

RESPONDING TO GOD

WEEK 2: PSALM 8

Over the next 8 weeks, we will be studying 8 different Psalms and exploring the theme of 'Responding to God'. This week and next week, we are looking at **Responding to God – in an ordered world**: where things 'are', as they should be and there is a sense of, something that the Old Testament refers to as, 'shalom'. Walter Brueggemann sees that there are a number of Psalms, including Ps 8, which:

"affirm that the world is a well-ordered, reliable, and life-giving system, because God has ordained it that way and continues to preside effectively over the process. At the same time, there is a profound trust in the daily working of that system and profound gratitude to God for making it so. Creation here is not a theory about how the world came to be. That is not how the Bible thinks about creation. It is rather an affirmation that God's faithfulness and goodness are experienced as generosity, continuity, and regularity. Life is experienced as protected space. Chaos is not present to us and is not permitted a hearing in this well-ordered world."¹

ICEBREAKER: What part of creation – or what piece of scenery – especially inspires you to praise God?

PRAY: Thank God for the world he has made and the glimpses of his goodness we see about us.

READ: Psalm 8

- What do you think is the main point or focus of this Psalm? Why? (There's many thoughts about this).

Psalm 8 uses a feature of Hebrew poetry: a chiasmic structure. The ideas move inward to a central idea, then we see similar ideas repeated in reverse sequence. As verses 'mirror', they highlight we reflect God's image.

Praise to God *in all the earth* (v. 1a)

God's *glory* in creation— God as maker of creation (vv. 1b–3)

Central Question: v4 the question of human worth - "What is man ...?"

Answer: crowned with *glory*—Humans responsible for creation (vv. 5–8)

Praise to God *in all the earth* (v. 9)

Brueggemann highlights that:

"the structure of the psalm is worth observing closely. At its centre is an affirmation of human power and authority. At its boundaries are affirmations of praise to God. The centre (v. 5) and the boundaries (vv. 1, 9) must be read together; either taken alone will miss the point. Human power is always bounded and surrounded by divine praise. *Doxology* [ie praise] gives *dominion* its context and legitimacy. The two must be held together."²

- Read Ps 8:4-5 again. How does God view humanity (including each of us, as individuals)? Does this change how we view ourselves and our place in the whole scheme of things?

The introductory lines tell us that Psalm 8 is a 'Davidic Psalm' and, while no one can pick when this particular Psalm was written, we know that David was once a king. There are lots of royal ideas that flow through this Psalm including: 'my lord', 'majestic', 'glory', 'crowned', 'dominion', 'honour', 'ruler' and 'under his feet'. God is the king that is above all kings. His glory and his name is magnified above the heavens and in the earth.

- In v3, the Psalmist describes God taking the moon and stars between his fingers and setting them in place. It's a bit like us taking a bowl of M&M's and 100's and 1000's – then using our fingers to put them – one by one – onto icing of a cake. What does the picture in v3 suggest to us about God and the way he undertook the creation process?

¹ Brueggemann, W. (1984). *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (p. 26). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

² Brueggemann, W. (1984). *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (pp. 37–38). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

This Psalm presents two REALLY BIG theological ideas about God. Firstly, God is supreme and sovereign. As creator, God is (logically) above, over and separate from creation. At the same time, God is imminent in that God is intimately involved in the world he has made. The relational aspect is evident when Psalmist addressed God as 'LORD' (ie, *Yahweh*, who made covenants with his people), coupled with 'our Lord'. Despite the magnitude of creation and our comparative 'smallness', God is 'mindful' of us and 'cares' for us.

- READ Psalm 139:1-4, 13-16 and/ or Matt 10:26-32. What do they say about God's knowledge of us?

In Ps 8:5, God made us "a little lower than the heavenly beings" (or, lit: gods, '*elohim*'). Genesis 1:27 puts it in different words, where we read that humans – both male and female - have both been created in the image of God. No other created beings are described in this way.

- In what ways do we reflect the 'image of God'? How does that impact how we deal with creation and the resources we have? What limitations do we have, that God does not have?

In one breath, we read that God is sovereign over creation. Then, in Ps 8:5-6, we have been given royal attributes and roles, as God has crowned us with glory and honour. God made us rulers over the works of his hands and put everything under our feet. But we shouldn't take that lightly.

"The laws that govern royal behaviour in Deut. 17:14–20 make it clear that the king was given *authority* and *responsibility* in equal measures. The authority was for the sake of the responsibility and not for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. The king was to be a responsible servant, never "exalting himself above other members of the community...." That same burden of responsibility rests upon humanity as a whole. The care of God's creation is our collective vocation."³

- God has given us a role on earth: to manage and steward creation. (Gen 1:27-30) During a normal week, what people, animals and resources (including home, garden, time, rubbish, money, water/ power, food, bushland, etc) do you look after and manage?
- In light of Ps 8 and Gen 1:27-30 - to what extent do you see these activities as a God-given vocation? How do they contribute to a sense of 'shalom' (ie peace, wellbeing and security) in your life?

As humans, while we can steward our resources, it hardly seems that everything is under our feet (Ps 8:6b) or responds to our attempts to create order. Both Paul and the writer to the Hebrews highlight that this was only perfectly fulfilled in Jesus (eg 1 Cor 15:27, Eph 1:22-23, Heb 2:5-9) In Col 2:9-10, Paul wrote: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."

After Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, children were shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," which made Jewish leaders angry. Jesus responded: "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" (Matt 21:15-16, citing Ps 8:2) By using words attributable to God, Jesus effectively declared he was not only a king in the line of David, but also the creator.

REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING VERSES & SHARE:

"... God exalted him (Jesus) to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9-11)

- We live our lives, humbly acknowledging that God is sovereign over us. What does it mean for you – and how does it affect how you live – when you name Jesus as Lord? How do you try to glorify God the Father, both in word and action?

PRAY: Use the words of Psalm 8 to praise God – his sovereignty, creativity and majesty – and for his intimate care of you and those close to you.

³ Jacobson, R. A., & Tanner, B. (2014). Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1–41. In E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, & R. L. Hubbard Jr. (Eds.), *The Book of Psalms* (p. 127). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.