

Today's Message: The Path of Life, Fullness of Joy, Pleasures Forevermore

Psalm 16, 9/18/2022, Michael Sitton

Middle Teton illustration.

That was a nice story, wasn't it? But how did I begin? I began by telling you what our destination was. "Caleb and I decided to climb Middle Teton." It sets the stage for the remainder of the story.

We're going to walk through Psalm 16 this morning, but to help us recognize the flow, it's important to first consider where Psalm 16 is going to end. This is why I asked Vic to read the last three verses of this psalm. It closes with a celebration of salvation: the path of life, fullness of joy, pleasures forevermore. If I tell you the objective, where we're going to end up, then the journey leading to that destination has a bit more context.

The main idea for today's sermon is: A Messianic psalm of comfort leading our hearts toward the path of life, fullness of joy, and pleasures forevermore.

So now we know where we're headed in Psalm 16, let's read it in its entirety.

**Psalm 16** Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

**2** I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you."

**3** As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones,  
in whom is all my delight.

**4** The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;  
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out  
or take their names on my lips.

**5** The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.

**6** The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

**7** I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.

**8** I have set the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

**9** Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;  
my flesh also dwells secure.

**10** For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,  
or let your holy one see corruption.

**11** You make known to me the path of life;  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

## I. The Beginning: Submission, Humility, Confession

I have labeled the first part of this message 'The Beginning.' In the first four verses of Psalm 16 we find submission, humility, and confession.

### A. *Submission and Humility (1)*

Psalm 16:1 Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;

I have no good apart from you."

Psalm 16 begins with a cry, "Preserve me, O God! Save me, O God!" We don't know the circumstances that precipitated David writing this psalm, but immediately, we get a sense of where the psalmist's heart is at -- a posture of submission.

If we view this psalm as a journey toward salvation, it is telling that the first emotion expressed is one of humility. The word that David uses for God is 'el which emphasizes God's strength. "Save me, O God, O Strong One!" At some point in our Christian lives, we came to realize that we cannot save ourselves. How long does it take for an individual's humility to overcome pride and cry out to God? And just a warning to those who are convinced they can go at it alone, this world has a knack for humbling us -- even the proudest person can be humbled and forced to their knees, pleading for God's help.

And what does David desire? Refuge. Protection from the troubles and sorrows and anxieties of this world. A couple of examples come to mind when I hear the word "refuge." Our church supports the City of Refuge, a men's shelter downtown. To enter those doors requires a heart of humility, a recognition that I can't do it on my own. I need help.

Last month, my wife and I had the privilege of hiking for eleven days through the Dolomites in Italy. Every night we would stay in a refuge; in Italian, they're referred to as refugios. Everything sounds cooler in Italian. One day near the end of the trip we were caught in this ugly storm for hours. We were hiking along the side of a mountain with quite a bit of exposure. The rain had drenched us completely through, thunder was cracking all around, and worst of all, the lightning strikes seemed to be hitting closer and closer. In the middle of this storm, we were passed by an Italian girl with the widest eyes you've ever seen, and she turned her terrified eyes on me and asked, in very proper English, "How do you see our situation?" Well, in that situation, she very much understood the value of the refuge that awaited us that evening.

Do you want to find refuge in God? Psalm 62:8 tells us that we find refuge in God through prayer:

Psalm 62:8 Trust in him at all times, O people;  
pour out your heart before him;  
God is a refuge for us.

We do find refuge in God through prayer. And we also find refuge through the unity of community, the fellowship of the saints. When I find refuge in God, I'm not really there all by myself, am I? As Jesus prays in John 17:11,

John 17:11 And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world (that's us), and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

No matter how confident we are that we can handle whatever life throws at us, at some point, the world will humble you and me. But then, once we've entered a place of refuge, the Lord's refuge, we find safety and we find comfort, maybe even one another, leading us to a state of rest.

### *B. Confession (2)*

Our second verse reads:

Psalm 16:2 I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you."

Now, in just a few short words, David has gone from a cry for help to finding refuge in God. Once he has humbled himself and found refuge, then right away we see confession. "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." It's difficult to confess until we've humbled our hearts. Thinking about the City of Refuge, I think that once a man has entered those doors, it should be much easier to confess his situation and his needs.

And what is David confessing? David, the King of Israel, a man after God's own heart? "I have no good apart from you." Well, that's a pretty frank self-assessment. Is man capable of good? Of course. David's not saying, "I'm no good." There's good in all of us, but as Christians, it's important that we realize that the source of good in us comes from being created in the image of God. A lack of this recognition is what underpins all humanistic philosophies -- that man alone is good enough to find his place in the world and save himself.

So submission and humility, prompting us to confession -- kind of sounds like the type of fertile soil from which the Spirit can lead a person to salvation, doesn't it? Romans 10, verses 9 and 10:

Romans 10:9-10 If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.  
Praise God!

Looking back at Psalm 16, there's a definite shift in tone with these next two verses.

Psalm 16:3-4 As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones,  
in whom is all my delight.

<sup>4</sup> The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;  
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out  
or take their names on my lips.

As I studied verses 3 and 4, I had to consider whether the point of view changed here from David to God. I do believe this is still David speaking. He has, however, quickly shifted from crying out to the Lord for his salvation to recognizing that, as a function of God's justice, there is a dichotomy in the world. There are sheep, and there are goats. God delights in the sheep, His saints. We find in Psalm 18:19 that God "rescued me, because he delighted in me." If God delights in the saints, then why wouldn't we as Believers do so as well? I hope that this morning you are here, delighting in the fellowship of the saints.

But, while the saints have accepted God as their Lord, others have refused to submit to His Lordship. Instead of humbling themselves before God, they stand defiant, running after other gods. “You are NOT my Lord.” Defiance has consequences.

We do need to remind ourselves, however, of the more subtle ways in which we frustratingly continue to rebel against our King. As Christians, we do still chase false idols, do we not? We chase after the lusts of our heart. We put our work above God. We desire material possessions over our relationship with God and family and friends. Or we value the image of our perfect family above all else. Do we even realize that we’re running after false gods? A disturbing question to ask oneself. But one worth asking. What’s most important to me? Where do I invest my time and energy? Are we open to asking those who are closest to us if our lives reflect our Christian values?

It is a challenging introspective, but to close out these two verses on a more uplifting note, remember that one day, our sanctification will be complete. Loving God and loving others will be our nature.

## II. The Middle: Contentment, Gratitude, Steadfastness

After much deliberation, I settled on titling the middle part of Psalm 16, “The Middle.”

### *A. Contentment and Gratitude (5-6)*

So let’s consider the themes of contentment, gratitude, and steadfastness beginning with verses 5 and 6:

Psalm 16:5-6 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.

<sup>6</sup> The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

The overarching emotion in these verses is contentment. One might not immediately recognize this, but David is likely referring back to God’s apportionment of Canaan to the twelve tribes. Portion, lot, lines, inheritance. When the Israelites conquered Canaan, God told them that they would receive an inheritance of land. Joshua 14:1-3 reads,

Joshua 14:1-3 These are the inheritances that the people of Israel received in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the people of Israel gave them to inherit. <sup>2</sup> Their inheritance was by lot, just as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses for the nine and one-half tribes. <sup>3</sup> For Moses had given an inheritance to the two and one-half tribes beyond the Jordan, but to the Levites he gave no inheritance among them.

Do you recall what the Levites inheritance was? Numbers 18:20,

Numbers 18:20 And the LORD said to Aaron, “You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel.

Now, as Pastor Jeff gently reminded me, in Numbers 35, the Lord did command the Israelites to give the Levites real estate in the cities and some surrounding pasturelands since they refused to do so of their own accord. But when all this land is being handed out to the other tribes, I do wonder whether some

of the Levites grumbled about their inheritance. “So, you’re saying there’s no land for me?” David’s response is to describe this inheritance as “beautiful.” And looking ahead to the New Covenant, we read in Ephesians 1:13 and 14 that the Holy Spirit guarantee’s our inheritance:

Ephesians 1:13-14: In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Turning back to Psalm 16, in verse 6, David declares that the lines of life have fallen in pleasant places. Lines imply limitations and borders. Are we content with the lines, the limitations that God has placed in our lives? Simple research studies have been conducted to assess how a fence or lack of fence on a playground affects preschoolers. When a group of preschoolers is taken to a playground with no fence, they tend to huddle around the adult in charge. But when that same group of kids is taken to a playground with a fence, they feel free to play and explore within the set boundaries. Now, there’s a not-so-subtle parenting tip here on setting boundaries for your children (they may not think they want rules, but you know better!). But I think there’s also a comfort for us as adults to recognize that God has placed boundaries in our lives and those borders create a pleasant place for us to worship God throughout our lives. Do not covet; instead, choose contentment.

Along with David’s expression of contentment, I get a sense of his gratitude toward God for his lovingkindness. I’ve often told my kids and my students that gratitude is the starting point for so many righteous attitudes; it’s great medicine for countering a sense of entitlement. Let’s practice gratitude in all situations, which would include – now.

First, I’m genuinely grateful for the leaders of this church. We have four pastors who love the Lord and love one another. Do you sometimes wonder if our pastors are really who they appear to be? And do they really get along with one another? I’ve gotten to know them pretty well over the years, and yes, they are genuine dudes. And pastors. I’m thankful for Beth Wiklund, our church administrator. I realize it’s cliché, but Beth is truly the model of a servant leader. She juggles a million responsibilities without ever a complaint, consistently serving all of us with excellence. We have fifty discipleship groups at this church. Think about that! That means there are fifty of you who have stepped up to lead. And that doesn’t even include the small army of Sunday school teachers and youth group leaders. Incredible.

A second suggestion for gratitude, directed to our children and youth, is to appreciate that you have a parent who loves you, who takes the time to invest in your well-being whether you recognize that as such or not. Not every child in this world has a parent to take care of them. In fact, there are untold millions of children in this world, possibly tens of millions, who have no parent watching out for them. All around the world, these social orphans scavenge the city streets for survival. I want to say that these millions of orphans are simply waiting for a permanent, nurturing family, but I’m not sure that most of them understand what family means. Students, be grateful that you have a parent who loves you.

We all need to embrace gratitude, every day, every occasion. A heart of gratitude offers us a constant reminder to come and delight in God. Gratitude feeds our contentment, curbing us from careless complacency on the one hand and selfish grumbling on the other.

### *B. Praise (7)*

Psalm 16, verse 7:

Psalm 16:7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.

David continues his spirit of gratitude in this verse, praising the Lord specifically for providing counsel. For David, God provided counsel through the Torah, God's moral instruction given to Israel. Today, we can likewise praise God for the gift of His Word. But are we truly thankful for the Bible? How do we treat this gift? Do we dust it off on Sundays, or do we revere the gift of instruction? If the wisest person in the world came to me and said, "Hey, I'm the wisest person ever (glaring red flag, but humor me) and I wrote down my insight, my instructions on how you should steward the life that you've been given. If you read my book and follow it, you will find the path of life, fullness of joy, and pleasures forevermore." How would you respond? "Cool! Thanks! You know what? I'm going to set this gift on my bookshelf, and I'm going to admire the excellent cover and binding. Sometimes, I'm even going to carry it around so people can see that I'm very much aware of the path of life, the fullness of joy, and pleasures forevermore." No! And of course, this book isn't coming from some person who thinks he's super wise. It's coming from the all-knowing, all-powerful Creator of the cosmos! What's a reasonable response to receiving this gift of instruction? I'm going to study it, listen to others who've studied it, get together with friends to study it. If you're not currently studying the Bible in some capacity, I have great news for you! At Christ Community Church, we have those fifty discipleship groups and classes that I just mentioned. If you didn't have the opportunity to sign up at the Discipleship Fair, you can visit our website and peruse the opportunities. You can even talk to an actual human being. Pastor Patrick would love to help you. Just not today. He's not here.

Now look at the second half of verse 7; there's an "also." I bless the Lord who gives me counsel, and also, my heart instructs me in the night. How is David's heart instructing Him in the night? I believe this is more than personal contemplation. The Holy Spirit is active, certainly for Christians today. Romans 8:26 and 27:

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because<sup>[a]</sup> the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

That's encouraging!

It's also worth noting the phrase, "in the night." It's my understanding that in 1000 BC, there was no electricity, so night was an opportune time to pray with fewer distractions. We also have a solid precedent for nighttime prayer in Luke 6:12:

"In these days, [Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God."

Find a regular time in your day to pray when you have fewer distractions -- whether it's morning, night, or sometime between.

Looking back at verse 7, I do want to offer a quick word of caution. The instruction of our heart needs to be held in tension with Jeremiah 17:9 which warns us that the heart is deceitful above all things. The world bombards us with this message to "follow our heart." "Believe in yourself, and follow your heart." "Follow your heart and you will never get lost." "There are no rules. Just follow your heart." That last one's from Robin Williams. Do we just blindly follow our heart? How do we know if our heart is trying to deceive us? Well, remember that "also" that connects the two halves of verse 7. Does what your heart tell you align with Scripture? If your heart is telling you that you should pursue an extramarital affair,

you'll find that Scripture solidly contradicts that pursuit. Probably not from the Spirit. If your heart tells you to empty your child's college savings in order to buy a fancy sports car, consider whether Scripture aligns with your heart. If your heart is telling you to invite a struggling friend out for coffee, that might be from the Spirit.

The instruction of our heart must align with Scripture.

### *C. Steadfastness (8)*

Psalm 16, verse 8:

Psalm 16:8 I have set the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

When I was a kid, our family would head down to Galveston beach just outside of Houston. I loved playing in the waves all day. Almost every trip we played this game where we'd go into waist deep water, and we would dig our feet down into the sand an inch or two, and just plant them there. The goal of the game was to stay upright while keeping your feet planted in place. So we'd have waves crashing into us, trying to push us back, but then, after the wave would hit you, the undercurrent would suck you back the other direction. So we'd get rocked back and forth and it usually wasn't very long before we had to give in to the power of waves. Basically, not drown ourselves. This is the visual I have when I read about not being shaken. It was impossible to keep my feet planted for very long, but if I had someone, say, Jesus, at my right hand holding me in place, I could have withstood those waves forever. And not only that, but how much more restful would it be knowing that you have someone at your side to keep you grounded and standing firm.

This is the choice that David makes. The Lord is before him always, and at his right hand. And hey, he can be in both places because he's omnipresent.

Verse 8 ends with such confidence, such steadfastness which leads directly to the celebration of the concluding verses where we find joy, faith, and salvation.

## III. The Celebration: Joy, Faith, Salvation

### *A. Joy (9)*

Beginning with verse 9, we read:

Psalm 16:9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;  
my flesh also dwells secure.

Does it feel a little bit like David's running out of words? The psalm began with a humble cry, submitting to the Lord and confessing unworthiness, then moves to contentment, gratitude, praise, then a steadfast commitment. The "therefore" signals that David's now bringing this psalm to a conclusion where he cannot but express his joy. He started with his cry, "Preserve me, O God" and God has answered his plea, and then some.

"My flesh dwells secure." These aren't exactly words that regularly inhabit my thoughts, but I do resonate with the idea. If I'm grounded in God's counsel and love, then I have nothing to fear with

regards to my flesh. I don't want a debilitating disease, but if that's "my lot," which God is holding (verse 5), I can trust in Him. James tells me that I should even find joy in those trials, as difficult as that might seem.

### *B. Faith (10)*

Verse 10:

Psalm 16:10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,  
or let your holy one see corruption.

What's this? I'm reading Psalm 16, and I feel like I'm tracking with David pretty well, and then, considering David's context and circumstance, he makes this wild proclamation! It's like we're cruising down the highway, seeing exactly what we expect to see, and then you hit construction and have to cross those little rumble strips as the lane shifts. You know, the ones that rattle the whole car? And the kids look up wondering what's going on, are we still on the road? The dog looks down at the floorboard with her ears perked up. Up until this point of the psalm, the focus seems to be on this life, doesn't it? In the previous verse, the psalmist refers to "my flesh," but now shifts to "my soul." This is something different. "Not abandoning my soul to Sheol," the abode of the wicked after death, is something new. Something glorious! It's an extraordinary claim, coming from David.

What confidence, what faith David has to declare that he'll be rescued from death. He has complete faith that death has no dominion over him. How can we not admire the boldness of his faith?

With the fullness of time, we now recognize Psalm 16 as a Messianic psalm. Who is the Holy One? Jesus Christ.

In Peter's sermon at Pentecost, he clearly articulates the fuller meaning of David's psalm. Acts 2:22-32:

Acts 2:22-32 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. <sup>24</sup> God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. <sup>25</sup> For David says concerning him,

And here, Peter quotes Psalm 16:

"I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
<sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
my flesh also will dwell in hope.  
<sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption.  
<sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'



Peter continues:

**29** “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. **30** Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, **31** he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. **32** This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

I love this quote from Leupold, summarizing the boldness of David’s faith.

“What [David] concluded in the logic of faith reached a marvelous fulfilment in the resurrection of Christ for every believer... Christ’s resurrection has vindicated David’s bold assertions of faith.” – H. C. Leupold

### *C. Salvation (11)*

And now, we arrive at the celebrated promise:

Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life;  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Is this not an expression of the Promised Land? Of salvation?

How awesome is it that in this psalm, just as we are reaching this final, life-giving proclamation -- the path of life, fullness of joy, pleasures forevermore -- we see Jesus, the true Joshua who leads us to the Promised Land.

God has made known to us the path of life. The path of life centers on the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Because of His love for us, our perfect king and our infinitely powerful yet personal Creator has offered his own life on the cross to satisfy God’s justice and thereby open the door to the gift of salvation, the path of life.

“In your presence there is fullness of joy.” Upon accepting the gift of salvation, we find true joy in the presence of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And this joy doesn’t end upon our death. Christ’s resurrection is the first fruits; as followers, we have the same hope of resurrection.

“At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” We find true pleasure in God’s presence, being at His right hand, not the counterfeit pleasures that the world offers us. We’ll experience this true pleasure in resurrected bodies in the New Jerusalem forevermore. Forevermore: what better way to close out this psalm.

The path of life, fullness of joy, pleasures forevermore. Are any of you seeking these things? Sign me up!

If you have not put your faith in Jesus for eternal salvation, there are many in this building who would love to come alongside you, help with your questions, or perhaps doubts. Don’t suppress that small urge, that spark, you feel in your heart, in your mind. Reach out. To those who have put their faith in

Jesus for eternal salvation, embrace humility, cultivate a heart of gratitude, study His Word and spend time in prayer, remain steadfast, and enjoy the blessings of contentment and joy.