

# Everybody's Fool

Psalm 14 February 14, 2024

Only 8% of job applicants ever make it to the interview phase.<sup>1</sup> On average, 118 people will apply for a given job these days. The pressure is compounded when you learn that 77% of recruiters will disqualify you as a candidate if they find a typo on your resume.<sup>2</sup>

God isn't *hiring*, but He *does* like to add people to His company. The problem is: None of us measure up. There's no one good enough to be recruited. *But*, in God's mind we're all loved enough to be *rescued*.

The State of the Union, quarterly earnings calls, unemployment and inflation reports all evaluate what's going on in a group and identify weaknesses and make projections. Psalm 14 is a sort of State Of The *Human* report for us. And, apparently the Lord *really* wants us to get this message, because this Psalm is published a *second time* almost word for word as Psalm 53. And Paul repeats much of it in his letter to the Romans. So, message received. *This* is the situation. This is the condition and position of man. And, it's not a pretty picture.

**Psalm 14:1 - For the choir director. Of David. <sup>1</sup> The fool says in his heart, "There's no God." They are corrupt; they do vile deeds. There is no one who does good.**

"Rodents Of Unusual Size? I don't think they exist." That line in *The Princess Bride* is immediately and hilariously followed by a Rodent Of Unusual Size absolutely smashing Westley out of frame and chewing him up for a bit.

Just because a person says it doesn't make it so. What novel or symphony or knock-knock joke ever wrote itself? What painting ever simply materialized on a blank canvas? But, this Psalm isn't just talking about smug, YouTube atheists who take pleasure in mocking the idea that God exists. This includes people who *live* as if there is no God, whether they philosophically believe a God exists or not.<sup>3</sup> And *that* is a much larger group of people.

The truth is, *most* people will tell you that they believe a God exists. 74% of Americans by one recent count.<sup>4</sup> But how many *live* as if God exists?

To either reject the idea that God exists *or* to live as if it doesn't matter, David says, is *foolish*. He uses a particular word here: The *Nabal* says in his heart "there's no God." Of course, many of you know there was a man named Nabal during David's time who embodied foolishness. He was selfish and senseless and shortsighted.<sup>5</sup> His foolishness went beyond being the local curmudgeon.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://withe.co/blog/job-interview-statistics>

<sup>2</sup> <https://legaljobs.io/blog/interview-statistics>

<sup>3</sup> J.J. Stewart Perowne *Commentary On The Psalms*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1412740/us-belief-in-god-by-party/>

<sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 25

He was a danger to himself and to others. His foolishness caused harm to his family, his community. It ultimately put him into an early grave and no one was sorry to see him go.

This is true of every fool, to one degree or another. Rejecting God results in corruption and vile deeds. I'm sure we can all identify some fools we know if we think for a moment. But David would have us sing this song with a mirror in our hands. "There is *no one* who does good." We're *all* fools.

Now, that is a bold claim. But if we pause to consider, we find that it is a very true claim. Any time I go my own way instead of God's way, I am living as if there is no God or as if God does not care about my life. I'm a fool. Of course, I don't consider myself a Nabal, but let's see what God thinks.

**Psalm 14:2-3 - <sup>2</sup>The Lord looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God. <sup>3</sup>All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one.**

There are lots of stories where the good guys are trying to find that special person who will become the chosen one. Willy Wonka found Charlie. Mr. Benedict found the four, extraordinary children who would comprise his Mysterious Benedict Society. Men In Black found Will Smith.

God looks down on *everyone* - in that last phrase it's as if He even checks the list twice - and His finding is: There is no one who does good, not even *one*. It's a poor showing for team humanity.

One translation says, "All turn astray, altogether befouled."<sup>6</sup> It's *not* just that we're misunderstood or that we're being misused on Team Humanity. Sin has *ruined* us. And we see it's not just in a passive way, as if, "Well, sin has stained us and that looks pretty bad." No, it's much worse than that because we have *turned away* from God. We have departed. We have *defected*. We have withdrawn from God.<sup>7</sup> We *all* have made the same choice that Adam and Eve made, only we make that choice again and again, day after day. We've become corrupt.

That's the second time David has used that word. That's bad news because, when the Lord looked down on the earth at Noah's time, He said, "Mankind is totally corrupt, so I have to judge them."<sup>8</sup>

Every time the Lord assesses humanity, this is what happens. Tower of Babel. The days of Noah. During Ezekiel's time. During Jesus' first coming to earth. The story is always the same.

Well, then, if no one does good and if no one seeks God, then does that suggest that God only saves some and doesn't save others? Or that, as some Christian traditions teach, "regeneration precedes faith?" That since we're dead in sin we can't exercise faith? That a person only seeks God because determines that they do?

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

<sup>7</sup> *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 6:3

No. The Bible reveals to us that without the intervention of grace, humanity will always stay in sin. *But, God has graciously intervened.* He reveals Himself in nature and in His Word. He calls to us. He puts eternity in our hearts and determines the time and place in which we live so that we *might* grope for Him and seek Him,<sup>9</sup> and He frees our wills so that we have a genuine ability to do so.

But without His intervention, we have no hope. And without His transformation, we remain in our sinful foolishness. We need a *new* nature, a new mind, a new heart that acts in response to grace.

**Psalm 14:4 - <sup>4</sup>Will evildoers never understand? They consume my people as they consume bread; they do not call on the Lord.**

When a person rejects God, when they refuse to follow Him, the *only* alternative is to do evil. That's the clear claim of the first 4 verses. That evil metastasizes and produces oppression. Harming others becomes commonplace - like eating bread before the entrée arrives.<sup>10</sup>

But wait! Out of *nowhere* there are suddenly *two* groups being talked about. Up to this point, everyone has been lumped together. No one is good. Everyone is foolish. Now we see there is a group of evildoers and then there is a group that the Lord identifies<sup>11</sup> as His people.

How do I get in the group of God's people? Call on the Lord. Psalm 91 is all about the people who are protected and cared for by God. In that Psalm, the Lord says:

**Psalm 91:15 - <sup>15</sup>When he calls out to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and give him honor.**

On the flip side, when a person or a nation does *not* call on the Lord, the result is wrath.

**Psalm 76:9 - <sup>6</sup>Pour out your wrath [Lord] on the nations that don't acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that don't call on your name.**

So these are the groups. Those who call on the Lord are brought into His family, transformed from the inside out, given heavenly honor. And then there are those who won't believe God or live as if God doesn't matter. That keeps you in your sinful foolishness and makes you a slave of evil.

Sadly, evildoers can come from anywhere. Think of the time of David and Samuel. There were Philistines. Those were obvious evildoers from outside. Very clear enemies with an obvious agenda. But then there were the sons of Eli. They were *priests* and should've been spiritual guides, but instead they abused the people, and ripped them off, and defiled God's house. Later there was Absalom, David's own son. He betrayed his family and the Lord.

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<sup>9</sup> Acts 17:26-27

<sup>10</sup> Gerald Wilson *Psalms Volume 1*

<sup>11</sup> Perowne

All of these enemies came from different places, but the fruit was always the same. They all tried to devour others for their own desires. They all oppressed the weak and thumbed their noses at God.

Paul would make a list of evildoers in 1 Corinthians 6 and then said, "And such were some of you." The good news is: The *corrupted* can become *consecrated*. Fools can become faithful. We all start as Nabal, but we don't have to stay that way. The Bible has a book totally dedicated to learning God's wisdom. Proverbs 1 opens by saying, "Take these words and with them you will be instructed in righteousness." And when we follow God's revelation, when we respond to His call and call back to Him, we become His people and the Lord protects His people. He provides for them. He communes with them.

**Psalm 14:5 - <sup>5</sup>Then they will be filled with dread, for God is with those who are righteous.**

The fools of the world often seem to have one up on the people of God. But there is a reckoning coming. A judgment is coming on all who reject God. And, when that day comes, they will be filled with dread. Why? Because, without God, they go into eternity alone. Separate. Abandoned.

One of the Old Testament prophets wrote, "[The Lord] will chase His enemies into darkness."<sup>12</sup> The foolish unbelievers are headed toward a dreadful end because they will not accept God's invitation to be *with* Him.

Now, we who believe in God and live like it are headed not to the *end* but toward a glorious new *beginning*. It's only possible because God has gifted us His righteousness.<sup>13</sup> Notice, it says "God is with those who are *righteous*," not "Those who are perfect." We're *not* perfect. We'll be *perfected*, but here and now we still fall short. We still make mistakes. We still fail to live up to the wisdom of God. But, we are clothed in His robe of righteousness, and that makes all the difference.

What a good reminder that God is *with* us. He's here now, watching your life. *Directing* your life. Let's *act* like it.

**Psalm 14:6 - <sup>6</sup>You sinners frustrate the plans of the oppressed, but the Lord is his refuge.**

An attack on God's people is an attack on the Lord Himself because He is our Refuge. We are *in* Him.

What did Jesus say to Saul on the road to Damascus? "Why are you persecuting *Me*?"

You Christians here tonight, remind yourself that God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in time of trouble. He is our Rock and stronghold. He is trustworthy and secure. We are invited to hide ourselves in Him and be sustained and satisfied by His grace. His ways are true. His Words are wisdom.

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<sup>12</sup> Nahum 1:8b

<sup>13</sup> Romans 5:17

Why try to find security somewhere else? In life we face problems or we get scared or we get into trouble and our tendency is to look to some other human or some human system or use human ingenuity to outwit our trouble. But, if we understand Psalm 14, that's just letting the inmates run the asylum and thinking things will be ok.

A "better" fool, or a lesser fool than the other fool is still a fool. We want to source the wisdom and insight and motivation and perspective we need for life from the *Lord*, our Refuge. That's the climax of this song. Look at verse 7.

**Psalm 14:7 - <sup>7</sup>Oh, that Israel's deliverance would come from Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.**

This is what we want. Not for a single problem to be solved but for *all* the foolishness of this life to be dealt with. That every enemy would be overcome, *including* the Nabal within our own hearts.

Our prayer can be: Lord, *deliver* me from Goliath, deliver me from Absalom, but also deliver me from myself. There's a Nabal within, trying to take over, trying to coax me *out* of my Refuge. Lord, keep me close and save me from all these fools.

That phrase, "When the Lord restores the fortunes of His people" may say "brings back the captivity" in your version. Linguists argue over specifics, but literally the phrase is, that God would "turn the turning" of His people.<sup>14</sup> What a beautiful picture this is - God bringing captives home. God, restoring the fortune of those who had lost everything. God turning and guiding and assisting us as we go His way.

At the end, the Psalm speaks to *both* Jacob and Israel. They're the same people, of course, but on a devotional level there's a *wide* difference between Jacob and Israel. Jacob was a scoundrel. Interestingly, one translation has verse 1 of this Psalm as, "The *scoundrel* says in his heart..."<sup>15</sup>

If you were here for our Genesis studies we saw the life of Jacob and how he developed in understanding and faith in God. As God walked with him, he transformed him from scoundrel to servant. And so, we can join with this final verse and say, "Lord, deliver us! Turn our turnings. Turn us from scoundrels to servants. From fools to faithful. Bring us into Your company and transform our hearts and minds. Fashion us into wise doers of good and make us glad along the way."

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<sup>14</sup> James Walter *Psalms: Believers Church Bible Commentary*

<sup>15</sup> Alter