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**Pastor Jonathan Falwell**

## **Spring Training: Winning The Game Takes Focus!**

### **Scripture: Psalm 127**

Summary: In the first in a series entitled *Spring Training: Preparing Your Family to Win*, Pastor Jonathan cites four statements we must make in committing to make God the center of our homes and families.

We believe that He is our healer, that in Him we find the hope that we need and the power that we need, the direction and the guidance. The Bible tells us that He is the lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, and He wants to be the one that leads you when we are walking through difficult moments, when we are walking through the darkness of this age, the challenges and trials that every single one of us face. It doesn't matter if you're a pastor, it doesn't matter if you're a student or a business owner or doctor or lawyer; it doesn't matter if you are a kindergartner, we all face moments in life where we desperately need someone to lead us through.

I want you to know today and I want you to believe today and I want you to grab ahold today of the truth that Jesus Christ is there for us every moment of every day. Period. He is always there. And yet in our lives so often we try to do it on our own. So often in our lives we try to travel this road, we try to travel this path and figure it out all by ourselves, to try to get to the point where we think we have the answers and we think we know the way, we think we know the direction, and then we fall flat on our faces and we wonder *Where was God? Why did God allow this to happen to me?*

Today we are beginning a brand-new series entitled *Spring Training: Preparing Your Family to Win*. God's desire is for each and every one of you to win. It may not be His desire to win in finances. It may not be His desire for you to have all the money in the world or the fame or the power or the status, but God's absolute desire for each and every one of us is for us to win in life and to be successful in our faith and to be a lighthouse and a witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, no matter where we go.

Yet we also know that in our churches today, when you look at the research and you look at the studies you see that anywhere from 42 percent all the way up to 55 percent of the marriages, of the homes, of the families that God has put together in our churches are falling apart and we wonder why. Why is that? Why does that happen? I believe firmly it is because a lot of us are trying to do it on our own. It doesn't matter whether the number is 42 percent or whether it's 55

percent. I will be honest with you: as a pastor in this local church, when one family falls apart in this church it breaks my heart and I want to do everything I possibly can to strengthen those homes, to strengthen that relationship.

That's why we're starting this series *Spring Training*. Today is the beginning of spring training. In fact today, as we are gathered here, the Seattle Mariners are working out today for the first time. The first team to do that. In the weeks to come, other teams will start their spring practice and they do it for one very specific purpose: it's to get the cobweb out of their game because they have been sitting and not playing for the last couple of months, so they want to get back out there and get in shape and get ready for the season.

But that's really not the way spring training started. Spring training started back in the 1870s when the Cincinnati Red Stockings and the Chicago White Stockings decided in the middle of January and February to go down to Louisiana to work on their games, because back in those days the players weren't paid \$100 million a season. In fact, they weren't paid much at all, and they had to go home and get jobs to pay for their homes and support their families, and then when the season came around they had to show up at spring training with all their bags of stuff and come back in there and try and figure out how to get their game back in shape again.

First let me start by saying this: I apologize if you're not a Yankees fan. How many Yankees fans do we have today? Let me make it easier: How many non-Yankees fans do we have here? First of all, let me just say that I'm not necessarily a Yankees fan. I asked this week for a baseball locker room look and this is what they came up with, which is probably telling that whoever did this is a Yankees fan and they're loving it. So for the record: If you came in this morning and you have already gotten anger up and you are forgetting all about church because "I can't believe you brought the Yankees into church. That is not in the Bible!" You're going to show up to me after the church and fuss with me and send me an email tomorrow. Listen: It's just a prop, okay? So let's move beyond that and get to the nature of this for a moment, and the nature of this is this: Every single one of us in our homes, in our families, in our marriages, we need the idea of spring training every single day.

This week is Valentine's Day, and I don't have any doubt that all of you, if you are smart, all of you guys out there are going to try and figure out how to impress your girls on Valentine's Day. I was talking this week with somebody in our choir, and they are going to remain nameless, I'm not going to embarrass them because they are sitting somewhere back up here, but I'm not going to say who, but they came up and they told me, "I got a Valentine's Day gift for my wife, and she really wasn't that happy about it."

I said, "Man, what did you get her?"

He said, "I got her a cemetery plot."

That's a true story. It's not a smart story, but it's a true story.

Friday night I took my boys to an NRA gun safety course, and Don Sloane and Ron Sloane were teaching the course and they shared a verse and I want to share it with you today because it's

important. They were sharing this with the idea of gun safety, which is obviously very important, but this verse in Proverbs 22:3 says the prudent man or woman always foresees danger and they take precautions but the simple or the stupid or the ignorant ignore the dangers, ignore the warnings, and then you know what happens to them? They suffer the consequences. That guy in the choir is going to suffer the consequences.

Listen to me: Every single one of us who does not recognize that Satan is out to destroy homes and destroy families and destroy marriages and we don't recognize it and we don't care about it and we are not taking precautions to protect ourselves from it, we will suffer the consequences, too. I'm just telling you as a pastor, as a husband, as a dad, as a Christian: I am sick and tired of Christian homes falling into shambles because we don't notice and recognize that Satan wants to destroy us. Do you agree today that we've got to begin today to do something to change it?

Psalm 127:1 is an important statement. It's going to be our theme verse throughout the next four weeks, and I know you know this, but I want you to not only know it but get it and breathe it and live it and get ahold of it and live by it. It says quite simply, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."

There are a lot of Christians today who are laboring in vain in their homes because they have left out the Lord in the building of their homes. They decided that even though they walked down the center aisle of a church somewhere, that even though they came to an altar where a pastor was standing over them and reciting great statements from the Scripture from 1 Corinthians 13 and other passages and sharing with them the importance of marriage and the importance of love the relationship between Christ and His Church and how marriage is a symbol of that, they stand there and say "I do" and "I will" and they nod their heads and hold their hands in agreement and kiss each other at the end of the service and then walk out from that place after the pastor has challenged them to make God the center of everything they do and they walk out and spend the rest of their lives trying to do it all by themselves, and God is nothing more than a fixture.

"We've got to stop that. Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." This passage goes on to say,

*Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate.*

"Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them." There is not a quiver that I know of that is more full than Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar, and they are worshiping with us this morning. Let's welcome them here today. Yesterday they had the privilege and honor of ministering at Love for Life Conference here, and they have to slip out, they weren't planning to stay over, but I was talking to them yesterday and said, "Would you like to come worship with us? Would you like to stay over?" They did that and they've got to slip out in a moment to catch a flight back to New York and do some things on their show—which, by the way, their show is an incredible

opportunity for ministry and for mission, and we ought to support them in what they do because they are speaking into a culture that does not care about God, and these are witnesses in a world that needs to know about God, and I thank you for your witness.

But what I would like for you to do, just in one or two sentences, what is the thing in your home—and I know this, I've seen, I've heard and I've read all about you guys—what is it that helps keep God the center of everything you do?

Jim Bob: I think one of the most important things that we can do as parents is trying to keep up with the hearts of our children, so having regular talks with them, asking them how they are doing, is there anything going on in their life, is somebody asking them to do something wrong? If Satan can keep a hidden sin in their heart, he can have a handle on their life and destroy their life.

Michelle: The power of sin is in secrecy is what we tell our children and the ones that have given their heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, we have adopted in our home the word JOY: Jesus first, Others second, and Yourself last. When we realize that God loves us and we put Him first in our life, like the little pin that you all wear, and then serving others, serving our brothers and sisters, loving each other and realizing that life isn't about me but it's about Him and following and loving Him, then we have that focus in our home of loving and serving Him and serving each other. It is such a joy to be here and just see how your father and mother instilled a love for Jesus for her children and then to see her children loving Jesus and following Him, and now your children. What a joy to see that godly heritage. What a testimony.

Jonathan: Thank you so much. Thank you for being with us.

Jim Bob: We have one more word for you, for everybody in your church: be fruitful and multiply.

Jonathan: I appreciate the encouragement, but four is enough for me. “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. I'm going to give you four quick statements that we have to make, one commitment we have to make if we're going to have our home successful in the grand scheme of our relationship with Christ, if we're truly going to be what God wants us to be. Number one—and this is vitally important—I will make God the center of my home. All of you sit here and nod your heads in agreement, say, “Absolutely. That's a great statement. I want to do that. I'm doing that. God needs to be the center of my home.” It can't be lip service. It has to be action.

In that passage, when we read these words in Psalm 127 it says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” The Hebrew word *vain* is the word *shav*. I want to read what the Hebrew dictionary says this word truly means. It says, “Empty. A state of nothingness or a quality that produces a false sense of stability or security.”

The reason that we see so many homes in the Church today falling apart is because we are all standing on a false sense of stability and security when we are not making God the center of everything we do in our relationships and our homes and our marriages and our families. We

might say we want it, we might say we need it. We might say we are doing it because we go to church, we pray together over meals. But I want to tell you something: until it is a passion, until it is a deep desire, until it is something that you model for your home and model for your family and model for your friends and neighbors and church, until it is something that is absolutely a commitment, then I can tell you, you are doing nothing more than lip service to this statement. “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” In other words, their work is useless and a waste of time. And then we wonder why our homes are falling apart.

Statistics I’ve seen recently show that 70 to 80 percent of our young people today are going to walk away from the Church when they turn 18 and graduate from high school. Of that 70 to 80 percent that will walk away, only 40 to 45 percent will actually come back. You say, “That’s awful. We’ve got to change that. We’ve got to fix that.” Really? Let me tell you why they are walking away from the Church. It’s because they are not seeing their parents and the men and women of their church modeling what it means to be a man or woman of God in the church and they are saying, “Why would I want to be a part of something that is not real?”

We’ve got to make sure that we are modeling this each and every day. It would do no good whatsoever for you to bring your kids to church and sit in a part of the church and stand and sing the songs and worship at the top of your voices, to hold your Bible and nod in agreement as the pastor preaches, the invitation to pray and maybe even to come and kneel at the altar and pray. It will do no good if then you turn around and walk out and the rest of the week you live as if nothing in this book means anything.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” I will make God the center of my home. Number two, I will not buy into the lies of this world. We keep reading in this passage, “Unless the Lord protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good.” Unless God is guarding our hearts, we can put all the protections in place, we can do everything that we can possibly think of to protect ourselves, but unless God is in our hearts and unless God is guarding us and protecting us, it will do no good whatsoever.

When those guys show up for spring training, when they show up to begin working on their game, when they show up to begin practicing to get all the weaknesses and cobwebs out of their game, they realize and understand that really it’s all about this. Their goal is to make sure that they can throw this a little harder than they did and a little more accurately, that they can hit it a little bit farther than they could the year before; to make sure the whenever this ball is coming toward them, they catch it every single time. It’s not about the wind sprints and it’s not about the weight lifting and it’s not about the uniforms and it’s not about the caps and it’s not about the Gatorade and it’s not about all the money. It’s not about any of that stuff. It is all about one little simple thing: making sure you don’t buy into what the world says is important and focus on the only thing that is important, and that is allowing God to be the protector, allowing God to be the center of everything you do.

We’ve got to make sure we’re focusing on that, this passage very clearly tells us. It goes on to say that it is useless for us to work so hard from early morning to late at night, anxiously working for food to eat. We are running and gunning all the time, aren’t we? We stay so busy, we work from morning until night. We go and we go and we go because we think we need to go, and we

go and we go and we go because we think we need to earn more money and we need more power and more status and job promotions, and we go and we go and we go and we go and we leave behind the ones that God has given to us.

I'll be honest with you. Five years ago, when my dad passed away, in the first few months after my dad passed away, he had a schedule of things that he was doing over the next six, seven months, speaking at different events and activities, different churches and conferences, and I felt that as the pastor I should and as his son I should offer them the opportunity, because they planned it and promoted it, that if they would like for me to fulfill that obligation I would be honored to fulfill that obligation that my dad made, to make sure that my dad was a man of his word, even though he wasn't here.

So I went and spoke at a lot of those events, and I spoke in church after church and conference after conference, going constantly. Then after that people began inviting me to other events in other churches and I felt like God had given me the platform, the open door, I guess I should walk through it, so I continued to go and to speak at this event and that event and this church and that church and go and go and go, and it came to the point where I realized that I was going constantly, I was wearing myself out, and I was leaving my family behind. So I made a decision and I made a commitment: God called me to be the pastor of a local church in Lynchburg, Virginia, and God called me to be a husband and a father in this family, and that's all God has called me to do, so I made the decision there and I told my staff and I told my family, "I'm not going anymore."

I'd go and do four or five things a year, and we'd talk about it before I go to make sure it worked, and it's got to be something that fits into our mission as a local church of planting churches and reaching our world and encouraging pastors to continue to plant churches and reach our world, and I will do those things, but I turn down everything else. And do you know why? Because God called me to be a pastor of a local church. He didn't call me to be a famous preacher. He didn't call me to be somebody on the cover of magazines. He didn't call me to be all the stuff that people equate with greatness. And at the end of my life, if all I can look back and say is that I was a great husband and dad and great pastor of one local church and I ministered to this one local church and I didn't do anything else, then that's a success as far as I'm concerned. So you're stuck with me.

But all of us need to take that time to evaluate because we can get so busy and focused and get going in so many different directions that we forget that the most important thing that we do and the most important thing that we have is not our jobs; it's our relationship with Christ and our relationship with our families, to make a difference in our lives.

You can gain all the world, you can earn millions and millions and millions of dollars. You can have the largest bank account and the largest house and the largest diamonds and the largest cars and you can have all the stuff that this world says is important, but if you lose your family, you ain't got nothing.

We've got to focus on making sure that we don't buy into the lies of the world. Next, we've got to understand the statement that we must make, "I will depend on God and God alone to bring

me joy.” We follow up on that verse from a moment ago when it says it’s useless for us to eat and sleep and work all day long because then it goes on to say in the end of that verse in Psalm 127:2, “Because it is God who gives rest to His loved ones.” It’s not the money, it’s not the fame, it’s not the power. Over the next few weeks, you know what we’re going to be talking about? We’re going to be talking about issues we face in our families. This is not going to be one of those series where it’s feel good and we’re all happy and all good and everything is great. This is the picture of a perfect life and that’s what we want to be and we go out and get all our junk back and we haven’t gotten any better.

In the next four weeks, we’re going to be dealing with real-life stuff and issues and conflicts and it’s going to make some of you uncomfortable. And I know that’s true because in putting this together it’s made me uncomfortable. It’s things that we’ve got to talk about and face today if we’re going to turn the tide back of our families and our homes and our marriages being destroyed. We’ve got to start trusting God and not playing God in our own lives.

“I will allow God to be the one who brings me joy.” Number four, the last one, “I will value my family more than I value wealth.” it goes right along with it. We so often see it. These guys get millions and millions and millions of dollars to play this game, and they say it’s all about the baseball, it’s all about the game, it’s all about the score, it’s all about winning, but then what happens is they stop focusing on the baseball and they start focusing on the bling, and we see it over and over and over again, and it’s all about the money and it’s all about the stuff and it’s all about the things that the world thinks is important, and they get their eyes off of playing the game to the best of their ability, they get sidetracked and start to value this stuff rather than they value what is important in the first place.

There are people in this church right now who are doing that in your home. You are valuing your stuff more than you are valuing your family. You are valuing your status and your bank accounts and your money more than you are valuing the people that live in your home. You are working your fingers to the bone to build a big house and to provide for your kids and forgetting the ones that you’re trying to provide for. It happens to all of us, and it’s got to stop.

This passage was written by Solomon. If you’ll remember the story of Solomon, that God came to him and offered him anything that he wanted. He would grant his wish. You know what Solomon asked for? He asked for wisdom, and God was honored and encouraged by that and gave him all the wisdom there could ever be, but also gave him all the other stuff, too. Kind of worked out good. That was a good deal. I know a lot of people that have been asking for wisdom for a long time.

Solomon asked for that and He blessed him and gave him everything that his heart could ever ask for or ever want, but then what happened towards the end of Solomon’s life? Do you know the story? Solomon got his eyes off of the one who gave wisdom. He got his eyes off of the one who blessed him. He got his eyes off of the one who gave him everything and he began to focus on other things, and it brought him down. And this is the wisest man that ever lived? I know a lot of you; I’ve had the opportunity to get to know you these last few years, you know one thing I know? The wisest man and woman that have ever lived are not in this church. It’s not me and it’s

not you. It's Solomon. He got off track and he blew it. If he can do it, we do it, and our homes suffer for it; our homes fall apart because of it.

Hebrews 2:1 says, "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest we drift away." Over the next four weeks we are going to be talking about the things that are causing us to drift away, the things that are pulling us away from what God intended. My prayer for you, my hope for you is that these next few weeks you will walk into these doors and set aside your pride, set aside your misconceptions, your ideas; you'll set aside your thoughts, you'll set aside the idea that church has got to be a certain way. You'll set aside all the stuff, the baggage, and you'll come into this room and want to hear not what I say but what the Word of God says about what He wants for us in our relationships and what He wants for us in our homes. My prayer is that at the end of this series that we will see in our homes a resurgence of godly men and godly women raising godly children and honoring God at every turn, and if we can do that, it will change our church, change our city, and it will change our world. But it starts with making God the most important thing in our lives.

In a moment we're going to sing through a song that is perfect for today, "Draw Me Close," because that's what we're asking God to do, and in a moment when we sing those words I am asking you to evaluate and look inside and ask, "Am I doing everything God wants me to do in my home? Am I being who God wants me to be in my relationships? Am I honoring God in my marriage? Am I honoring God in my dating relationship? Am I honoring God with my kids? Am I honoring God as a grandparent? Am I honoring God as a son or a daughter? Am I honoring God in all that I do?" If you can't answer that "yes," maybe today you need to come and say, "God, I am sorry. Today I want you to begin building the house. I'm tired of trying to build it on my own. I'm tired of trying to make it on my own.

"Unless the Lord builds the house," you are wasting your time. And I think there are some families and marriages that are wasting time and I think you know who you are. If God is not building your house, change that today.

(Singing: "Draw Me Close")

[Praying] Lord, I want to thank you for those who have gathered here today. Lord, we seek your face and we seek your heart. We want to be what you want us to be. Lord, we know we can't do it on our own, so we know that we've got to allow you to build the house, to build our lives, to build our marriages. Lord, help us to put you first in everything. Lord, I pray that everyone who is gathered here this morning, I know there are a lot of hurting people, a lot of relationships that are on the rocks and desperately need a healer. Lord, we know that you are the only one who can heal and restore and I pray that today you would begin that work in their lives. Help them set aside the pride; help them to set aside the past anger and past hurt and to come together and say, "I'm sorry, and let's let God rebuild what we've torn apart."

Keywords: Psalm 127, marriage, family, priorities, relationships, duggar family, commitment, Christ-centered, God-centered, wealth, values, work