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## *The Climb of Your Life: The Boast* Psalm 127

For the past two months we've been working our way through 15 Psalms that are called the Psalms of Ascent. They would have been sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, and by those returning from exile. For us, we've called this journey *The Climb of Your Life*. We've talked about how life is like one big long climb up a mountain. And the last two months we've packed our supplies, short-rope, belayed, overcome perils, cried out for mercy, suffered from altitude sickness... But today we're going to ask: Why? Why are we climbing? What's our purpose? What's at the top? Where are we going?

Tomorrow is Veteran's Day, and I want to start by saying thank you to those who have served this country, and by doing so, also served my own country of the United Kingdom, to secure the freedom we have. Thank you.

This week I came across the story of a World War I veteran named George Mallory. He was educated at Cambridge and went on to become a teacher at a prestigious private boy's school in England, returning to this after the war. But in 1921 he quit his job to join the first British Everest expedition. Over the next three years he made three attempts to climb Everest. Bear in mind this is still 30 years before Edmund Hillary became the first person to successfully summit. In each attempt Mallory climbed higher than anyone had done before, with his highest being only 2,000 feet short of the summit. Mallory is attributed with the most famous three words in climbing, said in response to a New York Times reporter's question: Why do you want to climb Mount Everest? He answered: Because it's there.

Because it's there... is that it? Is that why we're climbing this mountain... this metaphor for our lives? Is that why we are living... because it's there? Because life is just... there? Our Psalm this morning is going to ask us that very question: Why are you living? Turn with me to Psalm 127.

*[Read Psalm 127]*

Building a house, watching over a city, anxious toil, raising children; shelter, security, work and family. Four of our most universal preoccupations. That's what this Psalm is about. It's about life.

Verse 1 begins by talking about building a house. So much of our lives are centered around where we live. Do I live with my parents or move out? Do I rent or buy? Do I buy new or renovate? Do I build my own house? Do I upsize or downsize? What about if I'm upside-down? Do I need to remortgage? What about a second home? Should I buy to rent? We are preoccupied with property.

Verse 1 goes on to talk about a watchman watching over the city. In ancient times, the cities were guarded by watchmen, who stood on the walls, watching to see if an enemy was approaching. It was the city's security; it was its protection. And today we're concerned with security too. We lock our houses. We set alarms. We put valuables in safes. We buy insurance to protect our cars and home and health. We are constantly making sure everything that we own is safe... protected... secure.

We not only spend much of our lives preoccupied with shelter and security, but also with work. Verse 2 talks about rising early, coming home late, all to eat the bread of anxious toil. Work. It's what we do. Whether you're a banker, or a realtor, or a barista, or a stay-at-home mom, we spend most of our waking hours working and commuting to work. And for many of us, when we don't have work, we struggle with identity issues because we've lost a sense of who we are. Work is a huge part of our life.

Shelter, security, work and... Family. Verses 3-5 talk about our family. Children are a heritage from the Lord, ... a reward. Raising a family is what we do. We get married (or maybe not), and then have kids. Then we raise those kids up and send them off, hoping that one day they'll have kids, so we can have grandkids, and maybe even great-grandkids. And even if you don't have a family, we typically yearn for one and replicate it in other ways, sometimes through friends or even pets. We work towards family of our own whether we have one or not.

This is a Psalm all about life. About our lives. About the lives we live. It's about the things we build our lives around. And the four things the Psalmist talks about (shelter, security, work and family) they aren't the only things we build our lives around. There are lots of others... We've got: education [pick up box], health [pick up box], job [continue picking up boxes and building house], marriage, house, car, 401(k), kids, morals, vacations, insurance, sports/hobbies, clothes, church, vacation home, grandkids, boat, retirement [make boxes into shape of house].

These are things we build our lives around. In a sense, our whole life is like building a house. We've got to get all the pieces together and then stack them in the right way, and eventually... hopefully... our life is complete. Right? ... But why? Why do we live like this? What is it all for? Are we just like George Mallory climbing Everest? Do we just do it because it's there?

For many of us, we do it because it brings us significance. Because it enables us to boast about it. Just like climbing a mountain brings significance, building our lives brings us significance. We can look at what we've achieved, the house of our lives that we've built, and be proud of it. "Look at what I've done. I've worked hard, and here's the result." Many of us look to the lives we've built for our significance. That's me... I look at my education, my job, my vacations, my sports achievements and I say: "Look at me! I'm a success." I tell myself: these things confirm that I am significant, that I am somebody.

But maybe you're not like me, maybe you're more like my wife Rachel. She looks at this house of her life and finds not significance, but security in it. She sees that it's all together, it's all there. We've got a plan. We've got a future. We're going to be okay. She trusts that this house of our lives that we've built together is going to be there for her when times get tough, that family and insurance will come through. That our 401(k) will still be there when we need it. That our education is always something to fall back on.

Most of us look to the house of lives and find significance or security. We either see this as what makes us significance, or what is going to keep us secure. But what does our Psalm say about all that? If our Psalm is all about life, what wisdom does it have to offer about the houses of our lives that we have built? Look at it again...

Re-read verses 1-2 up to "anxious toil."

What words does the Psalmist keep repeating? "In vain." Do you know what he means by that? Emptiness. Nothingness. In vain means: empty. The Psalmist says, the house of your life that you've built is empty. Completely and utterly empty. Literally, it is just like these cardboard boxes here: empty. And he's right, isn't he. When we really think about it. When it comes down to it, everything we have strived to build, can't come with us when we die. We've got to leave all this behind. All that we've achieved, all that we own, it's all going to be left behind.

And not only that, but when we're here it isn't safe either. What happens if our marriage breaks down? What happens if our child is diagnosed with a disability? What happens if we lose our job? What happens if our morals are questioned? What happens if we lose our home? It all comes crashing down [knock down house]. And all of a sudden, we realize how empty all this cardboard is.

So what hope is there? If this is what we're all doing, and it's all empty, what hope is there? Look again at what the Psalmist says: "Unless the Lord builds the house..." You see, when we try to build the house of our lives by ourselves, we end up placing our significance and security in it. But when we start by placing our significance and security in the Lord, in Jesus, in whom He is, in what He has

done, and then allow Him to build our lives, we won't be looking to these cardboard boxes for our significance and security, because we've already found it.

When Jesus stretched his arms out on the cross he said: this is how significant you are. When he overcame the grave and rose again he said: this is how secure you are, even death can't harm you. And by defeating death he proved that in him is found eternal life, not temporary, empty life, like in these cardboard boxes, but eternal life.

And when we let go of these things and look instead to Jesus... he begins to build his house through us. And it might look very similar, but the difference is: we aren't looking to this house for our significance and security anymore, we're looking to Jesus. Finding significance in the cross, and security in the resurrection.

So... The question is: Are you building in vain? Is your life empty? But there's more... In verse 3-5 the Psalmist talks about children. They are a blessing from God—this I have come to know in the last few months. Although I have also come to know that with great blessing comes great responsibility...

In verse 4 the Psalmist uses this amazing image to describe our children, he calls them "arrows in the hand of a warrior." You see, as parents we are given these children by God, just like a warrior is given arrows, and as parents we have the same job as the warrior has with those arrows: aim and fire. As parents we can't control our children's lives, just like a warrior can't control an arrow, but we can aim them in the right direction and let them go. The question this Psalm asks of us is: where are you aiming your kids?

So many of us will bring, are bringing, or have brought our kids up by encouraging them to build the house of their lives just like the one we built earlier. We tell them to go and get a good education. We check on their grades to make sure they are. We tell them to get a good job. We tell them to eat well, stay healthy, see a doctor. We tell them to find a good spouse, to buy a house in a good neighborhood, to drive a good car, to save, to have kids, to have good morals, to take vacation, to buy insurance, to have a hobby, to go to church... And what happens? Our kids' lives end up looking just like ours, and where do they put their significance and security? And we can't understand why a whole generation of 18-35 year olds have left home and walked away from their faith...

Our kids are like arrows. If we aim them at this, this is what they will achieve. I do not want my dear Evelyn to grow up thinking that this is what matters. I want her to grow up knowing that there is only one thing that matters: Jesus. If that means she won't have the latest toy or clothes, that's okay. If that means she might not get the greatest education in the world, or the greatest job, that's okay. If that means that one day I'll be throwing her into a raging river like the Eubanks kids to teach her to swim, that's okay. Because at the end of the day, there is only one thing that matters: does she love Jesus? I want her to say, as the Apostle

Paul said to the Philippians: I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

George Mallory, our WWI veteran who climbed Mount Everest “because it’s there,” made one final attempt to climb it in June 1924. Aged 37 at this point, he knew it was his last chance. Travelling with fellow Brit Andrew Irvine, they were spotted less than 750 feet from the summit, continuing to make progress. But that was the last anyone saw or heard of George Mallory. He died on that mountain. He was mourned as a national hero back in Britain, with his funeral being attended by the King and the Prime Minister. And for 75 years his body lay buried on Everest, untouched. Then in 1999 it was discovered. What happened was this: he slipped and fell to his death as he was descending. But the thing is, no one knows if he summited. If he did, he would have beaten Edmund Hillary by a full 29 years! It would have been the crowning achievement of his life... the pinnacle of the house of his life... Either way, he can’t find his significance or security in it anymore, because he’s gone. That achievement, all of his achievements are empty.

One day, our lives will end. One day we will leave behind our earthly achievements, possessions, successes, failures, family, everything... The question is: Will your life have been empty? Will you have encouraged your children to live empty lives? Or will you have lived your life putting your significance and security in the only thing that matters: Jesus. Because the only thing of permanence in this life, the only thing that can fulfill us, is our relationship with Jesus. Is that what you’re living for?

### **Sermon Questions**

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don’t teach! Listen and reflect on God’s word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
  1. Where are you laboring in vain?
  2. Where are you encouraging your children to labor in vain?
  3. What is God calling you to do in response to this passage?