

AIMING THE ARROW

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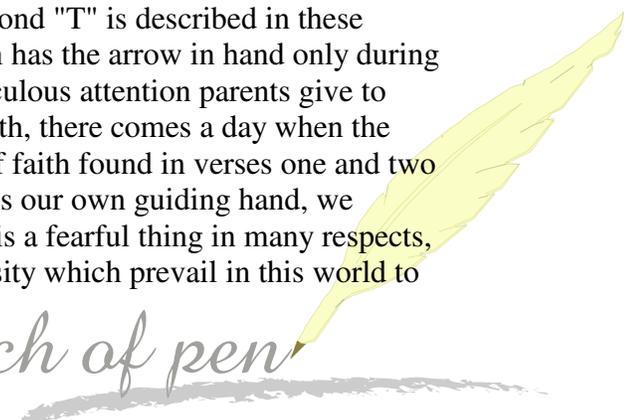
"As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them." (Psalm 127:4-5) Verses 1 - 2 of this Psalm have a number of application, containing three glorious principles of faith which are often claimed in building the church. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it," shows us that regardless of our own desires and efforts, only God can actually build anything. Paul reinforced this truth when he wrote: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (I Corinthians 3:6). "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Here we see that despite our best efforts at preservation, only God is able to protect His own. Verse Two illustrates the principle that there are some things which are entirely beyond our own control. "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so He giveth His beloved sleep." These words tell us that things such as death, referred here to as sleep, remain only under the control of God. Excessive grief and sorrow over things that have already happened, will not change anything.

Verses 3 - 5 inform us that these same principles are to be applied to building a family of children. Faith must come to the fore as we realize that only God can build our children, and only God can keep (guard, hedge about with thorns) them in safety. Furthermore, we realize that there are some things which are only in His hands and totally beyond our own control, even to the point of "giving His beloved sleep."

The instructions found in the final verses of this Psalm can easily be remembered by three "T's". Training of the arrow, Turning loose of the arrow, and target of the arrow. A child is an arrow which must be trained or aimed in the proper direction. This training begins in Verse Three with the message, "Children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is His reward." This message must be learned by both parent and child. Our nation, as a whole, has entirely forgotten the fact that life comes only from God. Mankind has flippantly cast away His heritage to them, as literally millions of babies have been aborted, and parents have treated children as nothing more than an inconvenience to be thrown out with the rest of the trash. Beyond this negative aspect, however, parents must first realize themselves how very precious and valuable a treasure, God esteems children to be. In addition, it is the responsibility of the parent to convey that message to his child. Children need to know that they are important, valuable, and of the highest priority. They are God's heritage and gift, and only good gifts come from God.

"As arrows in the hand of a mighty man" describes a mighty man of faith who has been charged with guiding the arrow. Children must have "hands on" direction and such direction must be both of and toward the Lord. The second "T" is described in these words, "So are children of the youth." The mighty man has the arrow in hand only during the youth of the child. Regardless of the time and meticulous attention parents give to their children as they nurture and admonish them in youth, there comes a day when the arrow must be launched. This is where the principles of faith found in verses one and two must be claimed more than ever. When the arrow leaves our own guiding hand, we realize that only God can build, keep, and control it. It is a fearful thing in many respects, for every parent knows the tremendous winds of adversity which prevail in this world to

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keep this missile from its intended target. To no longer have control or influence becomes one of the hardest things parents will ever face. All their attempts at shielding from pain, harm, and potential destruction, are no longer effective. Sometimes arrows having been launched, appear to be slightly, or even severely off-course. The tendency is often to blame the one who loosed it; however, there is no indication that the father of the prodigal son had failed to do his job. Like that father, we too, must relinquish total control to God, even though we are fully aware of the horrendous things the prodigal endured before he finally "came to himself."

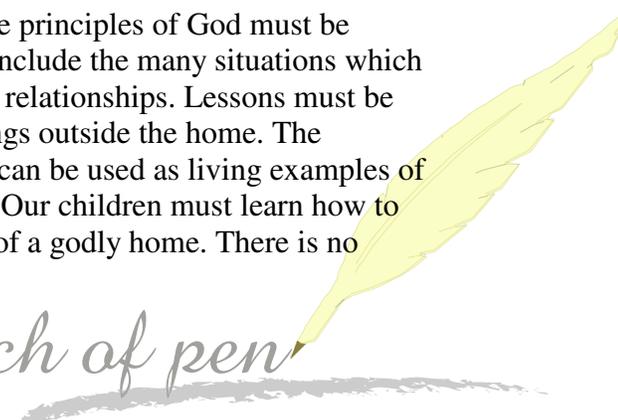
The third "T" is found in the statement, "They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate," better translated, "they shall subdue the enemies in the gate." This is the target or desired result. We want our children to be victorious in life. It is to this end that we are to aim, or train the arrow. This article is primarily about such training. Many a parent has longed desparately for a "how to" book and while none has really been found, the Scriptures do give us the instructions for successful direction. It begins in the life of the parent.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6 instructs parents thus: "Hear O Israel..teach them diligently unto thy children," but these lessons must first be learned by the parents. They must hear the voice of the Lord in their own lives. Secondly the parents are to "love the Lord with all thine heart.." Third, these words (all of the Word of God, not just the ten commandments) shall be in thine heart." In short, parents must incorporate God' s ways and Word into their own lives first. They must become living examples. Someone has said that the lessons children learn are "caught rather than taught." It means that they learn far more from the examples set before them than from numerous lectures they hear. If money is a parent' s priority, the child will know it. If possessions, self-fulfillment, or personal pleasure is number one, the child will receive that message. Contrariwise, if the love of God and His Word, along with prayer and Godly conduct is foremost, a child will learn that these things are important!

When fathers and mothers learn God' s lessons in their own lives, they are then able to "teach them diligently unto their children." The key is "diligent." Over the years, I have heard some parents make such statements as: "Well, I will just wait and let my children decide for themselves what they want to believe." What a potentially devastating course of action! The fact is that if we do not teach our children, someone else will. This would be like going into a field, putting on a blindfold, turning around three times, and then turning loose the arrow. There would be no specific target or direction. Likewise in the field of life, we get to turn around about three times and our children are gone. God forbid that we fail to aim them properly.

We must "talk of them when (we sit) in our house." The principles of God must be enacted within the atmosphere of the home, and these include the many situations which arise dealing with intimate family matters and personal relationships. Lessons must be taught "when thou walkest by the way," or in those things outside the home. The violence, wickedness, immoral ungodliness of our day can be used as living examples of what it means when men forsake the ways of the Lord. Our children must learn how to conduct themselves in purity outside the safe confines of a godly home. There is no

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vacation or idle time, since God' s ways must be spoken of continuously -- "when thou liest down and when thou risest up."

God' s Word must affect our actions as they are bound "for a sign upon thine hand." They must affect and motivate our thoughts as "frontlets between thine eyes." Homes must be places of purity and Godliness, displaying prominent signs that it is a Christian home, as "Thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." Some people display Scripture or plaques of Scriptural truths upon their walls, which is a wonderful witness. There are many ways to do this as leaving a bible on a table, which shouts forth the message that this home is governed by God' s Word. I am confident, in addition to these positive things, our homes must also be cleansed of that which is evil and defiling. David said, "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee." This must be applied to our homes. God' s Word must be lived in such a manner that the home itself is safe and pure for our children. Sadly, many homes contain reading, and other materials, which should never be encountered by a child. If such things are "hidden" in the home, I guarantee that a child will find it. I heard of one curious young son who found his father' s ungodly and immoral magazine hidden beneath the mattress in his parents' bedroom. Another equally curious child found his father' s Bible in the same location.

Finally, the target can be hit. Exodus 15 is a glorious song of victory ministered by Israel after the great Red Sea victory. They had indeed "subdued their enemies in the gate," but one truth becomes very personal as a major reason for their success. Moses seems to have written this song and it describes his own personal experience as well as that of Israel. "The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God and I will prepare Him an habitation: my father' s God, and I will exalt Him!" These should be comforting words to every Godly parent today. Moses had been "aimed" toward this target in his youth. He had gone into a far country, both literally and spiritually, but the arrow had finally hit its mark. His father' s God had become his own. No longer was He just the God my father loved and honored and worshiped. He is now my God and it is I, who will experience Him as my Strength, and my Song and my Salvation. What a blessing to know that the efforts of "the mighty man" were not in vain!

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