

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 "Chief Musician" (NKJV) or "choir director" (CSB). The question raised in verse 4 has captured the attention of humankind throughout the ages. **What is man, that thou art mindful of 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 O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

² Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

³ When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

⁴ What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

⁵ For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

⁶ Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

Look what good God did. Psalm 8 begins with a simple but profound declaration of praise. **O 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 excellent is thy name in all 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. *Excellent* comes

from a word that at its root means “wide or large.” While the Lord is certainly excellent in the sense of being superior or the best of its kind, here the word may be intended to affirm His greatness and glory. “How majestic” (NASB, NIV, ESV), or “How magnificent is Your name” (CSB) 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 *in all the earth*, or “throughout the earth” (CSB). *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, He **hast set thy glory above the heavens**. “You have covered the heavens with Your majesty” (CSB). “You have set your glory above the heavens” (ESV). *Glory* means “splendor,” “majesty,” or “grandeur.” The word is virtually synonymous with the word rendered *excellent*. *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 mouth of babes and sucklings** (“the mouth of babies and infants,” ESV; “the mouths of infants and nursing babies,” CSB). Whichever words are used, obviously they represent human beings at their weakest stage of life. They are contrasted with **thine enemies**—the Lord’s enemies (“Your adversaries,” NASB, CSB; “your foes,” ESV), who represent human strength. Yet the psalmist pictures a great reversal.

Because of, or in response to, the presence of these adversaries God has **ordained strength** sufficient to **still the enemy and the avenger**. An *avenger* is one who seeks to act with vengeance against someone; in this case the Lord and perhaps those who

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would stand for Him. *Ordained* can be rendered “established” (ESV, CSB, NIV). *Still* means “to cause to cease,” “to put an end to,” or “to remove.” *Strength* can be translated “stronghold” (NIV, CSB). The primary sense of the word 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 **out of**, “from” (NASB, CSB), 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 *ordained strength* as “established praise.” Thus, the idea is that **out of the mouth** 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 consider thy** (the Lord’s) **heavens**. *Consider* means “to see,” “inspect,” or “perceive.” It may be rendered “observe” (CSB) 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 thy** (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 **ordained** it. This is the same word used in verse 2. He who *ordained*, or established strength among the weakest of humanity also ordained, established, or “set in place” (ESV, CSB, NIV) *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 man, that thou art mindful of him?** *Man* is a collective noun and while it can refer to males, it also can be used to represent all humankind, male and female. Gender is not the focus here. *Mindful* means “to remember” or “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—humankind—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 man . . . That thou visitest him? *Visitest* means “to pay attention to,” “to attend to,” “to look after and 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 **thou hast 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 **a little lower than the angels**. Other translations render the phrase as “a little lower than God” (NASB), “little less than God” (CSB), or “a little lower than the heavenly beings” (ESV). The word used here can have three interpretations: 1) a divine being; 2) divine beings, like angels; or

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3) the ultimate divine being, God. 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 **hast crowned him with glory and honour**. *Crowned* means “to surround” or “to encircle.” *Glory* is a different word than “glory” in verse 1 but captures some of the same concept. It denotes “abundance,” “riches,” as well as “splendor.” *Honour* also expresses the idea of “splendor,” “majesty,” “comeliness,” or “excellence.” It is no coincidence that some of the words David used 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. **Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy 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 *have dominion over* all He had created. *Dominion* means “to rule,” but it 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 **hast put all things 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, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion . . .” David alluded to the same concept. *Dominion* and having *all things 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 hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.

² The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.

³ They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not 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 is 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 is 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

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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 **abominable works**. *Abominable* denotes that which is detestable or loathsome, both morally and ethically. *Works* represents one’s deeds or practices. Out of such people, **there is none that doeth 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 looked down from heaven upon the children of men.** *Children of men* is a way of speaking of humankind. 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 were any that did understand, and seek God.** *Understand* is to “look upon with insight; to give attention to.” *See* and *seek* 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. **They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy.** *Gone aside* means “to turn away, depart from, avoid.” *Filthy* means “to be morally corrupt 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 none that doeth good, no, not one.** 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 Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the LORD.

⁵ There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous.

⁶ Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD is his refuge.

⁷ Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

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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. **Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?** “Do all these evildoers know nothing?” (NIV). They **eat up my people as they eat bread**. These iniquitous people are “gobbling up God’s people as they would choke down bread.”³ The abuse of others was as common as eating the most available food. Furthermore, they **call not upon 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. **There were they in great fear** and those who **shamed the counsel of the poor** refer to the wicked. *Fear* in this context means “dread,” a fear that caused them to “shake.” *Great* intensifies the feeling. The **generation of the righteous** and *the poor* 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. *Poor* 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 *great fear*; 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 **salvation of Israel**—the people of the Lord. Such salvation would **come out of 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 to **bringeth back the captivity of his people**. *Bringeth back* means “to turn back” or “return.” The CSB, ESV, and NIV render the word as “restores,” as in restores the people to their homeland from captivity. When that happened—and the tone is one of certainty that it would—the results would be **Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall 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?

- 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.