

# Beyond the Pale Blue Dot

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Popular secular philosophies hold that this life on earth is all that there is--nothing beyond what you see around you. But, God's Word tells us why this is a lie. In particular, Psalm 139 gives us a fresh look at the truth of God's existence, His sovereignty and His love for us. This Psalm of David has one of the encouraging messages for Christians today, and provides valuable insights as to God's relationship with each and every one of us on an *individual* basis. But, there are so many people in our society who would be completely puzzled by what this Psalm has to say. And the reason for their perplexity is bound up in a world view that has become very popular today—a worldview based on what philosophers refer to as *secular humanism*.

Carl Sagan was perhaps one of the best examples of a secular humanist whose worldview was limited to his faith—not in God—but in science. Although he pretended to be an agnostic when it came to religious beliefs, his writings reveal him as basically a closet atheist with some vague sense of spirituality. He was a very good writer, yet his overall message gravitated to one of hopelessness and despair. Now the reason that I mention him is that, though he died back in 1996, his outlook on life is very much alive among a huge portion of our society. And, if we are not careful, even Christians can get mired in the despair created by his distorted perspective. One of his best known books was entitled the *Pale Blue Dot*. The book got its name from one of the last series of photographs taken by the Voyager 1 spacecraft way back in 1990. When the Voyager got all the way out to the rim our solar system, NASA engineers turned it around to take a few final pictures of planet earth. By then the Voyager was about 4 billion miles out into space and the photo it took of Earth was quite telling because the Earth appears as nothing more than a mere point of blueish light—about 1/10<sup>th</sup> the size of one little pixel in the photo. Noting the Earth's relatively tiny size in comparison to the vast space of our own solar system, Sagan wrote this—which is quite reflective of his worldview: **"Look again at that [pale blue] dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. . . The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. . . Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark."** And then, he makes the clinching statement that summarizes his entire philosophy, concluding with this comment: **"In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves."**<sup>1</sup>

Now, I don't deny for one minute that we should all be overawed when we think about just how physically large the planet Earth is. And, admittedly, when we think of the Earth as only a tiny speck of dust, or a "**pale blue dot**"—to use Sagan's term—it can make you feel incredibly small. And you can feel even smaller than that, if you want to, by thinking about yourself alone as one single soul as compared to the vast number of souls who are now living on the Earth today—a number which is estimated to be around 7.7 billion people.<sup>2</sup> Or, if you included all the people on the earth today, and add to that number all of the people who have ever been born and died on this planet since the beginning of humanity, it is estimated that we'd be talking about 105 billion people—or 105 billion souls.<sup>3</sup> So you are just one of them, living on a planet that dwarfs your tiny size in a universe that makes the planet Earth look like a mere speck of dust. OK, I would have to admit it: That does create a temptation to feel small. But, that's all it should be—a **temptation**. In fact, if our relationship with God is anything near what it should be, it is a temptation that we will readily reject, because fortunately, we have something more than the mumblings found in secular books like those of Carl Sagan's.

Rather, we have the benefit of an infinitely more blessed book—the one that we call the Bible, the *Book of All Books* that contains the promises and the words of God. And when I consider things in God's Word, especially things like Psalm 139, I come to a totally different conclusion than Carl Sagan's completely depressing and hopeless view of this world and our place in it. You see, what he is saying about the vastness of the universe and the Earth's relative microscopic size—well, yeah, that's true enough in a purely **physical** sense. But, his jump to the conclusion that this somehow means that there is "**no hint of help**"—no hope of salvation—coming from anywhere to save us is just plain false in the **spiritual** sense.

Before reviewing some of the encouraging points in Psalm 139, let me just say that there is nothing wrong in pondering why God would take notice of us in such a vast universe in which we are just the tiniest of atoms. In fact, David, in one of his other psalms, asks that very question: "What are people that You [i.e. God] should think about them, mere mortals that You should care for them?" Psalm 8:4 (NLT2) But, for a Christian, to ask the question is not to doubt God's concern for us. Rather, David, like me and I hope like you, had no doubt about God's care for us, but he still remained in amazement that a pure and holy God would be mindful of impure and filthy wretches like us. It's not the size of the Earth or the vastness of the universe that factors into our Christian belief in God's capacity to care for us—rather it should be the magnitude of our sins that causes us to be amazed that God still wants to call us His children. And yet, God does call us exactly that.<sup>4</sup> 1 John 3:1 tells us God still calls us His children, despite our faults and sins, because He loves us. John says: "See how very much our Father loves us, for

He calls us His children, and that is what we are!” Now listen to what else John has to say: “But the people who belong to this world don’t recognize that we are God’s children because they don’t know Him.” (NLT2)

And the reason so many don’t know Him is because of that false, worldly philosophy of secular humanism that claims that God either doesn’t exist or, if He does exist, we are simply too small and insignificant to warrant His attention. So let’s consider Psalm 139 and what it has to say about this fallacious secular view that teaches the lie that we have *“no hint”* of salvation. That first part of this worldly philosophy—the one that suggests that God does not exist—is a fairly easy one to counter. In fact, verses 13 and 14 of Psalm 139 give us our own personal testimony as to God’s existence simply if we examine the amazing complexity of our own human bodies. These verses tell us: <sup>13</sup> “You [God] made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. <sup>14</sup> Thank you for making me *SO WONDERFULLY COMPLEX!* Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.” Psalm 139:13-14 (NLT2)

Marveling over the human body’s ability to sustain itself, Joseph Paturi writes: “The body has a chemical plant far more intricate than any plant that man has ever built. This plant changes the food we eat into living tissue. It causes the growth of flesh, blood, bones and teeth. It even repairs the body when parts are damaged by accident or disease.”<sup>5</sup> That’s pretty amazing! And, when we examine the intricate make-up and design of the human body and its complex inner workings and functions of our muscular and skeletal systems, our nervous system, or respiratory and circulatory systems, along with all the amazingly complex organs that make them work—how could anyone regard these most intricately designed things and conclude that there wasn’t a Supremely Intelligent Designer—the One we call God—who put this human body all together? We could consider a multiplicity of organs in the body to make this point, but in the interest of time let’s think about only one of them. Let’s just consider the human brain.

Our brain is more powerful than the most complex computers ever made by man. Our brains analyze, organize and synthesize information and send it throughout our bodies in the form of billions of bits of data that controls every voluntary movement we make. It has been estimated that the human brain has more electrical circuitry than in all the combined computer systems in the world.<sup>6</sup> That is quite impressive—and a pretty good indicator that this brain that floats in the top of our heads didn’t just randomly plop together by some ridiculous series of random events as taught by Darwinian evolution! Yes, it is a wonderful thing—this brain of ours. It is something so amazingly complicated that it had to come about by a very specific design. And anything that has a design was fashioned by a

creator who came up with that design. And that Grand Designer is our Creator—the Most Holy One whom we know as God! And if God created our brains and our bodies and our world and all the universe, then it goes without saying that **GOD DOES, IN FACT, EXIST!** Those who have used their brains to come to a different conclusion may have a legitimate complaint that their brains could well be defective. Apparently a few of their wires somehow got crossed—not due to any deficiencies on God’s part—but due to their own tendencies to stray from the True God, and to crown themselves as “god” of their own little blue-dot worlds. And because of that, they generate these hugely deceptive, misleading and blasphemous philosophies. David rightly proclaims in Psalm 14:1—“Only fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!” (NLT2)

So, Psalm 139 tells you to just look around and one of the first things you can see is the wonderfully complex design of your own body and know that God made you and, therefore, God certainly exists. Now, I didn’t have to convince you of that—you already knew that. That’s why you are here today! But, now that you have the advantage of this Psalm, you have more ammunition to use in countering some of those foolish people who only believe in the existence of that *pale blue dot—and nothing else*, and have not seen the Light. But, I can tell you this: A time is coming when Jesus will come again, and people will see that Light, and when they do the Scriptures assure us that every knee will bow down to God, and every tongue will praise His name.<sup>7</sup> But, until Christ’s return, we are called to witness to a world loaded with “*Carl Sagan’s*”—people who claim to be intelligent, like university professors, scientists, politicians, entertainers and a host of other social elites. They reject the God of the Bible and either deny His existence or attempt to create their own little gods in their own puny images. This isn’t something new. Almost 2,000 years ago the Apostle Paul wrote about the “*Carl Sagan’s*” of his day and stated: <sup>20</sup> Since earliest times men have seen the earth and sky and all God made, [not to mention the marvels of your own human body that David pointed out] and have known of His existence and great eternal power. So they will have no excuse when they stand before God at Judgment Day. <sup>21</sup> Yes, they knew about Him all right, but they wouldn’t admit it or worship Him or even thank Him for all His daily care. And after awhile they began to think up silly ideas of what God was like and what He wanted them to do. The result was that their foolish minds became dark and confused. <sup>22</sup> Claiming themselves to be wise without God, they became utter fools instead.” Romans 1:20-22 (TLB)

Now, you might know some people like that—they reject God and think they are so smart, and that Christians who believe in God are just a bunch of dumb, superstitious, rubes. And you might think that what I have said about witnessing to them is a complete waste of time. But, it’s not a waste of time. We are called to tell them about our faith and the love of Jesus Christ. We are supposed to plant

the seeds of faith—that is our responsibility. God will take care of giving those seeds a chance to grow. And sometimes even the most unlikely *Carl Sagan-types* will respond and surrender their lives to Christ—and that mustard seed of faith begins to mature and grow in some of the most unlikely soil of all.

Take Dr. Rosalind Picard who is the director of the Affective Computing Research Group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). I expect that she’s a very intelligent lady because she holds masters and doctorate degrees in both electrical engineering and computer science. She was also a proud atheist who regarded believers with utter disdain. But, someone took a shot at witnessing to her and gave her a Bible and encouraged her to read. And for some strange reason that she can’t even explain, she *did* decide to read it. Dr. Picard says: “When I first opened the Bible, I expected to find phony miracles . . . and assorted gobbledygook. To my surprise, the Book of Proverbs was full of wisdom. I had to pause while reading and think.” And the Holy Spirit started to work on this highly educated woman and she felt compelled to read the rest of the Bible—so compelled, in fact, that she read the Bible from cover to cover two times over. And then someone invited her to church and as she sat there in the pew the pastor said something that the Holy Spirit etched upon her brain. The pastor asked a simple question, and the question was this: **“Who is Lord of your life?”** This made a huge impact upon Dr. Picard, and the question kept replaying in her mind, until she finally found herself praying to Jesus **that He would become Lord of her life.** And when she did that, her entire world began to change as she embraced Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. And then she found out something that surprised her. She found that following Christ certainly didn’t mean that she needed to abandon her intellectual pursuits as she followed the Holy Spirit—quite the opposite, in fact, was true. She explained: “I lost nothing of my urge to seek new knowledge. In fact, I felt emboldened to ask even tougher questions about how the world works. Today, I work closely with people whose lives are filled with medical struggles. I do not have adequate answers to explain all their suffering. But I know there is a God of unfathomable greatness and love who freely enters into relationship with all who confess their sins and call upon His name. I once thought I was too smart to believe in God. Now I know I was an arrogant fool who snubbed the greatest Mind in the cosmos—the Author of all science, mathematics, art, and everything else there is to know. Today I walk . . . with joy, alongside the most amazing Companion anyone could ask for, filled with desire to keep learning and exploring.”<sup>8</sup>

You see, for every *“Carl Sagan”* who rejects Christ, there is a *“Dr. Picard”* out there yearning for God’s love—it might be a family member, a good friend, a neighbor, whoever—but if we will just take the time and have the courage to introduce them to Jesus—for many of them, amazing things will

happen in their lives as they see Jesus for who He really is—the Son of God, and their only hope of salvation in pale-blue-dot of a world without a hint of any other hope. I love the way Dr. Picard described her awakening to the Holy Spirit’s touch when she said that her ***“world changed . . . as if a flat, black-and-white existence suddenly turned [into a] full-color and three-dimensional”*** one.

Her hope and future were no longer bound solely to the *pale blue dot* of this life. Through God’s mercy and grace there were other dots that made all the difference for her—and they make all the difference for you and me as well. But, they weren’t *pale blue dots* at all. No, they came in a very different shade. They were the ***crimson red dots*** that speckled the dusty ground beneath the Cross as Jesus’ blood flowed so freely for our sins. For the Scriptures tell us: <sup>12</sup> Jesus suffered and died outside the city gates to make His people holy by means of His own blood. <sup>13</sup> So let us go out to Him, outside the camp, and bear the disgrace He bore. <sup>14</sup> For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come. Hebrews 13:12-14 (NLT2) Yes, it is through His blood, His mercy, His grace, that we know our salvation is secure—pointing us to a new home where our eternal destination lies far beyond the bounds of this *pale blue dot* and into the eternal realm of a ***very real God*** who loves you more than you can possibly imagine—and whose Son’s blood dotted the ground for our sins. It’s time for us to connect those dots.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor  
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<sup>1</sup> www.Planetary.Org., Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population>.

<sup>3</sup> An estimate on the "total number of people who have ever lived" as of 1995 was calculated by Haub (1995) at "about 105 billion births since the dawn of the human race" with a cut-off date at 50,000 BC (beginning of the Upper Paleolithic), and an inclusion of a high infant mortality rate throughout pre-modern history. Wikipedia

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:26 (NLT2) For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Corinthians 6:18 (NLT2) And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Paturi, "The human body—God’s masterpiece," *Creation Vol.* 20(4):54–57, (September 1998), <https://creation.com>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 14:11 (HCSB) For it is written: As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue will give praise to God.

<sup>8</sup> Rosalind Picard, "An MIT Professor Meets the Author of All Knowledge," ChristianityToday.com (3-15-19).