



May 2, 2021

Knowing God - Psalm 16

Sermon Title: Counterfeit Gods and The Faith Process

RUTH SERIES PREVIEW

Hey beginning next week we are going to be in the book of Ruth for 5 weeks. I'm pretty excited about it. It's an awesome story of God's sovereign faithfulness and in it we will see God take this widowed woman named Naomi and over time bring a healing and hope to her that is so powerful. She became so bitter because she lost her husband and her sons...so bitter she named herself bitter. And then in her bitterness she returns home to...Bethlehem. Against Naomi's wishes, her daughter-in-law Ruth goes with her. And man, little does Naomi know that this daughter-in-law who is an unwelcome companion at first becomes the very channel through which God pours out his redemption on Naomi. And we get to watch Naomi go from empty and bitter to holding a legacy of hope for the whole world in her very hands.

The book of Ruth is a story of hope for hurting people. And I say that to say: maybe God is going to meet you in YOUR bitterness & emptiness. But also, maybe this is the story God is going to use to bring a friend or family member to faith. We humans are wired up for story. And the book of Ruth is a 5-week powerful story about the hope God gives. So this is me saying...invite some people. Invite a friend to read Ruth with

you and then listen to or even come with you to worship where we are talking about it. Psalm 34.8 says taste and see that the Lord is good. Maybe this is that time for your friend, teammate, classmate, to taste and see.

Intro

This week I wanted to do something a little different from our normal sermon rhythm. Normally we are doing like what I just talked about with Ruth. Walking through a book for several weeks. But I'm taking this week to do something a little different. I want to share a sermon with you that came out of my time I spend in the mornings in God's word. Most of the time, that time with God is just for me. To fill me up, to lead me to worship. That's my time with God and most of what happens there is for me. And I'm so grateful.

But, sometimes the Lord just shows me something that is for all of us. Well this year I'm trying to grow in meditation on God's word, not just checking off a list so part of what I'm doing is reading a Psalm a week. Doing this with a few members here at Mercy and its really been awesome. Well, last week we were in Psalm 16. A psalm I preached 2.5 years ago. But ya'll as I read it, it was so fresh to me and felt so renewing to me. And I felt like it offers a fresh word from God to Mercy Church.

Whenever we preach from the Psalms, our main goal is knowing God. Because one of the biggest shifts that I believe needs to happen in our lives...that will wake us up spiritually...is when we stop seeing God as a subject matter to know about and we start seeing him as a person to KNOW. I

want you to just know **about** God, I want you to know God. Walk with him. And the Psalms are these prayers to God that help give us words to talk to God with.

So we are just gonna walk through it. I hope this will feel, by the time we are done, like something you can do at home. Just walk through a chapter of scripture like a psalm and meet with God.

Today we are in Psalm 16. Here's why: In order for you and I to **know** the one true God, we've got to understand something deeply true about ourselves. What Psalm 16 is going to put before us today is that all human beings have gods they submit themselves to. And the real decision we have to make is not whether or not we will serve a god. **The decision is which god will we serve.** Because to be human is to worship. We all worship something. And that can be a little disorienting and even offensive.

If you are not a Christian, well then I'm telling you that you are already in a game you didn't realize you were playing. And if you are a Christian the challenge to you is going to be to see if your worship that you thought was going to the one true god has actually shifted onto something or someone else.

And my proposition to you today is that I believe MOST problems & frustrations in our lives are the result of directing our worship onto **counterfeit** gods. That underneath the surface of things like conflicts, like confusion about my life's purpose, money problems...every single one of those problems is actually first a worship problem. Where we've

taken a good thing and made it a god thing. And that's always a bad thing.

So today we are going to listen in as King David shares his process of placing his faith in the true God instead of counterfeit gods. We will expose counterfeit gods and see how we can place our worship on the one true God.

Protect me, God, for I take refuge in you. 2 I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have nothing good besides you."

Right out of the gate you see David describing a decision he's made. I take refuge...in you. See this whole Psalm is David expressing this process of choosing to direct his worship onto God. Refuge means exactly what you think it means. It's a hiding place for those in trouble. You come in and take shelter there. And then he says what seems like hyperbole but it's actually the result of what comes when you know God for a while. He says "I have nothing good besides you."

That sounds extreme right? Come on man...you are **KING** David. You've got some good things going. The only thing you have that is good in your life is God? And it seems so silly that we write it off as exaggeration or poetic over speak...Like if you ever have the good fortune of having my wife's homemade chocolate chess pie. In that moment I am so enraptured by the flavor-texture masterpiece that I may whisper to that pie "I have nothing good besides you." That's momentary bliss.

But David isn't over speaking. He is instead providing the most honest and true perspective on knowing God. In fact, Jesus says this same basic idea:

26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — yes, and even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. -- Luke 14:26

WHAT!?! Jesus isn't saying "hate" like be an enemy of. That would be counter his teachings in other places. He's saying the one who loves God...will get to a place where in COMPARISON to your love for Jesus your feelings towards them will be like hate.

This is what happens when you know God. David had experienced God's faithfulness while protecting sheep in the field, through the close friendship of Jonathan, through that time he killed Goliath, to his ascent to the throne. He knows God. And he knows that in comparison...nothing else is good. And that right there is the first thing we need to know about what we are going to call counterfeit gods. **Nothing is good when compared to God.** And this is HUGE. Because what happens so often is that God gives us GOOD THINGS. James 1 says every good gift comes from God. And when we keep it in its place as a gift from God...its good. But then over time we start to find our happiness in the gift and not the gift giver. **And that's when it moves in our hearts from being one of God's gifts to being one of God's competitors.**

I'll show you in a second how we do it, but David is showing how we prevent ourselves from traveling down that road.

David's statement of faith is to say God is so good that in comparison to him...nothing else is good. Period.

3 As for the holy people who are in the land, they are the noble ones. All my delight is in them. -- Psalms 16:3

He's talking about the others who choose God the way he has. His delight is in them because there is a deep common bond he shares with them. A huge HUGE blessing to you in your pursuit of knowing God...are the people of God. IN FACT, God has wired you so that you experience his character through other believers.

Example: Craig Bender. I love this guy. I and my four kids and wife were locked out of my car after soccer practice. Craig just calls me and says hey man where is your van? And I'm like...this is faithfulness. Friends who car-jack together stay together. But that's Craig. Super faithful. And he points me back to the faithfulness of God. So I delight in my friendship with Craig because Craig points me to God.

God's people keep you from counterfeit gods by pointing you to the one true God.

David delights in them because he experiences the God who is working through them. If you want to know God, God says then get to know my son, get to know my word, and get to know my people! We don't just tell you to get in community so our programs can work. We do it because your heart is a factory for making counterfeit gods. And God's people are the

ones who can say WHOA MAN...you've turned that good thing into a god thing. And that's a bad thing.

Illustration – Told you this one before – Passport Girl

4 The sorrows of those who take another god for themselves will multiply; I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood, and I will not speak their names with my lips.

I want to stop here. And try to pastor you. A heavy burden for me as your pastor...something that genuinely makes me grieve...is when you take another god for yourself. And you can't see yet how destructive it's going to be for you. How sorrow multiplying it will be for you. See you rarely know something is a god when you first take it.

You read this and you think...ok make sure I don't fall into another world religion. Got it. And we use that to push aside the reality that our heart is a false god factory. Ezekiel 14 God looks at the elders of Israel and says "they have set up idols in their hearts." These are the leaders of God's people and they've set up things *in their hearts* as counterfeit gods. As idols.

God was revealing to them they can take anything, usually a good gift from God, and turn it into his competitor. We do it too. We look to good things like love, a successful career, family and we turn them into ultimate things. And when we

¹ Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (Dutton, NY NY 2009) xviii. I am indebted to Keller's book *Counterfeit Gods* for a lot of the inspiration and a few direct quotes. The quotes will be cited but really the whole book is worth a look!

start to find our stability, our fulfillment, our sense of safety in these things...we have deified them.

Listen, a counterfeit god is anything more important to you than God. ¹

It's the thing or things that you have made so central to your life that should you lose it, your life would hardly feel worth living. Whatever you look at and say down in your heart of hearts "If I have that, then my life has meaning, I know I'll be secure, I know I'll have value." And the thing is we can do that with *anything*.

Let me give you three questions to ask yourself to help you uproot the idols of your heart:

Discovering your idols: What do you love? – one of the ways God talks about his relationship to us is as our spiritual spouse. God should be our one true spouse but when we desire and delight in other things more than God, the bible actually calls that adultery.² Idols will capture our imagination and we can probably locate them by looking at what we daydream about. What we hope for. We want our idols make us feel loved and significant. For example: A lot of people love... love. Romance. So the old song goes "Your nobody till somebody loves you." Well, that's a nice melody and a huge lie. But our whole culture has bought it. So we maintain that one day we will find our soul mate and when we

² Keller – p.xxxi.

find that person we will unload onto them all our deepest needs of significance and purpose and fulfillment and security....

AND NOBODY CAN LIVE UP TO THAT! So what will happen? YOUR SORROWS WILL MULTIPLY! Because you didn't realize it but you made them your god. The dating scene is filled with the god of love. Even among Christians. Romantic love is powerful and it is, on its own, a good thing god has provided right. But then we make a god out of it one of two ways: some people *must* have it. So they always need to be dating or looking for "THE ONE" and so their actions are controlled by the power of romantic love. But then others who avoid romantic love out of bitterness or anger or fear are actually just as controlled by its power. The person who is completely shut off to romantic love may miss out on a wonderful spouse who comes along, and the person who *must* have love will almost always rush into a relationship with the wrong person. If you are too afraid of love or too enamored by it, it has assumed god-like power. And that makes it a counterfeit god.

Discovering your idols: What do you trust?

Another way the bible talks about God is like David does in verse 1. As our refuge. He is our savior and our security. But idols slip into that spot and demand our trust. And with that they become the ones in charge of our sense of peace and security. The way to uncover these kinds of idols is to look at your nightmares.³ What do you fear losing the most? And if you lost it do you feel like your life would crumble?

³ Keller, xxii.

Obvious example: money. You know the bible talks about the love of money a lot right? Like waaaay more than any other sin. Why? Because it is so powerful and so seductive. Only 2% of Americans think of themselves as upper class. Even though making \$32,400 a year puts you in the top 1% of wage earners in the world. We fool ourselves. I've never once, ever had someone come to me saying "I spend too much on myself. I think my greed is hurting my family, my soul, and people around me." That's because greed hides in secret and blinds us to its work. But man do we trust it.

Me: for a long time – check my bank account 6 times a day. Nothing happening but I was checking it. Because for me, money was my security. Money was an idol, and the deeper idol money served was control. I felt like "as long as I have positive in my checking account, I'm ok." Seminary changed that. That's how savers make idols out of money. But spenders do it too. They use money to get stuff which makes them feel good about themselves. Better clothes, better house, better whatever. And usually the spender and saver marry each other.

Listen it's a hard question but where are you putting your trust? What is your security blanket? What is your refuge? When something starts to take that spot it is moving from being a gift of God to being in competition with God. You'll never know God as long as you are trusting in something else.

Discovering your idols: What do you obey?

The bible calls God our master & king. Which may be the most uncomfortable aspect of knowing God for most of us. We live

in an individualistic age that celebrates autonomy. We think we are independent beings. But, we are not. We are all servants of some god. God has created us so that we flourish when we submit to him, but we often take authority off of God and give it to something else. Anything that becomes more important to us and more non-negotiable to us than God has taken that place as god in our lives. Want to know what you are obeying? Look at what controls your emotions. What makes you uncontrollably angry, anxious, or despondent? What racks you with guilt you can't shake? ⁴

That is your counterfeit god multiplying your sorrows. I see this a lot with the idol of success. More than even money, the idol of being known as the best...as the youngest and brightest and most talented in your field...we even train it into our kids. My dad never once LET me win. I'd be like dad...have mercy on me. And he'd be like son, Jesus gives mercy, I give lessons. Sheltons win. That need to succeed...it leads people to all sorts of dark places doesn't it.

Athletes feel like they HAVE to stay at the top of their field so turn to things like performance enhancers because THEY WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES to win. How many athlete testimonies do we have to hear that if football, tennis, basketball...whatever was ever taken away they would have no identity? Same is true for all professions. Success promises security and joy in being at the top...yet in reality sorrows are multiplied. Families are usually the ones most hurt by it too.

What do you trust, what do you love, what do you obey? THE most common barrier to people growing closer to God is their

failure to recognize the counterfeit gods competing with the one true god. Almost always I can tie major breakthroughs in my life and in the lives of others I know to the time where they finally called them out and chose to shift their worship onto God.

Which leads to the rest of our psalm. Where David shows the blessing of worshipping the one true God:

5 Lord, you are my portion and my cup of blessing; you hold my future.

The future is the greatest source of anxiety right? Fear of what will happen. And false gods reveal themselves in your anxiety. When you put your hope in the one true God...you say he holds my future. And I trust him.

6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

Think about what this word inheritance means for us. For us it isn't riches or land. Our inheritance is God himself! In Christ we are purchased by God. God pays for our sin, he adopts us into his kingdom and puts the label of son & daughter on us. And says I'm going to give you my presence with you NOW in the form of the Holy Spirit and one day you and I will live together in eternity! No other god can say that. And the more we fix our eyes on eternity and the inheritance that awaits us the more the present allure of false idols will start to fall away.

⁴ Ibid.

This is why you hear us say a lot that the best thing for your walk with God is not just running away from false gods, but running towards the one true God. It's not JUST seeing the worthlessness of your gods, it's seeing the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ our lord.

7 I will bless the Lord who counsels me —even at night when my thoughts trouble me.

This verse spoke right to me this week. Anybody else ever have their thoughts trouble them at night? Anybody else have trouble going to sleep cause your mind is racing? Wake up in the middle of the night because fears, anxieties, decisions, conflict...they are troubling you?

David says in that moment I will bless the Lord. Which means in the moment where fear wants to reign I CHOOSE TO SAY LORD...MY LIFE IS YOURS! You prepare a place for me in the presence of my enemies. SURELY though I don't know how though I don't see how...surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. Surely in all my ways I will acknowledge him and he will make my paths straight. At night...all alone...just you and your thoughts...David says...AND GOD. God is there too. And you have the difficult but real option to surrender even your thoughts to the Lord and replace them with his counsel. His truth. And no idol will be able to hold its grip over you when you start attacking it with God's truth. Leads right to verse 8

8 I always let the Lord guide me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

David is now talking about life in victory over these idols. And over whatever might come. He's with me. He's my advocate. And when my worship, my security...when my love and trust and obedience is set on the one true God...I cannot be shaken. Another word here for shaken is moved. In short: God has me, he's not letting me go. He's my refuge. So when the storms come I find shelter, I find strength there.

9 Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my body also rests securely.

Look at this promise. This is the outcome of worshipping the one true god. Not anxiety, not fear, not stress, not anger. No its gladness, joy...and rest. My Body rests securely. Quick pause: How many of you need to just rest? You are tired...worn out in your soul? The body keeps the score ya'll. I rest securely because I'm under his care. My family, my job, my church...its under his care. Leads right to last two. More promises.

10 For you will not abandon me to Sheol; you will not allow your faithful one to see decay.

**11 You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures. --
Psalms 16:1-11 (CSB)**

We are going to come back to verse 10 in a second. Verse 11 is the beautiful culmination of this psalm. Of this truth that when I choose to direct my worship to God...when I choose to love, trust, and obey him...when I believe the gospel, receive God's forgiveness of my sin and believe he rose for me...I

stand in his presence and there I find life, joy, and pleasure. That's the pursuit we are all on! And there it is!

Now I want to show you the deeper beauty of this Psalm. I want to show you how you respond from here. There is a reality about the whole Old Testament: That you can meet God here. See his character yes. But you are not the main character of the Old Testament. Jesus is. Let me show you. We are going to jump over to Acts 2:

25 For David says of him:

"I saw the Lord ever before me; because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. Moreover, my flesh will rest in hope, 27 because you will not abandon me in Hades or allow your holy one to see decay. 28 You have revealed the paths of life to me; you will fill me with gladness in your presence."

29 "Brothers and sisters, I can confidently speak to you about the patriarch David: He is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day....31 Seeing what was to come, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah: He was not abandoned in Hades, and his flesh did not experience decay. 32 "God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this... 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." Acts 2:22-33 (CSB)

Psalm 16...its about Jesus. There is ONE TRUE GOD. His name is Jesus! All other gods are counterfeit. They've fought for

your love, trust, and obedience. They promise security but they deliver anxiety. Promise control but deliver chaos. Promise prosperity but deliver destruction. They consume you & leave you wrung out like a wet rag. But NOT JESUS. GOD lifted him out of the grave. And right there is the question for you. DID Jesus rise from the grave? According to Paul there were 500 eye witnesses. There are multiple gospel accounts written independently of each other. There is all the proof you need. BUT IF HE ROSE...He's God. and there are no others.

And the people around Peter said "37 When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: "Brothers, what should we do?"

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins -- Acts 2:37-38 (CSB)

Psalm 16 is a call to turn from your counterfeit Gods and when you come to God you will not find judgment. No your sentence was already laid down and put onto Christ. So you find a father with open arms saying come home.

REPENT & BE BAPTIZED!

Bench

That you don't actually have money problems, you have worship problems. You don't actually have relationship problems; you have worship problems. Career problems, addiction problems, friend problems, parenting problems, roommate problems are all

The sermon I reference more than any other here has got to be the simple sermon by Thomas Chalmers called the expulsive power of a new affection. Where he says the problem with a lot of religion is that all it does is tell us to stop worshipping false gods. Stop sinning. But all that does is create momentary guilt. It doesn't last. Because desire is more powerful than guilt.

And he says the best thing for breaking the power of idols is giving more of ourselves to the one true God. The more we give our worship to God...that will actually diminish our desire for those false gods. We'll find joy in him and want more of it and the best news is there's no end to that joy. That's the expulsive power of a new affection. In short: if you evaluate yourself today and see you are worshipping counterfeit gods, the first priority is to run as hard as you can towards Jesus. Abide in him. And then, in his power, you can untangle the snare of those false gods.

⁵ Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York, Harper, 1988), p.296, quoted in Andrew Delbanco, *The Real*

The Psalm breaks down in

Notes from Keller – Counterfeit Gods

“a strange melancholy haunts the inhabitants...in the midst of abundance”

“The incomplete joys of this world will never satisfy the human heart” ⁵– Alexis de Tocqueville 1830s!

Times of prosperity – there is a strange melancholy. When the prosperity diminishes, there is outright despair. Why? DeTocqueville says it's from making an incomplete joy the thing you build your life on. THIS is idolatry.

“13 No servant can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” -- Luke 16:12-13

You need to hear the words of the old hymn “lay your deadly doings down, down at Jesus' feet. Stand in him and him alone, gloriously complete.”

Older pastor who is a hero in the circles I was trained in is a guy named John Piper. His greatest contribution to the church, I think, was helping us all sit in verse 11. Because here we are reminded that God isn't just right while the counterfeits are wrong...it's that God is BETTER, more pleasurable to me than anything else. We humans are meant to find our greatest

American Dream: A meditation on Hope (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.3.

pleasure in knowing God. Almost sounds scandalous doesn't it? Do you ENJOY God?

because these psalms are constructed as songs that were written for the public worship of the people of Israel. And as they were sung they penetrated into the heart and mind as only music can do. They were central to the worship of the early church and really have been at the center of the Christian faith throughout history. That's because they do more than just inform you about God. They teach you how to go to God. How to talk to him about your life. And how to get help from him.