

What a Fool Believes

1. Warm up: Pastor Robert began Sunday's sermon with an example of a man falling in love with an AI woman, ignoring all evidence that she doesn't exist. Statistics show that 50% of the public now use A.I. daily. Interactions remain largely functional rather than social. However, deep emotional and conversational reliance is rapidly growing. What are your feelings and attitudes towards the increasing presence of A.I. technology in our daily lives?
2. Sunday's scripture passage – Psalm 14 – is the only chapter in the Bible that gets repeated, word-for-word, elsewhere in the Bible – *i.e.*, Psalm 53. Let's read Psalm 14, as printed on p 3.
 - a. Do you have any thoughts as to why the Spirit-led editors who assembled the psalms deliberately included the same passage word-for-word in two places?
 - b. The introductory statement in Psalm 14 declares, "The fool says in their heart, 'There is no God.'" The English word "fool" connotes someone who is silly and stupid. But the Hebrew word for "fool" (*nabal*) has a different connotation. It refers to someone who is morally hardened or not being sensible, *i.e.*, not facing the facts. Robert said that one of the most damaging and destructive things in the body of Christ are closedminded Christians who believe that anyone who doubts or denies the existence of God is stupid. Instead, he said, we should take the time to understand the road that led them to doubt God's existence. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?
 - c. What are examples of the kinds of things that someone goes through that might leave them doubting or denying the reality of God?
3. Verses 3 and 4 in our scripture passage suggest that perhaps the most common reason people doubt or deny God is all the evil and injustice they encounter in the world. The theological term for this is "theodicy," *i.e.*, the attempt to reconcile the reality of evil with the concept of God. People often ask how a good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God could allow suffering and evil in the world. Since they can't reconcile these three, they end up doubting God's existence.
 - a. When in your own life have you come closest to experiencing a "theodicy moment?" In other words, when have you been most tempted to question God's existence? What prompted that? How'd you get through it?
 - b. Have you ever known someone who went through a "theodicy moment?" What happened? How did they process it?

- c. In traditional theology, we learn that God is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), and perfectly good (all loving). Here's an example of a typical theodicy puzzle. Suppose a drunk driver runs over a child. Can you explain that without contradicting one of the foregoing three core characteristics of God? If so, how?
4. Given all the foregoing, Robert challenged us to consider, "What do we as believers say to individuals who don't believe God exists?" If you were challenged, how would you attempt to persuade someone that God is real?
5. Robert pointed our attention to verse 2, which offers a clue as to what makes the difference between those who believe and those who don't. Those who believe make an affirmative decision to "seek God."
 - a. What might that mean? And why might "seeking God" make a difference?
 - b. Robert said, "God is not a fact that is proven; God is a choice that is made." Your thoughts? Do you agree or disagree? In what ways do you think choice plays a role in our spiritual journeys?
6. The Hebrew word *nabal* doesn't just mean senseless. It has a secondary meaning as well. It also can mean "empty." In other words, "They empty says in their heart, there is no God." What might that mean? Empty of what?
7. Robert wrapped up Sunday's sermon by explaining why his heart, rather than being empty, is full of faith. He told about times when God has protected him from himself and others, about times when God's promises have been kept, and about times when prayers are answered. When we seek God, when we open our eyes to observe God's hand in our life, our heart is filled with faith. Robert said, "The only reason I am alive is because God has had a hand on my life." Tell us about a specific moment in your life when you experienced God's presence? How do experiences like that shape your faith?

Psalm 14:1-7

For the director of music. Of David.

¹The fool says in their heart,
“There is no God.”

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;
there is no one who does good.

²The LORD looks down from heaven
on all humankind
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.

³All have turned away, all have become corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.

⁴Do all these evildoers know nothing?
They devour my people as though eating bread;
they never call on the LORD.

⁵But there they are, overwhelmed with dread,
for God is present in the company of the righteous.

⁶You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor,
but the LORD is their refuge.

⁷Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!
When the LORD restores his people,
let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!