

# Walking In Integrity

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Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if it weren't for the superscriptions that head these Psalms, I don't think we would ever expect that they have the same author.

! Psalm 25, it includes three different admissions of guilt and distinct confessions of sin. A cry of faith from a man in desperate need of God's mercy and forgiveness.

Psalm 26, on the other hand, is a passionate declaration of innocence. It's almost the opposite of Psalm 25. And it's not just a declaration of innocence.

It's a call for God to act in righteousness, to publicly announce and vindicate the king's righteousness, David's righteousness.

After supplying the evidence to make his case, David even goes so far as to say that he stands on level ground.

[ 1 : 11 ] That's stability in relationship to his argument. I stand on level ground here that the right thing in David's mind is his vindication from God in judgment.

He fully expects, in the end, to remain inside the great community of God's people, that great assembly of worshipers.

His claim of innocence here in Psalm 26, it's so strongly voiced that some, including C.S. Lewis at one point, mistakenly, I believe, fought it to contain the seed of self-righteous Phariseism that ultimately comes into full bloom in the Gospels.

It's a strong, strong voicing of innocence. And yet, the man who wrote it is the same man who wrote Psalm 25, where we saw last week, is this just incredible contrition.

How could David express such contrition on one hand and maintain such confidence on the other hand? How can these two things actually come together?

[ 2 : 25 ] I think a basic explanation will suffice for this, and that is, whereas Psalm 25 really is concerned with David's life broadly as a whole, he's thinking of his all-around standing before God, it seems that Psalm 26 is zeroed in on a particular moment in his life.

We can't say for sure what moment that was, but it seems that he was at least facing accusations that he was fully persuaded he was not guilty of.

Whether it was accusations about using some type of wicked scheme to actually obtain the throne in following Saul. Maybe it was something in relationship to something else in his life.

We don't know exactly what it is, but it seems we can discern from all that's happening here that David is thinking about a particular moment. He has accusers in this moment, and he's not guilty of what he's being accused of.

But the accusations are serious. They're serious enough that if found guilty, David could have been expelled from the covenant community, being swept away in judgment with sinners.

[ 3 : 44 ] Psalm 26, then, is the prayer of an innocent man in response to his accusers. He submits his calls to the righteous judge.

He gives evidence of his integrity in the matter at hand, and then he trusts that God, being righteous himself, will in the end vindicate him and declare his true righteousness.

So what is the Psalm here for? Well, all of that being said, the Psalm, its primary intention is not to give us a prayer to pray whenever we are falsely accused. That's not exactly what it's here to do.

It's actually much more significant than that, I think. The song shows us what it looks like to truly walk in integrity. That's the word that David uses at least twice here.

He actually bookends the whole song with this language of integrity. He says in verse 1, vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in integrity. And then he circles back to it in the end, and he says, I shall walk in my integrity.

[ 4 : 55 ] Telling us that integrity is central to the song. And though there is the setting of a particular moment, a particular instance in David's life, what the Psalm as a whole is doing as Israel, as God's people are singing it together, it is putting in front of God's people what it actually looks like to live with spiritual integrity, to truly be righteous.

But even more than that, it points us finally to the truly righteous one. What was true of David in this instance was true of the greater David, Jesus, in every instance.

David might have been able to claim innocence at that moment, but he could not claim innocence altogether. Jesus is completely different than that. This instance in Psalm 26 is a microcosm of what we see in totality with the person of Jesus Christ.

And I think we're meant to see that here. Through Christ alone, we have level ground on which to stand. And in him alone, can we walk the path of integrity that's laid out in the Psalm and be assured of God's blessing, of being present in the great assembly of God's people, surviving the judgment.

We find that assurance here. That level ground, not on the basis of our own innocence and righteousness, but on the basis of Christ's innocence and righteousness.

[ 6 : 36 ] And that's what I want you to see as we work through it. I think if we break it up into three parts, it might be helpful to do that. We could probably do a few more than that. But to keep it simple, let's just look at three sections of the Psalm.

First, I want you to see integrity's examination. Integrity's examination. Look again at the first three verses. Vindicate me, O Lord. Why?

For I have walked in my integrity. I've trusted in the Lord without waiver. I've not slipped. Prove me, O Lord. Try me.

Test my heart and my mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes. Steadfast love bringing in the dynamic of covenant. Your covenant and my faithfulness to your covenant.

It's been in front of me. It's been before my eyes and all that I have done. I have walked in your faithfulness, he says. In no uncertain language, David here invites God to enter into judgment in the case that has been brought against him.

[ 7 : 38 ] A bold prayer to pray. A dangerous prayer to pray. Confident of his own innocence in the matter, he submitted his cause to the one he knew would judge justly.

And he expected that this judgment would result in vindication. The public declaration of his righteousness in the matter.

And notice that the grounds of his prayer, this invitation to appeal to the greatest judge, the grounds is that he had walked in integrity and trusted the Lord without wavering.

Both phrases, they picture for us a path. No doubt the very paths that David prayed for God to reveal to him in Psalm 25. We've now seen this many times over and over.

This picture of a path of walking in God's ways. And here David is calling for God to be the judge. Judge, Lord, because I have walked those paths.

[ 8 : 44 ] I have stayed faithful in this matter. As he faced his accusers, David maintains before the Lord, not merely before his accusers, but before the Lord, the one who sees all and knows all.

He maintains that he had indeed walked those paths. His feet had not slipped, and his conscience was clear. He entrusted his cause to God, which is precisely how Peter describes Jesus responding to his own accusers.

1 Peter 2.23, when Jesus was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten. What did he do? He continued entrusting himself and his cause and his innocence to the one who judges justly.

But this invitation for examination, it's heightened in verse 2. Prove me, Lord. Try me, Lord. Test my heart, Lord.

Test my mind. The threefold call of judgment, prove, try, test. They all refer to the process of refining and purifying precious metals.

[ 10 : 04 ] Like a smith who melts down a brick of gold to expose and remove any impurities. David asked for God here to put him through the fire, so to speak.

That his affections, that is his heart, and that his will, that is his mind, that those things would be tested. He places his whole being here before God and invites his omniscient inspection.

If you've ever been through TSA, I know that Shane and Becky do this about six times a day. You go through TSA. Sometimes it can be intense, right?

Several years ago, Jonathan and I were flying to, my brother and I were flying to New York City to meet with a pastor there and to talk to some people in his church.

And I had forgotten that the week before, I had been somewhere, and at the time I had a concealed carry permit, and I had been somewhere, and I had left a magazine of bullets in my bag. I didn't have the gun in my bag.

[ 11 : 11 ] I had the bullets in my bag. I completely forgot about it. I didn't even know it was there. And so we're going through two pastors on our way to go meet with another pastor in New York City. This is right at the 10th anniversary of 9-11, so people are like intense, right?

And we're going through the thing, and I get held up, and I cannot figure out why I'm getting held up, and it just takes forever. You know why it takes forever? Because they were going through a thorough examination at that moment, a thorough examination of everything that was in my bag, and they came, and they wanted to interview me then about why do I have this, and what are my intentions with this, and all these things.

I actually have a letter from Homeland Security threatening my life that if you ever want to see it, you come to the house, and I'll show it to you that I got in response. No matter how intense the examination is with the TSA or with any other institution or place that you may go through, all of it pales in comparison to the examination of God.

Remember we read in Psalm 19, as the sun, nothing is hidden from its heat. So is the mind of God and the word of God. It pursues every corner of our hearts and our minds.

It knows our deepest thoughts. It knows the things about us that we don't even recognize about ourselves, and it's that. It's that that David is praying for, so convinced of his innocence that he says, God, you try me.

[ 12 : 26 ] Put me to the test. Put me through the fire. He knows that it's one thing to claim integrity, but it's another thing to prove it when the heat is turned up, and so he asks for God to turn up the heat.

Do whatever you have to do, Lord, to purify me, vindicate me in this moment. And why was he so eager to do that? In one sense, I think he is convinced of his innocence in the matter and believed that God's inspection, which would be truer than the inspection of any other human judge, would lead to his vindication.

I think primarily that's what he means by the prayer. But because of the words that he uses here, the language, I think he's implying a secondary perspective.

Should God's omniscient examination reveal some sin in David's life? He wanted to be made pure. Just like the heat and the smelting process will bring the dross to the surface of that precious metal so that it might then be removed and the metal be purified.

David, I think, has that desire, at least by implication here. It's a prayer of humility in that regard. I think he's confident of innocence, but he was humble enough to recognize and admit that there may be some hidden sin to which he was blind.

[ 13 : 48 ] Which means we should be careful when we pray a prayer like this to the Lord. It's one thing to be innocent and it's another thing to be prideful, blind to our own sinfulness.

I think David is praying humbly here in that sense. As another sign of his integrity, he's opening himself to God's test so that he could be cleansed from all unrighteousness.

Isn't that what we want as God's people? We want to avail ourselves to God's judgment so that we might then be purified.

And doesn't God's judgment in this case always involve painful struggle, heat turned up type of struggle? Are you willing for that? Would you ever pray for that?

Lord, I believe I'm innocent, but I also know that I'm often guilty too. Would you test me and expose what is there?

[ 14 : 51 ] Christian integrity doesn't seek merely to be vindicated before others. It actually seeks to be truly right with God. Psalm 139, David says something similar.

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any grievous way in me. Lead me in the way everlasting, he says. And then we get to verse three and this is where we see David's motivation.

Because God's covenant faithfulness is always before him, he desired to be faithful himself. So on the one hand, God's faithfulness assured him of vindication, but it also motivated and shaped his own integrity.

It's in statements like this that we see why David was said to be a man after God's own heart. He wants to know God. He wants to know God's ways. He wants to pursue God. He wants to believe God. He wants to be faithful to God. The covenant is always before his eyes so that he might be faithful to it. God's faithfulness motivates his own.

[ 15 : 58 ] And so it will be with us. Those who keep God's faithfulness and steadfast love before their eyes will always welcome his righteous examination. Trusting God to vindicate their innocence or to be merciful when the test exposes their sin.

So we see integrity's examination. Now I want you to see in the heart of the psalm integrity's evidence or integrity's explanation. The categories that David uses to describe his integrity here we find in verses 4 to 10.

Three of them I think are evident. First in verses 4 and 5 we see that integrity loathes the ways of the wicked. It loathes the ways of the wicked.

Verse 4. I do not sit with men of falsehood nor do I consort with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers and I will not sit with the wicked.

So David begins to make his case and his first piece of evidence is his own hatred for wickedness and sinful schemes. He had put a serious distance between himself and those who are marked by deception and hypocrisy and ungodliness.

[ 17 : 16 ] He recognized the wicked even to be an assembly with all of the power and persuasion of numbers constantly inviting the faithful to turn away from God and share in their own values.

He knows that's the case. So he distances himself. He refused to sit and consort with them which is not a statement of social engagement but of moral and spiritual alignment.

In other words, he hated the ways of the wicked and he refused in any way to blend his worldview that had God's covenant faithfulness and steadfast love before his eyes.

He refused to somehow blend that with the worldview of sinners and of those who hated God and had no desire to follow in God's ways. He was blameless then in his associations.

Now to walk in integrity requires a hatred of sin and an intentional distance from the ways and the influence of the wicked.

[ 18 : 31 ] But this separation for Christians from the wicked is something we need to carefully navigate at least in this sense. Tim Keller used to say that Christians tend to err in two ways when it comes to separation from the world.

On the one hand he says some will tend to isolate. That is cutting themselves off totally from every possible way from non-Christians. Others follow a different extreme where it's not isolation it's actually incorporation where they imbibe the values of the culture in some attempt to keep Christianity ostensibly relevant.

And Keller would go on to say that Jesus teaches us to reject both of these errors. If you either isolate or incorporate you will fail to obey Jesus' command to let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

You can't do that if you isolate and they don't see the good works. And there are no good works if you just imbibe the values of the culture. So on one hand David doesn't mean that he's isolated in the sense of no social engagement whatsoever with the world but he is saying I'm not in any way incorporating.

I don't want the influence of their ways. I'm not going to try to blend the covenant of God and the ways of God with their ways. He's not going to do it. And Jesus modeled this perfectly didn't he?

[ 20 : 12 ] Jesus on the one hand sits and has dinner with prostitutes and tax collectors and the hated of his society. And it was the professional isolators the Pharisees that hated him for it.

And yet he prays that the Father would keep us in the world so that we would live distinctly among it not isolate from it or blend in with it.

So we need to be careful how we apply what David is saying here. But all that sin we must see that in the text spiritual integrity loathes sinful schemes.

It refuses to align with those marked by those schemes. So blamelessness before God then is as much a matter of our disposition toward wickedness as it is our direct involvement with it.

Do you see that here? David's heart toward the ways of the wicked is as important in his mind and in God's mind as actually doing what the wicked do.

[ 21 : 29 ] So we may understand that we may generally refrain from worldly actions but are we amused by them? Are we entertained by them? Do we secretly crave them in some way though at

least at this point we're willing to go so far as to make our alignment with them?

That would be a contradiction wouldn't it? I think what David is saying here not only am I not living in these ways but I hate these ways I don't want to be influenced at all I'm not going to be amused by it I'm not going to entertain it whatsoever.

Do you genuinely hate sinful ways or do you just hate the thought of others knowing how much you love it or are tempted by it?

Spurgeon is helpful here as he so often is a man who does not hate evil terribly does not love good heartily men as men we must always love for they are our neighbors and therefore to be loved as ourselves but evildoers as such are traitors to the great king and no loyal subject can love traitors what God hates we must hate so what is integrity in Psalm 26?

Integrity loathes wickedness it loathes the ways of the wickedness it distances itself appropriately from the wicked but secondly integrity loves to worship so in 4 and 5 we have what integrity hates but in 6 and 7 we have what integrity loves it loves worship look at verses 6 and 7 I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar oh Lord proclaiming thanksgiving aloud and telling all your wondrous deeds so that in contrast to his hatred for wicked ways is David's love for God's ways do you see that in verse 7 that love reveals itself in public worship while he hated the ways of evildoers he loved to tell others about the wondrous deeds of the Lord see the contrast I hate the ways of the wicked so much that I have set distance between me and the wicked in every appropriate way and then he says but oh what I love to do is I love to be among God's people just telling about how awesome

[ 23 : 57 ] God's ways are how wondrous are his deeds and the context of that phrase is Israel's place of worship he's around the altar of God and as he gathers with God's people he washes his hands of sinful ways and instead worships his God with joy and thanksgiving the reference to the altar here it's not a reference to the offering of atonement it's a reference to the thanksgiving offering so that rather than scheme with the wicked David loved to sing the praises of the Lord with the faithful that's true integrity in Psalm 26 it is a distinct way of life that in no way associates with the world view of our culture but it loves the worship of God's people it loves to be with others who love God it loves to tell of God's wondrous deeds and to worship him Christian integrity loves to sing the praises of God in the company of the faithful just like our hatred of sin this is as much about our heart's disposition toward corporate worship as it is the act of attending it you see the difference it's one thing to be here it's one thing to love to be here some evidence their lack of love for worship by how quick they are to abandon it for other things still others attend a church every Sunday without ever developing a love for what's happening there integrity as it's described here is about loving God and his ways so much that you cannot help but gather with others to offer your praise and tell of his wondrous deeds namely of his gospel and his grace in the Lord Jesus Christ isn't that why we gather isn't that why we gather on Sunday in particular isn't that why our songs are permeated with the death and the resurrection and the goodness of Jesus Christ we gather because we love the Lord and his ways and we want to offer our thanksgiving to him together third integrity longs for God's presence it longs for God's presence verses 8 to 10 oh Lord

I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells which is what leads to this horrifying thought in 9 and 10 do not sweep my soul away with sinners nor my life with bloodthirsty men in whose hands are evil devices and whose right hands are full of bribes these verses they're all about a genuine desire to dwell in the presence of God for David that was a specific place it was the tabernacle it was placed in the midst of God's people the place where God's glory dwelt on earth signifying his willingness to dwell with his people so long as the stipulations for atonement were met by them David longed to be there and he longed to be in the place that it represented the holy hill of the Lord but to be found guilty before God would have led to David being swept away with sinners expelled from the covenant community where God dwells and the thought of that in this life or the next was horrifying to him not simply because of the pain of judgment but the separation from the God he loved do not sweep my soul away with sinners instead vindicate my innocence or purify the sin that is there but please don't sweep me away

I want to be where you are David says even according to Christopher Ash even the most remotest possibility of being swept away with such an assembly of moral garbage horrified the believer as the prospect of the cross horrified Jesus is this just not another way that David points us to the greater David this cry it gives us a glimpse into the agony of Jesus as he prays in the garden of Gethsemane the thought of being swept away with sinners expelled from the presence of the father

was almost more than he could bear producing even a physical response sweat drops of blood and such stress and agony in that moment such was Jesus love for the father in his perfect integrity such was his love for us that he endured that agony so that we might be forgiven well that's integrity's evidence third and finally we see integrity's assurance integrity's assurance look at verses 11 and 12

David rounds it all out but as for me I shall walk in my integrity redeem me be gracious to me my foot stands on level ground he declares in the great assembly I will bless the Lord I will he says this is earnest expectation and assurance David sounds the notes of determination a determination that's based on his assurance of God's faithfulness as he had walked in integrity in the matter in which he was accused so he was determined to walk in integrity still he would continue I shall walk in integrity he says his determination was then met with remarkable assurance that he would be vindicated that he would stand in the great assembly to bless the Lord as regards his innocence in that moment David stood on level ground but his assurance was not rooted in himself his assurance was rooted in

God's grace and covenant faithfulness despite his claim of innocence he says redeem me be gracious to me all of his assurance it's resting on God's character here not on his own even if his integrity held up in God's examination David had plenty of sin that was worthy of God's judgment so his assurance here was ultimately built on the solid foundation of God's integrity of God's grace of God's faithfulness to the covenant of God's redemption and rescue of his people not built on his own he was certain he would stand in the great congregation because he knew God would graciously rescue him keeping steadfast love and covenant faithfulness to the very end in the end any spiritual assurance we must we have it must not be based on the strength of our determination but on the faithfulness of

[ 31 : 42 ] God those of you who may struggle with assurance right now in your life your assurance as long as you try to root it in the strength of your determination to keep doing all the things that are marked by integrity here you'll never be assured of anything because your strength is always going to be weak it will never be enough David doesn't rest his assurance ultimately on his own righteousness he rests all of his assurance on the goodness of God of the steadfast love of the Lord of the promised redemption that God had given him if we are to stand on level ground it will be the ground of God's integrity not ours and this in turn then is the very motivation for continuing in integrity because we know that God is faithful now we need to close but as we close we we need to realize that

Psalms 26 it's bigger than David's or our integrity in a given moment it's bigger even than a life that is largely committed to the principles that are enumerated here in the end the song sets a spiritual standard that's impossible for any of us to live up to in one moment we might act in perfect integrity perhaps in relationship to one accusation we might be able to claim innocence but this is about more than one moment this is pointing us forward to our standing before God we cannot possibly live up to what is here we can't neither could David which is why in the psalm before of it he's crying desperately to the Lord for forgiveness and mercy even if you could finish the rest of your days in spotless integrity which you won't do it won't change the sins of your past or the sins of your present they're still there they're real blemishes and they're not going to go away just by getting things better in the future if the integrity of the psalm is what it takes to stand in

God's judgment and not be swept away with sinners and isn't that really the theme that's at the heart here that it is this perfect integrity that leads to vindication and anything less than this perfect integrity will be swept away then we're all damned we're doomed that's why we so desperately need Jesus that's why we needed somebody greater than David who did great in some situations but failed miserably in a lot David wasn't the right king for us he wasn't enough you are not enough only Jesus fulfills Psalm 26 for what was true of David in this instance was true of Jesus in every way he walked in sinless perfection as the son of

God he stood the test without blemish even as the heat was turned all the way up whether you're thinking in the wilderness for 40 days as he fasted and was tempted of the devil or whether you're thinking in the garden of Gethsemane that last major temptation of the devil for him to abandon the cross or whether it's the cross himself itself the heat's turned all the way up on the Lord Jesus Christ and he never fails he never sins he never reviles he never threatens in a way that was wrong for him to do no he stands the test absolutely pure he proved his hatred of sin he proved his desire for worship he proved his love for God and while for a moment his life was indeed swept away with

sinner for us in death his vindication came through resurrection he was swept away so that we don't have to be and his resurrection and his vindication through it provides a vindication for all who will trust in him he does all of this so that we can be forgiven and so that his integrity can then be applied to our account for all who will trust in him and believe if

Jesus is your Lord and Savior then and only then will your feet stand on level ground not the ground of your righteousness but his righteousness not on your innocence for you have none but of his not on the possibility of your vindication but on the reality of his vindication and resurrection!

[ 37 : 04 ] and then for those who believe and have received him by faith we have the assurance of our eternal salvation not because we've done all that it takes but because he has and God is faithful and that will produce and motivate a determination to walk in integrity to hate the ways of the wicked to love worship and to long for God's presence in our lives