

# Psalms of Ascent

## Part 8 – Living on Purpose

### Psalm 127

This psalm identifies some of the most ordinary of human activities – work, rest, security, and raising a family. These issues are raised in order to ask whose purpose they serve and to whom we owe them. This Psalm bears marks of wisdom literature and is credited to Solomon. It is possible that the term “his beloved” (vs. 2) was Solomon’s way to embed his signature upon the psalm. Jedidiah or “his beloved” was the special name God gave to Solomon (2 Sam. 12:25). Later Solomon would build the Lord a “house.” However Solomon’s building much like his marriages and eventually his kingdom would end in ruin (1 Kings 9-11).



Though the two sections of the psalm seem at first reading to be disconnected they actually work together well. Both parts proclaim that only that which is from God is truly strong and purposeful. Also, it is common in the Old Testament for “house” to be used in the dual sense of a structure and a family. Both senses of house tie the psalm together with the former meaning used in the first half and the later meaning being used in the second half.

The works of creating and preserving are basic to human purpose. And yet these basic activities are in vain if not for the Lord. Certainly builders will go on building but only that which is from and for the Lord has any lasting purpose. That which man does for himself, for his own aggrandizement will ultimately lead nowhere.

A life marked by God’s purpose is usually more ordinary than sensational. God’s good gifts in this life, while good beyond measure, are also quite ordinary: productivity, safety, children, a continuing legacy, etc. The psalm does not mention material wealth or position. Children who honor their parents is real wealth. “And it is not untypical of God’s gifts that they first 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” (Kidner, 442).

**Main Idea:** Only by faith in the Lord and a commitment to his glory do we experience the purpose of the most fundamental human activities.

**Vs. 1** – The word translated “vain” is difficult to translate. It means empty or futile. But it also carries with it the idea of “false.” Obviously, people can build all sorts of things “without the Lord.” The point of the Psalmist is that whatever is done apart from the Lord is ultimately meaningless. That the Lord must build the house is theological language acknowledging God’s providence which attributes ultimate causality to God.

**Vs. 2** – The same structure and tenses in verse 1 are now used in reference to safety and security.

**Vs. 3** – The word “heritage” means something which is left to an heir; an inheritance. A heritage is something to be guarded but not hoarded. It is something to be developed and enjoyed.

**Vv. 4-5** – For the ancients, many children was a sign that God had richly provided. Many children meant that the parents would be cared for in their old age and that the family legacy would continue.

### 1. Purpose apart from the Lord is an illusion.

Vv. 1-2

- The opening verses address the most basic of human responsibilities: work, safety, and rest. Every person, in order to live in this world, must attend to these fundamental needs. Believer

and unbeliever alike must give attention to these building blocks of a healthy life. And while one does not need to know Jesus in order to labor responsibly or rest appropriately, their efforts will ultimately be in vain apart from faith in the Lord and commitment to his glory.

- Vain typically means “empty; futile.” Solomon makes much use of this word in Ecclesiastes as he reflects on the futility of a life lived apart from the Lord. Here, “vain” carries with it the idea of that which is false. In other words, apart from faith in the Lord even the most basic human responsibilities will not ultimately provide what we hope.
- Only that which is established by God has any lasting value. However, it has pleased the Lord to typically use means to build that which he desires. So, far from rendering human labor meaningless, God’s providence secures the purposefulness of human actions. We may say that the Lord “builds the house” if it is built...
  - a) With faith in God’s provision.
  - b) In accordance with God’s will
  - c) According to God’s ways
  - d) With an eye for God’s use
  - e) For the purpose of God’s glory

## **2. There is purpose in the Lord’s ordinary blessings.**

Vv. 2-5

- Most of life is lived in ordinary circumstances doing ordinary things. This is by God’s design. Responsibilities are not kept, safety is not secured, and children are not raised in those rare “exciting” or sensational moments in life. This Psalm points to the God-given goodness of the basic responsibilities of human activity. And yet any sense of the real and lasting purpose in those activities depends upon faith in God and a commitment to glorify him.

### **a) Work**

- The references to building a house may rightly be understood as shorthand for the whole scope of human labor and productivity. God made mankind to work and be productive. It is part of our sharing in the image of God. And certainly there is something good about honest labor whether it is done by a believer or unbeliever. And yet, apart from knowledge of the Lord and faith in him our labor will ultimately fail to provide any sense of lasting purpose.

### **b) Rest**

- The final clause of verse 2 says, “For he gives to his beloved sleep.” Good sleep requires a certain amount of faith. God designed his human creatures to sleep during a significant portion of their lives. Sleep is a reminder of our limitations. It is also a reminder that the Lord is in control. We must trust him for our safety and the fruitfulness of our labors.

### **c) Family**

- God gives children as a blessing and trust (vs. 3). Children are a prime example of the Lord’s provision of a life filled with meaning. Among the ancient Israelites family was treasured and the presence of many children was seen as a means by which God provided for the needs of his people from generation to generation. The Lord’s purposes alone give the ultimate rationale to love and cherish children rather than seeing them merely as a resource to be exploited. And only the Lord can help children to understand their role in being a blessing.