

DO I REALLY HAVE ANY VALUE?**PSALM 8**

The Bible says God made the first person, Adam, out of the dust of the earth. That doesn't make Adam sound very noble or special, does it? Well, consider this additional information. Some 15 billion years ago the universe came into existence by what scientists refer to as "the big bang." The universe has been growing and expanding ever since. In our universe, galaxies are made up of billions of stars of which our sun is just one. When you look up into a clear night sky and see all those beautiful dots of light so far away, have you ever reflected on what you share with them? You are literally made up of stardust physically. Our sun is a star and by it we receive the necessary heat and light to live comfortably here on Earth. But did you know stars manufacture the elements of which your physical body is made? Stars are factories using hydrogen to make carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen in a process we call thermonuclear fusion. It's the same process humans use destructively to generate the explosive energy of hydrogen bombs. These elements are expelled into the universe to create new stars as well as the planets that circle those stars which are the byproduct of all that goes into forming those stars. Yes, you are made of "the dust of the earth." But the Earth's dust is made up of the dust of the stars. You might say, "OK, Rick, well and good. So what?" The next time you feel worthless, unimportant, or of little value to God or other people, I want you to remember it took God over 15 billion years to create you!

Do you think of yourself as valuable and significant? We live in a world where many human beings see themselves as having little worth – even followers of Jesus. I'm not talking about the occasional bad day or occasional period of depression. That's just a normal part of life for everyone. Nor am I referring to the appropriate sense of feeling completely inadequate and unworthy when we think about Almighty God or enter His presence to worship Him or to pray to Him. As sinful human beings, what else should we feel? No, what I'm talking about is a chronic, persistent, crippling sense that you're worthless, unimportant, lacking any value, and not fit to be loved or cherished. Many people ask consciously or unconsciously, "God, do I really have any value?"

Let me make an alarming, controversial declaration today! I am a humanist. And I am a humanist precisely because of what the Bible teaches about the intrinsic value of human beings. Before you expire of shock, however, let me hasten to add that I'm a biblical humanist not a secular humanist. You don't hear that label as much today, but a secular humanist is someone who argues that human beings have value but refuse to acknowledge that God is the source of it. In fact, they prefer to be either agnostic or atheistic when it comes to God. Biblical humanists believe our value and worth is based upon God's creation of us and what He says about us in His Word. We argue that if you remove God or Scripture from the argument over human value, you remove any rational basis for the essential worth of human beings. The logical conclusion of secular humanism is, ironically, exactly the opposite of what it teaches. If there is no God, you and I are just random, accidental, chance arrangements of atoms and molecules. In the grand scheme of things, why are we any more valuable than a tree, a rock, or a fly?

This summer we're reflecting on several psalms together. Each one answers big questions about life and how best to live it. In psalm 8, David has something to tell us and teach us about who we are and our value from God's perspective. Let's read it now. David – inspired by the Holy Spirit – pointed to...

THE MYSTERY OF BEING HUMAN.

We were thinking about the stars just a few minutes ago. It was the starry night skies that apparently inspired David to write this psalm. Here was a man who spent a lot of time out of doors at night. Maybe he wrote this psalm when, as a teenager, he watched over his father's sheep out in the fields at night. Maybe he got the idea when he slipped out of some cave at night when he was hiding from King Saul who was trying to kill him. Or maybe he wrote it when he was an old man, the king of Israel, after looking at the night sky from the roof of the palace. I'm sure you've had a similar experience with nature: a breathtaking sunset, a fresh snowfall, a panoramic view of majestic mountains, or an exquisite garden full of spring flowers. Your breath is taken away by a powerful invasion of beauty. The magnificence of what you encounter visually leaves you speechless with wonder. David was overwhelmed by the awesome beauty of the night sky full of stars. As he took it in, he began to feel very small and insignificant in comparison. A question formed in his mind: "Who am I that God should care about me or even think about me? Or, to put it another way, "God, do I really have any value?"

David came face to face with the mystery of being human. "God, why am I here? What's my value? What's my purpose?" Appropriate questions to ask the God of the universe. Many people ask everyone and everything else to define their worth except God. The family you were born into. The parents who gave you birth. The talents you were given. The career you've pursued. The job you hold. The kind of house you live in or the car you drive. The accomplishments you achieved or failed to achieve. Life's successes. Life's failures. We often depend on the feedback we receive – either positive or negative – either from other human beings or life experiences to determine our value or worth not from what God says about us and what God has done for us.

Out there under the stars, David felt his own insignificance keenly. "When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?" (Ps. 8:3-4 NLT) And yet there welled up within him a need to feel significant. Why was that? Why is it important for you and me to feel valued, worthwhile, or significant? Why should that even matter to us? But it does. It did to David and it does to you and me. David came face to face with the mystery of being a human being – a mystery solved by God alone. Because of God, we discover...

THE MEANING OF BEING HUMAN.

Have you ever allowed God to become the most important Voice in defining who you are? Have you allowed Him to be the One who measures your worth and value? Some of us are hesitant to go there. Why's that? "Rick, isn't God kind of down on human

beings? The Bible says we're sinners, after all." True enough, we're all sinners and we all have a sin nature that's prone to attitudes and acts that displease God and hurt other people. Some people have concluded that if they're ever going to feel good about themselves, God is the last Person to consult. I suggest God is the very first Person you should ask. It's absolutely true He has a very negative outlook on sin, but He's still very much in love with you and me. The Bible does indeed paint a very unflattering picture of sinful human nature – no rose-tinted glasses, to be sure. But God's Word informs us each human life is of immeasurable value and worth to God. .

Irving Berlin. Perhaps no composer has captured America's heart and soul better. He wrote "God Bless America," "Easter Parade," and "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." He was once asked in an interview, "What do you think of the many songs you've written that didn't become hits?" He responded, "I still think they're wonderful." The way Irving Berlin felt about all of his songs is how God feels about every human being. God has an unshakeable delight in what and whom He has made. He thinks each of His children is wonderful. Whether they're a "hit" in the eyes of others or not, God always thinks of you and me as being wonderful. He created us. He brought us into being. He made us. That fact alone establishes and secures your eternal value.

David understood that truth and was overwhelmed by its implications. "You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor." (Ps. 8:5 NIV) Scholars have an interesting debate over what the literal Hebrew meant in that passage. The translation I used suggests human beings are just below angels in God's creative order and above everything else. But a second option is just as possible and is, in some ways, to be preferred. The word translated "angels" there is "Elohim" which is the name for God in Genesis 1:1 and elsewhere in the Old Testament. "In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth." (NIV) David could have meant human beings are just below God Himself and above even angels in God's creative order. Other translations make that choice. "Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor." (Ps. 8:5 NLT) We're told in the New Testament that God will ask human beings to judge fallen angels at some point in eternity implying we are a higher form of created beings than even the angels. Take all that in this morning. God created you just below Himself in terms of glory and honor.

The Bible says you were created in the image of God. It doesn't mean you look like God, because God is spirit in His essence. But you do share with God that indescribable thing we call "personhood." You've been given intelligence, will, reason, and emotions. You think, you love, you hate, you choose, and you relate to other persons. In all those ways every human being is like God. "But, Rick, we're sinful, broken, and a mess." True, but even sin's presence can't erase God's image in human beings. Have you ever looked into a cracked mirror? You hardly notice your own reflected image because of the condition of the mirror itself – broken, cracked, pieces missing. But if you look beyond those cracks and shattered glass, you can still see your reflection. It's like that with God and us. We're all cracked mirrors – broken and shattered by sin – but God can still be seen – even dimly. You still reflect His image.

Here's what would be amusing if it wasn't so tragic. People trying to convey significance, value, and worth upon themselves and others without God. If you truly believe you evolved from some microscopic amoeba floating around in the primeval ooze, instead of as a direct, creative act of God, what does that say about your value? You become a mere product of chance without any rhyme or reason for your existence today. Apparently, there's a scientific discipline called sociobiology that operates on this premise. God doesn't exist. You're the product of evolution. Therefore, your primary purpose in life is to reproduce so that our species can continue along the long line of evolution. You have no great value or worth as an individual because only species evolve. Your genes determine who you are and how you will behave. Sociobiologists argue parents only love their kids because it's the most effective way to keep the species evolving and not because they possess any real value as individuals.

But if you understand your life is based on God and His creation of you, then you understand God provides real and meaningful significance to your very small, very brief, individual existence. Only He conveys real dignity, self-worth, and value. And only God has demonstrated how precious you are. How? When? What Jesus did for us proclaims it loudly to anyone who care to listen. There we were – spiritually lost, unable to save ourselves, God's image in us degraded by our sin – but God stepped in. He sent Jesus into this world. He said to every human being, "I love you. You're mine. I love you so much I've sent the One dearest to Me – My very own Son. He died on a cross taking the penalty of your sins upon Himself. I want you back. You are worth that much to Me. You are that important to Me. You are that valuable to Me."

One morning, a student at a Christian college - who lived a distance away and rode a crowded bus to the college each day - said to his wife as he went out the door, "I'm just going to go out and immerse myself in God's creation today." The next day his parting words were the same. On the third day, she said, "Don't you think you ought to go to class today? A couple of days walking in the woods or on the beach is okay, but don't you think enough is enough?" He said, "Oh, I've been going to class every day." "Then what is all this business about immersing yourself in creation?" she said. "Well, I spend forty minutes on the bus each morning and afternoon," he explained. "Can you think of a setting more thick with creation than that—all these people created, created in the image of God, created male and female?"

It's easy for us to look at the grandeur and beauty of God's creation and stop there. Yet, sometimes we ignore the people right in front of us and their value and importance to God. We need to learn to embrace all the people around us with the same delight as beautiful stars, grand mountains, and awesome oceans. Men and women, kids and the elderly, the beautiful and the plain, the blind and the deaf, amputees and paralytics, the mentally impaired and the emotionally distraught—each one a significant and sacred demonstration of God's creation.

God knew all about you and had you in His heart before He created the world. He formed you in your mother's womb. He knew the name your parents would give you, your personality, the life experiences you would have, your future, and your destiny. He

knew the circumstances that brought you to the point of putting your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. By the same token, He knows why you're still refusing to surrender your life to Jesus today. God has plans for you. As your Creator, He has a purpose for your life. When you start to follow Jesus, you begin a wonderful new adventure in discovering what God wanted you to be and to become. In God, you and I discover our true worth, our true value, our true identity, our true self. He sent Jesus into this world and asked Him to give up His life for you and me. And then in God, you also discover He has a plan and purpose for you – one that was also drawn up before the world was created. Right there is the real meaning of being human. But don't let the revelation of what it means to be human end there! It leads us to one more insight.

THE MISSION OF BEING HUMAN.

First of all, the mission of being human entails being responsible stewards of God's awesome creation. "You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas." (Ps. 8:6-8 NLT) I don't really understand why some Bible-believing Christians find it hard to be against the misuse of our natural resources or just see them as something to use up as quickly and thoughtlessly as possible. I don't get why some of them aren't concerned about the different ways we pollute God's beautiful world. If you don't believe in global warming because you're not convinced it's scientifically accurate, well, OK. But if you resist it because you just don't want to be identified with so-called political liberals and their agenda, I'd be more concerned about being on the wrong side of Scripture. Christians have every reason to be environmentalists. This – and other Scriptures – underline the fact God calls us to be wise managers of this world's resources – the land, the air, the water, and the creatures who live here. We treat them with the dignity and care they deserve as a part of God's creation. This psalm implies God holds human beings responsible for what happens to this planet. It's part and parcel of our mission.

Secondly, the Bible suggests elsewhere – not here in Psalm 8, but in other places – that the mission of being human is to become like Jesus. In other words, you more and more clearly reflect God's image as you move through life. You develop His character. You increasingly do life His way. You more and more reflect His values. When you put your trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes into you. Through Him you receive a new power, a new ability, and a new strength to live a new kind of life. The Bible says, "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Cor. 5. 17 NLT) You unload all the spiritual junk that's accumulated in your soul over the years: a raging temper, a lying tongue, a controlling or manipulative personality, bondage to fear or anxiety, sexual promiscuity, bitter resentment from a deep hurt in your past, addictions to things like drugs, alcohol, or pornography, a sinful focus on money, on things, on success as the world – not God – defines it – just to name a few kinds of junk. In the place of that spiritual trash, God plants, nurtures, and grows new character stuff Scripture calls the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Yes, the mirror of your life and mine has been cracked. No doubt about that.

No argument there. But the more you live to and for Jesus, the more those cracks disappear and the more of God's image can be seen in your life and mine.

Thirdly, the Bible suggests elsewhere – not here in Psalm 8, but in other places – that the mission of being human means you become an integral part of Jesus' mission. What's that? Jesus said of Himself, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." (Lk. 19:10 NLT) Spiritually lost people matter to Jesus. That's why God sent Him into this world. All of us here today were once lost – ignorant of God, unaware of His love, and oblivious to the salvation He provided through Jesus. But someone prayed for us. For some of us, they had to pray a long time! Then, someone shared the good news about Jesus with us. Someone cared enough to become a channel of God's love to us. Do any specific lost people matter to you – a family member, a neighbor, a friend? Are you a "someone" to anyone today who is still far from God? Are you praying for anyone? Are you making an effort to build a relationship or get into a faith conversation with anyone who is lost? There are so many people around us who desperately need to know what God really thinks of them. Broken but deeply loved. Needing transformation but infinitely precious. Sinful but worthy of receiving forgiveness through Jesus' shed blood. God's method is to use those who have already been reached to reach out to those who haven't been reached yet. Are you a part of that great mission today?

I like the story of a pastor who was walking down the street early one Sunday morning when he noticed a red flower lying on the sidewalk apparently pulled up from the earth and left on the sidewalk to die. Although the sun was barely up, the leaves were already beginning to wilt, and the dirt around the few strands of roots was getting dry. In a very short time, the red flower would die and perhaps it was already beyond help. So this pastor picked up the red flower, carried it to the sanctuary of the church he served, and laid it on the communion table. During the children's message in the worship service, he explained where he'd found the red flower and that it would surely die unless together – pastor and kids – they did something to help.

So there in the worship service, they took some good soil, put it around the roots, propped up the flower with a good stick, and watered it well. The pastor warned the kids that even with this effort, the flower still might not make it. But even if it should die, they'd know they'd made an effort to save its life even if someone else had tried to harm it. Of course, the red flower fell off and the plant had to be trimmed back considerably. Even at that, more leaves continued to die and fail. From time to time, the plant would be brought back into the sanctuary and the kids would be given a progress report. When more leaves died and fell off, none of them said, "Let's give up." There always seemed to be hope the red flower would make it and new life would show up.

All winter long, that plant was watered and cared for. New leaves appeared and grew. One day, the church's secretary came into the pastor's office and said, "Guess what! There's a new red flower. It's blooming." That next Sunday, the red flower was on the communion table. The kids joined in the celebration that this plant – which had been left for dead – had been brought back to life through their efforts and care.

Why does this church exist? To bring honor and glory to God. Good answer. To help people trust in Jesus and become His disciples. Good answer. To grow red flowers. What? This church never looks at other human beings and says they're too far gone. We don't write anybody off. Instead, because of God's love and what Jesus has done on our behalf at the cross and empty tomb, we pick people up and do what we can to restore life and hope. And sometimes, an almost dead red flower blooms again.