

# CONTENTS

Psalm 15	8
<b>INTRODUCTION:</b> Stirred, Not Shaken	9
<b>Chapter One:</b> The Stories of Our Unsettled Lives	17
<b>Chapter Two:</b> Our Quest Starts with Questions	29
<b>Chapter Three:</b> Straw, Sticks, and Solid Bricks	41
<b>Chapter Four:</b> The Reassurance of Right Living	53
<b>Chapter Five:</b> The Epicenter of Authenticity	63
<b>Chapter Six:</b> Keeping Your Lips from Sinking Ships	75
<b>Chapter Seven:</b> Defying Evil, Doing Good	87
<b>Chapter Eight:</b> Stop the Spread	99
<b>Chapter Nine:</b> Godliness by Association	111
<b>Chapter Ten:</b> The Power of a Promise Keeper	125
<b>Chapter Eleven:</b> Why Money Matters	137
<b>CONCLUSION:</b> The Promising Playlist of the Heart	149
<b>Appendix One:</b> Salvation: The Beginning Place for a Never-Shaken Life	157
<b>Appendix Two:</b> Psalm 3—A Prayer Guide	161
<b>Appendix Three:</b> Psalm 15—A Prayer Guide	165
Acknowledgments	169
Notes	171

# THE STORIES OF OUR UNSETTLED LIVES

*I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.  
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people  
Who have set themselves against me round about.  
A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.*

PSALM 3:5–6

*The conversion of a soul is the miracle of a moment;  
the manufacture of a saint is the task of a lifetime.*

ALAN REDPATH

The most influential person in government opened his press conference “with the suggestion that every newspaper in the country print the text of the Fifteenth Psalm.” The passage had just been read at the services the renowned leader attended with his cabinet at St. John’s Episcopal Church. He noted to the sea of reporters, “There could be no better lead for your story.”<sup>1</sup>

So it was that the relevance of Psalm 15 captured President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s heart in a moment of extraordinary national and global crisis on March 5, 1938. It was the fifth anniversary of his first inauguration. The world was at the height of the Great Depression. The people of the United States were struggling to survive. Germany was on the march to dominate Europe. Just days later, Hitler invaded Austria. World War II loomed large. The fifteenth psalm had

gripped Roosevelt's heart as prosperity and peace slid away. It still engages us today as we navigate a world that often feels as uncertain as sprinting in thick fog.

## Never Shaken?

We struggle. We battle anxiety. Our body fails. Friends move away. We lose jobs. Coworkers scorn our faith. Our children walk away from the church.

Meanwhile, our prevailing culture has its feet firmly planted in midair as it assaults sensible morality and threatens our societal stability. We hold our breath waiting for a news report about the meltdown of another deranged shooter or the announcement of another global health crisis.

Can we really be unshaken? David, the author of Psalm 15, was a seasoned veteran of unsettling hardships. He had plenty of heartaches. David wrote prolifically with the praise that emerged from seasons of pain. He was no stranger to the long recovery road from tragic personal choices and agonizing family distresses. But over and over, he sang of the possibilities of an unshaken soul. David never wrote in a sterile vacuum of religious unreality. He wrote consistently and clearly from the crucible of a tested life.

## Unsettled by Testing

The long road from David's early anointing as the future king of Israel to his eventual royal coronation was about as straightforward as San Francisco's famously winding Lombard Street. Scholars estimate a fifteen-year waiting period filled with dangers, toils, and snares. For agonizingly protracted years, he was a man on the run. The jealous and God-rejected King Saul resolved to erase David's influence and existence. David survived in caves, among the enemy camps of the

Philistines. He navigated the constant tension of wondering when the trials would end and his divine assignment would begin.

## **Unsettled by Personal Failure**

David's greatness as the king of Israel took a hit in the coming years through scandalous sin. While relaxing on the palace rooftop as his troops were in battle, he caught a direct and extended gaze at beautiful Bathsheba bathing on a nearby rooftop. His lustful desire and unbridled sense of power led to personal disaster. He brought her into the palace for a passionate encounter. Then, to cover his sin, he arranged for the murder of her husband, a trusted military leader. David subsequently married the now-pregnant Bathsheba.

About a year later, the prophet Nathan confronted David. Filled with remorse, David repented, pleading with God for mercy. The illegitimately conceived child died soon after. The consequences of David's sin continued throughout the rest of his reign. His leadership and family life could easily be labeled as "sliding away" as he reaped the fruits of what he had previously sown.

## **Unsettled Again**

Most of us hope that in our later years, the waters will calm and life will get steadier. We grow weary of disappointments, longing for better days. We yearn to finally clean up the messes hatched by our own unwise choices and the consequential unwise decisions of others. We often look forward to a greater sense of financial security. We speculate about a day when all the political, social, and moral upheaval will settle down. But, unfortunately, the harsh reality is that as long as we are on this earth, all that seems familiar and safe will likely keep sliding away.

Indeed, King David had similar hopes for a calmer life. Yet unfolding before him was one of the darkest chapters of his reign. His

sincere confession and forgiveness before the prophet Nathan did not stop the harvest of consequences that would inevitably unfold. The ominous cloud of agonizing family drama cast a dark shadow over his later years. The summary of the last chapters of his life reads like a convoluted combination of murder mystery, family fracture, political coup, and public scandal.

## **An Unsettled Family and Future**

Let's review the back story that will lead us to a deeper experience of Psalm 15. Approximately five years after David's fateful tryst with Bathsheba, his son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. David was in his midfifties at the time (2 Sam. 13:1–14). One cannot help but wonder if Amnon had adopted a similar behavior modeled by his dad with Bathsheba. "Take whatever you desire and deal with the repercussions later." To further compound the drama, David did little to deal with Amnon. The Bible only records that he felt angry (2 Sam. 13:21).

Two years later, Tamar's brother Absalom murdered Amnon (2 Sam. 13:28–30). No doubt he was seething with bitterness toward Amnon and deep frustration over the apathy of his father.

A three-year estrangement between Absalom and David followed as Absalom went into exile, staying with his maternal grandfather, a king in the land of Geshur (2 Sam. 13:38). No attempt at reconciliation was initiated by David during this time. The roots of resentment in Absalom's heart grew deeper.

At the urging of Joab, David's trusted general, the king allowed Absalom to return to reside in Jerusalem. Still, David refused to see him, insisting that Absalom live in his own separate house (2 Sam. 14:21–24, 28). The estrangement festered.

## Assessing Absalom

At this point in the biblical narrative, we learn some basic facts about Absalom.

Now in all Israel was no one as handsome as Absalom, so highly praised; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no defect in him. (2 Sam. 14:25)

You may remember that Absalom was known for his beautiful and bountiful hair (2 Sam. 14:26). (Incidentally, I am known for my lack thereof.) Absalom seemed unfamiliar with the concept of humility. He actually erected a monument to himself so that he would be remembered after his death (2 Sam. 18:18).

The toxic mix of pride, antipathy, discord, and ambition drove Absalom in the coming days as he made a dramatic daily arrival at the city gates of Jerusalem. Setting up his campaign headquarters, he intercepted all who came with a concern, posturing himself as the wise and caring judge while systematically demeaning King David. He steadily endeared the vulnerable citizens to a budding loyalty to himself.

Over time, he reached the desired outcome. The Bible states:

In this manner, Absalom dealt with all Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel. . . . And the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom. Then a messenger came to David, saying, “The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.” (2 Sam. 15:6, 12–13)

David knew he had lost the allegiance of the majority of the people as they opted for the conspiring and ambitious son. Now in his midsixties, he faced another dramatic reversal in his journey.

## NEVER SHAKEN

David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, “Arise and let us flee, for otherwise none of us will escape from Absalom. Go in haste, or he will overtake us quickly and bring down calamity on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword.” (2 Sam. 15:14)

Chuck Swindoll captures the moment well:

Just picture the scene. The once-great King David scrambling around, throwing a few things in a bag, preparing to flee from his own son. After all these years, once again he is running for his life. Surely, he recalled the years he lived like a fugitive while running from Saul. He’s back at it. “Been there, done that!”<sup>2</sup>

### Unsettled but Singing

In these circumstances, many might cope by resorting to drugs or alcohol. Anxiety, depression, anger, or revenge might consume others. It might be natural to wallow in self-pity, regurgitating all the mistakes of the past. Some may even consider taking their own life to escape the pain.

David sings!

His psalms are his songs, resonating in and through every circumstance. And yes, in Psalm 15, David sings. The early notes may have begun with dark, minor key reflection, but the psalm culminates with tones of undaunted assurance. His song lingered in Israel’s worship as a plumb line of personal evaluation. So it remains today, in our treasury of the Psalms, as a roadmap for an unshaken soul.

### The Setting of His Song

I believe David wrote Psalm 15 from this devastating but defining moment as he navigated his betrayal and banishment at the hands of

his son Absalom. There is some fine detail here but stay with me. This will add compelling color and helpful context to our applications in the coming chapters.

Psalm 15 begins with two weighty questions. They serve as a time marker. David directs his song to God, referring in the same pen stroke to Yahweh's "tent" and His "holy hill." It reads, "O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?" (Ps. 15:1).

Commentators agree that this is a reference to the fact that the mobile tabernacle (tent) that housed the ark of the covenant was, at this point, relocated to a more permanent structure in Jerusalem—Zion, God's holy hill.

Prominent German scholars Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch conclude that this opening verse favors the time of David's exile at the hands of Absalom "when David was cut off from the sanctuary of his God, whilst it was in possession of men the very opposite of those described in this Psalm."<sup>3</sup>

Eugene Merrill, a distinguished professor of Semitics and Old Testament studies, reinforces this timing with a strong argument. Without getting into the weeds, he summarizes that the structure erected to house the ark of the covenant and the subsequent placing of the ark in Jerusalem occurred right at 977 BC. Absalom's rebellion then took place the following year (976 BC).<sup>4</sup>

The biblical account of this scene explains that as David was leaving Jerusalem, escaping Absalom's assault, the Levitical priests removed the ark of the covenant from the holy hill and brought it out to David on the edge of the city. David instructed them to take it back to Jerusalem where it had been, and still belonged (2 Sam. 15:25).<sup>5</sup> Again, this underscores the idea that the ark was lodged on the holy hill before Absalom's rebellion.

## The Saga of an Unsettled Songwriter

Let's briefly revisit the biblical narrative as we bring this chapter to a close. We read in 2 Samuel 15:16–17, “So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house. And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house” (ESV).

David fled. He was going nowhere in particular, except away. As he went, he wondered. What would unfold next?

One biblical scholar explains:

What emotion and pathos are woven into the fabric of those few words. David was leaving the great city of Zion—the city named after him, the City of David. As he came to the edge, at the last house, he stopped and looked back over the golden metropolis he had watched God build over the

past years. His heart must have been broken as he stood there looking back, his mind flooded with memories. All around him the people of his household scurried past, leading beasts of burden piled high with belongings, running for their lives.<sup>6</sup>

---

**ACHING PERPLEXITY  
PRODUCES WEIGHTY  
QUESTIONS. LIFE-  
CHANGING ANSWERS  
OFTEN EMERGE.**

---

Perhaps it was at that last house that David paused to initiate his song. Aching perplexity produces weighty questions.

Life-changing answers often emerge. Doubts may have tormented his soul. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David may have composed this masterpiece in a single sitting. Perhaps it took several days or weeks to discern the Lord's inspiration of the Psalm 15 truths. We do not know. But we know David would again find the grace and truth sufficient to embrace the promise of a never-shaken life. He would sing about it with confidence in His unshakable God.

## Ever True and Timeless

In Israel's unfolding history, Psalm 15 would be recounted recurrently by pilgrims as they went to the temple to attend one of the great religious festivals. One of just two "entrance psalms" (along with Psalm 24), it became a liturgy for approaching God in corporate worship. These psalms typically involved a call and response (a question from the leader and an answer from the congregation). In this case, David asks the question. The Almighty provides profound and practical answers.

Whatever the case or context, this divinely inspired song remains true and timeless. In the ups and downs of David's life, the Holy Spirit sang in and through him. During the good and the bad, the terrific and the tragic, the Psalms flowed from David's heart and still speak to us today. They are our songs of celebration and consternation. They are our expressions of praise and pain. They nurture strength and security so that we might remain stirred but never shaken.

As is true in my experience, I assume you have days when the promise of an undaunted life feels rock solid under your feet. Other days, this assurance might seem like sand on the beach sliding away under your feet as the waves retreat to the sea. The clouds of a heavy struggle can blur our perspective. But one thing is sure. We need to get back to the promise of Psalm 15:5: "He who does these things will never be shaken." So let us return there again—and again—with fresh resolve to renew our minds and reaffirm our obedience.

---

**OUR LIVES CAN UNFOLD  
IN A STRANGE MIX OF  
MAGNIFICENCE AND MESS.  
OUR RELATIONSHIPS  
CAN BE DELIGHTFUL AND  
DREADFUL AT THE SAME  
TIME. OUR MISTAKES  
HAUNT US WHILE THE  
LESSONS HELP US.  
THROUGH IT ALL, WE NEED  
SECURITY AND STRENGTH.**

---

## Loving and Living the Psalms

For decades, I met with a handful of church members early every Sunday morning to open a psalm and pray together. In those early Lord's Day moments, we would linger in each psalm for thirty minutes, even up to an hour. We journeyed through the Psalter five times over those years. Today, my ministry, Strategic Renewal, has produced a commentary and prayer guide for every one of the Psalms, entitled *Praying the Psalms*.<sup>7</sup>

I have fallen in love with the Psalms. I love leading prayer experiences with their truth shaping my praise, confession, requests, and preparation for the day. Psalm 15 has become my favorite of them all. In the coming pages, we will indeed linger on Psalm 15. Each chapter will include a "Never Shaken Application."

Like David, our lives can unfold in a strange mix of magnificence and mess. Our relationships can be delightful and dreadful at the same time. Our mistakes haunt us while the lessons help us. Through it all, we need security and strength. The same God who carried David to that place and provided all he needed for an unshaken life will do the same for you.

---

### Never Shaken Application

- Take a moment to recall one of the most difficult chapters of your life. Was there a particular psalm or passage of Scripture that God used to sustain your soul? If so, which one was it and how did it shape your perspective?
- Think of another favorite psalm you have loved throughout your spiritual journey. Take a moment to read it again now. Get creative and put some musical notes to it, perhaps borrowing

## THE STORIES OF OUR UNSETTLED LIVES

the melody of some familiar tune. Sing it to the Lord, and to your own soul, to experience the help and reassurance you may need, even now.

- Read Psalm 15 aloud (whether alone or in a group), keeping in mind the grim experience that likely inspired this song. Then, make a commitment to memorize Psalm 15 so that you can meditate on its truths to strengthen your soul in the coming weeks.