

## Building Strong Families (Part 1)

by Bayless Conley

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley

Hello, welcome to the broadcast today. I'm going to be talking about something that is as dear to my heart as virtually anything that I can imagine. In fact, it's so important. There's one verse that I have on my wall, in my office, out of the whole Bible, one verse, and I'm going to be speaking to you from that. So hey, grab a Bible if you've got one. Let's read that verse together.

As I said in my introduction a moment ago, in my office, I only have one verse. Actually, a portion of one verse on the wall. I don't have a lot of Bible references. I have tons of books in here, tons of books about the Bible, lots of different versions of the Bible, different translations, but only one verse on the wall. Now, I do have fishing pictures in here and a few other things. But this verse is one that has meant a lot to me throughout my journey with Jesus, especially in building a church and pastoring for many, many decades. It's from Psalm 127, and it's the first part of verse one. (Psalm 127:1 NKJV) It says,

<sup>1</sup> Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.

That's been sort of a mantra for me. Something that I've continually gone back to because God is the one who has built our church, Cottonwood Church. He is the one who sustains it. He is the guide. He is the wind in our sails. It is all about Him. He is the only superstar in this church. God has actually spoken to me deeply, on many occasions, from this verse and from some of the other things in this particular Psalm.

It's a very short Psalm, Psalm 127. I'd like to read it with you, and I want to encourage you to follow along as we read through it. Now, I'm going to talk to you about some of the things that God has spoken to me through this Psalm. And I trust that God will get those things that He's put in me, through me, to you. The truth is that one shaft of light from the Holy Spirit, one illuminating moment in His Word, can change the whole trajectory of your life. It can change your marriage. It can change your family. It can change your business. It can change everything about you. It can take you out of the miry clay and put your feet on a solid rock. In fact, I just pray right now,

Father, I pray for every person that's watching me. For those that are joining me, I ask that You would grant them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Your Word. Father, open their eyes and open my eyes. That the eyes of our heart would see, that the ears of our heart would hear and that these hearts of ours would comprehend Your Word. Father, we ask it in Jesus' name, and we do it with a view to be participants and to be doers. My friend and myself, we want to be doers of the Word, not merely hearers. Amen, amen, and amen.

All right, Psalm 127 beginning in verse one, and there's just five verses to this power-packed Psalm. Psalm 127:1-5 NKJV,

<sup>1</sup> Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. <sup>2</sup> It is vain for you to rise up early,

## Building Strong Families (Part 1)

to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. <sup>3</sup> Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. <sup>4</sup> Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. <sup>5</sup> Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Marvelous! Now, I read the Psalm, but I actually didn't read what came before verse one. In the original text of this, there's a little heading and it says this, "A song of ascents of Solomon." And then it goes on and says, "Unless the Lord builds the house," et cetera. A song of ascents from Solomon. It's literally a song about going to a higher place. It's a song about ascending, a song about going up, and that's where God wants to take us.

He wants to take you to a higher place. He wants to lift you up. Yes, He wants to lift you up. He wants to bring you out of what you're in and take you to a higher place. A place where you can see farther, a place of liberty, a place of freedom, and a place of blessing. He wants to take our families— He wants to take our families to a higher place.

This song of ascents, as it begins, we find this divine tension. It says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it." There's reliance, "Unless the Lord builds," and there's also action, "They labor in vain who build it." God's part is that we have to rely on Him. Then there's our part we need to do. We're trusting God to build, yet we still must labor. We're trusting God to guard the city, but we still are to set a watchman. You know, in the book of Proverbs, it says, "The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but victory comes from the Lord." Again, divine tension, we're trusting God for the victory, but we still need to prepare the horse.

We need to do our part and trust God to do His part. "Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." But there still needs to be a watchman. "Unless the Lord builds the house," He needs to be building. The people that are building it's vain for them unless God's building, but they still need to labor. You see God primarily guards and builds through us. As we look to Him for guidance, strength, and wisdom, He will help us do what we can do, and then He will do what we cannot do.

I want to say that again. As we look to Him for guidance, for strength, for wisdom, He will help us to do what we can do, and then He will do what we cannot do. The verses we just read in the Psalm have many, many applications. As I said, it has been a bedrock for me when it came to starting, building, growing, and then shepherding the great church that He's allowed us to serve in for all of these decades. It has been foundational for me to realize, all right, I need to do my part. I need to build. I need to guard, but I need to be relying upon God, not just in my own skill and not in my own wisdom. God will do it.

I was listening to someone the other day, and they were quoting the verse that says, "Be still, and know that I am God." They quoted a translation I hadn't heard before, and it said, "Stop your striving, and know that I am God." There can be a lot of striving when we try and do this in our own power, when we have to do it in our own flesh. It all depends on me. I have to solve this thing. I have to fix this thing, and there's just this great stress on us. But when we realize that God wants to be the wind in our sails, and yes, we still need to hoist the sail. We need to do our part, but we need to trust God to be the wind in those sails. I still need to labor, but I need to trust God to strengthen me and to guide me in that labor. And then He will do the things that I could never do on my own.

## Building Strong Families (Part 1)

Again, I've applied it. God has given these verses to me, to sustain me, and to strengthen me as we've gone forward in the church. I'm certain there are many, many applications, but the main application of these verses, the primary focus of this Psalm, is what I want to talk to you about. You might be surprised, but it is about the family. More than anything else, the verses here from Psalm 127 that we just read are about the family.

When it says, "Unless the Lord builds the house," the Hebrew word for house is the same word for family. Unless the Lord builds the family, they labor in vain who build it. God wants to build and guard your family. "Unless the Lord guards the city," the city being a metaphor for the family. He will build, and He will guard our families if we will invite Him in and seek His help. He will indeed help us. In verse 2 (Psalm 127:2 NKJV), he said,

<sup>2</sup> It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows.

How many have eaten their meals in sorrow and lost sleep over family matters, especially our children? He went on and said (Psalm 127:3 NKJV),

<sup>3</sup> Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.

I just want to let you in on something. You may have young children right now, and you're thinking, "Oh, when they're grown, you know—" Well, they never stop being our kids. Our kids are all grown. Our grandkids are getting big at a seemingly very rapid rate. Even though the kids, many, many years ago, left home and they're grown, they have their own families, they've never stopped being our kids. The fact that they grow up does not diminish their ability to impact our hearts, good or bad, for joy or sorrow. These verses say that, "It's vain to rise up early, sit up late, eat the bread of sorrows." Many a mother, many a father, have eaten their bread in sorrow and just had a pain in their heart over issues with their children.

Here, it says, "Children are a heritage from the Lord." Literally, they're a gift from the Lord. And, "the fruit of the womb is a reward." Kids are a gift, and they're a reward. They're not a punishment from God. If you are a parent that has young children, especially if they're very, very active young children, I have a word from God for you before we go any further. You will live. You're going to make it. We had three very active children, and we survived. You will survive as well. It goes on in verse 4 (Psalm 127:4 NKJV), and it says,

<sup>4</sup> Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth.

Arrows. As parents, we can send our children out like arrows, far and true. We can send them out into the world with faith in God. We can send them out with hope. We can send them out with a sense of eternity, with a heart that embraces honesty, integrity, justice, and compassion, especially if they have seen those things modeled in the home.

You might say, "Bayless, we made big mistakes. We weren't even Christians at the time, or we failed in a lot of areas with our kids. If anything, our arrows, our children, have come back and wounded our own hearts. We didn't model the things that we should have modeled in the home. We didn't train them the way that we should have trained them. Right now, when we think about our kids and the state of things, it's a heartache."

Well, listen to me. You cannot change the past. You cannot undo the things you did that you shouldn't have done. You can't go back and do the things that you didn't do that you should have done. I'm going to tell you two things. Number one, don't. Don't wallow in condemnation;

## Building Strong Families (Part 1)

that is the devil's quicksand. Do ask for forgiveness from God if you need it, but don't wallow in condemnation. Then, do pray. That is God's means of deliverance. Don't underestimate the power of your prayers.

Your children may be grown and gone and may be in all sorts of trouble, living a very anti-biblical lifestyle. It may be with their sexuality or whatever they do. They may be in a posture and a stance that is hostile towards the gospel and toward godly things. My friend, do not fear. Your prayers can have a powerful effect. I was not raised in a Christian home myself. I never heard the gospel till I was in my 20s. I did have a mother and father, thank God, who loved me and loved my sister, and they did the best they could.

Certainly, they came short in many, many areas, but I can't blame them for the way that I turned out as a young man. I got into a lot of trouble at an early age. I was drinking very heavily as a young teenager. I got into substance abuse as a young teenager, and things just escalated. They got from bad to worse. I left home as a teenager and really didn't see my family for about four years.

My parents didn't really know where I was or what was going on, except that I was hanging around with some dangerous people and that I had problems with drugs, alcohol, etc. My mother—I found out later, I didn't know this at the time—she cried herself to sleep every night for years. Just in anguish over me, the way I turned out, and the way things had gone. Now, mom was not a Christian, but she did believe in the God of the Bible.

She hadn't been born again yet; she got born again later on, but she did believe the Bible was God's Word, and she did believe in the God of the Bible. One night, she got on her knees and she said, "God, I can't take this anymore. This is killing me. This burden I'm carrying for my son, oh God, I just give him to You." And she asked God to take this burden from her. She literally gave me to God.

She said it was like a huge stone rolled off of her chest. All of that heaviness and that burden was gone. She never worried about me another moment after that day. Interestingly enough, I think within a matter of weeks, I was in a street mission full of derelicts, homeless people, drug addicts, alcoholics, and I heard the gospel. They gave an invitation. I was the only one that went forward that night. I gave my life to Jesus. People laid their hands on me, prayed for me, and I was set free from years of substance abuse and addiction.

Never from that day to this day, some 47 years or more, have I had another illegal drug in my body. God heard my mama's prayers, and sir, ma'am, God will hear your prayers. You may not be able to change the past; don't wallow in condemnation over that, but do pray. God will hear your prayers. He then went on in Psalm 127:5 NKJV,

<sup>5</sup> Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. (Them being children.) They shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Now, the quiver was the case that held the arrows. In my personal family scenario, my wife and I, we figured our quiver held three. We had three kids, and we were done. My wife came from a family where their quiver held ten. She's one of ten siblings. "Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them." Some of us have smaller quivers, and some of us have really big quivers.

He went on and said that, "They will not be ashamed." I take that as a promise for my children's salvation. A promise from God that my children will be saved. Our quiver held three. I have a

## Building Strong Families (Part 1)

promise from God here saying, “They won’t be ashamed.” I take that as a promise of salvation because in Isaiah 45:17 NKJV, the Scripture says,

<sup>17</sup> But Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever.

Second Timothy 1:12 NKJV,

<sup>12</sup> I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed.

He said, “But they shall speak with the enemy in the gate.” Good News Translation (Psalm 127:5 GNT) said,

<sup>5</sup> He will never be defeated when he meets his enemies.

Now, that can be looked at several ways. First, the gate is an entry point into a city. Any ancient city would have walls, they would have a gate, and that was the entry point. That was the focal point of attack for an adversary. If the gate falls, all is lost. Job 5:4 NKJV says,

<sup>4</sup> His sons are far from safety, they are crushed in the gate, and there is no deliverer.

That’s not what’s happening here, for us and for our children, because we’re looking to God to help build and guard our family. This is a promise that our children will prevail over the forces of darkness, and the devil will not gain entrance into their lives. We’re living in an upside-down world, where in culture, they’re calling evil good and good evil. In many cases, where the righteous are being punished, and the lawbreakers are going free.

People are confused and mixed up about their sexuality and about their gender. And actually, even, at least where I live, in the United States, there are some places where they are teaching young children in school things they ought not, about sexual perversions. It’s a crazy time to be alive. The truth of the matter is, if you pull the curtain back, we don’t wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities, powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this age.

It’s like there are blinders over some people’s eyes. And you just want to have a rational conversation with some folks about certain things, but you can’t have a rational conversation. They’ll just begin to rant and rave. It’s just crazy. There are certain things that make no sense unless you realize there are dark spiritual forces at work in the world. The Bible says, “If our gospel is hidden, it’s hidden to those whose minds the god of this world has blinded, lest the glorious light of the gospel should shine to them.”

The Scripture literally says, “Satan has blinded them.” There are blinders over their eyes. That is the world we’re sending our children out into, but they will not be defeated when they meet the enemy at the gate. They will overcome the forces of darkness. I believe our children don’t have to be captured by the current cultural norms that, in many respects, are anti-Christ and anti-biblical. I believe that God will put angels around them, to guard them and to keep them. And our prayers can keep them. The Word of God will find a home in their heart and will grow, and they will flourish in Jesus’ name.

The second way that can be looked at is the city gate was also the main place for public gathering and for conducting business in the ancient world. You can find it throughout the Scriptures. They would meet at the city gate to conduct business. Here’s the application:

## Building Strong Families (Part 1)

Soon enough, our children will find out that there are unscrupulous and dishonest people in the world who will deal crookedly in business and in life. The God we serve can protect them, cause them to succeed, and not be defeated as they live out their life's calling and transact whatever kind of business God has called them to. We have our part to build and to guard. But thank God, He has His part so we can lay down in confidence and sleep without distress when it comes to our kids because God will build them and guard them wherever they go.

Now, I want to begin to share some other thoughts. As I've meditated upon and reflected upon this Psalm many, many times, God has spoken to me and given me some things and I want to give them to you. I'm just going to let you know that I know I'm not going to be able to finish this in the time we have, so you're just going to have to join me next time if you want all of it. Here's a few thoughts in the remaining time that I do want to share with you. In verse 2 and verse 3 (Psalm 127:2-3 NKJV), which are connected, it says,

<sup>2</sup> It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. <sup>3</sup> Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord.

Those are connected. The most significant thing that we can do for our kids is to love them. But we can only do that fully when we know that we are loved, that is, loved by God. I can't give away what I don't have. I mentioned my parents earlier. My dad didn't get saved until later in life, and my mother didn't get saved until later in life. I know a bit about my dad's upbringing. He did not display a lot of affection. There were certain things, later on in life, after he became a Christian, that changed. But prior to that, I realized he was just a product of his upbringing. He didn't receive certain things in his family and in his life. He didn't have that in his arsenal to give to my sister and I. He did the best that he could, but some things he didn't have. Again, the most significant thing we can give our children is love. But we can't fully do that unless we know that we are loved.

This, in verse 2, it says, "For so He gives His beloved sleep." He calls you His beloved. That literally means "loved by God." When you know that you are loved by God, you will be able to give that love away. The Bible says, in Romans 5, "The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

I know I'm loved by God; therefore, I can give love away, especially to my family. God will build our family, but He will primarily do it through us. He loves us, and then He wants to love our kids through us. Consider this, if you would: There are only three times we have on record, only three times, that God spoke audibly in the Gospels. Only three times that God spoke audibly in the Gospels. We know that Jesus would get up before dawn and go and pray many, many times.

He would wrestle in prayer all night. Jesus was a man of prayer. You read the Gospels; it seems that He went from one place of prayer to the next, working miracles in between. Jesus prayed often. We don't know what happened in all those exchanges as He prayed. We don't know what the Father said to Him. Except three times, we do know what God said. Three times, we have on record in the Gospels that God spoke audibly. One is in John 12:28, Jesus said, "Glorify Your name." The Father responded audibly, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again." The second time we find that is Jesus' baptism, and that is recorded in Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22. Let me read it to you from Mark 1:11 NIV. The Father spoke audibly. People could hear it. It said,

## Building Strong Families (Part 1)

<sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

The third time we have where God spoke audibly, and people could hear it, was on the Mount of Transfiguration. He basically said the identical thing that He said at Jesus' baptism. Now, think about these three things. God said, "You're My Son," acceptance. "Whom I love," affection. "With You, I'm well pleased," affirmation. Acceptance, affection, and affirmation. Those are three things that we need to give our children. If you can give those three things to your children: acceptance, affection, and affirmation, you have done a lot.

Now, think about this. God could have said anything, at any time, to Jesus audibly for people to hear. But the only thing in the whole New Testament that God spoke to His Son, about His Son, that we have, the only thing that God said to Jesus, about Jesus, are these three things. "You're My Son," acceptance, "Whom I love," affection, and "In Whom I'm well pleased," affirmation. It could have been anything else. Why did God choose to let us know that?

Because those are the three things, the three most important things that every parent should give to their children. Tell your kids, "You're my son. You're my daughter. You belong to this family." Acceptance. "You're part of us. You're family. We belong to one another." The second thing is, "I love you." Tell them I love you. I referred to you earlier that my father didn't receive a lot of affection in his home. He didn't give a lot until after he became a believer.

I don't remember my dad showing much affection to my mother, to me, or to my sister growing up. I suppose he did it in his own way, but it was certainly not verbal. It's important for our children to hear, "I love you. You're loved." Show them, give them a hug, and demonstrate that love to them. Then, thirdly, affirmation. "I'm proud of you. I know you're trying." You might say, "Well, they're not doing really good right now." Look, just tell them, "I know you've got it. You've got what it takes. You have in you what you need."

Put it in your own words, in your own way, but show them acceptance. Show them affection. Show them affirmation. One of our pastors on staff, his name is Robert. He shared in a service recently. He was actually raised in our church as a little kid and then went off the rails as a young man. He was drinking, using drugs, going out partying, and doing all that. He was making a lot of money as a young man but still living with his parents for a period of time.

He came home late one night. He's high. He's been out partying. His dad's sitting in the dark, and his dad said, "Son," acceptance. Said, "I love you." Robert started to cry. Sat down in the dark with his dad, and after a few minutes, his dad said, "I know you've got what it takes," and that broke the dam. Robert began to sob, and he repented. He gave his life back to Jesus. Today, he's one of the pastors in our church. I've got so much more to say about this, but my time is gone, so you're just going to have to join me again. Until then, may God richly bless you.

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley