

Series FolkSongs of Faith

This Message God is Our Refuge for Time and Eternity

Scripture Psalm 16

Psalm 16 is a favorite of many believers. The theme is one of joy and confidence. David affirms his faith in God and celebrates the goodness of God in this life, and he anticipates an everlasting relationship in the presence of God. The flow of this Psalm is toward the last verse. That is the climax of David's thoughts. The last verse states, "You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Psalm 16 is about David's joy and pleasure in God.

Read Psalm 16

This Psalm expresses David's attitude about life and describes his spiritual orientation. This Psalm becomes helpful and encouraging to us when we put ourselves into David's shoes, that is, let his words become our words. I hope your orientation is similar to David's. If it is, then you will understand David's confidence and joy.

Verse 1 is an introductory statement. In this verse, David clearly states his allegiance to God. He has placed himself in the care of, and under the protection of, God. Verse 1 is a statement of trust. It is as if David fell back into the arms of God and said, "OK, LORD, I belong to You. You are responsible to take care of me."

David wants to be under the protection and care of God, but he is not just thinking about safety in this life on earth. Look again at the last verses. David is projecting ahead to what will happen after death. David knows that God will not "abandon him to the grave." He knows that he will have "eternal pleasures at God's right hand." This Psalm affirms that God will be our refuge for time and eternity. No matter what the stresses and pressures of life might be, David makes it clear that he will take refuge in God and will trust God to protect him forever. Hopefully, that is also our desire.

There are two names for God in verse 2. The first “LORD” is printed in caps because it refers to the Hebrew name “Yahweh.” Yahweh was the most important name used by the Hebrew people. It was the name God used for Himself when He revealed Himself in a personal way to His chosen people. It was the name God used when He established covenants with Abraham and Moses.

The second word translated “Lord” (without caps) is the Hebrew name “Adonai.” This is the name used to describe God as the “sovereign ruler or king;” so from the beginning of this Psalm, David makes it clear that Yahweh is the ruler or king of his life. Verse 2 is David’s personal testimony of his faith. He makes it known that his life is centered on, and submitted to, God. This should also be our desire.

David further described the importance of his relationship to his God with the statement, “apart from you I have no good thing.” Think about what that statement meant in relation to David. He was the king. He had all the resources of the kingdom at his disposal. He had authority and power. He had talents as a musician, warrior, leader; and yet David acknowledged that all the advantages he had in life were of insignificant value compared to his relationship with God. He knew that his abilities and position were benefits given by God. He knew that his success had come from Yahweh.

David took special delight in “the saints who are in the land.” Association with God’s people was another benefit that he enjoyed. These “saints” are also identified as “the glorious ones.” As king, David associated with the rich, the powerful, and the important people of the land. High government officials usually think of themselves and their influence more than they think about God. David, as a king who trusted God, was therefore an unusual leader because he stated, as part of his testimony, that he preferred to be identified with godly people and, in fact, he said that he was delighted to be in their company. David had a bond with these people because they had a common faith. My guess is that he could be relaxed among the people who followed God, just as we have common bonds with other believers. They would be the friends who could comfort in times of sadness and encourage in times of stress and difficulties.

David's thoughts about the saints of God caused him to reflect on those who turned their backs on God and pursued idols. His heart undoubtedly ached for these people. In contrast to the joys he experienced as a follower of Yahweh, David knew that the people who "run after other gods" would have increased sorrows. David lived in the midst of idolatrous Israelites and pagan Canaanites, yet he kept himself separate from them. He affirmed that he would not partake in their sacrifices nor even mention their names. David is our example of how to live in the midst of evil and still be true followers of God.

In verses 5 and 6, David explained how Yahweh was filling his life with joy and pleasure. He wrote several words to describe what Yahweh had "assigned" to him: "Portion and cup," "lot," "boundary lines," "inheritance." These are poetic terms to describe that God had provided for his physical needs and protected him in the circumstances of his life. He refers to these things as his "inheritance."

Remember David's background. He was the youngest son in a family with many sons. Because of his position in his family, he would not have received much of an inheritance. However, God had singled him out for special responsibilities and elevated him to the leadership of the nation of Israel. David knew that God had expanded his boundary lines and enriched his life far beyond his youthful expectations.

Also, God, in His mercy and graciousness, was providing everything he needed in his life. In similar fashion, we as believers can recognize that God has called us out of the ordinary expectations of this life, elevated us to citizenship in heaven, and given us an inheritance that is greater than anything we can imagine.

David was happy and contented about his situation. He described the benefits of God as "pleasant" and "delightful." God had worked in his life even though there had been times when he had faced formidable enemies and perilous circumstances.

The next section begins with the statement, "I will praise the LORD." This statement indicates that David's joy is not first and foremost in God's gifts but in Yahweh Himself. Instead of bragging about all he had, David praised the LORD, the Source of his blessings.

The statement, “I have set the LORD always before me,” is another indication of David’s orientation and focus in life. David was undoubtedly surrounded by many human counselors, but his chief goal in life was to follow the guidance of God, and not follow human wisdom. He sought to hear and to know the will of God each and every day.

David wrote, “even at night” God “instructed him.” There are other Psalms which state that the godly person meditates on the instructions of God day and night. Actually David wrote that “his heart instructed him.” The Hebrew word translated “heart” refers to the innermost center of conscious life, the place where a person’s character and motives originate. Perhaps David was stating that his heart was so oriented to God that he was learning even while he was sleeping, or perhaps verse 7 means that David meditated on God’s Word when he couldn’t sleep. The point is that David wanted to know God’s will and wanted to follow God’s guidance.

Another blessing was the stability of his life in spite of the trials and difficulties he faced. David made a conscious effort to keep his attention focused on Yahweh. His mind was intently fixed on the LORD. He was always trying to please the LORD. He meditated on God’s word and worshiped. In addition David wrote that he kept the LORD at his right hand. This means that David depended on the LORD to sustain and protect him. The result? David stated that he “would not be shaken.” No matter the circumstances with which he would be confronted, David knew that God would always be at hand to help, that he could lean on God for assistance. I think you can recognize that David is describing the lifestyle which is appropriate for each one of us. I hope you identify with David throughout this Psalm.

Verse 9 begins with the word “therefore,” which indicates that David was coming to the conclusion of his writing. In this Psalm, David gave two main reasons for his joy. First, Yahweh was his sovereign Master — the One he could turn to for protection and guidance. Second, Yahweh had been good to him. These were backward looks at what the LORD had been doing for him. On the basis of his past experiences, David had confidence about the future. The word “therefore” introduces a forward look into the future.

David believed that God, who had taken such wonderful care of him in this life, hadn’t done this just to abandon him to annihilation at physical death. David anticipated God’s continued care and blessing even in life beyond the grave.

This Psalm has described several features of God's care for us in this life, but the ultimate focus of this Psalm is what happens to the believer after physical death. David knew that God would keep his body safe and secure after his death, that he would not be abandoned to the grave, and that Yahweh would not allow his body to experience decay. Therefore, David could confidently announce that his "heart is glad and his tongue rejoices."

Yahweh makes known to us the path of life. Individuals who have placed their faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ, who have God's Spirit living in them, who are the spiritual children of God, know something about this path of life. Individuals who walk this pathway here on earth know that it extends into eternity. David understood that the earthly benefits of his relationship with Yahweh would never end, even though physical death would bring about a significant change in circumstances. The path of life is something to be enjoyed by the believer both now and throughout eternity.

David understood that he would stand before his God, and he anticipated the fullness of joy that there would be in the LORD's presence. He anticipated the eternal pleasures there would be at the LORD's right hand.

There is an interesting contrast in the references to "right hand" in verses 8 and 11. Here on earth, David leaned on the LORD whenever there were difficulties and trials. Because the LORD was at David's right hand, David was not shaken by earthly circumstances. In heaven, the positions will be reversed; David will experience his pleasures at the LORD's right hand, which is the place of honor. Here on earth we are dependent on God's help. In heaven we reap the benefits of faithful obedience.

David was not afraid of death. He knew that it was the doorway to eternal fellowship with God. David described himself as a refugee in verse 1, but he knew he would be the heir of God in verse 11.

"LORD, you have assigned Your people their portion and cup; You have made their lot secure. The boundary lines fall for them in pleasant places; surely they have a delightful inheritance awaiting them in Your presence." I hope you can identify with David, that you have placed your life under the protection and care of Almighty God, and that you are experiencing the joys of that relationship now, and are looking forward with hope and confidence to eternity.

Appendix

David's circumstances at the time of the writing of this Psalm are unknown. There are a variety of opinions about what his situation was. Some commentators suggest that David was in the midst of a crisis; others that it was a time of peace and quiet in his kingdom. Some commentators think that this Psalm was written at the beginning of David's reign as king over Israel; others that David was an old man at the time of the writing and that he was reflecting back on his life.

This Psalm has a superscription. The superscription states that it is "a miktam of David." No one knows what the Hebrew word miktam means, but it is assumed that it is some kind of literary or musical instruction indicating the style in which the Psalm was to be presented. I mention this because the superscription at the beginning of this Psalm may be a clue to the reason David wrote it. In all the other instances in which the word miktam appears, David was in some kind of danger. Perhaps that is the context in which David composed this Psalm.

If this is true, the reader would not recognize it because this Psalm does not dwell on danger or despair or complaint. Rather the theme is one of joy and confidence.