

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/4/93
Psalm 15 "The Marks of a Person Who is Close to God"

Intro:

Q: Are you close to God? Are you?

I didn't ask if you were a Christian. If you are a Christian, you are in God's family. God is your Father. No doubt about that. My question is different. I asked, Are you close to God?

You say, "That's kind of subjective, isn't it? Can we really know?"

Illust: David Koresh claims to be close to God

Illust: A person who truly had a close walk with the Lord

Q: How can you tell if you're really close to the Lord? What type of person is entitled to enjoy an intimate relationship with the Living God?

That's the question God's Word will answer for us this evening.

Proposition: Psalm 15 shows what is true of the person who is really close to God.

I. The Question (1)

II. The Answer (2-5a)

- A. The Person's Character (2): Integrity
- B. The Person's Conversation (3): Restrained
- C. The Person's Company (4): Honorable
- D. The Person's Conduct (5a): Selfless

III. The Guarantee (5b)

Two weeks ago, we began a new, Sunday evening, mini-series. I've entitled it, "How to Experience the Presence of God in Our Lives." The Psalms answer that question for us. God is real. And He wants us to enjoy a personal, vibrant relationship with Him. The Psalms show us how.

Of course, we won't digest all 150 Psalms. Time wouldn't permit that. But we do want to devote 6 weeks or so to 6 selected Psalms which will show us how to experience the presence of God in our lives.

I. The Question (1)

V 1 "Lord, who shall abide...?"

Notice the heading. This is a Psalm of David. David was a man after God's own heart. He didn't get that way over night. And he wasn't perfect. But he had learned how to walk with God.

Ps 15 begins with David asking a question. To whom did he ask the question? "Lord"--David asked the Lord. It's a twofold question:

1. Who shall abide in thy tabernacle?
(NIV "Who may dwell in your sanctuary?")
2. Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

The questions are one and the same. The tabernacle was the place God prescribed in Israel for two things: For worship, and for sacrifice.

We don't know for sure when David wrote Ps 15. It sounds a lot like Ps 24. Charles Spurgeon in his commentary suggests Ps 15 was connected with the removal of the ark to the holy hill of Zion. Remember what happened the first time David tried to move the sacred ark of the Lord to Jerusalem? Uzzah reached out and tried to steady the tottering ark, and was struck down!

David had learned that you must approach God on God's terms. He is holy.

So here's his question. Who can live in the presence of God? Who can worship God? Who can be close to God?

Caution: We tend to answer that question by going to extremes. On the one hand, we may ignore God's holiness, and approach Him thoughtlessly and casually and flipantly. Or on the other hand, we may misinterpret God's holiness, and think it's impossible to approach Him. Both are wrong. Certainly, we must not rush glibly into the presence of God. Nor should we shun Him out of fear. He desires our worship (Jn 4:23-24).

Note: Not everyone is interested in being close to God. If you have sin in your life, being close to God is not a priority to you, for His presence exposes your stains, and makes you feel uncomfortable.

Illust:

Tran: There's the question. Who can be close to God, and abide in His presence?

II. The Answer (2-5a)

Remember, David asked God the question. And God, by His Spirit, answered the question, as recorded by David. That's important for this reason. What I'm going to say next is not my answer. It's God's. No one can leave tonight saying, "Well that's just his opinion on how to be close to God. I've got my own way."

Q: Who is it that is close to God? Who can have fellowship with God?

A: What follows is a list of 11 marks (3 positive, then 3 negative, then 3 positive, then 2 negative). The list is not exhaustive. In fact, in Ps 24, some additional features are added in the answer.

But as we move through the list, one thing will be clear. If a person is close to God, God will be real in every area of his life. When we're close to God, God's presence affects every facet of our lives.

In his answer, David records 11 marks which can be grouped into 4 areas.

Challenge: Let's do some spiritual inventory tonight. Ask the Holy Spirit to use this checklist to point out the areas that are hindering our relationship with God, so that we can leave here tonight close to the Lord.

The first 3 marks are stated positively. They have to do with...

A. The Person's Character (2): Integrity

V 2 "He that walks..."

If a person is close to God, there's something peculiar about his character. Notice the 3 verbs in v 2. You can see God in his walk, his work, and his word. That's pretty comprehensive, isn't it? V 2 has to do with a person's character. The person who enjoys fellowship with God is a person who first of all, exhibits integrity in his/her life. In what ways?

1. He walks uprightly. (NIV "He whose walk is blameless")

Paul told Timothy a church leader must be "above reproach" (I Tim 3). The same standard holds for anyone who desires to be close to God. He has no cracks in his life. No areas of known inconsistency. No skeletons in the closet.

2. He works righteousness.

He does what is righteous (NIV). Let's set up camp here for a minute.

Q: Do you have a zeal to do what is right?

A lot of people will do what's right if it's convenient, if it's handy, if they'll get something out of it, but a person who is close to God does what's right all the time. Regardless.

Q: How do you respond to people when they hurt you? Do you retaliate? Or do you determine that you're going to do what's right?

Illust: Husbands, how do you respond to your wife when she...

3. He speaks the truth in his heart. (NIV "the truth from his heart")

This is just the opposite of Ps 12:2.

Ps 12:2 "They speak vanity...flattering lips...double heart..."

Q: Are you a truthful person? More about that in a moment...

In order to be close to God, we must have character marked by integrity.

Illust:

B. The Person's Conversation (3): Restrained

Now we're given 3 negatives, 3 things a person close to God doesn't do.

1. Doesn't backbite with his tongue. (NIV "no slander on his tongue")

The word for "backbiting" or "slander" has a background where it means "going around." To slander means we find things out about someone else and then spread them around.

2. Doesn't do evil to his neighbor.

The meaning's pretty obvious. A person close to God doesn't mistreat others.

3. Doesn't take up a reproach against his neighbor.

The NIV translates, "casts no slur on his fellow man." To take up a reproach against someone means that we find out some disreputable, juicy piece of information about another person, and then rake it up unnecessarily.

Listen. Just because something is true doesn't mean we need to pass it on. Just because I run across a piece of information about a person doesn't mean I have to tell it to someone else.

Illust: I wouldn't be telling you this, but it's the gospel truth!

So what? What does Prov 10:12 say, "Hatred stirs up strifes, but love covers all sins." Some things are better left unsaid! Bury the hatchet.

Q: Ask yourself, "What will I accomplish by repeating this piece of info?"

--Will it advance the cause of Christ?

--Will it help the person I'm talking about?

Key: When a person is close to God, it affects his conversation, his speech.

Illust:

C. The Person's Company (4): Honorable

3 more positive traits, having to do with our company.

1. Despises a vile person.

You say, "I thought we were supposed to love all people." We are. To despise doesn't mean to hate. It has to do with the company we keep.

A vile person is a reprobate person, someone who perpetually does evil. Listen. The person who is close to God feels uncomfortable around evil. He hates evil. In fact, he's not ashamed to declare where he stands. A godly person avoids the corrupting influence of vile people.

Q: Do people where you work know where you stand?

Q: Young people, do your peers know where you stand?

Do they know that sin offends you, that you're uncomfortable around it? I'm not talking about being obnoxious and self-pious. I'm not talking about making a scene.

When the guys start telling the off-colored jokes, what do you do? Do you laugh? Do you leave? Do people know that sin bothers you?

You see, the closer we are to God, the greater sin will grieve us. Why? Because sin grieves God.

A person close to God hates sin. On the other hand...

2. Honors them that fear the Lord.

Honor to whom honor is due. What kind of heroes do you have in your life?

Think of the applications. This principle affects the kind of entertainment we choose. What kind of models do you set before your children? Are your heroes people that fear the Lord?

Illust:

3. Keeps his oath, even when it hurts (NIV).

The KJV is rather choppy here, "he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." The sense is captured by the NIV. A person who is close to God keeps his oath, even when it hurts.

Q: How trustworthy are you? How good is your word? Do you pay your bills? Do you show up for appointments? Do you follow through with commitments? Even when it hurts?

Illust:

Tran: Who is it that enjoys fellowship with God? The person in whose life God is real. First, you can see God in his character (integrity), second in his conversation (restrained), and third in his company (honorable). And in a fourth area...

D. The Person's Conduct (5a): Selfless

V 5 "He that puts not out his money..."

Notice the two negatives:

1. Doesn't put out his money to interest
2. Doesn't accept a bride against the innocent

The OT law gave the Jews some guidelines about lending money. If a Jew loaned money to a fellow Jew, it had to be an interest free loan (Lev 25:36). God did not want his people getting rich at the expense of another. If a Jew loaned money to a non-Jew, apparently he could charge interest, as long as it wasn't exuberant. In fact, even in the Law God encouraged generosity and benevolence (Lev 19:33).

Q: Does Ps 15 forbid loaning or borrowing money with interest?

A: No. But it does forbid usury. God is never pleased when one person created in His image gets rich at the expense of another person created in His image.

The issue in v 5 is a person's conduct, especially as it relates to the way we treat others who are in need.

Key: A person who is close to God sees himself as a conduit, not as a bucket. He sees his possessions as gifts received from God, not to be hoarded, but to be used to help others. A person who is close to God sees himself as a channel God can use to touch the lives of others.

Q: Do we have a responsibility to the struggling, hurting Christians in Russia?

Q: What about to the poor in Scioto county?

Illust:

Tran: Those are the 11 marks of a person who is close to God. How'd you do?

That's a pretty sobering list, isn't it?

Q: Who can say they have all 11 marks in their life?

A: Not one of us!

Do you know what this list causes us to do? Look to Jesus! He is the personification of Psalm 15. He is the perfect God-man. He modeled every trait we've seen tonight. He lived a perfect life. And He did it for our benefit.

Listen. Only if we come to Jesus, can we be close to God the Father.

And if we do, here's the guarantee.

V 5b "He that doeth these things shall never be moved."

III. The Guarantee (5b)

Ps 15 begins with a question, followed by a detailed answer, and ends with a guarantee. The one who is close to God will never be moved. The person who is close to God experiences stability in this life, and security for the life to come.

Q: Do you want to be close to God?

Q: Are there things right now that are hindering that?

--Are you saved?

--Is being close to God a priority to you?

Q: Is God real in your life, in your character, your conversation, in the company you keep, in your conduct?