

# RESPONDING TO GOD

## WEEK 3: PSALM 15

In this week's study, we look at a second passage about **Responding to God – in the Ordered World**. Ps 8 looks at the 'big picture' of the order God placed in creation and our continuing role in that. Ps 15 looks at the order that God created in our relationship with God, our moral choices and in human relationships. When Henry Cloud and John Townsend started writing on the issue of 'Boundaries' in relationships, they explored this order. Knowing what God requires allows for order to be maintained – even in a sinful world.

"Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. As it was in the garden of Eden, God's created order was that we were to be free moral agents, and to operate within the boundaries that He established for us. We wanted to use our freedom in any way that we chose, and as a result, we lost it. Now, God has returned us to freedom, and like in the beginning, we are to use it responsibly, or we become slaves all over again."<sup>1</sup>

**ICEBREAKER:** When you were growing up, what was a 'house rule' that your parents set? What happened if you broke that 'house rule'?

**PRAY:** Thank God for all the loving and steadfast relationships you have, which give constancy to your life.

### READ: Psalm 15

When this Psalm was written, it was possibly used as people entered into worship – with a question asked and a response given. The word that NIV translates as 'sanctuary' is the same word for 'tent', so NRSV (validly) translates v1 as "who may abide in your tent?". Before Solomon built the temple, the people worshipped at the tabernacle or 'tent of meeting' – and this is likely what is being referred to here. The 'holy hill' most likely refers to Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where the temple was eventually built.

Verse 1 (depending on your translation) asks: who may 'dwell', 'live', 'abide', 'sojourn', 'worship', 'enter your presence', ...? For the Psalmist, worship wasn't just about spending an hour at church each week. These words hint at Middle Eastern hospitality practices of inviting people into your tent: to sit, eat and spend time together, out of the oppressive heat, as well as resting from travel.

- How would you describe your relationship with God? Is it like rushing in and out of his house, for a quick visit? Or like spending un-rushed time, sitting down and talking, over a meal?

Many Psalms are forms of Hebrew poetry. In Ps 15, the Psalmist reiterates thoughts and ideas by using parallels (eg walk/ does, blameless/ righteous). A useful exercise any time we look at Psalms is to look for patterns. Sometimes we see repetition and parallels. Sometimes, there are contrasts (eg X is BUT Y is not).

**PSALM 15 – A Psalm of David: LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury (ie interest) and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken. (NIV)**

Take 5 minutes by yourself or in groups of 2 or 3:

- Draw links between the words or phrases which are similar – or seem to be repeating an idea;
- Find the contrasting phrases/ ideas;
- Put brackets around the discrete sections which seem to be dealing with particular behaviours, actions, attitudes or relationships.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cloudtownsend.com/scoop-on-boundaries/>

- There are possibly 5 or 6 key issues that the Psalmist is addressing. (We could call them 'house rules'). How would you 'sum up' or label each of these main ideas?
- Which ones are 'individual' responsibilities – and involve an internal attitude or resolve? Which ones are 'corporate' (ie they are done in the context of community and our relationships with each other)? And which ones incorporate both?

READ: Matt 15:8-11, 17-20 and/ or Mk 7:18-23

- The Pharisees criticised the disciples for not washing their hands before eating. Jesus responded with the comment that it is not what goes into our bodies that makes us unclean, but our thought-life, speech and actions. How do the things that Jesus lists, affect our relationship with God and our relationship with others in Christian community?

One commentator notes that this Psalm seems to go against some requirements in OT law (eg Deut 23:1-6 and Lev 21:17-21) which focus on physical requirements and exclusions. Instead, requirements for worship are based on personal ethics, as in Is 33:14b-16, Ps. 24:1-3; and Mic. 6:6-8.<sup>2</sup>

- Read Ps 24:1-3 and Mic 6:6-8. What do these writers say are essential for worship?

Ps 15:5 echoes the concerns in Mic 6:8 regarding justice and mercy. There will always be some people in the community who have more money than others. But financial advantage should not mean we misuse that power, to gain financial benefit from each other or to avoid the consequences of our wrong actions. Both of these (prohibited) practices became widespread, but were condemned by various OT prophets.

- Old Testament law prohibited lending money at interest to fellow Israelites and some verses specifically mention this in context of looking after the poor and needy. (Ex 22:25, Lev 25:35-37, Deut 23:19, Prov 28:8). Instead of profiting from another's need, we are to practice generosity.
- Bribes impacted the legal system, because some people could afford to bribe judges and some judges were happy to line their pockets with bribes. As a result, innocent people were deemed 'guilty' and ultimately paid the price (both in terms of loss of reputation and paying compensation).

When we live consistent lives – and can expect certain types of behaviour from each other – it provides a level of trust and reliability in our relationships. That is part of the 'order' that God has created in our world.

**Choose one or two of the following issues to discuss.** In the context of your Life Group/ Connect Group and other significant relationships:

- What does it mean for you to act rightly/ do the right thing towards each other/ not do wrong to each other?
- How are you careful about how you speak about each other and about other people? (especially others in the Christian community) How do you protect each other's reputations? At same time, how do you speak honestly to each other? What things are/ aren't appropriate?
- How do you try to ensure you keep promises that you make to each other? (rather than making empty promises)?
- How do you practice generosity towards each other, especially when people are in need?

**PRAY:** In Prov 2:3-11, we're encouraged to cry out for wisdom, insight, knowledge and understanding – for God wants to give these things to us – to help us live a full and fulfilling life. We're told:

"He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest. He is a shield to those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of the just and protects those who are faithful to him. Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. Wise choices will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe. [NLT]

Ask God to give you all these things – so that you will speak and act rightly, justly and fairly.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobson, R. A., & Tanner, B. (2014). Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1-41. In E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, & R. L. Hubbard Jr. (Eds.), *The Book of Psalms* (p. 172). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.