A Grace Gathering
8 November 2026

The Tradition of Thankfulness as a Nation

For me November and December are very special in our calendar-year. We celebrate the goodness of God to us as a nation and personally within our families. Then the great moment of the advent of our Lord and the wonder of eternal redemption. New Year's Day is a time to reflect on the old and trust God for the new.

1. The roots of Thanksgiving Day is found in the Pilgrim experience at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in the fall of 1621, their first successful harvest. The Pilgrims gathered with the Wampanoag Indians in thankfulness for the Lord mercies through Massasoit and Squanto, three-day festival.
2. In the 17th and 18th centuries "Thanksgivings" were held intermittently to celebrate good harvests, peace, or military victories.
3. In the 19th century Sarah Josepha Hale (1788-1873), an editor of the popular Godbey's Lady's Book, and composer of "Mary had a Little Lamb," campaigned for some thirty years for a national holiday.
4. Abraham Lincoln issued a national proclamation in October 1863 setting the Thanksgiving holiday each year on the last Thursday of the month.
5. Franklin Roosevelt shifted the date in 1939 to help retail sales in the Great Depression.
6. Congress fixed the day in 1941, the fourth Thursday in November.

Psalm 16
Counting Our Blessings

<u>The Setting of the Psalm</u>
Without a scribal superscription, the context of the poem, as it may have related to a particular circumstance, cannot be discerned. I take it to be a universal poem of praise and the expression of confidence in the Lord for His present provisions and future assurances.

Also, the meaning of "miktam" is uncertain; most likely it has a musical connotation (such as sung to a particular tune or meter).

<u>The Theme of the Psalm</u>

The goodness of God toward His children brings joy, comfort, and delight as a daily experience and bright hope for the future. “God is good, God is always good, and God will always be good” is a wise, true statement. It is a testimony to the mercies of God expressed in deep trust in the Lord for our days and all our tomorrows.

The Key Words/Phrases of the Psalm

The actions of God
“refuge,” v. 1
“counsels,” v. 7

The requests of David
“Keep me safe,” v. 1

The claims of David
“In you I take refuge,” v. 1
“Apart from you I have no good things,” v. 2
“You make my lot secure,” v. 5
“I have a delightful inheritance,” v. 6
“I will praise the Lord,” v. 7
“I keep my eyes always on the Lord,” v. 8
“I will not be shaken,” v. 8
“My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices,” v. 9
“You will not abandon me,” v. 10
“You make known to me the path of life,” v. 11
“You will fill me with joy,” v. 11

From an initial, cursory reflection on the Psalm, several observations can be made.

1. David refers to God five times in the psalm. One time he calls his God by the name “Lord (Adonai, v. 2);” the one who is sovereign, all-powerful, the great creator, transcendent, master; four times he refers to God as Jehovah (LORD, vv. 2, 5, 7, 8); and once he refers to his personal commitment to God (“my God,” [EL] v. 1).
2. There is only one request in the psalm (“Keep me safe,” v. 1); it is the initial words in the psalm.
3. This is a personal psalm in which David is the primary spokesperson. The personal pronoun appears, “I,” eight times. Seven of the times David speaks of his own actions toward the Lord; once of his personal confidence in the Lord (v.6). “My” is found eight times and “me” five times.
4. David directly addresses the Lord using the second person pronoun “you” three times (vv. 1, 5, 10).

5. What is absent from this poem is any reference to troubles caused by external circumstances; it is an entirely personal psalm of the kindness of God to us.

The Uniqueness of the Psalm

The psalm had special significance in the early days of the church; it appears twice in the sermonic material of the Book of the Acts, in both instances to demonstrate to Jewish audiences the bodily resurrection of Christ. Because of usage in the New Testament, scholars have recognized its Christocentric emphasis and have called it the "Golden Psalm."

1. In Acts 2:14-47, Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, the apostle's appeals to this Psalm in vv. 27, 31 to indicate that David's words in 16:10 that Jesus was not only predicted, but also His vindication in life from death for us. In a sense David is a type of Christ. "...you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead nor will you let your faithful one see decay."

2. In Acts 13:35, a portion of Paul's preaching (13:16-41) in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, on the first missionary enterprise, the point is made by the apostle that David could not be speaking of himself, or any other descendent, other than Jesus citing 16: 10b ("…nor will you let your faithful one see decay"). David is only a shadow of the "faithful one."

The Survey of the Psalm

I think a fitting summary of this psalm is found in Psalm 73: 25-26. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Calvin gathers the thought of the psalm this way, "In the beginning David commends himself to the protection of God. He then meditates upon the benefits which he received from God and thereby stirs himself up to thanksgiving."

The scholars have found difficulty in reaching consensus in outlining the psalm. This praise psalm seems to have two parts: David's recognition of God's daily and present mercies (vv. 1-8) and, second, the assurance that it will continue even in death (vv. 8-11).

I. The Bountiful Provisions of the Lord in the Present, vv. 1-8
   In the first section of the poem, the poet praises the Lord for seven things (the number seven indicating wholeness or completeness [in all things]).
   A. The protection that we have in the Lord, v. 1
      1. The request, v. 1a

While stated as an imperative, the second line seems to be an expression of the confidence the poet has in speaking to God. It appears as more a prayer than a request since he is assured that he will receive, and has received, what he has asked of the Lord.

2. The reason, v. 1b
   The word “refuge” literally means shelter or protection (literally, “I go to you for safety”). In a sense, it is a statement of trust (“my God,” “I take”). The psalmist uses two names for God in this line (LORD and Lord, the first is Jehovah [the eternally existent one who is the loyal and the keeper of His promises) and the second is Adonai meaning master [Lord can be a translation of Elohim also, the sovereign, all-powerful creator. Both Adonai and Elohim are plural; some scholars take the plural as a statement of His majesty; we may have a hint here of plurality of persons.

B. The source of all good is in the Lord, v. 2
   As “my God” suggests the object of loyalty by the writer, so does “my Lord” (“my master” or “my ruler”). Without God there is no shelter; without a sovereign master, good things do not happen! Literally the text reads, “my good is not beyond You.”

C. The gifts of friends in the Lord, v. 3
   An example of the “good things” God provides are friends in Christ who are described as “holy ones” or saints and noble. Here the psalmist expresses the importance of the community of believers.

D. The recognition that we serve the one true Lord, v. 4

1. The folly of serving the gods, v. 4a
   The powers of the gods are an illusion; they cannot hear, talk, or rescue!

2. The refusal to serve other gods, v. 4b
   “Libations of blood” have to do with animal or human sacrifices to honor the gods (an unrequited deity was believed to be the cause of calamity). The pagan way of life, life without honoring God, is completely antithetical to trust in the Lord.

   Devotion to God is so focused in the writer’s mind that he refuses to even mention the names of the gods, showing distain rather than devotion. “Lift up their names,” most likely has reference to swearing of an oath, claiming by the gods is that of making a promise to do something.

E. The provision that we have in the Lord, vv. 5-6
   Unlike the gods who can neither hear or act, our behalf God hears, cares, and acts on our behalf. The words “portion” and “cup” are metaphors for sustenance. “Portion” most likely has to do with material

possessions such a land (Israeli's were farmers who lived off the land) and the "cup" nourishment. "Lots" were the means of land distribution. God, unlike the gods, gives to each of us what He purposes for us. Collectively, the verse speaks of economic stability.

The description of the benefits that God accords are described as "pleasant" and "delightful." However, the focus is not upon the God who graciously gives, but the Lord Himself ("Lord, you alone are….").

Such words as "boundary lines," "portion," "lot," and inheritance would remind the Israeli of the gift of the land of Canaan. However, that was in the past; the writer recognizes the continued blessing of God.

F. The guidance we have in the Lord, v. 7
The poetic praises, proclaims the Lord as worthy, the Lord who provides providential insight, advice, and direction throughout the day and at night He instructs or corrects through personal reflection or meditation on our moral choices (the word translated heart is actually kidney; the poet means our inner most being [sometimes the word is liver], normally translated as heart). Even when we talk to ourselves, God is in it!

G. The commitment we have for the Lord, v. 8
1. The resolve, v. 8a
The psalmists had made a decision that is also a statement of trust and conviction covering the entire span of his existence, both now and eternally.
2. The consequence: confidence, v. 8b-c
a. The reality, v. 8b
"Right hand" is a metaphor for strength; the Lord is our protector.
b. The consequence, v. 8c
Grounded upon the reality of God's dealings in the past (the disclosure of His goodness, grace, and fatherly instruction), the writer is confident of his tomorrows! What a wonderful statement to hide in our hearts, "I will not be shaken." *This is why it is a good idea to keep a diary of God's dealings with us. The past is the foundation of the future and comfort in the present!*

II. The Bountiful Provisions of the Lord in the Future, vv. 9-11
The Lord not only guides, protects, and instructs us in our life span, He will not abandon us in death.

The “therefore” provides a second ground of the writer’s confidence, clearly hinted in the previous verse. Not only in this life has he found a source of comfort, joy, and surety in the Lord, but also in death as well. God cares for His children today and all our tomorrows!

A. The confidence we have in the Lord, vv. 9-10
   1. His demeanor, v. 9a
      The writer rejoices; from his inner being praising the Lord.
   2. His consequent fact, v. 9b
      He finds delight in God because of the recognition in life, as well as in death, that God cares for him.
   3. The reasons, v. 10
      Death will not separate us from the Lord. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the “realm of the dead” was conceived as below the surface of the earth. According to Jesus, there were two possible abodes after physical death with a great gulf between (Luke 16:19-31); it is designated as “sheol” (in Greek, the equivalent is “Hades, the under-world) and paradise, or Abraham’s bosom. *Remember, there is greater clarity as one progress through the Scriptures. What is enfolded in the Old Testament is unfolded in the New Testament.*

      The word “decay” does not mean that his present body, his physical life, will not experience corruption in death, but that in death he will not suffer complete isolation from the presence of God since these verses are quoted by Peter and Paul as evidence of Christ’s life after death experience through the resurrection. Paul said it well, “…when this perishable shall have put on the imperishable and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying which is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory (Isa. 25:8)’ (I Cor. 15: 53).” Death will not destroy intimacy with God; it will only elevate the experience of it in duration and quality.

B. The prospect because we have confidence in the Lord, v. 11
   Here the psalmist develops the nature and quality of life in the presence of God.
   1. The disclosure, v. 11a
      God has revealed life to David, both presently and eternally.
   2. The reality, v. 11b
      The word translated “joy” is a plural noun, and can be translated “joys.” It is found only twice in the Psalms (also 45:15) in the plural, here emphasizing the experience of being in the presence of God forever. This stands contrastively to the experience of sheol.
   3. The delight, v. c

> The experience of God's presence will not only be endless; it will be beyond delightful and pleasant.

Perhaps a fitting summary of the teaching of Psalm 16 is an old hymn that I am sure we have sung, "Count Your Blessings." The poem was composed by John Oatman, Jr. (1856-1922), an American cleric in 1896 and the tune by the American composer E.O. Excell (1851-1921).

> When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
> When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
> Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
> And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.
>
> Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
> Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
> Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,
> And you will keep singing as the days go by.
>
> When you look at others with their lands and gold,
> Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
> Count your many blessings. Wealth can never buy
> Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.
>
> So, amid the conflict whether great or small,
> Do not be disheartened, God is over all;
> Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
> Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.
>
> Refrain:
> Count your blessings, name them one by one,
> Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
> Count your blessings, name them one by one,
> And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.