

# Word Alive 2022 UCCF Science Network

## Session 1 - What does it mean to be human?

*In every age, technology has shaped how we see ourselves. With this in mind, we'll unpack what the Bible says about who God has made us to be.*

A reductionist interpretation of Darwinian evolution as promoted by Richard Dawkins and others leads to a view of human beings as randomly evolved survival mechanisms. *"We are all machines built by DNA whose purpose is to make more copies of the same DNA. Everything else in the living world is there for spreading "copy me" programmes about. That is exactly what we are for. We are machines for propagating DNA...."*

Alternatively in a world which has been transformed by digital technologies, human beings are seen as information-processing machines, eg physicist Max Tegmark in his book *Life 3.0*

*Life is a self-replicating information-processing system whose information determines its behaviour (software) and the blueprints for its hardware."*

Life 1.0 is simple and biological: it is *"unable to redesign either its hardware or its software during its lifetime."*

Life 2.0 is human and biological: it can *"redesign much of its software (through culture), but not its hardware;"*

Life 3.0, which doesn't yet exist on earth although it is nearly here, is non-human and post-biological/ technological: it can *"dramatically redesign not only its software but its hardware as well."*

Reductionist understandings of humanity cannot explain rationality, the search for meaning, extraordinary mathematical and scientific abilities, creativity, love, relationships, morality, awareness of God, longing for glory and for transcendence etc etc.

For scientists one of the most extraordinary and inexplicable aspects of being human is the apparent correspondence between the human mind and the fundamental structures of the universe. *"The most incomprehensible thing about the Universe is that it is comprehensible."* Einstein

At the same time reductionist understandings of humanity cannot explain the horrific depths of evil of which human beings are capable - malevolence, genocide, self-destruction, violence against the unborn, etc etc

*'The glory and the shame of the universe' (Pascal)*

*'You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve, and that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth' (CS Lewis)*

### **Biblical understandings**

#### **a) We are created to reflect God's character and being – *the imago dei*. (Genesis 1:26,27)**

We are created as unique persons, but we are created to be in relationship. We are 'constituted by our relations'. We reflect the unique Persons of the Trinity. We are created to be in three-fold relations with God, with one another, and with creation.

Our creation in God's image explains the correspondence between the human mind and the universe – because our minds are capable of following and reflecting the mind of the Creator – "I am thinking God's thoughts after him." Kepler

#### **b) We are made from dust (Genesis 2). We are designed to be limited, fragile, dependent and contingent.**

**c) We are made into a family.** We are born into a web of relationships of mutual dependence. We are designed to care for one another and to bear one another's burdens.

**d) We are created in order ultimately to bear the divine glory.** (Romans 8:21,30, 2 Peter 1: 3,4). The two-fold meaning of being created in God's image. The image points both to the ineradicable dignity of our individual creation but also forward to the supreme promise of the fulfilment of the divine image in glorification. "We shall be like him for we shall see him as he is".

Yet all human beings are terribly **broken and contaminated** by the Fall and by the consequences of human and natural evil. Every aspect of our humanity is contaminated and damaged by evil.

Human beings are both more wonderful and more terrible than secular thinking can encompass.

**Common grace** – Despite the ubiquity of evil, God remains faithful to his creation and his Spirit continues to witness to and influence all human beings. God's common grace is continually revealed at work in all human beings, both those who are redeemed and those who are not. Despite our human brokenness and fallenness, God's reality, grace and glory are still continually revealed. Scientific exploration, technological creativity and advancing healthcare are all expressions of common grace and fulfilment of the **creation mandates**.

Exercising dominion over every living creature on the earth. Genesis 1:26

"Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it." Genesis 1:28

God put humans into the garden to 'work the ground'. To 'cultivate it' and 'to watch over it'. Genesis 3:5,8,15

### **Finding meaning within a greater narrative**

Human beings are created to seek after truth and to find a meaning to the narrative of their lives. And we are created within a master narrative, a great drama.

'You have to indwell the story of the Bible as the true story of the whole world'. (Lesslie Newbigin)

The scriptures interpret myself to myself – and act as spectacles which enable me to see the world as the 'theatre of God's glory" (Calvin).

The big picture is above all else a *drama*, a *narrative*, which starts before the foundation of the world and extends to the end of time, to 'the ages of the ages'. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. Each of us has the extraordinary privilege and wonder of being given a bit-part in the great drama of the ages. We are called to be bit-players and the only genuine choice we have is whether or not we choose to play the bit-part we have been given.

### **Further reading**

*Matters of Life and Death* (chapters 1 and 2), John Wyatt, IVP

*What makes us human?* Mark Meynell, Good Book Company

*Resurrection and Moral Order (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*, Oliver O'Donovan, IVP

More resources at [bethinking.org](http://bethinking.org) and [johnwyatt.com](http://johnwyatt.com). Premier podcast "*Matters of Life and Death*"

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