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PLEASURES FOREVER

Psalm 16

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Pleasures Forever
Psalm 16

God gets bad press. The name "devil" means "slanderer" and from day one Satan has engaged in an aggressive campaign to slander God. His original temptation to Eve suggested that God was withholding something good by forbidding Adam and Eve from eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The temptation also suggested that the first couple would find true satisfaction by sinning. The devil has used that same strategy again and again: "God is opposed to your enjoyment of life. Following God is gloomy. Sin will bring you true pleasure."

But the truth of the Bible is that sin may bring short-term pleasure, but it *always* brings long-term misery and pain. Submitting to God may bring short-term difficulty and pain, but it *always* results in lasting joy and pleasure. And so the core of the Christian life is to seek lasting joy and pleasure in God. The familiar Westminster Shorter Catechism begins, "What is the chief end of man?" Answer: "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." John Piper has thoughtfully improved on that by altering it to, "The chief end of man is to glorify God BY enjoying him forever" (*Desiring God* [Multnomah Books], Tenth Anniversary Edition, p. 15). As Piper often explains, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."

Piper (p. 16) cites the French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, who points out that all men seek happiness and that this motive is at the root of every action we take. Even those who hang themselves are seeking happiness, although in a very wrong way! Then Piper cites C. S. Lewis, who points out that contrary to what many think, the Bible consistently appeals to our desire for lasting pleasure. But that pleasure is not found in "drink and sex and ambition," but in knowing and following Jesus Christ. Psalm 34:8 invites us, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." It's an invitation to enjoy God!

Psalm 16 is about experiencing joy and pleasure in God: "In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (v. 11). The scholarly German commentator, Franz

Delitzsch, wrote of Psalm 16 (*Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* [Eerdmans], by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, p. 217), "There reigns in the whole Psalm, a settled calm, an inward joy, and a joyous confidence, which is certain that everything that it can desire for the present and for the future it possesses in its God." The message of the Psalm is:

When we make the Lord our supreme treasure, we will be satisfied with pleasures now and forever in Him.

There are different ways of outlining the psalm; I'm basically following Derek Kidner (*Psalms 1-72* [IVP]), who divides it into two main sections. Verses 1-6 describe how to make the Lord your supreme treasure. Verses 7-11 show the results that follow, namely, you will be satisfied with present and eternal pleasures in Him. But, also, there is a third point to be noted. Some (Spurgeon, following James Frame) take the entire psalm to speak of Christ, and that may be so. But all agree that verses 8-11 speak prophetically of Christ, because Peter quoted them of Christ (Acts 2:25-28). So my third point is that all of God's treasures are centered in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. Make the Lord your supreme treasure (16:1-6).

We do not know what the word "Mikhtam" in the title means. It also occurs in Psalms 56-60. Both Peter and Paul (Acts 2:25-28; 13:35-37) affirm that David wrote this psalm (as the title indicates). The first section shows five ways to make the Lord your treasure:

A. Make the Lord your refuge and Savior (16:1).

"Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in You." We don't know whether David wrote this at a time when his life was in imminent danger or if he was reflecting on the general course of his life. But the fact is, we all need a place of refuge and protection, both in time and for eternity.

Temporally, we instinctively try to protect ourselves from harm and danger. We avoid risks that could kill us. We wear seat belts when we drive. We avoid smoking and junk foods that can cause disease. While these are prudent measures, the bottom line is that the eternal God, who spoke the universe into existence by His power, must be our protector. Colossians 1:17 states that in Christ, "all things hold together." If He were to let go, we would literally

disintegrate! So it is right to pray for safety for our loved ones and for ourselves. We need the Lord's protection constantly.

But even more than temporal preservation, we need an eternal place of refuge from the frightening wrath of God that is coming on the whole world because of sin. In the Old Testament (Num. 35:9-28), God ordained cities of refuge where a person who accidentally killed a man could flee for protection. Those cities were a picture of the ultimate place of refuge, the Lord Jesus Christ. He bore the curse of God's wrath that we deserved for our sins. To experience eternal pleasure at God's right hand, you must flee now to Jesus for refuge. Then you will be safe on judgment day.

B. Make the Lord *your* Lord and your supreme good (16:2).

"I said to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; I have no good besides You.'" The Hebrew of the last phrase of verse 2 is difficult, resulting in two different translations. The KJV translates, "my goodness extendeth not to thee." The New KJV renders it, "My goodness is nothing apart from You." Both Calvin and Spurgeon follow this approach, taking it to mean that God does not need anything good that we may offer Him. He doesn't need our good works, because they can contribute nothing to Him.

But all the other modern translations and commentators understand the verse to mean (as in the NASB), "I have no good besides You." As Psalm 73:25 proclaims, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth." It goes on to state (73:28), "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, ..." Sam Storms expresses it this way (<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/satisfaction-psalm-16/>): "Everything without God is pathetically inferior to God without everything." He cites C. S. Lewis, "he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only" ("The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996], p. 31).

Can you truly affirm that in your heart: "Lord, I have no other good besides You"? The only way you can truly affirm that is if you can affirm the first part of the verse: "I said to the Lord, 'You are my Lord.'" In verse 1, David addresses God as *EI*, the Hebrew title for the God of infinite strength. In verse 2, the first *Lord* is *Yahweh*,

the personal covenant name of God. It is the name that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush when He said (Exod. 3:14), "I am who I am." The eternal, self-existent God has entered into a covenant relationship with His chosen people. But it is not enough to be a part of the larger group that calls itself by His name. You must personally bow before Jesus Christ as *your* Lord. The second *Lord* means Sovereign. When the Sovereign Lord God is *your* Lord, you begin to experience Him as your only good.

Jesus explained this by two parables (Matt. 13:44-46):

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Being a Christian, a follower of Jesus, means that the Spirit of God has opened your eyes to see Jesus as the most valuable treasure in the world. He is the pearl of great value, worth giving up everything that you have to gain Him. From joy over this discovery, you forsake all else in order to gain Christ. As Paul explained it (Phil. 3:7-8):

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ....

Have you done that? Has the Holy Spirit opened your eyes to see Jesus as your treasure and supreme good, so that you bowed before Him as *your* Lord? It is the only path to pleasures forever.

C. Make the Lord the basis of your friendships (16:3).

"As for the saints who are in the earth, they are the majestic ones in whom is all my delight." Making the Lord our only good (v. 2) does not imply separating from all people and becoming a monk in solitary confinement. Rather, it is to put God at the center of everything, including our relationships. David's point in verse 3 is that his joy in God is actually enhanced because he has delighted

himself in the company of God's people, whom he refers to as "saints" and "majestic ones." The latter term may be translated "excellent ones" (ESV). Together these terms describe God's people as those set apart unto Him, whose character is excellent or noble. The idea is that we should delight in the company of God's saints, growing together in holiness and love as together we find joy in God.

Thus make the Lord your supreme treasure by making Him your refuge and Savior; by making Him your Lord and your supreme good; by making Him the basis of your friendships.

D. Make the Lord the exclusive object of your worship (16:4).

David's thoughts about God's saints also cause him to reflect on those that turn their backs on God and pursue idols (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." The translation of the Hebrew verb here is difficult, resulting in either "bartered for" (NASB) or "run after" (ESV, NIV). Either way, the idea is that they have forsaken the living and true God to go after idols. David affirms that he will not partake in their pagan sacrifices, nor will he take their names upon his lips. Calvin interprets the last phrase to refer to the names of the false gods or idols.

While we should maintain relationships with lost people in order to reach them for Christ (Luke 5:29-32), we must take care not to be enticed to follow their false gods or to join them in godless behavior (1 Pet. 4:1-6; Jude 22-23). As Paul warned (1 Cor. 15:33), "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'" David says that the sorrows of the ungodly will be multiplied. God uses similar words in pronouncing the curse on Eve in Genesis 3:16 (Kidner, p. 84). So the warning to us is that while the godless lifestyles of those who pursue sinful pleasure may entice us, such ways only multiply sorrow. "Solid joys and lasting treasure, none but Zion's children know" (John Newton, "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken"). So make the Lord the exclusive object of your worship.

E. Make the Lord your present and eternal inheritance (16:5-6).

“The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; you support my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.” The NIV brings out the truth that there is a sense in which you can’t make the Lord your inheritance. Rather, He chooses your inheritance for you (16:5, NIV): “Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure.” As Paul puts it (Eph. 1:11), “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.”

The idea behind Psalm 16:5-6 is God’s apportioning the land to the twelve tribes of Israel. They determined by lot the various boundaries. But God did not give an inheritance of land to the tribe of Levi, the priests. Rather, the Lord said to Aaron (Num. 18:20), “You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel.”

As David reflects on this and applies it to himself, his thought is that having the Lord as his portion is better than the best piece of land that anyone could inherit. John Calvin has some especially sweet words on these verses. He says (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], on Ps. 16, p. 224), “None are taught aright in true godliness but those who reckon God alone sufficient for their happiness.” He adds (p. 226), “For he who has God as his portion is destitute of nothing which is requisite to constitute a happy life.”

I can’t leave this first section of this beautiful psalm without urging you not to rest until the Lord is your supreme treasure. If that concept is strange to you, then ask the Lord to open your eyes to see the treasure of Jesus Christ, so that out of joy, you will give up everything you have to gain that treasure. What happens when the Spirit of God enables you to do this?

2. When the Lord is your supreme treasure, you will be satisfied with present and eternal pleasures in Him (16:7-11).

David’s primary joy is not in God’s gifts, but in the Lord Himself (Willem VanGemenen, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, [Zondervan] ed. by Frank Gaebelien, 5:157). But these verses list four

blessings, all resulting from the supreme blessing of having God as our treasure:

- A. When the Lord is your supreme treasure, you enjoy His counsel and instruction (16:7).

“I will bless the Lord who has counseled me; indeed, my mind instructs me in the night.” The Hebrew word for “mind” is literally, “kidneys.” It refers to the innermost personal life (J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* [Zondervan], p. 194). “Night” is plural in Hebrew, so the thought is, “night after night the Lord has counseled and instructed me as I have meditated upon Him.” David may be referring to the night watches or to times when he woke up in the night and thought about the Lord. When you treasure God’s Word in your heart, you receive His instruction that will sustain you during the nights of difficulty and trials.

- B. When the Lord is your supreme treasure, you experience His stability in trials (16:8).

“I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.” Calvin (p. 228) explains, “The meaning, therefore, is, that David kept his mind so intently fixed upon the providence of God, as to be fully persuaded, that whenever any difficulty or distress should befall him, God would be always at hand to assist him.” He concludes (*ibid.*), “David then reckons himself secure against all dangers, and promises himself certain safety, because, with the eyes of faith, he beholds God as present with him.”

- C. When the Lord is your supreme treasure, you experience gladness and joy in His security (16:9).

“Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely.” *Glory* refers to the soul, but the LXX translates it as “tongue.” The tongue expresses what is in the soul. By adding, “my flesh,” David means that his total being, inward and outward, is glad and joyful because God has caused him to live securely. When we reflect on our security in Christ, as Paul does in the climax of the wonderful Romans 8, we cannot help but be glad and rejoice in the Lord. If God is your treasure then you are His treasure (Deut. 26:18), and He isn’t about to lose you! Rejoice!

D. When the Lord is your supreme treasure, you experience eternal joy and pleasure in God's presence (16:10-11).

"For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. 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." As we will see in a moment, these verses find their ultimate, literal fulfillment in Christ. But as applied to David, the idea is that although he will die, the Lord will not permit him to suffer eternal alienation. To "undergo decay" "is a metaphor for total isolation and abandonment from God's presence" (VanGemeren, p. 158). Rather than that, David had a hope beyond the grave to enjoy fullness of joy and eternal pleasure in God's presence. That is your hope if you know the Lord as your supreme treasure.

David's satisfaction as expressed in verse 11 stands in stark contrast to the sad experience of his son, Solomon. Solomon sought satisfaction in his work, but found it empty. He sought fulfillment through wisdom, but found it vain. He built a beautiful mansion and landscaped it with a breathtaking garden, but found no pleasure in it. He tried laughter and wine, but found these to be madness. He had sexual pleasures that few men have experienced, with 700 beautiful wives and 300 concubines, but they could not satisfy him. He had fabulous wealth, but it couldn't buy him happiness. He chronicles all of this in Ecclesiastes, where he finally concludes (Eccl. 12:13), "fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person." Too bad he didn't learn sooner from his father to make the Lord his supreme treasure!

But maybe you're wondering, "If I don't go after worldly pleasures and instead seek pleasure in God, how can I be sure of the *eternal* joy and pleasure that God promises? Maybe I'll live a hard life of suffering or persecution and die and that's it. How can I *know* that I will have pleasures *forever* with God?"

3. All of God's promises of eternal pleasure are secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (16:8-11).

Both Peter and Paul (Acts 2:25-28; 13:35-37) cite these verses and assert that they did not find ultimate fulfillment in David, in that he died and his body underwent decay. David wrote propheti-

cally of the son of David, God's Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to this earth to bear the awful curse of God's wrath for the sins that we have committed. God placed our guilt on Him. "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa. 53:6). As Paul explains (Gal. 3:13-14), "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

As Paul also explains (in 1 Cor. 15:12-19), the entire Christian faith rests on the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If His body is in the tomb and underwent decay, then we are not forgiven! But Paul and Peter and many other faithful witnesses joyfully testify that God did not leave Jesus in the tomb. He is risen! That means that God's promises of eternal joy and pleasure in His presence are secure for those who trust in the risen Savior!

Conclusion

In *Desiring God*, John Piper explains how C. S. Lewis helped him to see that it is not wrong, but right to seek our own pleasure. Lewis wrote (Piper, *ibid.*, p. 17), "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Infinite joy and pleasure are offered to us in Jesus Christ. Sell all that you have to buy the field with that great, eternal treasure and you will have fullness of joy and pleasures forever in Him!

Application Questions

1. Your friend claims to be a Christian, but is not experiencing joy in Christ. He asks your help. Where would you begin?
2. Is it okay to enjoy things other than God (family, friends, possessions, etc.)? When do they become idols?
3. Is it sin to be depressed? Why/why not? Defend biblically.
4. Does Psalm 16 alter your view of God? How so?

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