

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.”
(Psa 127:3)

I believe that one of the greatest challenges we face as humans is the recognition and active realization that we have no actual power or control in our lives, and are completely dependent upon God to lead us and provide for us. It grates against our nature and our desire to be in charge of our own destinies, as it were. When we come to a realization that our lives are not ours to control, it causes that greatest of our foibles and weaknesses – pride – to rise up in us and derail any right thinking we may have going for us.

This of course is discussed all throughout scripture, being covered in a number of Psalms, throughout the Proverbs, demonstrated repeatedly in the stories of the prophets, and the New Testament is resplendent in its display of this point, perhaps the Revelation of Jesus Christ being the penultimate example of God’s control over man and man’s dependence upon God.

This is no small struggle, the keeping of our minds, hearts and bodies in a state of subjection to the greater power and control of God. It is the thing, it seems, that drove Satan to his rebellion and to fall from grace to a place where he has no hope of standing in the presence of his creator in favor ever again. That pride and belief in the power of one’s self permeates God’s creations.

David had one of the more complete senses of this dependence upon God of all the patriarchs I think. If you look at his life, and how he lived it, and what he wrote, you see a strong understanding of his need to wait upon God for all things. Psalm 127 is a treatise on this topic of depending on God

“A Song of degrees for Solomon. Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep. Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.” (Psa 127:1-5)

There isn’t universal agreement on this, but this appears to me to be a Psalm written by David to Solomon. Some say that it was Solomon who wrote it based on what his father taught him and passed on to him as he grew older and needed teaching as to how to properly rule the kingdom, his house, and himself. Being born to be king doesn’t inherently grant you knowledge of what it is that is necessary in that role, and David understood this point well, I think, from personal experience. He knew well how his father taught him, but he had no practical understanding of what it would take to

lead a nation in righteousness, and understood his dependence on God. So he wrote these words. They are excellent in their poetry and highly instructional, and my goal today is to tear them down a little bit and explore what we can learn from them.

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” This is routinely positioned as a verse that just means God must be in our government, and I’ll speak to that in a second. That’s not the only meaning of this, though. House is certainly a metaphor for a nation, a government, but it also means a man’s house – the family, the bond of a man to his wife and the type that relationship is of Christ and His bride. The Lord builds one kind of house – one man, one woman, for life. You can do whatever you want to try and gussy up something outside of that, put some sophistry around it, some sort of packaging built of human reasoning, but it’s as vain an attempt as building a snowman in the Mojave desert. It just isn’t happening.

As God must be in the ruling of your house, God must be in the ruling of the government, else there is no government. That simple fact, while hated by this generation, is as simple a truth as you can get. If your leaders hate God, despise His word, and will not hear it, a nation has no hope and no ability to survive, much less thrive. The point of a city or government is to protect and provide for the citizenry. When Nimrod wanted to build a city, people rallied around that rebellion for many reasons, but one of them was that it would “protect them” from being scattered about and as they believed, “exposed”. Part of the rebellion seen here is that they didn’t trust in and depend upon God – He didn’t build the city. Of course this is an extreme example where not only did God not build the city, it was in direct contravention to what He ordered Noah and his sons to do – go forth from the ark and replenish the earth – in Genesis 9. That idea of going forth was to spread out. The command wasn’t to hole up in a spot and see what happens.

God wasn’t in the building of that city, and so the building of it was vain, to say the least. Think also about the sermon Sam delivered recently about Jericho. That city was built to protect its inhabitants, and it had a great set of walls surrounding it, to keep marauding enemies, wild beasts and other dangers at bay. But the Lord didn’t build that city, and you can see the vanity of the walls they were so proud of when not one finger of the children of Israel was lifted to bring them down. In Jericho we see not only the vanity of that city, but the actions of the watchmen.

Imagine that scene, being a watchman on those walls, regarding the procession of the priests, and the ark, and the people, and the rams’ horns being blown. Imagine going out for a morning shift on the wall. How discomfiting would it have been to look out at that procession of silent people, the only sound being the blowing of those horns? How could they have not wondered out loud, “what are we doing here, it’s not like we’re going to stop anything – you heard about Egypt, right?” Of course everyone

knows the vanity of those watchmen, and it drives home the point perfectly. If the Lord hasn't blessed your city, your nation, your governing, you can have the greatest walls, the most well organized city watch in the history of mankind, the greatest military, the best strategy, better weapons, etc., and the walls will still fall spectacularly.

Those who rule have a responsibility to follow God. Righteousness, justice, fairness, caring for the poor, enforcing equal treatment for your citizens, etc., are all notions dictated in scripture, and they are the responsibility of the government. Those are not the same things as telling your citizens they must worship some specific god or in some specific way. That's not the same thing as telling your citizens to worship some false god, like the catholic monster has done over the centuries. It is also not the same thing as putting "In God We Trust" on your money and calling it good. It means actually looking to God for how to rule, for what righteousness is and how it exalts a nation, and as a nation abhorring sin (Pro. 14:34).

One of the best examples of this is Nineveh when Jonah preached to them "yet forty days":

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." (Jonah 3:5-6)

They didn't make some pretense, shout "God Bless Nineveh" or have some candlelight vigils wondering what they should do. They listened to the preaching and they believed that God was going to destroy them. It doesn't say they "believed in God", it says they believed Him. Believed the message They repented and changed their national ways for a time. Of course, we know that didn't last, but it stands as a memorial to the point that a nation can repent and a nation can seek righteousness.

"It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep." Here we have the practical application of personally depending on God and not allowing our pride and our belief in our own strength to drive our behavior. This isn't about getting up early to get your business done, because sometimes we just need to do that, or staying up late to finish up a task in service to God. Sometimes we just have to spend some hours doing a thing. The reason you're rising early or staying up late is largely what's important. To put it another way, there is no real sorrow in the service of God, no matter how much energy is expended in it, so this can't be talking about working hard in service to God.

This is the expending of all our energies in everything but service to God, and/or prideful behavior we try to mask as service to God. Those who rise early and stay up late, and who eat the bread of sorrows are individuals who believe that they can "get ahead in the world" and frequently promote the idea that "he who dies with the most

toys wins”. This energy is expended because they seek the things of the world and man’s admiration and envy more than God’s favor.

A person who is content in the Lord, and realizes their complete and utter dependence upon Him, understands the futility of this kind of behavior. They also understand that sleep is one of His gifts to us, to allow us to put away distressing issues, troubling matters and things that cause our hearts to mourn; it is a gift to put away this day and be rejuvenated even a little bit so we may be prepared to take on the next one.

This rising early and staying up late is also a description of those who are simply unable to trust in the Lord to handle the perceived difficulties of their lives. Imagine being a king, responsible for an untold number of souls, for protecting them, leading them, etc., and the distress that the daily issues associated with that leadership causes. Add still being responsible for yourself and your own house, and it is easy to see how a person could get so wrapped around the axle of life that they are staying up late, not sleeping well, and getting up early the next day, on a routine basis in the name of “accomplishing things”; or just because they allow their life to be a constant roiling distress they can’t get proper rest on anything.

While we aren’t running whole kingdoms, our lives aren’t that different. The pace at which we run can easily see us thinking “just another hour and I can accomplish this or that thing” and looking to our strength and our wits to eke out a little more work by the power of our hands. Before too long with this thinking we’ve worked ourselves ragged, put ourselves into a frame of mind where we resent the work, each other, and ultimately God.

The remedy for that problem is simply to depend on God. Trust in Him to resolve your problems, to bring you peace on a matter, to deliver you from your enemies, heal your body, help your children, provide your every necessity, etc. What precisely will you do to resolve any of the things that bring you distress by rising up early or sitting up late to ponder the problem? A large part of our nature, remember, is to believe we have the strength, smarts, abilities, whatever word you want to put on it to handle all things ourselves. It takes maturity and faith to acknowledge that weakness and put it away on a daily basis to actually trust in God

This can be a hard thing to do. If you look at this group, and if you look at those in the Bible whose lives we have details of, you see a lot of “Type A” personalities. People who drive hard, who get things done, and who are highly motivated. When we cross the line from using that energy, drive, knowledge, and power that God has given us to serve Him and turn it to serving ourselves, and believing that **we** have done a thing, **we** accomplished that task, **we** turned the hand of the enemy away, we deny our dependence upon God and begin eating the bread of sorrows. The sorrow comes when we fail, which inevitably we will, and have to acknowledge that we have no

power, skill or control over any aspect of our lives. That sorrow can be monumental and can feel like an absence of God's presence with us. The answer, when we feel Him missing, is to return to Him. We have left Him when we ignore our dependence upon Him and we must return.

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.” “Lo” is the same word translated “behold” in other places. It is almost always like an exclamation point at the beginning of a sentence to draw extra special attention to what is about to be said. So it could have been translated *“Behold, children are an heritage of the LORD.”*

This is a strong declarative statement that deserves attention from any who would seek children as well as all who have them. Children come from God, and nowhere else. They are the heritage that He gives us. Now, a lot of expositors talk about how only elect children are His heritage, and I firmly reject that notion. Please don't think I'm rejecting the ideas of a lot of smart guys out of hand, I've considered this for a long time and think that this view ignores some pretty simple language and seems too easy. When an exposition is too tidy and doesn't address the major elephant in the room, it doesn't work for me. The way I read this, you can't isolate this heritage to just the elect.

This word heritage (Strong's 5159 *nakh-al-aw*) means what you probably think it means – an inheritance, an object inherited from a relative, an heirloom. Children have been left to us from God as the way to fulfill His commandment to “be fruitful and multiply”. This idea that children come from God is well understood in Scripture as we see from several examples

“And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?” (Genesis 30:2)

“And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.” (Genesis 33:5)

“But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb.” (1 Samuel 1:5)

The womb is one of the greatest and deepest mysteries for men. Science pretends to understand it, but they can't come even close to actually replicating its wonder. It is beyond our actual understanding

“As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.” (Ecclesiastes 11:5)

God controls this precious element of mankind's existence. If He controls the closing of a righteous woman's womb, does He not control the opening of an unrighteous?

The words simply don't say that this or that type of children are an heritage of the Lord. The words say children – that is all children. There isn't some special word used here, it's the same word for children used all over Scripture some 4900 times and translated son, children, child, young, etc.

It doesn't say that they are a heritage to only elect people, either. That's too self-serving an exposition in my mind. Remember, this Psalm is a compendium of what all men should acknowledge and understand what they depend upon God for. We are dependent upon God to provide children to us, and He does so as a heritage, an inheritance afforded us, but also as a heritage to himself to preserve mankind in his generations. If He didn't give any children, this race would have been pretty short-lived, once death entered into the world. Without generations of children given to fill the earth, how could we ever come to the great and terrible day of the Lord?

Generations mark the passage of time, and without continued bringing of children into the earth, those generations do not come and go, and time does not march forward to that final conclusion.

There is no doubt that children who fear God and keep His commandments are a joy and comfort to us, as opposed to the pain and anguish caused by those who rebel against God. That doesn't mean troublesome children or those who have left us when they reach adulthood were not, and indeed are not still, a heritage from Him. Yes, even those who are now thorns in our sides, are the heritage our Lord has provided us.

That might seem difficult to take. Some rebellious child who hates God and has been trouble to our hearts and souls is a heritage to us from God? How could that even be? I don't see how it can be any other way! How could they be our heritage on one day, when we think they're walking in His ways, or when they're little and cute, but not when they leave out from among us? That makes no sense whatsoever and is simply a mechanism to try and feel better about ourselves when dealing with rebellious children.

Here's the simple truth: whether you like the inheritance you've received doesn't change whether you received it; it is still your heritage.

Consider David, the author of this Psalm. On the one hand, you have Absalom. A thorn in a father's side if ever there was one. On the other, you have Solomon, the wisest man ever to live and a great king of Israel (but who also suffered from significant faults). Both these sons are a heritage of the Lord to David.

How do you consider Absalom to be David's heritage? Well, it goes back to this fundamental concept. God knows what it is that is needed and determines what to give us when. When a little soul comes into the world, it fills us with joy and thanksgiving to God. I have unique individual memories of the births of each of my

children, as I'm sure each of you parents do. The common theme that runs through them all is one of thankfulness. The thankfulness to God I felt at each of those moments when Rachel passed through the affliction of her travail and delivered that little one into this world, **by the grace of God and His grace alone**, is marked on my memory forever. How could it not be?

I'm sure David felt that way about Absalom, given the favor he showed him in his adult life even while he acted the part of a heathen. God sent that affliction to David the same way he sent the joy Absalom brought him in his younger years. I don't know why, but the Lord does. It taught David things, it teaches us things. That's all I need to know, that the Lord did it for His purposes.

The end result of a child's development and God's predestined, foreordained path for that soul doesn't erase that thankfulness, or erase the fact that He gives them to us. How could it? If you are truly thankful to the Lord your God for what He has given you, how He has given it to you, and what He has allowed you to do with any gift, you can't take that back! Why would we? We have no business looking at a child ever, no matter how hard a time or how many tribulations are delivered to us throughout their lives and seeing them as anything more or less than a gift of God. A difficult gift? Perhaps. An afflicting gift? At times. But always a gift worthy of thankfulness to Him regardless of what they do in their lives. If we are to love our enemies, how much less our offspring given to us by God?

The Psalm doesn't say children are all a blessing that will bring unending joy and infinite happiness to us every day of our lives. No child has ever been that for their parent. They are humans after all, and subject to the same depravity as all other humans. That doesn't mean you don't take the joy of them when you can, and you weep in sorrow when you must. But never, ever, look at them as anything other than the Lord's heritage He has given to us.

I think another helpful example is that of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. We know that God promised Abraham to make his seed more numerous than the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea

"That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;" (Genesis 22:17)

When we generally talk about this blessing, we apply it to the Jews, and their rise to prominence as God's chosen people, and that's right. But, that's not all of it. Consider these other times when the general blessing of Abraham's abundant progeny is also discussed.

“And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” (Genesis 15:5)

“As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.” (Genesis 17:4-6)

The blessing with which God blesses Abraham is not just regarding His chosen people being Abraham’s descendants. It’s true that the majority of the times God speaks to him about this promise it is about the line of Christ and His chosen people. But there is also promise made here that doesn’t apply only to the Jews. There are nations promised to Abraham, not just one, and greatness promised in all of them.

“And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.” (Genesis 17:20)

Of course, the ever-abiding covenant is fulfilled through Isaac, but there are two sons, one reprobate and one upright, both sons of promise and blessing. They are both his heritage. One, an arrow in Abraham’s quiver. The other, not. Here is where we see distinction between those of our children who serve God and those who do not.

“As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.” A mighty man, a man of valor, rejoices to have his hand full of arrows when the enemy charges the wall. He knows that with the arrows he can wound or kill from a distance, and an enemy dispatched from a distance is one he doesn’t have to battle face to face. More arrows in the hands means more opportunities to fire upon the adversary. It leads to a greater probability of success on the field of battle, and we know our adversary shoots his “fiery darts” (Eph. 6:16) at us in a constant barrage of fire with that very hope.

The arrows in our hand, from our youth, gives us the opportunity to hone our skills through teaching the children to resist Satan’s devices. The fuller our hands are, the more practice we get, and the better equipped both we and they are. Filling your hands with arrows in your youth, as opposed to having a child of “old age” (Gen. 44:20) provides you with many years of opportunity to hone your battle skills through teaching. Are we not admonished

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Eph 6:4)

What is our bringing them up in the “nurture and admonition” but a sharpening of our own understanding, being driven by their youthful inquisition and challenges to have

proper, ready and right answers for the questions our children ask or the situations their behaviors create? The more arrows we have in our hands, the more need we have for skill to use them; the more we are rewarded by our teaching because to teach we must first learn. I stress this point here – whether we deal with a righteous child or a child who clings to Belial, the honing of our skills here is a deliverance from our God, and our training “up a child in the way he should go” (Pro. 22:6) helps us to find greater faith and derive better understanding since it forces us to search the scriptures for that understanding. Of course, that is if you do the work.

That is why in our youth, the arrows are in our hand – to be worked, straightened, sharpened, etc., in the hope and desire that in our old age, they will have the wisdom, charity and skills to care for us and help us continue our work as our abilities and energies wane. We take them in our hands to work them, to make them into a mighty weapon for the Lord, an industrious person who can care for themselves and has the wherewithal and charity to care for others. That is the goal.

It is easy, when doing the work at the level and pace required by even one child to get lost in the outcome and be “goal oriented”. That’s a trap. It’s easy to see the negative effects of NOT doing the work. All you have to do is spend five minutes in a school to see how negatively children are impacted by lazy parents, who abhor the heritage they’ve been given and see it as a burden to do the work they’ve been entrusted to do. That doesn’t mean we flip the script and work toward some end state. We don’t own the souls of our children. We only own educating and raising them according to God’s standards. What happens when they come of age is outside of our control, because this heritage and reward is given of God for His purposes, not our own.

“Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.” An arrow is designed to be shot, that is its purpose. It is going to go far out beyond the wall the archer stands on, and once he looses the string, there is no further control that archer has over its course, its speed, its accuracy, or its efficacy. The arrow has been set to flight, and the Lord will take it where He wills, whether that is to the target or somewhere else. Do we not see even this in scripture?

“And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded.” (1 Kings 22:34)

A man, not even described as an archer, pulled the draw of the bow back, perhaps just to see what he could do, and the arrow that went forth changed world affairs and accomplished God’s purpose. The little guy didn’t even intend to hit anything, but that arrow went precisely where it was ordained from the halls of eternity to go.

So it is with our children.

The word translated “happy” should be thought of with an exclamation point on it. A man whose children stay with him, that is arrows in his quiver, under his roof, is a man who is blessed beyond measure. What I mean by this is those children who stay close, not venturing into the world, settling for citizenship in this unholy place. Now, I might be making more out of this metaphor than I should, but look at the juxtaposition.

In our youth, the arrows are in our hands, there for working and correcting the imperfections in fletching, or attaching a better arrowhead, or perhaps straightening. But once “complete”, and as we age and perfect the arrows, they rest in our quiver. Those arrows are not sent forth, they are with us, to bolster our armament and to give us a sense of safety. But those arrows sometimes have to be pulled from the quiver and sent out away from us. We don’t control that, and we don’t control their flight. We do the best we can for them and let God do what He wills in their regard. We should feel no ill will toward them nor think of them as less than God’s heritage. In the quiver or out, that doesn’t change.

Those who stay with us are not ashamed, unlike those who leave. They are ashamed of the testimony of our Lord and won’t be partakers in the afflictions of the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8), and so they flee the quiver. But those that stay, by the grace and mercy of God, bring great joy to their fathers and their mothers, especially as they see them gradually understand the things of God they have been taught over their formative years and into adulthood when they speak plainly in the gates.

The **result** isn’t the heritage God gives us, the **children** are. Elect or damned, that heritage is what He has given us, and we ought to be thankful for it in every way we possibly can. We have no right to be “proud” of our children, because we didn’t create them, we didn’t give them their skills or abilities any more than we gave them their souls. We have the duty to be thankful to the Lord for entrusting them to us for some brief period of time and the responsibility to teach them the ways of the Lord.

Finally we have the duty to trust Him – that all things that happen with that heritage are of Him, by Him, and for Him, not only as it relates to these children, but definitely as it does.