

*STRONG  
AND WEAK*

*BIBLE*  *STUDY*

*ANDY CROUCH*



6 STUDIES FOR INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS

IVP SIGNATURE BIBLE STUDIES

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## SESSION ONE

# *AUTHORITY AS GOD'S IMAGE BEARERS*

*PSALM 8:1-9*

**AUTHORITY IS** *meant to characterize every image bearer.* This authority, uniquely ours as the image bearers of God, is a gift in every way. It does not come from our own autonomous selves—it is given by Another. And it is good.

Think of authority as *the capacity for meaningful action.* The first readers of the biblical command to “be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28) can only have had the faintest inkling of how human beings have been able to fulfill that call. The sorrow of the human story is not that we *have* authority; it is the way we have misused and neglected that authority.

### SESSION GOAL

Consider God's gift of trusting human beings with a measure of his authority.

### READ

Chapters 1 and 2 of  
*Strong and Weak*

### REFLECT

- \* What are some ways our culture defines authority? Which of these seem godly? Which do not seem godly?

- \* How do you feel about being given authority (*the capacity for meaningful action*) by God?

STUDY

READ PSALM 8:1-9.

No other species has such a clear sense of responsibility for *other* species—what Christian theology calls *dominion*, the capacity and responsibility to act on behalf of the flourishing of the rest of creation. The psalmist considered both the vastness of the cosmos and the smallness of human beings in the midst of it, then exclaimed his response in Psalm 8.

<sup>1</sup> LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory  
in the heavens.

<sup>2</sup>Through the praise of children and infants  
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,  
to silence the foe and the avenger.

<sup>3</sup>When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,

<sup>4</sup>what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
human beings that you care for them?

<sup>5</sup>You have made them a little lower than the angels  
and crowned them with glory and honor.

<sup>6</sup>You made them rulers over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under their feet:

<sup>7</sup>all flocks and herds,  
and the animals of the wild,

<sup>8</sup>the birds in the sky,  
and the fish in the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.

<sup>9</sup>LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

1. What authority does God give humans?

A common theme in the Hebrew Bible is weakness (that of children and infants) turned into strength. The work of God's fingers is vast, incomprehensible, and strong (v. 3), contrasting with the word in this psalm for the humans (v. 4), which is often associated with human frailty.<sup>1</sup>

2. If you were to read verses 2-4 aloud, what tone might you take? (Astonishment? wonder? surprise? incredulity?) If you're willing, say these verses aloud with that tone, or be curious about what tone naturally arises in your voice.

3. How are men and women crowned with glory and honor in a way that animals are not (v. 5; see also Genesis 1:27)?

To put everything under human feet refers to the idea in Genesis 1:28 where dominion “does not indicate permission to exhaust the creation’s resources but suggests that God grants to humans the honor of representing God in caring for all of creation.”<sup>2</sup>

4. How do verses 5-8 resemble the creation account (Genesis 1:28; 2:19)?
5. The Psalmist opens and closes with the word *majestic*. If a child were to ask you what “majestic” means, what would you say?

The envelope of the psalm (beginning and end) is about God, whereas the body of the text is about human dominion, making the psalm centered on God, not humans. Human dominion is a gift from God the Creator. The use of power without the praise of God would exploit creation and corrupt the psalm’s hope.<sup>3</sup>

6. What does the fact that this psalm is centered on God and not humans tell us about how humans can best exercise any authority given to us?

**Psalm 8 follows seven psalms full to the brim with enemies. Human suffering (Psalms 1–7) does not diminish the royal place and vocation of humanity to care for God's creation.**

7. Why is it important for humans to know that authority (Psalm 8) exists for humans in spite of weakness and suffering (Psalms 1–7)?

 **RESPOND** 

- \* In what areas of life have you been given responsibility or the capacity for meaningful action (authority)?

✧ How does Psalm 8 shed light on that responsibility?

☀️ **PRAY** ☀️

As you pray this week, try paraphrasing Psalm 8 in light of a responsibility you bear in your life, even if it's as simple as caring for your home or car.

☀️ **NEXT STEPS** ☀️

This week as you water plants, do yardwork, or take care of pets, consider in wonder how God has given you the gift of dominion in caring for these creatures. If you do this work, try approaching it in the tone you found in question 2.

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 59.

<sup>2</sup>Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 59.

<sup>3</sup>Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 60-61.



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