

VINTAGE FAMILY

"TROUBLE IN MAYBERRY"

PSALM 127:1-5

This Week's Core Competency

Faithfulness – have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to that relationship Proverbs 3:3, 4

*3Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.*

*4Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man.*

The German proverb "An Gottes Segen ist alles gelegen" roughly translated "All success depends on God's blessing" captures the point of Ps 127:1-3. Apart from God, the faithful efforts of builders, watchmen, and workers are in vain. While faithfulness is a virtue, he is sovereign, and we cannot by our virtues guarantee the outcome of our efforts since God does as he pleases (Ps 115:3; 135:6). The proverb as well as the psalm raise the question of how God works in the world—what theologians call his *providence*. One aspect of which is called *concurrency*, the idea that God acts concurrently with his created things in their every action. "The doctrine of concurrency affirms that God directs, and works through, the distinctive properties of each created thing, so that these things themselves bring about the results that we see. In this way it is possible to affirm that in one sense events are fully (100 percent) caused by God and fully (100 percent) caused by the creature as

*An Gottes Segen ist alles gelegen.
(All success depends on God's blessing)*

-German Proverb

well" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 317).

On this aspect of divine providence the same author writes, "Success and failure come from God, for we read, 'For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up; but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another' (Ps. 75:6-7). So Mary can say, 'He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree' (Luke 1:52). The LORD gives children, for children 'are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward' (Ps. 127:3).

"All our talents and abilities are from the Lord, for Paul can ask the Corinthians, 'What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?' (1 Cor. 4:7). David knew that to be true regarding his military skill, for, though he must have trained many hours in the use of a bow and arrow, he could say of God, 'He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze' (Ps. 18:34).

"God influences rulers in their decisions, for 'the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will' (Prov. 21:1). An illustration of this was when the Lord 'turned the heart of the king of Assyria' to his people, 'so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel' (Ezr. 6:22), or when 'the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia' (Ezr. 1:1) to help the people of Israel. But it is not just the heart of the king that God influences, for he looks down 'on all the inhabitants of the earth' and 'fashions the hearts of them all' (Ps. 33:14-15). When we realize that the heart in Scripture is the

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the location of our inmost thoughts and desires, this is a significant passage. God especially guides the desires and inclinations of believers, working in us 'both *to will* and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13).

"All of these passages, reporting both general statements about God's work in the lives of all people and specific examples of God's work in the lives of individuals, lead us to conclude that God's providential work of concurrence extends to all aspects of our lives. Our words, our steps, our movement, our hearts, and our abilities are all from the Lord" (321).

For Discussion

Bob and Sarah have been married for five years. They've been trying to have a baby for a long time but without success. They even went on a "babymoon," a "procreation vacation" their doctor called it, with the goal of relaxing and getting pregnant, but it didn't work. They've tried other medical and non-medical interventions as well, but they haven't worked either. And the two of them are getting desperate. What's more, their home group is getting desperate, too, and maybe a little tired of praying that Bob and Sarah will get pregnant.

While other couples in the group didn't think twice about verse 3 when they read Psalm 127, it left Sarah in tears. "Sons are a heritage from the LORD," the psalmist said. "Children are a reward from him."

"Why would God not give us a baby?" she asked the group.

"Don't take this the wrong way," Bob added. "But he has given most of you children; why not us? He even gives babies to irresponsible people who don't want them but not us. What can we do?"

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Psalm 127:1-5

A song of ascents. Of Solomon.

1Unless the LORD builds the house,
its builders labor in vain.

Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchmen stand guard in vain.

2In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat-
for he grants sleep to those he loves.

3Sons are a heritage from the LORD,
children a reward from him.

4Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are sons born in one's youth.

5Blessed is the man

whose quiver is full of them.

They will not be put to shame

when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Cf. v. 2 and v. 5 in other translations

2In vain you get up earlier,
and put off going to bed,
sweating to make a living,
since it is he who provides for his beloved as they
sleep. (NJB)

5Blessed 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. (ESV)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "unless" indicating a *condition* in v. 1.
- * Circle "house" in v. 1.
- * Underline "vain" in vv. 1-3.
- * Box "for" indicating *reason* in v. 2.
- * Bracket "sleep" in v. 2.

- * Circle "children" in v. 3.
- * Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 4.
- * Underline "they" with two lines in v. 5.
- * Bracket "put to shame" in v. 5.
- * Circle "gate" in v. 5.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What do you infer from the psalmist's *repeated* use of the word "in vain" in verses 1, 2?
2. In what sense is the psalmist's first statement true, if "house" figuratively means "family"?
3. In what sense is the psalmist's second statement about standing guard in vain true?
4. His third statement seems at odds with what wisdom teaches elsewhere (Pr 6:9-11)—especially if the translation in the margin of the NIV is correct (see note on v. 2). How would you resolve this apparent contradiction?
5. Explain the relationship of verses 3-5 to verses 1-2.
6. What are childless couples to infer from verse 3?
7. What's the point of the *comparison* in verse 4?
8. Children were evidently "profit centers" in the psalmist's day; they seem to be "cost centers" today. (According to the USDA the cost of raising a child to age 18 excluding the cost of a college education is around \$200,000.) Do you think a quiver full of them is still a blessing?
9. **Discussion:** This psalm teaches that divine sovereignty overshadows human efforts. Is there nothing we can do to influence divine providence? Talk about it.

When all is said and done, we're all like farmers; all our lives are analogous to theirs. Even if we've never stepped foot on a farm much less been raised on one, no matter. Bill grew up on a family farm and was involved in FFA all through elementary and high school. When he graduated, he went to Texas A&M, enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, majored in Agronomy, and took classes in things like Soil Science, Crop Ecology, Soil Fertility and Fertilizers, and Plant Pathology. He graduated with a 3.7 GPR and returned home to manage the family farm. Once home, he realized the farm needed an equipment upgrade so he purchased a new John Deere 1870 Air-Hoe Drill which plants seed and fertilizes at the same time, saving time and money; what's more, it doesn't require that the ground be tilled before planting, saving even more time and money. He also bought the state of the art agribusiness software he'd used at A&M and computerized his entire operation. Still, he knew if his crops didn't receive rain at key times in the growing cycle and sun for the necessary number of hours, it would all be for naught. The education, the high tech equipment, the state of the art software, and all his hard work would be in vain. Paraphrasing Psalm 127:3, "Unless the LORD sends the rain, farmers plant their fields in vain."

Psalm 127 reads like two unrelated psalms, one about the LORD (vv. 1, 2), and a second one about children (vv. 3-5). A closer look, however, reveals that the two aren't unrelated at all. In the first, the psalmist makes it clear that without the LORD every human undertaking is vain. Building a house, guarding a city, sweating to make a living, they're all vain labors without the LORD's blessing. Working frenetically from dawn to dusk to put bread on the table, in particular, is vain or useless, even unnecessary, given the fact that the LORD provides

for those he loves while they sleep (see NIV margin italics added). "The point is not to discount human effort, but to emphasize that, apart from God's intervention, it is vain" (Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, NIBC, 460).

In the second, he makes it clear that children are a blessing from the LORD. The link to what he first said is found in the word "house" in verse 1. It can refer to a physical structure, but it can also refer to a household, a family. That being the case, it's not unreasonable to conclude, as one writer has that "the whole psalm is concerned with the building of one's family" (460). Moving from general to specific, the psalmist speaks first about God's sovereign involvement in our lives, and then second about him building our households by blessing us with children. "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior," he says, "are sons born in one's youth." The gist of his *comparison* can be put this way: a father's children born to him when he is young will live to become his defenders when he is old. Hence, the man with many sons would not likely be deprived of his rights or the justice due him in judicial proceedings as would widows, orphans, and aliens who had no families to protect their interests. And while having a quiver full of "arrows" is generally a good thing, as another writer observes, "It is not untypical of God's gifts that first they are liabilities or at least responsibilities, before they become obvious assets. The greater their promise, the more likely that these sons will be a handful before they are a quiverful" (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, TOTC, 478)—something all parents should know and all grandparents should know, if they don't know it already.

The Message of this Passage

Unless the LORD builds a family, the parents labor in vain to build it.

day 4 **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.**

- **Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.**

- **Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:**
 - o Belonging
 - o Becoming
 - o *going Beyond*

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage.**

- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)

It seems like some couples can never catch a break while everything other couples touch turns to gold. I'm not talking about irresponsible couples versus responsible couples or good Christian couples versus not-so-good Christian couples. Talk about why this is true or seems to be true, and what downtrodden couples should do-like just keep plugging away. Or should kpaynes@att.netthey do something to get the Lord on their side?

“Trouble in Mayberry”
(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

vv. 1-5 "The unity of verses 1-2 with 3-5 is the major interpretive question. It is impossible to say whether or not these proverbs had a life of their own before their combination here. But whether the psalm is an act of authorship or editing, it has certainly become more than the sum of its parts. A unity is achieved—whether by an author or editor—by several threads. Both sections share the distinctive theme of Yahweh's hidden, though decisive, involvement in house and home. In the Hebrew text, there is a wordplay between the 'builders' (Hb. *bonayw*) in the first half and the 'sons' (Hb. *banim*) in the second . . . Finally, the combination of the motifs found in both halves is attested in ancient Near Eastern literature" (Broyles, 460; cf., Kidner, 477). One writer comments, "the desire to separate the two parts is simply a manifestation of the occupational disease of commentators" (G. W. Anderson cited by A. A. Anderson, *Psalms 73-150*, NCBC, 866).

v. 1 **unless** Cf., "If the Lord does not build a house, then those who build it work in vain. If the Lord does not guard a city, then the watchman stands guard in vain" (the NET Bible, italics added). "This section is marked by two conditional clauses and a recognition of the vanity of human efforts. Each conditional clause begins with an affirmation of the Lord's involvement in a person's work. Each concluding phrase begins in the Hebrew text with the phrase translate in the NIV as 'in vain' (*saw'*). This emphasis calls attention to the place of God's blessing with regard to all human efforts" (Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 5, *Psalms*, by Willem A. VanGemeren, 912, 13).

v. 1 **house** "The building of a house may refer to the construction of a house within the protective walls of the city. It may also signify the raising of a family, especially since this section precedes a unit in which having children is emphasized as a reward from the Lord (vv. 3-5). In the OT it is usual to speak of a family as a 'house,' even as we speak of a prominent family as a 'dynasty' (cf. Ge 16:2; 30:3 Ex 1:21; Ru 4:11 1Sa 2:35; 2Sa 7:27)" (913; cf., Anderson, 867).

v. 1 **vain** I.e., "to no end," "without success or result." The basic sense of the Heb. word is "empty," "vain," "useless" (BDB, s.v., *saw'*, 996). "If the LORD does not build the house, the work of the builders is useless; if the LORD does not protect the city, it is useless for the sentries to stand guard" (TEV). "It is not simply that our projects will fail—there is at least 'bread' ['food to eat'] to show for them—but that they lead nowhere. In terms of verse 1, the house and city may survive, but were they worth building?" (Kidner, 477).

v. 2 **toiling** Lit., "the bread of toil," i.e., "food gained by hard work" (A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, Soncino Books of the Bible, 428). Cf., "bread of painful labors" (NASB); "bread of anxious toil" (ESV); "bread of sorrows" (NKJV); "sweating to make a living" (NJB).

v. 2 **sleep** Verse 2 can be taken in two slightly different ways: 1) God providentially provides for those he loves even while they are asleep (NIV mrgn, TEV, NJB, the NET Bible), or 2) God providentially provides for those he loves so they sleep worry free (NIV, ESV, NRSV, NKJV, NLT). "The point seems to be this: Hard work by itself is not what counts, but one's relationship to God, for God is able to bless an individual even while he sleeps . . . The statement is not advocating laziness, but utilizing hyperbole to give perspective and to remind the addressees that God must be one's first priority. Another option is to take "sleep" as the direct object: "yes, he gives sleep to his beloved" (cf. NIV, NRSV). In this case the point is this: Hard work by itself is futile, for only God is able to bless one with sleep, which metonymically refers to having one's needs met. He blesses on the basis of one's relationship to him, not on the basis of physical energy expended" (the NET Bible, **tn** 7 on Ps 127:2).

v. 4 **like arrows** "A house full of children born before one becomes old (cf. Ge 37:3) provides protection against loneliness and abandonment in society . . . when they come together in the city gate, the place where court was held (69:12; Dt 17:5; 21:19; 22:15, 24; Am 5:12), they will speak on behalf of their aging father in the presence of their enemies (v. 5)" (VanGemeren, 914).

v. 5 **they** Some versions have "they" (NASB, NKJV, the NET Bible; cf., "such men" [HCSB, NEB]) while some have "he" (NLT, ESV, TEV, NRSV, JEB). The problem is the plural Heb. pronoun. Does it refer to the father [perhaps "such fathers"] or to his sons or to both the father with his sons? It likely refers to both since the father would appear in court with his sons and both would be "put to shame" if the judge ruled against them.

v. 5 **contend** Lit., "speak with;" the NIV's translation is based on the implied legal setting. Cf., "confronts his accusers" (NLT); "meets his enemies in the place of judgment" (TEV); "confront their enemies in court" (NEB).

v. 5 **the gate** "The city gate was the place where persons most generally congregated. There business was transacted; there cases were tried in a kind of popular court" (H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 894).

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

Ask your family members: what are three things you like about our family? What about something you wished was different? Read Matthew 25:14-30. Just like the men were given money to oversee, God has given us our family to faithfully care for.

Pray it!

As a parent you can teach your child to pray by using actual scriptures as a guide. Pray this scripture with them this week..

Father, please help love and faithfulness never leave me; bind them around my neck, write them on the tablet of my heart. Then I will win favor and a good name in the sight of you and others. Pr 3:3-4

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Faithfulness – Sticking with God, no matter what, makes me a winner.

Memory verse – "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." Php 4:9

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- *Why did the master give each servant different amounts of money (talents)?
- *Which servant was not faithful with his money?
- *How were the two faithful servants rewarded?
- *How was the unfaithful servant punished?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

Families are different in many ways—size, personalities, habits, strengths and even weaknesses. God never intends for your family to be just like someone else's. He does want you to be faithful and make yours the best it can be. What can you do this week to help your family?

Kids K through fourth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.



Family completes **Experience It** _____
 Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____
 Family participates in **Live It** _____ and **Pray It** _____
 Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Child's name _____

Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Keith Smith (B.A. in Speech Communication, Texas Tech University and M.A. in Religious Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Family and Children's Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. Keith is a featured communicator for Song of Solomon for Students and speaks at children/student camps across the country. He has developed a number of relational parenting seminars designed to motivate parents to empower their parenting by emotionally connecting with their kids. Keith lives with his wife, Denise, and their two children, Jordan and Alex.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.