

West Van Baptist, August 23
Summer Psalms: You Are My Everything!
Psalm 16

I. Heart health

This past week Diane and I spent a little time in the store looking at fitness trackers.

Years ago, our kids gave one to Diane at Christmas. Our first reaction was puzzlement. *What's this? Why would someone need a watch that counts steps? Would either of us ever use such a thing?*

It turns out fitness trackers are addictive. It wasn't long before we were constantly counting steps. "Oh look, I don't have quite enough. Guess I'll crawl out of bed and walk around the apartment another 6 times before I go to sleep." And who knew you needed to look at an app to tell you how well you slept last night? The little gadget quickly became a regular part of life—affecting both of us, even though only she wore it. So when her tracker finally died, we found ourselves shopping for a replacement.

Fitness trackers have come a long way. They are easier to read now, which is good! And the new ones can do a zillion things. They track hundreds of activities, from hiking to swimming to playing guitar. They can play music, answer your phone, pay bills, maybe start your car and do your taxes. Even the cheap ones have some form of GPS along with heart-rate and step counting.

We didn't see any point in buying an expensive model. (I don't want a watch to pay my bills.) But we want to be heart-healthy, so we shelled out a few dollars for a new tracker.

As followers of Jesus, we want to be sure our spiritual hearts are healthy, too. We talked about that last week when we looked at Psalm 15. You may remember me saying that the Psalms are good tools to help us monitor our spiritual heart-health. This morning we'll see that in Psalm 16.

What is spiritual heart-health?

When my physical heart is healthy: the muscle is strong; it has good pumping capacity; it works consistently; there are no blockages; and it can handle intense activity then return to rest mode.

When the Bible talks about our spiritual "hearts," it refers to the inner part of us that controls what we love, what we value, our character and the choices that flow out of it. If my spiritual heart is healthy, I will love the right things; know the difference between right and wrong; have self-control; make good choices; build thoughts and attitudes and desires that make me gradually more like Jesus.

The Bible often speaks about people who do, or don't, love God "with their whole heart." It doesn't do me much good if my physical heart is "a little bit healthy," or healthy *some* of the time. In the same way, in the spiritual realm there is a danger that I can love God—genuinely love Him—but also love other things that become more important to me than He is. Or I can love Him conditionally:

when it's convenient but not all the time. Or I can love Him a little, but not deeply, definitely not in a way that is worthy of who He is and all that He does for me.

Beginning with Solomon, the Bible criticizes many of Israel's kings because *[their] heart was not fully devoted to the Lord* the way David's had been (1 Kings 11:4, etc.). James warns against being "double-minded" (James 1:8, 4:8), which is a way of describing someone whose love is divided. Revelation cautions that a whole church can leave its *first love* (2:4), slipping from a sincere and fully-devoted love into something half-hearted.

In English, that expression "half-hearted" is not a compliment. We might use it to criticize a sports team that doesn't give their best effort. No one wants a doctor who makes a half-hearted effort to help you when you're sick. You certainly wouldn't want to be married to someone whose love for you was half-hearted.

God feels the same way. He wants, and deserves, our very best. This is why way back in Deuteronomy, and—years later—in Jesus' teaching we're told to *love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind* (Luke 10:27, compare Deut 6:5). Spiritually speaking, a healthy heart is a whole heart, where love for God fills every corner.

In the Bible this is powerfully illustrated in the story of King Saul and King David, from 1 Samuel. Israel wanted a king. God told the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul, a young man full of potential. At first Saul seemed to be just right for the job: humble, eager to learn, trying to serve the Lord. But over time something in Saul's heart went sour. He became proud, self-centered, more interested in his own power and reputation than God's will. So God began to prepare the way for a new king: David.

In 1 Samuel 13 God revealed that He would replace Saul. We're told: *The Lord has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him ruler of His people, because you [Saul] have not kept the Lord's command* (13:14). God led his prophet to David, who was still just a boy. He said: *The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart* (16:7). David would serve God with his whole heart, setting the standard for all the kings who came after.

David wasn't perfect. He made mistakes. He sinned. But deep inside, David really loved God, really wanted to obey Him, to put Him first. When David failed, he acknowledged it and turned back to the right path. In general he had good character and made good choices. So the Bible treats David as an example of good spiritual heart-health.

Psalm 16 is a Psalm of David. I think this song was written by David, not just dedicated to him, and like all "psalms of David" it is to be read with David in mind. That means it's more than just a song of worship. This song expresses the thoughts and feelings of someone who loves God with his whole heart. This morning as we explore Psalm 16, I'd like us to come with that perspective. Picture yourself listening to the prayer of someone who has a healthy spiritual heart. What might that kind of person say when they pray?

II. Psalm 16: words from a healthy spiritual heart

(1) **“God, You are my everything!” (1-2)**

You can find this phrase in lots of places: song lyrics, greeting cards, sappy love poems. Nowhere is it more appropriate than when we speak to God, and it captures the big idea in Psalm 16.

David reminds us that we need to keep things in healthy balance. Someone might hear me say “God, You are my everything” and think that I never do anything but pray, sing, and meditate on Scripture all day. That’s not true of me and it wasn’t true of David.

A few people have actually tried to do this. In the 400s, a man named Simeon Stylites spent 36 years living on top of a pillar trying to be “spiritual.” Earlier he tried living in a monastery, but that was too comfortable. For a while he lived in a cave, but too many people interrupted him. So he built a platform way up on a pillar and lived there, reading and praying. In later years others (called Anchorites) lived in little rooms attached to churches, with no doors and tiny windows, spending their lives seeking God. For such people God really was “everything”—they had nothing else.

I won’t try to judge Simeon or the Anchorites. But I don’t recommend their approach to spiritual health. Most of us would go crazy living like that. And if every Christian lived in a cell or on a pole ... well, we’d all starve. More important, this isn’t what God created us to be. He created us to live in this world, honoring and loving Him as we tend gardens, raise families, and do the things normal human beings do.

David illustrates this. He was a “man after God’s own heart,” loving God faithfully. Yet David lived a regular life. He worked on the farm. He served his people where they needed him. When God called him to be king, he tried to be a good king. In all these things he needed God’s help and protection. So he prays: *Keep me safe, my God, for in You I take refuge*. He understands that asking for God’s practical help is not inconsistent with having a heart that loves God fully.

Verse 1 is balanced with verse 2. *I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; apart from You I have no good thing.”* David recognizes that those other tasks, responsibilities, and good things in his life are gifts from God, and that God is ultimately most important. While it’s perfectly OK to ask for God’s help and blessing on his normal activities, in the end God is the center and the one who makes everything else good.

Many of you like cruising. There are lots of good things to enjoy on a cruise: delicious food, comfy beds, interesting scenery, fun activities, and more. The passengers enjoy all these things. Imagine someone adding that, in addition to these benefits, it’s nice to have a cruise ship! That would be true, but inadequate. The ship isn’t just one of the benefits on the journey. Without the ship, all the other stuff would be impossible. The ship is the essence of the cruise. Take the ship away and the passengers really would have “no good thing” to enjoy.

In the same way, David teaches us that we can enjoy God’s good gifts and ask for His help and protection as we live in this world. Ultimately, though, God is the center, and apart from Him we have no good thing. So of course He should have first place, and we should love Him with all our hearts. He *is* our everything.

(2) “I delight in people who follow You.” (3-4)

Last week I pointed out that our heart attitudes about God tend to be reflected in the way we treat other people. Also, our values can be seen by the kinds of people we praise.

So, if I love God with my whole heart, what kind of people will I admire? David’s answer? *I say of the godly people who are in the land, “They are the noble ones, in whom is all my delight.” [But] Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out sacrifices of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips.*

David respects godly people. He’s not talking about monks who live on pillars. He appreciates others who also love God with all their hearts. By contrast, he avoids and does not follow the example of those who run after other gods. In his day this literally meant those who sacrificed to Baal and Molech. Today we don’t know many people who pour out blood to idols in their back yards. Still, many people worship things other than God. They dedicate their lives to the gods of money, power and success, fame and “followers,” beauty and popularity, health, comfort, and the like.

Again, God created us to live in this world. We need to earn money; we hope to succeed in our work; we want to be healthy; and so on. But we get into trouble when these become the most important things in our lives. So David, the *man after God’s own heart*, warns us not to admire or follow the example of people who put other things in first place, above the Lord.

(3) “You are my happy place.” (5-6)

The next two verses include some expressions from ancient culture that might need a little explanation. David says,

Lord, You alone are my portion and my cup of blessing; You make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

A “portion” was a person’s share of an inheritance. When a Jewish father died, his most valuable possessions—especially his land—would be divided among the sons. Each son got a piece: a “portion.” If you got a really good piece, you might say that *the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places*. By extension, this same term was used for the territory the tribes of Israel received when they entered the land of Canaan. Each tribe got a section of the land. However, the Levites—the tribe of priests—got no real estate. Instead, Deuteronomy tells us that the Lord would be their portion (10:8-9). Being able to serve God in the tabernacle was better than receiving a section of the land!

When David says *Lord, You alone are my portion*, He affirms that knowing God is better than any piece of real estate or any other good thing he might inherit.

The “cup of blessing” isn’t a drinking glass. This is about participating in a ceremonial drink, a little like drinking a “toast” today. These were used for several things, but especially to confirm a covenant or agreement. (Remember Jesus’ words about the cup in the Lord’s Supper: “*This cup is the New Covenant confirmed with My blood*”) For David, life with God is the best arrangement, the best covenant he could ever make.

David adds: *You make my **lot** secure*. In some places the Bible speaks about “casting lots” as a way of reaching decisions. Here the “lot” is like a set of dice one might roll. If God makes *my lot secure*, I can be confident that what happens to me is not a result of random circumstances, which would be terrifying. God is in control, guiding things for my good.

Taken together, David’s references to his *portion*, his *cup of blessing*, his *lot*, and his *delightful inheritance* speak about the things that define his life and make it good. They describe the place he calls home, his sense of identity, his most significant relationships and commitments, his safety and hope for the future. For David, these blessings all come from God. More important, in a very real sense God Himself is David’s safe place, His identity, his life-defining commitment and source of joy. David isn’t waiting for some other, greater blessing to be handed down to him. His heart belongs to God, and in God he has found the greatest treasure possible. Nothing else compares. *You alone are my portion.... “Lord, You are my source of good and my ‘happy place.’”*

(4) “You are my reliable guide.” (7-8)

This talk of casting lots and receiving an inheritance might give the impression that the person who follows God is just passively floating through life. But of course that’s not true. It wasn’t for David and it isn’t for us. We still make decisions and take actions. This means we have the ability to make bad decisions and take wrong actions, to make a mess of things. Sometimes we do!

How does someone with a healthy spiritual heart respond? With gratitude, because God is present to guide, and with a commitment to follow where He leads. So David continues: *I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

God is not silent. He speaks: in His Word the Bible; through His Spirit’s gentle whispers in our hearts and minds; through our consciences; through godly people; and more. He speaks when the day is bright and we can see clearly, and He speaks in the dark of night when we’re not sure where to go. He isn’t far away. God is near the person who loves Him, able to guide and help.

Of course, a guide isn’t much good if you don’t pay attention to what He says. So the person who loves God with all their heart celebrates the way God guides; he also remembers to pay attention. *I keep my eyes always on the Lord*. It’s not possible to love God with a whole heart while simultaneously ignoring or disobeying Him. This is why Jesus repeatedly says, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word”* (John 14:15, 23; 15:10).

(5) “You are my life.” (9-10)

If God really is my refuge and source of good, if He provides me with godly companions, if He is my delightful inheritance and the one who puts me in a good place, if He guides and goes with me ... then I’m very blessed!

This is true at every level: spiritual and physical, emotional and intellectual, personal and relational. So David says: *Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices; my body also will rest secure.*

It's also true both now in this mortal life and beyond, because God is everlasting and it was always His intention that our relationship with Him would be unending. So David adds: *You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will You let Your faithful one see decay.*

In short, the breath in my lungs, and everything that makes my life worth living are all found in God. He is the reason life is so good now, and He is the basis for my hope of life that extends beyond the grave. He is my life. Why wouldn't I love Him with my whole heart?

(6) "You are my everything, and it's very good!" (11)

How do you finish a psalm like this? David could go on and on, describing other ways that God makes his life good. But at some point he needs to say the "amen." So he ends with a kind of all-encompassing summary. *You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.*

Are you looking for the path that leads to a full, satisfying life? God takes us there. Do you want joy that's rich and deep and complete? It's found in God's presence. Do you hope for good things that please both now and on into eternity? God is the source of every good thing. David believes that these things are true, and—flowing out of a heart that loves God fully—he sings praise to God for them all.

III. A song for us

This is a song of David. It's a song written by a man who loved his Lord with his whole heart. It's easy to picture David singing these words to God, delighting in Him, calling Him "my everything."

It's also easy to picture Jesus singing this song. In fact the book of Acts does this directly on 2 occasions. In Acts 2 and again in chapter 13, Peter and Paul preach the gospel message about how Jesus died to deliver us from sin, then rose from the dead, breaking the power of death and confirming God's promise of new life to those who follow Him. Both sermons quote Psalm 16:10 as a picture of Messiah's victory over death: *"You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will You let Your faithful one see decay."*

Of course, Jesus didn't just rise from the grave—as important as that was. His whole life showed us what it means to love God fully. And Jesus calls us to do exactly that, to follow His example: loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

That means Psalm 16 is a song for all of us. If we call ourselves Christians—Christ-followers—then we also need to be people who can sing (and mean) all the parts of this psalm, because we're learning to love God with all our hearts. And that brings us to this week's "So what?"

Perhaps someday someone will invent a fitness tracker with a "spiritual heart-health" feature. Put it on, click a button, and get a score for how much of your heart is truly loving God today: 50%? 80%? 96%? Is the month-by-month trend going up or down? Is the graph green or red?

That feature isn't available yet, so we need other tools to monitor our spiritual heart-health. Here's one practical suggestion. Put a bookmark in your Bible at Psalm 16. For the next few weeks,

whenever you spend time in Bible study and prayer and personal worship, scan over this passage and see if you can honestly pray the things this Psalm says to God:

- Lord, You are my everything—apart from You I have nothing good.
- I only delight in people who love and follow You.
- You're my only true "happy place"—my identity and security and fulfillment.
- You're my reliable guide, the one I keep my eyes on.
- You're my source of life.
- You're what makes my life joyful and satisfying, now and forever.

Hopefully on many days the words will come easily and feel "right." Great! Let them lead you in worship.

If you're really honest, some days you will probably find one or more section of the psalm difficult to pray. You may think, "I want this, but right now I'm not sure I can really say it." That's OK. Don't be discouraged. We're all on a path of growth, and none of us are perfect yet. Where parts of the psalm are hard, talk with God about it. (You may find it helpful to talk with a trusted brother or sister, too.) Ask why it's hard. What might need to change in my heart and life so I really can say and mean these words? Ask God what to do. Ask for His help—and keep on asking. This is one prayer God always answers when we make it sincerely, because it is His will that we love Him with our whole hearts.

Many centuries ago, God made a promise to His hard-hearted, stubborn, disobedient people Israel. He said if they would sincerely seek Him, He *will circumcise your hearts ... so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live* (Deut 30:6). That promise applies to us, too.

I pray that I will grow, that all of us will keep on growing to be people like David, with hearts that love our Lord first and fully. May we all be able to pray without hesitation, *You are my Lord; apart from You I have no good thing. ... Lord, You alone are my portion and my cup of blessing. ... You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.*"

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Psalm 16 – A Miktam of David

*Please care for my needs, Lord—You are my protector.
But you are more: you are my everything—without you I have nothing good at all.*

*I delight in the people who follow You,
And have no desire to follow the example of those who worship other things.*

*You've put me in a place of satisfaction and joy, Lord,
But the greatest gift I've received is my relationship with You.*

*I'm amazed at how well You counsel me; even in the dark I hear Your voice.
So I'll keep my eyes on You, and keep my hand firmly in Yours.*

*Because of You I'm blessed in every way—body, soul, and spirit,
Now in this life, and through eternity with You.*

*You lead me into abundant life,
Being with You brings perfect joy,
You are the source of good things that never end.*