

THE GODLY LIFE IN AN UNGODLY WORLD
PSALM 15

Gracie Allen, an actress from a couple of generations ago and the wife of comedian George Allen once received an alligator as a gag gift. What do you do with a gift alligator? Who knows? So she put in the bathtub and left for an appointment. When she returned home, she found this note from her maid: “Dear Miss Allen: Sorry, but I have quit. I don’t work in houses where there is an alligator. I’d a told you this when I took on, but I never thought it would come up.”

We could say that about many things in life, couldn’t we? All we want is simplicity and ease. We don’t want to create problems for others, and we don’t want problems for ourselves. Yet, that’s not the reality for us: “Life is not a straight line leading from one blessing to the next and then finally to heaven. Life is a winding and troubled road switchback after switchback.” [Piper, *Sweet & Bitter Providence*, 101.] Difficult jobs, meddling bosses, taxes, financial pressures, miscommunication, sinful communication, broken relationships, broken cars, house repairs, temptations of a thousand kinds, moral failures, wars, and the list goes on. I didn’t sign up for that when I signed my adult papers, and I don’t think you did either.

How do we live in this ungodly world? For a few weeks we are looking at songs to sing to put our hearts at rest and to stabilize our souls. This morning we look at Psalm 15, a wisdom psalm of David.

As a wisdom song it provides direction for the reader for how to live. And as a song, it is to be sung to transform hearts and desires. This psalm appears to be a song worshippers would sing on the way to Jerusalem for one of the annual feasts. It was a reminder for the Israelites of the requirements of those who would worship the Lord corporately in Jerusalem. And it serves as a reminder for us as well of the kind of worshippers God calls all men to be — and what fellowship with God looks like.

Perhaps you are a little confused in your spiritual life — what does the Christian life look like? how are we sanctified and what does sanctification do? and what’s the advantage of living for God? These are the kinds of questions that this psalm answers; if you have these kinds of concerns today (and all of us have these or some variation of them), then this psalm and message are for you. In this psalm, we will find that —

WHEN GOD DECLARES ONE TO BE RIGHTEOUS, HIS ENTIRE LIFE WILL BE CHANGED.

The **psalmist reveals** what a godly life is like with a question, an answer, and a promise.

1. **Question: What **KIND** of Life is a Godly Life? (v. 1)**
2. **Answer: A Godly Life is a **SANCTIFIED** Life (vv. 2-5a)**
 - ✓ God sanctifies one’s **CHARACTER** (v. 2)
 - ✓ God sanctifies one’s **COMMUNION** (vv. 3-4b)
 - ✓ God sanctifies one’s **CONTENTMENT** (vv. 4c-5b)
3. **Promise: A Godly Life is a **STABLE** Life (v. 5c)**

1. Question: What KIND of Life is a Godly Life? (v. 1)

- This psalm opens with two questions that essentially ask the same thing: “who is fit to be a worshipper of God in the Temple in Jerusalem?”
 - ✓ The word **abide** has the sense of someone who might spend the night with a friend or find a temporary shelter somewhere, though it can also have a more permanent sense (Is. 11:6).
 - ✓ The word **tent** refers to the Tabernacle of God. The Tabernacle was the temporary place where God resided on earth in the early OT (in the NT He is within believers). Cf. **Ps. 27:5-6**.
 - ✓ So this is a request to be in the presence of God.
 - ✓ Hebrew poetry often uses parallelism to emphasize truths; but unlike much English poetry that uses parallel (or rhyming) sounds, Hebrew poetry uses parallel thoughts — and that’s what is happening in lines 1 & 2 of verse one. Line two echoes line 1. The request is repeated.
 - ✓ But **dwelt** goes beyond **abide**; it means to settle down without the thought of moving anywhere else. It’s a permanent residence. And that is emphasized by the words **holy hill**; this is not a tent that is moveable; this is a structure that is permanently fixed on the holy mountain of God — the psalmist is talking about the place of permanent residence where the Temple would ultimately be built and where Christ will eventually reign in the Millennial Kingdom.
 - ✓ But even more than that, notice that the song says it is the **holy** hill. The emphasis isn’t so much on the place of God’s dwelling, but the kind of dwelling it is — it is the place where God’s holiness resides, cf. **Ps. 99:9**. And it is a reminder that there is nothing unholy about God (5:4).
 - ✓ That short statement is an affirmation that to be in God’s presence requires holiness. From the OT to the NT, God requires men who come into His presence to be holy (Ex. 3:5; 33:20; Is. 6:3, 5; Rev. 1:17; 1 Jn. 3:3). So the request is not only to be to be in his presence, but to be holy like God is holy!
 - ✓ The questions are also asking, “what does that holy life look like?” and “How can I be holy?” They are questions about the character of the worshipper. What kind of worshippers does God accept?
- With these two questions, the song singers are essentially saying, “We don’t want to live in the world or like the world; we want to be with God and like God.” The questions are a quest for holiness. What follows, then, is a guide to sanctification so that one might enjoy fellowship with God (**Jn. 14:15, 23**).
- As we proceed to what a godly life looks like, let me remind you that there is nothing better than a life of godliness and holiness. God and Christ will not disappoint (e.g., 1 Pt. 2:5, 7ff; Rom. 10:11-13). Christ is not disappointing because He gives life and *abounding riches*.

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep for the sake of that which he can never lose.”

2. Answer: A Godly Life is a SANCTIFIED Life (vv. 2-5a)

- Before we move on, we have to address one overt question that arises from what follows: “Is David saying that by doing all these things that a man becomes holy himself — that he justifies himself?”
 - ✓ Salvation in the OT and NT is the same — it is by grace through faith (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4; Heb. 11:6, 39-40; Gal. 3:23-24). This is not meritorious salvation.
 - ✓ Instead, these verses are the psalmist’s way of saying, “This is what life looks like for the true worshipper of God; this is what God does to change an individual who has been saved by God.”
 - ✓ We are not saved *by* good works, but we *are* saved *for* good works.
 - ✓ What are the good works that the psalmist envisioned? He identifies 11 qualities (non-exhaustive).
- Now there are several different ways to categorize these characteristics:
 - ✓ Some have said that there are 10 qualities that follow and they are designed to remind the worshippers of the 10 commandments of Exodus 20. The problem with that is that there are 11 qualities, not 10, and the 11 qualities don’t coincide with the 10 commandments (diff. emphases).
 - ✓ Some have divided these up into six couplets (3 pos., 3 neg., 2 pos., 2 neg.). That structure *is* present.
 - ✓ For simplicity, I have grouped these into three broader categories.
- God sanctifies one’s CHARACTER (v. 2). The one who lives with God has a changed (*internal*) life.
 - ✓ He **walks with integrity**. This refers to his morality and internal character. He is sound, wholesome, and complete. He is living in accordance with the truth of God. He faithfully desires to please God and God blesses him (84:10-12). It is like **above reproach** (1 Tim. 3:2); it refers to his general character of life. There are no accusations against him.
 - ✓ He **works righteousness**. He does right in all his relationships and activities (4:1; Ezek. 18:5-9). And in that righteousness, he is demonstrating God-like character (Is. 51:1).
 - ✓ He **speaks truthfully**. But the psalmist says that his words are truthful even **in his heart**. He not only gives lip service to truthfulness — he speaks it with **his heart**. He is motivated by truth about himself and about God (12:2). What he thinks and meditates on inwardly is truthful.
 - Often we may speak the truth with our lips, but our meditations — our internal conversations and desires — are not the truth; we cultivate bitterness, anger, jealousy, hidden agendas, or ungodly passions, lusts, and desires. Not this man. Internally, he speaks truth about everything.
 - From the inside out, this is a truthful man (Eph. 4:15).
 - ✓ The verbs in this verse refer to different aspects of life: **walking** (general lifestyle), **working** (specific activities), and **speaking**. These emphasize that they are all inter-related and not isolated. We can’t do one and not the others. And they are dealing essentially with the inner character of a man — what is he inwardly and in the totality of his life.
 - ✓ The first picture of the person who is in fellowship with God is someone who pursues God inwardly: the one who lives with God will be transformed from the inside out.

- **God sanctifies one's COMMUNION (vv. 3-4b)**
 - ✓ The principles in these lines relate to all relationships: strangers, acquaintances, intimate friends. And the verbs in this verse all indicate that this is the habitual pattern of the godly man — this is what he always does; he is consistent in these actions.
 - ✓ The godly man **does not slander**. That is, his *tongue* is under control.
 - The word **slander** is a word picture that indicates he does not “spy” or “go around town” with his tongue. He does not speak when it is inappropriate or even questionable.
 - This is significant because it is inconceivable to slander and worship God with the same tongue (Jn. 3:8-10; cf. also Jn. 1:26-27).
 - Someone suggested, “Before you pass along information or comments about someone else, let it first pass through four gates for approval. If all four give you a green light, share it w/out hesitation:
 - ... Gate 1: Is it confidential? (If so, never mention it.)
 - ... Gate 2: Is it true? (This may take some investigation.)
 - ... Gate 3: Is it necessary? (So many words are useless.)
 - ... Gate 4: Is it kind? (Does it serve a wholesome purpose?)” [Swindoll]
 - ✓ **nor does evil to his neighbor** = his *actions* are under control. The godly man is not enticed by evil (or the Evil one), and he is not enticed to *do* evil (cf. 1:1; and contrast 10:2). The godly man intentionally hurts no one: neither a casual acquaintance nor a close friend.
 - ✓ **nor takes up reproach against his friend** = his *attitudes* are under control. He thinks so highly of others that he would never bring shame to them. He does not rejoice in their difficulty but empathizes with their hurt (and doesn't listen to the negatives about others).
 - The principle is that how we treat family and closest relationships are a greater indication of our godliness than how we treat strangers (1 Tim. 5:4, 8).
 - “You always hurt the one you love” is unfortunately true too often; but the godly person has a better reputation in his own home than outside it.
 - The one who lives in the presence of God practices Prov. 10:12 in his relationships.
 - ✓ Verse three spoke of the man and close relationships. Verse 4 broadens the picture of the godly man to include relationships w/ his acquaintances and the culture in general. And of those, he hates what God hates and he loves (honors) what God loves (honors).
 - The **reprobate** is not a casual sinner, but one who despises and rejects God (36:1-4).
 - To **despise** the reprobate means to give little worth to him; thus, the man of God understands the worthlessness of the reprobate's lifestyle and is not enticed by it.
 - He loves his neighbor (Mt. 22:39), but his evil neighbor is not his best friend (1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14ff). Even more, he is not enticed by the world system. God hates it and so does he (1 Jn. 2:15-17). He does not envy the sinner or the sinner's lifestyle (Heb. 11:25).
 - “Godless men are not the stuff out of which true friends can ever be made.” [Spurgeon]

- This verse is talking about avoiding and hating worldliness. What is that? “Worldliness is anything that makes sin look normal and righteousness look strange.” [DeYoung]

“Put your finger on any prosperous page in the Church’s history, and I will find a little marginal note reading thus: ‘In this age men could readily see where the Church began and where the world ended.’ Never were there good times when the Church and the world were joined in marriage with one another. The more the Church is distinct from the world in her acts and in her maxims, the more true is her testimony for Christ, and the more potent is her witness against sin.” [Spurgeon]

- We must live in this world, but at the same time, we must be aliens and strangers to the things in this world and the system of philosophy that runs this world (1 Pt. 2:11). We cannot love what God hates and have fellowship with Him (1 Jn. 1:6). Our culture is becoming more and more brazen about sin (Prov. 7:10ff); we must be vigilant against infiltrations of the world system into our thinking. Are we regularly taking in the antidote to the world (the Bible)?
- Instead of loving the world, the godly man gives **honor** (weight) to the one who **fears God**; his intimate friends are those with whom he is able to worship. He values those who respect, revere, worship, and are in awe of God (Ps. 112:1; 115:11, 13; 118:4; 128:1).
- ✓ The one who is in fellowship with God honors God in what he prioritizes/values. And all his relationships are conformed to God’s perspective of those relationships. He protects and guards his friendships and does not embrace anyone or anything that God rejects.
- ✓ There is one more major area of transformation of the godly man that the psalmist identifies...
- **God sanctifies one’s CONTENTMENT (vv. 4c-5b)**. The final three qualities hit us in the wallet — and for some of us, this may be the hardest hit.
 - ✓ When faced with bills that are unanticipated and large (like car repairs), I have often said, “I wouldn’t spend my money that way, but if God wants to spend ~~my~~ His money that way, that’s His prerogative as God.” Can I genuinely say that? That’s what these three lines identify.
 - ✓ The end of verse four identifies a scenario where a man **swears** something (he makes a vow). When he makes the vow he is anticipating a particular outcome, but something changes and to keep the vow will be *really* costly to him — it will **hurt**. But despite the cost of keeping the vow, he still keeps it. His word is more important than his wallet (e.g., Zaccheus, Lk. 19:8).
 - When he makes a promise, he keeps it (Mt. 5:33-37).
 - He believes that God is faithful and will care for him, so he is faithful to keep his word.
 - ✓ Even more than that, **He does not put out his money at interest**. He is so disinterested in accumulating material wealth that he is willing to lend his money without concern for collecting interest on his money.
 - This was a radical idea in that culture because in the ancient Near East, interest rates of 50% were not uncommon. Who will pay those kinds of rates? People who are desperate for cash.

The psalmist says that the godly man doesn't want to profit over someone else's trouble.

- This phrase is a condemnation of financial abuse of the poor. God is not prohibiting making wise investment with money, but He is prohibiting a desire for wealth that doesn't care if that pursuit results in the financial ruin of others.
- ✓ A third statement about money is given in the middle of v. 5 — ***nor takes a bribe against the innocent***. Often the poor were taken to court and taken advantage of by the wealthy who could pay a bribe to assure that they received the outcome they wanted in court.

- Ex. 23:8 "You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just."
- Deut. 16:19 "You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous."

- The godly man will not oppress the poor nor abuse his position/wealth (Js. 2:1-13).
- Instead, the godly man realizes that his resources are a means that God has given him to bless others. Our resources are given to us to provide for the needs of our families and then to advance the cause of the gospel and care for others (1 Tim. 6:8-10, 17-19).
- ✓ The one who lives in fellowship with God is not enslaved to money or power, but has mastered his money so he is content with his position (and gives freely and liberally).
- In vv. 2-5, David has affirmed what the OT sanctified life looks like. It's like the life of the NT believer.
- This is a psalm that invites self-examination — am I ready for worship? Am I in fellowship with God? You may not have done well (none of us will fulfill this perfectly, and most have many deficiencies).
 - ✓ You may not have done well because you are not really a follower of God (and Christ).
 - While not perfectly, these are the kinds of things the Spirit of God produces in believers.
 - If this list reveals you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, nothing you will ever do will be enough to appease God's wrath against your sin. But the Messiah, Jesus Christ (who the OT believers were anticipating) perfectly fulfilled the Law ("Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" Matt. 5:17). And in fulfilling the Law God could then impute Christ's righteousness to us when Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty of sins that He did not commit (2 Cor. 5:21).
 - You cannot be righteous enough to satisfy God, but Christ's righteousness eternally satisfied God. And if you believe in (love) and live for Christ, then He will be your righteousness.
 - ✓ If you are a believer in Christ, this is what you never could do before Christ, but this is what you can do after believing in Christ. This is what faith in God enables the follower of God to do. And if you do not do this perfectly (and we won't), know that you are accepted and not condemned (Rom. 5:1).
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3. Promise: A Godly Life is a STABLE Life (v. 5c)

- The promise for the one who lives this way is that he **will never be shaken** — he is secure in his standing with God — “He stands fast, being upheld by YHWH.”
- The word **shaken** also suggests that there are things that might leave us shaky and unstable (like if we aren’t growing in sanctification like vv. 2-5 suggest).
 - ✓ There are things that tempt us to fraudulent living, unrighteous actions, and lying tongues and hearts (v. 2). There are relationships that tempt us to slander, lie, and do evil things. There are temptations that entice us to desire worldly enticements, and dishonor the Lord, and be unfaithful. The pursuit of money and the need for money can entice us to harm others.
 - ✓ Those pressures and temptations are real.
 - ✓ And they are also for your and my sanctification. More than removing our problems and temptations, God wants to transform and change us so that we are like the Savior — and that is our stability and strength in this broken world:
 - “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything” (Col. 1:18).
 - “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (1 Cor. 8:6).
 - “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).
 - “What is the chief end of man? Ans. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”
 - ✓ And the Lord has given you everything that we need so that you don’t live the world’s way and we do live the Lord’s way. It was true in the OT (Hab. 2:4ff). And it is true in the NT (Gal. 5:18-24).
- The one who lives in fellowship with will be transformed into God’s image — and there is nothing in life that can defeat or discourage him because he is in fellowship with his God!
- Contrast this reality with Is. 1:8.
- In our trouble, the psalmist would have us sing the song of sanctification for our stability —

“Tried we must be, but triumphant we shall be; for Jehovah himself, who is mightier than many waters, shall be with us. The sorrows of life may rise to an extraordinary height, but the Lord is equal to every occasion.”
[C.H. Spurgeon, *Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith*, 341.]

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-25 (David L.)