

Introduction

Several years ago, President Obama released a list of personal guests he had invited to the White House. They included Bill Gates, Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Denzel Washington, and Oprah Winfrey. Most of us are never going to be guests of a President at the White House because we aren't celebrities or VIP's like they are. But we can be guests of One who is infinitely more important than any President of the United States is. That One is God and that's what I'm going to preach about today and next week – how you and I can be guests of His.

The Guest of God

David begins his psalm, in line 1 of verse 1, with a question, "**O Yahweh, who may abide (sojourn) in Your tent?**" He asks the same question in a different way in line 2, "**Who may dwell on Your holy hill?**" That is arguably the single most significant question in human life. Two other texts ask it as well – Psalm 24:3-6 and Isaiah 33:14-17.

The Hebrew words David uses in verse 1 are laden with meaning. "**Sojourn**" and "**dwell**" are words of hospitality. They describe what a guest does. He comes to a host's house and lives there. The word "**tent**" refers to the tabernacle and the words "**holy hill**" refer to the hill in Jerusalem upon which the tabernacle was placed. The tabernacle was the place where God uniquely manifested His presence to the people of Israel. That's why the Old Testament designates it "**the house of God.**"

Those words are metaphors. They picture God as a host and His followers as guests who come and live with Him. David uses them to convey a specific idea, intimacy of relationship. That is of course the central message of Christianity. The dominant reality of the universe is the triune God who created it. And we can, through Jesus, have a close personal relationship with Him. A.W. Tozer explains it this way in his book *The Pursuit of God*: "**The Bible assumes as self-evident fact that men can know God with at least the same degree of intimacy as**

they know any other person or thing that comes within the field of their experience.” He was surely right.

My most intimate human relationship, for instance, is with my wife Jill. She is the witness to my life and I to hers. I engage her and am engaged by her more routinely and personally than anyone else – except Yahweh. I direct my thoughts and actions to Him more than I do to her. And He directs His thoughts and actions to me more than she does to me. I have an ongoing conversational relationship with Him that is richer and deeper than the one I have with my wife. Those of you who arrange your affairs around Him have that very same experience.

And it fulfills us. David contends just that in his next Psalm, 16, in verse 11, **“In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”** All sane human beings desperately desire and seek the same condition of life, which is pervasive and habitual love, joy, and peace. There’s only one way to achieve it. It’s to arrange our affairs around engaging God. We become His guests as we do with all the fullness of joy and pleasures forever that go along with that. The little kitchen cook and guest of God, Brother Lawrence said it well, **“There is no mode of life in the world more pleasing and more full of delight than continual conversation with God.”**

You can see then why I said what I said. The most significant question in human life is, **“Who can be the guest of God?”** Who can have an intimate relationship with Him?

David answers that question in verses 2-5. He lists four qualities we have to have to be guests of God. These qualities are representative not exhaustive. Psalm 24:3-6 and Isaiah 33:14-17, which I mentioned earlier, identify additional ones. But our purpose today and next week is to examine, understand, and pursue the four qualities David lists here.

Our Character Must Be True

The first is found in verse 2. Let’s define three words in this verse. **“Integrity”** – what is sound or whole. **“Righteousness”** – what is right

or good. And **"truth"** – what is trustworthy or sure.

Notice what God's guest does. He **"walks"** in integrity, **"works"** righteousness, and **"speaks"** truth. Integrity, righteousness, and truth characterize his behavior.

Now notice what God's guest is. The word **"heart"** refers to his being, his inner dimensions. The same integrity, righteousness, and truth that characterize his behavior characterize his being as well.

David's point about God's guest is clear. His character is true. That means what he says and does is one with what He is. His behavior is in harmony with his being. Think of this in terms of two components. One is our face to the world. The other is our heart before God. You and I are in one of two conditions or states in that regard.

One of those is that our character is false. Our face to the world (what we say and do) is not one with our heart before God (what we are). Jesus used a word for that in the Synoptic Gospels, **"hypocrite."** The word **"hypocrite"** in the classical Greek referred primarily to an actor playing a part in a play. Over time though, it eventually became associated with a person playing a part in his relationships. The actor presents himself to an audience as a person he is not. In the same way, the hypocrite presents himself to people around him as a person he is not. He pretends to be something that he is not. Or he pretends not to be something that he is.

Examples speak a thousand words. A retired grandmother rarely spends time with her local grandchildren. Yet she speaks and writes to her friends as if her life revolves around them. Or consider a pastor's testimony: **"I am almost afraid that if people get too close to me, they will discover the hypocrisy in my everyday life. When I am behind the pulpit, I may sound like 'super Christian,' but in day to day living my flaws and failures become all too apparent. I preach a lifestyle that is better than the one I live."**

The grandmother and pastor are playing parts. They're presenting themselves to others as something they are not. They illustrate one

possible condition or state. Our character is false. Our face to the world is not one with our heart before God.

But notice what verse 2 in the context of verse 1 clearly implies. False character is disruptive of our companionship with God. Jesus alone brought the word **“hypocrisy”** into the vocabulary of the Western world. He did so because of His unique emphasis on the moral significance of our inner condition. Hypocrisy is immoral in other words and thus strains our relationship with God.

We must, therefore, commit ourselves to a second condition or state. Our character is true. We aren't hypocrites. Our face to the world is one with our heart before God. We do what Peter commands in 1 Peter 2:1, **“Put aside all guile and hypocrisy.”** **“Put aside”** suggests action on our part. We intend to be without any pretense in the routines and relationships of everyday life. We then try and train our best to achieve that. We work to make what we say and do one with what we are.

We begin by making and carrying out the decision to follow these five basic rules: (1) Don't emphasize opinions with which we think people might agree; (2) Don't tell stories that make us sound more intelligent, talented, and successful than we are; (3) Don't hide, manage, or put a positive spin on what we do wrong; (4) Don't hold back contrary opinions when we should honestly express them; and (5) Don't pretend to have thoughts and feelings about things that we don't really have. We commit ourselves to following those five rules to a tee.

We do so in the context of our discipleship to Jesus. We arrange our affairs around engaging Him and His kingdom at hand. He eventually transforms us in two ways as we do. First, our inner condition becomes more and more like His, which makes pretense less and less necessary. Second, we become less and less concerned about people's opinions of us, which makes pretense less and less desirable. Those are the transformations, which together eradicate hypocrisy from our lives.

That then is one quality we must have to be guests of God. Our character must be true.

Our Dealings Must Be Honorable

A second is found in the last line in verse 4 and the first two lines in verse 5. David identifies three behaviors of guests of God.

First, they don't swear to their own hurt and then change their minds. If they make a promise or deal and discover later that keeping it will be detrimental to them, they keep it anyway.

Second, they don't lend money at interest. It isn't immoral to charge people equitable interest for personal loans, but guests of God don't. They don't take advantage of anyone's misfortune for their gain.

And third, they don't take bribes against the innocent. It was commonplace in the ancient world for people in positions of influence or power to take bribes for personal gain. But guests of God don't do anything unjust or unfair to anyone for any reason.

Those three behaviors have a common denominator. In a well know letter to James Redpath, Louisa May Alcott, author of the classic novel *Little Women*, wrote this, "**I wish to be honorable and right in my dealings all round.**" That's the common denominator and precisely what guests of God are, honorable in all of their dealings. They do two things.

First, they recognize the greater good in the activities, experiences, and events of everyday life. They have a Biblically informed value system that enables them to identify what is important and not important in the situation before them – or what is more important and less important.

Second, recognizing the greater good, they then pursue it even when doing so is detrimental to them. They seek what is important over what is not important or what is more important over what is less important "**to their own hurt**" to quote verse 4.

Guests of God do both of those things. They are, in other words, honorable in all of their dealings. They're always honest, loyal, reliable, generous, just, and fair with everyone in everything they do.

Our Quaker forbearers illustrate what I mean. Imagine what life would be like without fixed pricing. We go to Marc's and have to dicker/haggle over the price of every apple and loaf of bread we buy. This is

called the **“Price System of Exchange.”** In it, buyers are driven to seek the lowest possible prices and sellers the highest. Exchange is motivated by self-interest and is unaffected by social or moral considerations.

That’s how business was conducted in the Western world until the Quakers came along in 17th century England. They viewed haggling as **“cozening (tricking), cheating, and defrauding”** to quote their founder, George Fox. So, to promote honesty, eliminate greed, and treat each person equally, they invented fixed pricing. Quaker merchants set a fixed fair price on all their merchandise to their detriment. They lost significant numbers of customers who were suspicious of their refusal to haggle. But people began to recognize the benefit of that and their businesses eventually flourished. Sociologist Kelsey Meagher sums it up well: **“The Quakers adopted fixed prices in order to support their values for honesty and equality, not because it would give them an advantage in the market; indeed, it was an unintended and fortunate side effect that the businesses eventually thrived.”**

Those Quakers were honorable in their dealings and so should we be. Think about practical matters like paying our bills, working for an employer, tipping a waitress, making a promise, serving on a board, fulfilling a contract, selling a product or service, checking out a book, renting a DVD, and disciplining children. We must be honorable in those and all transactions of life. We must be honest, loyal, reliable, generous, just, and fair with everyone in everything we do, period.

Conclusion

Let me sum up in closing what I’ve said today. Joyce Meyer writes, **“Jesus is a divine guest inside of you all the time.”** But that wasn’t David’s view. In his view, we aren’t the host, God is. And God isn’t the guest, we are. So let’s be good guests. Let’s commit ourselves to the qualities David lists in Psalm 15, beginning with the two we learned today. In God’s presence and power, make our character true and our dealings honorable.