

Illust: (Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life – Chuck Swindoll, p. 330)

It seems to me that if God were to decide to really capture the attention of the parents of young children it would be through their children’s own little lips and along the lines of what Chuck Swindoll in his book, Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life records for us, “a few well-worded reminders to ‘handle with care’ those little people who may seem to be anything but fragile. I think if we would let them talk, here’s what they would say:

- My hands are small; please don’t expect perfection whenever I make my bed, draw a picture, or throw a ball. My legs are short; please slow down so I can keep up with you.
- My eyes have not seen the world as yours have; please let me explore safely. Don’t restrict me unnecessarily.
- Housework will always be there. I’m only little for a short time – please take time to explain things to me about this world, and do so willingly.
- My feelings are tender; please be sensitive to my needs. Don’t nag me all day long ... treat me as you would like to be treated.
- I am a special gift from God; please treasure me as God intended you to, holding me accountable for my actions, giving me guidelines to live by, and disciplining me in a loving manner.
- I need your encouragement to grow. Please go easy on the criticism; remember you can criticize the things I do without criticizing me.
- Please give me the freedom to make decisions concerning myself. Permit me to fail, so that I can learn from my mistakes. Then someday I’ll be prepared to make the kinds of decisions life requires of me.
- Please don’t do things over for me. Somehow that makes me feel that my efforts didn’t quite measure up to your expectations. I know it’s hard, but please don’t try to compare me with my brother or my sister.
- Please don’t be afraid to leave for a weekend together. Kids need vacations from parents, just as parents need vacations from kids. Besides, it’s a great way to show us kids that your marriage is very special.

Because they are fragile, handling children with care is essential. Handle these little people with care. You’ll be glad you did when all you have is an old photo and the memory of a little package God delivered into your care many, many years ago.”

Children are a gift from God. They are God’s miracles. The miracle of God is that anything exists at all. Everything was brought into existence by God. Prior to creation, only God existed ... He always has. The opening words of the Bible state this plainly. “In the beginning God ...” What does this say about God?

“... everything comes from God.” (1 Co 11:12)

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” (1 Co 10:26)

“The LORD does whatever pleases Him, in the heavens and on the earth ...” (Ps 135:6)

“The LORD works out everything for his own ends—” (Pr 16:4)

God “... works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Eph 1:11)

“Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.” (Ps 77:13-14).

“He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.” (Job 5:9; and it’s repeated word for word again in 9:10).

God works in ordinary ways and God works in extraordinary ways. But God always works in ways that accomplish His purposes for His creation and for His glory.

The saying goes, “Little is much if God is in it.” The reverse is also true, “Much is nothing if God is not in it.” The two most significant creative acts of God are the creation of human life and the creation of the family.

Permit me to read the entire Psalm – Read Psalm 127.

“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for He grants sleep to those he loves. Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from Him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed 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.”

Psalm 127 has two main divisions that emphasize God’s Sovereignty:

1. God is Sovereign over everyday life (vv 1-2)
2. God is Sovereign over family life (vv 3-5)

In the first 2 verses the psalmist contrasts two attitudes toward God in the normal everyday affairs of life (dependence and independence). The term “vain” occurs 3 times in these verses emphasizing the futility of attempting to live life independent of God.

In the last 3 verses the psalmist conveys God’s attitude toward children, their value, and the importance of guiding them within the context of family life.

1. God is Sovereign over everyday life (vv 1-2)

If we think we can live our lives independent of God and have anything of real value to show for it, we are of all people most to be pitied. To drive this point home, the psalmist in Ps 127:1-5 uses four common life situations to illustrate this: 1. building a home, 2. providing security, 3. working for a living, and 4. raising a family. The long and short of it is this: “Our efforts, independent of God, no matter how noble are futile at best; our dependence on God has value for eternity.”

V 1 “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.”

Using the example of building a home the psalmist points out that it is ultimately God who makes building a home possible. He’s the one who created the materials and He provides the ability to do it. It’s possible because God makes it possible. Providing a comfortable home for your family is a responsible thing to do, and God honors this. But without God’s provisions it wouldn’t be possible. “... the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.” (He 3:3b-4).

It is God who provides protection over the city the house is built in. It’s appropriate to do what we can to provide security for ourselves and our family and to protect our belongings. But it’s ultimately God’s intervention that keeps us safe and secure.

The LORD is central in the building of a home and in keeping it secure. Although the actual building and protecting of the home is illustrated, it's the people in the home that God is focusing on – parents and children. God has placed His value on people as the crown of His creation not the homes or cities that we live in. We need to get this right with regard to what God values most.

“From one man He (*God*) made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He (*God*) determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him (*God*) and perhaps reach out for Him (*God*) and find Him (*God*), though He (*God*) is not far from each one of us. ‘For in Him (*God*) we live and move and have our being.’” (Ac 17:26-28). How central is God in these verses?

In each of the three statements of vv1-2, God is central and rightly so. Is God central to you and within your home? When you take stock of what matters most to you, when you honestly evaluate what you are living for, how central is God?

The phrase “Unless the Lord” is not only emphatic by position appearing at the front of each sentence but is also emphatic by repetition in both the English and Hebrew Bible. The intended meaning here is that the Lord must be the very Foundation upon which a home is built for that home to stand firm and the Lord must be the Guardian of the city for that home to be secure within its borders. Likewise the term “vain” is repeated twice and actually occurs first in each clause: “in vain it's builders labor” and “in vain the watchmen stand guard” emphasizing the futility of our efforts to bring about what only God can.

Not only is God central to the building and security of the home, He is to be central in our efforts to meet basic family needs. Although we are responsible as parents for providing a home, security, and working to for a living, attempting to do this independent of trust in and reliance upon God has no value for eternity.

V 2 “In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for He grants sleep to those he loves.”

You can work as hard as you want day and night to meet your needs and the needs of your family and this is the responsible thing to do, but God is our provider and need-meeter. It is God who grants you rest from your labors and the assurance that He is aware of your needs and will take care of them. No amount of concern over this is going to change what God chooses to provide. Haggai nails the idea being conveyed here in Ha 1:6 “You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.” Life in general and within the family is not about material things from God's perspective; it's about spiritual things.

It seems to me that what the psalmist is getting at in the second part of v2 is that God is at work providing for us even while we're asleep. “For He grants sleep to those he loves” is translated more accurately by the NASB “He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.” This is the sense of the alternate rendering in the footnote in my NIV Study Bible. It is God who provides for us and watches over us even while we're sleeping which rules out our efforts and makes what God does for us all the more apparent.

He always has our best interests at heart, which enables us to confidently rest in the assurance that He will provide what He wants us to have, which always amounts to the best gifts even though we may not always see it this way. “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Mt 7:11).

“Toiling” or hard work is the same word trans. “painful labor” in Ge 3:17 and stresses anxieties as well as painful experiences. While the Bible commends the diligent worker (Pr 24:33-34; 2 Th 3:10-13), stretching out each day with anxious toil and stress only leads to greater problems of body and spirit. Those who trust in God (Ps 4:8) are able to

sleep restfully in the knowledge that God is faithfully providing. It's hard to sleep if you don't have peace of mind about what matters to you. God doesn't want us burning the candle at both ends and neglecting what's most important – family and relationships. Having a strong family is what positively impacts the community and demonstrates the value of knowing God and living for Him.

The passage isn't negating the value of hard honest work. It's reinforcing the fact that it is God who makes it possible. It is God who has given us life and breath and everything else Ac 17:25 "And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." We are ultimately not self-sufficient. We are dependent on God every second of every day for all of our needs.

I love how Eugene Peterson renders 1 Sa 2:6-9 "GOD brings death and GOD brings life, He brings down to the grave and raises up. GOD brings poverty and GOD brings wealth; He lowers, He also lifts up. He puts poor people on their feet again; He rekindles burned-out lives with fresh hope, restoring dignity and respect to their lives— a place in the sun! For the very structures of earth are GOD's; He has laid out His operations on a firm foundation. He protectively cares for His faithful friends, step by step, but leaves the wicked to stumble in the dark. No one makes it in this life by sheer muscle!"

Israel's day began in the evening, not in the morning as it does for us.

Our days often begin with a great deal of hustle. We roll out of bed, grab a quick breakfast, and rush out the door. After all, we have so much to do!

On the other hand, Israel's day began in the evening. They rested and slept, then got up in the morning to join God in a work in progress, for "He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps 121:4).

Israel's sequence of evening and morning is significant, I believe, because it pictures the attitude we should embrace in all our efforts. Our days should begin by resting in God's infinite ability. When we begin our work, we join God in what He is already doing.

David Roper expresses it this way: It's useless to drive ourselves in anxious frenzy, "to rise up early, to sit up late" (127:2), as if success depended solely on our efforts. We are to work hard and be faithful in all we do, but we also need to realize that everything depends on God. He never stops working on our behalf. Before we begin our day's work, we must first find our rest in Him — a mindset of resting every day, all day, for all we have to accomplish, believing that God is at the heart of all our activity. It's an unencumbered, unhurried, relaxed lifestyle that grows out of a deep awareness that God is on the job twenty-four hours a day whether we are or not.

What keeps us from entering into God's rest? Unbelief. Underlying all our worry and compulsive self-effort is the thought that God cannot or will not come through. That's why the people of Israel wouldn't lay their burdens down in Jeremiah's day, and that's why we can't let up. That's why we have to keep hustling and hoping to do more. That's why we get so weary and worn out. That's why we get so worried. And that's why we need to find rest that God provides for us in Himself.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6–7).

Our wills can direct our thoughts to any object they choose. We can either obsess over our fear or look away from it and in faith direct our thoughts toward God and His perfect solutions. It's good to think objectively about the issues that distress us, but to fret over them is to deny God's love for us and His ability to provide.

God wants us to act responsibly but it's ultimately He who blesses and protects us. We will not be truly successful without God not in our work life or in our family life.

There's a wordplay in the Heb here "children" is *banim* and "builders" is *bonim*. The intended sense is that having children builds a family. It's God who gives us the skills and abilities to be there for our families.

The same is true when it comes to raising a family. We are to depend on God as we raise our children to become responsible and godly sons and daughters who love God and desire to live with confident trust in Him.

1. God is Sovereign over family life (vv 3-5)

V3 "Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from Him."

Children are a gift of God – "A heritage of the LORD." "Heritage" is a translation of the Heb word that means 'property, possession ... that which is shared/assigned. It is an expression often used in the OT with reference to the land that God promised Israel as an inheritance and which He gave them as an unconditional gift. Children are the Lord's possessions and the property that He shares with parents. Children are personal gifts from God. Children are not a liability; they a reward – trophies of God's love.

V4 "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth."

In the same way that a warrior points his arrows in the direction of his intended target, parents are to point their children in the direction God intends for them to go. An arrow isn't capable of guiding itself; it requires the skill and accuracy of the bowman to hit the target. God has entrusted parents with the responsibility of training their children in the things of God to hit the mark God has prepared for them. We are to bring our children up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4).

V5 "Blessed 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."

The city gate was the place where persons most generally congregated to transact business and where cases were tried.

F. B. Meyer points out that "contending armies of a besieged city would meet at the gate of the city. The thought here is that a man's children will defend him in civil or legal matters so that he doesn't suffer loss or injury. They see that justice is done."

Our children are invaluable as defenders of father and mother in times of war and hard times. Families with more defenders are better protected.

Illust: (Serm. III. File Children 5/96.4 – GEM Encyclopedia of Illustrations, NY Cranstons Stone, 1889)

Ancient history records, "A certain city was besieged, and at length obliged to surrender. In the city there were two brothers, who had, in some way, obliged the conquering general; and in consequence of this, received permission to leave the city before it was set on fire, taking with them as much of their property as each could carry about his person. Accordingly the two generous youths appeared at the gates of the city, one of them carrying their father, and the other their mother."

Children are a gift from God. They are God's miracles. God is the Creator, the Giver and the Sustainer of life. He's the only One who can give life and He is the only one who can take it away. What's hardest for us as human beings is to accept the fact that it is God's right as the Creator of all things to do what pleases Him and serves His purposes which often doesn't line up with ours.

It's not human ingenuity but divine intention that deserves the focus of our thinking and doing. The surest thing we have in this life is our inseparable relationship with God. "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Php 2:13)

A family without God can never experience the spiritual richness of relationship that God brings. Our children are our future. We need to invest in their lives with all the love, diligence, respect, and honor that we possibly can to prepare them in the present for the future. They desperately need this from us.

We all fail because of sin. Call it what you like: a mistake, an indiscretion, a lapse in judgment, a moment of weakness. God calls it sin, which is stepping outside of His will and doing our own will for our own ends not His. We'll fall short every time.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (Mt 7:24-27)

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Co 3:9-11)

Our children are worth every moment we invest in them. Spend more time with them, plan more family outings with them, talk with them more, ask more questions about what they are thinking and what has happened during their day and be lots more loving, caring, and understanding. Teach them about God and how important it is to know Him and trust Him; how much He loves them and do this mostly by how you live before them in all that you say and in all that you do. The most powerful influence in a child's life is that of his or her parents. Be constant in prayer, consistent in example, and compassionate in love.

A Reader's Digest article, "Hard truths About Day Care," concludes: "What the very young want, and urgently need, child-development experts agree, is not education or socialization, but the affection and unhurried attention of their parents. The deepest problem with paid child-rearing is that someone is being asked to do for money what very few of us are able to do for any reason other than love." (Ser. III. File – Parental Duty, 4/90.6)

"Ten Comments Parents make that Discourage Children" (Ser. III File – Parental Feeling, Sorrow, 12/93.17)

1. Do as I say, not as I do
2. I don't care what you want I know what's best for you
3. Because I said so, that's why
4. You want to be what?
5. This room is a pig pen.
6. Can't you do anything right?
7. What a stupid thing to say
8. You did what?

9. I don't want to hear it
10. I'm busy right now, maybe later

“Ten Commandments for Guiding Children” (Ser. III File – Parental Duty, 10/91.13)

1. Teach them, using God's Word (De 6:4-9).
2. Tell them what's right and wrong (1 Ki 1:6).
3. See them as gifts from God (Ps 127:3).
4. Guide them in godly ways (Pr 22:6).
5. Discipline them (Pr 29:17).
6. Love them unconditionally (Lk 15:11-32).
7. Do not provoke them to anger (Eph 6:4).
8. Earn their respect by example (1 Ti 3:4).
9. Provide for their physical needs (1 Ti 5:8).
10. Pass your faith along to them (2 Ti 1:5)

An Unknown Author penned these penetrating words about “The Heart of a Child.” Whatever you write on the heart of a child, no water can wash it away. The sands may be shifted when billows are wild and the efforts of time may decay. Some stories may perish, some songs be forgot, but this engraved record, time changes not. Whatever you write in the heart of a child a story of gladness or care – that heaven has blessed or that earth has defiled, will linger unchangeably there. Who writes it has sealed it forever and aye. He must answer to God on that great judgment day. (Sermons Illustration File – Parental Influence 6/93.19)

Benediction: “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (Ac 20:32).