

O Lord, our God and our Father
in heaven, you're the great and eternal God, the creator of the
ends of the earth. You're the one who is and who
is and who is to come. From everlasting to everlasting,
you are God. You turn man back to dust and
say, return, O children of men, For a thousand years in your
sight are like yesterday when it passes by, are like a watch
in the night. You've swept the passing generations
of mankind away like a flood. We fall asleep, O Lord. In the
morning we're like grass which sprouts anew, but towards evening
we fade and we wither away. But you are not like that. The
God of Jacob is not like these, O God. You are from eternity. the days of eternity,
O Lord.

And we come to you to root ourselves in the rock of our salvation.
I pray that you would speak to us this evening and do for us
what we cannot do for ourselves. Save those this evening who are
still dead in their sins. Reveal your love to them and
your saving power and call them to yourself, O Lord. with the
voice that wakes the dead. And for those of us who know
you, O God, we pray you would reach down and draw us nearer
to you, nearer tonight than we were this morning, that our life's
history in this world would be one of continual growth in the
knowledge of God, and that you would bless us and strengthen
us. For Jesus' sake, amen. Amen. If you turn with me in your copy
of the Word of God, to Psalm chapter 14. And we'll see boys and girls
this evening. Are there any boys and girls
still left here? After that wonderful children's
sermon by Scotty. Now there's a place in the Bible
that says there is no God. and it's in the heart of a fool. Many years ago, I said
this to

the 8.30 crowd, the 8.15 crowd this morning, but I was remarking
that many years ago when I was still in my kind of cage stage
as a preacher and I refused ever to change from the let you continue
pattern of Scripture, as I just take the next passage, whatever
it was, as we made our way through the church calendar. It didn't
matter what day it was, every day was the Lord's Day. And Christmas,
Easter, we just kept preaching. And I was going through the Psalms
at Kirk of the Isles in Savannah, and Psalm 14 on the Christmas,
I think it was either Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. It was
our evening worship service we had way back then. And I was
going through the Psalms on our Psalm that evening with Psalm
14. And of all times for an atheist to come to church, this atheist,
he was a journalist in the town, came to church. I think he wanted
some Christmas cheer. Even Dawkins said he loves Christmastime,
the lights and so forth. He calls himself a cultural Christian,
he loves the hymns of Christmas and so forth, even though he
doesn't know the God of Christmas. And this atheist came to church
and was quite shocked when I announced my text, Psalm 14, the fool hath
said in his heart. There is no God. And in God's
wondrous providence, he wasn't converted that night, but in

the weeks to come, the sermon and the idea of Psalm 14 kind of rattled around in his brain, and he gradually came to faith and is now still a member back at Kirk of the Isles in God's mercy. So it's a wonderful text, and we look at it this evening. This is the word of God. The fool, sorry, to the choir master of David, The fool says in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt. They do abominable deeds. There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt. There is none who does good, not even one. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the Lord? There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would shame the plans or the counsel of the poor But the Lord is his refuge. Know that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion when the Lord restores the fortunes of his people. Let Jacob rejoice. Let Israel be glad. The fool says in his heart, there is no God. And there are many in our culture who share that creed, an increasing number. of nuns. A lot of the nuns just have no particular religious affiliation, but there's a growing atheistical mood in our society. People claiming there is no God. I wonder this evening, perhaps, could there be someone here who shares that creed? Maybe a visitor, maybe even a child of the church who has a drug problem. Your parents keep dragging you to church, and here you are again. drugged to church by your parents, and you are sitting in the pew, and in your heart of hearts, you think we're all silly, wasting our time, and you pride yourself. You know better than your mom and dad. You know better than your brothers and sisters who may believe in these silly fairy tales. You know better than Pastor Stewart. You know deep down in your heart there is no God. Well, there's a psalm this evening for you, and it's this one. And there are many in our culture who share your faith, or lack thereof. Steve Turner, who's a British journalist, wrote what he calls the Creed of the Atheist, and it sums up perfectly the essence of atheism. We believe in Marx, Freud, and Darwin. We believe everything is okay, as long as you don't hurt anyone, to the best of your definition of hurt, and to the best of your knowledge. We believe in sex before, during, and after marriage. We believe in the therapy of sin. We believe that adultery is fun. We believe that sodomy is okay. We believe that taboos are taboo. We believe that everything is getting better despite evidence to the contrary. The evidence must be investigated, but you can prove anything with evidence. We believe there's something in horoscopes, UFOs, and bent spoons. Jesus was a good man, just like Buddha, Muhammad, and ourselves. He was a good man, a good moral

teacher, although we think some of his good morals were bad. We believe that all religions are basically the same, at least the one we read about was. They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ in matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation. We believe that after death comes the nothing, because when you ask the dead what happens after death, they say nothing. If death is not the end, if the dead have lied, then it's compulsory, heaven for all, excepting perhaps Hitler, Stalin, and Hengist Khan. We believe in masters and Johnson. What's selected is average. What's average is normal, and what's normal is good. We believe in total disarmament. We believe there are direct links between warfare and bloodshed. Americans should beat their guns and detractors, and the Russians would be sure to follow. We believe that man is essentially good. It's only his behavior that lets him down. This is the fault of society. Society is the fault of conditions, and conditions are the fault of society. We believe that each man must find the truth that's right for him, and reality will adapt accordingly. The universe will readjust. History will alter. We believe there is no absolute truth except the truth that there is no absolute truth. We believe in the rejection of creeds. And then later, Steve Turner wrote this postscript. If chance be the father of all flesh, disaster is his rainbow in the sky. And when you hear state of emergency, sniper kills 10, troops on rampage, white school looting, bomb blasts school, it is but the sound of man worshiping his maker. The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. The fool, in biblical terms, is Naval, or Nabal. You've heard that name before if you know your Old Testament. He's a man whose mind is closed, his heart is hard, his conscience is seared, his life is filthy, and his soul is dead. And our psalm this evening portrays the folly of this man's mind and of his life. The first thing we see is the revelation of folly. The revelation of folly. You can't hide who you are and what you are. You make your choices and then your choices return the favor. They make you. Show me your thoughts, and I'll show you your future. And it's hard to keep our mindset inside. What a man thinketh in his heart, that he is, the Bible says. And what you think in your heart will come out of your mouth and come out of your hand. It'll come out of your mouth in the words you say, and it'll come out of your hands in the things you do. And this man's mindset, his folly is no exception. It's revealed in two distinct directions, his attitude towards God and his attitude towards his people, God's people. He denies the person of God in verses one to three. The fool says in his heart there is no God. And you see the effects of that upon his heart, his soul, his mind, and his morals. And then in verses four to seven,

we see him demean and attempt to destroy the people of God. This man's mindset, which becomes his lifestyle, prompts wonderment from God. Well, the Chesedon says, there are no shortage of wonders in the world, but there is a shortage of wonderment. We see wonders every day, but very few wonder at it. Well, here's something that makes God himself wonder. Have these people no knowledge? All the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread. So their folly is revealed in their attitude toward God and toward his people. He denies the person of God. He demeans and attempts to destroy the people of God. That's the revelation of folly. Next we see the essence of folly. The fool is a fool not just because his thoughts are wrong, not just because his thoughts are worthless, but because his thoughts are weak. They have no power to change reality. It's one thing to deny God in your mind, to try and banish him from your thoughts, It's quite another, though, to actually banish him from reality. You can try to do the one, banish him from your thoughts, suppress him in your mind, but you can't banish God from reality. He is there. He's the great I am. He is the existing one from whom all other things that exist have their existence. What we heard in John 1, all things came into being through him and apart from him, nothing that has come into being has come into being. The ground beneath your feet, the sky above your heads, the birds that fly in it, the sun and the moon and the billions of stars that litter the cosmos as far as the eye can see, as far as the mind can imagine. It's a vast expanse. And all of it finds its existence flowing from the existence of God, its creator. I heard one apologist say, what would you say if you heard an atheist say, I can deny the existence of God? And he said, I'd think about the same as a mosquito who claimed he could destroy Everest with his hind left foot. That mosquito can bash that mountain forever in a day, but he'll break his foot before he ever knocks a piece of dust off the mountain of Everest. And you can deny God until the cows come home, as they say in Northern Ireland, but you can't change the fact that God is. And you only exist because God exists. And deep down in your heart, we all know that is true. As I prayed at the beginning of the prayer, for since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes have been clearly seen being understood by the things that are made because God Himself has shown it to us. We know who God is. We know we ought to glorify Him and we ought to give Him thanks. But human beings all across this planet suppress that truth in unrighteousness. But it makes no difference to the fact that God is there whether we want to admit it or choose to deny it. Now, the atheist thoughts are weak because they cannot change three fundamental facts of reality. And they're in

our psalm this evening. First of all, the perception of God from heaven, that God is in heaven and he perceives everything that goes on on earth. The perception of God in heaven, from heaven. Then secondly, the presence of God amidst his people. And thirdly, the providence of God over history. First of all, these thoughts are weak because they cannot change the fact of the perception of God from heaven or God's perception from heaven, maybe a better way of putting it. The fool says in his heart, there's no God. They're corrupt. They do abominable deeds. There's none who does good. The Lord, Yahweh, Looks down from heaven. The word looks down in the Hebrew carries the idea of looking down from a great vantage point. High and lifted up. So high you can see everything else. Everything else becomes into perspective. The whole lay of the land comes clearly into view. That's the picture of the psalmist. The atheist may say there's no God, but God is in heaven. And he looks down and he sees all literally of the sons of Adam, the sons of Adam. He sees all men, every nation, tribe, and tongue. God is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, above the angels and the archangels and the seraphim, far beyond all of the planets, far beyond the cosmos, up and up as high as high can be, higher than any creature can ever go. God is exalted above us all. And from that lofty vantage point, he looks down upon us. He sees all the sons of men. And while the fool may claim to have no knowledge of God, the psalmist says, oh, but God has full knowledge of you. He knows absolutely everything about you. He knows who you are intellectually. He knows what's going on in your heart. How does David know what the fool says in his heart? He can't know. We can't know. I was talking to one of my children this weekend. They were receiving some difficult, oppressive leadership in a particular area where they were working. And they wanted, this offspring of mine, wanted to go and give the leader a piece of their mind. And much of what they wanted to say was good and true, but I had to caution them, be careful, because you don't know their motives. You don't know what's going on in their heart. And every time you dare to speak about what you think this person's trying to do, what they're really trying to go after. You're venturing beyond your jurisdiction. You don't know what's going on in someone's heart, but this psalmist says that God does. His word is living and active. It's sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to the division of soul, of spirit, of joints of marrow. It discerns the thoughts and the intentions of our heart. And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things and all people are naked and laid bare before the eyes of him with whom we have to do. He knows us intellectually. There is no privacy from him.

Nothing slips under his radar. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand. The word understand in Hebrew

is *sahil*. Which means to think through your complicated problem and then come up with an appropriate solution. The idea here is God is looking down on human beings walking about this planet. And he wants to see, essentially, do you know what side your theological bread is buttered on? Do you know that I am God and that you are not? When you look at the cosmos, this vast array of majestic, creative power, its majesty, its intricacy, the little wings of a mosquito flapping about, your house buzzing, or more pleasantly, a hummingbird poising with such intricacy before the sugar water dispensers that you put outside your kitchen window and you watch them. It's a masterpiece of engineering. We design a Raptor, an F-22 Raptor. It's an amazing jet. Vertical takeoff and all those different things it can do. But it can't fly with the precision of a hummingbird. Those wings rotate and flap so many hundreds of times a second. That keeps that bird perfectly still so it could put its little beak into that little hole and get the sugar water. It's a wonder to behold. And God is asking, can you look at that, the majesty and the intricacy of the cosmos, and figure out where it all came from? Can you look at that complicated problem and come up with the answer? It came from the fate of Almighty God, that it wasn't just a random product of a meaningless, purposeless process, but that it was a specific, intentional creation of an infinite divine intelligence. The question of origin. Can you look and figure out where did life come from? Can you question, can you figure out the question of origin, the question of meaning and purpose? What's life all about? Is there a meaning to life? Where's life headed? Death, yes, but is there life beyond death? The question of destiny. When you look at this world and you see the fracturing of the social contract in America, you see nations rising up against nations, China and Russia and Iran. Oh, flexing their muscles, Israel trying to fend off Hamas and Hezbollah and Iran and seeing the rapacious desire of men trying to take territory and kill other human beings. Can you figure out what's wrong with the world? The problem of evil and how it can be fixed? And then when you get up on Monday morning, can you figure out how to live? The question of ethics. And God is looking down to see, can any of the children of men put these pieces together and figure out where it all came from? Can they get to wisdom? A wisdom that leads them to think and to seek after God. He knows where we are intellectually. You can't hide from him. But human beings, like Adam and Eve in the garden, we're like toddlers. You play hide and seek with a three-year-old. What do they do? Daddy, you can't see me. And they think because they can't see you, you can't see them. And of course, You can. You play along with the game.

It's charming with a three-year-old. But all across this world, human beings are hiding from God. But you can't hide from God. He knows who you are intellectually. He hears the thoughts in your mind. Nothing can be hidden from him. He knows also where we are spiritually. Are there any who seek after God? The word to seek here, *derash* in the Hebrew, it means to seek after something of value, something that's worthwhile. You seek for treasure. Something of great and abiding value. Is there anybody in this world seeking after God? Let me ask you a question. Are you seeking after God? If you were arrested tomorrow and your thoughts were marshaled against you as evidence, and you were accused of being a man or a woman or a boy or a girl who sought after God, would there be enough evidence to convict you? If you're a teenager and you say, well, I read the Bible, and Satan, who's a really good prosecutory attorney, stands up and goes, yes, your honor, he does read his Bible only because his mom makes him do it. He doesn't love to do it. If you're not spending time seeking God, what's that tell you about the value you place on God? That's convicting. They've all turned aside, God says, as he's examining their spiritual trajectory. The problem of the human condition, as I said, isn't just one of weakness. It's not that we kind of make these misguided but well-meaning mistakes. No, this is language that describes deliberate defiance. We've turned aside because we meant to turn aside. One atheist said, or one apologist said, an atheist can't find God for the same reason a thief can never seem to find a policeman. We can often justify this decision to turn aside from God. It's a bit like, you know, rules apply to thee but not to me. Like, when I'm driving down the road and I see you on your cell phone texting, I'm thinking, what a waster. That's so dangerous. But if my wife texts me, it's really important that I'm texting. For me, it's different, right? The rule applies to you, but not to me. When I was driving down 77 yesterday, and this guy in an M3, beautiful car, flew past me at like 90 miles an hour. And literally, there was a car, like, where the front row is, and me. He flew in, zigzagged before me, almost tripped my bumper. He's doing like 90 miles an hour faster. He's flying. Almost hits me, and then almost hits the guy in front of me, and weaves through the traffic. I'm thinking, Lord, why is there never a policeman when you want one? Right. Later on down the road, there was a speed cop, and he pulled over some dear housewife who'd been caught speeding. And I'm thinking, why couldn't he have caught the guy in the M3? But then when I'm speeding, I do not want to find a policeman saying, Lord, please have mercy. We can justify our sin. You never smell your own bad breath. But I can smell your bad breath. And other people who don't seek after God, we think, well, they're just wasters. But me, I'm busy.

I've got the deceitfulness of riches, the busyness of life. and the desires of other things
for other things. Yes, these are the very weeds
that grew up and choke the life of God out of the souls of human
beings. There's none who seeks after
God. Later in the Psalm, God says, have they no knowledge?
Are they complete ignoramuses? Which means the same thing as
agnostic. But agnostic sounds so much more classy. Ignoramus. Have they no
knowledge? Agnostic, no knowledge. Ignoramus,
no knowledge. But have they no knowledge? All
the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread. And do not
call upon the Lord. It's convicting. Reminded of
McShane's great quote, what a man is on his knees before God, that
he is and no more. He knows where we are intellectually. He knows where we are
spiritually. He knows where we are morally.
The fool says in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt. They do abominable
deeds. There is none who does good,
no, not even one. It's very convicting. The word
corrupt here means rotten to the core. That which is destructive,
sin has been destructive, it's perverted us, it's bent us out
of shape, but it's also offensive, abominable deeds. The Hebrew
for abominable means a nauseating stench. And you need to see the connection
between the second half of verse one and the first half of verse
one. This is the lifestyle that flows from the idea the fool
says in his heart, there is no God. It's one of my elders back
in Greensboro like to say, ideas have consequences and bad ideas
have victims. While this man's ideology cannot
change the fact of God's throne in the heavens, it does change
him and for the worse. The great theologian, Professor
John Murray, was asked once by a reporter, tell me, sir, what
do you think about God? That's a fair question. I mean,
John Murray's a genius. He's a professor of systematic
theology at Westminster, back in the day, one of the great
searing intellects of Westminster. And what do you think about God?
And John Murray looked at him and said, oh, sir, Far be it
from me to tell you what I think about God. I am much more concerned
to discover what does God think about me. The perception of God in heaven
is not changed. The perception, God's perception
from heaven, makes more sense, isn't changed. All of the ranting
and the raving of the atheist cannot change the fact that God
is in heaven and he looks down, he knows us intellectually, spiritually,
and morally, all the way down to the bottom. Secondly, and
more briefly, it can't change the fact of the presence of God
amidst his people. Verse four, have they no knowledge,
all the evildoers, you eat up my people as they eat bread,
and do not call upon the Lord. These are the wicked are attacking
God's people, and God's people seem so weak and so helpless.
Mr. Thoreau, Thoreau, Thoreau, I
don't get it. The guy up in Canada, the little
man with the little authority, and he likes to put pressure

on the church, and he eats up God's people as if they were nothing, bread. But there's coming a day, the psalmist says, when they'll be in great terror. Why? For God is with the generation of the righteous. You would shame, you would mock him for the counsel of the poor. These poor people who, in Psalm 1, you have the counsel, blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked. Here's the poor walking in the counsel of God and the wicked are mocking them. These foolish people listening to the Bible, silly people. And you'd shame them and mock them and laugh at them. The Lord is his refuge. And all of you are ranting and raving, can't take God out of the heavens, and I can't take God out of the midst of his people, young people this evening. This place is the most significant place in all the world because God is here, not just in this room, but in these people. God himself is with us, and we can run to him and take refuge in him. C.S. Lewis says, in the end, that face, the face of God, which is the delight or the terror of the universe, must be turned upon each one of us, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised. The atheist can't change God's perception from heaven, or God's presence amidst his people, or God's providence over history. Look at the last verse. What's the assumption? Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion. When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad. There's a providence. ruling history that grips His people with a tender omnipotence that is overruling all of the events of life for our salvation and for our joy. And the atheist, with all of his proud cavils, cannot undo the fundamentally Christ-shaped bent of history. The people of God might suffer now, but they'll not suffer forever. God will send salvation upon them. And with that salvation, there will be great joy. Let Jacob rejoice. Let Israel be glad. Isn't that wonderful? Because Jacob and Israel are the same person, right? Jacob is the twister who spent the early half of his life trying to get the blessing of God by wrestling with his own grit and gumption, wrestling against God from a posture of strength. I'll get the blessing. I'll get the birthright. I'll deceive my dad. And for years and years and years, the providence of God grinds this man down until that moment in Peniel when Jacob has planned and plotted and schemed his way out of every trouble so far, and he's now facing his irate brother who's coming with umpteen hundred armed men, and you don't need all those armed men to say hello, and Jacob's panicking, and he's left by himself by Peniel, and God appears, and God wrestles with him all night long, and Jacob wrestles with God, and it says, when he saw, when God saw that he could not overcome him, and the Hebrew's a wee bit It's hard to know exactly what's being said there. And most commentators say, when God saw that God could not overcome Jacob, he fought

dirty and touched his hip. But I'm not persuaded that's what the text is saying at all. I think the text is saying, when God saw that Jacob saw that Jacob couldn't overcome him, After all of this wrestling all night long, and when Jacob finally realized, I can't beat this guy, I can't overcome this guy, I'm out of my depth, out of my league, at that moment, when that thought went into Jacob's mind, God then touched his hip, and in a decimating moment, dislocated the man's hip and left Jacob clinging to God. As daybreak comes, what does God say? Let me go. Because you can't see God and live. Let me go. What does Jacob say? I'll not let you go until you bless me. And then Jacob learned the grand lesson of lessons, that you don't get the blessing and the birthright by fighting against God from a posture of strength, wily strength. Oh no, you get the blessing by clinging to God from a posture of helpless weakness. I will not let you go until you bless me. And in that moment, Jacob becomes Israel. And he's called the God of Israel, but he's also delighted to be called the God of Jacob, because he doesn't just become our God when we learn and we grow and we become strong in faith and godliness, but he's our God all the way back to the beginning. And he owns us as his people, and we can own him as our God wherever we find ourselves on the journey from guilt through grace to glory. And there's joy promised to Jacob and there's joy promised to Israel because of the fundamentally Christ-shaped nature of history and reality. If you're here this evening and you're an atheist and you like to pride yourself there's no God, your ideas are weak and they're worthless and they're wrong. You can deny God till the cows come home, but it doesn't change the fact of God's perception from heaven. He sees you and he knows you. God's presence amidst his people, he is with us and he is our refuge. Wouldn't you like to join us, taking refuge in him? There's no refuge from him, but oh, there is refuge in him. And his providence over history, he's ruling all things for the good of his people. So you have the revelation of folly. In this man's attitude toward God and God's people, you have the essence of folly. And you have the prevalence of folly. This idiot, excuse that technical term, but this idiot, we look at him this evening not in, or not through a window, but by nature. We look at him in a murder. He is we, and we are he. This folly, living as if we were God, and that ours was the kingdom, and ours is the power, and ours is the glory, is not a problem out there in the world. The line of atheism flows through every human heart. There is none who does good, none. They have all turned aside. Are there any who seek after God? No. They have all become corrupt. There is none who does good, no, not one." Which is why we come back again to the feet of that stubbornly persistent and yet remarkably plausible Galilean carpenter who says to you and to me, you

must be born again. Until you are, you can't see the kingdom of God, you can't enter the kingdom of God, and you don't really know what's going on in this world. Like my bank manager back in Northern Ireland, he had this sign on his wall, there are three types of people in this world, those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who ask, what just happened? And the atheist has no idea what's going on in this world, because he's dead to God and blind to everything. And this psalm is here as a mirror to show us by nature who we are and what we are. And if you're a Christian, it should make you rejoice that though I was blind, yet now I see. Though I was lost, yet now I am found. Though I was on my way to damnation and was a child of wrath, even as the rest, yet when I was dead in my sins, God made me alive together with Christ. Praise his name. And if you're an atheist this evening or an agnostic, this psalm is there as a mirror to show you yourself and to wake you up, to shake you up, that you might call out to God to do for you what you cannot do for yourself, to give you life, to make all things new from the inside out, to see things as they really are. And the first step to seeing things as they really are is to see yourself as you really are. I think it was Michelangelo when he first began painting. His teacher asked him why he painted men and women in the nude. And Michelangelo said, because I want to see them as God sees them. And his teacher said, yes, but you're not God. That's the first and fundamental lesson human beings need to learn, and until we do, We'll never know what side our theological bread is buttered on. Come to Jesus. He's the way and the truth and the life, and He'll show you who you are, and He'll show you who God is, and He'll bring you home to the Father through His death on the cross. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the wondrous glory of your word. It's like the sun in the heavens. We believe it's there not just because we see it, but because we can see all things by its light. It shows us who we are and who you are and how wonderful it is to live in the real world where truth is truth at all times and for all people and in all places. Help us to walk in that truth and to seek your face and to call upon your name while you may be found. In Jesus' name, amen.