

Psalm 15

Psalm 15:1–5

Who May Live in the Tent of Jehovah?

Outline of Chapter 15:

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vv. 1	David Asks, “Who Can Dwell in God’s Tent?”
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Charts and Maps:

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Introduction: Saul has called for David to come to him and play his lyre. Given all of the psalms that David wrote, it would be reasonable that some of them had been composed prior to his being pressed into public service. Therefore, I am going to present Psalms 15, 23 and 103 as four psalms that David composed while in the field with the sheep of his family. Unlike Psalms 18 and 30, whose time period and/or circumstance is made clear in the title, there are a number of psalms simply entitled *A Psalm of David*. I suspect that many of these were composed by a very young David while out taking care of his sheep.

Here’s the deal: the most relaxed period of David’s life was as a youth watching over his family’s sheep. Given that so many famous composers wrote at an early age (in fact, many contemporary musicians seem to do their best work in their youth, with many of the better ones in their 30’s, 40’s and 50’s playing old music in revival tours), it would be reasonable to assume that David composed many of his psalms during his youth. At this point in time, I am offering up 3; however, I would not be surprised if 20 or more of David’s psalms came from this time period.

McGee sees this as the concluding psalm for the group of psalms that go from Psalm 9 to Psalm 15. He does not imply that they were all written at the same time; however, they could have been arranged together for that reason. *Psalms 9–10 picture Satan’s man who is characterized by pride, boasting, and self-sufficiency. Psalm 11 deals with the testing of the righteous. In Psalm 12 we see the godly in the midst of godlessness and the ultimate godlessness of the great tribulation. Psalm 13 mirrors the plight of God’s people in the great tribulation. Psalm 14 shows us the depravity of man in the last days, with his atheistic attitude and his filthy and rebellious ways. Now Psalm 15 tells us about those who shall enter the kingdom.*¹

Whereas, we might be able to tie together Psalms 9–14 as related to the Great Tribulation, I don’t see Psalm 15 as a follow up and entrance into the kingdom of God, for reasons that we will delve into in the first verse. However, it is easy to make the case that Psalms 14 and 15 are contrasted psalms, the first dealing with a corrupt generation and the second with a man of integrity.

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Psalms Volume 1*; Thru the Bible Books, ©1977, p. 82.

Zodhiates, by the way, suggests that this psalm was written when David moved the Ark to Jerusalem (2Sam. 6:12–19).² I would suspect the reason he claims that is the mention of the Tent (or Tabernacle of God) in the first verse. Although this is not unreasonable, the Tent of God was not located in Jerusalem at this time. It is apparently in Gibeon (1Chron. 16:39) and Solomon will be the one to fetch it and bring it to Jerusalem (2Chron. 1:3–6). When David brought the Ark to Jerusalem, he pitched a tent for it himself (2Sam. 6:17 1Chron. 16:1). Furthermore, apart from the mention of the Tent of God in this psalm and the tent that David pitched for the Ark, there are no other thematic similarities.

Barnes, on the other hand, writes: *It is not known on what occasion [this psalm]...was written, nor is it material to know this in order to understand the psalm. It has been supposed by some that it was composed on the occasion when the ark was carried up from the house of Obed-edom (2 Sam. vi. 12, seq.), but there is nothing in the psalm itself which should lead us to refer it to that occasion, or to any other special occasion. It seems rather—like Ps. i.—to be adapted to all times and all places. It contains a general illustration of the nature of true religion, and there has been no state of things in the world in which such a psalm might not be appropriately composed; there is none in which it may not be appropriately read and pondered.*³

Psalm 15 is one of the shortest psalms in Scripture, being only five verses in length (plus a title). In this psalm, David asks, in so many words, who may spend eternity with God. In fact, we may further interpret this as not just eternal life, but eternal reward as well. David offers several behaviors which a man of honor and integrity should demonstrate.

To begin this psalm, it might be helpful to understand its overall organization.⁴

The Organization of Psalm 15

- A Who abides with Jehovah? (v. 1)
 - B The positive answer (v. 2)
 - The negative answer (v. 3)
 - B The positive answer (v. 4)
 - The negative answer (vv. 4–5b)
- A Conclusion: such a one abides with Jehovah in great stability (v. 5c)

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Although there is some disagreement on whether or not the inscriptions are a part of the inspired text, these titles are found in the Septuagint, indicating that the titles and inscriptions date at least back to 200 B.C. Furthermore, there would be no reason to think that the translators of the Septuagint inserted these, as they clearly misunderstood some of the musical terms which they translated (and often transliterated).

Slavishly literal:

Moderately literal:

[A Psalm to David](#)

Psalm
15 inscription

[A Psalm Belonging to David:](#)

[\[A Poem of David's\]](#)

² *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 1401.

³ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes, Psalms; Volume 1*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 119. I should mention that it is in the Psalms that Barnes will be at his most verbose (or, if you rather, *wax most eloquently*).

⁴ This was taken from *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*; E. W. Bullinger; ©originally 1898; reprinted 1968 Baker Books; p 135 and modified slightly.

Here is how others have handled this verse:

CEV	[A psalm by David.]
God's Word™	A psalm by David
NASB	A Psalm of David.
NJB	Psalm Of David
TEV	[no title]

What is the gist of this verse? This title simply attributes this psalm to David.

Psalm 15 inscription			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
miz ^e môwr (מִזְמוֹר) [pronounced <i>mizê-MOHR</i>]	<i>melody, song, poem, psalm</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #4210 BDB #274
lâmed (ל) (pronounced <i>l</i>)	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
Dâvid (דָּוִד); also Dâvîyd (דָּוִיִּד) [pronounced <i>daw-VEED</i>]	<i>beloved</i> and is transliterated <i>David</i>	masculine proper noun	Strong's #1732 BDB #187

Translation: A Psalm Belonging to David: As we have discussed in the past, the lâmed preposition here indicates that David as writer of this psalm more or less reached out and apprehended this psalm. It is like the musician who says that the song was already there and he reached out and grabbed it and wrote it down. David, in this way, is giving credit to God the Holy Spirit; recognizing that this psalm was not completely his own. This is in the original Scripture, and should be carried as an inscription or a title.

Since this will probably be the first psalm of David that we will study during the life and times of David, I should mention that he wrote nearly half of the psalms (73 out of 150). The author who wrote the second most psalms is Asaph, who wrote psaltry⁵ 12 psalms.

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David Asks, “Who Can Dwell in God’s Tent?”

Y^ehowah, who [temporarily] resides in Your tent?
[And] who tabernacles in a hill of Your holiness?

Psalm
15:1

O Y^ehowah, who [may] reside in Your tent
[and] who [may] pitch a tent in your holy mountain?

O Jehovah, who may reside in Your tent
and who may pitch their tent on Your holy mountain?

Here is how others have handled this verse:

⁵ Forgive me.

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	LORD, who shall dwell [temporarily] in Your tabernacle? Who shall dwell [permanently] in Your holy hill?
CEV	Who may stay in God's temple or live on the holy mountain of the LORD?
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	O Yahweh! Who shall be a guest in thy tent? Who shall abide [or, <i>make his habitation</i>] in thy holy mountain?
JPS (Tanakh)	LORD, who may sojourn in Your tent, who may dwell on Your holy mountain?
NASB	O LORD, who may abide [lit., <i>sojourn</i>] in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?
NJB	Yahweh, who can find a home in your tent, Who can dwell on your holy mountain?
NLT	Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?
Owen's Translation	Yahweh, who may live in your temple? Who may stay on Zion, your sacred hill?
REB	LORD, who may lodge in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy mountain?
The Septuagint	O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? And who will live in your holy mountain?
TEV	LORD, who may enter your Temple? Who may worship on Zion, your sacred hill?

What is the gist of this verse? David asks, *how does one have temporary fellowship with God on this earth?*

Psalm 15:1a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
YHWH (יהוה) [pronunciation is possibly <i>yhoh-WAW</i>]	transliterated variously as <i>Jehovah, Yahweh, Y^ehowah</i>	proper noun	Strong's #3069 BDB #217
mîy (מִי) [pronounced <i>mee</i>]	<i>who</i> ; occasionally rendered <i>how, in what way</i>	pronominal interrogative	Strong's #4310 BDB #566
gûwr (גּוּר) [pronounced <i>goor</i>]	<i>to temporarily reside, to sojourn</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect	Strong's #1481 BDB #157
b ^e (בְּ) [pronounced <i>b^{eh}</i>]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's #none BDB #88
ʾohel (אֹהֶל) [pronounced <i>OH-hel</i>]	<i>tent, tabernacle, house, temporary dwelling</i>	masculine singular noun with a 2 nd person masculine singular suffix; pausal form	Strong's #168 BDB #13

Psalm 15:1a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
<p>There are two words used for the <i>Tent of God</i>: <i>ohel</i> (Ex. 29:4, 10) and <i>mîsh^êkân</i> (יֹשֶׁבֶת) [pronounced <i>mish^ê-KAWN</i>], which means <i>residence, dwelling place, tabernacle, portable sanctuary, tent, abode; semi-permanent structure, semi-permanent tent, temporary dwelling place</i>. This is the word translated tabernacle throughout the end of Exodus. This is the word used more often for the <i>tabernacle</i> of God, as well as for <i>temporary dwelling place</i> (2Chron. 29:6 Job 18:21 Jer. 9:19), as found in Ex. 26, 36, 40 Num. 1, 3, 9 (yet, interestingly enough, rarely in Leviticus). These two words occur together in Ex. 40:2 Num. 3:25. The latter word seems to be more of a permanent structure, yet still based on the concept of a tent. It is a tent, nonetheless and can be taken up and pitched again (Num. 1:51). This appears to be a semi-permanent structure, like our modern-day trailer home in function. Strong's #4908 BDB #1015. I've gone into great detail here, as the verbal cognate of <i>mîsh^êkân</i> will be found in the next half of this verse.</p>			

One early printed edition has *tents*.⁶ Seeing that our Lord told His Apostles, “**In My Father’s house there are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you, for I got to prepare a place for you.**” (John 14:2), it is not unreasonable that this possible should read *tents* and was later changed to the singular, as it did not make sense to the Hebrew mind.

Translation: O Y^howah, who [may] reside in Your tent... First off, since this questions is addressed to Jehovah, we may infer that the answer will be from Jehovah. The implication is that the latter part of this psalm is therefore inspired by God (we know by doctrine, that all of the psalm is inspired by God).

It is interesting, as the verbs in parts a and b of this verse are both temporary residence words. Keil and Delitzsch distinguish them thus: *[the first] on denotes the finding of an abiding place of rest starting from the idea of a wandering life; the other the possession of an abiding place of rest starting from the idea of a settled family life.*⁷

Here, in v. 1a, the verb means *to temporarily reside, to sojourn*; it speaks of a man who is living elsewhere other than his usual home. Barnes backs me up, writing: *The Hebrew word means properly...to abide in a place as a sojourner or stranger; not permanently, but only for a while. The idea in this place is taken from the word tabernacle or tent, with which one naturally associates the thought of sojourning, rather than that of a permanent abode.*⁸ Then Barnes points us to Heb. 11:9–10: **By faith, Abraham lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow-heirs of the same promise, because he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.** Part of the idea of this passage from Hebrews is that which has to do with the earth and what man does on the earth is temporary; what God does is permanent. So, in our passage, David is asking Jehovah, “**Who may reside [for awhile] in Your tent?**”

Barnes adds: *It should not be inferred, however, that it is meant here that the residence with God would be temporary.*⁹ The key to the use of this temporary verb is the idea that we are speaking of fellowship here on earth with God. We will not live forever, therefore, our fellowship with God on this earth is not forever. We are not sinless; therefore, when sin breaks our union with God, that union must be restored (which restoration and mechanics thereof are not the topics of this psalm, per se).

⁶ Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 534.

⁷ Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament; Psalms*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 5, p. 132.

⁸ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes, Psalms; Volume 1*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 120.

⁹ Ibid.

What is meant here is fellowship with God, which is expressed by temporarily staying in His tent or house. Now, automatically, what some picture is that David is speaking of residing in the *Levitical Tent of God*. Although this is the word used for the *Tent (or, Tabernacle) of God*, it is unlikely that David is speaking of camping out in the earthly Tent of God. There are several places in Scripture where the *Tent of God* does not refer to the Levitical place of offerings.

Why Do We Know that David Is NOT Speaking of the Tabernacle of God?

Scripture	Reason
Ex. 25:8 29:43–46	There were numerous purposes for God establishing His Tabernacle as a religious sanctuary. One of them was that it indicated that God lived among the Jews, from which we may infer fellowship between man and God. This purpose of the Levitical Tent of God is key in correctly understanding this psalm.
Our study of 1Sam. 5–7	It is unlikely that the Tent (or, <i>Tabernacle</i>) of God is set up and functioning in Israel as it did during the early years of Samuel (recall that Samuel is an old man now and David is in his teens; therefore, the Tent of God probably was never in operation during the lifetime of David). All the evidence seems to indicate that, sometime during the time of Samuel, the Philistines came in and burned down the city of Shiloh, although the Tent of God apparently escaped unscathed. However, it does not appear to be functioning during the latter lifetime of Samuel, the early years of David, which would have been the time during which this psalm was composed.
1Chron. 22:19 28:1–21	David wanted to build a House for God, but it was to be his son Solomon's responsibility. I mention this so that it is clear that there was no Temple of God during the time of David.
1Kings 8:4 2Chron. 1:3–5	Solomon brought the Tent of God, which was in Gibeon, into the Temple. Although we have this mention of it being used during the time of Solomon, we do not have a mention in Scripture of the Tent of God being used during the life of David (with the possible exception of 2Sam. 12:20).
Psalm 15:2–5	As we will see, what David is speaking of here is temporary fellowship with God here on earth. Given that the Levitical Tent of God was not designed as a residence for man, this psalm would make little sense to understand it in that way.
Psalm 20:2	David speaks of God sending help from the sanctuary and support from Zion. Again, this is not to be literally understood, but to be taken as support from God during a time of crisis.
Psalm 23:6	Surely prosperity and grace will pursue me all the days of my life. I will dwell in the house of Jehovah forever. One of the most famous quotations from the psalms. Given that the Tent of God was temporary, it would make more sense to understand here that David is enjoying fellowship with God forever.
Psalm 27:4–5	The Tent of God is spoken of as a place of refuge, which was not the purpose of the Tabernacle of God. One thing I have asked from Jehovah, that I will seek: that I may live in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life, to behold the graciousness of Jehovah and to meditate in His temple. For in the day of trouble, He will conceal me in His tabernacle in the secret place of His tent, He will hide me; He will lift me up like a rock. This is another psalm of David, and, we already know that Solomon has not yet build the Temple of God. We have discussed the Tent of God and that it was not operational during the time of David. Furthermore, David is being concealed in the tabernacle of God in the day of trouble (or distress). This was never the purpose of the Tent or Temple of God. Therefore, we are not speaking of even a literal shelter of some sort, but of God acting as a shelter for David.

Why Do We Know that David Is NOT Speaking of the Tabernacle of God?

Scripture	Reason
Psalm 61:4	<p style="color: blue; margin: 0;">Let me live in Your tent forever; let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings.</p> <p>God does not have wings; furthermore, the Levitical Tent of God would be replaced by the Temple. Therefore, we are not speaking of the Levitical Tent of God here, but again, of God's protection (taking refuge in the shelter of God's wings) and eternal fellowship (Let me live in Your tent forever).</p>

When interpreting Scripture, I first opt for the most literal understanding. However, if there is strong reason to take a less literal view, then we must explore that option. In Psalm 61:4, living in God's tent forever suggests something different than the Levitical Tent of God (which was not designed to be a residence for man). The anthropomorphic reference to *God's wings* suggests that we not understand this as a literal interpretation. So it is with our presence passage; what David describes, given his time period and given the context, is not related to the Levitical Tent of God.

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Psalm 15:1b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
5 early printed editions, the Septuagint, the Syriac and the Vulgate all have <i>Or who...</i> ¹⁰ The Massoretic text lacks the connective.			
mîy (מִי) [pronounced <i>mee</i>]	<i>who</i> ; occasionally rendered <i>how</i> , <i>in what way</i>	pronominal interrogative	Strong's #4310 BDB #566
shâkan (שָׁכַן) [pronounced <i>shaw-KAHN</i>]	<i>to tabernacle, to pitch a tent; to dwell, to reside, to live in, to domicile at, to settle, to settle down, to encamp</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect	Strong's #7931 BDB #1014
This is the word whose cognate is <i>tabernacle</i> , which is a reference is to a <i>semi-permanent residence</i> . The idea here is <i>to dwell in a semi-permanent state with the option of leaving</i> .			
There is another verb which is used more often with the idea of <i>to dwell, to reside</i> for a long time: <i>yâsha</i> ^{bv} (יָשָׁב) [pronounced <i>yaw-SHAH^{bv}V</i>], which means <i>to remain, to inhabit, to sit, to dwell</i> . We find it used in the sense of dwelling for a very long time or eternally in 1Sam. 1:22 Psalm 23:6. However, there are obviously times where the end result was not a permanent dwelling place (Gen. 13:12 19:29 Ex. 12:40). Strong's #3427 BDB #442.			
b ^e (בְּ) [pronounced <i>b^{eh}</i>]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's #none BDB #88
har (הַר) [pronounced <i>har</i>]	<i>hill, mountain, hill-country</i>	masculine singular construct	Strong's #2042 (and #2022) BDB #249

¹⁰ Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 534. Or *And who...* Interestingly enough, I had inserted an *and* here prior to reading this footnote in *The Emphasized Bible*.

Psalm 15:1b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
qôdesh (קֹדֶשׁ) [pronounced koh-DESH]	<i>holiness, sacredness, apartness, that which is holy, holy things</i>	masculine singular noun with the 2 nd person masculine singular suffix; pausal form	Strong's #6944 BDB #871

Translation: ...[and] who [may] pitch a tent in Your holy mountain? Again, there is a temporary feel to this question, although not as temporary as the previous half of v. 1. David is not asking about who actually lives with God in His holy mountain, but who is able to pitch a semi-permanent tent (or, park a travel trailer)—that is, live temporarily—in the holy mountain of God. In other words, I don't believe that we are speaking of eternity, but of time (even though the potential is for a long time); I don't think that we are speaking of eternal life here, but of fellowship. This would be a temporary/semi-permanent state of affairs.

First off, what is *God's holy mountain*? David is not speaking of some particular religious place where he was going to go and build a house to live in. The Tabernacle of God, which may or may not have been functioning during the time of David, was in Gibeon, and is called the *great high place* in 1Kings 3:4. It is where Solomon goes to offer a thousand burnt offerings. In the time of Moses, God's holy mountain would have been Mount Sinai. The idea here is not, which exact place are we talking about, Mount Sinai or the high place of Gibeon (and most interpret this passage as a reference to Jerusalem)¹¹; but fellowship with God here on earth. Man appears to commune with God in these high places; but David is not speaking of moving to one of those places to live, but he is simply expressing poetically a place on earth where one is *close* to God. What is to follow is not a set of specific geographical directions (first you get on the King's Highway and turn left...), but moral directions that one must take.

The word for *living* or *residing* is more permanent than v. 1a, but not necessarily permanent, and it is not the most permanent word that David could have used (see the notes in the Hebrew above). Think of this more as an extended fellowship.

Keil and Delitzsch agree that we should have a spiritual and not literal understanding here: *The holy tabernacle and the holy mountain are here thought of in their spiritual character as the places of the divine presence and of the church of God assembled round the symbol of it; and accordingly the sojourning and dwelling there is not to be understood literally, but in a spiritual sense. This spiritual depth of view, first of all with local limitations, is also to be found in [Psalms] 2 7:4, 5; 61:5.*¹²

Psalm 24:3–5 (also written by David) asks a similar question: *Who may ascend into the hill of Jehovah and who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully—he will receive a blessing from Jehovah and righteousness from the God of his salvation.* One must be careful not to interpret Scripture out of its context or apart from other Scriptures. Rev. 5:1–10: *And I saw in the right hand of Him Who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worth to open the book and to break its seals?" And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it. And I wept greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book or to read it. Then one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; listen, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals." And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. And He came and He took it out of the right hand of Him Who sat on the throne. And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each on a harp*

¹¹ Also a faulty interpretation, particularly if this psalm were written during David's early years when, as far as we know, Jerusalem had no real spiritual significance.

¹² Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament; Psalms*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 5, p. 132.

and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worth You are to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain and you purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” This gist of this passage is, there is only One Who is righteous—the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Root of David.

A reasonable question is, *then why this psalm, if no one but the Christ is righteous?* This psalm deals with experiential righteousness; that is, the righteousness of the believer *after* salvation. This is not to say that all believers behave this way after salvation; this is how those behave who are experientially righteous and who have an active relationship with God.

It is my choice here to see this psalm as one which David composed under the stars while watching his sheep. Perhaps he composes this as he looks off into the distance to the hills or mountains around, thinking back to Moses on Mount Sinai, or thinking of the Tabernacle of God, which may or may not be functioning at this time. He considers God and fellowship with God, and thinks about what kind of behavior is correct and admirable. However, as Barnes has pointed out, there is nothing in the psalm to connect it directly with any time period or circumstance.

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David Answers His Own Question

**Walking complete
and doing righteousness
and speaking truth in his mind.**

Psalm
15:2

**[The one] walking complete [and without
blemish]
and doing righteousness
and thinking [lit., *speaking*] truth in his mind.**

**He who walks without blemish
and does righteousness
and thinks truth in his inner being.**

Here is how others have handled this verse:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	He who walks <i>and</i> lives uprightly <i>and</i> blamelessly, who works rightness <i>and</i> justice, and speaks <i>and</i> thinks the truth in his heart.
CEV	Only those who obey God and do as they should, They speak the truth...
<i>God's Word™</i>	The one who walks with integrity, does what is righteous, and speaks the truth within his heart.
JPS (Tanakh)	He who lives without blame, Who does what is right, And in his heart acknowledges the truth;...
NASB	He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart.
NLT	Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts.
NRSV	Those who walk blamelessly, and who do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart.
REB	One of blameless life, who does what is right and speaks the truth from his heart;...
The Septuagint	He that walks blameless, and works righteousness, who speaks truth in his heart.

TEV A person who obeys God in everything
and always does what is right,
whose words are true and sincere,...

Young's Updated LT He who is walking uprightly,
And working righteousness,
And speaking truth in his heart.

What is the gist of this verse? David has asked, in the previous verse, *how does one have fellowship with God?* He gives the general answer in this verse: you must function without sin, you must do that which is right and you must know God's truth.

Before I begin to exegete this verse word by word, I want you to understand why this verse gives us a general answer and why the subsequent verses give specific answers. How do I know that? First of all, the answers themselves go from a general answer and then they become very specific. However, v. 2 is different from the subsequent verses as a matter of syntax. Every verb in v. 2 will be a Qal active participle. This stands out to the Hebrew reader. The verbs in v. 3 will all be Qal perfect verbs. After that, we will have a mixture of types of verbs which are appropriate to the context. The Qal active participle denotes simple, continuous action.

The second aspect to this verse is the way the two verbs are overt actions followed by internal action. *The characterising of the outward walk and action is followed...by the characterising of the inward nature: speaking truth in his heart.*¹³ There was a parallelism in the verbs in the first verse, and this follows suit.

Psalm 15:2a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
hâlak ^e (הָלַךְ) [pronounced <i>haw-LAHK^e</i>]	<i>to go, to come, to depart, to walk; to advance</i>	Qal active participle	Strong's #1980 (and #3212) BDB #229
tâmîym (תָּמִים) [pronounced <i>taw-MEEM</i>]	<i>complete, whole, entire, sufficient, without blemish</i>	adjective	Strong's #8549 BDB #1071

Translation: [The one] walking complete [and without blemish]... In the previous verse, David asks the question, *who can temporarily live in Y^ehowah's house?* He also asks, *who can pitch a tent on His holy mountain?* David will spend the rest of this psalm answering those questions. However, in this verse, what he does is give an overview. Now, I mentioned that the key is temporary living. We are not speaking of eternity here, but of fellowship in time. That fellowship can exist and be a quality experience or it can be lost. First, the key is, *walking without blemish*. First off, *walking* generally refers in Scripture to one's manner of life; it is *how they journey* through life.

The second word is *tâmîym*. *Tâmîym* means *complete, whole, entire, without blemish*. There is more being conveyed here than simply being *without blemish*. This refers to one who is complete as a person. The only way one can be complete or whole as a person is to have believed in Jesus Christ. What is inferred here is that this person is both complete and *without blemish*. Now, I don't know about you, but I know of very few people who have no blemishes, who do not sin, who do not have mental attitude sins that they express with their tongues. However, for there to be fellowship with God, one must function apart from sin. So, once in fellowship, one maintains this fellowship by not sinning. Sinning is what breaks the fellowship of man and God. Recall that we just found nearly the same question and the same answer in Psalm 24:3-5: Who may ascend into the hill of Jehovah and who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully—he will receive a blessing from Jehovah and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

¹³ Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament; Psalms*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 5, p. 132.

In order to have clean hands and a pure heart, you must first be a believer, and then be in fellowship via the naming of your sins. *Waling without blemish* is the same thing here.

Psalm 15:2b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
w ^ə (or v ^ə) (ו) [pronounced <i>weh</i>]	<i>and</i>	simple wāw conjunction	No Strong's # BDB #251
pā'al (לַעַל) [pronounced <i>paw-GAHL</i>]	<i>to do, to make, to construct, to fabricate, to prepare</i>	Qal active participle	Strong's #6466 BDB #821
This word is the poetical equivalent of 'āsâh (which means <i>to do, to make, to construct</i>). Strong's# 6213 BDB# 793)			
tsedeq (צֶדֶק) [pronounced <i>TZEH-dehk</i>]	<i>righteousness, rightness, vindication</i>	masculine singular substantive	Strong's #6664 BDB #841

Translation: ...and doing righteousness... When a person is sinless, there is more to the life of the believer than simply functioning without sin. You have to do more than simply avoid doing that which is wrong. You must also do that which is right. The Law of Moses was more than a list of don'ts; there are also a large number of do's. These do's are of course covered in great detail in the Law, and David will also cover them here in this psalm. So, certainly, you cannot kill, you cannot commit adultery, you cannot disrespect your parents. However, there is more to fellowship with God than a righteousness that is simply not sinning. Sure, you cannot kill; but you cannot hate or speak viciously about another as well. And, those people about whom you would speak evil; you cannot simply ignore them; if they need help, you cannot just walk by.

What the Jews did when it came to their money is they would declare it *corban* and therefore, be unable to use it to, say, support their parents in their old age. They would say, "Sorry, but this money has been set aside for God. Obviously, I cannot touch it for that reason." Meanwhile, his own parents go without. That was the corban gimmick that one could use so that he could *respect his parents* without supporting them when they need it.

Barnes comment on this portion of the verse: *Does [that which is] right. That is, he does what is proper to be done in relation to God and to man...The doctrine is everywhere laid down in the Scriptures that no man can be a friend of God who does not do habitually what is right.*¹⁴ Barnes refers us to two passages: Micah 6:8: *God has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Jehovah require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?* And 1John 3:6–10: *No one abiding in Him sins; no one while sinning has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appears for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. At the moment when anyone is born of God, he cannot practice sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this, the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.*

¹⁴ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes, Psalms; Volume 1*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 120.

Psalm 15:2c			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
w ^e (or v ^e) (וּ) [pronounced <i>weh</i>]	<i>and</i>	simple wâw conjunction	No Strong's # BDB #251
dâ ^b var (דַּבַּר) [pronounced <i>daw^b-VAHR</i>]	<i>to speak, to declare, to proclaim, to announce</i>	Qal active participle	Strong's #1696 BDB #180
ʿemeth (אֱמֶת) [pronounced <i>EH-meth</i>]	<i>firmness, faithfulness, truth, certainty, stability, perpetuity, fidelity, reliable, stable, dependable</i>	feminine singular noun	Strong's #571 BDB #54
b ^e (בְּ) [pronounced <i>b^{eh}</i>]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's #none BDB #88
lê ^b va ^b v (לֵבַב) [pronounced <i>lay^b-V^bAHV</i>]	<i>mind, inner man, inner being, heart</i>	masculine singular noun with a 3 rd person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #3824 BDB #523

Translation: ...and thinking [lit., speaking] truth in his mind. Here is something that many pastors leave out when they speak of righteousness and fellowship with God—you must be able to think doctrine; your mind must be filled with God's truth. Your inner being (lê^bva^bv) has to be filled with Bible doctrine. We know, by the way, that this is *thinking* and not actual *talking* to which David is referring; the key is the word lê^bva^bv, which means *mind, inner man, inner being, heart*. This portion of this psalm is what suggests to me that David wrote this in solitude. He had a soul full of doctrine and he had a lot of time, while shepherding his father's flock, to think about it. If you spend any amount of time alone, you may find yourself *talking* to yourself—not out loud, but in clear, definable sentences. David, while alone, had a lot of time to ponder truth, his place in the world, and God; the result was that he *spoke truth in his mind*.

Therefore, the short answer to the questions that David asks—*How does one have temporary and semi-permanent fellowship with God [on this earth]?* You have to function without sin (which requires you to name your sins to God when you sin), you must do that which is right, and you must have a soul filled with God's truth (that is, you must know Bible doctrine).

Keil and Delitzsch tell us *The distich which contains the question and that containing the general answer [i.e., vv. 1–2] are now followed by three tristichs [vv. 3–5], which work the answer out in detail. The description is continued in independent clauses, which, however, have logically the value of relative clauses.*¹⁵

**He has not moved [with his feet] upon his tongue;
he has not done against his associate evil;
and reproach he has not lifted [or, carried] against his near [one].**

Psalm 15:3

**He has not moved upon his tongue [to gossip];
he has not done evil [or, iniquity] against his associate [or, neighbor] ;
and he has not lifted up [or, carried] scorn against his near acquaintance.**

¹⁵ Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament; Psalms*; 1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 5, p. 132.

**He has not gone out to gossip;
he does not cause his neighbor to be miserable;
and he does not scorn those who are near.**

Here is how others have handled this verse:

CEV	[They speak the truth] and don't spread gossip; they treat others fairly and don't say cruel things. [I've include the last portion of v. 2 for context]
God's Word™	The one who does not slander with his tongue, do evil to a friend, or bring disgrace on his neighbor.
JPS (Tanakh)	...whose tongue is not given to evil; who has never done harm to his fellow, or bourn reproach for [his acts toward] his neighbor;...
NAB	Who does not slander a neighbor, does no harm to another, never defames a friend;...
NASB	He does not slander with [lit., <i>according to</i>] his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend;...
NJB	who keeps the tongue under control, who does not wrong a comrade, who casts no discredit on a neighbour,...
NLT	Those who refuse to slander others or harm their neighbors or speak evil of their friends.
REB	who has no malice on his tongue, who never wrongs his fellow, and tells no tales against his neighbour.
The Septuagint	Who has not spoken craftily with his tongue, neither has done evil to his neighbor, nor taken up a reproach against them that live near to him.
TEV	...and who does not slander others. He does no wrong to his friends nor spreads rumors about his neighbors.
Young's Updated LT	He has not slandered by his tongue, He has not done to his friend evil; And reproach he has not lifted up against his neighbor.

What is the gist of this verse? The person in fellowship with God does not commit sins against those he comes into contact with.

Psalm 15:3a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
לֹא־ (אֵלֹא־ אוֹ אֵלֵּלֹא־) [pronounced low]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
רָגַל (רָגַל־) [pronounced raw-GAHL]	<i>to move the feet, to foot it, to tread, to go about</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect	Strong's #7270 BDB #920

Psalm 15:3a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
<p>ʿal (עַל) [pronounced <i>gahl</i>]</p>	<p><i>upon, beyond, on, against, above, over; on the ground of, according to, on account of, on behalf of, concerning, besides, in addition to, together with, beyond, above, over, by on to, towards, to, against, in the matter of, concerning, as regards to</i></p>	<p>preposition of proximity</p>	<p>Strong's #5921 BDB #752</p>
<p>lâshôwn (לָשׁוֹן) [pronounced <i>law-SHOHN</i>]</p>	<p><i>tongue; lapping; tongue-shaped</i></p>	<p>masculine singular noun with a 3rd person masculine singular suffix</p>	<p>Strong's #3956 BDB #546</p>

When I first looked in Owen and saw the spelling, and then looked back at my Hebrew lexicon, I thought that there must have been a mistake and that there was another word on that same BDB page which was more apropos. You see, in the Piel, this is the word used for what the spies did when they first went into the Land of Promise to get an idea of what lay before them. However, this word is used in contrast to *walking without blemish* in the previous verse.

Translation: [He has not moved upon his tongue \[to gossip\];...](#) The verb here is the same verb used to tell us what the spies did in the Land of Promise. They *explored* the land; they *spied out* the land (the verb is in the Piel in the book of Joshua). The idea is that they *walked* all over the Land of Promise in order to check out what was there. The idea here is that one moves around on foot to spread gossip, slander and lies about others. This verse tells us that we are not supposed to wander about gossiping and picking up information (juicy gossip) about others to carry about to the next house. We know that we are speaking of gossip because this is done *upon, according to, in addition to* the tongue. The moving about is associated with the tongue, and therefore means to spread gossip.

We covered the **Doctrine of the Sins of the Tongue** back in Lev. 19:16. These include slander, gossip, to circulate with evil reports; maligning, judging, backbiting; lying and perjury. The sins of the tongue are every bit as vicious and wrong as any other sin; in fact, in the list of the seven worst sins, three of them are sins of the tongue (Prov. 6:16–19).

David was naturally sensitive to sins of the tongue. He was the victim of these sins with his brother. As we saw, when David needed information about Goliath, he did not ask his older brothers, but he went to two other sets of soldiers. When his brothers overheard him, the oldest verbally reamed him out. In 1Sam. 16, I suggested that David was not held in high regard by his father because he was a redhead; if neither Jesse nor his wife were redheaded, this would explain a great deal of the natural prejudice which David endured. We understand today that such a thing is possible, as long as both parents have the recessive red haired gene, neither can have red hair, but they can bear children with red hair. In any case, this would have been one explanation as to the sort of treatment which David received. Having been on the receiving end of verbal sins all of his life, David would certainly mention this category of sins in his writing. Asaph refers to verbal sins in Psalm 50:19–20: [“You let your mouth loose in evil and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son.”](#) Had there not been Asaph’s name in the title, I would have thought that this was written by David.

Psalm 15:3b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
lô` (לֹא or לֹא־) [pronounced low]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
ʿâsâh (עָשָׂה) [pronounced gaw-SAWH]	<i>to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect	Strong's #6213 BDB #793
lâmed (ל) (pronounced l) ¹⁶	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
rêa` (רֵעַ) [pronounced RAY-ahg]	<i>associate, neighbor, colleague, fellow, acquaintance</i>	masculine singular noun with a 3 rd person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #7453 BDB #945
râ`âh (רָעָה) [pronounced raw-GAW]	<i>evil, misery, distress, disaster, injury, iniquity, aberration, that which is morally reprehensible</i>	feminine singular noun	Strong's #7451 BDB #948

Translation: ...he has not done evil [or, iniquity] against his associate [or, neighbor];... You have no doubt heard of the neighbors or co-workers who do this or that or the other thing against one another. They are unhappy, so they see what they can do to make those near them unhappy. The cause misery, evil and iniquity towards their associates. I've worked with people like this. They would walk to be together to gossip and to spread malicious evil about others to one another (and they would do it loudly with others around, hoping to infect them; or while the subject of their gossip was around, hoping to humiliate him). The idea here is that, the person to whom this evil is being committed is not a friend, but someone who is associated with the person doing the evil. They could be neighbors, co-workers, associates, etc. There is some sort of a relationship which brings them in proximity with one another, and one uses that proximity to do evil against the other. This could be gossip, slander, or any sin of the tongue.

Application: Having taught teenagers for years, one of the things which stands out particularly as of late, is their increased propensity to gossip and to believe most or all of whatever gossip that they hear. Most of them do not even have the slightest clue that what they are doing is wrong, hurtful, damaging, and vicious. They view themselves as *informative* or as *speaking their minds*. By the way, the next time you visit with someone who categorizes himself¹⁶ as blunt or as a person who just says what is on his mind, you will notice this: (1) they do not mind saying anything hurtful toward another person; particularly when it is someone that they do not like. (2) their self-proclaimed honesty or bluntness rarely expresses self-examination that puts themselves in a bad light. "You know, I am gossiping again, and I do that far too often." Or, "This is the 3rd time today that I have badmouthed Charlie Brown, and I really don't know enough to be expressing an opinion about him." Or, "I am getting too fat, and I lack the self-discipline to exercise and eat carefully." Or, "I am really having trouble in that class because I am not a very intelligent person, I talk too much, I daydream, I write notes, and I often copy other people's homework." David, three thousand years ago, tells us that a person with integrity does not speak ill of his neighbors, associates, friends, fellow students or coworkers; he does not do evil against them (which can be participating or initiating in overt sinning or a verbal sinning against them). We need young people today with personal integrity, who do not badmouth and slander others, and who do not spread rumors, and who do not report what they see or what they think they see to everyone they know when it puts someone else in a bad light. David may have wrote this three

¹⁶ This is the generic use; I am referring even more to young females here.

thousand years ago, but it needs to be said today; his words need to be proclaimed to our young people today. God's Word never goes out of date.

Application: Allow me another tangent, if you will: God's Word is filled with absolutes. We do not get to pick and choose these absolutes and we do not get to reinterpret them in the light of current mores. The Bible is *not* the Constitution of the United States, which is constantly reinterpreted to fit in with the mores of our society (had any of the founding fathers been alive to see how much their vision has been corrupted, they would be amazed and disillusioned). But the Bible is not a document which we get to change to conform with our own sensibilities. If a local church is going to, for instance, condone same sex unions, then they should not pretend that the Bible condones this as well; if a local church is going to put a woman at its helm, they should not pretend that the Bible endorses this sort of leadership (even if it is often superior to a man's). They should simply do what the Catholic Church does—when they want to make some sweeping change which does not conform to Scripture, they have decided that whatever the pope proclaims, that's the way it is. Now, don't get me wrong—absolute papal authority is an abomination to Scripture; but at least it's an honest abomination. They don't have to pretend as though they are following Scripture for this doctrine or that.

Application: Allow me another tangent, if you will: I mentioned homosexuality. It is the act, not the orientation, which is a sin. It is just as much of a sin for the heterosexual man who sleeps around (this means simply that he sleeps with someone other than his wife, before or after marriage). Both kinds of people can attend the same church and both can grow in that local church. If either man flaunts his sins to the congregation, then there would be reason to separate them from the congregation. The same applies to a prostitute. A church could have a congregation filled with prostitutes. That's not a problem; however, if they flaunt their sins before the congregation as righteousness, that is a problem. One of the ways to get tossed out of Berachah Church was to gossip and slander other believers. Every single person in your local church sins; every single person in your local church has a weakness, and sometimes several. It is not the business of the church to follow anyone around to see if they sin or not, because, quite frankly, they will. The problem is when a person presents their sins and weaknesses as righteousness. The problem is when a member of the congregation touts their sins as something to be admired and respected and their sinful behavior as something to be emulated. I have occasionally attended church with a same-sex roommate. Someone else might attend church with a same-sex sexual partner. It is not the church's business to follow either pair of us around to determine who is homosexual and who is not. Obviously, when the homosexual couple engages in homosexual behavior, that is a sin, and should be confessed to God by both partners, if they are believers.

Application: Another tangent: what about the argument, *God made me this way?* God is a loving God, He made me, I have been a homosexual from my earliest remembrance, therefore, God made me a homosexual, and I should celebrate that fact. The problem with such an argument is that we all have an old sin nature which is inexorably attached to our genetic structure. Can someone be born with the predisposition to become a homosexual? Absolutely. There are been recent studies (I am writing this in 2003) where it has become clear that there is a much greater interaction between genetic predisposition and environment that was realized before. That is, things which occur in our environment can affect our genetic predisposition. A simple example is intelligence. Someone can be born with the intelligence of Albert Einstein; however, if this person is deprived of early sensory learning (for instance, if they are kept in a closet for much of the first 3 years of their life), their intelligence level can be severely restricted. It is possible to take a genius baby and manipulate their environment so that they learn a hundred words at most by the time they are adults (and never be able to recover from the sensory deprivation).

Psalm 15:3c			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
w ^ə (or v ^ə) (ו) [pronounced <i>weh</i>]	<i>and</i>	simple wāw conjunction	No Strong's # BDB #251

Psalm 15:3c

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
cher ^h pâh (חַרְפָּה) [pronounced <i>kher-PAW</i>]	<i>a reproach, a taunt, scorn, shame, disgrace</i>	feminine singular noun	Strong's #2781 BDB #357
lô' (לֹא or לֹא־) [pronounced <i>low</i>]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
nâsâ' (נָשָׂא) [pronounced <i>naw-SAW</i>]	<i>to lift up, to bear, to carry</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect	Strong's #5375 (and #4984) BDB #669
ʿal (עַל) [pronounced <i>gahl</i>]	<i>upon, beyond, on, against, above, over; on the ground of, according to, on account of</i>	preposition of proximity	Strong's #5921 BDB #752
qârô ^v (קָרָב) [pronounced <i>kaw-RO^v</i>]	<i>near [in place or time], contiguous, imminent; near in relation, intimate acquaintance; that which is familiar to us; one who brings aide to another</i>	masculine adjective used as a substantive, with a 3 rd person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #7138 BDB #898

Translation: ...and he has not lifted up (or, carried) scorn against his near acquaintance. Here, we are speaking of one who is near—it could be a close friend, a brother, sister or other family member. One does not lift up (and, by implication, heap upon another) taunting, scorn, shame, or disgrace. Why do you think David wrote this? His brothers—in 1Sam. 17:28, his oldest brother, instead of being protective, lifts up and dumps on David scorn, reproach and taunting.

Keil and Delitzsch: *[To lift up scorn] means...to bring reproach on anyone, or load anyone with reproach. Reproach is a burden which is more easily put on than cast off.*¹⁷

Barnes elaborates: *The idea is that of taking up, or receiving as true, or readily giving credit to it. He is slow to believe evil of another. He does not grasp at it greedily as if he had pleasure in it. He does not himself originate such a reproach, nor does he readily and cheerfully credit it when it is stated by others. If he is constrained to believe it, it is only because the evidence becomes so strong that he cannot resist it, and his believing it is contrary to all the desires of his heart. this is true religion everywhere; but this is contrary to the conduct of no small part of the world. There are large classes of persons to whom nothing is more acceptable than reproachful accusations of others, and who embrace no reports more readily than they do those which impute bad conduct or bad motives to them. Often there is nothing more marked in true conversion than the change which is produced in this respect. He who delighted in gossip and in slanderous reports of others; who found pleasure in the alleged failings and errors of his neighbours; who gladly lent a listening ear to the first intimations of this kind, and who cheerfully contributed his influence in giving circulation to such things, augmenting such reports as they passed through his hands, —now sincerely rejoices on hearing everybody well spoken of, and does all that can be done consistently with truth to check such reports, and to secure to every man a good name.*¹⁸

¹⁷ Keil & Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament; Psalms*; 1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 5, p. 133.

¹⁸ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes, Psalms; Volume 1*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 121.

What we have in this verse are three specific activities that one is *not* to be involved in. If you want temporal fellowship with God, then you do not lift up and dump scorn and taunting on someone who is near to you; you do not do evil against someone that you are associated with (even if you don't like them); and you do not spend your time walking about getting (or spreading) the dirt on this person or that.

<p>Being despised in his eyes rejecting ones and those fearing Y^howah he honors. He has sworn to cause evil [or, to his neighbor] and he does not change.</p>	<p>Psalm 15:4</p>	<p>In his eyes, the rejected one is despised [or, regarded with contempt], but he honors those fearing [and reverencing] Y^howah. He is sworn [by an oath] [even] to [his own] hurt [or, to his neighbor] and he does not change.</p>
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**He despises those whom God rejects
but he honors those who fear and respect Jehovah.
He will not back down from an oath, even to his own hurt.**

Here is how others have handled this verse:

CEV	They hate worthless people, but show respect for all who worship the LORD. And they keep their promises, no matter what the cost.
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	Despised in his sight is the reprobate But <them who revere Yahweh> he doth honour, He hath sworn to his neighbour, and will not change;...
<i>God's Word™</i>	The one who despised those rejected by God but honors those who fear the LORD. The one who makes a promise and does not break it, even though he is hurt by it.
JPS (Tanakh)	...for whom a contemptible man is abhorrent, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who stands by his oath even to his hurt;...
NASB	In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt, and does not change.
NJB	...who looks with scorn on the vile, but honours those who fear Yahweh, who stand by an oath at any cost,...
NKJV	In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; He <i>who</i> swears to his own hurt and does not change;...
NLT	Those who despise persistent sinners, and honor the faithful followers of the LORD and keep their promises even when it hurts.
REB	...who shows his scorn for those the LORD rejects, but honors those who fear the LORD; who holds to his oath even to his own hurt [even...hurt: prob. rdg; Heb. To do evil],...
The Septuagint	In his sight an evil-worker is set at nought, but he honors them who fear the Lord. He swears to his neighbor and does not disappoints [him].
TEV	He despises those whom God rejects, but honors those who obey the LORD. He always does what he promises,

no matter how much it may cost.
 Despised in his eyes is a rejected one,
 And those fearing Jehovah he does honor.
 He has sworn to endure [or suffer] evil and change not.

What is the gist of this verse? The believer with integrity is willing to reject those whom God has rejected and to honor those who believe in Him. The second part of this verse is confusing in the Masoretic text; it appears to say that, when the person of integrity makes a vow, even if it adversely affects him, he still carries it out. In the Greek, it is much simpler—when a person of integrity makes a vow to his neighbor, he keeps the vow.

Psalm 15:4a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
bâzâh (בָּזָאָה) [pronounced <i>baw-ZAW</i>]	<i>to be despised, to be regarded with contempt, despicable, contemptible</i>	Niphal participle	Strong's #959 BDB #102
Here, the Niphal appears to take more of an active than passive meanings. Even though the Niphal is the passive of the Qal stem, but it can also refer to an action in a state of progress or development; therefore we add in the word <i>being</i> .			
b ^e (בְּ) [pronounced <i>b^{eh}</i>]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's #none BDB #88
ʿayin (עַיִן) [pronounced GAH-yin]	<i>spring, literal eye(s), spiritual eyes, spring</i>	feminine plural noun with a 3 rd person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #5869 (and #5871) BDB #744
mâ`aç (מָאַץ) [pronounced <i>maw-AHS</i>]	<i>rejected, despised, lightly esteemed; to ooze out, to waste away, to dissipate</i>	Niphal participle	Strong's #3988 BDB #549

Translation: *In his eyes, the rejected one is despised* [or, *regarded with contempt*]... In this world, God rejects those who reject Him. When you recognize just how easy salvation is (by simply believing in Jesus Christ), it is difficult to imagine that someone would choose to reject God their entire lives—however, they do. Therefore, those who are rejected by God, he despises or regards with contempt.

One of the Scriptural references which I unearthed is Esther 3:2. Mordecai, a Jew, would not bow down and pay homage to Haman, and Haman sought to destroy all of the Jews in Persia. Mordecai would not honor such a man of evil. There are certain people to whom you do not give honor—any man who is anti-Semitic does not deserve your honor. Any leader today in the middle east who publically expresses anti-Semitism or commits acts of anti-Semitism does not deserve honor. Bear in mind, in the application of this verse, God only rejects those who reject Him.

Barnes: That is, [a man] who does not show respect to a man of base or bad character on account of his wealth, his position, or his rank in life. He estimates character as it is in itself, and not as derived from rank, relationship, or station. While, as stated in the previous verse, he is not disposed to take up a false or evil report against another, he is at the same time disposed to do justice to all, and does not honour those who do not deserve to be honoured, or apologise for base conduct because it is committed by one of exalted station or rank. Loving virtue and piety for their own sake, he hates all that is opposite; and where conduct deserves reprobation, no matter where found, he does not hesitate

to avow his conviction in regard to it.¹⁹ The sentiment here, Barnes goes on to say, is not unlike that found in Psalm 1:1–2: [How happy is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the sea of the verbally derisive, but he delights in the Law of Jehovah and in His Law he studies day and night.](#)

Psalm 15:4b			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
w ^é (or v ^é) (וּ) [pronounced <i>weh</i>]	<i>and</i>	simple wâw conjunction	No Strong's # BDB #251
ʿêth (תּא) [pronounced <i>ayth</i>]	generally untranslated	indicates that the following substantive is a direct object	Strong's #853 BDB #84
yârêṯ (אִרָא) [pronounced <i>yaw-RAY</i>]	<i>to fear, to fear-respect, to reverence, to have a reverential respect</i>	masculine plural construct, Qal active participle	Strong's #3372 BDB #431
YHWH (יהוה) [pronunciation is possibly <i>yhoh-WAW</i>]	transliterated variously as <i>Jehovah, Yahweh, Y^éhowah</i>	proper noun	Strong's #3069 BDB #217
kâ ^b vêd (כָּבֵד) [pronounced <i>kaw^b-VADE</i>]	<i>to make heavy, to make insensible; to honor, to do honor to</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Piel imperfect	Strong's #3513 BDB #457

Translation: ...but he honors those fearing [and reverencing] Y^éhowah. On the other hand, those who believe in Jesus Christ and who reverence Him, those he shows respect and honor to. This honor and respect due those who have believed in Jesus Christ should transcend rank, station, fame, position or wealth. The believing janitor is due the same respect, consideration and honor that one might give to a rich president who is a believer. Simply put, he rejects those whom God rejects and he accepts those who God accepts. It may sound simple, but if you have been in a church lately, it is a difficult position to take sometimes.

One of our best Biblical illustrations of this is Paul, when he was in jail at the end of the book of Acts. Those believers who were not ashamed of Paul in bonds, but provided him with fellowship and supplies—they showed him the honor and respect that they should have (1Tim. 1:16 Philem. 13; compare Heb. 10:34 13:3).

Psalm 15:4c			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
shâbva ^ç (שָׁבַע) [pronounced <i>shaw^b-VAHG</i>]	<i>to swear, to imprecate, to curse, to swear an oath, to take a solemn oath, to swear allegiance</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Niphal imperfect	Strong's #7650 BDB #989
lâmed (ל) (pronounced <i>l^é</i>)	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510

¹⁹ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes, Psalms; Volume 1*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 121.

Psalm 15:4c

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
רָאָע (ר א ע) [pronounced raw-ĠAHĠ]	<i>to make evil, to do evil, to do ill, to cause to do evil, to cause something injurious to be done, to do harm</i>	Hiphil infinitive construct	Strong's #7489 BDB #949
<p>In the Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac, he swears <i>to his neighbor</i> rather than <i>to [his own] hurt</i>. On the other hand, this could have simply been the translators of the Septuagint trying to make sense of this verse (and others following their lead). As you will note, two of the translations which often follow the Septuagint (REB, NRSV) do not in this case while Rotherham does in his <i>Emphasized Bible</i>.²⁰</p>			
וָ (or וֵ) (ו) [pronounced weh]	<i>and</i>	simple wâw conjunction	No Strong's # BDB #251
לֹ (ל א ל or ל א ל) [pronounced low]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
מִוֹר (מ ו ר) [pronounced moor]	<i>to exchange; to change</i>	3 rd person masculine plural, Hiphil imperfect	Strong's #4171 BDB #558

Translation: He is sworn [by an oath] [even] to [his own] hurt [or, to his neighbor] and he does not change. We are uncertain as to part of this verse; however, what is clear is, when this sort of man is sworn to an oath, then he does not change. He does not look for some way to get out of this oath. Today, there are so many people who simply tell you what they think you want to hear. They would not stand by their own word if the slightest wind moved them in this direction or that. In fact, often when giving you their word, inside, they already know they are just giving you a line to get what they want.

One of the earliest expressions found in the Law of Moses is the fact that a person's word must mean something. If you took a vow to do this or that, then it was a sin if you later did not follow through (Lev. 5:4–6). If you did not honor your vow, then you had to publically offer animal sacrifices for this sin, publically admitting that you were wrong not to fulfill your vow.

The abuse of personal vows became so great that our Lord told those at the sermon on the mount, "Do not make any oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King." (Matt. 5:33b–35 Psalm 48:2).

Barnes: *Who has made a promise, or entered into a contract, that is likely to turn out contrary to his expectations, to his own disadvantage; but who still adheres to his engagement. If the thing itself is wrong; if he has made a promise, or pledged himself to do a thing that is wrong, he cannot be under obligation to execute it...but he is not at liberty to violate an agreement simply because it will be a loss to him, or because he ascertains that it will not be, as he supposed, to his advantage. The principles here laid down will extend to all contracts or agreements, pecuniary or otherwise, and should be a general principle regulating all our transactions with our fellow-men. The only limitation in the rule is that the above stated, when the promise or the contract would involve that which is morally wrong.*²¹

²⁰ Keil and Delitzsch also oppose the rendering *to his neighbor*, although I was unable to grasp their line of reasoning, which can be particularly dense at times. Refer to Keil & Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament; Psalms*; 1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 5, pp. 133–134 and see if it makes any sense to you.

²¹ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes, Psalms; Volume 1*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 121–122 (with some slight editing).

The old saying is, *a man's word is his bond*. This means that, you could enter into a business deal on a handshake, and you knew that both parties would honor the deal, even if it turned out to be disadvantageous to one of the parties. Nowadays, people enter into lengthy contracts, and still walk away when it becomes disadvantageous to them. Their reasoning is often, if breaking the contract and any resulting legal action nets me more than following the contract, then it is worth it. There is no thought to, *I gave my word to this other party and they are counting on my part*. Or, just as bad, a contract is written in such a way as to be legally disadvantageous to one of the parties, although in such a way that the party may not recognize it. Apparently, many of the Afro-American musicians and singers from the 50's were given contracts which put the bulk of profit and the residuals into another person's pocket.

Application: Your word must mean something and your business dealings must be honorable. When entering into a business agreement with anyone else, your intent should not be to screw that person out of everything you can, and casually blaming their lawyer (or lack of same) for not looking after their interests. Most savvy business people, in a business deal, understand what it is they are getting out of the deal and recognize whether or not they are taking advantage of the other party. They recognize if the person that they are entering into a business deal with lacks their business savvy and they often know whether or not they are taking advantage of that person. As believers, we are to be honorable in all of our interactions with others.

**His silver he has not given in interest
and a bribe against the clean he has not taken.** Psalm
The one doing these things is not shaken to 15:5
perpetuity.

**He does not loan his money with interest
and he does not take a bribe against the
innocent.**
**The one doing these things is not moved
forever.**

**He does not loan out his money with interest
and he will not take a bribe to testify against the innocent.
The person who adheres to these things remains forever unmoved.**

Here is how others have handled this verse:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	<i>He who does not put out his money for interest [to one of his own people], and who will not take a bribe against the innocent. he who does these things shall never be moved.</i>
CEV	They lend their money without charging interest, and they don't take bribes to hurt the innocent.
JPS (Tanakh)	Those who do these things will always stand firm. ...who has never lent money at interest, or accepted a bribe against the innocent.
NASB	The man who acts thus shall never be shaken. He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.
NLT	Those who do not charge interest on the money they lend, and who refuse to accept bribes to testify against the innocent.
REB	Such people will stand firm forever. Who does not put his money out to usury, And never accepts a bribe against the innocent. He who behaves in this way will remain unshaken.
The Septuagint	He has not given his money on usury and he has not received bribes against the innocent. He that does these things will never be moved.
TEV	He makes loans without charging interest,

and cannot be bribed to testify against the innocent.

Whoever does these things will always be secure.

Young's Updated LT

His silver he has not given in usury,
And a bribe against the innocent he has not taken.
Whoever is doing these is not moved to the age!

What is the gist of this verse? The Israelite with integrity does not lend out with interest to his brother Israelite; and he does not allow money to sway him when it comes to doing that which is right (in this case, he would not take money in order to perjure himself). The final sentence sums up the entirety of the verse: such a person remains secure spiritually forever.

Psalm 15:5a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
keṣeph (כֶּסֶף) [pronounced <i>KEH-sef</i>]	<i>silver, money</i>	masculine singular noun with a 3 rd person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #3701 BDB #494
lō' (לֹא or לוֹ) [pronounced <i>low</i>]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
nāthan (נָתַן) [pronounced <i>naw- THAHN</i>]	<i>to give, to grant, to place, to put, to set</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect	Strong's #5414 BDB #678
bē (בְּ) [pronounced <i>b^{eh}</i>]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's #none BDB #88
neshek ^e (נֶשֶׁק) [pronounced <i>nay-shayk^e</i>]	<i>something bitten off; interest, usury</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #5392 BDB #675

Translation: He does not loan his money with interest... Deut. 23:19–20 gives us the full story: “You may not charge interest to your countrymen; interest on money, food or anything that could be loaned out with interest. You may, however, charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countrymen, you may not charge interest, so that Jehovah your God will bless you in all that you do in the land which you are about to enter and to possess.” (see also Ex. 22:25–26 Lev. 25:36–37 Ezek. 18:8). The Jews were under a different economy than we are. Like any free market economy, some prosper and some do not. Those who needed help were to be given this help and without charge. There were provisions in the Law for those who could not pay their debts (which included indentured servitude, which servitude is qualified—Lev. 25:39–40). However, one Jew was not to charge another Jew interest. We are under a different dispensation today, and (in the United States) in an economy which encourages the borrowing of money. There is nothing inherently evil about borrowing money nor is there anything wrong with lending money out at a reasonable interest; however, it is still **the love of money which is the root of all evil** (1Tim. 6:10).

The word *usury* has gone through an interesting transition. At one time, it simply meant interest, which could be reasonably interpreted in the Bible as *illegal or unlawful interest*. In our day, it has come to mean *outlandish or excessive interest*; my guess is the current interest is around 24% annually, as that is the top interest on most credit cards. Since this is regulated by the federal government, we may therefore interpret *usury* to mean *unlawful interest*.

Since the Hebrews were allowed to take interest from those outside their group, then we can assume that assessing a reasonable interest for lending out money is not against Biblical principles. Probably the trickiest application is toward family members. First of all, the Law is not designed for Gentiles or for Christians; therefore, there is no reason for us strictly apply anything from the Mosaic Law to our religious lives. However, that does not mean that we can ignore completely what we find in the books of Moses. I recall that my parents lent me money without interest when I was a young person, and I learned about debt, saving, paying back and general financial responsibility (actually, in my youth, I learned very little about saving—that was my fault). However, at some point during my adult life, I began to repay with interest, with which I have no problem. If a family chooses never to ask another family member for interest, or if, even from a young age, interest is assessed (which would be a good math lesson for a young person, as well as impetus to repay his debt), any of these approaches is reasonable. However, we could reasonably rule out lending to anyone, including a family member, at a high interest rate (which, I would think would be far below the 24% lawful amount).

Barnes: *[This passage] would forbid the exacting of unusual and unlawful rates of interest, or taking advantage of the necessities of others—by evading the provisions of law, and making their circumstances an occasion of extortion...the thing forbidden is a harsh, grasping, griping disposition; a disposition to take advantage of the embarrassments of others to increase our own gains. He goes on: Kindness, and an accommodating spirit in business transactions, are as much demanded now by the principles of religion as they were when this psalm was written.*²² Again, this psalm, written 3000 years ago, is easily applied to our lives today.

Psalm 15:5b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
w ^e (or v ^e) (ו) [pronounced <i>weh</i>]	<i>and</i>	simple wâw conjunction	No Strong's # BDB #251
shôchad (שׁוֹחָד) [pronounced <i>SHOW-khahd</i>]	<i>a present, a gift, a bribe</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #7810 BDB #1005
ʿal (עַל) [pronounced <i>gahl</i>]	<i>upon, beyond, on, against, above, over; on the ground of, according to, on account of</i>	preposition of proximity	Strong's #5921 BDB #752
nâqîy (נָקִי) [pronounced <i>naw-KEE</i>]	<i>acquitted, clean, cleared, free from, unpunished, innocent</i>	masculine singular adjective	Strong's #5355 BDB #667
lôʾ (לֹא or לוֹא) [pronounced <i>low</i>]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
lâqach (לָקַח) [pronounced <i>law-KAHKH</i>]	<i>to take, to take away, to take in marriage; to seize</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect; pausal form	Strong's #3947 BDB #542

Translation: *...and he does not take a bribe against the innocent.* This kind of behavior is unbelievable. However, we have hundreds if not thousands of people who participate in this. We do not have to speak of a bribe, but simply of remuneration of some kind. When DNA testing became a greater factor in criminal cases, it has turned out that hundreds of people have been convicted of serious crimes that they did not commit. Obviously, in any system of justice, there will be those who are innocent and yet convicted. There is no perfect system. However, when a

²² Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes, Psalms; Volume 1*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 122.

prosecutor or a policeman withholds exculpatory evidence, they are taking a bribe against the innocent. Perhaps they receive a promotion; perhaps they do not have to go back and further investigate the case. For whatever reason, when a person is convicted, and there is exculpatory evidence not turned over by the prosecution, the prosecution has violated this verse.

We have the very famous case of Hurricane Carter, who had no reason to commit the crime that he was accused of, and apparently there was evidence that indicated that it would have been impossible for him to have committed the crime at the time that it was committed (which evidence was withheld). Those who were aware of this evidence, yet withheld it, violate this verse, and are enemies of God. No promotion, no amount of publicity, no raise, nothing can justify incarcerating an innocent person. Now, does our legal system have too many loopholes for the guilty to escape through? Certainly. Don't mistake these few comments as the position of a criminal advocate; it is just as wrong when criminals are allowed to go free on technicalities, when they are clearly guilty. Our system of jurist prudence is in need of a serious overhaul. However, the fact that prosecutors are often constrained by the law and, as a result, the guilty are freed; this in no way justifies jailing the innocent.

That justice prevail, and that bribes are at no time acceptable, is found addressed in Ex. 23:8 Deut. 16:18–20 27:25 Prov. 17:23. Felix handled this matter as was the custom of his day. When Paul was in jail under his care, Felix expected Paul to bribe him in order to get out of jail, and the implication is that Felix would have freed him (see Acts 25:26). Justice is never to be subverted by bribery in any dispensation.

Psalm 15:5c			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʿāsâh (אָשָׂה) [pronounced <i>gaw-SAWH</i>]	<i>to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare</i>	Qal active participle construct	Strong's #6213 BDB #793
ʿêlleh (אֵלֶּה) [pronounced <i>EEHL-leh</i>]	<i>these, these things</i>	demonstrative plural adjective (with the definite article)	Strong's #428 BDB #41
môwt (מוֹת) [pronounced <i>mohT</i>]	<i>to be shaken, to totter, to be moved, to dislodge, to throw into disorder or disarray</i>	3 rd person masculine singular, Niphal imperfect	Strong's #4131 BDB #556
lâmed (ל) (pronounced <i>l</i>)	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
ʿôwlâm (עוֹלָם) [pronounced <i>ô-LAWM</i>]	<i>long duration, perpetuity, antiquity, futurity</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #5769 BDB #761
ʿôwlâm together with the lâmed preposition mean <i>forever</i>			

Translation: **The one doing these things is not moved forever.** This portion of the verse, as you may have noticed, is often separated from the rest of the psalm by an extra blank line (as per the CEV, NLT and TEV). This simply indicates that this verse is a summary of all that has come before. The one who follows the principles found in this psalm shall not be shaken or moved. The idea is that, those who have maintained this sort of a lifestyle as a believer would be blessed by God, both in time and in eternity. That is, there would be stability in the person's life in time, with continued signs of God's faithfulness; and, in eternity, their reward would not be removed. Peter expresses a similar sentiment in 2Peter 1:10: **Therefore, brothers, be all the more motivated to make a spiritual reality of His calling and choosing of you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.** David

expresses a similar thought in Psalm 21:7, but relates it to trusting in Jehovah: [For the king trusts in Jehovah and through the grace of the Most High, he will not be shaken](#) (see also Psalm 112:6 Heb. 12:28).

Let me allow Barnes to summarize this psalm:

Barnes' Summary of Psalm 15

This psalm refers to a single subject, but that the most important which can come before the human mind. It is the question, Who is truly religious? Who will enter heaven? Who will be saved? The Psalm contains a statement of what real religion is: one of the most explicit and formal of the statements which we have in the Old Testament on that subject...

I. The question...is, Who shall be permitted to reside with God in His tabernacle? Who shall be entitled to the privilege of dwelling on His holy hill (that is, Zion, regarded as the dwelling-place of God)? In other words, Who has such a character as to be entitled to hope for the favour and freindship of God?

II. The answer...embraces the following particulars: —

(1) The man who is upright, just, honest, truthful, ver. 2.

(2) The man who treats his neighbour properly; who does not slander or reproach him; who does not readily listen to calumnious reports in regard to him, ver. 3.

(3) The man who regards the righteous and the wicked as they should be regarded; who looks with proper disapprobation on all who are "vile" in their character, and with true respect on all who fear the Lord, ver. 4.

(5) The man who does not take advantage of the necessities of others, who does not put out his money "to usury," and who, if a magistrate, does not take a bribe to induce him to condemn the innocent, ver. 5.²³

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²³ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes, Psalms; Volume 1*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 119. I did some minor editing throughout.