

## Living Blamelessly

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This is my second to last Sunday for the next three months. I will be taking a sabbatical leave for the entire summer. As I've prepared to depart, it has been comforting to know that God loves you enough to provide these elders to care for you. And as I've considered what to say in these last couple of messages, I've been impressed by two things: 1) To commend to you communion with God 2) To impart God's love for his church the world. The first is my goal today. Please turn with me to Psalm 15 for the Scripture reading.

### Holy Hill

A worshipper would make their way up the dusty streets of Jerusalem toward the hill, an elevated place in the center of Jerusalem where the temple of Yahweh stood. It was there they would confess their sins, offer sacrifices, and commune with God. In this psalm, David models the worshipper's approach asking, "[O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?](#)" (15:1). You can feel his reverence: Is anyone fit to *pass* through God's house? To live on your holy hill? In other place, search me, try me know my ways O God. It's rare to find this kind preparation for worship today. Many of us roll out of bed and scramble to church. But we prepare for what we prize. We may spend hours researching, comparing, and budgeting in anticipation of a new Apple product or outfit. But how much do we prepare to worship? The Psalms show us a prepared, reverent worshipper. Why the reverence? It has to do with the *holy hill*. The hill symbolized God's cosmic mountain, Zion, the place where God put his feet. You see, in Jewish theology YHWH sits enthroned above the heavens, with earth as his footstool, his holy feet rest on the mountain, signifying his immensity and omnipresence. God is holy. How do I enter his presence? When you look at a mountain, what do you feel? Small, tiny, finite. "What are men to rocks and mountains?" Jane Austen wrote, but somehow looking at mountains also lifts us up. Why? They point away from themselves, an artifact of an enchanted age, signaling transcendence. But today we know better than enchanted worlds, where communion with the gods is possible. We live in a "disenchanted" age, an age of reason, science, cold hard facts. But fascination with the enchanted age is on the rise. Entertainment guru Marvel films has led us to mountains in their last three films: a medical doctor questions his strictly rational view of the world on a mountain, a broken hero leads refugees through mountains to Eden, and a band of guardians search for purpose on a mountainous planet. Despite our penchant for the visible world, we still long for the mountains. Because they remind us we're made to worship something immense. To get into the tent, into the presence of the Holy, and live on his hill. How do we commune with God?

### Walk Blameless

This psalm answers that question in various ways. We'll focus on three of them: *walk blamelessly, do what's right, tell the truth*. Who shall dwell on your holy hill? "[He who walks blamelessly and does what is right](#)" (2). If you want to draw near to the Flame, you must **walk blamelessly**. Who can do that? Noah did. The architect of the life-saving ark described as "blameless before the Lord." But do you know what he did after the flood? *Got drunk, naked, and passed out. I'm sure he snapped at his kids a time or two also.* We'd hardly

call him blameless. Blameless is sometimes translated *whole*. Noah lived a whole life. How? By walking in the way of the Lord, by choosing to do what's right, preferring good over evil. Not flawlessly but consistently. Blamelessness isn't sinless perfection but a way of life made whole by walking with God. The word "walk" is chosen carefully. It shows up often to describe the Christian life because it's an everyday term. To walk blamelessly is to include God in the everyday stuff of life. Holiness in the mundane. Communion, then, is joining God wherever you are. Brother Lawrence wrote that he could sense the presence of God cleaning dishes simply because he recognized God was there. Remember, the *whole* earth is his royal footstool. His holiness stretches over everything, and when we acknowledge it we dwell on his holy hill. *It's the exhausted mom patiently instructing her children because she knows how patient God has been with her, the student meticulously going over her studies love God with her mind, the designer including that extra level of detail because he wants to please his Creator, Dad gladly washing the dishes grateful to God for the food he just ate.* Communion with God. Of course this is difficult, particularly if we roll into our day without any preparation for worship. But it can also be challenging because we often live in bits and pieces not wholes. We treat life like a cafeteria food tray: God gets a section, work, family, politics, art, and rest. But everything *gets the same space, is given the royal treatment.* And serving that many gods is just flat out exhausting. God is saying, Don't you see, I'm the tray, the whole tray. I take up all the space. I'm everywhere. I undergird everything. All things hold together in me, not you. Work, family, art; they can't make you whole. I make you whole. Brother Lawrence called it practicing the presence of God. And it does take practice, effort, but so does living in bits and pieces. The difference is the fragmented, disenchanting life leaves you stressed out. But the enchanted one makes you whole.

### Do What's Right

A second way to commune with God is to **do what's right**. To do something right it to make a decision against what's wrong. If I choose to be patient, I also decide *not* to be easily angered. If I choose to be pure, I also decide *not* to lust. And there are real consequences to our decisions. If we choose what is right we put ourselves next to God. But if we choose what is wrong, we place our foot on a path that leads away from him: **"The righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness:** (Prov 11:5). Another way to say this is, *character affects communion*. If I come out of my office self-absorbed and snapping at everyone, it affects my relationships. Cools them. If I'm kind and thoughtful it warms them. If it's true with coworkers, how much more true is it with God? The psalm goes on to describe character that negatively affects communion: **"who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend"** (3). This verse is essentially about gossip. One translation says the person who communes with God refuses to gossip, harm neighbors, or speak evil of friends. Gossip talks about others, but it's more often about me. If I'm hurt or disappointed by someone I may seek vindication by running them down to someone else: "My husband is never around; he's always working." That person always dominates conversation and I can't get a word in. Gossip plays on the pity of others to get attention, to be seen as righteous. But gossip can't give us vindication or righteousness we desire; only Jesus can do that. Jesus is our righteousness not what people think of us. As one author put it, **"gossip**

says things about your sister or brother that the Trinity would never say about you.” He says, you’re righteous, vindicated from your guilt because Jesus suffered your consequences. Show mercy not gossip. And if the hurt is strong enough to gossip, Jesus tells us what to do—go and be reconciled. Why? To win a brother. Gossip makes an enemy but the gospel wins a friend. It’s so important Jesus says leave your gift at the altar and go and be reconciled. In other words, *reconciliation before worship. Character affects communion.* Sin separates us from God, but repentance put us back in his tent.

### **Tell Yourself the Truth**

The final way to commune with God. Remember how we talked about the importance of preparing for worship? And that if we don’t orient ourselves to the Holy, it will be very difficult to live whole lives? David tips us off to a practice critical to a life of worship, speaking truth in your heart. We all know it’s possible to do what’s right on the outside with rotten motivations on the inside. A friend recently confided to me he’d been doing the dishes at home, not because he loves his wife but because he thought it would put her in his corner. An act of service looked good on the outside but rotten on the inside. Jeremiah the prophet said, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (17:10). So how do we heal the heart? Silence the lies. You see summer’s coming and you decide to lose a little weight so you can dress a little more provocatively. You think to yourself, I bet I’ll turn more heads and that will make me feel worthwhile. Or if I do the dishes, I’ll get the acceptance that matters. Or if I work a little later, get my numbers up, the approval of the boss will satisfy me. All lies. What matters most is not what others think about us, or even what we think about God, but what God thinks about us. He looks at us the way he looks at his very own Son. Do you remember what the Father said about the Son at his baptism? “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mk 1:11). *Before* Jesus did a single miracle, preached a single sermon, before he did anything for God. The Father is saying to you, “I am pleased with you. I approve of you before you a thing for me.” That’s where you find worth, acceptance, approval. But we’ve got to tell our hearts what’s true. And to do that, we have to pry the lies out of its hands. That’s called repentance—confessing to God that you’ve preferred to turn heads, put people in your corner, and to impress the boss. But it’s nowhere to live. God wants you to live in the tent of his holy presence, to adore him for his greater love, acceptance, and mercy, to be enamored with him not yourself. You see, Jesus lived a blameless life, did what’s right every single time, and told the world the truth. He’s your way up the hill. He puts you in the presence of God’s holy love. And if we do these things—walk blamelessly, do what’s right, tell the truth to our hearts—we’ll live in his tent. The holy will enter the mundane. And we’ll be a little more enchanted with the immensity of God’s grace.