

# DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

February 6, 2022 | Godly Investments

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

What spiritual practices have you adopted that you hope will have implications long after you are gone?

Read Psalms 127 and 128.

Ask God to help you invest your life to yield generational blessings.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God's plan for your life has implications that extend beyond you to the coming generations.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Your greatest joy is linked to seeing the coming generations multiply in godliness.

### MEDITATE

*"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1).*

## GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to consider the importance of investing your life in godliness.

**Q:** *Why is “investing” generally considered to be a wise course of action?*

**Q:** *In addition to financial resources, what other resources might be invested for gain?*

The concept of financial investment can be traced back for centuries. Stock exchanges in the United States are almost as old as the country itself. Today, it is widely recognized that investing part of your financial capital will secure a better future for yourself and for those who love and depend on you. Even though companies fail, recessions occur routinely, and the financial market can crash unexpectedly, few financial experts recommend stuffing your savings under your mattress. Over a long enough period of time, it is better to give up a little now in order to see greater gains in the future.

Regardless of your views on financial investments, the same concept—sacrifice now to create a greater gain in the future—can be seen at work in how the Bible describes living for the sake of the coming generations. Trusting in God’s provision and following His will over your own inclinations will create blessings that extend far beyond your own lifetime. The concepts are not completely identical. Gains from financial investments are not strictly realized until they are cashed out whereas righteous behavior is likely to secure benefits both now and in the future. The benefits you reap now will not diminish the return recognized by those who come after you. Thus, investing your life in righteousness yields dividends now and in the future.

**Q:** *Is there ever a time that would be unwise to invest your life spiritually?*

**Q:** *In what other ways are spiritual investments unlike financial investments?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Another key distinction must be noted at the outset of this lesson. The idea of investing for future generations is not unheard of within the wider society. The common phrase you might hear is, “I want to make the world a better place.” But Christians intend far more than this vague cliché. Where non-Christians may seek to make the world a better place by decreasing their carbon footprint, picking up litter on the highway, or even just extending goodwill to one another, Christians recognize that the only lasting difference carried forward to future generations rests within the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel has the power to transform hearts and change lives. The gospel has the power to reconcile people to God and encourage godliness in every area of life.

Christians may determine that it is their responsibility to join in the efforts listed above, but we must always recognize that our responsibility to the coming generations extends beyond those matters to the gospel.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Psalms 127 and 128 share a concern for investing in the future generations. Psalm 127 emphasizes the importance of trusting in God for the sake of those who will come after you. Psalm 128 emphasizes that the blessings that stem from fearing God extend to future generations.

### 1. INVESTING BY TRUSTING GOD

### 2. INVESTING BY FEARING GOD

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will examine these psalms and consider how each emphasizes the importance of investing in future generations.*

## 1. INVESTING BY TRUSTING GOD

### ■ PSALM 127

**Q:** *Why is our labor in vain apart from God?*

**Q:** *How can the psalmist's point be extended to other parts of life and labor?*

Psalm 127 urges readers to keep God central in their lives and to acknowledge their need for Him in every circumstance. No matter how hard the builder works or how alert the watchman remains, their work can be easily undermined. Poor planning may leave the work of a good builder undone. It does not matter how well two-thirds of the house is built if the rest is never completed. Even if the builder completes his task, it can be undone by an earthquake or some other unpreventable natural disaster. The watchman may save a few hundred people who otherwise would be captured by an advancing army, but if the army is big enough, he may only delay the inevitable. All of humankind's striving is pointless apart from God's oversight. There are not enough hours in the day, even if

you spent all of them awake, to plan for every contingency.

**Q:** *Why is it challenging to accept that some circumstances are beyond our control?*

**Q:** *How is the psalmist's point liberating for us?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – One of the most important lessons we can learn in life is that some things are beyond our control. No matter how thoroughly we prepare, disaster can strike at any moment and derail our efforts. Or we could learn the situation contains more variables than we could have possibly recognized. Sometimes, things do not go the way we planned because of circumstances beyond our control. This can be devastating for many of us, but this fact is crucial to the message of Psalm 127. We dare not ever conceive of our lives apart from God. Once we recognize we are completely dependent on Him, we can also recognize the blessings that come from learning to trust in Him. If we keep God at the center of our lives, we do not have to work ourselves to the point of physical and mental exhaustion. We are not left wondering if we have done enough. Keeping God at the center allows us to rest in His provision.

**Q:** *What is the relationship between verses 1-2 and verses 3-5?*

**Q:** *Why does the author describe the blessings of children with a war metaphor?*

For us, the psalmist abruptly transitions from discussing God's provision and our limitations (Psalm 127:1–2) to praising children (Psalm 127:3–5). Perhaps this transition would have been more intuitive for the original audience. We think the decision to have kids or not is a personal choice and/or a scientific matter. We call it “family planning.” If children are not wanted during a certain period, the use of contraceptives can reliably achieve that result. On the other hand, many couples are able to overcome struggles with infertility with various medical techniques. It was probably far easier for ancient Israelites to recognize that the size and timing of the family ultimately rests in God's hands. Thus, for them, the move from accepting God's control over all of life's circumstances to a house full of children would seem more intuitive.

The psalmist employs an unexpected metaphor to describe the blessings of children. The language is unmistakably warlike, comparing children to arrows. To understand the author's point, we have to consider

what an arrow does for a warrior and what metaphorical connection he envisions between this and children. In a battle, arrows could be shot indiscriminately into a group of enemy soldiers. They could also be shot with precision, targeting a specific warrior. Children are similarly versatile. As we grow older, our opportunities to influence those around us change and often begin to diminish. Children, if trained in godliness, are able to sustain our legacy over many generations. They are a versatile approach to continuing our influence even when we begin to decline.

**Q:** *How does the portrayal of children in this psalm challenge today's common assumptions?*

**Q:** *What common concerns make people weigh the value of having children in today's world?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Declining birth rates across Western civilization reveal that many people do not share the psalmist's sentiment. This can be a challenging subject to address because so many other issues are intertwined with childlessness. The general outlook towards children today falls well short of the ideal presented in Scripture. Many Christians have, probably unwittingly, adopted the common cultural mindset toward having children.

Several decades ago, there was a growing concern among intellectual elites that the earth was heading toward irreparable over-population. They predicted large increases in starvation, poverty, and neglect. The decades since have revealed their fears to be unfounded, not because the increase in population did not come but because our means of production proved to be more capable of handling the growth than the prognosticators feared. Today, a similar concern revolves around ecological issues. Some people worry that an expanding human population will have ever more devastating effects on the environment. Others take what they perceive to be the high ground, declaring they could not conceive of bringing a child into a world facing such an ecological crisis. It does not take hysteria to sound the alarm against having children. Many couples today are choosing not to have children because of the financial cost they will demand. Others simply recognize that children would be more of an imposition on their lifestyle than they are willing to accept.

These common mindsets against having children all view children as a problem, whether ecological, financial, or otherwise. The Bible, however, presents children as a blessing, not a problem. If anything, raising godly children is the solution to many of the problems facing our world. We can thus see the metaphor of the psalmist take full effect. Children are like arrows that can be drawn back and released into the world with tremendous gospel effectiveness. This does not demand that every Christian couple have as many children as possible. It does

demand that we reshape our outlook on having children and the value they have for us and for society. Children are an investment for the future, not a problem.

**Q:** *Does the outlook of this psalm reflect the life of Solomon?*

**Q:** *What does the Bible tell us about Solomon's children?*

### ■ 1 KINGS 9:19, 11:1–13

Psalm 127 concludes with a cautionary tale. It begins with a superscription containing the words “of Solomon.” Many conservative scholars believe this is an assertion of authorship, just as the words “of David” often identify him as the author of a particular psalm. If this is indeed the case, Psalm 127 contains a tragedy in that its author failed to live out the message he penned. Solomon can best be described as half-hearted. At times, he exhibited unparalleled wisdom and devotion to God. His final analysis in the book of 1 Kings, however, severely maligns his character. Instead of trusting God to establish the infrastructure of his kingdom, Solomon invested in extensive building projects through the conscription of slave laborers (1 Kings 9:15–22). Rather than watching over Solomon's kingdom, God determined to hand most of it over to a political rival soon after Solomon's death (1 Kings 11:9–40; 1 Kings 12:16–24). Solomon had over seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3), but the Bible only mentions three of his children. Two daughters, Basemath and Taphath, are mentioned passingly in 1 Kings 4:11 and 15. His son Rehoboam succeeded him as king only to see the kingdom quickly disintegrate. This hardly seems like a strong heritage or “arrows in the hand of a warrior.” Thus, the author of Psalm 127 tragically failed to live out the message of his psalm. He was the author of inspired Scripture, but the message of his own words failed to penetrate his heart.

**Q:** *Why do we often struggle to live according to the principles we know are right?*

**Q:** *How does your time in God's Word impact your daily life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Solomon’s tragedy contains an unmistakable warning for you. You have God’s inspired Word. You are encouraged by your pastors to engage with it daily, and, no doubt, many of you do. Reading and studying the Bible is vital for your spiritual health and the health of your church, but if your engagement with it goes no further than mere exposure, you are heading for a tragedy like we see in the life of Solomon. You must learn to be subject to God’s Word and apply its precepts to your life. If engaging with Scripture during a sermon or devotional time does not lead to spiritual growth through application to your life, the Bible is not having the full effect God intends. Checking a box on a Scripture-reading plan is good, but our engagement with God’s Word cannot stop there.

## 2. INVESTING BY FEARING GOD

### ■ PSALM 128

**Q:** *What cultural differences can diminish the importance we see in Psalm 128:2?*

**Q:** *How is Psalm 128:2 related to Genesis 3:17–19?*

Psalm 128 highlights the benefits of fearing God. As this psalm makes clear, fearing God is best demonstrated by walking in His ways. The commitment to follow God’s ways has benefits that resonate throughout all parts of life. Thus, fearing God can be seen as an investment.

The psalmist begins by describing how those who fear God will eat the fruit of their own labor. For an ancient Israelite, this entailed freedom within the land God had given them. They were not under the control of a ruthless foreign power who exploited them. Their toil no longer served to profit a cruel master. The fear of God leads to freedom to reap the rewards and enjoy the benefits of one’s own labor.

Another dynamic of this promise pertains to the curse upon the land in Genesis 3:17–19. After the original human couple sinned, God cursed the land so that it would be difficult to harvest a reliable crop. Psalm 128:2 shows that a commitment to walk in God’s ways and in fear of Him represent a reversal of His curse on the ground, at least to a minor extent. This curse was ultimately reversed by the work of Jesus on our behalf (Romans 8:19–21).

Q: *How does the gospel transform the way you think about the struggles you face at work?*

Q: *How can this passage transform your view of work even at a job you do not enjoy?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – We do not typically think of blessings in terms of work. Work for us often seems like a drudgery we would rather do without instead of a vehicle of God’s blessing. The Bible, however, gives a much different portrayal of work. From the very beginning, humanity was expected to work in God’s creation (Genesis 2:15). The gift of the promised land, a sure symbol of God’s blessing in ancient Israel, entailed a responsibility to work. Land apart from labor would do little good. We were created for work, and one of life’s greatest blessings is to see God multiply the fruits of our labor. If we walk in God’s ways, we will see how God blesses our labor to provide for our families and reflect His own glory. God-glorifying work is a worthwhile investment.

Q: *What does the image of a fruitful vine communicate?*

Q: *In what ways are children like olive shoots?*

Walking in God’s ways has benefits that extend to your family as well. The psalmist described the wife of one who fears God as a fruitful vine. He wrote this psalm from a male perspective, but it is easy to see how this blessing could be reciprocal. A fruitful wife will support a fruitful husband and vice versa. The children of those who walk in God’s ways are like olive shoots. This comparison underscores how children are an investment for future generations. Olive trees sometimes remain barren for nearly forty years before producing a crop. An ancient Israelite would not plant an olive tree for himself but for those who came after him. In the same way, the children of those who fear God are blessings for future generations.

Q: *What kind of enduring legacy do you want to establish for your children?*

Q: *What steps will you take to create that legacy?*



**APPLICATION POINT** – The most enduring memory I have of my father is of him sitting in his chair in the living room an hour or so before he left for work to read his Bible and pray. He was a shift worker, so sometimes he read in the afternoons and other times early in the mornings. He was the most faithful man I have ever known in spending daily time with God, and he did it in front of the entire family. Years after he passed on, my brother and I still remark how we remember Dad reading the Bible and praying before leaving for work. It is an enduring legacy that has carried on in his children, and I hope will carry into the future. Sometimes it will be appropriate for you to seek private opportunities to pray and read Scripture (Matthew 6:6), but it is also important for parents to model a strong devotional life for their children. Children need to understand that Christianity is not reserved for Sundays, and one of the best ways parents can show this is by demonstrating for their children the importance of daily time in God’s Word and prayer. A month ago, my wife remarked that she was happy to know I spent regular time in God’s Word, but she was concerned that our children did not understand because I always read from my iPad. There is nothing wrong with reading God’s Word digitally, but we now do so many things on these devices that it is harder for children to recognize when parents are reading Scripture. I realized I need to read a physical Bible to have the effect I intended for my children.

Q: *What is a “Psalm of Ascent”?*

Q: *When would an ancient Israelite ascend to Jerusalem?*

Psalm 128 begins with personal and family blessings, and it concludes by widening the circle to include the blessings this man will find in his community. Walking in God’s ways allows him to seek the prosperity and longevity of the nation. The superscription of Psalm 128 says it is a Psalm of Ascent. Many scholars believe this notation means the psalm was commonly sung among Israelite pilgrims as they ascended to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. As families drew nearer to Jerusalem, they encountered more and more pilgrims along the way. It was an opportunity for them to reflect on the ways in which God had blessed them and rejoice with one another in God’s provision. The person who had faithfully walked in God’s ways had a lot to share. Those walking with him would recognize how God had blessed him and how his blessings would resonate among the rest of his people.

Q: *How can we emulate the kinds of conversations that would have taken place as Israelites ascended to Jerusalem?*

## Q: *Why is community important for Christians?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Today, we do not have an opportunity to take a pilgrimage to a holy city for festivals. Most people drive to church, and the walk from the parking lot to the sanctuary does not provide much opportunity for conversation. We need to protect our conversation at church to ensure that we experience the blessings of community fellowship. Move beyond banal discussion about the weather, politics, and sports while you are with other believers. Take time to ask others what God is showing them in their times in His Word. Pray for one another and encourage one another. Community blessings will not occur if we hold one another at arm's length.

## NEXT STEPS

Your devotional life is one of the primary investments you can make to see the rest of God's blessings discussed in these psalms come to fruition. Many of you will be at a crucial point if you began your personal devotions when Oakwood began emphasizing this need. At 4–5 weeks in, you are forming good habits, but you are also at a point when many well-intentioned Christians fall off. Take the steps you need to persevere. Seek the support of someone else in the congregation. If another person is in the same situation, commit to checking in with each other during this week. The blessings described in these psalms for those who will follow in God's ways are well worth the effort.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*Father, help me to fear you and walk in your ways. Your way is filled with blessings, but more importantly, it leads to you.*

*God, help me to invest in the future, especially by investing in children who will live long past me.*

*Father, help me live according to conviction. Take my wayward heart and replace it with a heart that is able to stand upon your Word.*

*God, help me to create a legacy founded on your Word, relevant for the community around me, and focused on the coming generations.*