

# Christian Book Summaries



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## CAN MAN LIVE WITHOUT GOD

### A Quick Focus

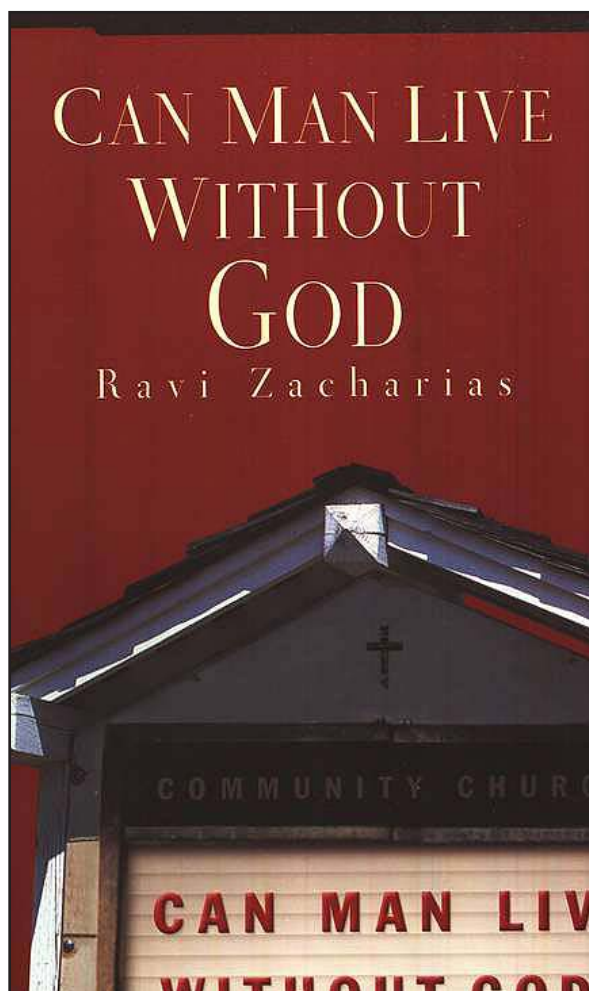
#### The Book's Purpose

- Divulge the philosophical and existential inadequacy of atheism
- Defend the reality of man's longing for meaning and provide answers for it
- Demonstrate the plausibility and coherency of the Christian worldview

#### The Book's Message

Atheism is really antitheism. It fails the test of logic on the philosophical level, the test of meaning set forth by the arts, and the test of practical application.

The human penchant for meaning cannot be met by antitheism, neither can it be ignored. A child's sense of wonder and a young adult's search for truth and love need fulfillment. A mature person's experience with suffering demands answers. Only Christ, the God-man, brings truth to satisfy the intellect, love to restore the soul, and grace to heal the brokenness of suffering.



by Ravi Zacharias

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### Five Main Points

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# Antitheism is pervasive but

# EMPTY

The music of Western culture betrays its spiritual barrenness. In spite of affluence and technological advancement, Western culture battles an emptiness of soul that no sum of money can fill and no medical discovery can cure.

*“From the canyons of the mind we wander on and stumble blind,  
Wade through the often tangled maze of starless nights and sunless days,  
Hoping for some kind of clue~a road to lead us to the truth.  
But who will answer?”*

The lyricist’s pen confesses freely what the scientist and politician try to hide: Western society’s wealth, academic opportunity, and scientific progress have conferred on it neither wisdom nor meaning. The intentional denial and removal of God from society has not improved it but rather denied people the only recourse where they might have found rescue.

Making this argument requires a careful balance between philosophical rigor and everyday accessibility. The philosopher will dismiss what he deems intellectually weak; the average man will toss aside what he cannot readily grasp.

Three levels need to be addressed. First, the level of theory requires thoughtful discussion in keeping with the laws of logic. Arguing occurs here, but only sound reasoning and civility prevent abuse at this level. Secondly, the pervasive influence of the arts in Western society demands an address, for they are not mere entertainment. Rather, they delve into the philosophical and existential. *“What is so unique in our society, though, is the all-pervasive influence of the arts, even upon matters of transcending importance~in effect, desecralizing everything and programming our very beings.”* Illustration, therefore, is useful at this level.

The third level, practical application, is the necessary landing point of any discussion. A workable theory must be relevant to the *“kitchen-table conversation”* or it remains merely an academic pursuit and not a life-changing endeavor.

Foundational assumptions must accompany the starting point of a constructive argument. This requires defining the term *atheism*.

**“Atheism is not merely a passive unbelief in God but an assertive denial of the major claims of all varieties of theism; atheism contradicts belief in God with a positive affirmation of matter as ultimate reality.”**

The term *antitheism*, then, is more accurate than *atheism*. Western culture has adopted a philosophy that actively seeks to remove God from society and replace Him with a naturalistic worldview. This worldview, however popular, has not succeeded in aiding progress as it promised. Instead, it bequeaths meaninglessness to all who embrace it.

# Antitheism cannot provide a foundation for morality or for HOPE

Frederick Nietzsche, philosopher and refuter of theism, set forth emotive and prophetic descriptions of atheism and its logical social implications. He proposed that Christianity undermined human progress because it elevated morality, repentance, and humility, virtues no power-seeking civilization could be founded upon.

Nietzsche foresaw a utopia built on individual achievement, of human progress unhindered by moral restrictions and sentimental religion. He did warn, however, that the overthrow of the moral foundation of Western society in order to build a new foundation would initially be catastrophic. Those he influenced, Hitler and Mussolini among them, proved the last part of his warning.

The utopia, however, has not and will never come. The foundation Nietzsche proposed, an inherently illogical one, cannot support an intelligent, progressive society. Instead of unbridled intellectual achievement, it has given rise to mindlessness; instead of harmony, it has bred violence. These are the logical outcomes of antitheism put into practice. When a human being is reduced to mere matter, his thoughts and emotions to a series of impulses, there is no logical or moral reason to preserve his life. Violence, then, merits no restraint. Antitheism as a philosophy lacks reasonable grounds for a moral law.

Immanuel Kant, among others, tried to construct an ethical framework based on reason alone. He proposed that human beings can know and do what is right apart from divine revelation. Kant also warned that morality was unconditional and universal, that an individual should not make moral decisions based on his own happiness. Rather, morality was independent of preference and could be arrived at by any person through reason. However, Kant's theory has a few flaws. The very premise of deciphering morality through reason is the cause of a breakdown in communication between Eastern and Western thinkers.

“What may be reasonable in India may not be reasonable in France, and what may be reasonable in America may be “satanic” in Iran.”

If morality could indeed be universally determined through reason, wouldn't people from any nation be able to arrive at the same moral propositions? Kant points to a universal moral code but cannot prove that code from within a framework devoid of the transcendent. Also, Kant's own Christian background provides an unspoken but no less influential component to his philosophy. Though denying the need for divine revelation for morality, he nevertheless gleaned from a theistic worldview to construct his ethics.

Kierkegaard, building on Kant's work, decided that if rational thinking did not lead to morality, individual choice could. He admitted that apart from a transcendent moral code, the choice between ethical and immoral behavior was not a choice between right and wrong. Rather, he stated that an ethical way of life *should be* adopted “*as a choice that lay beyond reason.*”

Does that not sound like an appeal to the transcendent in order to undergird an argument that denies the need for such? Such circularity is endemic to any attempt to develop ethics apart from God. There is a logical connection between what one believes about human life and how one treats other human beings. If matter is all there is, and man is mere matter, then man's life has no transcendent purpose. Without purpose, morality has no foundation. Antitheism cannot provide one, so moral chaos is its offspring.

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## ANTITHEISM CANNOT PROVIDE A FOUNDATION FOR MORALITY OR FOR HOPE

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Probably the most poisonous dart antitheists shoot at theists is the question of human suffering. This dart is double-pronged. The existence of evil is the first prong and death is the second. "If there is an omnipotent, loving God," exclaims the antitheist, "then why is there so much pain and suffering?" Suffering is portrayed as evil, as something that, for some reason, should not be a part of man's experience or at least not to the degree that it is. The very phrasing of the question betrays incoherence in the antitheist's worldview, for he is appealing to a transcendent morality with the pathos of injustice in his voice. His worldview denies the first and does not give him the right to claim the second. If matter is ultimate reality, as the antitheist claims, then the question is moot. "Why not?" the theist could contend. Only if this is a moral universe and man's life replete with purpose can his pain be phrased in a moral context. ***"Apart from God the question of pain and death not only remains unanswered; it even defies justification."***

Also, while an antitheist may seek to undermine religion by pointing to suffering, his own worldview provides no answer to the question either. A man at his child's graveside might reject any comfort that religion could offer. He might even decide that God must not exist. But he knows better than to seek comfort in such a premise, for none is offered there.

Death, the second prong, poses the greatest challenge to antitheism. In Nietzsche's thinking, death was not the enemy but the liberator. A dead person no longer suffers or wants for anything, and there is no judgment to face. The terrifying conclusion, then, is that extinction is the best world man can create. The logical outcome of a life lived without God is despair or even suicide.

**"One has no right to a future hope, either personal or cosmic."**

CBS

# What constitutes MEANING?

One point of commonality between theism and antitheism is the question of meaning. Stephen Jay Gould, ardent proponent of atheistic evolution, insists that mankind is a cosmic accident, and if he wishes to seek any meaning for his life, he must seek it in himself. Though Western society continues to pursue the "American dream," affluence, the wealthiest people claim, it cannot provide meaning. Fame too, proves fleeting. Advancing technology serves only to ***"create new hungers to help us forget old ones."***

Yet the human hunger for purpose remains insatiable. Antitheism offers no bread of meaning to satisfy it. The sad truth about the antitheist is that ***"...such a person is compelled to deny a moral law, to abandon hope, to forfeit meaning, and to risk no recovery if he is wrong."***

If life is the gift of God, then it is sacred. If it is merely chance, then it is dispensable. Answering the "why" of life is essential to defining the "what." Western society has allowed science to dictate meaning instead of infusing science with meaning already defined by religion, art, and poetry. By doing so, it has rendered the search for meaning futile.

While some would attempt to distill meaning down to love alone, as great as love is, it fails to fulfill the search. This search manifests itself differently in people of different ages and can be divided into four stages: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and maturity.

The child seeks meaning through wonder. The world of children's fairy tales sums up the crucial elements that engender wonder in the mind of a child. First, each tale has a moral principle encapsulated in it. Secondly, each tale has a set of conditions defined by the world of fairyland that are unalterable. Thirdly, the conditions are unquestionable. They are imparted by the tale's author and add to not only the structure but mystery of the story. Cinderella never asks why her curfew is midnight, nor should the reader.

Sadly, a thirst for knowledge often destroys a sense of wonder. People refuse to believe that there are and should be limitations to human knowledge, that mystery is a legitimate and even sacred part of life. Instead, they seek to understand the intricacies of all facets of the universe, touting any mystery temporary until technology can catch up. A loss of wonder results in three tragedies: the reduction of the universe to its chemical components, the disappearance of gratitude, and an inevitable slide into meaninglessness.

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## WHAT CONSTITUTES MEANING? continued from page 4

While some loss of wonder is simply the result of growing up, a total loss of it leads to despair. Only a worldview that hinges on the infinitely transcendent can perpetually guard wonder even in the oldest of souls.

**“The older you get,  
the more it takes to fill  
your heart with wonder,  
and only God is big enough  
to do that.”**

As a child grows into adolescence, fantasy gives way to a search for truth. Suppression of truth is pandemic in politics, in advertising, and even in the classroom. Past generations stood behind causes they believed in and sought security they considered obtainable. The present generation speaks a language of cynicism, having found no truth in causes and no fulfillment in monetary security. Young people today seek only someone with integrity, a relationship based on truth. Not surprisingly, this is exactly what Jesus offers, Himself as the embodiment of truth.

While many of Christ's followers have sullied His reputation by living contradictory to the values of the gospel, Christ's own goodness should not be rejected on these grounds. Investigating the claims of Christ will yield a more accurate picture of who He is, and a relationship with Him will reward the search for truth.

Love, then, is the quarry of the young adult. In both Eastern and Western cultures, love is the test that the truthfulness of the heart must pass. Love requires both sacrifice and utter vulnerability, for it leaves the heart open to rejection. It requires courage to be willing to take the risk.

In Christianity, love is not mere sentimentality but a relationship that entails personal cost. This is why the cross of Christ sums up love more eloquently than any other event in history. For the love of the unlovable and undeserving, God who is love, surrenders even to death. ***“He becomes the consummate expression of love, and in knowing Him we find that love which brings meaning.”***

The fourth stage of meaning, that of the mature adult, centers on security. As a life draws to a close, only the expectation of something more offers purpose. It is the promise of resurrection and life beyond the grave that takes all four elements of meaning—wonder, truth, love, and security—and binds them into a perfect hope. This hope is found in the person of Christ.

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## Do Christ's claims bear up under SCRUTINY?

Christianity claims to be the truth. How, though, is a proposition verified as true? A threefold test is helpful. First, it must be logically consistent. Second, it must have empirical evidence. Third, it must be relevant to life.

Christianity's claim to absolute truth is rejected by many as the height of religious intolerance. Truth, however, is by nature exclusive, and Christianity is not alone in claiming exclusivity. Any religion that claims to be true is claiming exclusivity. Simple laws of logic prove why. The law of non-contradiction states that two contradictory statements cannot be true in the same sense at the same time. That is to say, if a statement is true, its direct opposite cannot be true at the same time. If the statement, “the woman is pregnant” is true, then the statement “the woman is not pregnant” cannot be true at the same time. She either is or is not pregnant.

Some would argue that only Western logic is built on the law of non-contradiction, an “either/or” kind of thinking. They might contend that philosophers in the East employ a “both/and” approach to reason. However, even human language—including Eastern languages—are built on the law of non-contradiction. Without it, there can be no clear communication. Ultimately, the law of non-contradiction tests for falsehood. If a worldview is inherently contradictory, it cannot be true. If it logically coheres and meets the other tests for truth, then it must be given due consideration. Jesus' claims must then be tested.

One of Christ's teachings that requires scrutiny is His concept of human nature. Modern theories have rejected any idea of an innate

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## DO CHRIST'S CLAIMS BEAR UP UNDER SCRUTINY?

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sin nature and instead constructed an optimistic view of people. The notion that people are inherently good and can achieve their own salvation is the major tenet of optimistic humanism. A tragic and violent human history, however, mocks that premise as ridiculous. Christ taught that the human will seek its own desires and refuses to bow down to a higher authority. This autonomy is rebellion against God, and the Scriptures call it sin. Rather than saving mankind, it condemns him to judgment, strips him of his dignity, and leaves him isolated from God and other people.

Racism is a painful, universal example of mankind's penchant for evil. Modern governments have outlawed overt prejudice in many arenas, yet racism in the hearts of men and women persists. In the United States, African-Americans fought for and won equality, at least in the law books. Yet, even in a northern city like Chicago, a black man in a certain part of town is met with suspicion by policemen and passersby.

South African apartheid was legally abolished. Still, racially-charged violence decorates Johannesburg with gated homes and barred windows. People can change laws, but apart from God they cannot change their own hearts.

While the Scriptures indeed charge man with inherent sinfulness, they also give him a dignity that no naturalistic worldview can offer. In Christianity, all people are equal because they are the special creation of God. Ideas, on the other hand, are not. Some are true because they reflect the reality of the world God made. Some are false because they distort reality.

Antitheism, in contrast, states the opposite. Ideas are all equal. All people are not. Because the antitheist views people on an evolutionary ladder, he naturally concludes that some are more advanced than others. Racism, in fact, fits logically into antitheism. If people hope to end this scourge, they will do so only by recognizing mankind as the image-bearers of God not as the products of minute and innumerable mutations.

Jacob's wrestling with God exemplifies the painful cure of self-recognition and humble confession through which every individual must pass on his or her way to truth. Jacob deceived his father by pretending to be his brother Esau. Through this deception, he stole Esau's blessing. Jacob then fled and spent many years away. On the evening before he met Esau for the first time since his betrayal, Jacob wondered whether or not his brother still bore him ill will. Terrified, Jacob cried out for God's help. Instead of a reprimand, God responded by asking Jacob to identify himself. Jacob's name means *deceiver*. In naming himself, he had to relive his deception. This humbling moment resulted in God's blessing and a new name, Israel. Only when people recognize their own sinfulness can God begin a work of redemption.

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# What does Christ offer that antitheism CAN'T?

One enduring question of philosophy is how so much diversity in the universe resulted and what one element holds it all together. From the Greek philosopher Thales to the modern proponent of evolution, thinkers have sought "*unity in diversity*."

One radical claim of Christ is that He is the answer to this quest and that the triune God is the pattern for it. Once, theology was considered the primary discipline, gathering all others, however diverse,

into a cohesive worldview. Having abandoned God, academicians and others forfeited this coherence and tried in vain to replace it. Atheistic evolution and other religions cannot manage it. The Trinity, however, provides the supreme example of perfect harmony among diverse persons. Father, Son, and Spirit exist together in loving community and yet remain distinct. Individuality is not erased by union but rather finds its fullness there.

Though mysterious, even mind-boggling, the reality of three co-existent, coequal Persons working in perfect accord has practical application. Worship is the first of these.

Worldwide, people worship. They may worship God, money, or even themselves, but they worship something. However, worship without truth becomes at best sentimental superstition and at worst a deception that can lead to the most repulsive kinds of evil. When a human spirit yields its devotion to God, it finds wholeness. Every area of life, from career to relationships, is guided by a transcendent morality. Worship that is centered on and governed by the Creator unifies and saturates life, bringing discordant areas into harmony with one another. This is peace. The second outworking of a trinitarian worldview is the ability to live in community. The love of the triune God invites the individual to join a family of diverse people. It also equips this individual to see the beauty of diversity while striving for unity.

Christ's teaching offers a meaningful outlook on history, something antitheism with its accompanying determinism cannot do. Different philosophies view history in various ways.

**"The existentialist lives for the now; the utopianist, for the future; and the traditionalist, for the past."**

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**WHAT DOES CHRIST OFFER THAT ANTITHEISM CAN'T?**

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Christ came into the world at a particular point in history. He lived fully in the present with His disciples, healing wounds and meeting immediate needs. He was also the fulfillment of prophecies, echoes of the past. He offered a kingdom that was present with His arrival yet also future with His second coming. To the Christian, then, all of history is infused with meaning because it is the parchment upon which God writes His story.

The future hope of life after death that Christianity claims is centered on an event that took place in history: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Throngs of scholars have worked tirelessly to disprove the reality of the resurrection of Christ while ignoring utterly the lives and works of other religious figures like Buddha, Mohammed, or Krishna. Why is this? Christ's resurrection is the critical doctrine of Christianity. After all, as Paul said, if Christ did not rise, then Christianity is worthless.

Yet, evidence for the resurrection existed in the first century and remains. First of all, Christ spoke of His resurrection clearly enough that Roman officials felt compelled to carefully guard the tomb in order to prevent claims that the event indeed occurred. Second, Jesus' followers cannot legitimately be charged with faking the resurrection since even they did not expect it. They had to be convinced of it by a missing body and various post-resurrection appearances. The post-resurrection appearances themselves compose a third point of evidence. The Scriptures indicate that a multitude encountered the risen Christ, and no early witnesses contradict the claim.

Fourth, the terrified disciples became fearless martyrs, a transformation that requires some sort of explanation. Fifth, there is no record that Rome ever produced a body, which would have rapidly dispelled rumors if the resurrection were a lie. Finally, even the Koran, though denying Christ's deity, claims that He could raise the dead.


A person cannot take a neutral stance toward Jesus of Nazareth. He is God in flesh, or He was insane, or He was a master deceiver. His claims leave no other option. The hope He offers is the same reality He demonstrated: resurrection. In Him there is hope of new life. Without Him, there is no hope at all.

Finally, Christ holds the answer to why people suffer. All worldviews, Christianity included, must confront the issue of suffering. For the antitheist, there is no explanation for why or to what degree people suffer. Atheistic evolution, with its accompanying determinism, can only hope that before mankind destroys itself, it will be able to develop technologies to preserve a part of its population from complete eradication.

This answer may seem hollow, but it is the best a philosophy void of God can offer. Christ's answer to suffering is the cross. On the cross Christ took the suffering and sin of mankind on Himself and bore it unto death. On the cross Christ satisfied the demands of justice and displayed the power of self-sacrificing love. Christ's answer to suffering is not an abstract philosophy but a personal encounter. He suffered and died just as people suffer and die so that when they ask "Where is God in suffering?" He can simply stretch out a scarred hand and point to Calvary.

Suffering, then, becomes an avenue of fellowship with Christ, a loud-speaker to the world, calling mankind to recognize its helplessness, its need for a restored relationship with the Creator.

Life apart from God denies a person intellectual satisfaction, dignity and meaning, and above all, hope. Our challenge is to weigh the evidence of Christ's claims against the evidence of all other philosophies and to choose a worldview, but to do so knowing what the results of that choice will be.


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