

Psalm 15 starts out with the most important question that anyone can ever ask: O LORD, who may come and live with You? This is about salvation. This is about eternal life. But by the time we get to the end of the psalm, the answer seems to be, No one. Because it sounds like you have to be perfect to live with God, and no one is perfect. So, the conclusion seems to be, No one has a hope of living with God, in this world, or, in the world to come.

But David isn't asking, LORD, who is holy enough, who is good enough, to come into Your presence? God promises eternal life. He promises that we can be His children, and live with Him now and forever. David is asking, LORD, who may rightfully claim that privilege? Who is welcome to sit at Your table, and live under Your roof? Who may be sure that one day, he will come and live with You forever?

David says, This is the kind of person who's allowed to make the claim that he walks with God: He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honours those who fear the LORD; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change; he who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

That seems to bring us back to square one: No one can make the claim that he walks with God, because it sounds like you have to be perfect. No one is sinless. The Bible says that we're all conceived and born in sin.

The reformer, John Calvin, said that we shouldn't read Psalm 15 as if it were a step ladder to heaven, or as if it were written to condemn all of us. That's not what it is. What it is is a warning against hypocrisy. David's not condemning the children of God who slip and fall into sin, because they're weak. He's giving a warning to people who claim to be believers, but who keep living in sin, even though they know that what they're doing is wrong.

It's terribly sad, but sometimes people call themselves Christians, but you can't trust them when you do

business with them. They're inconsiderate, and even cruel, to their wives and children. They're always looking for their own advantage. And we wonder how those things go together. David is saying, They don't go together. If that's how those people live, they're hypocrites. They may call themselves, Christians, but the way they behave shows that they don't walk with God.

We use the word, hypocrite, to describe someone who's a phony, who pretends to be one thing when he really is something altogether different. Someone who acts one way in public, but very differently in private. Originally, a hypocrite simply meant, actor. What is an actor? In those days, actors wore masks when they were performing. They hid their true identity and pretended to be someone they're not. Actors play roles in order to receive applause from the audience. So you can see how we came to use the word, hypocrite, the way we do. Hypocrites hides who they are, pretend to be someone they're not, and they do it because they want approval from the people who are watching them.

Sometimes actors get so caught up in the role they're playing that they forget that they're acting. The role takes over their life. And that's what happens with religious hypocrites: they don't realize that they're acting. They start believing that God accepts their outward actions. That's why hypocrisy is such a deadly trap: because they're the first people who are deceived by their act. And they think they're right with God, because of the good things they do, and they forget, or they convince themselves somehow, that God either can't see what they're really like, or that God doesn't care about that, as long as they go to church.

But the person who really lives with God is a person of integrity. Integrity means, your life fits together, it's all of one piece. Integrity is the opposite of hypocrisy. It means that you're the same on the inside as you are on the outside; you're the same when you're all alone as you are when you know that people are watching you. This is what Psalm 15 is all about.

David says, You can tell that a person is a true child of God from the way he talks to other people, and the way they talk about other people. They don't slander their neighbours. Slander is making accusations about other people, twisting their words, putting their actions into the worst light. The Bible talks about false

witness; slander is false witness. You tell people bad things about someone because you want them to condemn him, to hate him.

You can tell whether a person walks with God by the kind of behaviour he despises, and the kind of behaviour he honours. He resembles God in this respect; he has the same values as God does. He despises what God despises, and he honours what God honours. He despises a vile man, but he honours those who fear the Lord.

Vile means, wicked, low, corrupt. In our culture, we often honour vile people. We're impressed by people who are beautiful or powerful or wealthy, even if we know that they live immoral lives. David says, People who walk with God despise vile behaviour. Not because they're self-righteous. But because there really is nothing honourable about people who make fun of the God Who created them, or people who mistreat their neighbours. And people of integrity see that for what it is. It's despicable, and they say so.

But he honours those who fear the Lord. Fearing the LORD means, really loving Him, and living according to His will, and worshipping Him not for show, but genuinely, from the heart. An upright person admires people who fear the LORD, for their piety, and their humility, and their honesty. He admires the way they're always ready to help, and to serve. He admires their generosity. He sees what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives, and he honours them.

A true child of God keeps his vows, even when it hurts. In our culture, people make promises, but when it looks like it's not turning out the way they thought it would, they walk away. We make commitments to our spouses; we make commitments to each other in our families, and friendships, and in business dealings. Sometimes those commitments are costly. When we make our wedding vows, we don't know what it's going to cost us to keep them, and sometimes we say, This isn't what I signed up for. Something happens, or our spouse changes, and we don't feel like we have to keep the promises that we made. And we walk away.

But God is faithful, and His children are faithful, too. They keep their promises. The children of God say, No matter what may have happened, no matter how things have changed, I gave my word. They keep their

oaths, even when it hurts. Even when it costs them money, or time, or even pain.

David says, Here's another thing that shows that who are really God's children: how we treat each other when it comes to money. The way we handle our money shows who and what are at the centre of our thoughts and concerns. God is generous. God gives good things to us, freely. And God's children show the same generosity. If their neighbour's in some kind of trouble, and he needs some financial help, they don't say, Here's an opportunity for me to get rich at my neighbour's expense. They use the money that God has given them to genuinely help their neighbour.

He does not take a bribe against the innocent. David is talking about more than bribery. Bribery is used to pervert justice. That's what David is talking about: justice. Dealing with our neighbour fairly. Being impartial, not favouring anyone because they're rich or powerful or popular, or even because they're our friends.

So Psalm 15 doesn't say, Here's the ladder that you have to climb, the kind of life you have to achieve, to have fellowship with God. It says, This is what the real children of God look like. These are the people who live with God. This is a portrait of the people who live in communion with God, now, and who will live with Him forever.

What does it take? How do we get to live with God forever? It's the same for every one of us, no matter who we are or where we come from. It's not what you do. Despite what your heart tells you, despite what every other religion tells you, you don't have to earn the right to live with God. You only have to repent, and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this is the promise: you will be changed. You will become a new person.

Psalm 15 wasn't written to make us hopeless. Psalm 15 wasn't written to make us despair of having fellowship with God. Psalm 15 is a promise; it says, This is what God will do in your life, if you believe His promises, and sincerely live by faith in Jesus Christ.