

# How to Be Human

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## Prayer of Illumination

Gracious God, give us humble, teachable, and obedient hearts, that we may receive what you have revealed, and do what you have commanded.

Amen.

## Background

*"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void and there was darkness over the deep, with the Spirit of God sweeping over the waters."*

The Hebrew words for "formless void" are *tohu bohu*. Say it after me, wherever you are: *tohu... bohu*. *Tohu bohu* is not only fun to say, but it sounds like it could be a downtown bohemian vegan restaurant. It's not.

*Tohu* means "formless" and *bohu* means "empty." To the Hebrew mind, to not have shape or form, is basically non-existence, a deep darkness of nothingness.

*Tohu-bohu* has been adopted into the English language. It means chaos and confusion. You can look it up in Webster's dictionary. We need to use this word *tohu-bohu* more. I mean we see *tohu-bohu* all around us these days, don't we?

But here's the really good news in all this:

Our Creator God is still creating and still bringing order out of the *tohu-bohu* engulfing our world today:

- The *tohu-bohu* of the coronavirus.
- The *tohu-bohu* of systemic racial discrimination.
- The *tohu-bohu* of violence and destructive behavior.
- The *tohu-bohu* of sickness, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, and abandonment.

Genesis reminds us that our God is the *tohu-bohu* whisperer!

God has the power to bring harmony out of chaos—christening it “holy chaos.”

God creates out of the *tohu-bohu* something new— a new creation, a whole new world.

On Days 1-3 of creation in Genesis 1, God creates and orders space in the *tohu-bohu*.

- Separating light from dark.
- Cordoning off the waters above from the waters below.
- Scooping out oceans to create space for dry land.

On Days 4-7 God fills the *tohu-bohu* with goodness and blessing.

- Hurling into the skies sun, moon, and stars.
- Flooding the water with sea creatures.
- Catapulting birds into the skies.
- Populating the land with animals—including humans.

Yet something very different is also going on with the creation of humans, you and me.

God speaks only to us—not to the other creatures. On the other days of creation, God says “let the earth produce...” but here God says, “let us make humankind in our own image.”

There is some mystery here with this divine “us.” As Christians, we can see “this us” as a foreshadowing of the later revelation of the Triune God.

So both male *and* female, were declared—  
not only blessed,  
not only good,  
but *very* good.

And God gives us a job to do. Be fruitful, multiply, have dominion over the earth.

We're the pinnacle of God's creation—we all are created in God's image and likeness.

*So let's hear now the word of the Lord from:*

### **Scripture: Genesis 1:26-31 (NRSV)**

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

### **SERMON – How to Be Human**

There was an ancient rabbi who once said that we need to carry with us wherever we go two pieces of paper in each pocket.

On one paper should be written the words, "I am made of breath." This is for the times we're discouraged and feeling the weight of either inner or outer *tohu bohu*. We remember that God created us by his breath, making us a living being, created in God's image.

On the other piece of paper should be written the words, "I am made of dust." We need to hear these words when we take ourselves too seriously or think the world should revolve around us or we're abusing the power entrusted to us.

The Latin root word for the English words "dust," "soil," or "ground" is *humus*. Not "hummus" but "humus." Also the words humanity and humility come from the same root *humus*.

- Humility is so important because going low is the way to be raised up in the kingdom of God.
- "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he will..." what? "lift you up."

But another word that comes from the root humus is humor.

Part of humility is seeing the humor of our humanity—that even though we’re so small, we’re still created in God’s image. We’re freed to loosen up and laugh at ourselves. We don’t have to take ourselves so seriously. Humor helps us remember that in the Genesis creation story we forever share the same day—Day 6 of creation—with the cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts.

But there’s more at work in our passage too. Being made in God’s image and likeness means that we’re in a special relationship with God. We reflect God in a way that no other living thing does. All of us—both male and female are entirely and utterly equal. To fully understand humanity you need both female and male.

God is also reminding us of the importance of community. Right now we’re painfully aware of how important community is in this season of physical distancing from one another. Now being made in God’s image also speaks to the unity of the entire human race. There are animals of every kind, but only one human species, one human race. There aren’t some kinds of human beings that inherently have supremacy over other races. The Bible teaches us we all are made in God’s image equally. We have different skin tones and cultures and sizes, but we are all equally human.

This means we must take every single human life seriously. The Jewish sages of old emphasized the importance of this. They taught that humanity was created as one single unit by God to teach us that the destruction of one single life is tantamount to the destruction of the entire world. And the preservation of one human life is the preservation of the entire world. And God intended that no person or people group have a claim to unique or superior ancestry that would put them on a higher plane than others. Later in Genesis, God blesses Noah and his family after the flood and declares murder to be the most grievous of crimes because “in His image God made human beings.”

To be made in God’s likeness, means that to be truly human, We also are to be godly, and to reflect God’s character. We’re not just a bunch of animals. We’re a chip off the old block. And so like God, we’re enabled to be creative and life-giving. We’re called to bless others and create good things. Our reason for existence is to ensure that not only God is respected, but that every human being is respected and their dignity upheld—no matter their race, nationality, creed, gender, or social status.

So to be made in God’s image—the *imago dei*—speaks of the infinite worth of human beings—from the womb to the tomb. To say we’re created in God’s image means that we have the stamp of royalty upon us. Every single human being—male and female, child and adult, white and black and all the colors in between bear God’s image. To be made in God’s image also means that we’re symbols of God’s presence on earth. We’re God’s representatives and ambassadors.

Although we aren’t divine, we bear witness to the activity of God in the world. In addition, we’re endowed with a divine task to partner with God in this high calling. And so our purpose and mission on earth is:

to tend and shepherd God’s creation and God’s people on God’s behalf.

We’re to be good stewards and managers of God’s creation that’s on loan to us. This authority or “dominion” we have is given to us by God, It isn’t earned—it’s graced upon us. This endowed power

isn't to be flaunted or abused. It's a responsibility that we'll all be held accountable for before our Maker. Our influence should be exercised and carried out in a way that brings glory to God and respects all.

God's power isn't tyrannical, punitive, abusive, or destructive. Instead in Genesis 1 we see God's power used to empower—create and affirm life in a way that invites, beckons, evokes, and permits. We follow God's lead and reflect God in the way we deal with one another, the way we lead in our spheres of influence, and how we treat God's creatures and God's planet.

Thank God, we have some help with this. Christ is the ultimate example of what it means to be human and how to be human. And he lives in you and me.

Paul writes in his letters about how Christ is the image of God. In Philippians 2 he says this:

“Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.”

Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.”

To be made in God's image is a divine charge to us—to co-operate with the Spirit to have Christ's image fashioned and formed in us more and more.

So to be human is to be both earthly and godly. Dust and breath. Made in God's image, but not God. God alone is God. We're created, not the Creator. We belong to God— we're not our own.

To be made in God's image means that God speaks to us. God is personal with us. God longs to know us better. And when God speaks, he reminds us that we're not only good, we're very good, and blessed by God. Even in our brokenness.

The Scriptures teach that even after the Fall in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve, you and me, are still good.

Paul Tillich puts it this way: We're "essentially good, but existentially estranged" from God. Our selfishness has created a distance between us and God and us and others. The image has been marred—but it's still there. We're "glorious ruins" as C.S. Lewis put it.

Like Adam and Eve, when we feel shame or self-hatred or are just plain mean to others, God calls us back to himself—all of us. Don't hide. Receive grace and forgiveness. Show up with your good and bad, sacred and profane. Bring to God your shadows and light, victories and defeats. Offer to God all of your humanity—body, mind, and soul. You don't have to pretend or hide from God—He already knows and sees. Let him take it and transform it.

Give to God your thirsts, longings, and aches. Your misunderstandings and missed opportunities. Your frustrations, questions, and doubts. Your emptiness and hollowness.

Don't cling to your bitterness or resentments. Don't hold on to, but rather hold up to God your fear and anger and hatreds and blind spots. Give him your wounds, masks, shields, and walls. Your attachments and addictions.

Let God calm your own personal *tohu bohu*. Take it off your shoulders. Put it on Christ—his yoke is easy.

Know that you're created, loved, and forgiven by God. You don't have to prove your worth to God or others. And don't forget—

Your neighbor is loved by God.

Your enemy is loved by God.

It's in this place of humility and honesty that we're most exalted. Most human and most godly.

Let Christ's abundant life seep through your broken cracks, and spill over your rough edges.

And that's how to be human.

Amen.

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