God is Upright

Third in the series “Giving Thanks for God’s Character”

# Scripture: Psalm 25:4-15

# Key Thought: Because God is upright, we learn right living.

# Intro:

The passion to know God will transform your life and determine your lifestyle.   James L. Snyder, editor of Delighting in God - p.10

In his prayer for all of us, Jesus said,

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. John 17:3

So, understanding who God is and getting to know God personally through prayer and Scripture needs to be the priority and passion of our lives.

The place to begin in our search to know God is with the picture of God, the revelation of who God is, that we find in the Bible. Today people experiment with different religions and spiritual practices, even with witchcraft, seeking to knows the realm of the spirit. But ultimately, God who is transcendent, cannot be known unless God chooses to reveal himself to us. And that is exactly what God has chosen to do through the history of God’s people in the Bible, through the words of the prophets, and through Jesus and his disciples.

If we do not seek truth about God through the revelation that God has sent, then we succumb to a grave danger. We inevitably shape an image of God in our own mind. As A. W. Tozer writes,

There is another kind of idolatry, and it is the idolatry of the mind. It is thinking of the God you want and then worshiping what you think God should be. (A. W. Tozer Delighting in God - p. 100)

The only way to avoid this error is to study the character of God as the Bible reveals God to be. That is one purpose of this four-week series of sermons. And as with most sermon series, I hope that it simply whets your appetite to study more of the character of God. In this series we are focusing on some of the keywords used in the Book of Psalms to describe the character of God.

# The character of the "Upright One"

## Today’s keyword

Today’s key word is “upright” or “just” as it is also translated. The Hebrew keyword is “yashar.” When we look at how the word upright is used in the Old Testament, we discover that this word has the distinction of being used in one of the titles, the names of God. In the passage in Isaiah 26 that we read the prophet names God as, "The Upright One" (Isaiah 26:7) or in the NRSV, “Just One.”

## Uniqueness of God

Now at first, when we hear the title for today, “God is Upright,” we are tempted to say, “Duh, how can it be otherwise?” But not so fast. We only say that because we are not aware of the huge contrast between the character of our God compared to that of the gods who were worshipped by other nations around Israel. For example, Zeus, the main Greek god was known mostly for seducing goddesses and mortal women. Dionysus was the Greek god of drunken revelry (ZPEB Vol. 2 p. 835). Baal, the fertility god of the Canaanites who surrounded Israel in OT times, was worshipped with ritual prostitution of both sexes (ZEPB Vol. 1 p. 433). Let’s look at Hinduism, another very ancient religion, and one that has many gods, but yet a religion that influences millions still today.

According to the [Bhagavad Gita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita) (16.6–16.7), all beings in the universe have both the divine qualities and the demonic qualities within each.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_deities#cite_note-fowlergita-5)[[66](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_deities#cite_note-chrischapple-68) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_deities>)

I saw a news article on BBC about a Shinto ceremony in present-day Ohara Beach, Japan called the “festival of eight million gods.” Friends, it is only our ignorance of the kinds of things that are worshipped around the world that causes us to take the character of the God of Israel for granted. There is a huge contrast.

In our brief survey, what we find, to our amazement as Christians, is that having a God who is completely upright is rather unique to the God of the Bible. We sing those worshipful words, “There is none like You.” But we are only vaguely aware of how amazingly true they are. So, it is even more important for us to learn more about our awesome God.

Let’s focus on today’s keyword.

## Meaning of upright

We use the word upright to refer to something which stands straight up. And in English, we have a second meaning referring to someone's character, someone who is honest just and honorable. They do the right things; they are a person of integrity. We say they are an upright person. Our English word is used to translate Hebrew word pronounced, "yashar" which has the same two meanings. It could refer on the one hand to something that stood straight up; or it could refer to someone whose character was upright. Such a person was just, honest and honorable. This is the word that is used here in Psalms and in Isaiah to describe the character of God. And unlike the gods of Palestine and Greece and other ancient places, the God of Israel was not subject to the vicissitudes of human passions. Our God could not be just one moment and unjust another. It is impossible for God to act contrary to his nature.

One of the ways we can be sure that we understand what the word “upright” means in the Old Testament is to observe how it is used in the parallelism of Hebrew poetry. You may recall that while we in English make poetry through rhyme and rhythm, the Hebrew people often made poetry through lines with parallel meaning, either synonymous or antithetical.

In the case of the word that means upright, we find it paired synonymously with words that mean faithful, true, good, righteous and just. For example, in our text for today we found,

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore, he instructs sinners in his ways.   
Ps 25:8 NIV

And in Psalm 111:7,8 we find three of these words together.

The works of his hands are faithful (emet) and just(mishpat); all his precepts are trustworthy.  
They are established for ever and ever, enacted in faithfulness (emet) and uprightness (yashar).   
Ps 111:7-8 NIV

So, in teaching us that God is the “Upright One,” the Bible is telling us about the unchanging, perfectly moral character of God. Since God is upright, we will not be surprised to learn that God is faithful and true; that God is also described as perfectly righteous and holy.

# The "Upright One" teaches us

## Love and uprightness together are ideal foundations for instruction

But David not only wants us to understand God’s character, he wants us also to understand a very practical result.

We know that in homes, love from the parents that is not also shaped and guided by standards of uprightness results in spoiled children. But when love is strong and moral uprightness describes the family, the result can be beautiful. The children grow in a positive supportive atmosphere, and they are guided into right choices.

So it is with our God. Because God is both loving and upright, we as God’s children are cared for and supported and guided into right paths. God’s mercy and love which we have talked about in the previous two weeks are mentioned in Psalm 25:6 as describing God’s character. But notice what comes next. Notice the number of phrases and verses in Psalm 25 which refer to God’s directions for his followers.

## David was teachable, are we?

First in verses 4 and 5, David prays to be guided into the right paths.

Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.  
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior. Ps 25:4-5

There is an interesting implied question here. Are we teachable before God? One of my prayers for my two grandchildren is that they will be teachable. Children who have the know-it-all attitude do not realize how much more they could be learning, how their skills would advance, how much farther along in maturity they could be if they were being teachable. Parents and grandparents quietly bemoan it. I wonder if God does not also quietly bemoan how unteachable we often are. We think we know enough and are just not interested in spiritual learning. How sad. Thankfully, David was teachable.

## God instructs us in his ways

Then in verses 8, 9 we find assurance that God does, in fact, do as David requested.

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore, he instructs sinners in his ways.  
 He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. Ps 25:8-9 NIV

First God instructs us in “his ways.” This is a struggle for us. We want to know things like how to get rich, how to be happy, how to find the right house or car or business opportunity, etc. We have our agendas and priorities. But that is not where God begins. The questions we are asking arise from the twisted selfish values that we in our pride espouse without thought. They are often not even the best questions for us to be asking God. So, God must start by reorienting us. God must begin by giving us a new foundation. We are like people lost in a wilderness, going in circles, who first need to be turned in the right direction and shown the way. The new framework that we need from God is described as “his ways,” his commands, his thinking, his values, his ideals. These will reorient our lives.

## God guides us were we need it

Then in verse 12 we find a second assurance of God’s instruction but with a little different emphasis.

Who, then, are those who fear the Lord? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose. Ps 25:12

This time, God’s assurance of instruction reaches into those daily choices that we need to make. We do face tough choices where the right path is difficult to discern. Sometimes moral issues are at stake. Other times it is simply a matter of what direction our own lives should take on matters such as job choice, parenting strategies, housing decisions, or business deals. In this verse, God is assuring us that, having begun by learning God’s ways, we can now anticipate God’s help in discerning our way on practical things as well. Now this still does not make it simple. Scriptural principles often help. Sometimes, God brings a quiet thought, sometimes called “the still small voice” into our minds. But I believe most often, God helps us by allowing his peace to rest upon the best path as we pray. As Paul wrote,

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:7 NIV

But the promise of the Psalms is that God will help by guiding us. God is a communicator and we can trust him to get his point across.

## God desires to confide in us

Let’s continue in Psalm 25. The Holy Spirit speaking through David does not even stop there but gives us further promise of God’s desire to reveal to us things about himself as well as the other things we need to know.

The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. Ps 25:14

So, in answer to David’s prayer for guidance, we are assured again that God will indeed instruct us in the ways that we should go. God will teach us right ways. God will teach us the ways that fit with his covenants. Even better, God will teach us his own ways! And he will help us when we need wisdom. Consider the corresponding promise from Psalm 32.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Ps 32:8

We cannot help but be reminded of Jeremiah’s prophecy that looked forward toward the New Covenant;

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Jer 31:33 NIV

There is no doubt that God desires that we inculcate his values, his characteristics. In short, we are to grow in godliness until God’s goals for us are reached. As Paul admonished Timothy and with him all of us,

But you, man of God… pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 1 Tim 6:11

The goal that God desires is expressed by the Psalm writer in another place.

The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just.  
 The law of their God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip. Ps 37:30-31

And there is no doubt that God wants us to be at peace in the assurance that God will help us with the perplexing decisions that we often face. God is not perplexed and is willing to help us find perspective and directions for our lives.

# Conclusion

Yet none of this would happen if we did not worship the “Upright One.” We emulate and are taught by our God who is the epitome of justice, righteousness, honesty, and goodness. As we worship him and follow him, we grow in upright character, truthful words, honest dealings with others, concern for justice for those oppressed, etc. In short, our character begins to reflect the God whom we worship. And our daily decisions do as well. How awesome is that.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matt 5:6 N IV