

Our Refuge in Life and Death

Psalm 16

INTRODUCTION

At the first church I ever served at, the lead pastor would begin each year with the assertion, “This year, we will be surprised, but God won’t be.” It was his way of reminding the congregation of God’s sovereignty and, consequently, the believer’s security.

When John Marc asked me to preach on this occasion, I thought it would be a fitting time to remind us (myself included) of these realities. The truth is that none of us knows what a day may bring. But the Lord does.

Yet knowing that God is sovereign is only one piece of the puzzle to experiencing our security in Christ. We must also know God’s goodness to withstand life’s trials and difficulties.

If we don’t keep God’s goodness at the forefront of our minds, we will be tempted to doubt Him when suffering comes. Instead of navigating the pain with faith, fears will take over. Insecurities and anxiety will replace peace and trust. Our hope in prayer will dwindle, and our praise of God will diminish.

We must constantly return to God’s goodness and grace towards His people. He does not waver in His love or commitment to His own. He doesn’t love us based on our merit but entirely based on His good purposes for us in Christ. His love for us is everlasting, and it is His good pleasure to shepherd, lead, and comfort us through challenges and hardships that He ordains for our good and His glory.

Psalm 16 is a beautiful prayer song of David that communicates his trust in the Lord’s goodness. One commentator (Broyles) has called Psalm 16 “**a confession of faith and loyalty to the LORD.**”¹ It has been referred to as a psalm of confidence.

We find in this Psalm David’s awareness and appreciation of the Lord’s goodness, and this in turn produces a devoted commitment to the Lord, which results in a deep confidence that the Lord will not abandon him, even in the ultimate trial, death.

Read: Psalm 16

MAIN POINT: In Psalm 16, David models three attitudes we must consider and apply to cultivate trust in the Lord’s safeguarding through all life’s circumstances.

OUTLINE:

- 1. A CRY FOR THE LORD’S PROTECTION (1)**
- 2. A DELIGHT IN THE LORD’S PROVISION (2–7)**
- 3. A CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD’S PRESERVATION (9–11)**

My prayer for this sermon has been that the Lord would use it to deepen our trust, delight, and confidence in Him. That this year, no matter what He has ordained to come, that our hearts would be secure in Him.

I. A CRY FOR THE LORD’S PROTECTION (1)

¹ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms 1–89: Commentary*, vol. 1, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011–2013), 399–400.

This Psalm has a heading, **A Mikhtam of David**. It reveals that David is the author but what is a **Mikhtam**? It's difficult to determine this with certainty, but there are six Psalms with this word in the heading (56–60). David wrote all six Psalms, four of which are tied to specific events in David's life.

When the ancient Greek scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek (Septuagint), they chose a word meant for **engraving** or **inscription in stone**. This suggests that these were significant Psalms, likely engraved somewhere on a stone or a wall and used regularly in corporate worship. If this is true, it makes the content of this Psalm and its application all the more important.

David begins with a cry **Preserve me, O God**. The word **Preserve** means “to keep” or “to watch over” and was regularly used for shepherding sheep. David directed this plea for protection to **God**. The word for **God** here is the Hebrew word *El*. This designation was the most common word for **God** and emphasized His strength: “**the Strong One,**” “**the Mighty One,**” or “**Almighty God.**”

It appears David was in some crisis, and his comments at the end of the Psalm imply it was a life-threatening situation. It could have been an illness, a physical threat, an imminent danger, or any number of difficult circumstances.

Whatever the cause was, David had an initial fear when the circumstances came. And what I appreciate about this is that it shows us that it is not wrong to be afraid in a frightening situation. **But what did David do with that fear?**

He ran to the Lord for protection. He consoled his fear with faith, he relieved his terror with trust, and he calmed his panic with prayer. David's example here shows us that we often fear so much because we pray so little.

As the crisis comes David responds by seeking refuge in the Lord, **for I take refuge in You**. He knew where he could find shelter, he knew where to find sanctuary, he knew where to find safety and security. He went directly to the Lord in prayer.

His response showed that David knew His God. Consider what he wrote in **Psalm 17:7 Wondrously show Your lovingkindness, O Savior of those who take refuge at Your right hand...**

For him, the knowledge of God wasn't just an intellectual exercise. It was an experiential one. He knew God: His holiness, His goodness, His faithfulness, His character, and that transformed the way he handled his fears and trials.

His relational knowledge of God rightly produced a total dependence upon God. He ran to the Lord when trouble came, knowing and trusting that God would care for him.

Illustration of a child running to and clinging to their mom or dad. Use the story of the corgi.

So, this year, whatever may come, let us not run to what the world runs to for security. Let's not trust in ourselves (our own strength, our own thinking, our own scheming), let's not trust in wealth (the stock market, retirement funds), let's not trust in the state of political affairs, let's not trust in even in our own health and well-being.

If at any point a crisis comes into our lives this year, let us run to the Lord and seek our refuge in Him.

Nothing and no one besides the Lord can provide us with ultimate security. As believers, we have access through Christ to this security. But this Psalm teaches us that the experience of security in the Lord begins with seeking our security in the Lord.

The opening line of this Psalm serves as a summary statement for the whole Psalm. The focus is on seeking God for security and looking to Him for safety and care. David will expound on this by showing the actions associated with trusting God as a refuge.

II. A DELIGHT IN THE LORD'S PROVISION (2–7)

David shifts from the initial cry for protection to confessing the Lord's goodness. We can view these verses in the Psalm as evidence of seeking refuge in the Lord. He knows the Lord is good, and all that He provides is good, so he confesses his delight in the Lord's provision.

Let's work through these verses in three separate groupings. David focuses on delighting in the Lord's goodness, delighting in the Lord's people, and delighting in the Lord's instruction. Let's look to the first of these groupings.

A DELIGHT IN THE LORD'S GOODNESS (2, 5–6)

In (2) David writes, **I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good besides You."**

In the English translation, it is easy to miss part of what David is saying here. We find the word **Lord** two times, and it appears redundant. But the first **Lord** is the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. This is the covenant name of God. The name *Yahweh* has a depth of meaning but in short it emphasizes God's self-existent, eternal, and unchanging nature.

The second word for **Lord** is the Hebrew word *Adonai* ("**Master**" or "**Ruler**"). So, what David said was, "I said to Yahweh, you are my Master, you are my Ruler, you are my Lord."

This is the recognition of Yahweh's Lordship over his life. It shows that David was loyal to God. It's the declaration of his allegiance, his obedience, his submission to God's authority over his life.

This loyalty to Yahweh isn't given begrudgingly, it is offered lovingly. David continues, **I have no good besides You**. He knew that the Lord provided for all his essential needs and this provision is perfect and satisfying.

(David) Psalm 34:10 The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; But they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing.

(Sons of Korah) Psalm 84:11 ...The Lord gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

(Asaph) Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.

When David says, **I have no good besides You**, he is confessing that God is the Provider for his welfare. He is acknowledging that God is the source of everything needed and gives loving care for His people. The Lord is the reason we have life and any pleasure that it brings. **"My well-being is entirely dependent upon you."**

In verses 5–6 David builds on this thought; He says **The Lord is the portion of my inheritance**. This is a metaphor that connects to the tribal allotments for Israel in the promised land. It also is a reference to the tribe of Levi who didn't receive a land allotment because the Lord was their inheritance.

In ancient agrarian societies, you needed land to have sustenance for life. David is saying that the Lord is the Supplier and constant source of everything he needed in life. All who delight and put their trust in the Lord will have everything they could ever need, because the Lord is faithful to provide.

David also refers to the Lord as **[his] cup**. In the Scriptures, imagery of a cup was often used to convey the outcome or result of one's life. For the ungodly there was prepared the cup of judgment, the cup of staggering, or even the cup of fire and brimstone (Ps. 11:6).

But for God's people, David says in that familiar line in **Psalm 23:5 ... You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows**. Blessing upon blessing, grace upon grace.

The idea here in Psalm 16 is that the Lord is in control of the outcome and result of our life. He has provided for our ultimate end, and that end is secured. That is why David says, **You support my lot**. David is comforted by the fact that it is Lord who provides, supports, and holds his life.

All of these poetic lines are used to express God's incredible goodness towards David. He says **The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me**. Again using the language of land allotment, he is communicating that the circumstances of his life are blessed because they are determined by God.

Because God is completely and totally sovereign, David knew that all circumstances of his life were under God's providential care. And as he reflected on his life, he saw that all of it was good, all of it was satisfying and pleasurable. Not because it was absent of pain, sorrow, and even suffering, but because in it all He had the Lord by his side.

I must admit, it is easy to intellectually affirm this truth, but it is an entirely different matter to embrace this truth in a trial. It is simple to state our amen to this in peace and prosperity, but the mark of spiritual health and maturity is when we can trust God as the world around us gives way.

Although Romans 8:28 was not written, he knew that God's plans and purposes being worked out in his life were for his good and for God's glory. And to that he could say, **the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places**.

What we find is that these metaphors are being used to communicate that the Lord was everything to David. The Lord was everything David longed for, and his heart was fully satisfied in Him. So as David says this, he is saying he has received the greatest inheritance, the greatest portion, God Himself.

If we are to deepen our trust in the Lord we must find our greatest delight in Him. We must be able to say like David, Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good besides You." The only way we will increase in our trust and delight in Him is by spending more time with Him.

If God is our refuge, then it will be evidenced in the fact that He is our delight.

A DELIGHT IN THE LORD'S PEOPLE (3-4)

(3) As for the saints who are in the earth, They are the majestic ones in whom is all my delight.

The word **saints** ("lit. holy ones") **who are in the earth**. This is a reference to genuine believers. He is speaking of those who live focused on God's glory and purposes. They desire to live out the righteousness that God intends for His people. Their thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions are consistent with the faith that they profess.

And David says, **They are the majestic ones** (“excellent ones” “noble ones”) **in whom is all my delight**. He delights in the Lord’s people. He identifies with the Lord’s people. The Lord’s people are his people. These are his friends and his closest companions.

Whether the world accepts them or rejects them, David wants fellowship with them. Whether society values them or views them as insignificant, David wants to be friends with them. Whether they are easy and pleasant to deal with or difficult and awkward, David delights in them.

He isn’t drawn to them because they are great, he’s drawn to them because they are devoted to a great God.
Psalm 119:63 I am a companion of all those who fear You, And of those who keep Your precepts.

“Those who love the Lord will love the company of those who also love him. Those who find their delight in God will also find delight in His people.”²

No matter a person’s social status, economic status, ethnic background, education, level of success, or any other worldly evaluation... if they love the Lord and fear Him, they are our people, they are our family, they are our brother or sister, and we are called to love them and delight in them.

If we truly love God, we will truly love His people.

What does delight in God’s people have to do with finding our refuge in the Lord? We need to understand that other Christians are the only ones who will be able to speak God’s truth to us (in love) in our time of need. They are the only ones who will seek to comfort us with God’s promises in the midst of the crisis. Our brothers and sisters in the Lord will be the only ones who will seek to minister to us and serve us according to the one another commands when the trial comes.

All of this will reinforce our trust in the Lord’s care. It will increase our delight in Him as we witness His good hand support us through His people.

All of this stresses the importance of biblical fellowship. The importance of the local church.

In verse three, David expressed his delight in the Lord’s people in the positive sense. But in verse four he also presents it in the negative sense. His love for God’s people is contrasted with his disassociation from the ungodly.

He says that **those who have bartered for** (“obtain by paying a purchase price”) **other gods** will have their **sorrows (distresses, worries, pains) ... multiplied**. To live life in the pursuit and service of a false god will only lead to increased anxiety, anguish, emotional pain, physical distress, and on the final day, judgment.

God offers Himself as a Refuge to those who seek Him, but if one rejects Him, they are left with the intensifying consequences of their sin. They deny the true God and the goodness He offers to their own physical and spiritual detriment.

David continues, **I shall not pour out their drink offerings of blood, Nor will I take their names upon my lips**. These are the activities associated with idolatrous worship. The pagan religions surrounding Israel would **pour out** (or possibly consume) **drink offerings of blood** in ritual worship to their gods. To take the **names** of

² James Montgomery Boice, [*Psalms 1–41: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 132.

these gods **upon** one's **lips** was to confess to know them, to pledge allegiance to them, and to come under their authority.

David asserts, I will not join them in their sin. I will not be associated with their idolatrous worship or ways of living. I will not comprise by seeking the approval of those who go after other gods. He expresses his commitment to the Lord by stating he will not partake in the worship of these false gods. He distances himself from these evil things.

If we are to delight ourselves in the Lord and His people that means that we are to separate from the world and those who still follow it. This is why Paul would later say in **2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?**

I want to clarify three points. 1) I am not saying that we as Christians look in self-righteous judgment on unbelievers. The only difference between us and unbelievers is the undeserved grace and mercy of God on our lives. 2) I am not saying that we don't love unbelievers. Jesus has called us to love everyone, even our enemies. 3) I am not saying we don't have dealings with unbelievers. How else would the gospel be proclaimed if Christians never interacted with unbelievers?

Yet, as Christians, we need to understand that unbelievers will not intentionally strengthen us in our trust in the Lord. They will not encourage us to be obedient to the Lord when under trial. They will not share God's promises with us.

For us to grow in our understanding of the Lord as our Refuge, we need to delight in the Lord's people. David has one more point to highlight for us in verse seven...

A DELIGHT IN THE LORD'S INSTRUCTION (7)

David presents praise in (7), he says **I will bless the Lord who has counseled me; Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night.** The word **counseled** could also be translated "**advice.**" David received Yahweh's instruction as advice from a loving Father guiding His son. He delighted in the Lord's truth.

He treasured it so much that it became the meditation of his **mind... in the night.** **John Marc always talks about how in those late-night hours when we find ourselves unable to sleep, what a wonderful opportunity that the Lord has given us to work on Scripture memorization and prayer.** This is what David is talking about.

I am always challenged by Job's words in **Job 23:12, "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."** David's delight in the Lord's instruction was evidenced in his praise and in his daily and nightly treasuring of it.

David modeled that a delight in the Lord, a delight in His people, and a delight in His instruction. These actions gave evidence that He was truly dependent upon the Lord as His refuge. He confessed His delight in all that the Lord had provided.

And now he affirms his confidence in the Lord to keep him secure, even in the face of death...

III. A CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD'S PRESERVATION (8–11)

In (8) David says, he has **set the Lord continually before** him. This means that the Lord is his constant contemplation. All throughout the day, the Lord is always on his mind. I have heard John MacArthur refer to this kind of living as a "God-entranced life."

It is giving the Lord priority in all our thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions. It is to walk and live in a complete devotion to the Lord. Again, it is not just that David is devoted to the Lord, he also knows the Lord is devoted to Him.

He says **Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.** The **right hand** signified strength, support, and honor. In battle, warriors would carry their shield on their left hand and their sword on their right. The right side was more exposed, unprotected, and susceptible for attack.

With the Lord at his right hand, David was confident of the Lord's protection, security, and preservation. This is why he could say, **I will not be shaken** no matter what circumstances he found himself in.

I remember going with John Marc and some of the other elders here at Cornerstone to visit a member of the church who was sick. John Marc read Psalm 46 to this individual in their distress. And the words of that Psalm stood out to me in a way I had never considered before.

Psalm 46:1–3 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; 3 Though its waters roar and foam, Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. Selah.

This is the confidence that David had in the Lord. His confidence came from his commitment to the Lord but even more, it came from the knowledge of the Lord's commitment to him.

David continues in **(9) Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;** Having security in the Lord produced an inward contentment. His **heart was glad.** The word **glory** here is a reference to David's spirit (his whole person) and the word **rejoices** could be translated **exults** (shout joyfully). David's heart was fully pleased, and it overflowed to public praise.

His assurance in the Lord led him to say, **My flesh also will dwell securely.** David's peace was undisturbed. He could live untroubled and unworried resting and trusting firmly in the Lord.

How could he have such peace? What was the source of his comfort? (10) For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; The phrase **You will not abandon** is a firm statement. It means that God would not forsake, leave, or disown him. The word **Sheol** is a reference to the grave. David is saying, you won't permanently abandon my soul (life) to the grave.

He continues with, **Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.** This is a tremendous expression of faith.

One commentator has written, "The boldness of it all almost leaves the reader breathless. How can a man see all men dying and note that all the children of men before him have died without exception and still say: God cannot let that happen to me!"³

David knew that if God initiated a covenant relationship with His people, that if He cared for them as a faithful Shepherd and a loving Father all throughout their life, this relationship would not ultimately end with death.

Instead **(11)** there was **the path of life** that he was confident that God **would make known to** him. And this **path** would lead to the very **presence** of God where there would be the **fullness of joy.**

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 134.

And where the Lord was committed to being at David's right hand, we find that it is at the Lord's **right hand** that there **are pleasures forever**.

The conclusion of this Psalm reveals to us that for all who find their refuge in the Lord, there would be life. And this life is defined as joy and pleasure through fellowship with the Lord. This is the promise the Lord gives to His people. The death is not the end, it is only the final crossing to our eternal home.

But when we read this, we know something is missing. We are left confused. Yes, David was confident in the Lord's preservation, but he wasn't preserved. David did die. David was buried in a tomb. His body did decay in the grave.

Paul in **Acts 13:36** affirms this **"For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;"**

What is happening here in this Psalm? Was David mistaken? How should we understand this? To understand what is happening here we must understand a theology of the Messianic Psalms.

David was given a unique position in redemptive history. In 2 Samuel 7 God promised David that a Son would come from his line whose throne and kingdom would never end. This would be the Root of Jesse, the descendant of David, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus the Christ.

David knew that his life was, according to God's providence, was a type, a foreshadow of One to come. That although David was a king, there would come a greater King. One from his very line. David understood this because although he was a man after God's own heart, he knew he was also a man of great sin.

Although David wanted to always trust the Lord as his refuge, he knew he had failed in taking the census of Israel. Although He delighted in the Lord, he knew that he delighted in Bathsheba, and that although he delighted in the Lord's people, he knew what he did to Uriah. And although he delighted in the Lord's instruction, he knew he failed to uphold it.

But he was also confident that one day there would come One who would perfectly trust the Father as His refuge, he wouldn't waver. One who would perfectly delight in the Father, even rising while it was still dark just to spend time with Him. One who would delight in God's people, to the point that He would be their sin-bearing substitute. One who would delight in the Lord's instruction, even after 40 days of fasting and temptation.

What we see here in these closing verses of the Psalm is a reference to Christ and His resurrection. This is a prophetic picture of the perfect Son of David who would be preserved and overcome the grave.

This is what apostle Peter affirmed in **Acts 2:31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.**

The apostle Paul references this in Acts 13:35–37.

The resurrection of our Lord gives grounds for the confidence of all believers since they, too, will not suffer corruption.

IV. CONCLUSION

Some of you might have heard my introduction and thought, “Wow, how morbid. We are about to start a New Year and you want us to realize that something terrible could happen?” It’s true, that does seem morbid, but I don’t say it to get you down.

I say it to strengthen your heart. Pastoral books that have been written on shepherding God’s people through trials repeatedly say one of the most effective ways you can minister to them in trials is to prepare them well. You don’t have to operate from a state of anxiety; in fact, you are commanded not to.