

# Integrity God Honors

Psalm 26

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**Main point:** Trusting and enjoying God are easier exercises when we can claim personal and spiritual integrity.

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity,  
And I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

<sup>2</sup> Examine me, O LORD, and try me;

Test my mind and my heart.

<sup>3</sup> For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes,

And I have walked in Your truth.

<sup>4</sup> I do not sit with deceitful men,

Nor will I go with pretenders.

<sup>5</sup> I hate the assembly of evildoers,

And I will not sit with the wicked.

<sup>6</sup> I shall wash my hands in innocence,

And I will go about Your altar, O LORD,

<sup>7</sup> That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving

And declare all Your wonders.

<sup>8</sup> O LORD, I love the habitation of Your house

And the place where Your glory dwells.

<sup>9</sup> Do not take my soul away *along* with sinners,

Nor my life with men of bloodshed,

<sup>10</sup> In whose hands is a wicked scheme,

And whose right hand is full of bribes.

<sup>11</sup> But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;

Redeem me, and be gracious to me.

<sup>12</sup> My foot stands on a level place;

In the congregations I shall bless the LORD.

## PSALM 26

### Introduction:

Psalm 26 is very powerful and practical. It is **powerful** because it *confronts us with the reality* that we bear personal responsibility for our moral and spiritual integrity. It is **practical** because it *challenges us to extend to God an invitation to test our integrity*. Together, Psalm 26 gives us a GPS of the kind of integrity that gains entrance into the precinct of favor and fellowship with God Himself.

**Psalm 26** is an entrance psalm. As we step into this psalm, David sets before us methods anticipated to maintain his integrity and motives, which he cultivated, and which affirmed his integrity. From this powerful and practical psalm, two personal questions must be asked:

- *What would a divine investigation of your life and mine reveal?*
- *Would you be willing to permit a thorough examination of your life before the Lord?*

David would, and we must, if we would enjoy the integrity that God honors.

Let me take you inside this psalm. This psalm will teach us something about **David's WALK, David's WORSHIP, and David's WITNESS.**

Notice David's walk appears in verses 1, 3, and 11. Verses 1 and 11 form an *inclusio* which frames, bookends, or brackets the psalm and underlines its theme of *integrity*. Notice, David's worship is mentioned in verse 6 in as the "*washing of his hands in innocence*" as he goes about the "*altar*" of the Lord. That was a purification ceremony performed in temple worship. Notice finally in verse 7 and in verse 12, David's witness as he "*proclaims with the voice of thanksgiving and declares all God's wonders...in the congregations*" of the Lord. Our walk affects our worship and determines our witness.

Anyone can pray to God, but this psalm gently instructs us that trusting and enjoying God's fellowship is an easier exercise when we can claim personal and spiritual *integrity*.

What does David teach us about the kind of integrity that God honors?

## **Exposition:**

### **A. DAVID'S WALK (vv.1-5)**

**Walking** is one of the most straightforward and lucid metaphors in the Bible, which explains a person's moral conduct and spiritual condition. In Ephesians 4:17, our walk indicates whether we are *saved* or *lost*, *regenerate* or *unregenerate* (1 Cor.7:17; Col.2:6). The Christian is to walk in "*newness of life*" (Rom.6:4), "*after the Spirit*" (Rom.8:4), "*in honesty*" (Rom.13:13), "*by faith*" (2 Cor.5:7), "*in good works*" (Eph.2:10), "*in love*" (Eph.5:2), "*in wisdom*" (Col.4:5), and "*in truth*" (2 John 4). In fact, we are not only told how we ought to walk but also how we are not to walk. For example, we are not to walk "*after the flesh*" (Rom.8:4), "*after the manner of men*" (1 Cor.3:3), "*in craftiness*" (2 Cor.4:2), "*by sight*" (2 Cor.5:7), "*in the vanity of the mind*" (Eph.4:17), and in a "*disorderly*" fashion (2 Thess.3:6).

Here in this psalm, David desired vindication because he *walked in integrity*.

When David says to God, "**Vindicate me...**" he is not saying that he is perfect or sinless, but rather, that he is *blameless* or *beyond reproach*. The word "**vindicate**" is David's way of saying, "God make Your decision about me." What people think about you matters. Full stop. But what God *decides* about you matters more! Period. David brings himself before the examination bar of God, because he desires God's affirmation of his walk. As accusations fly and the rumors float, David can say before God, "I have walked in my integrity." Can you?

#### **1. What is integrity? (v.1a)**

<sup>1</sup> Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity,

You can hear the word '*integrated*' in the term *integrity*, and that's actually what it means. It means to have *wholeness in your life*, unfragmented if you will. It is when one-part matches with the other parts. Now, if you woke up this morning and put on mix-matched socks, you are not *integrated*, you don't have *fashion integrity*—friend, you don't match. But when you have personal and spiritual integrity, your actions match with your profession. Your belief matches your behavior. Your words match your walk. Your inside matches your outside. Are you living a life beyond reproach? Do you have a life of integrity?

## 2. What kind of integrity does God honor? (vv.1b-5)

David gives us a *run-down*, a *checklist*, a *snapshot*, if you will, of the kind of integrity that gains entrance into the fellowship of God with honor. How does it look? David points out three marks.

### a. Consistency (v.1b)

And I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

**"Without wavering,"** here means *to slip up*. And you know what it's like to be *living right* and *doing good*, and then your brother, sister, spouse, or co-worker enters the picture, and you get "snitty" with your words. Or, you get angry about something. David is not saying that he never had daily struggles with sin; instead, he is saying, *"I held fast my confession and profession of faith without backing away."* He was not like a yo-yo, trusting the Lord one week, but the next week chasing the world. No, he was consistent.

God calls us to be consistent in our trust of His Word. One of my favorite hymns is *God Moves in Mysterious Way*. And in it, William Cowper writes,

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense  
But trust Him for His grace  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

Even when our belief collides with our experience, we know the Lord cannot change—He is immutability—so we can trust Him in good times and in bad times. This trust is what the writer to the Hebrews encouraged us to have when he wrote,

- **Hebrews 10:23-25**—Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

The integrity that God honors is consistent. It is also...

### b. Comprehensiveness (vv.2-3)

<sup>2</sup>Examine me, O LORD, and try me;  
Test my mind and my heart.

<sup>3</sup>For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes,  
And I have walked in Your truth.

**"Examine, try, and test..."** are synonyms to drive home David's willing submission to undergo a complete examination. There are three Hebrew words for "testing," and each one reveals the level of testing that David desires. The first word (*bachan*) means *to test for reality or reliability*. For example, before you buy a car, you take it on a test drive to see if it performs as advertised. That's the idea. The second word (*nasah*) means *to test circumstantially for fidelity*. We apply this test when we are about to purchase a couch or a chair reportedly made of quality material. Before we buy the chair, we sit down on it to see how it feels and if it holds up.

David is saying, "Lord, not only take me for a test drive but sit down on my statements—see if they hold up." Finally, the third word (*tsaraph*) means *to test for impurity* like refining precious metals. Listen, I could not tell you the difference between 24 karat gold and a piece of gold-plated fake jewelry, but one drop of God's testing fire on our lives would bring out all the dross or impurities to the top of our lives.

Can we admit that this COVID-19 trial has brought to the surface the impurity of our hearts and desires? Jesus said the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, and that includes the Coronavirus (*Matt.16:18*).

Now here is the good news if you are a Christian: whatever trial you face, it has a divine purpose.

- **Job 23:10**—But He knows the way I take;  
*When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*
- **1 Peter 1:6-7**—In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Trials for the believer have a divine purpose. One purpose is to prove the value of our faith, and to produce the unimpeachable testimony of praise to God!

Would you be willing to permit a thorough examination of your heart before the Lord right now? Not a spot check, but an exhaustive, comprehensive review of the entirety of your life. David is serious. He mentions "**the mind and heart**" in verse 2. He speaks of God's committed love, which was before "**his eyes**" or fueling his motives.

One of the attractive characteristics of the Hebrew language is that physical organs are used to describe what one is *thinking* and *feeling*. The word for "**mind**" refers to the kidneys, and its plural because kidneys come in a pair. While the Syrians and Arabs viewed the liver as the center of a man's being, the Jews held that the kidneys, along with the heart, were the most important internal organs. Here David uses "kidneys" to refer to the core of his life (*Ps.73:21; Prov.23:16; Jer.11:20*). They were also the areas of greatest vulnerability.

This examination is the level of investigation that David is inviting. Would you embrace the words of the modern poet and songwriter Steven Green who wrote:

There burns a fire with sacred heat  
White hot with holy flame  
And all who dare pass through its blaze  
Will not emerge the same  
Some as bronze, and some as silver  
Some as gold, then with great skill  
All are hammered by their sufferings  
On the anvil of His will

Chorus:  
The Refiner's fire  
Has now become my soul's desire  
Purged and cleansed and purified  
That the Lord be glorified  
He is consuming my soul  
Refining me, making me whole  
No matter what I may lose  
I choose the Refiner's fire

I'm learning now to trust His touch  
To crave the fire's embrace  
For though my past with sin was etched  
His mercies did erase  
Each time His purging cleanses deeper  
I'm not sure that I'll survive  
Yet the strength in growing weaker  
Keeps my hungry soul alive<sup>1</sup>

The integrity that God honors is marked by 1) *consistency* and 2) *comprehensiveness*. But third, it is characterized by its *companionship*.

### c. **Companionship (vv.4-5)**

<sup>4</sup> I do not sit with deceitful men,  
Nor will I go with pretenders.

<sup>5</sup> I hate the assembly of evildoers,  
And I will not sit with the wicked.

Verses 4-5 focus on the types of people a person with integrity does not associate with as a rule. "**Deceitful men**" are those characterized by falsehood or emptiness. It describes those whose life is vain or hollow because they ignore God's commandments. "**Pretenders**" describes those who "play the faces" or hypocrites—actors. "**Evildoers**" describes violent men in alliance and conclave for the overthrow of the innocent. The "**wicked**" describes the character of the heart of those who have committed themselves in rebellion against God.

Notice David speaks of what he did *in the past*, and what he will do *in the future*. "**I do not sit...nor will I go...I hate...and I will not sit...**"

I can hear someone saying, "I thought Christians were to love their neighbors as themselves?" We must love as Jesus commanded us (*John 13:34-35*). But love and fellowship are two different things.

Resist the notion that David is self-righteous here. David saw every person as *a potential ally* or *a potential enemy*, and which one you were depended upon the choice one made with Yahweh. It may seem unspiritual to us that David uses the word "**hate**," but hating certain company was not a matter of *social preference* but of *spiritual alignment*.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Green, *The Refiner's Fire*

Now, I *hate* to be around cigarette smoke, but that's only a personal preference. The word that David uses here for "assembly" means a congregation, party, or rival group that is opposed to God.

The reason it was necessary to David is that *his character and his kingdom was at stake in this choice of associates*. Dear friends, this is true of any enterprise we are involved with today. You may be clean as a whistle, but if you do business and run with sharks and con artists, you will be associated with what they do. Do you remember what your mother taught you as a kid about associates? "If you lie down with dogs, you'll get up with fleas."

- **1 Corinthians 15:33**—"Bad company corrupts good morals."
- **2 Timothy 2:22**—Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Do I love what God loves?  
Do I hate what God hates?  
Do I go where He leads?

It was Spurgeon who said, "A man who does not hate evil terribly, does not love good heartily...It is better to sit with the rejected of Christ at the table of mercy than with the wicked at the feast of ungodliness. It is better to sit with Job on the dunghill of sorrow, than on Pharaoh's throne...for the company we keep in this world, we are likely to keep in the next."

David explains his *integrity* in both *positive* and *negative* terms. On the positive side, in verse 3, "I am motivated by God's love and faithfulness." On the negative hand, he reveals that the way he maintains his integrity is by avoiding certain people whose influence could distract him from his relationship with God.

How is your walk with the Lord? Look at its consistency. Look at its comprehensiveness. Look at your companionship. Now David's walk affects his worship.

## **B. DAVID'S WORSHIP (vv.6-8)**

Notice carefully here that David turns from what IS NOT done to what IS done. In other words, this is the practice of one entering into the presence of God in worship. This approach is the act of a righteous man with integrity.

- *He desires what God desires.*
- *He follows where God leads.*
- *He rejects what God rejects.*
- *He hates what God hates.*

Now, he does something that will mark our lives as we approach God in worship.

## 1. I confess what You forbid. (v.6)

<sup>6</sup> I shall wash my hands in innocence,  
And I will go about Your altar, O LORD,

What is the difference between a saved, godly man or woman when they pray, versus the unsaved, pretender when they pray? The difference is not only in *how they choose to live* and *what they choose to love*, but it is also seen *how they approach worship*.

**"I shall wash my hands in innocence..."** David says. He is thinking of the laver ceremony used by those who officiated worship in God's house. Between the altar and the tent stood the laver, where the priest washed their *hands* and *feet* before approaching. The "washing" was symbolic, signifying both *innocence* and yet, at the same time, *the need for purification*. Clean "hands" symbolized *a clean heart*. It prepared the worshiper to enter the presence of Yahweh and join in the assembly of worship. What David is saying is: it is only when my heart and hands are clean that I can go about the altar of God, which symbolized *God's presence*.

The directive is given many places in the Scriptures. For example:

- **Proverbs 28:13**—He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,  
But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.
- **Psalm 32:3-6**—When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away  
Through my groaning all day long.  
<sup>4</sup> For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;  
My vitality was drained away *as* with the fever heat of summer. *Selah*.  
<sup>5</sup> I acknowledged my sin to You,  
And my iniquity I did not hide;  
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD";  
And You forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*.  
<sup>6</sup> Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found;  
Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.
- **Psalm 66:18-19**—If I regard wickedness in my heart,  
The Lord will not hear;  
<sup>19</sup> But certainly God has heard;  
He has given heed to the voice of my prayer.

Now, some of you are feeling like one of the psalmists, a man by the name of Asaph. As he looked around him at those who lived in sin but seemed to prosper, he descended into discontentment and discouragement. Perhaps, that's where some of you are this morning. You've become envious of those who are not nearly as sincere as you are. You are jealous of their family, their spouse, their job, their skills, and even their blessings. You go to church, you give, you serve, you seek to do the right thing, but they get the raises, the promotions, the attention, and seemingly, the blessings of God. You say like Asaph,

- **Psalm 73:13**—Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure  
And washed my hands in innocence;

But dear friends, when your belief and your experience collide, just come into the presence of God in worship, and then you will "*perceive their end*" (*Ps.73:17ff*).

Now with his hands, feet, and heart clean, David anticipates entering into the presence of God, where he will make known to others what He has learned from God. He confesses what God forbids, and...

## 2. I proclaim what You do. (v.7)

<sup>7</sup> That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving  
And declare all Your wonders.

Imagine David in church with this spirit of thanksgiving and gratitude. His worship is no mere “it’s good to be in church” kind of thing. David is making it known to others how thankful he is for what the Lord has done in his life. Imagine that kind of spirit by those who come to worship!

You might hear someone over there saying, “Brother, it has been a hard week, but let me tell you how thankful I am for what the Lord has done!” You might hear a sister over on the other side saying, “Yes, I was at my wits end with these kids and at these stores, but the Lord was my help!”

We would be mistaken if we thought that all David gave thanks for *what the Lord had done for him* in particular. No, but notice, David “**declared all Yahweh’s wonders.**”

- The wonder of His creation.
- The wonder of His salvation.
- The wonder of His preservation.
- The wonder of His sanctification.
- The wonders of His love.

He rules the world with truth and grace  
And makes the nations prove  
The glory of His righteousness  
And wonders of love<sup>2</sup>

It is as if David is just circling the altar, giving God praise! This is what examination produces in his life. Here is the *evidence of his integrity* and his *piety—he desires what God desires, he follows where God leads, he rejects whom God rejects, he hates what God hates, he confesses what God forbids, he proclaims what God does*, and then finally,

## 3. I love what You love. (v.8)

<sup>8</sup> O LORD, I love the habitation of Your house  
And the place where Your glory dwells.

David is not merely saying that he loves to be in church, but he loves *God’s people*. He loves *God’s will*. I delight to be with God and with His people. United. Learning. Praising. Praying. Serving.

Albert Barnes once said, “there can be no true religion where the soul does not find pleasure in the worship of God. A person who does not delight in such a service here is not prepared for heaven, where God eternally dwells.”

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<sup>2</sup> Isaac Watts, *Joy to the World!*



- **Psalm 84:1-2, 4**,—How lovely are Your dwelling places,  
O LORD of hosts!  
<sup>2</sup> My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD;  
My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.  
<sup>3</sup> The bird also has found a house,  
And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young,  
Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
My King and my God.  
<sup>4</sup> How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!  
They are ever praising You. *Selah*.
- **Psalm 84:10**—For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand *outside*.  
I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God  
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Immersing oneself in the things of God and avoiding those things that are counter to God’s purpose and undermine a relationship with God makes *trusting God a greater delight*. Where we *live* and where we spend *our time* has a lot to say about *who we are* and *what we value*. Do you love the house where God dwells? Or, are you content to rub shoulders with the worldly and the ungodly?

David calls us in this psalm to *reflect upon our own lives*. Think about your walk and your worship. Can you describe your life as David did? What changes do you need to make to be able to say, “Lord, I am walking in consistent fellowship with You and with Your purposes.”?

Now the picture shifts from David being a *worshiper* to one seeking asylum in the house of God.

In the Old Testament (*Ex.21:13-14; 1 Kings 1:50-53; 2:18-30*), when a person wanted to be judged by a righteous standard, they would flee to the temple and claim asylum. Once there, a determination was made on the justice of their claims. If it was right, they were allowed to remain until a court date. Or, if the request for asylum was denied, they would be taken out of the temple and executed. David employs this language as if to say this is my witness.

### C. DAVID’S WITNESS (vv.9-12)

<sup>9</sup> Do not take my soul away *along* with sinners,  
Nor my life with men of bloodshed,  
<sup>10</sup> In whose hands is a wicked scheme,  
And whose right hand is full of bribes.  
<sup>11</sup> But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;  
Redeem me, and be gracious to me.  
<sup>12</sup> My foot stands on a level place;  
In the congregations I shall bless the LORD.

I believe we can summarize David’s witness like this:

1. **Lord, don’t take me away**—with the lost but count me in with the saved. (vv.9-10)

<sup>9</sup> Do not take my soul away *along* with sinners,  
Nor my life with men of bloodshed,  
<sup>10</sup> In whose hands is a wicked scheme,  
And whose right hand is full of bribes.

Again, David is not saying that he is not a sinner but rather that *he has lived and is living with integrity*. The request is, "Lord, when you clean house of those who play the faces and reject Your Word, exclude me because I prefer to be in Your presence than in the presence of lost sinners."

Pass me not O gentle Savior,  
Hear my humble cry.  
While on others Thou art calling,  
Do not pass me by.<sup>3</sup>

O when the saints go marching in,  
O when the saints go marching in,  
O Lord, I want to be in that number  
When the saints go marching in.<sup>4</sup>

2. **Lord, hold me fast**—I am committed to You, but I need your salvation and grace. (*vv.11-12*)

<sup>11</sup> But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;  
Redeem me, and be gracious to me.

<sup>12</sup> My foot stands on a level place;  
In the congregations I shall bless the LORD.

We have all faced those times when our integrity is on the line. This psalm is for those times. To face God and ask Him to judge is a frightening place for any who are aware of their sins and shortfalls in life. But the desire for integrity invites God to "weigh my life in the balance Lord! Examine to see if my motives come from the heart or if I do what I do for show. Check me out, probe me, investigate me, Lord! Examine what I have done and what I have chosen not to do!"

Now, we know that God needs no investigation, for He already knows. But our willingness to place our lives under the scrutiny of God says something about who we are and whom we trust. If you think that by living a righteous life, you will qualify to receive God's favor now and heaven when you die, you must dismiss the thought at once! This entire psalm communicates that David had a real trust in the Lord. And if we possess a saving truth, then it is reflected in our WALK, our WORSHIP, and our WITNESS.

## Conclusion

The only way sinners can be right with God is to receive from God the righteousness He demands and provides—and this righteousness is found BY FAITH in Jesus Christ (*Rom.1:16-17; 2 Cor.5:21; Rom.5:1*). When we place our trust, our faith, our hope for salvation only and solely in Christ, then and then only, can we be declared, "not guilty." But with this declaration comes *a new birth and new life* that changes the way you walk (*Eph.1:13; Ezek.36*).

- Do we follow consistently?
- Do we act differently?
- Do we worship properly?
- Do we trust wholeheartedly?

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<sup>3</sup> Fanny Crosby, *Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior*

<sup>4</sup> Black Spiritual, *When the Saints Go Marching In*

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