

# **“The Path of Life”**

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Psalms Series

Sermon 16

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1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Psalm 16

## **1 Corinthians 10:14–22**

**[14] Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. [15] I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. [16] The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? [17] Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. [18] Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? [19] What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? [20] No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. [21] You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. [22] Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (ESV)**

## **Psalm 16**

**A Miktam of David.**

**[1] 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. (ESV)**

## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Comedy or Tragedy?**

I've been told it's good practice to start a sermon with a joke, but it seems to me that the Gospel is more *literary* comedy than *standup* comedy. "In stand-up comedy the comedian usually recites a fast-paced succession of humorous stories, short jokes called 'bits', and one-liners, which constitute what is typically called a monologue, routine or act."<sup>1</sup> Each joke has a setup, and then a punch line, that reframes the setup in an unexpected way. Standup comedy tends to involve brief observational humor about the way things are here in this broken world. Literary comedy, by contrast, is a long narrative story or play that has a happy ending. (Its opposite is tragedy—which has a sad ending). Literary comedy can involve a great deal of sadness and pain at the beginning and in the middle of the story—but at the end, all is well. I think the Christian story is this sort of literary comedy—and that includes our own experience of it.

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions.net

Psalm 16 fits this pattern of the literary comedy—it begins with danger and affliction, but ends by looking forward to salvation from God. This is not the quick belly-laugh of standup comedy—it’s the deep satisfaction of a long, hard story that ends well.

### **B. Psalm 16: Author and Context**

David is the author of Psalm 16. We don’t know the immediate context of when he wrote this, but the threat of death might indicate either the time when King Saul was hunting him, or even the later period when David’s own son, Absalom, rebelled and was seeking to kill him. Both were very bad situations. And we, too, will have our own hard situations. What is yours right now? Or if all is well for the moment, how do you prepare your spirit for a hard time that’s maybe right around the corner? Ultimately, we’re all on the way to the grave, unless Christ returns first. Things are going to go south on us at some point. It is wise to live with a clear understanding of our mortality. So how *do* we cope with afflictions, fear, and our impending deaths? What is a believer to do?

## **II. The Last Laugh—Living through Hard Things**

### **A. Pray to God for Help (v. 1)**

Psalm 16 clearly begins with these sorts of issues in mind. Right off the bat, David is calling out for help. And yet even here, we see divine

wisdom at work. In verse 1, he cries out, *Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge*. Here we see that in his distress, David turns first of all to God for help. He doesn't try to handle it himself, or get aid from someone else. Right away, he turns to God in prayer. Is that your approach as well? Or do you try to handle things on your own strength for a while, and only if you find that you can't resolve the issues yourself do you then go to God in prayer, as your backup, so to speak? No, we are to go to God first. When you feel threatened or afraid, go to God. David calls on God to preserve him, to guard him. In other words, he's asking *God* to rescue him from the frightening situation. For David sees enemies, sin, and death all as threats to his wellbeing. And so he prays to God for help: *Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge*.

### **B. Take Refuge in God (v. 2)**

When you take refuge, you are seeking protection from enemies, storms, or some other form of danger. To take refuge means to find, and then go to, a place of safety and protection. David *goes to* God in prayer. But this Psalm is not only a private prayer—it is also a song meant to be sung in public worship. Therefore the Psalm models two ways of running to God as our refuge—we do so both through private prayer, *and* through coming together for public worship. In both, we confess that we belong to God. This is a reaffirmation of God's covenant. Verse 2: *I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."*

But now also notice that as David turns his focus to God, the size of his fears and problems diminish in his perception. Instead, David's spirit is

filled with a whole world of wonder, awe, and delight that is to be found in God alone. So long as you keep your focus on your personal problems, you will remain mired in anxiety and fear. But as you put your trust and your attention and your heart back upon the living God, hope and joy will begin to get the upper hand. For our attention will be drawn away from our temporary, earthly sufferings, to focus on the eternal joys of the Lord himself.

### **C. Enjoy the Goodness of God**

Therefore, even in the midst of pain and struggle, we can rest our souls in the Lord, and find shelter from the storms. In him alone do we find our true Sabbath rest. In him, we begin to find enjoyment once again, for he is the source of all goodness.

#### **1. All Goodness Comes from God**

Verse 2b says, *I have no good apart from you*. This really means that *all* goodness ultimately comes from God. There's nothing that is good that does not come from God. And notice the assumption that follows here—happiness is tied to *goodness*, and goodness comes from God. If you run to God, then you run to the source of it all. *Nothing* good comes from separation from God. So turn to him and trust in him, and you will find enjoyment in him, and then you will also find enjoyment in all who belong to him. When you have fellowship with God, you will also delight in fellowship with God's people.

## **2. Delight in Fellowship with God's People (v. 3)**

Verse 3: *As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.* The word “saints” simply means the people of God. It does not mean a super-Christian of exceptional piety. It means anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, for it is the gift of *his* righteousness given to every believer that makes them holy. All who believe in Jesus are saints, and his Holy Spirit now lives within them. And so we have delight in God's Spirit who dwells within each of us who believes, and we also delight in other believers, for they, too, have the Spirit of God. We delight in fellowship with each other, and indeed, this is a key part of life in the body of Christ. As we enjoy time with one another, we enjoy life in the Lord, and we model the love and community at the heart of the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are to love God above all, and our neighbor as ourselves, and part of love is time together, prayer for one another, and help for one another. Thus, fellowship is a good and godly part of life in the church here in this world, and beyond. Verse 3: *As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.*

### **D. Worship God Alone**

When we turn to the Lord, we find such an overflow of joy in himself and in all his people, that it makes no sense to turn anywhere else. Further, because all that is good comes from God, if you turn anywhere else for help, then you will find only evil. And because it's only goodness that leads to joy, when you turn to evil, you will find only sorrow and pain.

## 1. False Gods Bring Sorrow

David makes this choice clear in verse 4. False gods can only bring you sorrow. He says, *The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply*. The sorrows multiply because false gods are not good, and won't bring you joy. Moreover, you are storing up judgment for yourself by running after things that are not God. Therefore, if you seek solace for your troubles from any other source than God himself, then you will both fail in your efforts, *and* fall under God's judgment. For although you may *seek* life apart from God, you will not find it.

## 2. False Gods *Take* Your Life

In fact, if you run after idols or false gods, you will find death rather than life—injury instead of healing. False gods require drink offerings of blood—and blood means life itself.<sup>2</sup> Idols and false gods will drain your life away. They will bring hurt and death. May we not bind our souls to anything other than the good, holy, living Lord God himself. May we declare with David that we will not pour out the drink offerings of blood of the false gods.

## 3. False Gods are Actually Demons

Moreover, as we learn in 1 Corinthians 10, if we run after false gods, this is not simply some harmless form of spiritual experimentation. False

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<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 17:14.

gods are either nothing in and of themselves, or they have demonic activity underlying them. This is nothing to mess with! 1 Corinthians 10:20-21: *what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.* There's no neutral position—you are either *for* God, or *against* him. As Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*

In sum, when you turn away from God, you open yourself up to multiplying sorrows, death, and the devil.

#### **4. The True God Brings Joy**

By contrast, the true God brings joy. As verse 11 says, *in his presence, there is fullness of joy.*

#### **5. The True God Gives Life**

And rather than *draining* your life, the true God *gives* you life, for he is life itself. *The river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*<sup>3</sup> Jesus also said, *whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will*

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<sup>3</sup> Revelation 22:1.

*give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”<sup>4</sup>*

With him, you drink the cup of salvation. Apart from him, you will drink the cup of the wrath of God. The true God *gives* life.

## 6. The True God Is Real

And while idols and false gods are either nothing or devils in disguise, the Lord God Almighty is true, he is holy, he is good, and there is no shadow of turning in him. Therefore, I choose him. Verse 5: *The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.* The true God is *real*.

### III. Contentment in God

#### A. God Himself Is my Reward

Thus, *the Lord is my chosen portion and my cup.* In a profound sense, God *himself* is our reward. He is the source of all goodness and the creator of all things. If you have God *himself* as your reward, then all other things are yours as well. Relationship with God is everything. It is the highest blessing, and from him flows every other blessing. So *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John 4:14

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:33

This is the great truth underlying Christian contentment. Because he has relationship with God himself, the Apostle Paul can be content in every situation. He once wrote, *I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. [12] I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. [13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*<sup>6</sup> Suffering and deprivation are temporary setbacks in this world alone. Christians know that soon we will be enjoying God's blessings forever, and that the Lord is comforting us now even in our affliction.

## **B. God's Providential Goodness Even Now**

### **1. Present Blessings**

Verse 6 says, *The lines **have fallen** for me in pleasant places; indeed, I **have** a beautiful inheritance.* This shows that David finds his consolation not just in the prospect of going to heaven one day, but also in the reality of God's providential blessings, even in this broken world. He speaks of his inheritance as if he already possesses it, and not as if it is only a future expectation. For indeed, he already has relationship with God, and that is a blessing we experience now already to some extent—and much more fully in the life to come. And so the Lord provides spiritual consolations now, and oftentimes some physical ones as well. And so because of the reassurance of relationship with God through

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<sup>6</sup> Phil. 4:11-13. See also 1 Tim. 6:6-10.

Jesus Christ, we can give thanks for present blessings, while also looking forward to their future perfection.

## **2. Counsel and Guidance**

Part of God's blessing to us, even in this broken world, is his counsel and guidance. We can learn from him through his Word, and through the Holy Spirit's application of it to our minds and hearts as we meditate upon it. When you make a regular habit of getting God's Word into you, it often works in a powerful way—even slowly, over time. It's the same way with yeast in bread dough. You knead the dough and knead it, and then leave it covered in a bowl in a warm place—and over time, it will double in size. Sometimes the Holy Spirit employs a similar process—powerful and slow, as God's Word works in our thoughts. That's why David writes in verse 7, *I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.* Of course, your own sinful heart can lead you astray—but if you are spending time in God's Word, and you have invited the Spirit of Christ into your heart, then the Lord will work *in* your thoughts and meditations to instruct you during times of quiet reflection. And by the way, this should not just be something that happens when you can't sleep. Create a pattern for reading the Bible, and for praying and reflecting quietly. The Lord will instruct you in your heart in those moments. But if you fill every second of your days with sensory input and activity, then you will miss this blessing.

## **3. He Will Neither Leave Me Nor Forsake Me**

Seek the Lord, pay attention to his Word, pray to him. If you *search for the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul, you will surely find him.*<sup>7</sup> In other words, if you seek the Lord with all your heart, you will discover that he has been right there with you all along, and that you just didn't realize it. Therefore (verse 8), *I have set the LORD always before me.* As he promises in Hebrews 13:5: *I will never leave you nor forsake you.* Psalm 16, verse 8 then continues, *because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.*

### 5. Steadfast: I Shall Not Be Shaken

The reality is that God is with me, even when I am unaware of his presence. But when we fasten our minds and hearts on him and set him always before us, then we are reminded that the Lord of the universe *is* right there with us, and therefore we can be steadfast in adversity. For the Lord loves us and will help us. *I shall not be shaken*, says David. Now—be careful here—for this does *not* say, “I shall never be attacked,” nor “I will never suffer,” nor does it say that life will be easy and problem-free for believers. No indeed—this verse *assumes* you are going to get buffeted by *something*—only, because God is right there with us, we will trust in him, he will take care of us, and we will not be shaken. The key is to look beyond your troubles, to the Lord himself. For he is your reward, and through him, you will eventually be rescued from all adversity to life and joy everlasting.

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<sup>7</sup> Deut. 4:29.

## C. Joy of the LORD

### 1. Ultimate Security

We can have this joy even in the midst of sorrow and pain, because we have relationship with the Lord himself through Jesus Christ. Verse 9 gets at this: *Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.* Why does my flesh dwell secure? Because we know that if we are in God, then even the health and life of flesh will be guaranteed in an ultimate sense. We will be redeemed from death itself, we shall be made holy, and our bodies will rise from the dead incorruptible and perfect. Verse 10: *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol [that is, the grave], or let your holy one see corruption.*

### 2. Life After Death

Even here in the Old Testament, this verse clearly teaches life after death. Though our bodies die, yet shall we live, and even our mortal bodies themselves shall be redeemed and saved from their corruption.

### 3. Escape from Corruption

This is a big deal—this verse promises that we shall escape from corruption! This promise has a double sense. First of all, it means that the natural decomposition of physical bodies will one day be undone. As Jesus once said, *an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear [the Son of Man's] voice and come out, those who have done good to the*

*resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*<sup>8</sup> More than this, we shall also escape from *moral* corruption. Even as our bodies shall be rescued from decay, so our souls shall be redeemed from moral corruption. All sin will be gone, once and for all. We shall then be free of our struggle with sin that has plagued us all our lives here in this world. And we shall no longer sin.

All of this is made possible through Jesus Christ—who is the firstborn from the dead—the first of humanity to rise. And while Psalm 16 can apply to all who are in Jesus Christ, the New Testament makes clear that Psalm 16 is also a prophecy about Jesus Christ himself. For he, in fulfilling this Psalm in himself, made it possible to apply the promises of this Psalm to us all. Let's see how.

#### **4. Jesus Christ the Firstfruits from the Dead**

The Apostle Peter preached a sermon on this very Psalm, even on Pentecost Sunday. Here's what he said, in Acts 2:22-41:

*[22] "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—[23] this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. [24] God raised him up,*

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<sup>8</sup> John 5:28-29

loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. [25] For David says concerning him [in Psalm 16],

*“I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
[26] therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
my flesh also will dwell in hope.  
[27] For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption.  
[28] You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”<sup>9</sup>*

[29] “Brothers, [Peter continues] 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. [33] Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this [Holy Spirit] that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. [34] For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

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<sup>9</sup> Peter quotes the Septuagint—an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament—this explains the slight variation in the wording of Palm 16 as it appears in Acts 2 of of the ESV, as opposed to Psalm 16.

*“The Lord said to my Lord,  
 “Sit at my right hand,  
 [35] until I make your enemies your footstool.”*

*[36] Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”*

*[37] Now when [the crowd] heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” [38] And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” [40] And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” [41] So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (ESV)*

Therefore, as we learn from Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, Psalm 16 does prophetically depict the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And because of *his* resurrection, all who believe in him will also rise from the dead.

Here is how the Apostle Paul unpacks the significance of all this, in 1 Corinthians 15:20-26:

*[20] But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [21] For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. [22] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. [23] But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. [24] Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. [25] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. [26] The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (ESV)*

## **5. The Path of Life**

Here then in Jesus Christ, we discover that although it seemed that his story was tragedy when he died on the cross, it is actually comedy—that is, it has a happy ending, in that he rose from the dead. Jesus himself then is that path of life, for all who believe in him are united to him, so that he died our death in order that we might live his life. Although we who trust in Jesus shall die in this world, we also shall live forever—in that our spirits shall go to heaven, and we will one day be resurrected. Our own lives have been transformed from tragedy to comedy. And so, in the words of Psalm 16 verse 11: *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy.* Jesus Christ is the Way and the Truth and the Life.<sup>10</sup> When God makes known to us the path of life, it means that he is making Jesus Christ known to us. That’s why our vision at First United Presbyterian Church is “to know Christ and to

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<sup>10</sup> John 14:6.

make him known.” Knowledge here means *relationship*, and this is reflected in the joy we have in fellowship with God and with one another—for when we fellowship with each, the Spirit of God is also present. That’s why verse 11 says ***in your presence*** *there is fullness of joy*.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Pleasures Forevermore**

The path of life takes us to Christ Jesus. In him, God himself becomes our lot, our inheritance, our portion, our reward. At the right hand of Jesus Christ we find *pleasures forevermore*. All honor and glory and pleasures belong to Christ, and he shares them with all who belong to him. For Christ is the head, and we are the body, if we repent and trust in Jesus. Just as he took our punishments, so we receive his rewards.

Therefore when we face hard times in our lives, when all seems to be tragedy, and when we even face our own deaths, let us pray to God for help, take refuge in him, and enjoy his goodness. May we worship God alone—in both good times and in bad—remembering that God himself is our reward, and that even in adversity, he still gives us many blessings, even in this world. Finally, we rejoice in the Lord, for we are secure in him. Jesus Christ died and rose again for our salvation, so that not even bodily death will be the end of the road for us. Instead, it will be the gateway to paradise. The path of life may take you through the valley of the shadow of death, but in Jesus Christ, we have salvation and restoration and glorification in eternal life. We shall indeed laugh, for God’s story is the best sort of comedy. In him, all is well, and all shall be well, forever and ever.

Amen.