



WHEN YOU FEEL OF NO IMPORTANCE

Today we begin a new series on the Book of Psalms: specifically, how to worship our way from a negative place to a positive one. And we kick off with a subject that is relevant to us all, really: self-esteem. Now some people might assume I'm talking self-image here, and switch off. But I'm not. Self-image is looking at yourself and liking what you see (and that's OK). But self-esteem is more than that – it's looking at yourself and knowing that you matter; that your existence is important; that you are of value.

And that's the theme of this particular psalm.

Psalm 8

OK, I want you to imagine: it's 1000 BC, and there's King David, looking up at the night-sky from the roof of his palace in Jerusalem. And it suddenly dawns on him not just how big the *universe* is, but how small *he* is in comparison.

And the pivotal verses, the ones that sum up the whole song, are vs3-4: "Why do I matter?"

To answer that question, we need to realise 3 things:

1) God Is Big (vs1-2). You open a lot of self-help books, and they start off with statements like "You are amazing / fantastic / incredible!" But Psalm 8 doesn't begin with human beings. It begins the same way as Genesis 1 does – with God: "O *Yahveh* our Lord, how majestic is Your name", i.e. "God, *You*

are amazing / fantastic / incredible!” It ends that way too, which is David’s way of saying this is the most important point of all.

He then uses 2 words to get across how big God is: ‘glory’ and ‘praise.’ Let’s just think about those words:

- **Glory** (*hoda*). *Hoda* means ‘beauty’, a word commonly associated with appearance. But God is invisible – so in what sense is He ‘beautiful’? In His personality traits – His love, His mercy, His patience, His wisdom, His holiness, etc. God is ‘big’ in regard to His qualities.
- **Praise** (*otz*). *Otz* means ‘strength.’ Kings in the ancient world relied on soldiers and chariots to get their own way. But God doesn’t need any of that stuff – He can use a tiny baby to achieve His purposes, if He wants to (just like the kids who sang to Jesus).

So what is David saying here? If you want to know how important *you* are, you need to know how important *God* is; and if you want to know how important *God* is - look around you! Be lost for words! Ever looked at something really beautiful and been lost for words? A sunrise? A newborn baby? One of the things we’ve done on many a youth-camp over the years is to get them to lie down on the grass, look up at the stars, and listen.

Why?

To help them realise how *big* God is.

2) We Are Small (vs3-4). When David wrote these words, do you know how many stars he would have been able to see (clear night, no light-pollution around)? 2500 stars (apparently!). Now you might think that’s a lot of stars, but actually, that’s peanuts compared to the stars we *can’t* see. Thanks to the technology now available to us, we know something David didn’t know:

- All we’re really seeing is just a small part of the Milky Way, which is made up of approximately 200 billion stars.
- The Milky Way is one of approximately 100 billion galaxies, each one of *them* containing hundreds of billions of stars.
- Those galaxies make up a universe that is estimated to measure approximately 100 billion light years across.

In layman’s terms, the universe is *humungous* – which puts a whole new spin on David’s words: “What is mortal man that You are mindful of him, the son of Adam that You care for him?” I.e. why does God love us so much? David doesn’t really give us an answer, except what’s in the question itself. He loves us because He loves us!

So Psalm 8 is a reality check, too. The universe doesn’t revolve around us – it revolves around God.

3) Yet We Are Precious (vs5-8). Even though we are tiny, God has made us a little lower in status than the ‘heavenly beings’ or *elohim* (in this case, the supernatural world), and crowned us with “glory and honour”:

- **Glory** (*k'vod*). Ask most Christians what 'glory' means, and they'll say, "Well, glory means, you know ... glory!" But what is glory? The Hebrew for glory, *k'vod*, means 'weight' or 'significance.' It comes from a time when a thing's value would be determined by its weight.
- **Honour** (*hadar*). The word *hadar* comes from a root word meaning 'to big up!' It's sometimes used of objects of great beauty. So when God looks at us, it's like He's looking at the most precious jewels in existence – the things that mean the most to Him.

But here's the incredible thing: these words are usually applied to God. Yet here ... they're applied to us!

That's why Genesis 1 says we're made in God's image. This idea has its origins back in ancient Egypt, where the pharaohs were regarded as the earthly images or representatives of the gods (e.g. the name *Tutankhamen* literally means 'the living image of *Amun*'). The Bible, on the other hand, says we're *all* God's image-bearers – which means we've all been given responsibility for the world in which we live, for everyone in it, and for God's plan for it. *That's* how important we are to God!

From Negatives To Positives

So how can we learn to truly love ourselves as we should? By realising that God is big, we are small, yet God says we're precious.

There can be lots of things in life that make us feel unimportant or unlovely: backgrounds; experiences; relationships; health-issues; limitations; mistakes; stupid people. The real game-changer is realising how much *God* loves us, and loving Him back. Interestingly, this psalm was later used in Hebrews 2 as a picture of Jesus Himself, who made Himself a little lower than the angels in order to die for us on a cross. *That's* how much God loves us!

A final thought: many, many moons ago, as I was putting Josh and Abi to bed, I said, "Never forget – Mummy loves you, Daddy loves you, and Jesus loves you." And Josh came back with, "Mummy loves me, Daddy loves me, Jesus loves me. And I love me!" And then he burst out laughing. But there's a lot of truth to that statement, isn't there? Josh was learning to love himself, because he knew that we love him, and that Jesus loves him too.

And that's what Psalm 8 is really all about.