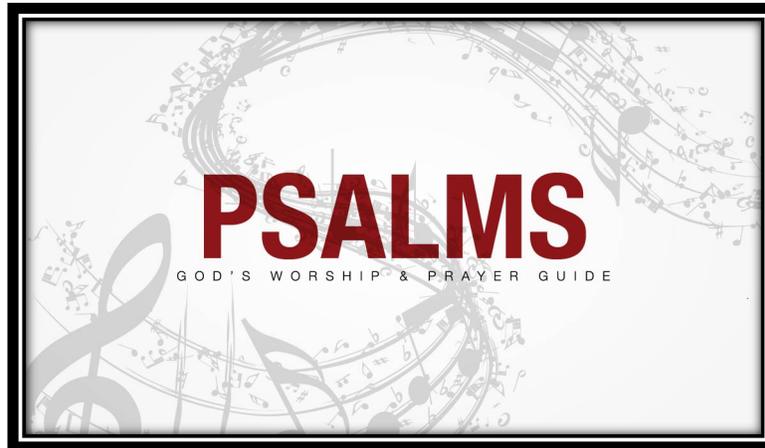


# Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide

Selected Texts  
Written By  
©Dr. Marty Baker  
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**W**hen you enter the presence of a powerful person, you expect there to be protocol. Right after Trump won the presidency, Vice President Pence's Chief of Staff dealing with religious affairs contacted me. What did he want? He said Pence wanted to know if I would come down to the White House and pray for his staff. Even though I was prepping for Easter week, I moved my schedule around so I could oblige.

Do you think I just took the Metro train down there and simply walked into the Executive Office building? Not quite. The Secret Service wanted all of my personal information, including my Social Security number. While I do not give that coveted number to just anyone, I figured I could give it to them. After all, I reasoned, if I could not trust them, who could I trust, right?

After I received an all-clear notification, I hopped on the train and headed north. Walking up to the to western gate just off of 17<sup>th</sup> Street, I gave the guard in the booth my name and ID. He looked it up on his computer, verified my validity, returned my ID, and gave me a White House ID badge on a chain. After this, I proceeded through the southern door to enter what appeared to a bomb/explosives sniffing machine (replete with a hungry looking guard dog on a leash). From here, I proceeded through an X-Ray machine after emptying my pockets on a conveyor belt, along with my belt and Bible. Once I cleared this check, I enjoyed the freedom of walking to the Vice President's office. Outside his office door that day stood four very fit, finely groomed, and well-dressed Secret Service agents. As I walked up to them, a propped open door allowed my contact to see me and invite me into the "inner sanctum." I was in because I followed well-devised protocol.

Do you think, in light of this story, God has absolutely no protocol for entering *His* presence? Do you think you can just thoughtlessly waltz into His holy presence, surrounded by the seraphim rhythmically chanting quietly “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts?”

וְקָרָא זֶה אֱלֹהֵי וְאָמַר קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת

Yes, the author of Hebrews says we can “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16), and, yes, Paul teaches in Romans 8 we can rightfully call God, *Abba*, or Father, as we approach Him (Rom. 8:15).

Yet verses like this must be balanced by other verses and passages which remind us how ominous it is to tread upon holy ground around the throne of the Almighty. Who can forget Isaiah’s response when he was ushered into God’s throne room:

<sup>1</sup> In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.’ <sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. <sup>5</sup> Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.’ <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth *with it* and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven” (Isa. 6).

Isaiah immediately beheld the magnificence of God as THE King of the seen and unseen worlds, coupled with a keen sense of his intrinsic sinfulness in the presence of absolute holiness. He quickly must have thought, “How can I, a man with sin who lives with sinners, stand *here* in the presence of utter holiness?” Only when a seraphim touched his mouth with a special coal from God’s holy altar was he cleansed of his sin and made acceptable to appear before God to receive a word from God.

I think we, in the lax, cool, comfortable, and contemporary age, tend to forget the importance of following proper protocol in standing before God’s throne in prayer and worship. I, also, tend to think we enter worship, either on-line or in person, without giving too much serious thought to *how* we should prepare ourselves for said worship of the living, holy God. We are more focused on what the songs are for the morning, and what the sermon passage is under consideration. We are big on evaluating whether we liked the song selections, and whether the sermon followed the text and was replete with good exegesis, application, and a smattering of humor. We are also skilled at examining others. Who are they with, or not with? How are they dressed? What happened to her hair? Are they raising their hands a bit too much on every song? And so on and so forth. We are, I fear, not big on examining and evaluating ourselves as we prepare to enter into worship, whether that worship is corporate or personal.

King David understood this human dynamic. He also understood the person of God and what protocol must be followed in order to appear in God’s court. Realizing this, and attempting, by means of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the wise king seeks to help us prepare for worship

of the living God in Psalm 15. In five short, but powerful and thought-provoking verses, David answers the question of all questions for would-be worshippers of the LORD of hosts:

## What Is The Protocol For Communing Before God's Throne? (Psalm 15)

### The Question For Would-Be Worshippers (Psalm 15:1)

Two Socratic questions grab our immediate attention:

<sup>1</sup> A Psalm of David. O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?

Spiritually sensitive people want to know. Lord, who can “abide in your tent?” Can just anyone come before you? From a New Testament perspective the answer is unequivocally, “No.” Just as an Old Testament saint could not approach God's tent, or tabernacle, nor tread upon Mount Zion, the location of divine worship (Psalm 2:6; 43:3; 87:1; 99:9; 11:9; Zech. 8:3), without the appropriate burnt offering, per the command of Leviticus 1, so, no person in our age can approach God without first coming by means of faith in Christ who is THE fulfillment of all of the Old Testament sacrifices. This is the concise argument of the author of Hebrews in chapter 9, verses 16 through 27. Question, Is Christ your sin-sacrifice? Have you, by faith, accepted His substitutionary death (Mark 10:45) to be true for you? If not, why not? If so, then you are *positionally* prepared to stand before Him in eternity because in Christ you are properly prepared (1 Cor. 1:30); however, in the *practical* present, following proper protocol is most important.

It is interesting that the Hebrew word/verb David employs for “abiding” in God's presence, *gur*, is the lexical word for an alien, of a person who did not necessarily naturally belong to the cultus of Israel:

Holladay, Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT (HOL)

Holl494 גור

I גור: qal: pf. (גָּרָה Gn 35<sub>27</sub>), גָּרָה, גָּרָה; impf. יִגְרֹה, יִגְרֹה, יִגְרֹה; impv. יִגְרֹה; inf. לִגְרוֹה; pt. גָּרָה, גָּרָה, גָּרָה; גָּרָה: stay as foreigner and sojourner (« gôr) Gn 21<sub>23</sub>•<sub>34</sub>; w. acc. °oniyyôt as rowers Ju 5<sub>17</sub>; loe° y@g¥r@k¹ r¹± nothing evil dares to stay with you Ps 55; oft. w. š¹m Gn 12<sub>10</sub> &c.; w. °im Gn 32<sub>5</sub>, w. °ôl Ex 12<sub>48</sub>, w. b@tôk Ex 12<sub>48</sub>, w. b@ among a people Lv 20<sub>2</sub>, in sanctuary Ps 15<sub>1</sub>; abs. Gn 19<sub>9</sub>; g¹rat bêl¹h her protected lodger Ex 3<sub>22</sub>.

The word choice rightfully shows how God, in His love for us, does desire us to enter a place we could not typically go because of who we are. He is divine. We are human. He is celestial. We are terrestrial. He is holy. We are positionally holy, but our daily walks reveal we have practical issues with breaking free from sin (Rom. 6:19ff). Thank God He allows us, of all people, the opportunity to commune with Him; however, as David goes on to drive home, it matters greatly how we approach God. Protocols are of extreme importance for those former aliens, who are now sons and daughters, who desire an audience with the Pantokrator (ὁ παντοκράτωρ, Rev. 21:22), the One possessing ALL power, the Almighty.

What is the protocol? David gives us the coveted answers in the ensuing verses.

## The Answers For Would-Be Worshippers (Psalm 15:2-5a)

Before we dig into David's counsel about how to properly prepare yourself for entering into an audience with the Divine, allow me to first say a few foundational things.

One, David counsels saints to do careful spiritual introspection prior to a divine encounter. Will you? . . . is the question. Wise people will answer in the affirmative.

Two, David's list, I am sure, is not exhaustive, by any means. He is merely denoting how important it is to take a hard, honest look at your inner life to make sure it squares with what God says in the Word constitutes holiness. God's Word, of course, covers a plethora of possible debilitating, limiting sins from Genesis to Revelation. Hence, while not all of the concepts mentioned by the king here might apply to you, I am convinced the Holy Spirit will tap you on the shoulder and give you some much needed insight into yourself. After all, this is His job (John 16:8-10).

Three, David moves back and forth between positive and negative concepts: Positive (v. 2), Negative (v. 3), Positive (v. 4), and Negative (v. 5a). Why does he do this? Because he knows that we do make spiritual progress in our walks with God, plus he is man enough to admit that the old carnal nature (1 Cor. 3:1-5) lurks in our flesh until we see Christ face to face.

So, what about it? What are the ten characteristics would-be worshippers should look for in their lives as they seek an audience with God? What about our lives commends us to Him, and what condemns us and needs quick confession (1 John 1:9)? David wastes no time answering these questions.

Positively, the first three things God is looking for in our lives as we approach Him are detailed for all to see in verse 2:

<sup>2</sup> He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.

To walk in "integrity" underscores a lifestyle. The presence of a Hiphil participle for "walking," tells us this much ( הִלְךְ ). You just are not occasionally a person with integrity, but it is who you are on a daily basis. What does "integrity" mean? The NIV translates this Hebrew word as "blameless," underscoring the trait of a person who loves so above-board, who is so Christ-like it is well-nigh impossible to dig up dirt on them. Let's drill down on this word and concept.

To possess integrity means many things:

- You are a person of your word.
- You have lofty principles you will never compromise.
- You are not a proverbial weather-vane, going with whatever the culture says is important or right.
- You can be utterly trusted with whatever. Ostensibly, it means you will never betray a trust.
- You monitor the little things in your life because you know that they can, and will, become bigger things either for good or evil.
- You embrace valid criticism and efface invalid criticism.
- You are not known for hypocrisy.
- You are very careful how you talk or write about others.

- You are the same person in private, when no one is looking, as you are in public, when others are looking.

Integrity is in short supply in our godless, mean-spirited, morally rudderless, highly ideologically weaponized society. Anymore, it is hard to find a person known for integrity, but they are out there. Perhaps it is you, and it should be if you are saint. If your integrity is in order, then God says, Welcome. If not, then it is time to shore it up by yielding to the Spirit's conviction, and asking Him for power to be consistently known for integrity (Eph. 5:18).

Another positive trait God looks for in those who seek to worship him is described as a person who "works righteousness." The Hebrew for "works" is another participle denoting a continual lifestyle. If this is you, then, you are known as a person committed, more often than not, to performing actual works of righteousness, *sedeq* (  $\text{סֶדֶק}$  ). Interestingly enough, this unique Hebrew word literally denotes just weights for just calculations (Deut. 25:15). Who wants to go into a Safeway or a Giant and purchase fruit on a scale which is not just, which is off, thereby ripping you off so the store owners can make a bigger profit? What, then, is a just person but one who does what is right in any given situation. If you want illustrations of someone who lived like this, then just study the life of your Lord . . . and then seek to emulate Him.

- He helped the sick and hurting (Mark 2:1).
- He purposefully hung out with outright sinful people (Mark 2:13-17).
- He spoke truth to mean-spirited, volatile religious leaders (Mark 3:20-28).
- He monitored His inner purity (Mark 7:14-16).
- He washed His disciples' feet when they, prior to His crucifixion, should have washed His (John 13).
- He purposefully met with a Samaritan woman when other Jewish men would not talk to a woman, let alone a despised one because of her mixed ethnicity (John 4).

Need I go on? You get the picture. When Jesus said that on the day He judges His saints, he will be looking for whether they gave food to hungry people, visited criminals in prison, and handed a small cup of water to a thirsty soul (Matt. 25:31-40). Many in our church live like they are supposed to. For instance, a group of our men this weekend assembled and put a wooden ramp in for a needy family in the community at large. This is what David is talking about.

The question is, Are you a worker of righteousness? If so, God welcomes you before Him because you reflect Him. If not, you need to confess your selfishness and carnality and ask God to show you where and how you can be a righteous worker. Who knows, it might start with leading a men's basecamp group offsite during the Corona virus, or taking food to a family who has a parent with the dreaded virus. The time to get to work on this is now for who knows when Christ shall appear and we all have to give account.

A third positive trait God looks for in those who desire to step into His presence deals with truth and truth-telling:

- . . . and speaks truth in his heart (Psalm 15:2).

If there is truth in your heart, there will be truth in your mouth. Or as the Lord teaches elsewhere, what comes out of your mouth reveals the condition of your heart (Matt. 12:34). Here is what He said to the outer tradition cautious Pharisees:

<sup>1</sup> Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man (Matt. 15).

A man is defiled by his mouth because it betrays his vile, truth-hating heart. Sadly, our culture today is vile and vicious, going after the supposed sinful actions of people committed years ago without pausing to consider that their own f-bombing ways is a mirror of great sin, or sins, present in their inner lives. Further, our culture is awash in the art of lying, of rejecting truth and twisting the truth with half-truths. You see if from our political leaders all the way down to many newspaper reporters who do everything but report the truth.

A truth-teller is of a different spiritual caliber. If a husband, he is open and transparent with his wife. When he has been quiet and somewhat unusually moody for a couple of days and she says, "Honey, how are you doing?" She gets more than a deep guttural grunt. If a son, he does not deceive his parents so he can do things they would not approve of. If a new college graduate student looking for a job, they will not pad their resume in order to get a coveted job. If a single who is on the dating circuit looking for a life-mate, they will be truth about what they post about themselves on *EHarmony*, *Match*, *Elite Singles*, or *Silver Singles* (for those over 50). If a used car salesperson, he will not hold back detrimental facts from a client, but will, on the contrary, be truthful. If it is a Christian posting a story on-line, it is not tainted in any way and would easily pass the Snopes.com fact check. Again, you get the picture. God enjoys truthful people in His courts. Is that you? Be encouraged that His face smiles on you. If not, then it is time to get to work so your lack of truth-telling negatively impacts your time before God.

For items four through six, David keys on three negative sins which God does not want to see in His worshippers' life as they enter His court in prayer. As we read through these, stop and ask yourself, Am I guilty of any of these? A follow-up question will certainly be in order, What am I going to do to get victory in this particular area so my worship of God is enriched? Here are the next three:

<sup>3</sup> He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

The Hebrew word for *slander*, *ragal* (רָגַל) is built off the root word for *feet*. How did this word become used for speaking slanderously about someone? Easy. What does a mean-spirited gossip do but spy on you (spying is another lexical nuance of this interesting word according to Holladay's *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*) to gain information they can twist, distort, and re-cast in a negative light against you, and then they take off immediately with their feet to spread their disinformation around. Any more *Twitter* gushes with slanderous statements, which was not the original intent of the man who designed the program. He thought it would bring everyone together. Guess he was not clued into the sinful disposition of all mankind as articulated by Paul in Romans 5, verses 12 through 21. *Facebook*, also, is awash in a tumultuous sea of untrue and unverified statements by one person against another in order to defame, humiliate, and destroy another.

Do you have a slander problem as a Christian? If so, realize it is negatively impacting your worship of Christ because He personally sees it and cannot stand it. You may fool me, but you

will never fool Him who sees all (Heb. 4:13, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”) No kidding. Could you imagine how different D.C. would be, how radically different protests would be, how other-worldly different exchanges between people of opposite opinions would be if slander was minimized? Ah, it is but a hope. Let speaking good words, healing words to others start with you. When you master this crucial spiritual area you will have earned your right to come before the God who fully appreciates language which is uplifting, kind, merciful, and honest.

Fifth is a person David says is person who does no evil toward his neighbor. If applied, the second greatest commandment would solve almost all of our societal ills:

<sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> And He said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> "This is the great and foremost commandment. <sup>39</sup> "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Matt. 22).

A neighbor does not use his position as a police officer to abuse people he does not like. A neighbor does not throw frozen bottles of water and fire commercial grade firecrackers at Federal police officers guarding a federal courthouse. A neighbor does not show up with loudspeakers in the middle of the night and keep public servants like politicians and police they do not like up at night by yelling and screaming at them. The list is virtually endless, is it not? Unfortunately, we live in neighborless times where neighbors do acts of evil toward other neighbors. I know one professional man who did not like a tree located in the middle of a plot of grass he shared with his neighbor. So what did he do? He sprayed it with *Roundup*, a systemic plant killer extraordinaire. I do not know if you have seen this, but this is a neighbor, who if he is a Christian, is going to have a tough time finding God open to having him walking into His presence. The picture pretty much says it all. This is not how to handle a property line dispute. No, a *Sawsall* is not to be used in this fashion.

What about you? Are you truly neighborly? Do you, in every facet of your life, really treat people . . . I mean all people . . . as you would have them treat you? If improvement is warranted, then it is time to get to work, for rude neighborly actions do impact a person's time before God.

A sixth sinful concept logically follows.

. . . nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

*Reproach* in Hebrew “is a cutting taunt, scorn, sharp criticism or personal attack.” If you need an illustration of what this looks like, then just watch how the press talks to the President's Press Secretary, Kayleigh McEnany. Barbed, loaded, pointed, prickly questions designed to humiliate her are, pretty much, the order of the day. It is, well, disgusting no matter where you stand on the political spectrum as a Christian. Such should never be how we talk to others. Some mates speak this way with each other to the detriment of their quality of their marriage. Yes, some wonder why their relationships are rocky when they employ ridicule and taunt as a way of communicating with each other. Some cliques at school speak toward others with the most venomous, mocking words. As saints, as people seeking to live as salt and light in an ever-darkening culture, such talking should never be named among us.

Are you a person who readily insults others? If so, realize you are not earning any points with God. As a matter of fact, this type of verbal behavior thwarts your spiritual growth and

worship because God finds it repulsive. When you seek His assistance to gain a much needed victory here, know you are positioned to stand before Him without worry.

Godly dispositions numbers seven through nine are hopefully ones the Lord sees in your life as you seek to worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

<sup>4</sup> In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD;  
he swears to his own hurt, and does not change;

A seventh trait God looks for is one who exercises sound discernment regarding the people he hangs out with and/or calls friends. On the one hand, he does not like “reprobates,” which is just a biblical code word for a person who lives for whatever is godless. Believe me, our world is full of them, of people who live for doing evil, speaking evil, enjoying evil, and attacking anyone who is wholesome and good. The sad truth is by nature people tend to gravitate toward those sporting a bad-boy or bad-girl image, who live for pushing their music to the moral edge, who get off on distorting sexuality, who, well you fill in the proverbial blank. God, conversely, is desirous of worshippers who can spot these people. Once identified, these wise people walk away from them and befriend those who actually honor and fear the living LORD. Again, I must ask, Does God see this trait of discernment in your life? If you are wondering, then look no further than the types of friends you befriend. Do they hate or love God? Do they love evil, or embrace and defend that which is holy? Those who know how to choose godly friends are, by definition, worthy to stand in the presence of the one who is holy. Is this you?

Trait number eight deals with you and your word. When David says this type of person “swears to his own hurt, and does not change” means that what he promises, he will deliver, no matter what. During seminary, I took at vacation to see my mother’s sister, Roberta, and her husband, Tony, my beloved uncle, in northern California. One day the phone rang and my aunt handed me the phone. On the other end of the line was a very well-to-do woman, whose husband was a major land developer. She wanted to talk to me because they were in a pinch. They were headed to Hawaii for vacation, and they could not find anyone to mow their yard. “I’ll do it,” no problem. I even told her how much I would charge her, and she seemed quite pleased. I will never forget the day I drove out in the country to mow their lawn. Yikes. It was a massive estate. Did I say massive? Using their riding lawnmower, it took me two and half hours to mow just the front yard, and that yard had trees everywhere, which made mowing all the more difficult. That was the last time I ever accepted a job sight unseen, but I still charged them what we had agreed to because that was the biblical thing to do, right? This type of scenario is exactly what David is talking about. Perhaps you are in one right now. How you respond will most assuredly impact your worship of Christ either positively or negatively.

Trait nine you need to be cognizant of is most interesting. It deals with money:

<sup>5</sup> He does not put out his money at interest,

Israelites were forbidden from charging other Israelites interest on loaned money (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-38). Nice. They were supposed to take care of each other and not rip each other off. They could, however, charge non-Israelites interest. Here the application of David’s words concerns fellow Israelites. They were not to charge interest toward those who could not afford it. The word for interest here in Hebrew literally denotes something with a bite. If you do not know what that means, then go to Rocket Loans on-line and secure a loan between 7.16-29.99% APR. Looking at one of my credit cards bills one day, which I always pay off immediately, I noticed in the small

print that if I did, in fact, miss a payment, they would charge me over 60% interest. That, my friend, is interest with a bite.

How should a godly person operate? If you happen to encounter another saint with financial issues you can either step forward and loan them money at no interest, or just be highly generous and give it to them to alleviate their need. Years ago when Liz and I did not have much money, my Uncle Tony purchased us a large car for our growing family. He said we could pay him back whenever. Whenever really became almost never because we almost never had extra cash to send him because of what it costs to raise young children on literally a pastoral salary of \$20,000 a year. He eventually called me up and said, "Hey, Marty. Don't worry about the debt. It is forgiven." David would have been proud of my humble, generous uncle. I am sure his actions made his worship of Christ that much richer and more fulfilling. How about you? Who will you bless with the blessing God has bestowed on you?

The final trait is one we are all too familiar with in the D.C. environment:

... nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

A bribe is nothing more than money a person receives in order for someone else to purchase influence or get something wicked they desire. A drug cartel member once offered my father a year's salary to let one truck pass through his truck gate bordering Mexicali and Calexico. As a godly man he refused, even though it would have benefitted his family in the short term. The bribe, from my father's vantage point was just never the right thing to do, and once you took it the briber, of course, essentially owned you.

Bribes are still alive and well, unfortunately, in our power-hungry, evil culture. Are you being tempted? Walk away. It will not only hurt you and your family, it will, most certainly, have a disastrous impact on your walk and worship of Christ.

This is the end of David's list of things to look for which fit you for worshipping in God's holy presence. For those you do find in your life, I say, Amen. Keep committed to them. For those concepts you find are lacking, I challenge you to deal with them before the feet of Christ, seeking His forgiveness and strength for victory and mastery. What is at stake? The one main thing He created you for which is worship before His amazing throne.

For those who remain committed to living victoriously in these areas, what is God's promise through David's inspired pen?

## The Promise For Protocol Followers (Psalm 15:5b)

The promise could not be clearer:

He who does these things will never be shaken (Ps. 15:).

You will be like Larry Csonka, aka The Bulldozer, or Jerome Bettis, aka The Bus, or John Riggins, aka The Diesel, or a Walter Payton who were, well, hard to take down in a game when they had the ball. No, holiness will naturally build you into a running back of all running backs, who can, and will, run long and hard for God. The Devil will try and take you down through a variety of means, but you will just plow through them because you know the Coach, God, is not just honored by your play. He empowers your play on the field called life.

