

Psalm 128: A Song of Blessing

Thesis: Blessing and happiness is found in walking with Jesus.

Psalm 128

- 1 How happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!
- 2 You will surely eat what your hands have worked for.
You will be happy, and it will go well for you.
- 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house,
your children, like young olive trees around your table.
- 4 In this very way the man who fears the Lord will be blessed.
- 5 May the Lord bless you from Zion, so that you will see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life 6 and will see your children's children!
Peace be with Israel.

Icebreaker: Have each member of the group answer the following questions. These questions allow the conversation to start off in safety and fun.

- What is something people expect will bring the happiness, but never really does?
- How have you found disappointment in your search for personal happiness?

Opening Quote from *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

The easiest thing in the world is to be a Christian. What is hard is to be a sinner. Being a Christian is what we were created for. The life of faith has the support of an entire creation and the resources of a magnificent redemption. The structure of this world was created by God so we can live in it easily and happily as his children. The history we walk in has been repeatedly entered by God, most notably in Jesus Christ, first to show us and then to help us live full of faith and exuberant with purpose. In the course of Christian discipleship, we discover that without Christ we were doing it the hard way and that with Christ we are doing it the easy way. It is not Christians who have it hard, but non-Christians.

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, ever blessing ever blest, help us to understand this week's psalm. Not simple to understand it in our head, but to feel in our heart and to live in in our lives. May it reframe our story and reshape our perspective as we walk with you and ascend to your house. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Opening Meditation: Listening Prayer

At the start of the session, you will read through Psalm 128 three times. You can use the version above (Christian Standard Bible), another version, or three different versions.

Have your group sit and listen. Invite them to listen for a theme in this Psalm. Listen for repeated phrases that are echoed in this psalm. Listen for words or ideas that resonate with them. Listen for God to speak to you through this psalm.

Discuss:

- What was something that you heard, felt, or experienced while listening to this psalm?

- Were there any word or phrase that resonated with you in this Psalm?
- What do you think is the central theme or message from this psalm?
- What questions about this psalm came to mind as you listened?

Sermon Discussion: This past Sunday we explored Psalm 128 in worship. Take some time to review the sermon, discussing the themes, application, and questions

- What were some of lessons of Psalm 128 that were discussed during the sermon?
- How did these lessons connect with you and your spiritual life?
- How were you encouraged to apply the lessons from this psalm to your life?
- Share any questions of concerns that came to you from this week's sermon?
- How can the lessons from this Psalm help you on your spiritual journey?

Psalm 128:1 How happy is everyone who fears the Lord

- Does being a Christian make you happy? Why or why not?
- Do you think non-Christians think Christians are happy? Why or why not?
- Is happiness what we should be seeking?
- What do you think is the difference between world happiness and Christian happiness?

Fear the Lord: According to Psalm 128, Christian happiness is found in fearing the Lord. Like Christian happiness, this idea of fearing the lord might create imaged of terror and dread, but this is not what that term means. Let's look at what Eugene Peterson has to say on the topic.

Quote from *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*:

"Fear GOD." Reverence might be a better word. Awe. The Bible isn't interested in whether we believe in God or not. It assumes that everyone more or less does. What it is interested in is the response we have to him: Will we let God be as he is, majestic and holy, vast and wondrous, or will we always be trying to whittle him down to the size of our small minds, insist on confining him within the boundaries we are comfortable with, refuse to think of him other than in images that are convenient to our lifestyle? The Bible talks of the fear of the Lord-not to scare us but to bring us to awesome attention before the overwhelming grandeur of God, to shut up our whining and chattering and stop our running and fidgeting so that we can really see him as he is and listen to him as he speaks his merciful, life-changing words of forgiveness.

- How does what Peterson writes help you have a better understanding of what it means to "fear" God?
- Why is it dangerous to "whittle God down to the size of our small minds"? How have you done that in your own life?
- How might a correct posture of fearing the Lord lead to happiness?

Promised Happiness and Pronounced Blessing

Psalm 128 begins with three promises for happiness and three pronouncements of blessing.

Happy is everyone who fears the Lord... You will surely eat what your hands have worked for. You will be happy and it will go well for you...

The man who fears the Lord will be blessed... you will see the prosperity of Jerusalem... and will see your children's children!

- What are the promises and what are the pronouncements?
- Are these different than the happiness and blessing that most people are seeking?

- How does Psalm 128 help reshape our perspective in the things we think will give us meaning in life?

Quote from *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*:

The world's happiness depends on taking from one to satisfy another. To increase my standard of living, people in another part of the world must lower theirs... The road we travel is the well-traveled road of discipleship. It is not a way of boredom or despair or confusion. It is not a miserable groping but a way of blessing. Christian blessing is a realizing that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." As we learn to give and to share, our vitality increases, and the people around us become fruitful vines and olive shoots at our tables.

- How does Peterson help us better understand the heart of the Christian blessing?
- How have you experienced the blessing found in "it is more blessed to give than receive?"
- How has the blessing you experiences help others experience the blessing of God?

Psalm 128:4 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children, like young olive trees around your table.

Trigger Warning: Verses 4 might be upsetting to those who were unable to have children. Be cautious when discussing this verse. Thankfully Peterson helps us understand the blessing in terms of the Hebrew culture of that time.

Quote from *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*:

The illustration is, as we would expect, conditioned by Hebrew culture, in which the standard signs of happiness were a wife who had many children and children who gathered and grew around the table: fruitful vine and olive shoots. This illustration is just that, an example that we need not reproduce exactly in order to experience blessing. (We, for instance, don't try to have as many children as possible-or try to get them to stay at home for all their lives!) But the meaning is still with us: Blessing has inherent in it the power to increase. It functions by sharing and delight in life... The characteristic of blessing is to multiply.

- What does the illustration used by the Psalmist teach us about the blessings from we receive from God?

God's blessings multiply and increase. As verse 4 says, "In this very way the man who fears the Lord will be blessed." As you join in the song of Psalm 128, may you discover the blessing God has for his people as we ascent to the House of the Lord in worship, together.

Quote from *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*:

Everyone wants to be happy, to be blessed. Too many people are willfully refusing to pay attention to the One who wills our happiness and ignorantly supposing that the Christian way is a harder way to get what they want than doing it on their own. They are wrong. God's ways and God's presence are where we experience the happiness that lasts.

Optional Musical Interlude: Listen to Psalm 128 by Poor Bishop Hooper, reflecting on the words and music, allowing God to speak through this psalm into your heart.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=nL9MoUXUzOI

Final Thoughts: From Timothy Keller's *The Songs of Jesus* (pg. 334)

Family. A loving spouse and growing children are a great blessing. But sin in the heart and evil in the world have disrupted the life of the human family. Many wish to have families who don't, and many who have families wish they had had different ones. There are also people who have suffered terrible abuse within their families. Jesus said that his family did not consist of biological relatives, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother:" (Mark 3:35) The church must not only support and repair families but also find a way to become the family of God where everyone, married and single, childless or not, can flourish in love.

Application: Consider ways that you can experience Godly happiness by giving to others. Perhaps the small group can do something together.

Discuss:

- What is something you discovered today during our study of Psalm 128?
- How will this psalm help you through life's journey this week and beyond?
- How can you apply this psalm to your life this week?
- How can you support the people in your group as they journey through Psalm 128?

Closing Prayer: Invite the group to share any prayer requests for the week ahead. Then have one person close in prayer or invite the group to pray for each other.