

Psalm 127 and 128

Introduction

The connection between the two psalms

- v. 1: both describe the actions of a person
- v. 2: both are eating something
- v. 3: both talk about family

The Passage

I. The fear of the Lord (128:1)

- A. It can mean to be afraid of the Lord (he is awesome, holy, powerful)
Example: Israel at Mt. Sinai (see Deuteronomy 5:24-29)

Definition: realizing God is God and we are not, and living accordingly
God is holy, powerful, awesome

- B. But it means a lot more than being “afraid” of God

- 1. Fear of the Lord is paired with other positive actions
Delighting in his commands (Ps. 112), hoping in his love (Ps 147:11), walking in his ways, loving him, serving him (Dt. 10:12-22), not withholding from him (Gen 22:12)
- 2. There are many rewards/benefits for those who fear the Lord
God’s instruction (Ps. 25:12), God’s friendship (25:14), God’s pleasure (Ps 147:11), life (Proverbs 19:23), wisdom (Psalm 111:10), steadfast love and compassion (Ps. 103:11), fulfilled desires (Ps. 145:19)
- 3. The New Testament continues to teach the fear of the Lord
2 Cor 5:11, 7:1, Phil 2:12

Complete Definition: realizing God is God and we are not, and living accordingly
God is holy, powerful, awesome
AND this awesome God is calling people into relationship with him that involves trust, love, intimacy, obedience, and joy

II. What the fear of the Lord acknowledges (127:1)

Unless the Lord is in our labor, our labor is in vain. God is the one ultimately responsible for our provision and for the fruit of our labor
Work done independently of God is “vain”

III. What happens when we fail to acknowledge this reality? (127:2)

- A. “rise up early, go late to rest”
We think we have to make everything happen so we work crazy hours and live lives without proper boundaries
- B. “eating the bread of anxious toil”
Their food is received at a great cost: anxiety, stress, toil
- C. “For he gives to his beloved sleep”
Contrast all this anxious toil with the peacefulness and rest of sleep

Sleep is our forced submission to God's sovereignty
It demonstrates that God runs the world and we don't
When we trust God to provide, we can sleep well

IV. What happens when we do acknowledge this reality? (128:2)

- A. This is the fear of the Lord
- B. "Eat the fruit of the labor of your hands"
 - 1. Notice "labor": you still have to work hard for your food
But working from a place of dependence/acknowledging God
 - 2. eat the fruit = enjoying the benefits of your work because God is providing for you through your work
- C. "You will be blessed and it will be well with you."
 - 1. This does not mean if I start praying more, my business will necessarily be more successful
 - 2. This does mean that I can expect God to provide for our needs
That's Jesus point in Matthew 6:25-34

V. Summary

- A. Fear of the Lord = a life of confidence and trust; depending on God as the one who ultimately provides
- B. The opposite doesn't have to be outright rebellion; it may just be a life of self-sufficiency—failing to depend on God and trust him to ultimately provide

Conclusion

I. How am I going about my work, my life?

Am I approaching my work anxiously as if I'm the one who's ultimately responsible, or has God lifted the weight of ultimate responsibility off my back so that I'm working from a place of trust and dependence?

Practical challenge: How can I remind myself regularly of my dependence on God?

II. How long do I go about my work?

Am I "rising too early and going to bed too late"?

Two tests to determine if you're working too much:

- 1. Do you feel chronically tired, chronically overworked?
- 2. Are important values consistently being sacrificed?
e.g. time with God, time with spouse and children

Practical challenge: How can I create healthier external boundaries

- 1. Create a daily boundary: a stopping point
- 2. Create a weekly boundary: Sabbath

Discussion Questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?
2. In your own words, how would you reconcile the frequent command to “fear the Lord” with the New Testament passages that talk about not fearing (especially Romans 8:15 and 1 John 4:18)?
3. What was the busiest, most stressful time of your life?
4. It was suggested on Sunday that God is the one ultimately responsible for our provision, and so we can rest in that and trust him to provide for us. Did the perspective offered on Sunday seem unrealistic or naïve given the real responsibilities of providing for a family in today’s society?
5. How successful or unsuccessful have you been in maintaining appropriate internal boundaries with work and life that acknowledge God’s ultimate responsibility for providing for you? What specific practices or perspectives have been most helpful for you in “holding onto things loosely” (prayer, perspective, etc)
6. What experiments have you tried with setting external boundaries on work? Have you set limits on the amount of time you work each day? Have you tried a Sabbath? What have been the results?