

STEADFASTNESS IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

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Scripture Reading: Psalm 112

Psalm 112:7 says, “He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.” The first part of this verse describes a state of mind that should be desired by every one of us here. It is the state of mind that causes a person to be fearless in the face of adversity. The second part of this verse describes the secret to the fearlessness described in the first half of the verse. The secret is a heart that is steadfast, because it is trusting in the Lord.

Even though every person here should desire to experience fearlessness in the face of evil tidings, this characteristic is especially needed among those in leadership roles. A certain person will have a hard time leading if that person falls apart every time he is confronted with bad news. The mark of a good leader is a state of mind that will allow him to continue making sound decisions based upon truth even in the face of bad news that tends to throw everyone else into a state of panic. Although we all need this kind of fearlessness, people in leadership roles especially need it.

Today is Father’s Day, and the Bible has ordained every husband and every father to a place of leadership in the family. Of all the leadership roles possible for a human being to experience, I don’t think there is any leadership role more important than the role of the husband or father who has been ordained by God to lead his family in fulfilling the family’s primary purpose for existing. Husbands and fathers are truly the most important leaders on the face of this earth. They are far more important than kings or presidents or corporate executives or even pastors. I would not say this if it weren’t for the fact that I believe with all my heart that the family unit is the most important structure in the universe. And though it may be argued that the church is more important than the family, the most basic components that come together to make up a church are family units. Without healthy family units, it is impossible to have a healthy church. Thus, in my mind, the family unit remains the most important structure known to mankind, and the one ordained to be the leader of this most important structure is the husband or the father.

I have spent a lot of time thinking why God has ordained husbands and fathers to lead families. To this day I am not certain I know the answer to this question; however, I am certain about one thing. When considering the qualifications needed to lead a family in fulfilling its high calling, at the top of the list is the qualification of steadfastness that comes from trusting God. It is the quality that causes a person not to be shaken or deviate from pursuing his goal. He remains steadfast even when faced with physical sickness or mental sickness or death or financial catastrophe or family members who rebel, refusing to cooperate in helping the family pursue its high calling. In the face of any of these things or all of these things, there is a need for a kind of leadership that remains unshaken. The family must do the thing it was created to do despite the circumstances it faces. And the one who leads the family should not give up in doing whatever is necessary to make sure

the family fulfills the purpose to which it has been called. He should be steadfast in his duty.

Let us be reminded of the main purpose of a family unit. Why did God create the family unit in the first place? What is the high calling of the family?

In short, the purpose of the family unit is to reveal the image of God to all men and women and children. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." In the tenth chapter of Mark, Jesus is recorded as saying that it is for this reason that a man and a woman should get married. Why should people get married and create a family unit? The family unit is created to reveal the image of God. That is the purpose to which the family unit is called.

The primary responsibility of the family is to help its own members to know and experience God. When children are born into the family unit, the family unit's primary concern must be to help those children know God. That is far more important than good grades and piano lessons and getting into prestigious schools.

And the family unit must work hard to reveal God to people who belong to the community in which the family lives. They work with other family units to do this. And so churches are created. And the witness goes on beyond the immediate community to the whole world.

It is to this highest calling that the family unit must dedicate itself. And it is the father or husband who has been ordained by God to lead the family unit to fulfill its calling.

When the Bible talks about the husband or the father leading the family, it is not referring to a dictator who makes all the decisions in the home. It is referring to a leader who is determined to fulfill the primary purpose for which the family has been created and to which the family has been called. It is the kind of leadership where a person sacrifices himself to lead by example. Family members will watch the leader in action and they will be influenced to follow. The action of the leader will inspire people to follow.

In Psalm 112 we can see the kind of action I am talking about. Please notice with me the activities of the steadfast man described in Psalm 112.

Verse 1 describes him as a man who fears the Lord. This kind of fear is a deep respect for God that expresses itself in obedience. This person delights in obeying the commands of His Lord. He not only studies the commands of God, he actively works to obey them. I love to recite the Apostles Creed that begins with these words, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." The man in Psalm 112 who fears God may not recite those exact words, but that is the truth about him. Everything he does reveals the fact that he believes in God. Even without verbally proclaiming the fact, people see him and know that he believes in God. His wife knows it. His children know it. And his community knows it.

And then notice another activity of the man described in the 112th Psalm. It is found in verses 2-3. This man is a home-making man. He actively works to help the members of

his family experience righteousness. These two verses mention the power and wealth and blessings that the children of such a man will experience. But all these things must be seen in the context of righteousness. We are mistaken when we use money and political power as a standard to measure real power and wealth. The person who is truly rich and able to influence others around him is the person who is godly regardless of how much money he has or what his position in society may be. Righteousness must be the standard we use to measure power and prosperity. The man in Psalm 112 actively works to help his children experience the highest and most noble form of power and prosperity. He is a home-making man.

And he is a helping man. He is gracious and compassionate to those who are in need. This man is a light to those living in the darkness of despair. Listen to verse 4 of Psalm 112 as I quote it from the Good News Bible. "Light shines in the darkness for good men, for those who are merciful, kind, and just." In verses 5 and 9 we see examples of this practical kindness. This man is "generous and lends freely." And he gives "gifts to the poor." He is a man who is determined to reveal God to others by helping them. He is a helping man.

Then, finally, he is a hated man. Wouldn't it be nice if we could go about our duties to fulfill our high calling without facing opposition? But this is never the case. Verse 10 tells us that the wicked man will observe this man who is determined to obey God's commands and committed to guiding his children in the path of righteousness and practices compassion to all those in need—the wicked man will observe this person, and he will be vexed. He will even gnash his teeth. Eventually his hatred will waste away, but not before expressing his distaste in one form or another.

And so the activities of the man described in Psalm 112 are revealed to us. He is a God-fearing man, a home-making man, a man who actively works to help others, and a man who is hated by wicked men. In the case of the man who has been appointed to lead a family unit, all of these activities are done with one goal in mind; namely, to make sure the family unit is fulfilling its purpose of revealing the truth about God to other people.

And that brings me back to the main point of this sermon. The husband or father who has been ordained by God to lead the family in fulfilling its high calling needs to be steadfast in doing these things regardless of the internal difficulties he faces. And he needs to be steadfast regardless of the external attacks he receives from wicked men. He must not be shaken. He needs to be like a rock that will not be moved.

Certainly he will experience grief if one of his children should die. Weeping and sorrow are part of his experience. The wound will be full of pain, but there will be no panic and no fear. He knows that death is not the final news. He may be set back momentarily, but even in his grief he will say, "He shall not return to me, but I shall go to him." His heart is not afraid of evil tidings. The bad news will not cause him to give up in his God-given responsibility to lead his family.

He will experience confusion at times. Any organization—whether it be a church or a business or a government or a family—any organization will eventually experience

circumstances that are characterized by turmoil where everything seems to be out of order. But the man described in Psalm 112 will not let such circumstances fill his heart with fear. He will understand that God is in control of all circumstances. He knows that the last word and the final outcome will not be chaos; rather, it will be the Word of the God who is in complete control of the circumstances. His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.

And he will experience that agony that comes to all of us when we realize that we are hated by another person. Most of us feel very uncomfortable when we realize that what we did with good intentions offended another person. But even this knowledge and the criticism that might come his way, will not cause the steadfast man to flinch. He continues doing what is right in the face of criticism and opposition.

His focus on God is the source of his stability. Psalm 112 and Psalm 111 are a matching set of Psalms. One talks about the man whose heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord, and the other talks about God, the One in whom we trust.

By focusing on the truth about God revealed in Psalm 111, we are then able to receive the vision and strength needed to remain steadfast in doing the things that are described in Psalm 112. Notice the beautiful parallel structure that exists with these two Psalms.

Verse 1 of Psalm 111 says, "Praise the Lord. I will extol the Lord with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly." As the man focus his attention on the magnificence and majesty of God, his response is seen in verse 1 of Psalm 112; namely, a great respect for the Lord and a delight to do His commands. Psalm 111 verses 2 and 3 talk about the great and majestic works of the Lord that reveal His righteousness. In verses 2 and 3 of Psalm 112 the man responds to this revelation by working to establish righteousness in his family. The wealth and prosperity seen in the children of this man are but a reflection of the majestic works of the Lord. God's compassion revealed in verse 4 of Psalm 111 causes the man to reach out in compassion to those who are in need as revealed in the parallel verse of Psalm 112.

The point that we must understand by looking at this parallel structure is simple. The point is that steadfastness of heart comes only by focusing on and trusting in the great attributes and deeds of God.

I prepared this sermon for Father's Day, but I know that probably fewer than ten percent of those present in this auditorium are fathers. There are also husbands and perhaps fathers-to-be. I particularly had fathers and husbands and fathers-to-be in mind as I prepared this message; because, for some reason, God has ordained the husband or father to lead the family in fulfilling its purpose. There seems to be some theological argument that a man is more suited to fit this role than a woman, and that is why God chose the husband and father to take the lead.

But the reality of our day is that most family units are led by wives and mothers and not by husbands and fathers. Sometimes it is because the husbands and fathers have left. Other times it is because the husbands and fathers are unaware of the purpose to which the

family has been called, or they are unaware of the fact that God has ordained them to lead the family in fulfilling its purpose. Most husbands and fathers are too busy pursuing earthly goals. They have no time to help their family fulfill its highest calling. Such is the tragedy of our age.

And when such tragedy occurs, women and single people have to consider stepping in to fill the gap. Whether or not the husband or father does what he is supposed to do, the children still need to hear the words of life revealed in the Holy Scriptures. They need to be prayed for and they need someone who will pray with them. Family members still need someone they can look up to who will not go to pieces at the first sound of bad news. They still need someone whose heart is steadfast, because they are trusting in the Lord. Even though the Bible indicates that husbands and fathers are the ones best suited to lead the family, the Bible does not indicate it is wrong for someone other than a husband or a father to do the same thing.

The truth contained in Psalm 112 is for everyone, and we should all aspire to be like the person described in that Psalm. When husbands and fathers live up to the truth contained in this Psalm, they will naturally be recognized and respected as leaders in their family. But when husbands and fathers are filled with fear at the sound of bad news and are shaken because of their inability to trust in God, then they will not be able to lead the family the way God intended the family to be led. Regardless of how much control a certain man exercises in the home, that man will not be able to lead unless he has the qualities described in Psalm 112.

And when the father or husband does fail to lead, God often gives the grace needed for others to step in and fill the gap. In most cases, those who fill the gap are wives and mothers. In some cases they are sisters or brothers. And in some cases they are single people who do not have a blood relationship with the family. In our church we have some single people who are serving as surrogate leaders of families where no one in the family is leading in the way God intended a family to be led. There may be a child attending your Sunday school class who has no one but you to provide the kind of example that will help him to know God.

The message of Psalm 112 is for everyone. But on this day that we celebrate fatherhood, let us recognize the fact that God ordained those of us who are husbands and fathers to be leaders. God wants us to demonstrate the kind of steadfastness described in this Psalm as we lead our families to fulfill the purpose for which they have been created.

My final appeal is for prayer. Our society gives little encouragement to fathers. It does little to encourage us to lead our families in the way they are supposed to be led. Even those of us who profess to be Christian find ourselves away from home most of the time. And when we are at home, we often have little energy left to give to our children. And being a professional minister does not give one an advantage. We are no better and sometimes worse than the rest.