

Psalm 16
A Fork in the Road
7/12/22

The great New York Yankee catcher, Yogi Berra, who was known as much for his humor and wit as he was his baseball playing career, is famous for once saying **“When you get to a fork in the road, take it”**.

Of course, the cleverness of this quote is that usually there is not a fork there lying in your path to take, but many of us will have “forks in our roads” that we are facing this morning... decisions that need to be made, conflicts that need to be resolved, paths that need to be taken, and we’re not really sure exactly where these roads will take us.

In fact, both as a pastor, as a brother, and as a friend, this is easily the number one question that gets brought to me... “I have these job options in front of me and I’m not sure which direction to go? ... “my family is involved in so many activities, how do I choose what is best for us?... “I’m at a crossroads in this relationship and I’m not sure how to resolve it” ... “I need to start making plans for my future, but I barely even know what tomorrow will look like”... or, “I’ve been going down the wrong path for a long time, and I’m not sure how to turn around anymore”...

How do we know which path is best? How do we decide which path to choose? When we’re at a crossroads in life, which direction is the right one to take? Often times we wish that our path and direction could be determined by the simplicity of a silly quote.

Psalm chapter 16 offers us a glimpse of clarity as we go along life’s journey. In fact, months ago, God began teaching me Psalm 16:11 as a personal verse for this season of my life. Every day for the last 9 months I have seen in my kitchen and read and prayed this verse asking God to **“Make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore”**

And as we study Psalm 16 this morning, let’s get a quick preview of where we are going together. **This Psalm of David hinges upon God’s Presence in your life.** David writes of the protection that comes from God and the rest that He gives. The counsel He instructs and the beautiful inheritance that He provides. The path He makes known, the fullness of joy He gives and pleasures forevermore at His right hand, AND all of these gifts or blessings come as a result of God’s presence in your life.

So, if you are here this morning, and you relate to being in at a fork in your road, a crossroads in your journey, let’s understand this as we get into the text together... this Psalm is not a this is “God’s will” for my life message. This is not an Old Testament fleece that you are going to set out to determine which path to take.

That is because Psalm 16 offers us something even greater than a fleece. Psalm 16 offers us Jesus! The text brings us into God's presence. It gives a path of life because Jesus is The Way, The Truth, and The Life. It shows us how the presence of Jesus fills us with joy in all circumstances. And it gives us the hope of His pleasures for all of eternity.

Our natural inclination, is to take the quickest route to wherever we are going. I've never plugged a destination into my GPS and taken the slowest route available; but maybe I should. The way God usually works is not to say, "Here is my will for your life, Go, quickly!" He says, "Get these things right first... choose the right path. Enjoy my presence. And in doing so, you will find me, and I will show you my will. **Only when we are satisfied in God's presence will we experience His blessing forevermore.**"

Often times in our lives, we desire God's will, but our natural disposition is to be impatient and try taking shortcuts to get there, and when we do this we miss out on the greatest blessing; **His daily presence in our lives.** Eugene Peterson says, "One aspect of world that I have been able to *identify as* harmful to Christians is the assumption that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once. We assume that if something can be done at all, it can be done quickly and efficiently."

And the reality for us this morning is, most forks in our roads are not intended to be resolved quickly. If we miss any part of God's path or God's presence in our lives, we will never be able to follow his will for our lives, and we'll be left wandering from fork to fork, frustrated and tired, with no real path to take. So, let's take our time today. Let's examine our path, experience His presence and celebrate His pleasures forevermore.

Read Psalm 16:1-11

For the rest of this morning we are going to zoom in to look at verse 11. For those of you who like sermons with alliteration, you can remember this verse by remembering Path, Presence and Pleasure forevermore. And if you don't like sermons with alliteration, well, you can take that up with King David, because he wrote it that way 😊

Psalm 16:11 says – You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore"

Path

"You make known to me the Path of Life" **What is this Path, and how do we get on it?**

Scripture is FULL of references to paths and shows throughout the Old and New Testaments how there are only 2 distinct paths in life for us to be on. One is a straight path, a narrow path, a path full of wisdom, and that leads to life and peace. The other is a crooked path, a path of wickedness, full of violence and snares and pitfalls.

I'm just going to quickly read some of these verses to help paint a broad picture, but you can get the references from the screens, behind me...

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your **paths**. – Psalm 25:4

Lead me in the **path** of your commandments, for I delight in it. – Psalm 119:35

For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; ⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, ⁸ guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. ⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; - Proverbs 2:6-9

...discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, ¹² delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, ¹³ who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness... Proverbs 2:11-13

Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. ¹¹ I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. ¹² When you walk, your step will not be hampered... Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not walk in the way of the evil. ¹⁵ Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day ¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. Proverbs 4

And finally, 3 scriptures that are directly linked to the "Path of Life" here in Psalm 16:11...

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Psalm 139:24

¹³ Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Matthew 7:13-14

John 14:6 says, "I am the Way the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

We hear in these verses a contrast between two types of paths. Wide and narrow. Crooked and straight. Wise and wicked. Light and darkness. And God's promise of his presence is personal and brings great reward for those who are on the good and upright path.

So, Let's talk about what God's Word tells us about these two paths... If you have never repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus, you are on the wrong path. There is no 3rd option path. There is no middle ground path for those who do a lot of good works and give a lot of money, but aren't really convinced about following Jesus. **There are only 2 paths in this world. One that's wide and easy, and there are many people on it. And one that is narrow and hard, but those who find it are few.** There are only two paths. The way of life, and the way of destruction. Which one are you on? And how do you get on the right path?

Turn over in your Bible to Acts chapter 2:25-38. After the ascension of Jesus, at the Pentacost, filled by the Holy Spirit, Peter is preaching to the crowd and quotes David from **Psalm 16:8-10** in saying that Jesus was the Promised Messiah, the Savior of the World. And that day 3000 people were saved!!! **READ 2:36-28**

That's not all! In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas are preaching at a synagogue in Antioch, sharing the Gospel and defending their faith, and Paul again quotes David from Psalm 16:10, in Acts 13:35 saying, "You will not let your Holy One see corruption", again pointing to Jesus as the one who was Resurrected, and offering sinners the ONLY PATH to God the Father.
Read 13:35-39

These New Testament passages make Psalm 16 a prophetic Psalm in that David was foretelling of the Messiah who would come to show the entire world the ONLY path of Life. So, if you have never received Jesus as your Savior, David, Peter, Paul, Jesus himself, and the entire Gospel story make clear that the only path to life, the only way to find peace in this life and have hope in the future is through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. No shortcuts. No alternative paths. **Jesus is the path of Life that had been make known to us.**

Let's pause here for a moment... Because I know what a lot of us in this room are probably thinking. You're possibly thinking "of course I'm on the narrow path. I get it. I agree with what you are saying. I'm in church this morning. I've been saved. I trusted Jesus a long time ago. I've been baptized. I do Christian things. I believe there is only one path of life. I'm definitely on the narrow path...

...But, I still feel lost. I feel broken and hurt. I feel exhausted. I'm in a spiritual slump. My heart isn't glad. My whole being isn't rejoicing. I can't find any pleasant places or beautiful inheritances on this path. I don't have any joy, or pleasures forevermore.

So, I want to pause and say this... along with being a prophetic Psalm, Psalm 16 hits at the exact heart of the **"already but not yet" tension** that Christ followers live in as our reality. The **ALREADY** is that as believers we have been rescued, redeemed, adopted and made new in Christ, and we ARE ALREADY experiencing the blessing and promise of His presence in our lives.

However, there is also the “Not Yet” reality that we still live in a broken and sinful world. Even when we are walking on the right path, and have the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us, we still experience the effects of sin and the battle for our hearts.

A great example of “already- not yet” is in Romans chapter 8. Look at verse 15. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father...*

And then just a few verses later in 8:22-25 - *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* ²³ *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.* ²⁴ *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?* ²⁵ *But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

We have already been brought by the Spirit into adoption and sonship, AND we eagerly await the adoption and redemption of our bodies, as we wait patiently, and with hope for our eternal reward.

This “already but not yet” reality can be confusing often times as Christians. We have a promise of things to come, but we aren’t always sure how to get there. These crossroads in our journey, the life decisions we aren’t sure which way to turn, the brokenness that we experience, while not part of God’s best, they still affect us, even when we are on the right path.

And even when we don’t feel like it, even when life isn’t sailing as smoothly as we feel it should, on God’s path there is protection and preservation for those who take refuge in Him. This is why David cried out in verses 1-2, “Keep me safe, for I take refuge in you. Apart from you I have nothing good.” And in VS. 8-9, “I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.

To better consider where we are, we need to look back at Vs. 11 to get a bigger picture of God’s presence, and the fullness of joy that He brings us.

Presence

Where is God’s presence, and what does God’s presence look like in our lives? Let’s start by looking back in Psalm 16:4 – The sorrows of those who run after gods shall multiply...

Tim Keller writes, “We may not believe in literal divine god-beings of beauty, wealth, pleasure or fertility. But we all live for something, and if we live for and love anything more than God himself, we are trapped. They become things we have to have, so we “run” exhausted after them.”

This picture of running, being exhausted, chasing after things that we feel so close to obtaining, but never quite reach the mark, that’s the opposite of the peace and joy that God’s presence brings.

You see, for most people I talk with, and I experience this myself in certain seasons too, we are just living day by day trying to get by. By the time we get through the day, exhaustion is setting in. And I’m not talking about just being tired from a busy day. I’m talking about reaching the end of a busy day, realizing that the next day will be exactly the same, and just wanting to check out. This is a message that is popular coming from the world, in TV, music, culture, influencers, social media... there is a constant barrage of pressure to escape your exhausting routine for a few fleeting moments of temporary “happiness”. And I hear that. I experience that with you. Some days I feel that myself. If that’s you this morning I relate and empathize with that.

But it brings me to this question... If I am truly walking each day in God’s presence, shouldn’t I feel different? Yes, being tired is part of humanity, but Psalm 16:4 says the wicked are the ones running down the wrong path and who are exhausted and whose sorrows are multiplying. **Being that I’m on the right path, shouldn’t I feel different?**

July 4th weekend I was spending time with friends in East Tennessee and the friends I stayed have 4 boys, 3rd grade, 1st grade, almost 3 and almost 2... or something close to that. They are so much fun, and every bit as wired and full of energy as you would expect 4 young boys to be. Well, Jason had to go into work for a few minutes and Meagan had a friend over to help her pack for a trip, so I gave my best shot at watching these 4 boys as we played outside... We did great! We lasted almost 2 hours with no major injuries, no lost kids and no total meltdowns, but at the end of it I told my friends that it was easier to talk 18 kids to Centrikid for a week than watch those 4 for an hour!!!

For some of us our family may have us running in 100 different directions each week, but that’s not the only thing that leaves us drained. For some maybe its our jobs. Or unhealthy relationships. Or living to meet the wrong standards or trying to please people in ways we shouldn’t. One thing for me that God has identified in my life that can be just exhausting and draining in unhealthy ways is as simple as my cellphone and the constant barrage of technology in my life, so I’ve had to take intentional steps to fight against this unhealth and create room for God’s presence in my life.

When we’re walking in God’s Path, and living in His Presence, our lives will feel different than those on the wicked, but we have to be active and fight every day to invite His presence into our lives as we experience Him in every season we walk through. The message of this world

is LOUD. It's everywhere we turn. It's overwhelming. We can fall into it without even realizing it.

God's presence may not always be as loud as what the world screaming around us, but it is more powerful and more personal than we can ever know! Every day we must be disciplined and invite God's presence in our lives because His presence is not a mystical, omnipresent, automatic reality in our lives. The promise of God's presence is real: *Matthew 28:20 - I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* But to have and enjoy His presence on a personal level in our lives each day, we must welcome his presence.

In Psalm 139 David asks, "where can I go from your presence" but we also see examples in Genesis 3 of Adam and Eve hiding from God's presence. In Genesis 4 Cain, after murdering his brother Abel, is punished by being cast out of God's presence. Jonah decided he would try to "flee from the presence of the Lord". And in his Psalm of repentance in Psalm 51, David cries out to God "cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. 10"

Yes, God's omnipresence is a powerful truth that we cling to. But God's presence must be welcomed and invited into our lives with humility, with repentance and with obedience.

Do you ever feel like God's presence is hard to experience? Do you ever feel like He is way off in the distance? Maybe you aren't fleeing from God like Jonah, but you still feel a long way off. Exhausted. Unsure of your path. I get it. Every day our hearts are at war, so let's look at what David says in Psalm 24 about seeking God's presence.

Psalm 24:1-6

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

The greatest treasure God can give us are not the things we are chasing after. It's not those things of earth that pursue our heart and fill our minds causing us to pursue them to the point of exhaustion. **The greatest treasure we have is the treasure of God's presence, and to find that, we must approach him with clean hands and a pure heart.**

And as we do, what is His promise?? **Fullness of Joy and Pleasure Forevermore!!!**

One of my favorite chapters that I have read in the last year comes from Eugene Peterson's book "A Long Obedience in the Same Direction", and his commentary on Psalm 126.

I REALLY REALLY just want to read the whole chapter to you as a source of encouragement, but that's not possible, so I'll summarize his thoughts on why the PRESENCE of the Lord produces Joy.

Peterson says, *"Joy is not a requirement of Christian discipleship, it is a consequence. It is not what we have to acquire in order to experience life in Christ, it is what comes to us when we are walking in the way of faith and obedience. Pg. 96"*

And he further explains how we must recognize that joy is rooted in the past works that God has done and our anticipation of current and future joy-producing works that God will do. Because joy is of God and not from ourselves, because joy is found in God's presence and not in our current circumstance, because joy is what God gives and not what we create, we can hold on to God's Path no matter what is going on around us because His Presence will lead us to find and experience fullness of joy.

We know that James 1:2-4 says - *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

But what about the times when we try to fill our paths with the wrong kind of joy? Here's what I mean by that.

Peterson writes, *One of the most interesting and remarkable things Christians learn is that laughter does not exclude weeping. Christian joy is not an escape from sorrow. Pain and hardship still come, but they are unable to drive out the happiness of the redeemed. A common but futile strategy for achieving joy is eliminating things that hurt: Get rid of pain by numbing the nerve ends, get rid of insecurity by eliminating risks, get rid of disappointment by depersonalizing your relationships. And then try to lighten the boredom of such a life by buying joy in the form of vacations and entertainment. There isn't a hint of that in Psalm 126... because laughter is a result of living in God's great works. Pg 100*

Life in this world is filled with forks and crossroads as we live in the tension of "already but not yet". Our journeys include both laughter and tears, victories and defeats, happiness and sorrows. But for a Christian who is following the Path of Life, we will not experience exhaustion, despair or lose hope in the way that someone without Christ does. Psalm 16 teaches us that a life lived on God's path and in His presence produces joy that only God can give as we look forward to the promise of His pleasures forevermore.

Pleasure Forevermore

For some in this room this morning, you have been walking God's path and experiencing His presence for a long time. His pleasures forevermore seem closer than ever. Psalm 16 encourages you to stay on the right path, and finish your journey strong!

For myself, and for others in this room, pleasures forevermore seem a long way away. We need the help of you who have traveled this path. We need your wisdom. We need your encouragement. We need to fight together against the patterns of the world. And we need to continually be working together to pursue the presence of God.

And we are left to consider these things this morning...

- 1) Have we chosen the Path of Life by trusting in Jesus and living for Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength?
- 2) How are we inviting God's presence into our lives each day?
- 3) Are we living lives filled with joy and anticipation for His promised pleasures forevermore?

