

# The Myth of the Perfect Family

## Psalm 127 & 128

There are 1189 chapters in the Bible. As we open to Psalm 127-128, we open to two of the most beautiful pictures of marriage and family life in all of God's Word, captured on paper for us to read. God allows us to see marriage and family life from His perspective, with children described as growing like these healthy green, fruitful trees, entwined lovingly into our lives as parents, and growing with us in godliness.

The picture seen in this Psalm would be the dream come true for every parent who knows and loves God today. But we must balance this picture with the reality taught by the other 1187 chapters of God's Word:

- God will never make believers answer for how their children turned out—only for how they raised them.
- God wants us prayerfully living out our marriages and families based on prayer and His Word. That is all He expects from each of us His children today.

Amazingly the 127<sup>th</sup> Psalm, breathed out by God's Spirit through Solomon, came through a man who would be considered **a disaster in his personal life** (lost pagans deeply influenced him), **a disaster in his married life** (he couldn't stop chasing after and acquiring more women), and **a disaster in his family life** (his son Rehoboam wreaked havoc on the nation he inherited from his dad, by his proud, arrogant dismissal of any wise advice).

Yet, God in His grace used Solomon greatly for His Glory, and does so even to this day by the Scriptures Solomon wrote. Listen to what God describes about the delights of a Word filled marriage in this wonderful chapter, as we head God's voice in:

## Psalm 127

*A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.*

- <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.

## Psalm 128

### A Song of Ascents.

<sup>1</sup> Blessed *is* every one who fears the LORD,  
Who walks in His ways.  
<sup>2</sup> When you eat the labor of your hands,  
You *shall be* happy, and *it shall be* well with you.  
<sup>3</sup> Your wife *shall be* like a fruitful vine  
In the very heart of your house,  
Your children like olive plants  
All around your table.  
<sup>4</sup> Behold, thus shall the man be blessed  
Who fears the LORD.  
  
<sup>5</sup> The LORD bless you out of Zion,  
And may you see the good of Jerusalem  
All the days of your life.  
<sup>6</sup> Yes, may you see your children's children.

Peace *be* upon Israel!

Biblical Christians live in reality; and they see life as it really is from God's vantage point in His Word. So we who follow and serve the Lord know that:

## There are no Perfect Families

What do David the "Man after God's own heart" and Abraham the "Friend of God" both have in common with Solomon?

It is the same reality that Adam and Eve faced after the Garden of Eden, and Noah found after the global flood, and the Patriarchs Isaac and Jacob discovered at the end of their lives. Each of these Biblical giants, along with almost every other family that is chronicled to any length in God's Word—all had what we would describe as "wayward" or spiritually struggling children.

One of the greatest challenges in life is raising children.

After years of combing through every verse of the Bible dozens of times, I still haven't found the perfect family—a family with a godly dad, a godly mom, with all their children who are submissive their entire time at home, and all of whom grow up to move on into godly marriages and homes. **This type of “perfect family” just isn't recorded in the Bible.**

What we do find in God's Word are some godly parents who have both godly and ungodly children (most of the recorded families); we also find some ungodly parents who have all ungodly children (like most of the kings of Israel), while other ungodly parents end up with some godly children (like a few rare kings of Israel's sons). **There just doesn't seem to be a parenting pattern that always works to produce a “perfect” family.**

One 'parenting challenged' father said it best. His name was Samuel, his sons did not follow the Lord as he had, and in public, at the end of his ministry he said these words:

*1 Samuel 12:23 "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but teach you the good and the right way. (NKJV)*

So what is the answer for us as we parent? The delightful reality that God only asks us to pray and follow His Word, not produce a “perfect” family. There are three steps we need to follow as godly parents today. Open with me to see the first step in Luke 2.

## **Step One: Give them back to God**

When God blesses us with children, He asks us to give them back to Him in dedication. That is what Christ's parents did way back in Luke 2:22. That is also what godly parents have done through the centuries.

Luke 2:22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him* to the Lord

When we do parent/child dedications here at CBC, the parents you see are dedicating their children to the Lord. Part of their preparation is using the training manual in my book called **Word Filled Families**. Let me read from that book to show explain the essence of what godly parents see that God's Word desires from them:

- Godly parents want to present their children in dedication back to the Lord.
- Godly parents are saying is that these children belong to you Lord, and they want to publicly acknowledge that.
- Godly parents affirm that God never holds us responsible for our children turn out—only for how we raised them.

So, in dedicating their children back to God, believing parents make the public affirmation of the promises in Scripture by saying, **"Lord God—**

- **We will raise Your children** as our very own.
- **We will surrender them** back to You.
- **We will have Your peace** when it is hard and when they are making their own choices that will shape their future lives.
- **We will always pray for them**, always love them, and no matter what happens—
- **We will have Your peace because we gave them to You**, raised them for You as best we knew how and could do."

## **Parents are Stewards for God**

But what happens when we dedicate them and they don't turn out as we had hoped and planned? To answer that very relevant question, look with me again at the entire process of child rearing: Christian parenting and our stewardship of the precious lives of our children.

When we as parents present our children in dedication back to the Lord, we are declaring: "These children belong to You, Lord." Dedication is our public acknowledgement of God's ownership of them (Psalm 127:3).

We can then rest in the joyful reality of being stewards of the promises of God's Word. The Bible repeatedly records godly men and women with less than godly children. That is because godliness is a choice; it is an obedient response to the Lord. Godly children can not be made; nor can godliness be forced upon them. They grow that way, by God's grace, with—or sometimes even without—godly parenting.

The bottom line of Scripture is that **God never holds us responsible for how our children turn out—only for how we raised them.**

So let me remind you again of the truths parents affirm when they hold up their precious children to the Lord in dedication of themselves to godly parenting as stewards of their children for the Lord: **I will raise the children God gives me** for His glory; **I will surrender them** back to Him; **I will have His peace** when it is hard, and when they are making their own choices that will shape their future lives; **I will always pray for them**, always love them, and no matter what happens—**I will have God's peace because I gave them to Him**—and raised them for Him as best as I knew how and could do.

Whatever place you are in your parenting— anticipating children, in the midst of raising children, sorrowing over a wayward child, or looking back over wonderful (or not so wonderful) years of parenting—why not go over these dedication truths in your own hearts as parents?

If you have surrendered your children to the Lord already, then reaffirm in your heart these five simple truths that liberate us from years of anxiety and guilt over how our children may struggle in the years ahead.

1. **I raised the children You gave me as my very own;**
2. **I surrendered them** back to You;
3. **I will have Your peace** when it is hard, and when they are making their own choices that will shape their future lives;
4. **I will always pray for them,** always love them, never give up on them or You; and no matter what happens—
5. **I will have Your peace because I gave them to You,** and raised them for You as best as I knew how and could do.

## **Step Two: Respond Biblically to Struggling Children**

If you are a believing parent, and your child has gone astray from the Lord, **how should you respond to a struggling, straying, or wayward child?**

- What comfort is there for parents when this happens?
- What hope can we have after all the years we loved them, earnestly prayed for them, read God's Word to them, nurtured them in the ways of the Lord, and sought to guide them as best we could?

Here are some truths that comfort our hearts—and the hearts of the many parents we have encouraged over the years:

## **Twelve Precious Truths a Wayward Child can teach us**

1. A wayward child *is* ***no surprise to God***. Every day of our life (Psalm 139) was written in His book—even the darkest of days!
2. A wayward *child is* ***an opportunity for God to see our response***. Our response is what matters to God most. He is watching and waiting for what we will do, to whom we will turn—and when we turn to Him, our Lord is glorified.
3. A wayward child ***drives us to pray for what we may think is impossible***—their return to the Lord and us (Jeremiah 33:3; Matthew 7:7)
4. A wayward child ***opens to us a situation where only God can encourage us*** in times like this (I Samuel 30:6b; II Corinthians 1:3-7).

5. A wayward child ***fills us with hope as we remember that God isn't ever through with us as long as we live***—and neither is He ever through with our wayward child (Romans 15:13).
6. A wayward child ***reminds us we have a perfect heavenly Father*** as we see our own imperfections reflected by our children (Matthew 6:32-34).
7. A wayward child ***humbles us as we remember how often we also have failed*** our children (Psalm 130:3), and failed to respond correctly to our perfect Father.
8. A wayward child ***rebukes us because we expected so much obedience from our imperfect parenting***, yet we ourselves gave our heavenly Father such imperfect obedience—even though His parenting was perfect (Ephesians 4:32, 6:4)
9. A wayward child ***makes us believe more and more each day that God is able to do that which we could never do***: touch their hearts, soften their hearts, and turn their hearts back to Him (Ezekiel 36:26-27)—and to us.
10. A wayward child ***shows us God's never ending grace*** as each wave of fear and sorrow rolls over us, but we find our feet firmly planted on the Solid Rock (Psalm 40:1-2).
11. A wayward child ***reminds us that there is no greater joy in life than seeing our children walk in the truth*** (III John 1:4) and the other end of that promise, there is no greater pain than when we see them not walking in the truth, because we love them so much!
12. A wayward child ***challenges us to never give up on him or her*** (Hebrews 13:5b; 7:25).

Many years ago, in one of the darkest hours in my job as a dad, I sat with one of my children watching a movie. One line, which was clearly stated twice by Alfred the butler to Master Bruce, will always stay etched in my mind: "So you haven't given up on me yet?" To which the butler answered resoundingly, "NEVER!"

I challenge you to say the same in your own heart, to your partner, and by your actions toward a wayward child all your life—"*Never will I give up on you, for God will never give up on me!*"

I hope that these truths will give you strength when the parenting path gets rough—whether for a moment, or a few weeks or months, or even for the rest of your life.

## Step Three: Practice Life Long Prayer

God is faithful, so never stop trusting Him—and never cease waiting upon Him!

Remember: Faithful prayer, in step with God's plan in His Word, is God's most powerful key to unlock children's hearts as we disciple them for Christ.

The battle for our children's souls is won "one prayer at a time"—"Is anything too hard for the Lord? . . . " (Genesis 18:14a)!

Prayer is how we can penetrate the lives of our marriage partner, our children, and our dearest friends with God's truth.

Prayer is how we can see God unleashed in our life and theirs.

Prayer is how we can every day be actively using God's Word and seeing it touch those we love so much.

I could summarize the guidelines for all believers, every parent, and all who nurture, disciple, and teach to pray as:

## **A Four-Part Prayer Plan For Every Believer**

There are four elements in the lives of our children that we must be sure we ask, seek, and knock for at the Throne of grace and mercy. Those prayers invite the Hand of God to be at work in their lives to stir:

- reality in their spiritual life
- integrity in their personal life
- stability in their relational life
- eternity during their temporal/earthly life

These truths are all summed up with the Scripture passage that teaches them, on a small card that I carry around in my wallet that corresponds to and summarizes the Word Filled family book.

We must pray in complete agreement as a couple, about our responsibility to cultivate **reality in their spiritual life:**

1. Seeing them ***genuinely saved***. Acts 26:18 to open their eyes, *in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.*
  - 1 Timothy 2:4 who ***wants all men to be saved*** and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (NIV)
  - 2 Timothy 3:15
2. Seeing them ***loving God's Word***. Job 23:12 I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary *food*.

- Psalm 119:97, 165
- Jeremiah 15:16 Your **words were found, and I ate them**, And Your word was to me the **joy and rejoicing of my heart**; For I am **called by Your name**, O LORD God of hosts. (NKJV)

3. Seeing them ***living in victory***. John 8:32, 36 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” <sup>36</sup> Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.
  - John 17:15 "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You **should keep them from the evil one**. (NKJV)
4. Seeing them ***thinking of heaven***. Colossians 3:1-2 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.
  - 2 Corinthians 4:16-17
  - 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20
  - 1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, **lay hold on eternal life**, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (NKJV)
5. Seeing them ***finding sin repulsive***. Psalm 38:18 For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.
  - Proverbs 20:17 .
  - Luke 15:17-18
  - Hebrews 11:25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy **the passing pleasures of sin**, (NKJV)
6. Seeing them ***responding to God***. Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.

We must pray in complete agreement as a couple, about our responsibility to cultivate **integrity in their personal life:**

1. Seeing them maintaining a clear conscience (I Timothy 1:5).
2. Seeing them learning to stand alone (Daniel 1:8).
3. Seeing them seeking to stay pure (I Peter 2:11).
4. Seeing them cultivating a servant's heart (Mark 10:44-45).
5. Seeing them avoiding bitterness in trials (Ephesians 4:30-32).

We must pray in complete agreement as a couple, about our responsibility to cultivate **stability in their relational life:**

1. Seeing them loving their brothers and sisters (I John 4:7-8).
2. Seeing them trusting God with hard situations and not rebelling I Samuel 15:23a).
3. Seeing them loving the way God made them as men and women (Psalm 27:11).



4. Seeing them waiting to meet God's chosen life partner for them II Corinthians 6:14).

We must pray in complete agreement as a couple, about our responsibility to cultivate **living for eternity during their earthly life.**

1. Seeing them choosing a life of contentment<sup>1</sup>. Philippians 4:11
2. Seeing them choosing a life of personally knowing, serving, loving and obeying the Lord. 1 Chronicles 28:9
3. This them choosing a life of consecration. 1 Timothy 6:9-12

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<sup>1</sup> CONTENTMENT is a habit of life that helps us avoid things that deeply offend and grieve our Heavenly Father. Some of these are: The desire for things more than God; The desire for pleasure more than godliness; The desire for satisfaction through things more than to be satisfied by God; The desire for better things and other things that others have more than thanking God for what we have; The desire for the rewards of the physical world more than a desire for eternal rewards.