

Psalm 127 is an odd little Psalm.

The first three verses seem to express the wisdom that is found elsewhere in the Old Testament, urging us to leave things to God and not to be so anxious.

*Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.*

*Unless the Lord keeps the city the guard keeps watch in vain.*

*It is in vain that you hasten to rise up early and go so late to rest, eating the bread of toil, for he gives his beloved sleep.*

But then the final three verses seem to be about a completely different topic; basically saying it's great to have children, isn't it? The translation I most often use is this:

*Children are a heritage from the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his gift.*

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

*Happy are those who have their quiver full of them: they shall not be put to shame when they dispute with their enemies in the gate.*

I am blessed with two children and I also have a foster son whom I describe separately out of respect for his mother and father. They all look after me in their different ways, using their various talents. They've got my back. They would defend me in a dispute with enemies.

Not everybody is lucky to have children and those among us who are parents cannot be certain that our children will look after us. Many of us worry about who will look after them when we are gone.

But all of us who grow old depend more and more on younger generations. How clearly we see that in our present situation. All over our community younger people are working in shops and carehomes, delivering food and other essentials, shopping for older people, running errands to keep them safe. Showing them how to use computers and smartphones.

This crisis is teaching us a lot about how interdependent we are in general and especially how dependent we are on younger generations, on their skills and on their courage. The heroes we applaud every Thursday night are young people of working age. They are the ones who will get us through this crisis. Thank goodness we have our quiver full of them.

And this feeling of interdependence is stripping us of our arrogance. It is stripping us of the illusion we cling to that we prosper purely because of our own efforts. It is bringing us closer to an appreciation that we are all in God's hands. We may labour to build the house and guard the city but unless we are doing God's work we will labour in vain.

How may we pray with Psalm 127 in our present situation?

*Loving Creator God; we thank you for the many ways you bless us. We thank you that you have blessed us with children, all of them gifts from you. We thank you for the courage and energy of younger generations and for everything they can show us and teach us. We thank you for everybody who works in the NHS, in carehomes, in food distribution and retail and all other key workers. Help us to appreciate them. Help us to let them help us. Help us to see them as your gift to us. Help us to give thanks for all your gifts to us. Give us thankful hearts. Amen.*