

SPECIAL MESSAGE

SEVEN CHARACTER QUALITIES OF A GODLY PERSON

Psalm 15

*O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
He who walks blamelessly and does what is right
and speaks truth in his heart;
who does not slander with his tongue
and does no evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;
in whose eyes a vile person is despised,
but who honors those who fear the LORD;
who swears to his own hurt and does not change;
who does not put out his money at interest
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these things shall never be moved.*

Psalm 15 begins with a question: Who will dwell on God's holy hill? Who will sojourn with God? It's a picture of life. It's a picture of walking with God, dwelling with God, living in the presence of God. And it comes to us in the form of an invitation or a question. Who is it that will know the presence of God? We might say it like this: Who will walk with God in this life and then live with him for all of eternity? What follows is a description of a person of godly character. I have summarized that which follows in these verses under seven headings, seven character qualities. For fathers, we might say seven character qualities of a godly man. But really, I think it's appropriate to say of a godly person -- of a godly man or a godly woman.

Now, here's the problem with Psalm 15 -- here's the challenge. I personally find that many times I come to psalms like this, and I don't like them. I don't. Because I read the psalms that say: "Who will ascend the hill of the Lord? And who will dwell with God? And who will walk with God?" Then I read the description of the people who meet the qualifications, and I suddenly don't feel so good about myself. When you read Psalm 15 and you understand that he is talking about an internal

condition of the heart as well as consistency in living it out, you immediately are aware of where you don't measure up. But these passages have a purpose. They are in God's word for some very good reasons.

- **The first reason is that they show us what we are not. They show us our need. They show us where we are not living a godly life and where what is needed to be in the presence of God is missing from our lives.**
- **Secondly, they show us what we can become by faith in Jesus Christ.**

William Perkins was an early Puritan who died in 1602. His conversion was rather uniquely inspired. He was overhearing a mother correct her child. As she scolded her child, she said, "Listen, if you don't straighten up, I'm going to give you to Drunken Perkins over there and let him have you." That's a wonderful characterization of your life, is it not? A mother so upset at her child she calls you a drunk in front of you and says, "I'm going to give you to him and let him take you."

First of all, that is not a model of good parenting. Fathers, mothers, this is not what we are after. So, William Perkins hears this and has a spiritual awakening. If you think about that moment, he could have responded in a variety of ways. He could have gone deeper into despair and drunkenness. He could have just seen it all as completely worthless and hopeless. He could have responded with blame, or justification, or anger. He could have tried to reform himself. But he went to the one place he could really get help, and that was Jesus Christ. There, he received forgiveness of his sin for what he was not, and he began to experience a transformation in his character, so that God would shape and mold him into one of the great leaders of the 16th century. Today his writings are still read, and they are especially full of the grace of God and practically helpful. Why? Because there was a moment of awakening where he realized he was not what he needed to be in order to know God and walk with God and spend eternity with God. He knew he had to go to Christ to receive what he needed.

I think there are really three purposes in psalms like this.

- **#1 -- they show us what we are not.**
- **#2 -- they show us what we can become when we follow Christ, when we receive God's grace.**

- **And #3 -- they show us what to aim at. They hold up for us a target in life. This is how we are to live.**

And they are valuable for that purpose in terms of giving us instruction. My hope, dad, is that today you are going to receive some practical instruction on how to live as a father. I hope that all of us will find here some practical instruction on how to live as a godly person.

So, dads, we are going to give you a copy of a book by Thomas Watson called The Godly Man's Picture. If you already have it and you are a dad, we encourage you to go ahead and take one and give it to someone who would benefit from it. The book was written in 1666. What Watson is doing here is giving you a portrait, or an overview, or a picture of a godly man. Watson is a master of the list. He uses list after list after list. He will give you, for example, the ten duties of a godly man. Part of the value of the book is that it gives you a marvelous overview of a godly life. It gives you the big picture.

But then he will drop down on some of his points, most of his points, and he will give a level of detail. In just one paragraph there will be a pithy phrase or sentence. It's very penetrating, and you say, "Wow, I never really saw it as that important." Or, "I never saw the consequences related to that action." It's really a style of wisdom writing where he is helping you to see from God's perspective through his insight.

One of the great values of it is that it was written in 1666, so all of the biases of our day and our culture are not present. It will be startling for you at times when you read it. It is certainly not politically correct. It will challenge you. It will challenge your post-modern perspective. I would encourage you, dads, to read it devotionally. This is not the kind of book you want to try to read cover to cover. Read a page as a part of the time that you spend with God in meditation and prayer. It's our gift to you. Happy Father's Day. But it is in the spirit of passages like Psalm 15 that we offer it, with the thought of saying, "This is something we want to aim for in life." But more than that, we want to believe that this is what Christ is doing in us. This is the promise of scripture. This is who he wants to turn us into, and as we fall short, we receive forgiveness in Christ, and in Christ alone.

Before I jump into the seven character qualities, let me give you this context. I think the response was the same for the original readers. If we go back into the Old Testament and we have David's psalm here before us – this ancient song of worship -- the worshippers who came in David's day

offered sacrifices for their sin. They received forgiveness by faith. Those sacrifices were all pointing to the one perfect sacrifice – Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

I want you to understand that even in the context of Old Testament worship, there was an understanding that when the worshipper read or sang this psalm, he or she understood: “I don’t perfectly meet these qualifications. I am offering sacrifice for atonement for the forgiveness of sin. It’s pointing forward to the work of Christ – the perfect Lamb of God, the Messiah yet to come.” They were to live by faith.

Now in the New Testament era, we have a greater understanding of how God desires for us to walk with him by faith in Jesus Christ. Having said that, here’s part of the value of a message like today. Sometimes we miss this as New Testament Christians: **Character matters. It brings glory to God.** We desire for there to be real, genuine, God-given, grace-inspired, grace-driven fruit in our lives. If we neglect the importance of this fruit, of character, there will be in the short run an instability in our lives. You will see that in this psalm. There will be a lack of a sense of the presence of God, and diminished fruitfulness.

Let’s jump in and look at the first character quality.

I. **Consistency.**

In verse 2 we are told: “He who walks blamelessly.” This is the person who enters into the presence of the Lord. This is the one who sojourns with God. This is the one who dwells with God. I think of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus told us: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Think about that for a minute. Jesus gives us this instruction: “Here is what I want you to shoot for. I want you to aim at perfection.”

Really? Isn’t that a bit of an unrealistic target for us? God is showing us here that salvation is *completely* free. We receive it. We don’t earn it. It’s grace. It’s his gift. We come as we are. He accepts us. He forgives us. But he wants us to understand that he genuinely has designed transformation for us. He doesn’t want to leave us as we are.

So we express our love to the Lord through worship and song, but also through obedience. We looked at that a little bit earlier in our study of the gospel of John. That’s what we are normally studying these days. We saw that God provides opportunities for us to follow him and to obey him, and that that’s an expression of love. He actually put that in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and

Eve had never sinned. There was an opportunity for them to receive his love and to return it to him, as expressed in obedience.

If you stop and think about it, what happens? You come to the understanding: “Look, there is life in Jesus Christ. I receive this gift. I don’t do anything to earn it. I just trust in Jesus and I receive eternal life.” And what does God say first thing? “I want you to follow me in baptism.” There is a need in the human heart to then walk with God and express that in trust and obedience.

Someone will say to me: “Brian, does baptism save you?” “No. No, Jesus saves you. You receive it as a gift. You trust in him. It’s faith.” “Okay, so I don’t have to be baptized to be saved.” Listen, this question is not helpful. In one sense, you need to know that you are saved as a gift -- you are saved by faith. But imagine this: You are following Jesus; the way you express it is obedience. Then the first thing he gives you to do, you say: “Hmmm, no. Not so interested in that. Don’t like water. Don’t like people. Don’t want to be in public. Don’t want to be seen.” Whatever the reason is, listen: Adam will come to your house and baptize you in the canal behind your house. Well, maybe not Adam, but one of us.

If there is really a genuine apprehension or fear, come see one of your pastors. We want to talk to you. I’m just trying to simply demonstrate to you now that the character of a godly person is a consistency, a desire not to just pick and choose, but to follow God in everything – to walk blamelessly before the Lord. This first character quality informs all that follows.

II. Integrity.

Again, verse 2. This person “does what is right and speaks truth in his heart.” This is what is emphasized here. There is alignment between what this person does and what is on the inside. There is an integrity. You know, a lack of integrity is duplicity. It’s a double nature. It’s where I appear to be one thing, but underneath I’m something different. There is an agenda that you don’t see, which is really the agenda that is driving what I’m doing. God says that no, in the godly man there is a transparency. There is truth in his heart. There is truth in her heart, and it is lived out. There is an integrity.

Dads, I was thinking about what you really need to be successful as a father. If I could give you today three weapons to put into your arsenal as a dad, I would give you these three things.

- 1) **The first would be the power of your example.** I would give you an understanding of the power and the influence of your example in your children's life. It's going to be very difficult for you to lead your children somewhere that is a contradiction of what you are. If you have not entered in, and if you are not experiencing God and are not fully given over to the Lord, then you are modeling something different to your child. The importance of your example cannot be stated enough. I know that that's a bit of a frightening first weapon, but it's balanced by the next two.

Let me say this before we move on from it. I have an *amazing* earthly father – a very godly man. He is not a perfect man, but there was an integrity about his life. He genuinely lived for the glory of God. What that means is that because of the limits of his gift or experience, or whenever he stumbled or fell or even failed me in some significant way, there was always the power of his example that said he is genuinely a man who lives for the glory of God. It provided a certain grace to overcome any weaknesses that are there in all of us. It wasn't that he lived it out perfectly, but I just knew that what drove him as a man, as a husband, as a father was: "If this doesn't glorify God, I don't want it in my life." It was a powerful witness and example in my own heart.

- 2) The second thing is very important because it brings balance and an avenue to experience the first. **It is the gospel, and an understanding of the gospel. What we can give our children is not this idea that they have to meet all of our expectations perfectly, but that we are all sinners and that our hope is found in Jesus Christ.**

Dad, if I could give you anything, I would give you the understanding of how Jesus Christ forgives us of our sin, and how that applies to every single area of life. Learning to live that and speak it to others is the second great weapon that you need to be a parent. So when your son or daughter comes to you in a moment of sin, in a moment of failure, what they hear from you is not: "I would never do that. I would never have spoken that way. I would never have done that." But what they hear from you is: "I understand the battle that you are in. I am in the same battle myself. I have sinned, and here is the hope I've found in Jesus Christ."

- 3) **The third weapon is a vision for living for the glory of God.**

#1 -- The power of your own example. #2 -- The gospel. #3 -- A vision for living for the glory of God. This is what we all need, understanding that life's purpose is found in glorifying God in all we do (#3).

We do that by faith in Jesus Christ (#2). And the result is that there is an example (#1). And the example is not that we are perfectly living it out, but that we are demonstrating a life that's living for the glory of God by the grace and forgiveness that is found in Jesus Christ. I think that is a good three-point application grid for consistency and integrity – living by God's grace, living for the glory of God, understanding the impact of our own example.

III. Loyalty.

Verse 3: "...who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend..." It's difficult to translate this particular verse, but it's really talking about one who is loose with his or her tongue. This person doesn't just talk too much, but talks about people too much. This person is loose with the reputation of others. If this person applies the idea of loyalty, they only apply it to a very tight inner circle. Scripture, specifically this verse if we could expand it, is saying that this person is someone who can be trusted. In fact, if we were the opposite of this verse, it would be said about us: "You just can't trust him. You just can't trust her." There is a loyalty that is to characterize our lives.

Let me qualify that and say that it doesn't mean you never disagree, or the person is never wrong, or you always are siding with that person. Of course not. That's an unhealthy loyalty. This speaks of a kind of "Who I am when I'm with you is who I am, and you know that when I leave you I am going to be speaking the same way. If I am at odds with your perspective, I am speaking it directly to you, and anything I say when I am away from you will be a charitable expression of what I am candidly and lovingly speaking to you." Loyalty.

I preached from this text at the funeral of Jerry Warner, who was an elder at this church for many years. Fifteen or so years ago he moved to Atlanta. A few weeks before he passed away, he called and asked me to do his funeral, and I was honored to do it. I went and I shared from this psalm because his life so characterized this kind of loyalty. It was so pivotal, first of all, because through his life I personally experienced a loyal friendship which was safe.

I have actually had pastors come to me and say, "Brian, don't let people get near you." I would say, "That's really difficult. You know, I'm a shepherd. I'm supposed to care for the sheep." "Yeah, but just keep them away." "That's going to be hard to do." I've actually had pastors who would brag to me about how important it is to have an admin who knows how to keep people away. And I would say, "Listen, I don't do this perfectly. I don't claim for a moment to have this all figured out, but that

just seems to be a completely unbiblical view of spiritual leadership. We need to be accessible.”
“Yeah, but if you let people near you they are going to hurt you. They are going to betray you.”

Yes, sometimes that will happen. But you know what? God puts people like Jerry Warner in your life who are just loyal. You are probably not a pastor, but God will give those people to you and you will find that you can't do what God has called you to do without those people. I don't deserve the loyalty maybe, but it's there. They are trustworthy before God.

Be that kind of person in the lives of the people around you. Be the kind of person who is loyal. Scripture is speaking to us when it says the wounds of a friend can be trusted. We really do speak the truth in love – very imperfectly -- but we are not demolishing people in their absence. Riverside, I think you do that well. I want to hold that up and say, “Let's do it really well.” Let this be a safe place for very messed up people to come and get healed in Jesus Christ.

My neighbor is a lady named Sharon Stark. She also used to go to this church. Pretty much everyone used to go to this church at one time or another. She also left 15 or 20 years ago, but she didn't leave town. She and her husband Mike went to another church – Calvary Chapel. But they left there and are somewhere else now. I'm sorry to tell their spiritual journey. I'm not insinuating that it's without integrity. It wasn't. Our relationship is good, and here's why I'm telling you this. I was at a dinner the other night with some mutual friends of the Starks. Someone said, “You know what I love about Sharon? In all the years, the decades I've known her, I've literally never heard her say an unkind word about anyone.” And I was immediately able to say, “You know, that's exactly who she is.” She is not a perfect person. Jerry is not perfect, but you have those people in your life. You have those people who have modeled for you loyalty in relationship. They are not yes people. They don't always agree with you, but they are loyal. God, help us to walk out this character quality. Proverbs 10:12: “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.”

Listen, as I go through these seven character qualities, some jump out for me, like: “Whoa. This one -- maybe not so bad. This one -- good. This one – ooh, I'm not feeling great about how I've done in this area recently.” My encouragement to you would be to go to Jesus. Go to him. Be honest. Receive forgiveness. Receive cleansing. And thank him that this is the person he's making you into if he is your Lord and Savior.

IV. Righteousness.

Life In His Name – Seven Character Qualities of a Godly Person

Psalm 15 | Sunday, June 18, 2017 | By Brian Brookins



This person (verse 4) “in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD...” I have put the character quality of righteousness, but it’s phrased in a way that challenges us. We know the scripture tells us to love people and to love everyone, but we are given this picture of despising the vile person. I don’t want you to be put off by that language. It’s calling you to a place of saying, “Listen, don’t forget, we stand for what’s right. We stand against what is wrong.” Sometimes that brings us into a relational tension, where we have to say, “No, this is dishonoring to God.” It is phrased in a very unique way, where the person we are drawn to is the person who fears the Lord. This is the person who lives for the glory of God. This is the person who wants to please God with their lives.

If you look at scripture, we are told over and over again in the bible: “Do not be afraid. Don’t fear.” To godly men I would say this: **If you want to live for the Lord, then don’t live in fear.** If you struggle with that, like all of us do in some measure, God wants to create in you a spiritual strength. He wants you to hear the admonition: Be strong in the Lord and live that way as a godly man. I think it’s true for all of us, godly men and godly women.

Think about Joshua Chapter 1. Joshua is going in to lead the people to take occupation of the Promised Land. If I were giving instruction to Joshua, it would probably go something like this. “Joshua, be careful. Okay? This is not going to be easy. Some of these cities have big walls. Don’t get too close to the wall. They will throw things down on you, like hot, boiling things, and they will throw spears at you and you will get killed. Joshua, listen to me. You have been wandering around the wilderness for 40 years. You can’t just kind of aimlessly walk in. You have to have a plan.” I would fill Joshua’s heart with fear. Right?

You know what God tells Joshua over and over? “Don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid. Be courageous.” God tells him to fear one thing: God. He tells Joshua, “Take my word. Meditate on it day and night. Do what it says and you’re going to be great.” So, what does he do? He walks in and there’s a wall. I told you. God says, “Just march around the wall seven days. Shout. Blow some trumpets.” The wall falls down. I did not see that coming.

Parents, it’s so easy. We live in a troubled world. If you voice every danger, you will fill your kids with such fear. It’s really easy to do. We live in a day now where literally on my phone, every 30 seconds bad news pops up. Someone is shot. Someone is killed. Someone is this. Someone is that. Right? Never does it pop up: “Hey, someone got a promotion! Someone is having a great day!” “So and so

has been praying for this for 40 years and it just happened!” It’s a big world! There are billions of people in this world. There are some bad things happening, and all of them can be delivered right to your phone in a moment. There’s a lot to fear if you don’t know God. There’s only one thing you need to fear if you know him. I could qualify this. There are things to be aware of, and wisdom is needed, but live to please the Lord. **Right and wrong do matter.** That is the test that is most important for us in this particular category.

V. Dependability.

“...who swears to his own hurt and does not change...” This person makes a promise, then there is regret. It brings harm. It brings hurt. But they keep their word because they gave their word. The godly man or woman pays their debts. They keep their word. They keep their promises. They show up. They can be counted on.

VI. Kindness.

Verse 5: “...who does not put out his money at interest...” This is a little bit hard for us. This is contextualized in the culture of the day. Interest rates in ancient times would be 20-50%. People didn’t finance things the way we do. I’m not offering a defense for how we finance things. We need to very much be careful about debt and how we use debt and how much debt we have. People would borrow money out of desperation and they would pay these exorbitant interest rates. There would be people who would victimize individuals in their vulnerable condition. Scripture is telling us here that we don’t do that. We don’t seek to make profit off of people by taking advantage of them in those moments.

I don’t know if you’re familiar with the whole idea of payday loans. There are stores where one of their main activities is to give a loan to a person that is due on their next payday. They can be at very high interest rates. Then frequently an individual will get to their payday, and because they have nothing and they are living moment to moment, they won’t be able to pay that debt because something has come up. Then the fees and the penalties and the interest escalate till very quickly that person is completely held in bondage. It’s ungodly. The Christian should have no part of it. I understand that I am giving a label or a moniker and there might be varieties of how it’s done, but it’s a picture for us, a warning that we are to be kind.

VII. Incorruptible.

Life In His Name – Seven Character Qualities of a Godly Person

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This person does not take a bribe against the innocent. This person can't be bought. There is a consistency, a dependability. It means that the individual is not subject to being corrupted.

These last couple here -- they don't put out their money at interest, they don't take a bribe - maybe these seem a little outside of our normal interactions, but I think if we look at the headings of kindness and what it means to be incorruptible, we can see many applications for us in everyday life.

Now, let me bring us to a point of conclusion if I could. The psalm starts with this question: Who can walk with God? Who can dwell with the Lord? Who will know the presence of God in this life and for all of eternity? Then it ends with a promise. **The person who knows the presence of the Lord, the person who walks in this way shall never be moved. There is a promise of stability.**

What we do in life, dads, can create tremendous stability when it's done to the glory of God by the grace that is ours in Jesus. There is the potential of a very stabilizing influence, not just for ourselves but for everyone around us.

Williams Perkins, Drunken Perkins - do you remember him? God did such a transformation in his life. This is going to be a foreign picture to you, but one day he is standing at the gallows, watching a man ascend, about to be executed. Perkins yells out to him: "What's wrong?" That seems like an insensitive question to me. "What's wrong? Are you not ready to die?" The response comes back: "No, I'm not." So Perkins calls the man down off of the gallows and prays for him. He prays down heaven and he prays the gospel. He prays, "Lord, help this man to see that his sins can be forgiven in Jesus Christ. Help this man see that even though he doesn't deserve it, he can receive complete forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. Help this man see that in just a few seconds he is going to be standing before you. If he will trust in Christ, he will stand before you completely dressed in the spotless garments of Jesus Christ. The man is weeping, gets up, goes up on the platform, confesses Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, and dies in the peace of God.

That's an interesting, fascinating picture, but what's more fascinating to me is a man who is bound in drunkenness. He understands that now, as he is standing there, watching someone die, that could have been, that would have been, that should have been him, and he is offering grace. He has the faith to offer a dying man the grace of Jesus Christ. That's a great picture, isn't it?

And God comes to you right now, no matter who you are, and says: "Here it is. It's free. I've paid for it. Complete forgiveness. Eternal life. Righteousness." The day will come when you will stand before the Father and you will be judged. If you will trust in Jesus, you will be completely forgiven.

Life In His Name - Seven Character Qualities of a Godly Person

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And you are not on the gallows. So let's just believe for a moment that God is going to leave you here. **Every moment from now until you stand before God, he is going to be transforming your life, creating in you the character qualities of Jesus Christ.**

Isn't that good news? He could have saved William Perkins and left him in that condition for the next 40 years. Isn't it more glorious that he used him in a way that glorified him and brought stability to others? That's what God wants to do in our lives.

Let's pray.