

Who May Dwell with the LORD?

Psalm 15

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Ames, Iowa

October 12, 2025

If you noticed on page 7 of our Service Guide, we had three *New City Catechism* questions for our *Remember the Gospel* reading this morning. Catechisms have been used for hundreds of years to teach and equip children and adults with biblical and doctrinal truths.

This morning, we will work through Psalm 15, and it sounds like a catechism question. Verse 1 is the question, and vv. 2-5b give us the answer. Psalm 15:1 asks the ultimate question in life.

Friends, it is so important to ask the right questions in life —and about life. David asked the most important question. How important is it? It is more important than deciding what your major should be in college. It is more important than asking what career you should pursue. It is more important than asking how you will pay for a car or a mortgage. It is more important than asking how you will plan for retirement. It is more important than asking who you should date. It's even more than asking who you should marry. You see, in one hundred years, those questions will not matter. But the answer to King David's question will matter — for it matters for all eternity. David wants to know who can live in the presence of the LORD in heaven. This is the ultimate question in life, and an ultimate question like this one requires an ultimate answer.

Before we get into Psalm 15, I want to remind you that this Psalm marks the beginning of the fourth unit of Psalms. Unit four begins with Psalm 15 and runs through Psalm 24, and it examines the way of the righteous King.

If you were with us last Sunday, you may have noticed that Psalm 14 was challenging. You might think Psalm 15 is going to be better, but honestly, on the surface, it's more discouraging than Psalm 14. When you consider King David's question and his answer, you realize that there is no way you can live up to the standards in Psalm 15.

Yet, here's our dilemma: David's words express the longing of every human heart. We are created for God and to be in relationship with Him, so therefore the deepest cry of our hearts is to be near God.

The heart of this Psalm takes us back to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve had unbroken fellowship with God. When they sinned against God and our fellowship with God was broken, it left us with a longing for redemption and restoration. It left us longing to be restored to the right relationship with God. However, when you read Psalm 15, you understand that it will take a massive, heroic effort on our parts to repair that relationship.

I have three points that will help us walk through Psalm 15: *Question*, *Answer*, and *Assurance*. Let's get to work on Psalm 15.

I. Question: Who Shall Dwell with the LORD? (v. 1)

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?

Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

Psalm 15 begins with a question that is directly addressed to Yahweh. David's question paints a picture of earthly places where God's people meet with God. In the first part of v. 1, David asks, "*Who shall sojourn in your tent?*"

In the Old Testament, the "*tent*" meant the "*tabernacle*." The *tabernacle* represented God's dwelling place and was where God's people met with God. When Israel was traveling to the Promised Land, the tabernacle was set up in the center of all the tribes of Israel. The location of the tabernacle was key. It communicated that the presence of God was to be central to the people of God. It communicated that they would never make it to the

Promised Land without Yahweh being near them and the very center of the life of God's people. So, when King David asks, *"Who shall sojourn in your tent?"* He is asking who is able to live in the presence of God and fully center their lives on God.

The next sentence in v. 1 asks the same question but in a slightly different way. This time, he uses the word *'dwell'* instead of *'sojourn'*. However, when you take these words together—*sojourn* and *dwell*—the Hebrew words tell us about the importance of continually being in God's holy presence.

Then, when David asks, *"Who shall dwell on your holy hill?"* The idea and imagery of *"holy hill"* or *"holy mountain"* actually looks back to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve experienced the uninterrupted presence of God. It also looks to Mount Zion, where the Ark of the Covenant was, and represented the presence of God to the people of God. It also looks forward to Christ and how He brought the presence of God to earth and tabernacled with us when He walked the earth. Ultimately, it looks forward to when Jesus will return and God will create the New Heavens and the New Earth. This will be when the people of God experience the fullness of God's presence.

So, these two questions get to the heart of longing to be in God's presence. It is the longing that was put in us at creation. We are created to know, love, and be in relationship with God. Saint Augustine famously said,

*"You have made us for yourself, O Lord,
and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."*¹

David's question is not about a brief encounter with God. It's not about having the warm fuzzies in your quiet time. It is about having unending and abiding fellowship with the One who is Holy. The question is: Who can live there? Who is welcome as a permanent guest in the house of the Holy One?

King David's question about unbroken intimacy with God echoes through the ages. Adam and Eve once walked with God in Eden, but were driven out because of their sin. Since then, humanity has been seeking a way back into His presence. When you read the Old Testament, you realize no one ever walked sinlessly with God. No one ever kept God's covenant perfectly. When you consider that, David's question leaves us feeling hopeless.

Nevertheless, Psalm 15 is a call to be in right relationship with God so that we can be in God's presence. It is a call to covenant faithfulness and gives a moral vision of what that looks like. So, there we have King David's question. Now let's consider the answer.

II. Answer: He who walks blamelessly (vv. 2-5b)

Like using a good catechism, David answers his own question from v. 1. His goal is to answer the most important question in life: Who can live in God's holy presence for all eternity? Who qualifies for that? Who is able to achieve this blessed condition?

In vv. 2-5b, David lists off ten characteristics of the one who can enjoy God's presence. When you take all of these characteristics together, they are a picture of full-bodied godliness. This call to covenant faithfulness doesn't list off sacrifices or ceremonies but calls for internal heart change that works itself out in behavior. Let's work our way through vv. 2-5b.

Look at v. 2:

*He who walks blamelessly and does what is right
and speaks truth in his heart;*

Verse 2 tells us that to enter the LORD'S presence, we must live blamelessly, practice righteousness, and acknowledge the truth in our hearts.

¹ Saint Augustine, *The Confession of Saint Augustine*.

The Hebrew word for *blamelessly* means “whole,” “complete,” or “undivided.” It implies *integrity*. The person who walks blamelessly lives with consistency between profession and practice. There is no hypocrisy here—no hidden compartments of sin.

The godly person doesn’t merely know what is right, but does it. He does what is right even when no one is watching. For the godly person, righteousness is more than mere talk. It is how they strive to live.

The next phrase in v. 2 is, “*Speaks truth in his heart.*” This last phrase clarifies the meaning of v. 2. You see, it is not enough to have an external form of religion or simply articulate biblical truth. God demands that we believe and speak the truth from our hearts.

Remember, the heart is the center of a person’s desires, motives, and loves. *We say what we say and do what we do because we love what we love.* So, to be in the presence of God, we must believe the truth in our hearts, love it, speak it to our hearts, and then live it out.

Bottom line: In v. 2, King David is describing absolute moral integrity. The person who dwells with God is not divided between outward show and inward deceit. He is the same in private as in public. He lives a life of moral integrity.

Next, in v. 3, we see the relational integrity of the righteous person.

*Who does not slander with his tongue
and does no evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend.*

According to v. 3, the one who can live in God’s presence is the one “*who does not slander with his tongue.*” The Hebrew literally says, “*does not go about as a talebearer.*” This means being a gossip. Gossip is an insidious sin that kills reputations, divides communities, and betrays trust. However, the godly person with moral integrity refuses to use speech as a weapon.

He “*does no evil to his neighbor.*” He does not take up a reproach against his friend. He will not listen to gossip or lies and doesn’t spread accusations against others. In other words, the godly person strives to protect others and keep them from verbal harm. They don’t ridicule others, mock them, or make fun of them. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors and our enemies.

Friends, v. 3 is profoundly countercultural because we live in a world where reputations are destroyed by a single social media post. Those who dwell with God are careful with both their words, their social media posts, and their judgments of others.

So, as we plow through this list, let’s do a heart check: How are you doing? Are you feeling good about yourself?

Well, let’s keep going. Look in v. 4. This is an interesting verse, so let’s break it down into two parts. Look at the v. 4a:

*In whose eyes a vile person is despised,
but who honors those who fear the LORD;*

This verse may sound harsh, but it describes the moral ability to discern and reject wickedness and despise injustice. It is the ability to evaluate character as God does. Think about v. 4a like this: It is the picture of the one who grieves over evil and hates wickedness. It is the picture of the person who loves what God loves and despises what God despises. This is the person whose heart is shaped by God.

The last part of v. 4 is one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. Listen to it again, for the godly person is one:

Who swears to his own hurt and does not change.

This is the portrait of a person whose word is his bond. If he makes a promise, he keeps it—even when it becomes costly. No one has a problem keeping their word when it is to their benefit, but what about when the pressure is turned up, and all of the sudden, keeping that promise is costly?

Friends, the bottom line is this: Integrity means consistency between your promises and your performance. In an age of broken vows, false advertising, and shifting commitments, the psalmist calls us back to covenantal faithfulness. The godly keep their commitments no matter the costs to themselves.

The picture of the godly man who lived this perfectly is Jesus. He came into the world specifically to die on the cross as a substitute for sinners and pay the penalty for their sins by having the wrath of God poured out on Him on the cross. When He came to the Garden of Gethsemane, and He knew what was about to happen, He asked God if there was any way that this cup could pass from Him so that He would not have to endure such horrible torture and death. Yet, He ended His prayer in the Garden by saying, *“Nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done.”*

Jesus kept His promise at the cost of His own life. He endured beatings, mocking, ridicule, slander, shame, and being nailed to the cross. Jesus kept His word and loved us to His very last breath, His last heartbeat, and His very last drop of blood dripped from His body. His commitment to God and to us was costly for Him.

So, when we face this kind of dilemma and the cost of keeping our commitment will be high, we can look to Jesus and remember that the salvation He purchased for us cost Him His very life. When we are tempted to cave to sin and break faith with God, we remember that God made Jesus to be sin so that we may become the righteousness of God. Jesus resisted sin to the point of shedding His own blood. He did this so that we may have His strength and persevere and not cave when the cost is high.

Let’s move on to v. 5. So, are you still feeling good about yourself? If vv. 2-4 weren’t discouraging enough; now David addresses how we handle our finances in the first part of v. 5. He says the person who dwells in God’s presence is the one . . .

*Who does not put out his money at interest
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.*

David now applies godliness to our finances. In ancient Israel, lending at interest to the poor was a form of exploitation and therefore forbidden by Mosaic law.² The bottom line is that the godly person uses money not to oppress but to bless.

Verse 5b says he *“does not take a bribe against the innocent.”* This means justice cannot be bought or sold in the covenant community of faith. The godly person is the one who values righteousness over profit. The godly person will uphold absolute righteousness and integrity in all areas of their finances, no matter the cost.

So, how do you feel as we have worked through these verses? I don’t know about you, but my heart sinks because I know how far short I fall of being this person. I can’t help but ask myself: Do I always walk blamelessly before the LORD? Do I always do what is right in all of my relationships? Do I always handle my money in ways that reflect my love for Jesus and others? Do I always speak the truth of God in my heart and love it above all else? The answer is a terrifying – No!

God knows my thoughts. He knows me inside and out. He knows how far short I have fallen with just this small list of godly characteristics. Bottom line: If you and I are honest, we know we don’t live up to Psalm 15.

It should make us wonder how David can write the last part of v. 5, which is meant to give us assurance of God’s presence. That being said, let’s unpack the last sentence of v. 5 and try to understand how David gets his assurance.

III. Assurance: Such a person will never be moved (v. 5c)

This final promise in v. 5 is worth lingering over. Listen to it again:

² Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35–37.

He who does these things shall never be moved.

How in the world can we have assurance of “*never being moved*” when we don’t live up to vv. 2-5b? Friends, living Psalm 15 is impossible for us. It’s good that you want to live it out, but at some point, the wheels in your life will fall off, and living Psalm 15 becomes a train wreck because you don’t have the ability. It is not in you to live it.

However, think about this: What if Psalm 15 serves to remind us that we will never be the kind of people who can enter God’s presence? What if Psalm 15 is like the Sermon on the Mount and meant to drive us to desperation? What if the point is to cause us to cry out for mercy? What if Psalm 15 is meant to point us beyond ourselves to the only One who is qualified to enter God’s holy presence? Friends, this is precisely the point of Psalm 15.

Psalm 15 is what J.R.R. Tolkien called a “*eucatastrophe*.” This was a word that Tolkien coined to describe:

“a massive turn in fortune from a seemingly unconquerable situation to an unforeseen victory, usually brought by grace rather than heroic effort. Such a turn is catastrophic in the sense of its breadth and surprise and positive in that a great evil or misfortune is averted.”³

Psalm 15 turns from an impossible hill to climb to a gift of grace that Jesus Christ earned.

Our assurance is not found in our ability to live out Psalm 15 but in the One who fulfilled Psalm 15. Jesus is the only man who has ever met the qualifications to enter and live in the presence of our Holy God.

We must see that Psalm 15 finds its fulfillment in Christ. He alone is worthy to dwell on the holy hill of the Lord. Yet, in grace, He brings us there with Him. Consider how the Psalm reads when seen through the lens of Jesus:

- He walked blamelessly, living a sinless life.
- He did what was right, fulfilling all righteousness.
- He spoke truth in His heart, for He is the Truth.
- He did no evil to His neighbor, but instead he healed and forgave others, and even forgave His enemies.
- He kept His covenant with the LORD to the cost of His own life by dying on the cross for us.
- Jesus refused to take a shortcut to His kingship. He rejected the bribe of Satan and chose the will of His Father above all else.

And because of His obedience, we now have access to live in God’s tent on His holy hill as His beloved children. Jesus is the Psalm 15 Man.

Because Jesus has lived Psalm 15 perfectly, His assurance becomes ours when we turn from trusting in ourselves by confessing our sins and placing our faith and hope in His perfect life, substitutionary death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, the Apostle Paul writes:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Brothers and sisters, our assurance comes not from our righteousness but from Christ’s righteousness. This means that through our faith in Christ, Psalm 15 becomes not a standard that condemns us but a portrait of what Jesus did for us and what grace produces in us, for the indwelling Spirit of Christ begins to shape Christ’s disciples into the image of Psalm 15.

³ <https://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Eucatastrophe>.

Conclusion: So, one last question: How do you know Psalm 15 has done its work in your heart? Jesus tells a story in Luke 18:10-14 that helps us understand:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Listen, if you go to the LORD and begin to give Him your resume of how good you have been and deserve to go to heaven and live in His presence, then you don’t understand Psalm 15. However, if you stand before the LORD, cry out for mercy by humbly claiming Jesus’ righteousness as your own, then you get Psalm 15. Then you know it is by your faith in Jesus that you are justified and therefore invited into God’s presence for all eternity. Here’s the point of Psalm 15: *The only way we can but put back into right relationship with God and enjoy His presence is through the righteousness of Christ.*

So, what happens after we have been given the righteousness of Christ? Can you just be living however you want? Can you simply claim Christ as your righteousness and then intentionally live in sin? No, we can’t.

Friends, when you place your faith in Jesus—the Psalm 15 Man —the grace of God begins to transform your life so that you begin to live like the One who saved you. Mercifully, the Holy Spirit begins to form the character of Psalm 15 within us. We begin to change from the inside out because our heart’s desire is to follow Jesus. We begin to live with more integrity, honesty, justice, and compassion. We are quick to confess and repent when we fail. We marvel at God’s grace working in us as we are changed into Christ’s image.

Brothers and sisters, may we be a church that is shaped by the truth of Psalm 15. Imagine a church where truth reigns in the heart, where slander dies on the tongue, where promises are sacred, and where generosity overcomes greed. That is the church that is a light set on the LORD’s holy hill. That is a church that has learned to rest in the righteousness of Christ so that Christ’s life overflows in how each person lives. May we, by grace, become such a church.