

# **Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide**

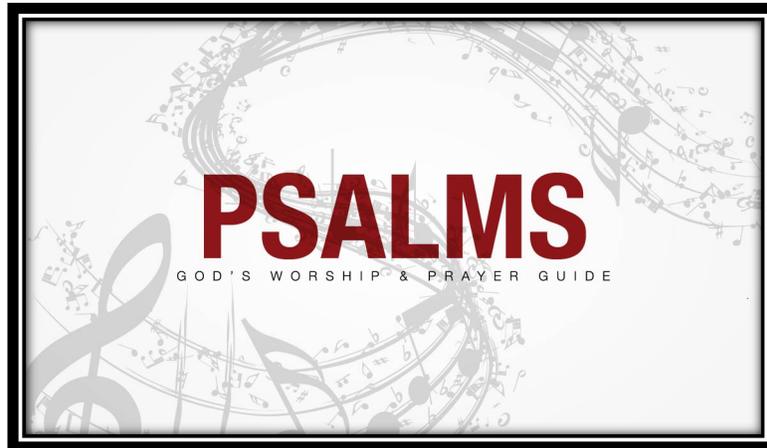
## *A Garden, God, & the Godless*

Selected Texts

Written By

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**D**oes God exist? Non-Christian philosophers Anthony Flew and John Wisdom devised a modern-day parable to shed light on the age-old question of all questions in life.

Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing growing side by side were many flowers and many weeds. One of the explorers exclaimed, "Some gardener must tend this plot!" So they pitched their tents and set a watch.

But though they waited several days no gardener was seen.

"Perhaps he is an invisible gardener!" they thought. So they set up barbed wire fence and connected it to electricity. They even patrolled the garden with bloodhounds, for they remembered that H.G. Wells' "Invisible Man" could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen. But no sounds ever suggested that someone had received an electric shock. No movements of the wire ever betrayed an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never alerted them to the presence of any other in the garden than themselves. Yet, still the believer between them was convinced that there was indeed a gardener.

There must be a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to elective shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves."

At last the skeptical explorer despaired, “But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary Gardner or even from no gardener at all?”<sup>1</sup>

You are probably either the believing or skeptical explorer. You either probably look at a story like this and either conclude, “The order, specified complexity, and design of this unique garden naturally and logically points to a Master Gardener, God,” or you, like the second man, basically sit back and muse, “In order for me to believe in God, you are going to have to show Him to me. All this particular garden shows is random chance could be responsible. God, therefore, is just a prejudicial perspective, a personal point of view.”

Three thousand years ago, David, wrote a psalm/song for Israel’s worship in the Temple which puts the question about God’s existence or non-existence in order. In typical Davidic style, he drew a hard, definitive line in the sand with these powerful, thought-provoking words:

<sup>1</sup> The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good (Psalm 14).

Whoa. He minced no words, did he?

Having investigated the evidence for the existence of God in the cosmos (Psalm 19), coupled with divine power he encountered in God’s inspired Law and Word (Psalm 119), David knew it was intellectually foolish and dishonest to take the untenable position there is no God inside or outside the cosmos. Hence he concluded that such a person is nothing short of a fool, a Hebrew word (*nabal*, נָבָל) denoting something which wilts.<sup>2</sup> Applied to a person, it denotes one who wilts before wise evidences and instruction, choosing rather their own way, which ironically and tragically is the wrong way (“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel,” Proverbs 12:15, “Fools take no delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind,” Proverbs 18:2).

Is this you?

Alister McGrath was a devout atheist, Marxist, and lover of socialism and hater of Christianity back in the 1960s. As a lover of mathematics and science in high school, he naturally attended Oxford University to pursue a higher degree in chemistry, choosing to focus on molecular biophysics. He started his studies in 1971, and thoroughly enjoyed how they substantiated his disbelief in God. At this time, he believed that Christian belief in God was just that, a belief lacking any valid, viable reasons. His atheistic view, on the other hand, rested squarely on rock solid evidences.

From a Davidic perspective, however, he wilted before the evidence of divine existence. He was, in fact, a fool. Why? While at Oxford he started talking to Christians and quickly discovered he knew very little about Christianity and its proofs for God. Authors like Bertrand Russell and Karl Marx convinced him there was no link between natural science and God, only an inexorable link between science and atheism. Yet, the more he investigated the claims of Christians, the more he discovered his disbelief in God rested not on scientific proofs but an

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Flew, “Theology and Falsification,” in John Hick, ed., *The Existence of God* (New York: Collier Books, 1964), 225.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 710-711.

untenable belief system. He also was shocked to learn most of his arguments against divine existence were directed against cleverly designed straw men he had devised, not against the actual arguments for God's existence Christians actually held. At this time of his life he was, from David's perspective, a fool.

This fool, however, came face to face with the weaknesses of his science in the face of excellent and logical Christian arguments for the reality of God's person. The academic journey he started in 1971 at Oxford to further his belief that science and atheism walked hand and glove with each other vaporized before the Christian evidences which embrace the belief that it is more logical to believe in a personal God who created all things and has a plan and purpose for each of us. Today Alister is one of the greatest, most gifted apologists (defenders) the Christian faith has ever seen, and he is a thinking, educated man.

What about you? Are you a foolish man or a wise man? A foolish man smugly and arrogantly (defiantly) argues against God's existence, while a wise man investigates the evidence and then humbly bows before the Creator in worship. Ostensibly, how you respond whether God exists really is *the* answer to all of life's and society's complex, gut-wrenching, fearsome problems. I say this because of what David says in Psalm 14:

For the choir director. A Psalm of David. <sup>1</sup> The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. <sup>2</sup> The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. <sup>3</sup> They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one. <sup>4</sup> Do all the workers of wickedness not know, who eat up my people *as* they eat bread, *And* do not call upon the Lord? <sup>5</sup> There they are in great dread, for God is with the righteous generation. <sup>6</sup> You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, but the LORD is his refuge. <sup>7</sup> Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores His captive people, Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad.

Do you see the cause/effect relationship here between belief/disbelief in God and how this impacts your life and world? Once sinful man (Rom. 5:12-21) rejects God and the evidences God has built into the warp and woof of the cosmos (Rom. 1:18ff), he naturally descends into ever-increasing darkness.

All of this, of course, tells us that the ultimate solutions to our personal and societal problems have really virtually nothing to do with voting in the right candidate, defunding organizations you think are harmful or inept, cancelling those who espouse worldviews you do not like, offering more training and education, giving people money they did not work for, creating more social programs, relaxing or creating more laws, and the like. No, man's troublesome, trying issues are directly related to his *systemic sin* and *systemic rejection* of the God who is there and who is, as Francis Schaeffer noted years ago, not silent.<sup>3</sup>

Why should man not reject God? More precisely,

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<sup>3</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *He is There and He is Not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972). I read this book when I graduated from college in 1980. It is one of the greatest books for giving us viable, logical, and philosophical evidences for the existence of God.

## What Are The Evidences There Is A Divine Gardener? (Psalm 14)

Because this question and its answers are so important for the healing of our nation and our people, because this question and its answers are the foundation for true, lasting hope and peace, and because this question and its answers are the hub of the wheel which brings ultimate purpose and meaning to all the spokes of life (Why am I here? What is my life's purpose? How should I respond to the law? How can I build a quality marriage? How can I raise wonderful, respectful children? How should I properly respond to injustice? How should I respond to faulty, potentially destructive worldviews? What kind of work ethic should I evidence? How should I view sexuality and gender . . . and what constitutes marriage? . . . to name a few spokes), we will take several weeks to dig into Psalm 14.

As we dig, permit me to say a few predatory things.

One, I cannot give you undeniable, complete airtight evidences for belief in God. No one can. Classical apologetics is, first and foremost, about establishing the reasonable foundation for belief in a divine being by considering various lines of logical, scientific, and philosophical evidences. At the conclusion of these evidences one is left to make a decision. Is it logical or illogical to believe in God?

Two, J. Warner Wallace, a former cold-case homicide detective turned Christian case maker, reminds us of the value of circumstantial evidence for proving a case,

. . . circumstantial evidence (also known as indirect evidence, emphasis his) does not prove something on its own, but points us in the right direction by proving something related to the question at hand. This related piece of evidence can then be considered (along with additional pieces of circumstantial evidence) to figure out what happened.<sup>4</sup>

Where the existence of God is concerned we will, therefore, consider the circumstantial evidence at hand to draw, hopefully, the most logical inference of what the data suggests. Does it point to a God or to no-god?

Three, we are typically told that science possesses all the answers to life. Peter Atkins, an English chemist and a Fellow of Lincoln College at the University of Oxford, says this much, "There is no reason to suppose that science cannot deal with every aspect of existence."<sup>5</sup> Science cannot do all Atkins touts it can. Science, or really scientism, has major limitations. It cannot answer the big questions of life: Why is there something rather than nothing? Why is their cosmic order and not total chaos? How did a Big Bang produce specified complexity? Since matter is not eternal, what preceded the cosmos? How did something come from nothing and no one? What is beauty? How do we know the difference between what we should and ought to do if we are simply part of evolutionary mindless chance processes? Science can tell me about the chemical construction of cocaine, but can it tell me whether I ought to ingest it on a daily basis? Scientism, or the belief that science possess the ability to answer all of life's questions has many metaphysical limitations which can only be answered by disciplines outside of science like philosophy and ultimately religion.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013), 57.

<sup>5</sup> *Nature's Imagination: The Frontiers of Scientific Vision*, ed. John Cornwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 125.

Four, even though we are talking about philosophical and logical evidences for God, do not get glassy-eyed, and, for sure, do not mentally check out by having a flashback to a philosophy class you took in college which put you out at your desk. If great thinkers like McGrath get saved on these types of evidences, it behooves us to know them, memorize them, and employ them in speaking with people who live as if there is not God.

Five, saving faith does not arise definitively from the evidences used to substantiate belief in God's existence. While these evidences can guide you toward God, they cannot give a relationship with Him. As Jesus said most clearly, "16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3). To this, Peter adds,

<sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health. <sup>11</sup> He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, *but* which became the very corner *stone*. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved (Acts 4).

With these foundational thoughts in mind, I invite you to come with me as we take a look at some of the circumstantial evidence I believe points us to a need to belief in an eternal Being.

## Evidence From Causation

I learned about cause and effect early on, especially by means of having two sisters. If I spent a good deal of time setting up dominos, and one of them waited until I finished my masterpiece to quickly (and/or secretly) push over the first domino, it did not take a rocket scientist to figure out what happened next. One by one and in consecutive order they all fell flat. I could, then, walk back into my domino room and draw some viable observations. One, I could surmise I had an unwanted effect, viz., all my dominos were laying down. Two, a first cause caused them to fall. Since there had not been an earthquake (remember, we were in California), and no pet had wandered through the room, I could deduce someone had engaged in "criminal" activity worthy of a report to my parents.

Yes, cause/effect ruled my young world and I knew as a youngster one cannot logically escape it. Later, when I won a first place ribbon in the county fair for making a large plaster model of the Hoover Dam, this highly complex effect was carefully designed and caused by me. To say it just appeared for me to take to my science teacher would have been ridiculous.

As I wrote this sermon, I headed into the staff kitchen to heat up my Chinese food. While waiting for it to cook in the microwave, I went over to a cabinet to get some salt. Resting on the counter were two round rocks. One was every bit a rock, while the other, which had the same smooth, round shape of the other, sported a bright blue paint job. "Hmmm," wondered. "I see an unusual effect. I wonder what or who caused it? Could it just have somehow become blue by itself? How did this paint get applied to this particular rock? Really, who did this." Believe me, heading into the staff kitchen can be a philosophical, metaphysical endeavor of the first order.

Causation, has for many years, provided thinking, inquisitive people with data which can guide them to see the need for a Divine One, God. In philosophical circles, causation is wedded to what is termed the cosmological argument. Cosmos is the Greek word for the world. Applied to this type of argument, it denotes the evidence we see in the cosmos for the logical probability

God exists. There are two types of this argument as Geisler denotes in *The Big Book of Christian Apologetics*:

“The horizontal cosmological argument reasons back to a Cause of the *beginning* of the universe. The vertical cosmological argument reasons from the *being* of the universe as it now exists. The former, explaining how the universe came to be . . . the latter, explaining how it continues to be . . . The first calls for an *originating* Cause and the latter for a *sustaining* Cause [emphases his].”<sup>6</sup>

We shall consider these two interesting arguments in order.

One, the horizontal cosmological argument, or the *kalam* (denoting its Arabic origins) can be presented in simple, yet helpful, syllogistic format. Per Dr. Norman Geisler’s *Introduction to Apologetics* doctoral class notes, it can be laid out in this fashion:

1. Everything that begins has a cause.
2. The universe had a beginning.
3. Therefore, the universe had a cause.

A Big Bang as the source of the cosmos is old news at this point in the scientific world. The question is, how, exactly, did it begin?

J. P. Moreland gives us our choices in his book *Love Your God With All Your Mind*,

1. The Universe Exists Now
  - a. Option 1: It Had A Beginning
  - b. Option 2: It Had No Beginning

Since item “b” is not logical based on the evidence at hand, we are forced to look at item “a.” I say option is not viable because it is impossible to traverse infinity. Hence, since we can count time, days, months, and so forth, it demonstrates time has a starting point from which we calculate. This would be impossible if time was/is infinite. Logically, then, option 1 is most viable.

2. The Universe Had A Beginning
  - a. Option 1: It Was Caused
  - b. Option 2: It Was Uncaused

Since “item “b” is a completely illogical because there is no such thing as an effect which is uncaused, or which causes itself, we are forced to move to consider item “a.” Everything which has a beginning has an ultimate cause. Option 1 is, therefore, the natural choice.

3. The Universe Was Caused
  - a. Option 1: It Was Personal
  - b. Option 2: It Was Impersonal<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *The Big Book of Christian Apologetics: An A to Z Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999), 98.

<sup>7</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 161.

Of these two options, one would be hard-pressed to believe that prior to the creation of the cosmos, this magnificent, complex effect, there existed some type of (unknown) impersonal force which just happened to cause all of this wonder and specified complexity. How could an unthinking impersonal anything create anything? Why would it? An impersonal force like electricity cannot, on its own initiate, create anything.

It seems, then, more plausible to conclude that a personal highly complex agent, God, created the complex effect we enjoy, coupled with the personal we thoroughly enjoy. Further, since we know that matter is not eternal based on the first two laws of thermodynamics, then at the beginning of the cosmos there was absolutely NOTHING. Regarding this, Francis Schaeffer observes:

“The first basic answer is that everything that exists has come out of absolutely nothing. In other words, you begin with nothing. Now, to hold this view, it must be absolutely nothing. It must be what I call nothing nothing. It cannot be nothing something or something nothing. If one is going to accept this answer, it must be nothing nothing, which means there must be no energy, no mass, no motion, and no personality.”<sup>8</sup>

I am compelled to continue to quote Schaeffer.

“The great problem with beginning with the impersonal is to find any meaning for the particulars. A particular is any individual factor, any individual meaning thing—the separate parts of a whole. A drop of water is a particular, and so is a man. If we begin with the impersonal, then how do any of the particulars that now exist—including man—have any meaning, any significance? Nobody has given us an answer to that . . . Beginning with the impersonal, everything, including man, must be explained in terms of the impersonal plus time and chance. Do not let anyone divert your mind at this point. There are no other factors in the formula, because there are no other facts that exist. If we begin with an impersonal, we cannot then have some form of teleological concept. No one has ever demonstrated how time plus chance, beginning with an impersonal, can produce the needed complexity of the universe, let alone the personality of man. No one has given us a clue to this”<sup>9</sup>

The late Christian apologist/thinker could not be more right. This leaves us with the logical and common sense position that a personal complex agent caused the magnificent, highly ordered effect of our universe. It would, therefore, be quite foolish, to employ David’s word, to believe an impersonal cause instituted this glorious and unfathomable cosmic effect. Someone, then, who is eternal, not temporal, and who is personal, not impersonal fashioned all we see and can study. Scripture identifies this Someone with Jesus when Paul writes:

<sup>13</sup> For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His Beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of

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<sup>8</sup> Schaeffer, *He is There and He is Not Silent*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

sins.<sup>15</sup> And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.<sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him (Col. 1).

These verses serve to guide us to the second part of the cosmological argument, the vertical argument.

The vertical aspect of the cosmological argument seeks to answer the question: Since the cosmos (an effect) had a definite beginning (a cause), and that cause was most logically personal as opposed to impersonal, what is the evidence that this Personal One really exists? To answer this query, Geisler posits the following syllogistic argument:

1. Something exists (I do)
2. Nothing cannot produce something
3. Therefore, something exists eternally and necessarily
4. I am not a necessary and eternal being (since I change)
5. Thus, both God (a Necessary Being) and I (a contingent being) exist (=theism).<sup>10</sup>

This is what you see in the creation account of Genesis 1-2. God, who is outside of our time and space as the eternal One, created everything, including us, and collectively we are all dependent things/beings. Again, the Scriptures speak of God as the eternal One quite often:

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, (Ps. 9).

<sup>16</sup> The LORD is King forever and ever; (Ps. 10).

<sup>6</sup> Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. (Ps. 45).

<sup>8</sup> But Thou, O LORD, art on high forever. (Ps. 92)

In a temporal cosmos built on the premise of cause and effect you logically need a divine being who is eternal to set it all in motion and to keep it going after it was created.

All of this type of talk usually leads to the following question: "If God created cause and effect, who created Him?" This is usually asked as if this shuts down all this God-talk as if a laser guided missile of just arrived. The truth is the law of causality does not mean, as many have pointed out, that "everything has a cause. The law of causality says that everything that has a beginning has a cause, or every effect has a cause. But not everything can be an effect. In order for there to be motion or change at all, there has to be something that isn't an effect but an eternal, uncaused first cause—an 'unmoved mover.' We can't go on in infinite regress of causes. When we trace the causal chain back into history, it must end at a self-existence uncaused first cause."<sup>11</sup> And that self-existent, uncaused first cause is none other than the eternal, personal God of the

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<sup>10</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Introduction to Apologetics*, unpublished class notes Southern Evangelical Seminary, 201.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Turek, *Stealing From God; Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 2014),

Scriptures. He is the One who stands outside of our limited world of cause and effect who, alone, was equipped to set it all in motion for His grand, lofty purposes.

Let us get back to the garden story.

How does a well-manicured garden in the middle of a jungle tell us there has to be a gardener, even if we never bump into him?

1. The presence of a garden in the jungle (of all places), which is an amazing effect, does not occur without a viable, personal cause, i.e, a gardener.
2. The presence of a manicured garden, one which stays this way whenever we visit it, suggest there has to be a gardener who keeps it well-ordered in an environment known for disorder (based on the presence of the second law of thermodynamics, viz., entropy in an isolated system always increases).
3. Since the matter which forms the garden is not eternal, but highly temporal, scientifically speaking, there must some kind of amazing gardener who is not bound by the temporal but who is eternal. His name would be God, the Gardener of all Gardeners.

The question which needs to be asked then is quite simple: In light of these evidences for the existence of God, *what is it going to take to move you toward Him in faith as your Creator?* The moment you do this, the moment you embrace the Creator by faith, and His name is Jesus (Col. 1:16-17), is the moment you move from being a fool (who thinks he is wise) to being a wise man (who used to be a fool) in His eyes. Alister McGrath knows what I am talking about. When will you?

