

Purpose Abandoned

THE POINT

God created us with purpose, but our sin keeps us from living out that purpose.

THE PASSAGE

Psalms 8:1-6; 14:1-7

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The purpose for which God created us is far greater than any purpose we might devise for ourselves. Unfortunately, we fall short of God's desire and plan for us because we have sinned; we are drawn to live for our own selfish ends. Only when we turn back to God and seek Him can we live with purpose.

THE SETTING

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Psalm 8 is a psalm of David extending praise to the Lord for His majestic greatness and expressing a blend of awe and gratitude at David's own remarkable position in the created order. The setting in which the psalm was written is not specified. However, it is a simple but beautifully written poem of praise that, according to the superscription, was used in worship since it has instructions to the "choir director" or "Chief Musician" (NKJV). The question raised in verse 4 has captured the attention of humankind throughout the ages. **What is a human being that you remember him?** In coming to an answer, we see the great value the Lord has for humankind, including the weakest among us.

Psalm 14 is another psalm of David, also with instructions to the Chief Musician (NKJV). Of interest is that the first four verses of Psalm 14 are restated in the first four verses of Psalm 53. Moreover, Paul quotes and alludes to Psalm 14 in establishing his case of the universality of sin's dominion over humankind (Rom. 3:10-18). The psalm has features of a wisdom psalm but also of a personal lament. It is a word from God wherein He speaks through the psalmist about the folly of those who live as though God did not exist, especially seen in their propensity to abuse His people. The psalm concludes with a declaration that a day of judgment and reckoning will come, as will a day of salvation for God's people.

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STUDY THE BIBLE

Psalm 8:1-6

Why is “Lord” used two times in the declaration of praise in verse 1? What words indicate the Lord is God of the universe? Who, though they would appear to be weak, are the strong ones God uses to silence His enemies? What prompted the psalmist to great contemplation? Why was he amazed at the elevated status of humankind? What was humankind commissioned to do in relationship to all creation?

¹ **LORD, our Lord,
how magnificent is your name throughout the earth!
You have covered the heavens with your majesty.**

² **From the mouths of infants and nursing babies,
you have established a stronghold
on account of your adversaries
in order to silence the enemy and the avenger.**

³ **When I observe your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you set in place,**

⁴ **what is a human being that you remember him,
a son of man that you look after him?**

⁵ **You made him little less than God
and crowned him with glory and honor.**

⁶ **You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:**

Look what good God did. Psalm 8 begins with a simple but profound declaration of praise. **LORD, our Lord.** The first use of *LORD* is the proper name of the one true God, *Yahweh*. God first revealed His name to Moses in his encounter with God recorded in Exodus 3. The second use of *Lord* is the word meaning “sovereign,” or “master.” It is a declaration of who God is in relationship to an

individual, the community of faith, or even a nation. Thus, the declaration could be rendered “Yahweh is our sovereign master.”

How magnificent is your name throughout the earth!

Obviously, this is a declaration not a question. It is the psalmist’s affirmation of the superiority of the *LORD* and a shout of adoration. *Magnificent* comes from a word that at its root means “wide or large,” and is used to affirm the Lord’s greatness and glory. “How majestic” (NASB, NIV, ESV), or “How excellent is thy name” (KJV) describe the Lord.

Name is used in Scripture to refer to a person’s given name, but in the Hebrew culture it meant so much more. A person’s name represented the person’s character and sometimes his destiny. The frequent reference in Scripture to “the name of the Lord” was an acknowledgement of His character, the essence of His being, and His authority, all of which is worthy of being praised.

The scope of His majestic greatness is *throughout the earth*. *Earth* can be understood to mean the earth at large or all the land. In late usage, the word represented all the countries of the earth and often was used in contrast to Canaan as a single nation or territory. The LORD was Israel’s Lord, but He is also the God of the whole earth, all the nations.

Furthermore, **You have covered the heavens with your majesty**. “You have set your glory above the heavens” (ESV). *Majesty* means “splendor,” “glory,” or “grandeur.” The word is virtually synonymous with the word rendered *magnificent*. *Heavens* can refer to the visible heavens, the sky, or to the sphere wherein the abode of God lies. His excellence or majesty is not earth bound but abounds in all of creation.

The focus in verse 2 is on **the mouths of infants and nursing babies**. They represent human beings at their weakest stage of life. They are contrasted with **your adversaries**—the Lord’s enemies (“your foes,” ESV; “thine enemies,” KJV), who represent human strength. Yet the psalmist pictures a great reversal.

On account of, or in response to, the presence of these adversaries God has **established a stronghold** sufficient to **silence the enemy and the avenger**. An *avenger* is one who seeks to act

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with vengeance against someone; in this case the Lord and perhaps those who would stand for Him. *Silence* means “to cause to cease,” “to put an end to,” or “to remove.” The primary sense of the word *stronghold* is “strength, might, power” and is most often used to describe God’s inherent power or strength, or the strength and power He provides. God accomplished this **from**, or “through” (NIV), the speech or praise of the weaker ones. “Out of the mouths of babies and infants, you have established strength” (ESV). “Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies” (NIV).

The Septuagint renders *established a stronghold* as “established praise.” Thus, the idea is that **from the mouths** or speech of weak ones, like little children and nursing babes, God has established praise so strong as to put an end to those who oppose Him. You will recall that Jesus quoted this verse to those who criticized the people of Jerusalem who greeted Him as He entered the city in triumph riding on a donkey (Matt. 21:16).

David engaged in personal reflection: **When I observe your** (the Lord’s) **heavens**. *Observe* means “to see,” “inspect,” or “perceive.” It may be rendered “consider” (KJV) or “look at” (ESV). He looked with his eyes, but he understood in his innermost being. It was more than a passing glance, but he examined what he saw and contemplated its meaning. *Heavens*, as in verse 1, refers to the visible heavens, the sky as the abode of **the moon and the stars**. He saw those heavenly bodies as **the work of your** (the Lord’s) **fingers**. *Work* denotes a “deed,” “thing done,” “product,” or “achievement.” What the psalmist saw was no accidental or coincidental occurrence. It was an intentional effort by none other than the Lord God of the universe. He **set it in place**. This is the same word used in verse 2. He who established strength among the weakest of humanity also established *the moon and stars*. But as glorious an act as it was, the Lord is so mighty that their creation and placement in the sky was something He did only with His *fingers*, suggesting minimal effort on His part. So mighty is His power.

Another question came to mind. **What is a human being that you remember him?** *Remember* means “to think about.” “From an objective perspective, human beings are but the tiniest fragments

in a giant universe; it is not conceivable that they could have significance or a central position in the universe. But the name of God, through which revelation comes, indicates that the very opposite is true.”¹ How amazing and humbling it is to think that we—human-kind—are on God’s mind, in His thoughts, remembered by Him. Thus, we must have value to Him, and if to Him, we ought to see each other as persons of worth as well. What is important to God should be important to us.

The phrase **son of man** is a parallel statement, or poetic synonym, to *man* in the first part of the verse. However, in Hebrew these are two different words. In the second use, it is same word rendered Adam, another word meaning mankind and the name of the first man. *Son* denotes a male child, but it can also be used to refer to children or offspring, male and female.

What is a human being . . . that you look after him? *Look after* means “to pay attention to,” “to attend to,” “to care for.” Thinking only from a human point of view, it is one thing to remember or think about something; it is an entirely different matter to act on what we call to mind. That was no problem for the Lord. He remembered and acted. “What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” (NIV).

Just as the moon and stars came into being and were placed in the heavens as an act of the Lord, so **You made** humankind. One reason humankind is so valued by the Lord is that we are His creation. Thus, He values the work of His hands. The value of humankind is indicated by the phrase **little less than God**. Other translations render the phrase as “a little lower than God” (NASB), “a little lower than the angels” (KJV), or “a little lower than the heavenly beings” (ESV). The Lord had an exalted role in mind for humanity and created them thusly. Human beings are not little gods, but they are greater than objects, animals, or even celestial bodies.

David continued, noting that the Lord has **crowned him with glory and honor**. *Crowned* means “to surround” or “to encircle.” *Glory* denotes “abundance,” “riches,” as well as “splendor.” *Honor* also expresses the idea of “splendor,” “majesty,” “comeliness,” or “excellence.” It is no coincidence that some of the words David used

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to describe humankind are like the words He used to describe the Lord, for humankind was made in God's image (Gen. 1:26); hence another reason He regards humankind as having great value.

Humankind was given a critical assignment. **You made him ruler over the works of your hands.** *Hands*, understood figuratively, represent strength and power. The omnipotent Lord exercises absolute authority over all creation, time, and circumstances. However, He endowed humanity with the capacity and commissioned us to be rulers over all He had created. To rule can be understood as "to care for, to manage." Dominion is intended to be used in the best interest of the subject being ruled not for the exclusive interest of the one ruling.

The Lord **put everything under his feet.** The statement captures the idea of management of the created order. In Genesis 1:28, God charged the man and woman, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule . . ." David alluded to the same concept. *Ruler* and having *everything under his feet* communicate challenge and privilege, however they do not allow for autonomy and license. Neither allows for exploitation and abuse of the creation. The work was not to be purely for one's personal benefit. The purpose was to enable the rest of creation to achieve its fullest potential. Because the assignment came from God, humankind has a responsibility to carry out the assignment with accountability to Him.

What are a few lasting lessons that come from Psalm 8:1-6?

- Even in the vastness of the universe, the Lord remembers and cares for humankind, for we too are His valuable creations.
- The value the Lord places on humankind is realized in the distinctiveness with which He created us and the responsibility He assigned to us.

Psalm 14:1-3

*What does the word **fool** mean in this context? How does the Lord assess those who live as if He does not exist. How pervasive is the sin that characterizes humankind?*

¹ **The fool says in his heart, “There’s no God.”**

They are corrupt; they do vile deeds.

There is no one who does good.

² **The LORD looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God.**

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

Look how we messed up. The psalm begins with a taunt directed toward persons who lived as if God did not exist; thus, they felt no sense of accountability or responsibility to Him. Such a person would not have said it with his lips and would have denied it if asked, but **in his heart**, he said, **There’s no God**. *Heart* signifies the inner person, the seat of emotion, intellect, volition, and moral character. The heart was the motivational center that determined one’s actions. People like that are not theoretical or philosophical atheists, but they are practical atheists. In practice, they live like *there’s no God*.

The psalmist described such a person as a **fool**. “The ‘fool’ described in this psalm is not intellectual deficient. A fool may be smart and clever. A modern description would be of a secular person—one who lives without regard for God . . . God and spiritual matters simply are not of any concern to such a person.”² The spiritually deficient were **corrupt**, bent on destroying, perverting, or spoiling that which was good and upright. They were guilty of **vile deeds**. *Vile* denotes that which is detestable or loathsome, both morally and ethically. *Deeds* represents one’s actions or practices.

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Out of such people, **there is no one who does good**. *Good* is to be understood in the sense of being appropriate, excellent, ethically right, or beneficial.

None of this escaped the attention of the righteous, holy God. **The LORD looks down from heaven on the human race**. Even though the Lord God resides in the *heaven* beyond, He is not oblivious or disinterested in what is taking place on this earth. Here is what He was looking for: **to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God**. *See* and *seeks* are different Hebrew words, but they are synonymous in that they incorporate the idea of giving due consideration to something; it is more than just glancing at it. So, The Lord was looking to see if anyone was looking back to see Him.

Is verse 3 a statement of what God saw? Or is it the assessment of the psalmist who feels isolated because he sees himself as the only one standing faithfully for the Lord? Either way, the conclusion—the Lord’s, the psalmist’s, or both—is disappointing, disheartening. **All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt**. *Turned away* means “to depart from, avoid.” *Corrupt* means “to be unethical or tainted.” What the Lord saw was not a pretty sight. And note the use of the word *all* followed by the statement, as in verse 1, **there is no one who does good**. We need to read this assessment as hyperbolic expression as frequently found in the Old Testament. After all, the psalmist would not be included in that comprehensive indictment since in this instance he is speaking as an agent of God. Nevertheless, how bleak a view of humanity. What God pronounced as “very good” (denoting high quality and moral excellence) in creation (Gen. 1:31) is now declared not good!

If the Lord God made humankind good, but now it is not good, then what happened? Somewhere, somehow, humankind—we—messed up! God had a good purpose for His creation. Along the way His creation abandoned that purpose by deciding to turn another way and not consider the person, the presence, the power, and the purpose of God.

What are a few lasting lessons that come from Psalm 14:1-3?

- No matter our words, our actions speak the truth about the place of God in our lives.
- The Lord is fully aware of what is taking place in this world.
- We may not like to admit it, but the way of humankind apart from God is the path of foolishness and sin.

Psalm 14:4-7

What does the psalmist find incredible about the foolish wicked? What was their disposition toward God and why did they feel that way? What is the blessing given to the humble, righteous ones? For what does the psalmist pray? What will be the disposition of those who are the recipients of God's salvation and release from whatever holds them captive?

⁴ Will evildoers never understand?

They consume my people as they consume bread; they do not call on the LORD.

⁵ Then they will be filled with dread, for God is with those who are righteous.

⁶ You sinners frustrate the plans of the oppressed, but the LORD is his refuge.

⁷ 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.

Look at the fix God offers. “Unbelievable!” “What were they thinking?” “It’s hard to accept that people don’t know any better.” Those are common statements at my house in response to the horrific acts reported on local and national news programs. The psalmist essentially said the same thing. **Will evildoers never understand?** “Do all these evildoers know nothing?” (NIV). **They consume my people as they consume bread.** These iniquitous people are “gobbling up God’s people as they would choke down

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bread.”³ The abuse of others was as common as eating the most available food. Furthermore, **they do not call on the LORD**. They never see the necessity of praying to the Lord, a sign they have no relationship with Him.

The foolish ones and the people of God not only have contrasting views of the Lord, but the Lord also has contrasting responses to each group. **They will be filled with dread** and those **sinners** who **frustrate the plans of the oppressed** refer to the wicked. *Dread* in this context means “fear,” a fear that caused them to shake. **Those who are righteous** and *the oppressed* refer to the people of God. *Righteous* denotes those who stand in right relationship with the Lord by virtue of His blessing of justification and vindication. *Oppressed* can refer to economic status but likely denotes people who suffer, are oppressed by others, or come humbly before the Lord. Those without God live in *dread*; those who live in right relationship to God—the *righteous*—know Him as their **refuge**. A *refuge* was a place of protection. To the humble, the Lord is a shelter from the storm and a fortress from that which would destroy.

Craigie and Tate provide a paraphrase of these verses that help our understanding. “The wicked lived in a state of fear as a result of their folly, but the righteous had peace of mind (greater than their oppression) as a consequence of God’s presence in their midst. The fool attempted to do ill to the righteous, but found that the righteous benefited from the presence of God as refuge.”⁴

The psalm concludes with a prayer anticipating **Israel’s deliverance**. Such salvation would **come from Zion**. *Zion* is another name for Jerusalem, with Jerusalem being the location of the temple, which represented the presence of the Lord. Whenever salvation or deliverance came it would be because of the presence and activity of the Lord God Himself. He would be the only One who **restores the fortunes of his people**, as in restores the people to their homeland from captivity. When that happened—and the tone is one of certainty that it would—**let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad**, parallel statements that mean when salvation came to God’s people, it would be a day of joy and celebration. And how true that is!

What are a few lasting lessons that come from Psalm 14:4-7?

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- We are amazed at those who live in such rampant sin.
- Rejection and rebellion against God ought to generate fear.
- Those who live in right relationship with the Lord can be assured of His protection and care.
- Salvation comes only from the Lord and gives us reason to rejoice.

LIVE IT OUT

Consider “The Point” of this session: “God created us with purpose, but our sin keeps us from living out that purpose.” Identify and review the primary subpoints of this study of Psalm 8 and Psalm 14 that validate that statement. If you agree that the statement is true, then here are some questions to ask yourself to determine how you can live it out.

What are some practical ways you are fulfilling the purpose of God for your life that bring Him praise and glory?

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As an act of personal confession, what are some habits, practices, or failures that prevent you from being even more faithful to the purpose of God for your life?

What actions and changes in attitude do you need to make today to acquire or be restored to a right relationship with God that give Him glory, bring you joy, and fulfill His purpose for your life?

1. Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, Psalm 1—50, 2nd ed., vol. 19, in the Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004), 108.
2. Alton H. McEachern, Psalms, vol. 8, in Layman's Bible Book Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981), 30.
3. John I. Durham, "Psalms," Esther—Psalms, vol. 4, in The Broadman Bible Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 195.
4. Craigie and Tate, Psalm 1—50, 148.