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8-23-2022

What it Means to be Human: A Review of You're Only Human

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Recommended Citation

Doornbos, G. E., & Landman, H. (2022). What it Means to be Human: A Review of You're Only Human. Retrieved from https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/1405

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What it Means to be Human: A Review of You're Only Human

Abstract

"We are embodied creatures created by God to be limited by time and space and with our own unique set of gifts and abilities."

Posting about the book *You're Only Human* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/what-it-means-to-be-human-a-review-of-youre-only-human/>

Keywords

In All Things, book review, You're Only Human, Kelly Kopic

Disciplines

Christianity

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What it Means to be Human: A Review of *You're Only Human*

Gayle Doornbos

Hannah Landman

August 23, 2022

Title: You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News

Author: Kelly Kopic

Publisher: Bazos Press

Publishing Date: January 18, 2022

Pages: 272 (Hardcover)

ISBN: 978-1587435102

A book conversation between Gayle Doornbos (GD) and Hannah Landman (HL)

Note from GD:

Unpacking what it means to be human—creatures whose limits are good gifts from God—Kelly Kopic's book offers rest to weary souls. It has quickly become one of my favorite books, and I have recommended it to colleagues, friends, and students. Kopic invites readers to embrace their limits and delight in our particularity as we depend on God and live in a community with others. Given the focus on community, we thought a review conversation would be a fitting way to engage in this book. This review is a written version of a discussion Hannah Landman and I had after reading the book.

GD: My limits are not something I usually delight in. In fact, I usually find myself wishing I had more time and more capacity and didn't really need sleep to function, especially during the hectic pace of the school semester. It's easy for me to slip into thinking that overcoming my limits can be achieved by implementing a tightly managed schedule and drinking another cup of coffee. Kopic's book, however, reminds us that to be human is to be limited. We are embodied creatures created by God to be limited by time and space and with our own unique set of gifts and abilities. Kopic rightly notes how a vast majority of western Christians have forgotten this reality, and confused human limitations with sin and consider dependence a sign of weakness. I found his invitation to explore what it means to be human deeply restful and beautiful, especially because it recasts what it means to live into Christ's redemptive work. Our goal is not to become superhuman, independent people who can do everything, but rather people who

delight in who God made us to be and grow into who we are in Christ through our dependence on Him and others. I'm wondering what struck you about Kopic's vision of the goodness of human finitude?

HL: First off, I'd echo what you said about often not delighting in limits—especially as someone who often likes that they have things to do. There were many instances in this book that I found myself both confronted by my own tendencies and comforted that I'm not alone in this, and that a cycle of nonstop work is not what God has designed us to do. I found Kopic's reflection on Christian community to be encouragingly challenging, especially as it pertains to human finitude. As we explore our limits and begin to accept that we are incapable of being and doing everything (which is not a bad thing!), we are encouraged to look to the body of Christ and lean on each other, which, admittedly, isn't something I feel I do well very often. Here, too, we can begin to let go of the control we feel we need and fall into rhythms of community with our church, family, roommates, peers, and coworkers. I appreciated Kopic's exploration of human finitude in this context, as defined by embracing and participating in community with God, neighbor, and creation as a part of a whole working together. Something I particularly appreciated was the idea that loving often isn't efficient, but we are called to love God and others first. There's a feeling that God encourages us to take time to invest in each other. We're not called to be hasty in our love because deep community is built slowly and intentionally, looking away from sheer productivity and towards relationality. There's a lot to unpack, but I'm curious what you found interesting about the way Kopic discusses slowness and process?

GD: I loved the way Kopic invites us to reorient our relationship with time. I'll be the first to admit that I often say things like "there's just not enough time in a day!" but Kopic points out that this kind of statement reveals a particular relationship to time that idolizes efficiency and productivity.¹ What if time wasn't about what we got done but about living in and cultivating our sense of the presence of God? What if our question at the end of the day wasn't 'did I get enough done?' but 'did I find myself "living in awareness of the sovereign King who is ever present, ever wise, ever concerned?"²' The latter opens up a much more abundant and full relationship with time in light of God's abundant presence. If time isn't about efficiency but presence, there will always be enough of it. I also loved how Kopic's discussion of slowness and process recasts our understanding of sanctification and spiritual growth. If our temporality is good news, then God delights in the process of our growth and sanctification. It's hard to fully grasp the reality that God's economy isn't particularly oriented to efficiency, but to transformation and relationship. One of the things I enjoyed about the book was that Kopic offered practices to start to live into this kind of reality, like Sabbath and participating in the life of the Church. What practices did you find meaningful, and were there any that surprised you?

HL: Honestly, I found Kopic's encouragement (and challenge) to embrace the rhythms and seasons of life not particularly surprising, but rather a larger call to action than it seems. The tendency to pack a schedule as full as it can get and then scowl in disappointment when I can't invest enough time in relationships (or sacrifice sleep to attempt to accomplish everything) is all too real. However, it is not necessarily healthy or fulfilling. There's so much we miss in a life

driven by a to do list. And, Kopic offers a reminder that a faithful life is not one driven by check boxes, but by resting in a Creator. Stepping back and looking at life from God's perspective, Kopic speculates that our view of a faithful and rich life is likely "much slower, more ordinary and earthy, but also more beautiful than we anticipate."³ However, I did initially find it surprising that Kopic specifically frames sleep as a spiritual discipline⁴. Sleep is one of the most powerful reminders that we are created dependent on a Creator and is a good gift of his as we are reminded of our lack of control and of the control of the one who sustains us. Even more broadly, rest is profoundly important, and it's easy to be swept up in a cycle of 'doing' that I forget to sit and delight in fellowship with God and my neighbor. We need rest to be active in our living as a community of individuals, even though it often seems counterproductive. More importantly, as we see our own limitations in light of God's design for and delight in community, and as we commune with God and others, we are blessedly able to rest in a good God who has no such limits.

GD: We are so hardwired for productivity! It's so ingrained that it's easy to start to add Kopic's recommendations to an ever-expanding to-do list (appreciate and get more sleep, Sabbath, participate in church, etc.). But, his work truly invites us to embody our lives in a different, more fully human way. It's a call to rest and delight. It's a book that I will continue to come back to and read again and again because it reminds me that my humanity is a gift from God to be delighted in and cherished, not overcome.

HL: Yes! Kopic invites us into a way of life that embraces our limitations as gifts that encourage us to rest and look outside of ourselves, which he presents as vital to living faithfully. Part of the reason I will likely pick this book up again in the future is, as you mentioned, the beautiful reminder that our human finitude is not a burden but comes from a God who knows us.

1. p. 126

2. p.142

3. p.195

4. p. 214