

## Building Strong Families (Part 2)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, friend. Thank you for joining me. We are going to get into the second part of a message that I started last time, but if you weren't there, fear not. It's going to be a total message in and of itself today. You're going to be blessed by it. In fact, put your seatbelt on and put your crash helmet on. I'm going to be talking to you from Psalm 127, "Unless the Lord builds the house..." Get ready!

Now, my dear friend, I am so glad that you've joined me. I have some things on my heart that I want to share with you, and they're all from Psalm 127. Basically, there'll be some thoughts that I pull in from some other Scriptures, but God has spoken to me profoundly from this Psalm. It has helped me so much in my life and with my family. And I believe that through it, He's helped me to help others. I trust that divine help is going to come to you. It says, Psalms 107:20 NKJV, that God,

<sup>20</sup> He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

Deliverance, healing, and blessing come through the Word, and His Word is coming to you right now. Wherever you happen to be, whatever medium you're listening to this through or watching this from, I trust that God is going to open the eyes of your understanding and give you something that is very specific to you in your life right now. Now, I began this last week, and I'm going to finish it today. We're talking from Psalm 127:1-5 NKJV. I want to begin today by just reading the entire Psalm. It's very short, only five verses, but it's power-packed. It says,

<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, 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.

Now, there are many applications to these beautiful statements, promises, and encouragements that we find here in this Psalm. More than anything else, it applies to family. As it begins, "Unless the Lord builds the house," the Hebrew word for house is also the word for family, and in context, that is what He's talking about. "Unless the Lord builds the family, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." The city being a metaphor for the family.

God wants to build and guard our families, yet there's a bit of divine tension here. There's reliance, and there's action. There's reliance, "Unless the Lord builds..." We're trusting Him to do it, "They labor in vain who build it." We still need to labor. "Unless the Lord watches the city," okay, we're trusting Him to guard things, to guard our family. "The watchman stays awake in vain." We still need to set up a watchman. God builds and guards, but He mainly does it through

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us. As we look to Him and invite Him into the situations of our lives and our families, God will help build and guard the family through us.

He will strengthen us as we look to Him for strength. As we look to Him for wisdom and guidance, He'll give us those things. He will do things through us, and then He will do things for us that we cannot do on our own. It's a bit of responding to God's ability. I like what someone said one time; "Once you get saved, your life is no longer your responsibility, but it's now your response to His ability." You still have your part to do, but we're trusting Him to do what we cannot do and to strengthen us in the things we can do. God wants to build the family. He wants to guard the family.

And then He talked about children being a heritage, literally a gift from the Lord. "The fruit of the womb is a reward." Children are a gift or a reward. They're not a punishment from God. Last time, we ended talking about one of the most important things we can give our children, which is love. But the truth is we cannot fully love them unless we know that we are loved. It says in Psalm 127:2 NKJV,

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

Many a mother and many a father have done that. Their hearts filled with pain over children that have gone astray, but it says it's vain for you to do that. It says, "For He gives His beloved sleep," and then, "Behold, children are a heritage of the Lord." Those things are connected. God gives His beloved sleep. Beloved means to be loved by God. Once you know you are loved by God, you can, in turn, give that to your children.

Your relationship with God will impact your relationship, first of all, with your family. You get the vertical right, and the horizontal things will begin to work out. You get the vertical right and the life, the love, and the power that flows to you and the wisdom that flows to you through that relationship with God, the love that you receive; you can then give that out on a horizontal level to your family. When you know you're loved, you can give love.

For the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts. We talked about that briefly last time as we ended. Of all the things that we could have been told that the Father said to Jesus in prayer—we're basically told very little—God chose one main thing. In fact, there's only one thing that God said to His Son, Jesus, about His Son, Jesus, revealed in Scripture at all. Jesus, no doubt, had great discussions and fellowship and times of worship with the Father, but only once are we told what God specifically said to the Son about the Son. We find it when Jesus is there at His baptism. It's recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Father basically said three things to Him. In Luke 3:22 NIV, it says,

<sup>22</sup> And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

The Father said that to Jesus. He said, "You are My Son," acceptance. "Whom I love," affection. "In whom I'm well pleased," affirmation. The Father gave those three things to the Son. Now, why, out of all the things that the Father said to Jesus throughout His entire life, would this be the one thing that we're given that the Father said to the Son about the Son?

Because these are the three most important things that we can say and that we can give to our children. Affirmation, "You're my son. You're my daughter. You belong to this family. You're not some outsider. You belong. You're loved, whom I love, in whom I'm well pleased," affirmation.

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Your kids may not be doing well right now, and you think, “Man, I can’t say I’m proud of you.” Just tell them, “Look, I know you’re trying. You have what it takes.” As parents, if we’ll give at least those three things to our children: acceptance, affection, and affirmation, we have done a lot. But where you don’t find those things, you’ve got trouble.

There are many wounded men and wounded women who struggle in life because they didn’t receive those things growing up. And because they don’t receive those things in the home, they will go looking for them in all the wrong places. Kids and young people will go to the wrong places to receive love, acceptance, and affirmation if they don’t receive those things in the home. I want to say this: being a father, being a man, being a grandfather, especially guys, it’s most important that it comes from us.

You may have been raised in a home where you were given no affection, and you’re not quite sure how to do it. Hey, just step out there and try. Tell your son, “Look, you’re my son. I love you, and look, I’m proud of you. You have what it takes.” Just do your best. Show it and express it verbally, and it will be so important in the lives of your children. Now, every person craves those three things. Every person needs those three things. How blessed is the child that receives them in the home! It will build confidence, stability, and security. He goes on in the Psalm after that, in Psalm 127:4 NKJV, he said,

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

Arrows in the hand. Our hands pull the bowstring back, and our hands also direct the bow. They direct the direction. Our hands determine how far and with what velocity the arrow goes out. Our hand also determines what direction the arrow goes out. God wants to use your influence, Mother. He wants to use your influence, father, to determine how far and in what direction your children will go. Now, it certainly is not entirely dependent upon us. You go all the way back to the beginning; the Lord wants to build the house. And God certainly brings other people in to add. But the main thing He wants to do, God’s highest and best, is that He does that through the family, through the mother and the father.

Now, a warrior didn’t waste arrows. He did not have an unlimited supply. A warrior was very precise and careful with his aim. Because he had a limited supply of arrows, he didn’t just point it up in the air in battle and let the arrow go and say, “I sure hope it hits somebody. I sure hope it takes out one of the enemy.” No, they were precise and very specific in what they did. Our job, as parents, is to observe and then aim our children in the direction of their gifting. I’m going to say that again. As parents, it is our job, as fathers, as mothers, as grandparents, it is our job to observe our children and then aim them in the direction of their gifting. You probably know the verse Proverbs 22:6 NKJV. It’s often quoted,

<sup>6</sup> Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

That verse is very, very rich. I love the Amplified Classic because it brings out a lot of the original Hebrew meanings and the layers of what’s actually there and what’s being said. It says this, bringing out the meaning in the original it says, Proverbs 22:6 AMPC

<sup>6</sup> Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent].

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“Train up a child in the way he should go and in keeping with his individual or her individual gift or bent.” Their inclinations. He says there in Psalm 127, “Like arrows in the hands of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth.” I believe we need to do this when we’re young. When we’re young parents is the time to start. When our children are young is the time to start guiding them in the direction of their inclinations and their giftings. “So are the children of one’s youth.” They will begin displaying certain traits or certain inclinations at a very young age. Mother and father look for those traits. Help them develop them for God’s glory and for their possible future employment.

I hope you’re listening to me. I think about our grandsons. We have four grandsons. One is, right now, as I’m recording this, 14 years old. Another is 12, another is 7, and another is 2 1/2. They all have different inclinations to certain things. I even think about the very youngest one. His name is Liam. I could see it when he was one and a half years old. If he sees anything roll, he goes, and he wants to study the wheels and how the wheels go around. If there’s a rocking chair, he gets under it to see how it works. Anything mechanical, he looks at it. He wants to understand how the gears, how the levers, and how the wheels work.

You could have all this flashy, beautiful stuff up here, and he says, “Forget that. I want to see the mechanism that runs it. As a little boy, he’s got this bent towards how things work. I think God has put something in him when it comes to that. I think about one of our middle grandsons. I think when he was like seven years old, I gave him, for a Christmas gift, a barrel full of pieces of wood and scraps of metal and gave him a toolbox. It was one of the best gifts he ever got.

He creates things with his hands. He’ll disappear for a couple of hours and come back with a bow that’ll shoot an arrow 100 yards. It’s just crazy. He fashions things. He’s just got this eye. He can create things. It’s interesting. He has an uncle who’s a famous artist that creates things and has made things that other people have never made before him. He’s actually a pioneer in certain areas of art. Our middle grandson has that. I could talk about our other grandsons as well. You see certain inclinations and certain giftings in them.

It’s a parent’s job to look for those things and then to encourage them in the area of their gifting. Teach them through instruction and example that their gifts should be used for God’s glory. It’s important to know what we’re gifted to do. I hear a lot of people wanting to ask the question or saying in one way or another, “What’s my destiny? What is it that I’m supposed to do? What is God’s plan for my life?” I think those are good questions. Maybe a better question is, what is God up to in the world? What is important to God? What are God’s priorities?

Just, in general, in every generation, or what is God doing in this season in the world? Then I ask myself, “All right, how can my giftings fit into that? How can I lend what He’s given me in support of that, in doing that? How can I use what He’s put in me for His glory and to do His work?” When it comes to the kids as well, and we realize one has a certain gifting, maybe you’ve got a child that can do complex math problems in their head. It’s just astonishing to you. They’re like a little computer there. And while another child hates school, but has giftings in other areas. They’re all different, so it’s important that we don’t love or favor one child more than another because their gifts or their bent is similar to ours.

Isaac loved Esau more than he loved Jacob because Esau was a man of the field. Isaac related more to Esau. Rebecca, however, loved Jacob because he was more like her, and it caused big trouble. You may recognize the inclinations, the inward gifting that God has put in a certain child, and think, “Man, I’ve got that same thing,” and so you favor them. Don’t do that. You favor

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them equally. I know a couple of men my age, actually, in one case, a little older. One of them was the heir to a sawmill, a lumber mill. It had been in the family for generations.

He's the heir apparent, instant inherited wealth. He's going to take over and run this sawmill, but it's not what he wanted to do. He went to his father, and he said, "Look, Dad, I know that I'm the one expected to step in and take this for another generation, but that's not what I want to do. That's not what I feel I'm gifted to do." He said, "I love interior design. I want to make people's houses look beautiful. That's what I want to do." With the blessing of his dad, he went and did that and flourished and has had a good life doing that.

Now, he may not have made as much money as he would have in the sawmill, but he's been happy for decades. He's probably had a far greater influence through his interior decorating business than he would have ever had, as far as touching people, than he would have ever had running that sawmill. I've got another friend. By contrast, his father metaphorically beat him into submission, said, "You are going to carry on with the family business," and threatened him. Threatened to disown him and to cut him off from everything if he didn't do it.

He didn't maybe know how at the time or didn't have the courage, but went ahead and did it. He's made a good living for himself. Truly, he has, but he's been an unhappy man for decades. I don't believe that he's had the influence that he could have had if he would have followed the things that God had put into his heart. The result when someone ends up being forced into or not encouraged to go into the direction they should, and they're forced into another thing, is that they're the proverbial square peg being pounded into a round hole. And it just doesn't fit.

They never end up being the blessing for God's kingdom that they could have been. Now, certainly, they can have a good life and a happy life, but God's best is that we realize our kids are like arrows in our hands, and it's our job to help determine the direction that they go. Listen, look at your kids, especially if they're young. If they're grown and left home, you can pray now. You maybe can't influence them the way you could when they were young, but look for those inclinations and for their individual giftings and encourage them to go into that.

Really, the Bible says in the book of Psalms that "God from heaven looks on all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashions their heart individually, and He considers all their works." God sees everyone on the whole earth, it says. And I don't know how He does it, but He's God, and He can. He's fashioned their hearts individually. The next thing it says, "He considers all their works." Meaning that the work of our life, the employment of our lives, should come from the individual wiring of our hearts. God has wired me up in a unique way. I may be similar to some people, but there are some unique things about Bayless Conley.

The works that I do, the employment of my life, what I spend my life doing for the glory of God should flow out of that individual wiring. It's best when the parents can help the children to do that and teach them to do it for the glory of God. Now, it says, "As arrows are in our hands..." You might even want to look at your hands right now. It's in the power of your hands, so to speak, to touch and bless, direct, give energy, give trajectory to your children. You draw the bowstring back, and you send them out for God. The purpose of the arrow is to be sent out.

The warrior does not say, "Look at my arrow collection, but don't touch them. I keep them with me always." Sometimes, you get what we call a helicopter parent, the one that's just always hovering over their children. "I want to keep them close by my side, and I don't want them to go out." No, our job is to prepare our children to be sent out, not to keep them by our side. I read an article about a mother and father in New York who actually had to get a court to move their son

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out. He's in his late 30s and he refuses to leave home. He won't work, and he won't leave the house. No, the job is to send them out.

I talked with a parent not too long ago, and it was after a service. They were just crying because they knew what they had to do, but it was hard for them because your heart is always attached to your kids. They had a son well into his 40s that's not working, refused to work, living with that single parent, drinking like a fish, and mooching off of that parent's very small retirement that they had. Here, the guy is in his 40s, won't work, is drinking himself into oblivion, and wants to take away part of the pension of his elderly parent.

The parent is crying and says, "I know I need to force him out and force him to get a job, but it's so hard. I feel so guilty." The thing was that grown child was heaping guilt on them and manipulating them. Our job is to send them out. To prepare them to go out, not to keep them by us all the time. We can send them out with encouragement, with prayer, with financial help, if possible, and with faith in God. He said, "As arrows in the hands of a warrior." You're going to have to fight for your children. Most of all, we fight for them in prayer.

Our oldest son, Harrison, is the lead pastor of our church here at Cottonwood Church in Southern California. When he was a little boy, he got this terrible fever, and we prayed for him. It was so severe. We didn't get immediate relief, so we went to the doctor and got medications. The fever got taken care of, but the result of the fever was that he lost a good part of his hearing, about 80% of his hearing. He was just a little boy. I think he was four years old. It's heartbreaking for a parent. You stand right behind your son, say, "Harrison," and he doesn't turn around. "Harrison." Now, he's just a few feet away. "Harrison." You'd go, "Harrison." He'd go, "Huh?" He couldn't hear you.

Now, this is past the time; fever is a thing of the past, but the hearing is gone. That was the effect that it had, and there was nothing the doctors could do about it. I remember just agonizing as a father. And you would understand this, father or mother, you would trade your place with your kids in a heartbeat. Give your life for them in a heartbeat. We prayed and prayed, and one night I was in—Harrison was asleep in his bed—I was there praying, and I felt like the Lord said, "Sing over him."

Man, I didn't feel like singing, but I did it anyway. I felt like there were lead weights on my hands. But I lifted them up, and I began to sing. I just began to worship God, and it was a hard thing. Five minutes, 10 minutes, began to sing. I just worshiped God, and I worshiped God. God's presence came into the room, and suddenly, that heaviness that was there, maybe about 10 or 15 minutes into it, just left. I had this note of victory and this sense of breakthrough. I just began to worship God and just continued to sing and sing, and eventually went on to bed.

The next morning, when Harrison woke up, his hearing was 100% restored, and it's been 100% restored to this day. My point is we need to battle for our children, whether it's worshiping or praying. "As arrows in the hands of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth." If your kids are grown, and you realize that you haven't helped them discover their gifting, you maybe didn't send them in the right way. It's not too late. Remember, God wants to help. This Psalm begins with, "Unless the Lord builds the house," the family, "they that build it labor in vain."

God wants to get involved, but you have to invite Him on the building site. That starts by you yielding your life completely to Him. If you want Him to help your family, the most important thing you can do is yield your whole life to Him without reservation. You can't say, "Okay, God, come in, but there are certain rooms where I'm hanging a do-not-enter sign. Over my finances, God,

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don't enter. I want to follow you, but my money is my money, and I'm not going to be giving to the church. This sign about my sexuality, God, this is a do-not-enter sign for you. I'm going to keep living with my girlfriend or my boyfriend," or, "I'm going to stay in a relationship that you say is out of bounds for a follower of Jesus. Lord, don't touch that, but I want to follow you."

No, friend, that doesn't work. It's all in or not in at all. If Christ is not valued above all, He's not valued at all. You need to give all of your heart and all your soul to Him. Make His Word, the Bible, the final authority, the final word in your life, on your finances, on your sexuality, on your money, on how you deal with enemies, on how you deal with friends, on how you deal with family, on how you raise your children, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Let His Word be your final authority. That's what calling Jesus "Lord" is all about. If you want God to come on the building site and to work on your family and to work in the lives of your children, be they small or be they grown, it starts with you inviting Him into your own life completely and totally. Just pray with me right now. Listen, I can give you words to pray. If you'll put a sincere heart behind them, if you'll tie your heart around the words and speak them sincerely to God, He'll meet you. Will you do that with me? Just right now, just say, "Oh God," say it out loud, wherever you are. In your bedroom, in your living room, wherever you're listening to this, just say,

"Oh God, I bow my heart before You." Go ahead and say it. "I bow my heart before You. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe He died on the cross for me. Jesus, I believe You paid for all of my sins. I believe on the third day that You were raised from the dead. I ask You now, come into my life. Be my Lord and my Savior. I give You access to everything, Jesus. All I am and all I have, I place in Your hands, Lord. Amen."

God bless you!

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