

How To Get Close To God

By Vic Coleman

Introduction

Anyone who has been in or around church for any significant amount of time has heard the phrase, “You need to get close to God”. But what does it mean? How do you do it? How do you get close to an invisible, holy, perfect God? Fortunately, God tells us how in His Word and it’s fairly straightforward.

I’ve read Psalm 15 many times in the past. I thought it was “okay”, but I never noticed anything really significant about it...until recently. For some reason the scripture “spoke” to me. It almost seemed like an iceberg, where the bulk of the meaning was just below the surface, and the Lord let me see some of what’s down there.

When we get “close to God”, we are poised to receive many benefits. We can:

1. Hear and know His voice so we can do His will
2. Acquire wisdom
3. Gain strength to overcome obstacles
4. Stand firm in the midst of storms
5. Have peace of mind
6. Receive healing for our minds and bodies
7. Prosper as He wants us to prosper
8. Pray more effectively for ourselves and others
9. Respond to situations as Jesus would respond
10. Know Him better (the most important one in this list)

So how do we get close to God? Well, the Bible makes it clear, as a study of this Psalm will reveal.

Scriptures for This Lesson

Psalm 15:1 – 5

Proverbs 23:7

Proverbs 18:21

Proverbs 6:16-19

Getting Close – What Does It Mean?

Psalm 15:1 poses the questions, “Who may dwell in the sanctuary of the Lord?”, and “Who may live on His Holy Hill?” To really understand what the scripture means, i.e., what it means to “get close”, we need to first define some terms used in the verse.

In verse 1, the New International Version of the Bible (NIV) uses the word “dwell”. The original Hebrew word means *to sojourn, or to seek hospitality with, to assemble oneself, to abide, to lodge as if you’re on a journey.*

“Sanctuary” is also used in the NIV. “Tabernacle” is used in the King James Version (KJV). They come from the Hebrew word “obel” which means *covering, dwelling place, home or tent.* It refers to His holy dwelling place. (Originally, the presence of the Lord was in a tent that housed the Ark of the Covenant).

Paraphrasing, verse 1 asks, “Who may lodge and seek hospitality in the dwelling place of the Lord? Who can make their home where the Lord lives and get comfortable?” Not only can you get close to God, but also you can make your home and “get comfortable”.

I thought about this for a moment and pictured my family driving to Texas to visit my wife’s twin brother. He has a nice home out in the country on a couple of acres. He always shows us “southern hospitality”. We are the focus of his attention. He makes accommodations just for us and makes us feel welcome and “at home”. In the same sense, when we approach the Lord in

His dwelling, we can be welcomed. He wants to welcome us into His presence and make us the focus of His attention. We are special to Him.

The second half of verse 1 asks, “Who may live on your holy hill?” The word “live” comes from the word *shakan* which means *to settle down, to abide, to reside, to establish*. The word carries with it the sense of an extended stay, not a short visit. So, to “shakan” on His holy hill means that it is possible to “settle down” and “reside” in the presence of the Lord. Once you get there, you get to stay! Psalm 15:2 begins to tell us how.

How to Get Close – Step 1

To be in the presence of the Lord, your “walk” must be blameless. The word walk comes from the Hebrew word “halak” which means *to behave oneself, to exercise or conduct oneself*. “Blameless” comes from a word that means *integrity, truth, sincerely, without blemish*. So, Step 1 is to conduct and behave ourselves with integrity.

What does being a man/woman of integrity mean to you? Do you think integrity is getting lost in our society or is it still a virtue held in esteem? Why or Why not?

The next part of verse 2 relates to the first part, “...who does what is righteous...” “Righteous” carries the meaning of what is legally, morally, or naturally right. These two parts of verse 2 deal with how we conduct ourselves...basically being men and women of integrity in our actions.

From the Amplified Version of the Bible, verse 2 reads as follows. (The emphasis is mine):

“He who walks and lives uprightly and blamelessly, who works rightness and justice and speaks and thinks the truth in his heart.”

The last half of the verse is interesting. It speaks to what is inside a person. The one who gets close to God speaks and thinks truth in his heart. God looks at the “inner man”. He is more

interested in our hearts than what we wear or what others see externally. Righteousness needs to be descriptive of our inner thoughts. If we think on “good things”, “good things” will come out of our mouths, and influence our actions.

Key Point: Whatever you think about, will greatly influence your actions.

What effect will a “steady diet” of pornography have on a young male? What effect will a “steady diet” of violent television shows have on our kids? What effect will a “steady diet” of sexually explicit music and videos have on a young mind? What effect will a “steady diet” of the word of God have on a young mind?

Have some doubts about the Key Point above? Why do companies spend billions of dollars on television commercials every year? After sixty years of commercials, advertisers know that seeing something repeatedly will eventually affect behavior. Their goal is to influence your behavior so that you will be more inclined to buy their products or services.

Psalms 23:7 says:

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee. (KJV)

The Bible says that as we draw closer to God, He will draw closer to us when we seek Him with our *whole* heart.

How to Get Close – Step 2

Psalms 15:3 speaks to another area of our conduct...our words. Words are powerful. By the words of God, the world was created. By words, wars have been started and stopped. By words, men have been elected to the most powerful office in the country. By words, sports teams have rallied to stage great “come from behind” victories. The scriptures say:

“The tongue has the power of life and death...” (Proverbs 18:21, NIV)

As a matter of fact, a study of Proverbs will reveal that how influential our words can be. So, to get close to God, we must take care in what we say.

Verse 3 says that one who “dwells with the Almighty” does not speak slander. Slander is defined as:

To defame; to injure by maliciously uttering a false report respecting one; to tarnish or impair the reputation of one by false tales, maliciously told or propagated.

How often do we propagate a story about someone that we don't know for sure is true (gossip)? How often do we talk about someone knowing that his or her reputation will be injured by what we say? How often do we say things out of anger knowing that our words will hurt someone else?

Key Point: Once words are spoken, you can no more “take back your words” than you can “un-eat” yesterday’s dinner. Be thoughtful of what you say.

There are certain things that the Lord *hates* and slander is one of them (Proverbs 6:16 -19).

The first part of verse 3 says that a person who gets close to God does not wrong his neighbor. Again, we see that our actions and words play a key part in our relationship to God.

One definition of reproach is to charge with a fault in severe language. Again, it speaks of the tongue and what we say. This part of the verse didn’t address whether or not what we say is

true; that's beside the point. It's the intent of our hearts that's at issue. To get close to God, our hearts and words must be right before Him.

How to Get Close – Step 3

Psalm 15:4 introduces a new concept – hating what's evil and loving what's good. The NIV reads:

“...who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts...”

The word “despise” comes from a Hebrew word which means to disesteem something or someone. To get close to God, we have to have the same attitude toward sin that He has...He hates sin, i.e., anything that is contrary to his nature and separates us from Him. (That's why He gave us a new nature and we are “born again”).

Do you hate that which is evil in the eyes of the Lord, or do you have a tendency to tolerate evil? Name something that is “evil” in the eyes of the Lord that is common in our society. Do you hate it or have a mild dislike for it, knowing intellectually that it's bad?

Key Point: Being “tolerant” of sin allows that sin to grow and take root.

The last half of the verse speaks to integrity again...keeping your word, even when it hurts. By the Word of God, the universe was created. He holds His Word in high esteem. Even His Son is referred to as “The Word”. We should hold our words to a higher standard.

How to Get Close – Step 4

Psalm 15:5 touches on another aspect of our character that is near and dear to our hearts...money. From the NIV it reads:

“...who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent...”

It speaks of generosity, fairness, selflessness, and integrity. The book of Proverbs is full of scriptures that refer to the “generous man” and his blessings. Why? Because the Lord is generous, fair, selfless, and defines integrity. The bottom line is that He wants us to be like Him.

Summary

Getting close to God is not an impossible feat; it is not a mystery. We must strive to conduct our actions, words, and “meditations of our hearts”, in a manner that is like Him. The more we conform ourselves to His image, the closer we will get to Him...automatically. And the benefits of that closeness will begin to flow...automatically. And this passage ends with a powerful promise, (I like to think of it as a statement of fact) – “He who does these things will never be shaken.”