

Wisdom in the Journey



AN ART OF TALEH MINI-STUDY | PSALMS 127 & 128 | BY COLSON HAUSER

The Psalms of Ascent

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Pilgrims sang the Psalms of Ascent (120-134) on their way to Jerusalem. As a poetic group, these psalms lead us toward God's presence as the source of life and flourishing. Individually, they express the wide-ranging pleas and praises of God's people. Right in the middle of this grouping, Psalm 127 and 128 provide a word of wisdom. They act as a beautiful interlude in the pilgrims' journey. Psalm 127 is attributed to Solomon. While no author is mentioned for Psalm 128, both read like they are extracted right from Proverbs. Each emphasizes God's sovereignty and blessing for those who walk in wisdom. They encourage us to think rightly about our work and family. When used in corporate worship, they give our hearts further expression of praise.



Questions To Get Us Going

- 1) How do you understand God's involvement in your work and family?

- 2) Are you more prone to sit back and let God do all the work? Or do you attempt to control all your circumstances?

- 3) What is your general attitude towards sleep and rest?

- 4) Do you think that God blesses those who live according to his wisdom? Why or why not?

Outline

At the Art of Taleh, our first approach to a Bible passage is to study it sentence by sentence.

First, read through Psalm 127. Then, summarize in five words or less:

A. Verses 1-2

B. Verses 3-4

C. Verse 5

Second, read through Psalm 128. Then, summarize in five words or less:

A. Verses 1 and 4

B. Verses 2-3

C. Verses 5-6

WISDOM IN THE JOURNEY

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Work and family are two main categories of our lives. It was no different for the Bible's authors. Understanding how work and family fit into God's plan for life is practical and important - not just for us, but for God's people as a community.

Psalm 127 starts off with a conditional statement separating us into two groups. All our work e.g. building and watching, is in vain unless God is behind it. Does it strike you with fear? Or does it bring great relief? For the workaholic who takes excessive pride in their efforts, these verses admonish a humbling reminder: God is sovereign and we can't be even if we try.

We may push yourself 110% and yet fail. God does not fail. As he watches over us, it is never in vain. In contrast, the overworked and anxiety-ridden may take great comfort from these verses. God is sovereign; we need not pretend to be. Let go of fear. We can stop trying to do the job of the maker of heaven and earth (Ps 121,124).

Verse 2 portrays a worker overburdened with stress. Many of us toil anxiously trying to secure our future with absolute certainty. Whether motivated by pride or fear, embrace rest as a gift from God. Work hard, then accept sleep as a God's gift of love. God demonstrates his loving protection when you sleep precisely because you are vulnerable and finite. Trust him and let yourself rest.

The second half of Psalm 127 seems like a change of subject except it proves Solomon had family in mind the whole time. Children are a blessing, even more, a reward from God. Of the many things to say about children, the psalmist describes the help they can provide in protecting the family and its assets. Solomon expresses the irony that while the direction of inheritance goes from parent to child, it is the children who are a heritage for their parents.

Understanding the flow of thought from the first section to the second is important but especially so for young parents who burn the candle at both ends. Living in this stage myself, this Psalm provided great comfort and needed challenge throughout my wife's pregnancy and the unique challenges that come with infants.

God was, is, and will build your family, so do not toil as if you're sovereign. In faith, accept sleep when you can as God's loving gift. Work hard and faithfully but with faith because if God wasn't working from the beginning it would all be in vain anyways. Trust that God's wisdom is really best.

Despite being a different poem, Psalm 128 expounds on the blessing of family and work. Such a blessing comes from the fear of the Lord. If there was any doubt wisdom is the subtext of these Psalm, verse one and four should settle it. Echoing both Proverbs 1 and Psalm 1, we see that fearing the Lord leads to fruitful work and family. These verses stand in direct contrast to the anxious toil from 127:2 and ultimately the great mistake of Adam that brought death. Instead, fearing God and living in his ways, i.e. wisdom, brings life and flourishing. Using similes comparing a wife and children to luscious fruit, the author celebrates the blessings that come from walking in the ways of the Lord.

If we are tempted to think the psalmists see life with rose colored glasses, we need only look back to chapter 126 and forward to 129. These chapters stare hard times in the face with brutal honesty.)

Blessings from wisdom follow not only for individuals but for the community as well. The Psalm concludes with a blessing for peace, prosperity, and progeny! Life emanates from Zion, the destination of worshippers singing these Psalms. As a community, when we focus on God as the source of shalom (mentioned a few times in the Psalms of Ascent), we're on the first step toward wisdom and the fruit that comes from it.

The corporate blessing at the end of Psalm 128 reminds us these Psalms were not primarily for individual devotional use. Pilgrims sang them in groups as they journeyed toward God's presence in Jerusalem. How does a wisdom Psalm fit into corporate worship? In my own church tradition, while we corporately read scripture every Sunday, it's rare to read something out of the wisdom literature.

Yet wisdom and worship absolutely go together! Remember the Psalms of Ascent themselves are also a journey towards God's presence and promises. The psalmist begins in Psalm 120 regretting how far they are from God amidst violent, lying people. Psalm 122 rejoices in the call to move towards Jerusalem. Psalm 126 remembers when God restored his people's fortunes, brought them out of captivity, and looks forward to a future restoration. The climax of the group, Psalm 132, focuses on God's rule from Zion as he promised to David.

When reading wisdom literature alone or in a teaching setting, they are excellent resources for how we should live our lives and relate to our creator. When used in a worship setting, however, they allow God's people to recite his truth back to him. Our hearts humbly assent that God is the source of wisdom, and blessing comes from fearing him. Speaking God's wisdom back to him in the context of worship says, "We trust you and want to live according to your wisdom." Since Psalms 127 and 128 speak specifically about work and family, reciting them in worship says to God, "We trust you to watch over our families and communities, and we reject the wisdom of the world for the fear of the Lord."



Reflection

- 1) Are you able to pray this wisdom back to God?
- 2) Do you trust that ultimate success is in God's hands? Do you work too much or not enough?
- 3) Do you see family and children as a blessing to be stewarded or a chore to be managed?
- 4) How does this Psalm encourage you to adjust your perspective?
- 5) What are specific things you need to change in order to bring your attitude about work and family in line with God's perspective?