

Psalm 15

How to Secure Fellowship with God, 15:1-5

(15:1-5) Introduction: in nearly every society around the world, access to important people is restricted and closely guarded. Government leaders—kings, prime ministers, presidents, governors—live in mansions that are closed to the public and carefully protected. In many cases, security guards surround the leaders wherever they go. Only after careful scrutiny are a select few granted an audience with them.

The great God of the universe, however, has an open-door policy. Because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, we, as believers, can freely approach God's holy throne. He not only invites us but also encourages us to come boldly before Him for everything we need (Heb. 4:16). Amazing! The Lord wants to be personally involved in each of our lives. In fact, He yearns for us to live in close communion with Him. Surely, the Lord's heart is pained when we do not desire the same close fellowship with Him, when we neglect to acknowledge His presence or live in such a way that quenches His presence.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Many scholars believe that David wrote Psalm 15 to celebrate the bringing of the ark of the covenant to the tabernacle at Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). It is very similar to Psalm 24, which was written for that occasion. The ark of the covenant represented God's presence among the people of Israel. The mercy seat of the ark was the precise spot where God's presence dwelled (Ex. 25:22). This psalm teaches us how to live daily in God's holy presence—in close fellowship with Him. It is a psalm of instruction and a psalm of examination. Some commentators think it was sung by the Jews as they journeyed to Jerusalem up to the mountain of the Lord to offer their sacrifices and worship at the tabernacle. This is, How to Secure Fellowship with God, 15:1-5.

1. Seek the Lord (v. 1).

2. Walk blamelessly and righteously before the Lord (vv. 2-4).

3. Believe the Lord's promise: If you do these things, you will never fall, 2 Pe. 1:10 (v. 5).

1. (15:1) Seek the Lord.

David asked two simple but insightful questions of the Lord: Who can enter the Lord's sanctuary, and who can dwell in His holy presence there? These were not empty words spoken to impress the Lord but rather sincere questions asked for a specific purpose. David desperately longed for a deeper experience with God. He wanted to be as close to the Lord as possible. Picture him standing on his palace balcony, gazing up at Mount Zion to the tabernacle where the priests served the Lord. Every day they lived and worked in that holy atmosphere. David yearned to know this joyous, sacred experience himself.

a. Seek to enter His sanctuary (v. 1).

The tabernacle or sanctuary was the center of Jewish worship, and it represented God's presence among the people on a broader scale. However, the priests only were allowed to come and go in the Lord's house, so even though David was king, he did not have the privilege or the right to enter. He fully understood the significance of God's commands regarding the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant, which was set in the Holy of Holies. A veil separated this sacred spot from the inner court of the tabernacle. Only the high priest could pass through the veil into the place where God's presence dwelled, and that was only once a year, on the annual Day of Atonement. This holy structure and the laws that governed its operation taught an important lesson about the individual's relationship with the Lord.

David longed to live beyond the veil—in the very presence of God. He asked the Lord what was required for a person to experience this glorious privilege.

b. Seek to dwell in His presence (v. 1).

Golden cherubim covered the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant. Their outstretched wings symbolized their protection of God's holiness. If the high priest stepped into the Holy of Holies with any trace of uncleanness, he would be immediately stricken dead in the holy presence of the Lord. For this reason, he first had to go through a detailed, strenuous process of purification.

Note that David did not want to merely visit the Lord's presence, as did the Jewish pilgrims who made their annual trek to the tabernacle. He wanted to dwell or abide in the glorious presence of God, just as the priests did who served daily in the Lord's house. The word abide (*gur*) was used in reference to foreigners who lived as citizens of another land, or to non-relatives who lived in other people's houses. David recognized that he had no right to a place in God's presence, but what he desired was a life of uninterrupted fellowship with God, a life that would allow him to experience the fullness of God's joy, mercy, protection, and provision.

Thought 1. We should all ask ourselves this question: Is David's desire my desire? Do I long to live in the presence of the Lord daily, to walk in uninterrupted, unbroken fellowship with Him? The psalmist compared this longing to that of a parched deer thirsting for a cool drink of water (Ps. 42:1-2). Paul shared that this was the most important thing in his life. He was willing to give up everything for the privilege of knowing the Lord (Phil. 3:8, 10). Jesus prayed that we might experience this great privilege, and He gave His life on the cross to purchase it for us (Jn. 17:3; 1 Jn. 1:3).

Sadly, far too few of us are concerned about our daily fellowship with God. Too few of us have a regular time of communion with the Lord through Bible reading and prayer. Too few of us make pursuing God the chief objective of our lives. Too few of us are willing to sacrifice for the privilege of knowing Him. And too few of us are willing to pay the price to live in fellowship with Him.

We need only read through a few of the psalms to understand why David craved the Lord's presence so much. He turned to God for comfort, shelter, protection, guidance, companionship, and any number of other reasons. We, too, can pray to God as our Father, knowing that He will hear and answer our prayers for those same needs. Who but God could know us so well and yet love us so much? Where else could we spend time that would benefit us so greatly? If we are honest with ourselves, when we look at Christ, God's Son, dying on the cross for us, we have to admit that no one loves and cares for us as much as our heavenly Father does. He alone is worthy of such longing and adoration.

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Jn. 17:3).

“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.... That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 3:8, 10).

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn. 1:3).

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42:1-2).

“I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah” (Ps. 61:4).

“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Jer. 9:23-24).

2. (15:2-4) Walk blamelessly and righteously before the Lord.

It is necessary to understand that David was questioning God as one who already had a relationship with Him. He was not questioning God about entering into His covenant, about salvation and dwelling in God’s presence in heaven eternally. He was asking about daily fellowship with the Lord: how to live in conscious awareness of God’s presence on earth. Salvation is entirely God’s work of grace; it is not dependent upon our works (Eph. 2:8-9). Clearly, God’s answer to David’s question centers around our character and conduct. It requires that we walk in integrity and do what is right, separating ourselves from sin and worldliness. We must live righteously in our daily walk, especially in our relationships with others and our actions toward them.

a. Speak the truth (v. 2).

The first virtue mentioned arises out of an inner quality, a matter of the heart. The person allowed to dwell in the Lord’s presence must be pure within, that is, have a heart that is in line with God’s truth. This person speaks God’s truth inwardly. The heart is of great importance to the Lord, of greater importance than physical appearance or stature (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chr. 29:17; Ps. 51:6). True righteousness consists not only of outer actions but also of inner attitudes. Jesus condemned the Pharisees because their righteousness was merely outward appearance while their hearts were corrupt and void of truth (Mt. 5:20-22; 23:25-28).

The truth that produces holiness is the truth of God's Word (Jn. 17:17). And the transformation from wickedness to holiness, when it is genuine, begins with the heart. God places His glory within us and changes us into the image of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. 3:18).

b. Do not slander others (v. 3).

A person who holds the truth inwardly will speak only the truth outwardly about others. Backbiting is slander or tale-bearing. God will not be an audience for gossip. He allows no slanderous speech in His house (Ex. 20:16; 23:1; Le. 19:16). In fact, whisperers and backbiters are listed alongside murderers and immoral people as the vilest of sinners (Ro. 1:29-32). The Lord despises slanderous, divisive speech (Pr. 6:16-19). Those who delight in spreading or listening to tales about others will never know the delight of dwelling in God's presence. Instead, they will face severe punishment from God for their venomous tongues (Pr. 19:5, 9). The righteous person will not speak ill of others and will experience a personal peace along with the peace of God's presence.

c. Do no wrong to a neighbor (v. 3).

It is impossible to love God and hate your neighbor (1 Jn. 4:20). Six of the Ten Commandments that express God's holy, moral law are directed to our actions toward others (Ex. 20:1-17). Jesus clearly taught that loving our neighbors is second only to loving God (Mk. 12:30-31). If we love our neighbors, we will not sin against them in any way. However, it is not sufficient to merely refrain from taking action against someone. This also includes not wishing any ill will toward any individual. Remember, God knows our hearts, so our consciences must also be clear toward our neighbor(s).

d. Cast no slur on others (v. 3).

The person who desires to dwell in God's presence will say nothing that is even questionable about others. He or she is careful not to suggest

anything that will bring reproach on another person (Pr. 10:12). Quite the opposite, the individual will look for ways to edify others and to esteem others better than him- or herself.

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Ro. 14:19).

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3).

e. Despise vile, persistent behavior of sinners (v. 4).

Many believers disqualify themselves from living in close fellowship with God because they admire, or at least excuse the behavior of, ungodly people. The people they look up to and often seek to emulate live in open wickedness. For instance, many of the sports figures and celebrities that people idolize in our world live in open sin and immorality. Many of them flaunt their wickedness and perversions proudly, and the media and general public soak up every filthy detail. Believers, however, are to despise the behavior of such individuals. If we wish to enter God’s sanctuary and live in his presence, we will neither admire the wicked nor associate with them (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

f. Honor those who fear the Lord (v. 4).

Those who walk in the fear of the Lord—people who revere God and live in obedience to Him—are in sharp contrast to vile sinners. God’s friends should be our friends. We ought to seek out and honor those individuals who strive to live for the Lord. If they walk with the Lord, we would do well to walk with them!

g. Keep your word (promise)—even to your own hurt (v. 4).

People of principle and integrity are honest in all their dealings. If we have integrity, our word is our bond. We will keep our word even if it brings us harm or is not in our best interest. But as flawed human beings, what are we to do when we sometimes make thoughtless or rash

agreements, agreements that are more difficult to keep than we originally anticipated (Le. 5:4)? Things often do not turn out as we expected. As a person of integrity, it would be preferable to suffer loss rather than to break our word and bring reproach upon God and self. However, there can be times when dire circumstances force us to break our word. In such situations, we have to be totally honest and upfront about the facts involved. We never have a license to lie.

h. Lend money without interest (v. 5).

Israelites were forbidden to charge interest to fellow Jews (Ex. 22:25; De. 23:19). Keep in mind that money was not as frequently borrowed in the ancient Hebrew culture as it is in many cultures today. Those who needed to borrow were in a desperate situation, usually on the verge of being sold into slavery to satisfy their debts. The truly righteous would never exploit others in their time of need. Likewise, if we truly care about others, we will use our resources to help them, not take advantage of their unfortunate circumstances by seeking to profit financially at their expense.

i. Do not accept a bribe (v. 5).

A person with integrity is not for sale. He or she cannot be bought or swayed by the promise of gain, financial or otherwise. The scales of justice in the ancient eastern world were usually tipped toward the rich. In both civil and criminal matters, the wealthy often bribed witnesses and judges. Average citizens—those who were not wealthy—were powerless and oppressed in this corrupt system (Ecc. 4:1-3). God would never allow anyone to live in His presence who thought he or she could buy the Lord's favor—or anyone else's. The thought must never even cross our minds!

Thought 1. These virtues are important to God and are required of all who wish to live in His presence, in close fellowship with Him.

Violation of these virtues breaks our fellowship with the Father. We

need to examine ourselves—our words, actions, and speech—to see if we are guilty of any of these sins. If we are, we need to confess and forsake them immediately (1 Jn. 1:9). Thankfully, the Holy Spirit who lives within us can deliver us from these fleshly attitudes and deeds (Gal. 5:16, 19-25).

It is vital that we remember the great principles of this psalm, for we are tempted to betray some of these virtues on a daily basis.. We need to consider the price we will pay when we are tempted to gossip, to speak evil of another, to conspire against a neighbor, or to commit any other act that is displeasing to God. If we yield to our sinful human nature, our fellowship with God will be broken. We should ask the Holy Spirit to help us make walking with God the most important thing in our lives every day. To accomplish this, we must let nothing damage or interrupt our communion with Him.

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mt. 7:12).

“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Ro. 13:10).

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

“Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter” (Ps. 118:19-20).

“The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him” (Pr. 20:7).

“He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence

shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure” (Isa. 33:15-16).

“And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD” (Eze. 18:7-9).

“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic. 6:8).

3. (15:5) Believe the Lord’s promise: If you do these things, you will never fall.

These things, of course, refers to all the virtuous qualities discussed in this passage. So, Scripture is stating that the person who does these things or possesses these qualities is stable in his or her relationship with God. He or she will not fall or be moved. What does this mean? First, he or she will not be moved from God’s tabernacle—from His presence. If we live righteously, we will live in uninterrupted, unbroken fellowship with the Lord. We will know the incomparable joy of God’s presence each day of our lives here on earth, and, afterward, we will dwell with Him eternally in heaven (Ps. 23:6).

Second, by living righteously, this person will not be burdened with the consequences of sin. He or she will reap righteousness and blessings, exactly what was sowed (Gal. 6:7-8). As people of integrity, we will never be the object of God’s judgment, and never have to live in fear of the law. Our sowing seeds of righteousness will bless us again and

again. We will feast on the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” all the days of our lives (Heb. 12:11).

Third, the righteous person will not be moved by the stormy circumstances of life. Jesus described the godly person as one whose house is built upon the rock. When the storms of life rage against it, it stands firm (Mt. 7:24-27). Those who dwell in the Lord’s presence are always safe. No matter what problems or trials they come up against, nothing can take them away from the Lord. Yes, the righteous do suffer and are persecuted, but at no time do they leave the Lord’s presence. When we are in fellowship with Him, we are continually in His divine care.

Thought 1. The Apostle Peter, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote a passage in his second epistle that parallels this psalm and gives great insight into how to live blamelessly and righteously:

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Pe. 1:3-10).

The true believer's life is to be a life of continual growth. As we "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pe. 3:18), we become more and more stable in our walk and fellowship with the Lord. And, in our growth, we add to our faith the virtues and graces listed in the passage in Second Peter. These virtues, in turn, are the qualities that enable us to fulfill the requirements of Psalm 15. They are produced in us through the work and power of God's indwelling Spirit:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Note two truths:

(1) We have to do our part to grow in holiness by intentionally focusing on developing these qualities. We need to "give all diligence" to adding these virtues to our faith (2 Pe. 1:5, 10).

(2) We have to be filled with the Spirit to walk in the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16). We can sow seeds of righteousness in our lives through God's Word, but we cannot produce fruit on our own. Only God's Spirit can do that. He activates the life of Christ within us. We cannot reform ourselves. It is through the new birth, when we are born again, that the divine nature is given to us (2 Pe. 1:4). As we yield to God's Spirit and walk in His strength, He will change us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). As that happens will we experience the peace and joy of living in unbroken fellowship with God.

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pe. 2:1-2).

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen" (2 Pe. 3:18).

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (Ps. 55:22).

“A good man showeth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour” (Ps. 112:5-9).

“They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity” (Ps. 125:1-3).

“As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation” (Pr. 10:25).