

Psalm 16:9-12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-16/psalm-169-12/>

Our heart is glad and we rejoice, not so much in earthly things or as a result of our circumstances, but because of who God is and what He will do. We can trust Him to lead us and make His will and His presence known to us, which will bring us the fullness of joy.

Therefore is a word that calls for our full attention. It connects what is gone before with what is to come next, and it usually means that it will provide some kind of conclusion for what has been presented.

In this case, David declares that in light of the knowledge of a God who gives refuge and who gives purpose and meaning to his life—because God counsels and instructs him and is always with him—*my heart is glad and my glory rejoices*. That is a wonderful sentiment, but what does it really mean to have a glad heart?

Consider the goodness of God, as David has expressed it. The living God that David has been declaring is good all of the time. So, how do we declare “God is good” when circumstances are bad, disappointing, or painful? What of the tragedies and trials in life? How can we say *my heart is glad* at the moment of losing a loved one? Is God really good all the time?

When we follow David as he says *my heart is glad*, we can begin to see that God’s goodness is in Him and Who He is. Even in our darkest moments, He is still before our face and at our right hand in the worst of times.

Rather than speaking of his environment, David is expressing a state of being, a chosen perspective on life. David is looking beyond circumstances and into the reality of his existence. David’s happiness is not rooted in his circumstances. It is, rather, rooted in his intentional choosing of a perspective: “I have no good besides You” (Psalm 16:2). What is good is God, and therefore all that God allows into our lives will work for our good. The New Testament says that all things work together for our good:

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.”
(Romans 8:28)

In addition to saying his *heart is glad*, David also says *And my glory rejoices*. This can be a difficult phrase to comprehend and interpret. Several translations say, “and my tongue rejoices.” That certainly is an apt response to a *glad heart*, but it does not fully express what is most likely intended. Though the tongue would be a part of that rejoicing, the rejoicing comes from the inner being, which is likely the direction in which the word *glory* is pointing.

It seems David here in using the term *glory* is referring to his own soul. This is similar to the usage of the same Hebrew word translated as *glory* in Genesis:

“Let my soul not enter into their council;
Let not my glory be united with their assembly.”
(Genesis 49:6a)

Here in Genesis, “glory” is used as a synonym for “soul.”

The New Testament term translated “glory” (Greek “doxa”) is used in just this manner. As can be seen in 1 Corinthians 15:40-41, “glory” is an observable essence of someone or something. The sun has a glory that differs from the moon’s glory. Similarly, each person has a glory; it is the observable essence of who they are. People can have a glory that is good, or one that is shameful (Philippians 3:19). It depends on their essence.

In this case, the true essence of David, who he is in his innermost being, *rejoices* because God is at David’s *right hand*. David is *glad*, and his innermost being *rejoices* because the stability of God as his foundation causes him to *not be shaken*.

Again, we are not aware of any particular result or situation that David is recalling. Rather this rejoicing comes from deep within that the living God is Who He says He is. It is because of God’s goodness, and faithfulness that David can choose a perspective that makes him joyful.

In our very busy life, which is filled with constant distractions (smart phone, perhaps) do we ever get to this place of worship where David is taking us? Perhaps we can be challenged to follow David’s lead, and take time to reflect, to feed our mind on the reality of what is true. We are easily distracted with all sorts of things that claim to be good. But the reality is that “I have no good besides You” (Psalm 16:2).

David continues, *My flesh also will dwell securely*. If we follow the connection here, because God is our *right hand*, our steady helper in whom we can trust, then our *flesh also will dwell securely*. Because we have this stability, this faith that God will always bring us to the best place, regardless of circumstances, we have the result in our inner being that *my heart is glad* and its synonymous expression *my glory rejoices*. This appears to be a chiasmic structure:

A Because God is at my right hand I will not be shaken

B My heart is glad

B’ My innermost being rejoices

A’ *My flesh also will dwell securely*

In a chiasm, the middle provides the emphasis. In this case, David emphasizes that his happiness is rooted in God, not in circumstances. David is not looking at what the world defines as good in

order to define his happiness. Rather, David has declared that “I have no good besides You” (v. 2).

The word *flesh* in the phrase *My flesh also will dwell securely* refers to David’s physical body. Here the scripture indicates that our mental state affects our physical state. If we have peace of mind, we have wellness of body.

Next the scripture turns to a verse that is quoted in the New Testament book of Acts regarding Jesus’s death and resurrection. The words *For You* in the following verse (v. 10) can also be translated as “because.” David points to five reasons his *heart is glad*, his *glory rejoices*, and he can have confidence that his *flesh will also dwell securely*:

1. *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol;*
2. *Nor will you allow your Holy One to undergo decay.*
3. *You will make known to me the path of life;*
4. *In Your presence is fullness of joy;*
5. *In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.*

1.) For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol.

Some translations of *Sheol* are the “realm of the dead” (NIV), “among the dead” (NLT), “in hell” (KJV). *Sheol* is often translated as “grave,” as *Sheol* is the literal word, but the context of *Sheol* was rooted in the world of David’s day. The general thought of *Sheol* was the place where everyone went, good or bad, after they died. It seems to have always referred to the grave, as that is where the body went. The grave is in the earth, thus one would go “down” to *Sheol*. We have a New Testament passage that indicates that *Sheol* here refers not only to a physical grave, but also to the place of the dead.

David says to God, *For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol*. In Acts 2:25-28, Peter, on the day of Pentecost, quotes Psalm 16:8-11 in his sermon. The Greek (the written language of the New Testament) translates the word *Sheol* in Psalm 16:10 as “Hades” in Acts 2:27. Peter, who is speaking to a mostly Jewish crowd, quotes David to support that the scripture predicted the resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah.

Peter certainly believed that David was pointing to the resurrection when he says in Acts 2:31, “He [David] looked ahead and spoke of the Christ, that ‘He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.’” The Old Testament speaks sparingly of life after death. But David is one through whom we know there was a belief in life after death. When David’s first son by Bathsheba died, David said “I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Samuel 12:23b). (For the reader’s interest, two other Old Testament references to life after death are Job 19:25 and Daniel 12:13).

David expressed a hope that he would be resurrected, which is expressed here in his statement, *For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol*. The only hope we have is in Jesus Christ, “For the

wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:26). For more on this topic, read our [Tough Topics Explained: What is Hell? Hades and Tartarus in the Bible](#).

The quote of Psalm 16:10 in Acts 2:27 makes clear that Psalm 16 is prophetic. We can, therefore, consider that the intentional meditations of David rooted in the thought that “I have no good besides You” was the mindset chosen by Jesus. And we have confirmation that this is the case. Consider this passage from Philippians:

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 2:5)

Philippians 2:5-11 describes an attitude, perspective, or mindset that Jesus chose. It was an intentional choice. And it was a choice that Jesus made to trust that God knew what was for His best, so He became “obedient to the point of death.” In doing this, Jesus showed that laying down our lives in service to God leads to our greatest good (Mark 8:35-35).

2.) Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

If we follow where David takes us in this Psalm, we can stand with Peter when he quoted *Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay* in Acts 2:31.

Peter makes clear this quote from Psalm 16 prophetically refers to Jesus in the following verse, Acts 2:32, when he says, “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.” Peter here equates the *Holy One* in Psalm 16 to Jesus, and the fact that he did not *undergo decay* predicted Jesus’s resurrection.

When David says, “I have no good besides You” (Psalm 16:2), he knows any eternal hope he has is in the living God, and no one else. But it seems likely that David is also prophetically posing the same attitude Jesus adopted when He left His throne in heaven in order to do the will of His Father, and become a servant (Philippians 2:5-11). Jesus also exhibited the mentality that “I have no good besides You” when He obeyed His Father, and took on the form of human flesh, and died for our sins.

The phrase “I have no good besides You” would, in application, mean that we choose to believe that whatever God has for us is for our best—regardless of experience or appearance. It was this attitude that led Jesus to learn obedience and go to the cross. And Jesus’s faith was rewarded. It was as a result of His obedience that His Father elevated Jesus as the God-Man above all of creation (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:10-11).

3.) You will make known to me the path of life.

As we follow David's mind and heart in Psalm 16, we are struck by his humility. In the world in which we live, humility, if it is considered at all, would be found as some sort of weakness. At the very least, it would be some kind of acknowledgment that I have not measured up in some area, so I will do better the next time.

The dictionary defines humility as "freedom from pride or arrogance." Pride and arrogance are both rooted in the idea that "I know what is best." In this statement *You will make known to me the path of life*, David acknowledges that God knows what is best. Paired together with the theme statement from verse 2, "I have no good besides You," David advocates an approach to life that recognizes that God's ways are always for our best.

It can also be said that humility is a willingness to see reality as it is. David is stating a raw truth; humans are not capable of finding the *path of life* apart from God's direction. David is simply stating what is real and true. In doing so, David is choosing God's kingdom, and rejecting the principles of this world.

The world system feeds on pride and arrogance. We see, we take. We feel, we consume. We envy, we boast (1 John 2:15). Even many attempts at what we may call false humility are really a ploy for others to see our accomplishments.

We can also make a spiritual application to *You will make known to me the path of life* by focusing our prayers on listening to God, and seeking His ways. How many times have we, the followers of Christ, come to God and said, 'This is what I want to do, or am planning to do, or have to do, would you please bless me?' David, the King of Israel, who had access to practically anything the world had to offer, certainly could have come to God and said, 'Here is what I am planning and I would like your blessing or help or affirmation.' In this statement, he acknowledges that God is the director and He will draw the "lines in pleasant places" (v. 6).

When we see this statement *You will make known to me the path of life* it is worth contemplating "What is the path of life?"

We might think of the statement Jesus made that defines finding the path of life in terms of choosing gates and paths:

"For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."
(Matthew 7:14)

David recognizes that God will show him the *path* that leads to *life*, but it will remain for him to make the choice to walk that path. Jesus states that the world's way, the broad way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13), is the "path of least resistance." Following God's ways requires intentionality. But David recognizes that this is, in fact, the path that leads to *life*. Therefore it is worth the effort.

In the New Testament, the word translated life is the Greek word "zoe." "Zoe" comes from living the principles of God's kingdom now and serving Christ as King through the trials of our time on earth (Matthew 5:3, 11). *Life* ("zoe") comes from seeking harmony with God and seeing Him

through eyes of faith (Matthew 5:6, 8, 20). *Life* (“zoe”) is being called “great” when the Messiah’s kingdom is fully established (Matthew 5:19). *Life* (“zoe”) is receiving the full reward from your Father who is in secret (Matthew 6:1, 4, 6, 18).

All of this comes through God. David knew the path to life comes from God. But Jesus states that He is the gate and the path that leads to life,

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”
(John 14:6)

It is often said that this is exclusive, that there are many mountains to God, not just one. However, the biblical argument is that there are NO mountains to God. That is why God came to us. God came to us because of His love for us:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”
(John 3:16)

Paul writes,

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us (all humanity), in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
(Romans 5:8)

Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:9 that God is “patient toward you, not wishing for **any** to perish but for **all** to come to repentance.” The offer of life is inclusive to all. However, God has chosen to leave it to each person to decide which path to choose. Each of us can choose a *path* that leads to *life*, or we can choose a way of our own making, which will lead to death. Death is separation, and choosing our own way leads to many kinds of separation. One in particular is that it separates us from our design to serve and love one another in love.

For some, the words *path of life* can bring to mind the concept of God’s perfect will. However, God tells us plainly what His will is for each of us: that we be sanctified (1 Thessalonians 4:3). To be sanctified is to be set apart from the world. To live for the purpose of service to others, seeking their best. To speak and follow what is true, and reject what is false. To live as a “saint” which means “set apart one” (sanctified) which is what gives God delight (Psalm 16:3).

“God’s perfect will” does apply to how we do what we do. It does not usually, or necessarily, apply to our circumstantial choices, such as what job to take, or which house to purchase. It does not mean that there is one specific, standardized *path* of specific circumstantial choices that we must find or all is lost. There is indeed one *path* to life, and that path is Jesus, as we have already noted. He alone is the way or *path* to God the Father, eternal life, and righteousness. It is following His ways and walking in His resurrection power that is the key to experiencing *life*.

Look again at the words of David in verse 11, *You will make known to me the path of life*. Because God loves us and has a purpose or plan for us, He designs a *path* for us (Ephesians

2:10). That *path* is a customized *path* that was created for each one of us. It is a *path* of good deeds we can do in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. It is a Holy Spirit-led walk through the twists and turns of everyday living.

In the western world we have GPS (global positioning satellite) and it can guide us to anywhere we want to go, telling us how far it is and how long it will take us to get there. GPS does give us options as to the route you want to take and sometimes it will take you where you have gone before, only by a different *path* because there might be construction or an accident the way it normally takes you.

This is a good illustration of how the Holy Spirit leads us in the *path of life*. Some prompts and directions may be confusing or difficult to accept, and we may make a wrong turn. At times it's easy to deliberately ignore the GPS's instruction when we think it has made a mistake.

As God directs our life in our *path*, we can sometimes (perhaps too often) say to God, "That can't be right; surely, Lord, you wouldn't want me to go there, say that, or do that." As we learn to rely on the Holy Spirit, we become more and more aware of how He leads us, and more sensitive to His direction.

Of course, with GPS, we have to engage it with our phone or our car; it doesn't just automatically lead us. So it is with the Holy Spirit; the engagement is called prayer and is what Paul means when says to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The best way to pray unceasingly is to listen constantly. Just as we listen to the GPS, the Holy Spirit will always guide us if we are attentive. The good news is that, just as David declares to God, *You will make known to me the path of life*, He does the same for us when we seek His will.

4.) In your presence is fullness of joy.

As we have been following David's journey through this Psalm, we should now be aware that we are at a point in our expression that would go deeper even than our emotions. The *fulness of joy* here is going deep into our souls, far past mere circumstantial happiness.

David connects *joy* to the *presence* of the Lord. His confession that the Lord is the one true God, "You are my Lord" (v. 2), that "I have no good besides you" (v. 2), that He is "my inheritance and my cup" (v. 5), that the boundary "lines have fallen to me in pleasant places" (v. 6), that "my flesh also will dwell securely" (v. 9), that He *will make known to me the path of life*, focuses David so that he experiences the presence of the Lord, and in that *presence is fullness of joy*.

The *joy* does not come from outside sources or circumstances, but from the realization, acknowledgement, and declaration of who God is: *You are my Lord*.

Too often, when believers offer some kind of expression of joy, it is associated with some circumstance, usually a perceived blessing from God. While it is good for us to be thankful and perhaps even to rejoice in these circumstances, the *fulness of joy* David is speaking about really

has to do with God and God alone. It is in the *presence* of God that David finds his *fullness of joy*.

We have already seen that David's living in God's presence is a constant companion, in all areas of his life. This is not limited to a once-a-day quiet time, where perhaps David might attune his mind for an hour. Rather he experiences God's presence within all the "lines" and "lot" of his life (Psalm 16:5-6).

In the "instant gratification" world in which we live, it may be difficult for us to become the "true worshipers (who) will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). It is important to gather in order to stir one another up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Love, peace, and joy can be experienced in such a setting.

But mere emotions do not reach the place with David in verse 9, "Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices." How do we become worshippers that "the Father seeks to be His worshippers" (John 4:23)?

In Acts 13:22 we read that God "testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart.'" It is perhaps easy for us to think that David was made that way and was chosen by God and made king, so he had to have a heart for God. As we read Psalm 16, we can see the intentionality of David to worship the Lord:

"I take refuge in You," (Psalm 16:1)

"You are my Lord," (Psalm 16:1)

"I have no good besides You," (Psalm 16:2)

"I will bless the Lord," (Psalm 16:7)

"I have set the Lord continually before me," (Psalm 16:8)

"In your presence is fullness of joy," (Psalm 16:11)

If we are to be the worshippers that the Father seeks, we will need to exercise discipline throughout the week. Our weekly gatherings should stir us up to discipline of living an intentional life the rest of the week.

The word "discipline" which is necessary in order to live with intentionality, might not be a word that we prefer. However, discipline, self-control, or self-governance is a fruit of the Spirit.

"the fruit of the (Holy) Spirit is...self-control"
(Galatians 5:23a)

Spending time each day praying and reading scripture is a good basis for becoming a worshipper, but the purpose of our meditation on what is true is to lead us to live what is true. Worship is

what we do in all of our lives. Our relationships, our work, our possessions, our hobbies are all a part of worship. Worship is simply acknowledging God for Who He is (Matthew 8:2, 19:8, 14:33, 15:25). We should do this with our mouths as well as our lives.

When David says *In Your presence is fullness of joy* it is in context of speaking of walking the *path of life*. It is throughout our lives, in all aspects of our life experience that we should experience the presence of God, and worship Him by walking in His ways. As is always the case, when we walk in obedience to God, we find the best for ourselves. This is the path to *life*.

The Apostle Paul provides an excellent description of life-as-worship in his letter to the Romans:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”
(Romans 12:1)

This Romans verse tells us that true worship is living our lives as a sacrifice. A sacrifice gives up its life in service to and for the pleasure of another. When we live our lives in service to and for the pleasure of God, we are living a life of worship. The word translated “spiritual” in the phrase “spiritual service of worship” is the Greek word “logikos” as in “logical.” If we understand that *fullness of joy* comes from living out the presence of God through living a life of service and worship, it is logical to live as a sacrifice, set apart (holy) for His service.

When we adopt this perspective (or mindset) that David presents we may just join David in experiencing the *fullness of joy* in God’s *presence*.

5.) *In your right hand there are pleasures forever.*

Certainly a promise of having *pleasures forever* should get our attention. In this case, the *pleasures* we can have *forever* are in God’s *right hand*.

The phrase *right hand* appears thirty-eight times in the Psalms. The phrase *right hand* often refers to strength, as the *right hand* is the strong hand for most, so it would be the hand that gripped the sword or spear. That seems to be the usage here, that it is from the presence and mighty personage of God that *pleasures forever* flow.

Human children might be more interested in the pleasures that come from the *right hand* of their parents in the form of a present, perhaps on a birthday or at Christmas. They tend to take their parent’s presence with them for granted. We can also find ourselves treating God like a cosmic vending machine, a mere source of material benefit.

But in this psalm we are reminded to keep the Lord before our face, that all things come from His presence.

Remember that large crowds were following Jesus, many of them with their eyes on the tangible *pleasures* in His *right hand*, i.e, miracles, but when He began to teach what it meant to be a disciple, or follower of Christ, many of them left because the teaching was too hard. They did not comprehend that the true *pleasures* that flow from His *right hand* are spiritual and eternal. They last *forever*.

When we keep the Lord before us, before our face, all the *pleasures* that flow from the power of His *right hand* are ours. The clear message of Psalm 16 is that our real best interest flows from aligning our mind, heart, and inner being with who God is. It should come as no surprise that when we align with directions from our creator that we gain the greatest fulfillment, because it is in this way that we become who we were meant to be.

We can get a glimpse of what the *pleasures* in His *right hand* may be when Paul quotes Isaiah,

“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.”
(1 Corinthians 2:9)

In Psalm 16, we can join with the Lord not so much in the call of doing, but in being.

God truly is who He says He is and much, much more. Our opportunity is to follow David’s example, and to declare, believe, and act on that truth, “You are my Lord.”

We have the opportunity to recognize and believe that “I have no good besides You” (Psalm 16:2). This is the core of reality. All existence stems from the Great I Am, the creator of all things. It is in Him that all things were made, exist, and continue (Colossians 1:16-17).

Living with this perspective can lead us to the same place as Paul, who expressed that he had reached a point where what he cared about most was to know Jesus:

“that I may know Him [Christ] and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”
(Philippians 3:10)

When we have the eyes to see reality as it is, this makes complete sense, for peak experience we can gain in this life is to know God, and to know Jesus (John 17:3). It will be in this life alone that we will have the opportunity to know by faith. The angels have been in the presence of God for eons, and they are watching the church in order to understand the many facets of God’s wisdom (Ephesians 3:10). One thing we know we can do on this earth that the angels cannot do is to walk by faith.

It seems reasonable then to conclude that our greatest opportunity in this life is to come to understand, by faith, that “I have no good besides You” (v. 2). To live that reality. To walk daily while experiencing God’s presence. To follow Jesus in obedience and service, trusting that we will gain the blessings He has promised to those who love Him, and keep His commands.

We can grow closer to our Lord so that we might say, “I have no good besides You” (v. 2). In living this out we can accept that God draws the “lines” in “pleasant places” (v. 6). We can accept circumstances that come to us, because we know God has drawn those lines for our good.

Within those boundaries will be our refuge and our intimacy with God. He is always with us, outer circumstance and inner being. Our eternal hope and life is in Him and we can experience His joy and His pleasure. When we may become distracted or overwhelmed in our circumstances, we can remember the preacher and hymnist John Wesley’s words, “thee, only thee, resolved to know in all I think or speak or do” (“Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I Go”).

Biblical Text

**⁹Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will dwell securely.**

**¹⁰For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.**

**¹¹You will make known to me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.**