**Unpacking the gift together**

Have you ever gotten a present that you didn’t *quite know* what to do with? Hmmmm. Maybe something technical or really specialized… and you’re puzzled. You look up at the person who gave it to you expectantly. They’re usually more than ready to point out a few features, since of course (!!) they have one too. Gradually, you get more and more excited. This thing could be really useful, we think. How could I have ever lived without this thing?

For some time now, we’ve been studying together in the book of Acts. We’ve seen how the first disciples learned **how good** the “good news” really is. Last week, Hans emphasized how this learning took quite a while– over a period of 30 years. (Did that timeline surprise anyone else?) During this time and beyond of course, the Jesus-followers learned how to live their lives together in the Lord. They learned how to be guided by God, often in times of prayer or meditation. They had each other and the Holy Spirit of Jesus to help them.

This morning we will take a break from Acts, and look at a psalm of David. David, lived more than 2500 years ago, but left us a treasure in descriptions of his times with God. These journals are so honest, so embedded in normal life. David often mentions his own fears, insecurity, frustrations, or what he delighted in, for example. These meditations are written for our encouragement and inspiration.

Today I want to share from Psalm 16.

Why Psalm 16? This psalm is like a journal and a prayer-blog all mixed up together. The psalm starts with a request: Lord, keep me safe! And it ends with confident expectation: I’m sure the Lord will show me the way of life!

David goes from defensive and fearful man to a joyful and hopeful man. Like us, he has a real range of emotions.

**Read psalm 16/ handout** (I will preach from the English NIV version, butI have printed it out in Dutch, in two versions, so you can refer to it more easily, since we will be going back and forth.)

Psalm 16

1 Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.

2 I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.”

3 I say of the holy people who are in the land, “They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.”

4 Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips.

5 LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.

6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

7 I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.

8 I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure,

10 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.

11 You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

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Now, I don’t want to get too technical here, but I would like to say a few words about a **pattern** that exists in *some* of the writing styles of the psalms and prophets. Paul uses this pattern in some of his letters too.

(If anyone is interested later, I’d be glad to point out several other texts that show this pattern.)

 What is the pattern? In some poetry, the ‘keys’ to understanding the whole thing are found near the **middle**, where there is a **turning point**. This is surprising to us **21st century readers**, because we **expect** the important stuff to be at the *beginning or end* of a text.

What this means is that the texts before and after that **key point** are also related, and I will explain how later. So, in psalm 16 there are roughly three parts. **See handout**.

Let’s **outline** the psalm first.

**At the start** of the psalm, in verses 1-4, David describes his reality: he has some negative emotions and situations he can’t figure out. He’s fearful, confused, whatever. So, he goes to God because David knows that God is a refuge when you are fearful, and when you need help. He speaks ***to the God he knows* as powerful and generous**. He then tells God about several pressing things. This shows his trust. It’s like by naming these things he can set them aside for the moment.

**In the middle,** verses 5-8, David has made an expectant space for God to speak. david comes into God’s light. God shows him things.

**At the end**, in verses 9-11, David shows all the ways that the solution—the middle bit—impacts all of the issues named at the start of the psalm. David was fearful and he says he feels safe now. He states that he is going to be hanging out with God ***a lot more*** in the future. Why is that? Because, in his time with the Lord, David has understood **more deeply** that **God is the one** who gives him **abundant life**—God is the one who will guide him always in the future.

That’s the outline. Now, I’ll take a few minutes to point out some features of this psalm. I will also show how David points us to Jesus, who inspires us and lives in us

**Detailed look at this blog/prayer**

As I said, the psalm is like a prayer blog—a hybrid journal/prayer thing—isn’t life just like this sometimes? Sometimes it’s not just a neat, contained prayer. That’s ok! David shows us that it is good to be yourself with God.

David starts with telling God that he’s afraid and needs his *protection.* David ends by tweeting to the world how confident and joyful he his.

David knows that God is ‘**the place to go’** with everything. We may want to hide when we find ourselves in a negative cycle. Remember Lans’ sermon? We hide and then **keep sliding down** because we don’t **trust anyone**—even God-- anymore, and we think we are **alone**.

But David reminds himself of who God is for him: that no matter how fearful he may be *right now*, the Lord is **his Lord**. He reminds himself that God has helped him in the past. David declares that he belongs to God, and that all that he has is from God. Perhaps some of David’s worries have to do with possessions. (Doesn’t this remind you of Jesus saying things like, trust the Father; do not worry, little flock; do you think that by worrying you can add a single hair to your head?)

When David says, *I take pleasure in the ones who trust you,* David is, I think, reminding himself that he is **not the only one** trusting in God and benefiting from the relationship. This is **important**, because **right after this** he brings up the common practice of the peoples all around him who are trying to get what they want in life by other means – in verse 4. Do you see that? Was David tempted sometimes? Could be. Perhaps he was afraid of them? That’s possible too. In any case it’s on his mind. And so he brings it to God. He declares in this prayer that **these are dead ends**, and he wants no part in them. He’s committed to looking to God for help.

(TAG)

These four verses—part one-- remind me in a way of a kid’s game of tag. Did you ever play tag? There are lots of different kinds of tag. In **Freeze tag**, one person is “**it**”. When she tags someone, they freeze in position, waiting for a free player to tag them free. Sometimes there’s a base in this game. After running around like crazy, evading being tagged by the one who’s ‘it’, you get back to ‘base’—‘butte vrij’, the refuge. What did you do first, before running back out to unfreeze your friends? You got your breathing under control… (see the boy at the tree?) and then you looked out at the field to see where the big bad IT is running; you see where your friends are frozen, and where you need to go next. **David’s at that point now, in this psalm**. He’s catching his breath at ‘base’. His strategy is to get close to God. *Tweet that*. Running after other strategies is a dead end. **Tag**, frozen.

So David has come to base. He’s uncertain about how safe his possessions are, and he’s probably aware that ‘there are some people’ out there who think that he’s foolish to trust in God. But David is coming to God to **trade in** this insecurity. He’s coming to **trade in** his weakness. He wants to trade them in for **something else**. He is expecting God to **do something**.

I **admire** David’s honesty. I think that his honesty gave him **space**-- because he knew he was safe with his creator, he could catch his breath. David could tell his story and expect compassion. Have you ever experienced that, perhaps with a parent or close friend?

Now verses 5-8

What does David get ‘in trade’ from God? We see that David becomes amazed in his heart by how deep God’s love is for him. Perhaps he knew very well *in his head* that he was part of a people that were ‘chosen’ by God. But as he worships God, David seems to understand *with his heart* that **God.. has.. chosen .. him**. It is like David has now become aware of a different layer: an inheritance for him. He says, Lord, you alone are my inheritance!

**What is an inheritance?** For one thing, It’s a *very little* bit like a lottery. A lottery, if you **win** it, gives you something desirable. An inheritance, if you **receive** it, also gives you something desirable. A lottery is **impersonal**, though. An inheritance involves relationship. It’s passed down to a son or daughter, to an heir. It is something *entrusted* as a gift, almost. I would like to “circle in” on this idea.

This inheritance/gift seems to overwhelm David. He says, “You God, have given me **Yourself** as my future!” What is the ‘land’ the Lord has given David? I think that It is **family-relationship** with the almighty God. It’s being part of the family business, also known as the kingdom. And David says, “This is **wonderful**!” He says, ‘I will bless the Lord who guides me, even at night he instructs me’.

David, like every other person, needs guidance. But, how does guidance relate to inheritance? Think about how one generation might help the younger to understand **what to do** with the inheritance. A father explains to a son or daughter the **value** of something that **might not be obvious**. In the example of land, he might say, “See this land, where this river flows? This is how you raise crops in this field; then you can take care of everyone living here”. The guidance is extremely important with an inheritance, so that **what is entrusted** *is used for good*. There’s a lot of responsibility, to use the inheritance for **good**.

Does this remind you of the story of the **prodigal son and his father**? How the son wanted his inheritance, but didn’t value the relationship that goes with it. How painful this was for the father **and** for the son. The father said that he wanted **always** to share *all that he had* with both his sons.

So David goes on in verse 8; he’s thinking about what he should do with the inheritance. What should he do with this **call on his life?**. He decides he will take steps to stay close to God. He says “I have kept the Lord always before me. Because I experience him at my Right hand, I will not be shaken”. David chooses **each moment** to stay close to God. In choosing this, David discovers that God is **closer than he imagined**.. He says the *result* is ***that he will not be shaken***.

Now the last part, v 9-11

At the end of the psalm David says he is now glad and full of joy. David seems now to have a **very hopeful view** of the future. He is sure he will not be shaken, no matter what the circumstances. He is no longer trapped in the negative cycle of fear. David sees that he is truly safe—both right now and in the future. He’s not afraid anymore of losing things, like at the beginning of the psalm. God is so much more than a safe haven from circumstances! David is filled with hope. He is sure that as he spends his life close to God, God will keep revealing himself. God will give David everything he needs. David expects God to shower him with love, and to always guide him in his life.

**Who is David for us?**

**First, David is “one of us” who points the way.**

David points the way in several ways.

He shows us that we are **meant to connect** with God. David is **fully human**. He doesn’t do ‘life’ perfectly, and he makes mistakes.

David shows us how it benefits us to trust in God’s goodness and love (my heart is glad and my body rests in safety). It's the best thing, the highest thing, the thing that **brings** the **joy we crave**.

When David says he has the Lord **always before him**, he shows us how important our concept of God is. You can also look at psalm 16 as a series of interactions with God. Each time, David gets to know God more.

Connected with that, David gives us a bigger view of prayer; psalm 16 verse 8 appears on many synagogue walls as an inspiration to pray. Pray without ceasing, as Paul urges us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. But the psalm, as I mentioned, is also a sort of a blog of what David feels, what he’s experienced. What he hears from God. **Listening** is perhaps even more important than our talking. David keeps God at his right hand because he wants to receive from him, be guided by him, and to hear from him.

**Perhaps most importantly, David’s example points us toward Jesus.**

**Jesus** fully understood the heart of his father. He always kept the father before him; and was not shaken.

Jesus is the one we keep in front of **us**. The Holy Spirit dwells in us, so we have an advantage that David **never had**. Jesus is my hero. And I love to read the stories where Jesus reveals himself in his interactions with the people he meets.

God wants us to *live our lives* in confidence. He wants us to **know joy**—even in the midst of hard times. We can have **joy** that **we belong to him**, **joy** that Jesus is our **big brother**. **Joy** that he **promises us** that-- in **every reality** of life-- he will never leave us.

In **every reality of life**, right now. It’s important to realize this, as God calls us to be… **together with him**... **in this world**.

(TAG)

*Returning for a moment to the example of the game of tag, you might say that God doesn’t want us to stay forever at ‘base’. Yes, base is very good, and God wants to* ***refresh us*** *at his ‘JOY BASE”;*

***He*** *wants to satisfy us with living water,*

*and* ***then…*** *he wants to* ***whisper strategy*** *in our ears and*

***send us back out again*** *to the game.*

**So, What are the ‘takeaways’?**

I came upon this psalm because I had an unusual period of **dizziness**. I was physically thrown off balance. It was weird. And I felt the Lord give me this text. Perhaps some of you have areas where **you feel** off balance. It doesn’t have to be **negative** things. In fact, **also positive things** can throw us off balance. Things like going into a **new phase** in life, or getting a **new job**, or having energetic small children in your life.

***The first takeaway is this: if I am feeling off balance, David shows me that it’s good to go honestly to God. Our Immanuel God wants to be with us***

And I’ve got a story for this.

My daughter Danielle experienced being off balance recently. Sharing this with permission. As we speak, she’s on her way home from California…

Ever since she was small, Danielle has dreamed of studying and living in the US. She has tried many doors -- and now, after all, one door is opening. Her first choice of school has offered her a study spot. And this **wide open door**, with at least four unknown years gaping into the future, has thrown her off balance.

It has been a time of prayer and struggle. About a week ago, Danielle heard a story from a friend, and she decided that this story was **also** a word from the Lord **for her** .

**Here’s the story: ‘**Jane’ was having some boyfriend issues. When she prayed, she felt the Lord saying something like this: “Jane, you’re not treating this ‘dating thing’ like a gift from me.” Jane was, for example, worrying about dating, and seeing and examining all the **flaws** of the dating relationship she was in. It felt like **a burden** and like **work** -- instead of a **present**. Jane felt the lord say, “Here, let’s unpack this gift together. Let me walk through the insecurity with you.”

When Danielle heard this, she felt **right away** the application to her own life. She felt God say to her also: **Let’s unpack this California adventure together.**

***The second takeaway is that God is the* giver of life*. He’s the best one to unpack life’s challenges with.***

The way forward is not trying to control *all of the things* that are not tied down. That was true for the first believers in Jesus, and it’s true for each of us.

***Here’s a final takeaway: God wants to trade with you. Your weakness for His presence and joy.***

Who wants to trade?

**Let’s pray**. Dear Lord, we come before you, the one who loves us. Thank you for Jesus!

Lord, we need you. …..

We **trade in** our **insecurities, our weakness and temptations**.

We trade in our **sorrows**. …………..We look to you.

You are the **living water** we crave. …..

Holy Spirit **confirm** this in our hearts—the height, the depth, the breadth of the love of Christ.

And Lord, transform us in your light, at your JOY BASE, so we can be filled with your joy. So we can **hear you** guiding us. So we can be lights in the world this week. **AMEN**

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**House groups,** talk together about what ‘a prayer lifestyle’ practically looks like. Some people are more structured, some less.

How can keeping your focus on Jesus, valuing and loving him (WWJD), help you to ‘have the Lord always before me’?,

what kinds of things are shaking you? How do you feel about being honest with God about these things?

Have you ever experienced God helping you to unpack things?

*You might say that you can plug in almost anything to psalm 16. And that’s my challenge to you. To pray about things this week using psalm 16.*