

Psalm 16  
Comparative Religions  
July 8, 2018

**Main Point:** This is a psalm of comparisons and contrasts. At some point in the past, David surrendered to God and said “yes.” And, he said “no” to all other contrary allegiances. David invites us to compare the life of faith in God with the life of trust in anything else, especially self. He shows us what trusting confidence in God looks like even as he struggles through the temporary discomforts of life.

**SI:** David is on the run. He is a refugee. Where will he go? In what will he trust? When things go bad for you, in your life, where do you go? David is giving us the practical – hey let’s think about this – He boils it down to two ways of life, two comparisons.

Read (and pray)

David invites us to compare and contrast here. There are only two religions: The religion of the exaltation of the self, the autonomy of the self, or joyful surrender to the love of God.

Let’s look at this through David’s comparisons of >  
Two Trusts, Two Communities, Two Confidences

**Intro:** David the refugee.

What is it like to be a refugee? On the run for the sake of survival.  
Desperation.

Fleeing b/c you believe your life is at risk.

Nothing like the risk of life

“I can’t relate... I don’t have any idea what that is like.”

Well, yes you do. We are all pursued, we all live in danger. We all live in a world that is not the way it was made to be.

A warfare song. This psalm is a warfare song. A good war, a just war, a war waged out of love.

Confidence will be tried and tested.

Seasons, doubts, temptations

The contrasts > the whole Psalm is about these contrasts...

### **1 Two Trusts (vs. 1-2):**

v. 1-2 > between two trusts > finding good in God and not finding good in anything else ... David said yes to God and no to all contrary allegiances...

There are only 2 religions...

God, and everything else. The God of Israel, the God of the Bible, and everything apart from God. V.2 > “no good apart from You.”

Jesus would later say, “I am the vine, you are the branches... apart from Me you can do nothing.”

The LORD = “I Am” – Moses questioning God, “who should I say sent me?”

Jesus: I am the Bread of Life. I am the Living Water.

**God-Trust** > So David uses all these words of what trust in God is and does: refuge, goodness, delight, fullness, freedom from fear, inheritance, counsel, instruction, fearlessness, security, life, pleasure.

And he is saying in v. 2 > all other trusts are no good. And this can be summarized as self-trust. The exaltation of the self and what the self, what I have to do. And this self-trust can have a religious, even Christian, veneer to it.

Trusting in self means trusting in what makes sense to the fleshly instinct of going your own way. Even if that means a religious way. The way of earning for yourself rewards from God because of your good behavior or at least your good intentions. That you are a good person.

But in our day, the exaltation of the self through self-trust is displayed throughout our culture as doing what is best for you and only you. Being true to yourself. Being authentic about who you are and not denying yourself of anything that will get in the way of you being who you are.

1992 Supreme Court case > “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” gave language to this age’s turn to self as ultimate authority. (TGC - )

What defines your happiness? Who is over you? Who is master of your fate? The self as ultimate authority. The self as determinative and therefore put in the place of God.

**Self-Trust** > sorrows, abandonment, destruction, corruption, death

How did he get there? Through leadership development? Through education and training? Yes, but most of all through the furnace of affliction.

The gift of release from stubbornness and pride and self-centered independence. Why is this so hard to turn loose from, to recover from, to turn away from? God has to prove to you that you can't make it on your own and that He is your all in all.

David gets this.

And so he glories in the contrast between the two communities:

### **2 Two Communities (vs. 3-4):**

v. 3-4 > between two communities > delighting in the saints and abundant sorrows for those who run after other gods...

You've heard the lies of the gods of the flesh – this will make you happy, content, satisfied. Or this will drown your sorrow– alcohol and drugs, material things, shopping, vacations... But they don't! They only make your sorrows multiply!

If the Self rules, there is no foundation for community. Individual selves just war it out against other sovereign selves. V. 4 – blood is the result.

David is making an appeal to the community of the church. We are in this together. We **love** like this: From Matt Chandler – “Love says: I've seen the ugly parts of you, and I'm staying. Our culture doesn't love love; it loves the idea of love. It wants the emotion without the sacrifice.”

We bear one another's burdens. We are not afraid of the worst about each other, because Christ has sacrificed Himself for our shame and guilt. Therefore we love one another.

Two trusts, two communities,

### **3 Two Confidences (vs. 5-11):**

Certainty & Maybe

the certainty of the Resurrection

the maybe of there is no life beyond death

The Apostle Peter uses this psalm in Acts 2 to show that David is writing about Christ. V. 10 > David's tomb is right over there... but Jesus was not abandoned to the grave, death could not hold Him. “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses.”

Peter is saying that the Resurrection proves everything that Jesus said and did is true, believable, and we must abandon all other hopes, especially our hopes in ourselves.

Peter says – “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

v.5-11 > between certainty and maybe / between truth and denial > certainty of the Resurrection; between what is (the resurrection) and what could be (death, corruption, blood) ... the attraction of blood, death... the culture of feasting on what brings death, doubling down on sin and death...

Assurance is guaranteed. It may take a lot to get there, but it is certain. You may have to battle all kinds of doubt and temptation, but God will get you there. It's not self-confidence, it is God-confidence that produces an outcome of confident assurance and affects your whole being.

vs. 5-6 > When you have the Lord, when you know He has you, this is what you can say. ILLUS of job, marriage, neighborhood (Monroeville) – this is not what I expected, but this is where God has me. I have no other choice but to believe this and to bloom here, where I am planted. When I got there, it made life much better.

The getting there... wow, a process, a trial – look at v. 7 – David had to receive counsel – instruction, teaching, through sleepless nights, to internalize it, to get it into his inner being, into his guts.

There isn't anyone in the Bible that just gets this, that is born with this kind of confident dependence. Even Jesus – Heb 5:7-8 > “In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save Him from death, and he was heard because of His reverence. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered.”

It is the fruit of suffering.

When the Lord is your confidence, look at what you can face! > sleeplessness, insomnia, being chased, homelessness, death.

\*Draw out especially v. 7 – night, loneliness, alone-ness, frustration – quote from Amy Carmichael – “I went away alone...I had feelings of fear about the future. That was why I went there – to be alone with God. The devil kept on whispering, ‘It's all right now, but what about afterwards? You are going to be very lonely.’ And he painted pictures of loneliness—I can see them still. And I turned to my God in a kind of desperation and said, ‘Lord, what can I do? How can I go on to the end?’ And He said, ‘None of them that trust in Me shall be desolate.’ That word has been with me ever since. It has been

fulfilled to me. It will be fulfilled to you.” - quoted in *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* by Ruth Tucker

And then David builds up, crescendo's up, to the end. Gladness, rejoicing confidence. Fullness of joy. This can be yours. It is yours if you are in Christ.

**Conc:**

How do you know if the Lord is your confidence?

Have you made him your confidence? Can you put your name, your ownership on this song?

ILLUS of singing along to your favorite song... it's the singer's song, but you so identify with what it is saying that it's yours. And when you sing along and you abandon yourself to the song, like when you see that guy across the intersection from you and he is just jamming out and singing at the top of his lungs oblivious to everyone else. He has momentarily transformed himself to another world. That's what Christianity is. That's what David has experienced.

Don Carson says, “To know God is to be transformed and thus to be introduced to a life that could not otherwise be experienced.” You may not know what this is like b/c you don't yet have the experiential knowledge of God!

But if you want this, you can have it. God rewards those who earnestly seek Him with all of this that David is singing about, that Christ Jesus gives > the path of life, fullness of joy, pleasures forever. Security, safety, fearlessness.

Abandon your self trust and surrender to the great love of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Anthony Kennedy made it onto the highest court in the land due, it could be argued, to marijuana and a penumbra.

When a vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court became available in 1987, Ronald Reagan nominated two other men before settling on Kennedy, the president's third choice.

Douglas Ginsburg withdrew from consideration after admitting to using marijuana while a law school professor. The first choice had been Robert Bork, who was taken out of consideration because of a decade old-penumbra (i.e., a group of rights derived, by implication, from other rights explicitly protected in the Bill of Rights).

In the case of *Griswold v Connecticut* (1965), the Supreme Court struck down a state law prohibiting the possession, sale, and distribution of contraceptives to married couples. In deciding *Griswold*, the justices found within the Bill of Rights various "penumbras" and "emanations" that create "a zone of privacy." Later court rulings substituted the term "zone" with "right," making it possible to find innumerable "rights of privacy" within the Constitution that had previously remained undiscovered.

## Penumbra of Privacy Leads to Death

The most notorious example came in 1973, when the Court concluded in *Roe v. Wade* that while the Constitution "does not explicitly mention any right of privacy," the "right of personal privacy, or a guarantee of certain areas or zones of privacy, does exist under the Constitution." From that penumbra they concluded, "This right of privacy . . . is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy."

Judge Bork rejected the idea that there was a "zone of privacy" secretly embedded in the Constitution. "Constitutional guarantees not only have contents, they have contours that set limits," Bork said in his confirmation hearing.

Democrats in the Senate recognized that by rejecting the penumbras of privacy Bork was rejecting the recently created right to abortion. So the Democrats rejected his nomination.

When the Senate confirmed Reagan's third nominee, the president claimed that Kennedy was a "true conservative." Yet four years later, Kennedy joined Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Justice David Souter in writing the court's plurality opinion in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*. The *Casey* decision not only reaffirmed *Roe* but also imposed a new standard to determine the validity of laws restricting abortions.

## Notorious Mystery Passage

In the 1992 opinion Kennedy included what the editors of *First Things* dubbed the "notorious 'mystery passage'": "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." You'd search in vain to find a more apt description of our secular age. It's not as though Kennedy invented our culture of expressive individualism. No one would fault him for introducing our "age of authenticity," to borrow a phrase from philosopher Charles Taylor.

But Kennedy gave language to this age's turn to self as ultimate authority. And then he codified that authority at the nation's highest legal level through his interpretation of the Constitution. Without the "right to define one's own concept of existence" and "the mystery of human life" we would not still today have the legal right to deny existence to babies in their mothers' wombs. We would not have the right to deny these helpless children, our very offspring, their own chance to define the mystery of human life. Abortion is the fruit of a culture that cannot live for or even imagine anything meaningful beyond the self. Abortion is the cost we pay to ensure the self will not be encumbered by the consequences of its choices. Abortion is the reason Kennedy's retirement triggered apocalyptic predictions from the gatekeepers of this self-centered morality.

Kennedy's "notorious mystery passage" would re-emerge in another age-defining Court decision. Writing for the 6-3 majority in the 2003 decision *Lawrence v. Texas*, Kennedy once again returned to what fellow Justice Antonin Scalia denounced as the "famed sweet-mystery-of-life passage" that "ate the rule of law." This decision struck down anti-sodomy laws, which would eventually pave the way for perhaps the most significant decision of our lifetime, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which invalidated all laws that defined marriage as between one man and a woman. Once again Kennedy would join the Court's liberals and write the majority 5-4 decision.

We could argue for years and never conclusively determine whether politics and law are downstream from culture or if politics and law shape our culture. Undoubtedly the streams flows both directions. Whatever direction you identify, you can see how Kennedy, more than anyone else, moved to the wrong side of the law all who recognize authority in the divine lawgiver or even in our nation's own legal history. In this new legal atmosphere, God cannot violate the sovereign self. Tradition may not bound the sovereign self. Whatever the self determines is right; whatever the self determines must be acknowledged and accepted by every other self.

## Sovereign Self

How we're supposed to get along in a society ruled by every man, woman, and child who survives birth, Kennedy never told us. He did show willingness to afford religious believers the freedom to exercise their conscience in more recent decisions, including *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*. He concurred with the 5-4 majority in *defense of Hobby Lobby*. And he joined the 7-2 majority that *ruled for Trinity Lutheran Church*. Still, Kennedy leaves the Court at a time when sovereign selves across the political spectrum regard their political enemies as existential threats to their "right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." That's because the self cannot possibly carry this burden. And society cannot long endure when every self wields this right as a bludgeon against every other self that reaches different conclusions on the meaning of the universe and its very own life.

The genius of America is the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In a misguided effort to expand liberty, Kennedy denied life to our most vulnerable citizens, and he thwarted the pursuit of happiness by saddling the self with impossible demands. He ruled on the nation's highest Court at a time when conservatives and liberals have ceded unprecedented power to nine unelected, lifetime justices, so they can adjudicate fights we share no common concern to settle ourselves.

The solution is not just to replace Kennedy with a justice who views the Constitution differently. The solution is to ask God that he would give us a Court—indeed, a whole government—that seeks justice, corrects oppression, brings justice to the fatherless, and pleads the widow's cause (*Isa. 1:17*). We don't just need to shift the Court in a different direction. We need a society

that recognizes the self is a cruel taskmaster and incompetent peacemaker. We need a society that turns toward God, who has endowed each one of us with the privilege of caring for each other and all creation as we bear his image.

**Joe Carter** is an editor for The Gospel Coalition, the editor of the *NIV Lifehacks Bible*, and the co-author of *How to Argue Like Jesus: Learning Persuasion from History's Greatest Communicator*. He serves as an elder at [Grace Hill Church](#) in Herndon, Virginia. You can [follow him on Twitter](#).

**Collin Hansen** serves as editorial director for The Gospel Coalition. He is the author of several books, including *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey With the New Calvinists* and *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir* (with John Woodbridge). He earned an MDiv at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and an undergraduate degree in journalism and history from Northwestern University. He edited *Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor* and *The New City Catechism Devotional*, among other books. He and his wife belong to [Redeemer Community Church](#) in Birmingham, Alabama, and he serves on the advisory board of [Beeson Divinity School](#).



Instagram



thegospelcoalition



“The courage to die for Christ begins long before the moment of martyrdom. That courage is born when you embrace Jesus’s call to take up your cross and follow him daily. It is a courage that grows as you wield God’s Word. It is a courage refreshed by the Holy Spirit, who daily empowers you to die to self, to pray for those who persecute you, and to even die like your Savior. This is the courage that changes the world.”

—Dieudonné Tamfu,  
*Janani Luwum (1922-77): Faithful unto Death*

12 Faithful Men by Collin Hansen and Jeff Robinson, eds. • #12FaithfulMen



1,219 likes

**thegospelcoalition** Most pastors know when they enter the ministry that they will spend time... more

View all 10 comments

