

Psalm 16

Psalm 16 is a prayer composed by David, probably late in his life and maybe reflecting on what he prays about when awakened in the middle of the night. It begins with a request that is common in David's psalms – a petition for God's protection in his current difficulties.

Psalm 16:1 (NASB) Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in You.

You might expect the rest of the psalm to express David's current problems or adversaries – but he goes in a very different direction. First, he reflects on his *past, initial* decision to entrust himself to the Lord (16:2). Next, he recalls several of the blessings God has brought into his life since then (16:3-7). Finally, he looks forward to the *future* blessings that the Lord has promised him (16:8-11).

There is a lesson for us here. When we are beset by problems or dangers (especially in the middle of the night), we should bring them to God and ask Him to preserve us. But having done this, it is most helpful to place our present difficulties in a larger context. By deliberately reflecting on God's past faithfulness and His promises for our future, it is easier to rest in God's care in the present.

David's initial decision

16:2 I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good besides You."

David begins by remembering his initial decision (decades earlier, probably during his teen years) to personally entrust himself to God. Notice how he describes that decision. He uses two different Hebrew words for "Lord." The first "Lord" is *Yahweh*, the name God gave for Himself to Moses in Exodus 3 – the one true God who reveals Himself in the Bible. David, like many of us, grew up knowing about the God of the Bible. But there came a day when David said to God: "You are *my*



Lord.” This “Lord” is *Adonai*, which means master or leader. He made the decision to make the God of the Bible his personal leader, to entrust himself to this God who is not a tyrant, but is rather the Source of all goodness. David regards this past decision as the most important decision he ever made, because of all the goodness God unleashed into his life through it. This is why most Christians celebrate two birthdays – the day of their physical birth and the day of their spiritual birth when they received Jesus.

David’s past blessings

Next, David muses on four reasons why he is so glad he chose to make the Lord his Lord. Maybe you can recognize them in your own life.

- *16:3 As for the saints who are in the earth, they are the majestic ones in whom is all my delight.* David has gained a new family. “*The saints who are in the earth*” does not refer to super-believers who are now dead and buried. “Saints in the earth” refers to other genuine believers who live in the land of Israel. David’s decision to receive the Lord introduced him to other Israelites who had made the same decision, and he experienced great delight in his relationships with them. He learned about walking with God through their teaching and example. He formed close friendships with some of them which helped him to follow the Lord through many difficult times. He served the Lord with them (rather than alone) in many different ways. What a priceless privilege it is to go through life with other believers!
- *16:4 The sorrows of those who have bartered for another god will be multiplied; I shall not pour out their drink offerings of blood, nor will I take their names upon my lips.* David has learned to turn away from all false gods. When you know and follow the Lord, He rescues you from being deceived by counterfeit gods and their false promises. David reflects on those he has known (like King Saul) who looked to money or power or fame to fulfill them, and



how these false gods brought them misery rather than true fulfillment. While David had lapses in his obedience to God, he knew how to turn back to Him rather than embrace a lifestyle of idolatry.

- *16:5a The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup . . .* “Portion” and “cup” are the food and drink elements of a feast. *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows” (Psalm 23:5).* Like David, we can daily experience God’s kindness and nourishment, even in the midst of difficult times.
- *16:5b . . . You support my lot. ⁶ The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.* David has experienced the goodness of God’s purpose for his life. When the Israelites took possession of their land, God apportioned their property by having them draw lots. David uses “lot” as a metaphor for the “pleasant” and “beautiful” life God has given him. As he looks back on his life, he can say without regret: “God has given me a life I wouldn’t trade for anything.”

No wonder David says: *16:7 I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; indeed, my mind instructs me in the night.* Even as an old man who often wakes up in the middle of the night, he is not beset by fear or regret. Instead, he spends those times thanking God for how good His guidance has been.

David’s future blessings

But David doesn’t stop there. He knows that God has not only been good to him in the *past*, but that God will continue to be good to him in the *future*. Note his shift to the future-tense: *16:8 I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices . . .* Specifically, he is not afraid of death because he knows that God will grant him eternal life. Notice what this involves:

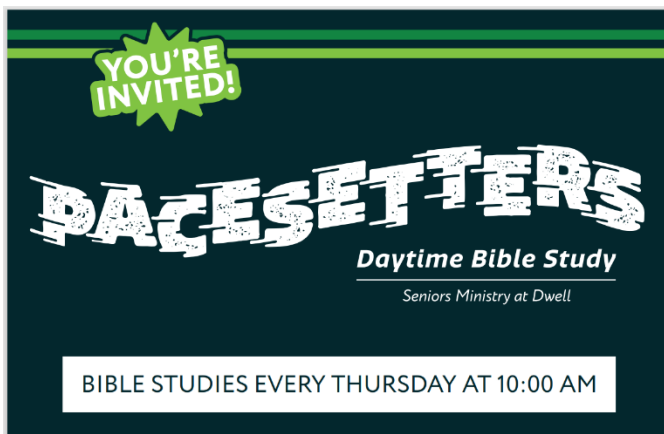


- *16:9 . . . My flesh also will dwell securely . . . 16:10 . . . Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.* This promise refers to bodily resurrection versus permanent bodily decomposition. Because Jesus conquered death, when He returns He will give us glorified bodies like His resurrected body (Philippians 3:21a).
- *16:10 For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol . . .* This promise refers to ongoing personal consciousness versus personal unconsciousness or annihilation. The moment believers die, we will be consciously with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).
- *16:11 You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.* For the believer there will be no eternal regret or boredom. Instead, we will experience God's never-ending and ever-increasing kindness (Ephesians 2:7).

At our stage of life, this is where the rubber meets the road! We don't look forward to dying, but we don't fear death as the end of our lives. We know that our deaths will be the beginning of the life we've had glimpses of since we made the Lord our Lord!

Until then, let's respond to our problems the way David did in this Psalm – reminding ourselves of God's past goodness, and looking forward to His future goodness!

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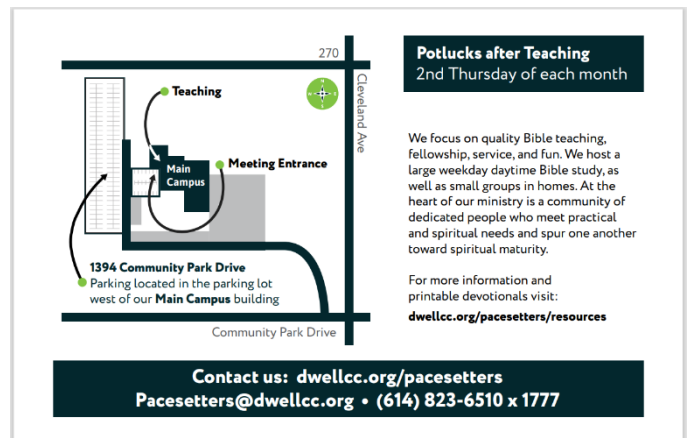
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