

## Psalm 127

*1 Unless the LORD builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it;  
Unless the LORD guards the city,  
The watchman keeps awake in vain.*

*2 It is vain for you to rise up early,  
To retire late,  
To eat the bread of painful labors;  
For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.*

*3 Behold, children are a gift of the LORD,  
The fruit of the womb is a reward.*

*4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,  
So are the children of one's youth.*

*5 How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;  
They will not be ashamed  
When they speak with their enemies in the gate.*

For those of you who read ahead in that Psalm, and thought, Oh he's going to talk about children, on Mothers Day, how nice, . . . no.

I want to take some time this morning to reflect on our first year together with me in the pulpit, as your pastor, and just share with you my vision for this church.

Bear with me for a little background.

In a way, it was because of my love for youth in the church that I've wound up here in this pulpit this morning.

As you know, we raised our 3 daughters in the Baptist church even though strictly speaking, we weren't Southern Baptists. Pam taught Sunday school faithfully for at least 30 years, and her and Pat, and then Karen, taught the pre-school.

Pam was more faithful than me. I pinch hitted here and there from time to time, but for the most part, whether right or wrong, the verse I read this morning made labor there seem like a waste of time. I never committed to much.

I taught through Romans, early on, but the man in the pulpit decided I wasn't a team player and that effort fizzled.

Then I think, the best I can remember, when school started in 2008, Mike was sort of overwhelmed and said he would not work on a youth group if the church was going to require a Sunday evening service.

So I finally bit the commitment bullet and said, no, youth has to be a priority, and I will lead a Bible Study on Sunday evenings in order to free you up to effectively devote yourself to the youth group.

That began a rather timid effort at teaching faithfully through the minor prophets. 5 or 6 people would faithfully come. Often that included Deb Rhodes and the Baca's, who wanted to honor biblical exposition, even done poorly.

Almost no one from the Baptist church bothered to come. My brother would come. My mom. Sherr and Robert. Smooches, and the Campbells, when they were in Tonopah. Gary Flood was faithful. Nick and Holly sometimes.

I recall that I was invariably relieved each Sunday when it was over. I was extremely timid and felt like I was way out of my element, even with 6 or 7 people.

But for the first time, I was faithful to the task, whether I felt like anything was being accomplished or not.

1 year went by, then two, then three. And as time went on, it got a little easier to stand in front of people. But if you had told me then that I would fill this pulpit in 2015 I would have laughed.

In 2011 I moved to this church. The first Sunday here, noting that there wasn't an evening Bible study, I offered to Dennis and Maxine, to simply pick up, chapter and verse where I'd left off in the book of Mark on Sunday evening if they would like me to.

Dennis said, "Can you start tonight?" I said no, but I can begin next Sunday, and we did.

We finished Mark and then completely went through the book of Revelation.

Right from the start, the interest in the Word of God and the respect of it was different. About double the number of folks came, and the support and encouragement made it a lot more fun.

I immersed myself in listening to really good preaching. John MacArthur. R. C. Sproule. Ligon Duncan. Mark Dever. Al Mohler. John Piper. Some of the best preachers alive. And I went to the Together 4 The Gospel conferences in 2010 and 2012. Unbelievable preaching.

I guess I was hoping some of it would rub off. I practiced on the folks in the Sunday night class. I knew Dennis wasn't going to last forever, and I was praying he would.

The end came sooner than expected last year! A happy ending. We didn't lose him in sorrow. Him and Maxine were blessed by God with an opportunity at an altitude that Dennis really needed to be at. And they were gone.

I had already purposed in my heart that if asked, even temporarily until they could find someone suitable, I would do my best to fill this pulpit. I didn't tell anyone that. Not even Pam.

As soon as the board here knew of Dennis departure, my brother asked me, "Could you just do what you do on Sunday evenings, except do it on Sunday mornings, in the pulpit?"

Oddly, I was ready, and having pre-purposed the possibility of that open door with the Lord, I said with no reservations at all, Yes, I'll do that. I had been praying for God to allow me to have some fruit for His glory before I'm too old. I considered this an answered prayer.

Look again with me at Psalm 127. There is a premise here that is foundational. I started in this pulpit one year ago, with this premise as my foundation.

*Unless the LORD builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it;*

I've understood what that is saying now, for almost 45 years. Let's unpack it.

There's a house under construction. There are laborers working to build the house. And yet the Psalmist says, if the Lord isn't building it, the labor is a waste of time.

The house is the congregation of people who have come out of Satan's kingdom and into God's kingdom, and who worship Him.

And yet, there's this component of sovereign God joining in with his people, which if that doesn't happen, the whole effort is a waste of time.

What's surprising to me, is that no one pays any attention to this verse.

Do you have any idea how rare an occurrence it actually is, for the Holy Spirit to come and really bless a congregation? Why?

I grew up in Grace Community Church. Saved on August 26th, 1970 at a youth retreat. John MacArthur was speaking. I responded.

At that moment in time, that church was exploding with growth. You had to come back every week just to see what the Spirit was going to do next. It seemed like everything they touched turned to gold. God was in it all.

And that began a lifetime, really, of observing churches and the interaction of God with them.

Mostly, though, what you learn is that churches like Grace are a phenomenon. An exception to the rule of dryness. Sadly, most churches are dead. No spiritual life. Why is that?

I remember the excitement of youth group and young men talking about why God was blessing this church, and how you would take the principles that we believed had brought the blessing, and apply it on a smaller scale at other churches we would fan out to.

I remember Darryl DelHousaye was one of the first guys to do that. He left Grace some time in the 1970's and started a church in Arizona. All of the same principles he'd learned at Grace community, but on a smaller scale somewhere else. Would God bless again? Like He'd done at GCC? Yes. Darryl is faithful to this day.

I dreamed of getting out of southern California. I was no church planter. But I longed to be part of something, like Grace, but somewhere beyond Los Angeles.

We moved to Carson City in 1980. We had heard from another brother that had left Grace church for Carson City that there was a church there doing all the things we believed in. Rancho's Community church with Joel Berger as pastor.

They were actually a spin off from Ray Steadman's group in the bay area. But the principles were the same, and from the minute we walked in the door, we knew we were at home. We could sense the Spirit of God, and the blessing in that place.

Trouble was, we were in and out of work and our stay in Carson City was a short one. By early 1982 we were on our way to Tonopah.

I was shocked. Tonopah was a desert. Really? That was news to you?

A spiritual desert. Dry as toast. Parched. It seemed to me that the Holy

Spirit must have been angry with Tonopah. It was that parched. Void of spiritual life. Compared to the blessing I'd known. Devoid of the Spirit.

And so began 30 years of struggle.

So, what are the principles, from my youth, that I believe will in fact bring the response of God, the Almighty in Spiritual blessing?

It's nice to look back and say, I haven't changed my mind at all in 44 years. I may have wandered in the desert like the children of Israel, for 40 years, but my core beliefs are rock solid, unchanged.

What a grace to have been given the foundation that I was given in the Word of God at Grace church from the beginning.

- First principle. A high view of God. A high view of God.

Who God is, and who we are. Proverbs 9:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

God is not your buddy. People who begin their prayers, "Yo God, it's me, \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name here)

You may say, but God says we are His friends. He called Abraham friend and told the disciples they were His friends. And that is true. But never forget that friendship is at the grace of a mighty king. We are not equals in that friendship. He is the King, we are the slaves. The King may graciously reach out to us in love, kindness, friendship, and He does, but at the bottom line is grace.

Lest we forget, Psalm 47:2 says; *For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.* And again in Malachi 1:14 "*But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King," says the LORD of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations."*

A high view of God. A fearsome view of God. He is a mighty King. We are sheep. Unworthy slaves.

- 2nd principle is like the first. A high view of scripture.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Bottom line. Our connection with our Mighty King is revelation. This book. He has revealed to us everything we need to know in order to be in a right standing with Him, in this book. *The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

We are totally under it's authority. And commensurate with that truth is a logical connection of the necessity of seriously endeavoring to find out what the book says.

A high view of scripture says we are under it's authority and we need to get serious about learning what it says. All of it!

And having done that, we then need to double down, and DO it. All of it. God responds to a people who hold Him and His book in reverent obedience.

- 3rd principle follows suit. Expository preaching. Vs. by vs. expository teaching and preaching of the word of God until we can say with Paul in Ephesians 20 to the Ephesian elders, *I did not fail to declare unto you the full counsel of God.*

The Bible isn't for seminary students. It's normative in the churches for the people to learn and understand, all of God's word. The easy stuff, and the hard stuff.

You know, for the generations of the church from the 2nd century until now, the local church and what was taught in the local pulpits was sort of the luck of the draw.

There was some good. Some excellent. A ton of mediocre. And some downright wolves in sheeps clothing. And not much the local folks could do about it.

You got what you got.

In urban America in my lifetime, you could at least seek out something better. Travel was possible. You weren't locked into the corner church.

Then we came to Tonopah. It was like the 1st century. We weren't holy rollers and that meant we would be going to the Baptist church. Period.

Something has happened though in the last 15 years. There is a banquet of excellent preaching these days on the internet. You don't have to just listen to me. Go check out John Piper at Desiring God. Or John MacArthur at Grace to You. Those are just 2. There's a banquet of every delectable things just waiting.

I urge you to find this sermon on our web site and google the names I rolled off at the beginning. Listen to those men. A banquet of delectable things at your fingertips.

Sound doctrine. Held in high regard. Expository preaching.

- 4rth principle. A humble and prayerful **response** by God's people to His word.

If the first 3 are in place, at some point, this 4rth principle must follow. We corporately and individually commit our lives to be Kingdom of God people first, and everything else in line under that.

Go back and look again at Psalm 127:1a with me.

*Unless the LORD builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it;*

Again, a house is being built. There is labor involved by a congregation of builders. We talked about that. But do you see the Sovereignty of



God here.

There's a bunch of people building something, but none of it matters unless God is building it with them.

I've been in churches, in fact most churches, in fact I can subscribe entire movements, where there's a group of people, and they don't have a clue about the principles I've outlined, but they want the house, and devoid of God, they just start building something.

If God won't come, we'll replace Him with emotions. We'll work ourselves into a frenzy, in order to try to invent, from our own human flesh, some kind of reality.

I actually respond badly to people who are trying to get an emotional response going, devoid of the spirit of God. You won't see that in this pulpit. Sometimes I get choked up. But I never intentionally try to evoke an emotional response from you. I pray the Holy Spirit will, but that's His business, not mine.

God is Sovereign. We can't make that part of the equation happen. We're helpless. *Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it;*

You can't force God to get on board with the house you want to build. It doesn't work that way. You have no control over a Sovereign King.

But here's what you can do. We can look into this book and get in line with the house God has been building since He ascended into heaven.

Our time in Matthew 6 a few months ago completely revolutionized how I pray.

The disciples are walking along and they ask Jesus, teach us to pray. And He does. Really? Yes. Do you think that might be a key to this.

Since that time in the Lords Prayer, I've been praying that prayer. For Tonopah.

Hallowed be thy name. In Tonopah Nevada. Hallow your name in Tonopah. Lord, please do something in Tonopah that makes your name look magnificent. Send your Spirit to do a work here that will make your name great, among the nations. Hallow your name. Here. In Tonopah Nevada.

Now, I don't know exactly how He's going to answer that. I'm in perfect synchronism with the prayer He told the disciples to pray. Make your name great, in Tonopah.

I don't know what He's going to do here to accomplish that. To answer that. But I expect an answer. And here's the next part. Whatever it is you're going to do to make your name magnificent in Tonopah, please, let us join you in it.

So I'm praying that the Spirit will do something in Tonopah that the whole world will look at and marvel at His great name. And I'm asking for Him to let us come along for the ride.

Expository preaching. Did anyone else hear that when we were going through Matthew 6. It's on the web site. Go back and read through it again. Simple stuff.

Magnify your name. Do something magnificent that makes your name hallowed. Do it in Tonopah. I've been including Goldfield, and Beatty and Round Mountain, and Silver Peak and Fishlake in my request. And graciously let us join you in it.

God is sovereign in all this. But He told us to pray for that. It's all about Him. But think what fun we'll have when He comes and does that.

Wouldn't it be fun if so many people in Tonopah became christians that we had to go buy that empty school from Nye County just to have enough room for them all?

Pray that prayer with me. Hallowed be thy name. Specifically in

Tonopah! Hallow your name right here.

OK, back to earth. I said I would share my vision for this church.

I'm being patient. I'm trying. First year; just see if we can do it. Preach. See how many people vote with their feet. It's a different diet than most christians are used to. Solid food. Meat. No more pablum.

We're doing OK. Some lost by attrition. But I was surprised and delighted that no one simply said, I'm not going to listen to this, and went away.

I have sometimes had this image of a hospital room with a heart monitor. Is it going to flat line. Not so far. In fact like the old Prairie song says, "mercy drops round us are falling" but for the showers we plead.

We're holding our own. Pam encourages me. She says the ladies at the Bible study are often gracious. Many of you are gracious and encourage me. Thank you.

Little things. I was super blessed when Chris couldn't do our books any more, and Arlene stepped up. That's how it's supposed to work.

I went a few months ago to a meeting in Round Mountain. The guy from the Billy Graham evangelistic crusade organization was spending a day with the pastors explaining about their latest effort. It's called My Hope America.

You show movies and then teams go out and witness. At the end of the meeting they asked each pastor if they were going to get involved. I said no. Not because it isn't needed. Not because it's not excellent.

They kind of took offense. Whad'ya mean no!

I would love to do something like that some time. But it's got to be done by you folks, not me. I'm not going to be part of a church with one guy in the center throwing dust in the air, and everyone else, watching.

Some day, maybe we'll do exactly what the program was laying out. But not yet. Right now we're just getting muscled up for what we're going to accomplish *in God's time*.

Looking in my crystal ball, year 2 and 3. More of the same. Expository preaching. Waiting for God to work in your lives. Waiting for God to build this church.

By the end of year 3, a couple of goals I'd love to see in place.

- A plurality of Godly elders. Shepherds. Right now, you have one. I'm your shepherd. In a church this size, that's probably OK. But I'm praying for elders. Because that's the picture of church polity that Paul put in place as he established the gentile churches.

The elders, with Christ as their head, seek His will for the direction and care of the local church. They are shepherds to God's flock.

- Membership. This church was founded by some folks who had romantic notions about having an old fashioned country church like we used to have in the good old days. Just come. No membership required.

Unfortunately, that isn't the biblical model. We know from Paul's discussions about church discipline, something we hope we never have to experience, that there is to be accountability in the local churches. Membership.

Everyone's welcome, and we'll love one and all, but sooner or later, you need to respond in obedience, gladly, to the word of God.

In a mature church, the elders would visit prospective members and ensure that they understand the basic truths of salvation and have given themselves completely to the Lord Jesus. Then as members of this local body the people are submitting to the care of the elders of this church. The elders are guardians over the souls of those entrusted to their care.

Not saying the elders would supplant the board of directors. Elders are for spiritual direction and care. A board for the nuts and bolts finances and physical needs is great.

- Younger people here. Young christians that are serious about living for God and who have little ones running all over the place. Young families.

Sunday school. I'm amazed at what God has already done. And I'm grateful. I'm thrilled. But I'd love to see the day when one of the Elders was in charge of a well organized Sunday school with classrooms for different ages, and kids soaking up the Word steadily on the appropriate levels.

- Finally, I would like to see a solid statement of faith on our web pages. A compilation of exactly what we believe. What we teach. Something the members could sign as a pledge. This is what we believe.

Those are goals for down the road. Good goals because there is biblical precedence for all of those things.

I want you to notice. I didn't come in with guns blaring saying this is how it's gonna be. I'm patiently waiting on God to incorporate these and other things into His church that are clear in His word. Maybe we'll need 5 years. Maybe not. His problem. His time.

Meanwhile we'll keep feeding you the solid food to the best of our ability. The heart monitor didn't flat line. Now it's time to bulk up. Get some muscles. Get ready for however God's going to answer that prayer that He told us to pray.