

# What are humans?

New Year 2021 (27 December - 30 January)



2021.

Writing those four numerals in late 2020 as this theme is developed feels surreal. Who knows what things will look like in a few days, let alone when the calendar rolls around to a new year? The world has been thrown off kilter by a global health crisis and the accompanying economic and social turmoil left in its wake.

Everything is on its head as we seek to rebuild a better world.

At the start of this new year we are going to go back to basics and ask — *what are humans?* On a physical, cultural and spiritual level what does it mean to be human?

Who are we called to be and what are we called to do?

How can we come together in this strange turbulent time to live up to our humanity?

We will consider the cosmos, gold, worms and how utterly precious we are...

*Each week of the five week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and thought triggers.*

# Stardust children of God (27 December)

What are humans? We are the stardust children of God woven out of the fabric of the universe! We are each burning lights in the firmament who are invited to call our heavenly father — *Abba* 'Dad'! This first week — in the space overlapping one year ending and another unfolding we will contemplate those two facts: 1) We are stardust. 2) We are God's children.

## 1. Genesis 1: 26-31

1. **A wonder. A responsibility. An honour.** The fundamental, revolutionary, mind-blowing fact at the heart of human beings is that we resemble God — the creator and maker of all.

## 2. Psalm 148

2. **"Praise him all you shining stars..."** Elementally speaking, most of the things a human body is made up of originally came from stars. We, alongside the rest of the created world, are a constellation of worship.

## 3. Galatians 4: 4-7

3. **"Abba!"** There is a cry within us: "Dad!" Humans are not slaves or robots that are meant to mechanically serve God — but rather we are precious children beloved of the Father.

## 4. Ecclesiastes 3: 16-22

4. **Dust to dust.** Verse 20 contains an iconic phrase that's familiar in popular culture but verse 21 is startling and perhaps not something you would expect to find in the Bible. It doesn't feature on many cards or inspirational posters... But it expresses a real, profound wondering at the heart of humanity.

## 5. Romans 8: 12-17 (Hogmanay)

5. **A Hogmanay Hallelujah!** We end this year crying out: "Abba Father!"

## 6. Numbers 6: 22-27 (New Year's Day)

6. **A timeless blessing to start the year.** What are the things that we stardust children of God are wanting to bless and keep this year?
7. **We are heavenly dust!** What better way to kick off the new year in earnest than a mind bending Pauline riff on physicality, transformation and eternity!

## 7. 1 Corinthians 15: 35-58

# Screw ups, comeback kids, utterly precious? (January 3)

So what are humans and what's the point of us? What does it really mean to **be** human? Certainly a quick look through history shows us that we seem to screw up a lot; but we also have a certain irrepressible spirit. We are the comeback kids of the universe. Through the Bible we discover something else as well... that we are — each of us — utterly precious.

## 1. Jeremiah 31: 7-14

## 2. Psalm 8

## 3. Philippians 2: 5-11

## 4. Isaiah 60: 1-6 (Epiphany)

## 5. Psalm 72 (Verse 14 especially)

## 6. Ecclesiastes 3: 1-13

## 7.2 Corinthians 13: 13

1. **A timeless vision of return and renewal.** We humans, both as individuals and as collectives, have a propensity to screw things up. We get lost, we get in over our head, we get carried away. And yet we also have an uncanny ability to survive, to make it back again to tell the tale. The powerful stories that come up again and again in the Bible (and throughout global culture) of homecoming speak both of our desire to *explore* and our profound desire to *return*, to *belong*.

2. **What are human beings that you are mindful of them?** One of the inescapable facts of the Bible is that God loves humans. Sometimes you have to ask yourself — why? Or if not 'why' then 'how'? How does God go on loving us? Given the amount of times we are all too fallible.

3. **Human likeness.** Jesus became like one of us to live life like we do. That's how much we are loved! That is how precious we are.

4. **Being radiant.** This Epiphany are we feeling radiant? We bear God's light to help others so to see by.

5. **Precious blood!** Our human physical, skin and bones lives are valued, cherished, treasured.

6. **Throwing away and gathering.** Human life is full of ebb and flow, of passing seasons — of exodus and return, failure and redemption. Thinking metaphorically, this year what are the stones we are gathering and what are the stones we are throwing away?

7. We human beings are bundled up in the loving arms of the community of the Trinity... **Let's live up to the invitation.**

# Golden fools (10 January)

One of the things about being human is that we are phenomenally clever but also surprisingly foolish. Cognitive bias is the study of how our secret weapon — our massive complicated brains and the mystery of consciousness — can also be our secret downfall as we miss what is right in front of us. Sometimes we are literally too clever for our own good. But foolishness isn't always bad. We can indeed, as Paul urges, be fools for the sake of Christ! Is it sometimes foolish to keep hoping? To keep loving? To keep trying?

Foolishness can be a catalyst for change. Many great human endeavours have started foolishly — *who do this ragtag bunch think they are trying to take on an empire?* Foolishness can be part of growing in wisdom when it leads to insight, laughter and wonder.

## 1. Genesis 1: 1-5

1. **Lights up!** The stage is set. Before we even get to 'us' so much has happened. Let's begin by grounding our lives in a cosmic perspective.

## 2. Matthew 7: 24-27

2. **Sand CO (Lapse Industries).** 'Invest in our speedy, eco-friendly costal lots offering unparalleled access to nature. Experience the elements as never before, water all around... lots and lots and lots of water — each unit has a sea view.\* *\*Please note some sea views are from under the waves...*' It's easy to think what a numpty the foolish man in this story is but he likely got there through a series of logical sounding steps.

## 3. John 3: 1-9

## 4. Mark 1: 4-11

## 5. 1 Corinthians 4: 9-13

3. **Born again?** One of the things about being born is that it's a one time thing. It must have sounded crazy to Nicodemus to think about being born 'again'. Sometimes when going through a paradigm shift of understanding we have to pass through foolishness to get to the wisdom on the other side.

## 6. Jeremiah 27

## 7. 1 Corinthians 3: 10-23

4. **John the Baptist must have been quite intense...** The Bible — like humanity in general — is made up of some pretty wacky characters. Imagine coming face to face with John the Baptist.
5. **Fools for the sake of Christ.** To the world it often seems foolish to keep trying in the face of failure, to keep loving in the face of rejection, to keep striving in the face of struggle. But the people who change the world the most are often the ones written off as foolish to begin with.
6. **Practical yoker.** You're down the town getting your weekly shop when suddenly a man wearing a yoke around his neck starts going on about perishing, Nebuchadnezzar and false prophets. How do you react?
7. **Gold doesn't seem like the best building material.** It's notoriously soft and expensive, but it can withstand fire and never rusts... As foolish as it seems, we are called to build our lives with the precious gold that has been given to us so that we can shine for all to see. The world would have us hide treasure away but we are foolish enough to share our priceless gift...

## Words, worms, and worthiness (17 January)

You are of great worth. Your mind is of worth. Your body is of worth. Your spirit is of worth. Your words are of worth. Your contribution is of worth. Not one of us is worthless or goes unnoticed and unrecorded. Our highly complicated lifestyles can be alienating — caught up in big abstract systems that make us feel like cogs in a machine, or not even cogs — just spare parts no-one can remember the use for. Sadly we often live as if life is cheap.

But life is never cheap.

### 1. 1 Samuel 3: 1-20

### 2. John 1: 43-51

### 3. Mark 2: 13-17

### 4. 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20

### 5. John 3: 16

### 6. Psalm 22

### 7. John 8: 31-38

1. **Do my words fall to the ground?** Doubt is an integral part of what it is to be human. Surely God isn't talking to *me*! Surely I haven't got anything worthy to say...
2. **"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"** Sadly we all too often use our words to limit one another. We refuse to look past our prejudices and fail to notice the intrinsic worth of others.
3. **In-groups, out-groups, cliques, outcasts, insiders, outsiders...** Jesus did not accept the social boundaries of his day that said he shouldn't associate with 'unworthy' folk. Through history the powers that be have often had a vested interest in *divide and conquer* strategies setting groups against each other and making them forget what unites them.
4. **Your body is a temple.** Mind, body and spirit are all closely connected. Forget buildings — your own body is a place of worship!
5. **So loved.** Whether or not we feel it — we are considered by the creator of the world to be worthy of great love and sacrifice...
6. **"But I am a worm, and not human..."** When life has beaten us down and we feel we have lost our very humanity God draws close to us whispering words of life.
7. **The truth will set you free.** We humans, precious in God's sight, have been entrusted with freedom — the freedom to discover who we really are as beloved children of the most high.

# Unshakeable, unbreakable, unfake-able (24 January)

When it comes down to it what are humans? With God, the creator of the universe, at our side?  
Unshakeable, unbreakable, unfake-able!

## 1. Psalm 62

## 2. Mark 1: 14-20

## 3. John 18: 15-27

## 4. John 21: 15-19

## 5. Matthew 18: 21-35

## 6. Micah 6: 1-8

## 7. 1 John 4: 7-21

1. **"I shall not be shaken."** Over the centuries humans have called upon God through trial and adversity. Ironically it is often through contemplating the divine — the superhuman — that we discover our own human strength.
2. **Immediately they came.** Curiosity is one of the essential components of what makes us human. If it wasn't you would be living in an open-plan cave... Right from infancy humans are remarkably determined to do things that are hard, to persist, to explore, to test the limits. The disciples were invited to do something completely uncharted, with little explanation or context. And, like countless generations before and since, they immediately leapt at the chance.
3. **Only human.** Peter was wrestling with catastrophe, trauma, threat to his life... he broke. Humans break. We are, after all, only human. But the human spirit can't be broken beyond repair. And Peter's wasn't.
4. **Mending the spirit.** Healing a broken spirit can be painful as Peter discovered but through love he was repaired, re-equipped and restored for the task ahead.
5. **A comic tale of unkindness writ large.** Imagine the snarl of the servant grabbing his fellow servant by the lapel and demanding payment. The 'big man' reduced in our eyes to a greedy eejit. His rage and shame unaffected by his own forgiven status. He isn't living as one freed by forgiveness. This encounter reads like a sitcom episode where a furious everyman comes a cropper of his desire for status. Sadly part of ingratiating yourself with the 'higher ups' is to distance yourself from the 'lower downs'. Humans often start cycles of pain passing frustration down the chain. But this chain can be interrupted and reversed with compassion and kindness. We can pay back meanness to people who don't deserve it but we can also pay forward generosity. Real humanity — accept no imitation.
6. **Remember who you are. Remember your story.** God doesn't want thousands of rams. God wants you to act justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly. Not because it's nothing — but because it's everything. That we should choose to care for one another and walk humbly — that means the world to God.
7. **Born of love. Bound in love. Belonging in love.** We humans ultimately were made as an act of love, are held together in love, and are called to belong with one another in love.