation. Largely because fathers did not raise up Godly children, they did not view children as a blessing, they did not trust in the Lord, and the Lord did not build their house.

So having looked at this Psalm, do you see the great vision cast for us as fathers? Do you see the importance of building a house, a dynasty, that will stand upon the Word of God? Do you see the function you and I fulfill as fathers in God's plan for history? We have the great and weighty task of being dominion takers and disciple makers by building a house under God, establishing it upon the rock of the Word, and transferring its plans, goals and direction to our children to carry on, building upon the foundations we lay as fathers.

This means you can't slack off. You and I must be about the business of establishing the spiritual direction of our families from the Scripture, their long term goals of faithfulness, their path and plan to follow God's established principles down through the generations. It is our duty to insure that the family knows that they are expected to be faithful through the years.

Forget about this secular idea that children are supposed to discover their beliefs on their own, this is nowhere found in Scripture, and is the highest form of child neglect and emotional abuse. We as Biblical fathers must practice what we preach. We are to be examples to our family, to our children, to our children's children. The godly father honors his father and mother, and his elders. He includes his children in talking about the future, planting a plan of hope and peace as he builds his house. He prepares his children for their roles as husbands and wives, and he expects them to follow in establishing their own house, extending the dominion of Christ.

He captures and keeps their hearts by establishing trust and overflowing with unconditional love, and works to keep his own vision clear. He is a visionary, and seeks to institute family practices and traditions that advance the Gospel of Christ in his house for generations to come.

The Visionary Father subject all spheres of influence to God alone, and rejoices when God builds his house.

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