

Prayers

To God

Pray in thanksgiving for the many blessings God has poured out on you this day. Pray in thanks especially for those things that have lightened your spirit and enabled your to rejoice.

For myself

Weekly theme: Feelings about 'church'

Father God, lift Your people out of the devil's deceptions and away from Satan's lies, and by Your Spirit, protect them from the the evils and sins of the world by which they are tempted. Draw the closer, hold them in Your might and power, instil Your vision within them, and empower them to stand tall in Christ and be content to proclaim salvation and the "Good News' of God. **AMEN**

For others

Pray for the USA, again, in the aftermath of the presidential elections. Pray for peace in the country and for reconciliation amongst its citizens after the election campaigns.

Meditation

Security.

Now that's something we all seek,
in different ways.

But how many people find it?
For many it is a stranger on the path of life,
never found, seen only from behind,
something chased ... but never caught ...

So consider whether you have touched this phantom,
or is it an illusion of a bygone age
sent packing by our ever changing lives?

God is closer than you think,
and as you race ahead,
look down,
across, behind, beyond, above and deep within,
For, running side by side with every runner in our race,

if you will see Him,
is our Lord whose passion drives Him on
to offer His security,
as God, as friend, companion, leader, healer ...

Yes all of this for us;
that we might rest in Him and know for sure ... He cares.

Bible Passage

Psalm 16

A Miktam of David.

- 1 Keep me safe, O God,
for I look to You for help.
- 2 I said to Him, 'You are my Lord
and You are the only good thing I have.'

- 3 As for the holy people in the land,
they are the glorious good,
for whom I am extremely grateful.
- 4 Those who run after other gods
will multiply their sorrows
I will not pour out blood before false gods
or take their names on my lips.

- 5 LORD, you have assigned me my inheritance;
you have made my place secure.
- 6 The boundary lines have fallen well for me;
and I certainly have a delightful legacy.

- 7 I will praise the LORD, who gives me advice,
and at night corrects me through my conscience.
- 8 I keep the LORD always in mind.
Because he is present with me,
I shall not be shaken.

- 9 Therefore my heart is glad
and every part of me rejoices;
my body also rests secure,
- 10 because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.

- 11 You will show me the path of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence,
and with eternal happiness
at your right hand.

Review

Psalm 16 may appear a rather straightforward Psalm, because it is relatively easy to understand what is being said . Certainly, it appeals to people of faith who appreciate its sense of trust in God (16:1,5,6), its spiritual advice (16:7,8), its confidence in God's protection even at the end of life (16:9,10), and its joy (16:11). There is some evidence that Psalm 16 has been a favourite of many who believe in God. This may be because it speaks plainly and encouragingly of the relationship between the believer and God, from Old Testament times to this.

The attractiveness of Psalm 16 should not lead us to gloss over its majesty; certainly, those who have studied it in detail have found it far more complicated than they first imagined. If you read this psalm in different Bible versions, you will find that they are all very different, which is because the original language of the psalm is not straightforward. It is quite difficult to translate even though the general sense of the Psalm is clear.

We know immediately we start that we are reading a positive psalm. David begins with an appeal to God for safety, but there is no hint of an enemy hounding him, as we found, for example, in Psalm 13. He looks to God for safety and help (16:1), as if this is a regular prayer for all life's circumstances. It is wise counsel to begin each day with such an appeal to Almighty God. The Psalm continues with words of worship, in which God is honoured as *'the only good thing I have'* (16:2). Again, it is fitting to start any day with such prayers of worship.

Verses 3 and 4 move on swiftly as a prayer for others. Here, David give thanks for the *'holy people ... the glorious good'* of Israel (16:3). He clearly appreciated the support of faithful people in Israel during his long years of waiting to be King, and he had to learn to discern the true motives of those around him. On the one hand were those intent on doing God's will, for whom he was *'truly thankful'* (16:3). On the other hand there were those in his kingdom who had wandered away and were motivated not by the love of God but by *'other gods'* (16:4). he does not say what these other gods are, but David declares that as king, he will not go to war or give his life in defence of those who worship any such false gods (16:4).

Perhaps the best way for us to read verses 3 and 4 is to focus on their message of appreciation for God's people. From David's day to this there have been people who love God and are intent on doing His will, and we should be grateful to be one of their number. Our destiny is marked out by our relationship with God, not by our bondage to any of the gods of this world, who only seem to *'multiply the sorrows'* (16:4) of those who trust in them. We have reflected on what such gods could be in recent studies, but could at least add to them the pernicious and disabling gods of drink, gambling, sex and power.

At verse 5, the psalm takes a different turn, and gives thanks for material blessings (16:5,6). When it speaks of an inheritance, it refers to the allotment of land to the Israelites, as carried out by Joshua when the people entered the Promised Land (Joshua 13-21). In David's day we assume these original boundaries were still largely known and remembered, though the finer details were lost to later generations as Israel and Judah grew and developed. Overall, there was a clear understanding that the land belonged to God firstly, but was given for people's use and pleasure (Gen 1:28, 2:15). But for the ancients, the word *'inheritance'*

stood for a great deal more than it does today; it meant belongings, a place to live and work, and also through the working of the land, the potential for wealth.

Perhaps more than thanks for this inheritance, however, these verses express a considerable delight in God's gifts. There is a big difference between accepting what God has given and rejoicing in it! In contrast, one of the greatest temptations of our day is to think of what we own as private gain, and where we live and work as something of a right and not as a gift from God. Psalm 16 therefore reminds us that all our possessions and even the circumstances of our lives are given to us by God, and the best way to enjoy it is to be thankful to God for all His many gifts.

So far, Psalm 16 had given praise to God (16:1,2), has prayed for others (16:3,4) and given thanks for property and work (16:5,6). It seems to be following a very helpful formula of personal prayer, because the next subject is more like a form of 'petition', that is, a prayer expressing feelings and requests to God. Verses 7 and 8 speak of honouring God as the One who, '*gives me advice and at night corrects me through my conscience*', and in gratitude for receiving this, making a 'vow' to keep the Lord '*in mind*' (16:8). We can imagine David listening to the Lord's counsel at night and doing his best to keep the Lord in mind as king of God's people. But this is more than a reflection of David's faith. These words remind us of what it means to keep close to our Saviour in everyday life, through receiving the Lord's counsel, keeping Him in mind, and trusting in the reality of His presence.

The Psalm comes to a conclusion with some astonishing verses, which are possibly more important than the rest of the Psalm, because they speak of God's eternal love. They describe God as One who will not '*abandon me to the grave*' (16:10), but who will '*show me the pathway of life ... and eternal happiness at Your right hand*' (16:11). In general, Israelites believed that after death, the soul was condemned to 'Sheol' (or in Greek, 'Hades'), but traditionally, they dared not hope for anything more. Yet here, David dares to go further, as do many other Old Testament writers, to hope for God's presence even beyond the grave (see Psalm 22:29-31, 30:3 Job 19:25f. Isaiah 25:8, Hosea 13:14, and more). For this reason, Christians often refer to Psalm 16 as 'Messianic', which means that it points the way to God's power to save, through Christ.

David may not have known everything we know today about God's eternal plan for those who have faith, but it is a glorious glimpse of this great Biblical theme. Certainly, David ends the Psalm in a state of happiness and joy at the Lord's love and provision (16:11). His Psalm is a wonderfully expressive and informative, full of confidence in God and containing wisdom for all people of faith. It beckons us to come and join the delights of being one of God's children, who, by rejoicing in His presence, put all earthly things in their place and look forward to God's eternal blessings. Such a life is not a fairy tale, but it is free and readily available!

Discipleship

Application

Selfless, positive faith

Psalm 16 firmly points the believer in a positive direction, highlighting the Lord's interest in every aspect of life, including wealth and prosperity. It also describes the Christian life as blessed (16:5,6), glad (16:9) and full of happiness (16:11), and it encourages us that all this is possible through being content in God's provision, and content with God Himself.

But how easy it would be, particularly today, to take the opposite view; society is defined by powerful desires and motives that are in complete contrast to what we read here. Our world is full of materialism (contra 16:2); self sufficiency (contra 16:5,6); bickering, sarcasm and complaint (contra 16:3); irreligion (contra 16:4); and all manner of dissatisfactions. If this is the life and culture of many in the West, then it is not godly and it will not last. The future cannot be built on selfish, bigoted attitudes and the putting of self before others.

The world of psalm 16 is so much better. It does not describe a static state of contentment, but a dynamic state of trust in the Lord, which can handle all life's changes. In this world, the Christian rejoices in God's good gifts, especially that of the faith by which he or she is saved; hearts, minds and emotions are willingly placed under God's guidance at all times, even at night (16:7), and the turmoil of the world leaves God's people unshaken (16:8).

Being content with God

We may be surprised that a psalm of praise and contentment makes so much mention of land and belongings. It is because these things are important to us, and God knows it. We are truly content when we are 'happy with our lot', our circumstances and resources; but if we spend our lives fretting over increasing our standard of living, buying new products and maintaining fashion, then it is unlikely that we will be in a place of contentment, even with God. Psalm 16 reminds us that God is the author of our happiness, and, as the New Testament says, when we put the Lord first, 'all these things will be added to you' (Matt 6:33).

Ideas for what to do

- Make a list of things that you can praise God for a) privately, b) with loved ones, c) with friends, d) in public. Why is it that some are suitable for one list and not another?
- Consider what proportion of your giving should go towards organisations not directly attached to your church; charities, special events, and pan-church organisations such as the Bible Society. Pray about the priorities you feel you must exercise and ask the Lord to help you. Try to put aside your personal preferences in order to demonstrate those of God.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. As the years go by, do you feel more confident or less confident in God, and His love for you?
2. How important is land and property to you and to your life? Discuss what things are essential to life for you, and why.
3. How important is it to you to know that the resurrection is foretold in the Old Testament? Would it matter if it were not?

Final Prayer

May my life be a testimony of praise to You, my Lord and God.
May my life be an expression of love and compassion for all I meet.
May my life be complete, and may I be content with all I have.
May my life be full of hope because I know my future is safe in You.
May my life be in Your hands, returned to You, with thanks,
So that I may do Your will. AMEN

