

Ten Books that Make Us Human

1. [The Bible](#), It is one of the first books I read (not cover-to-cover, at first, of course), and the first book I memorized passages from as a child. I cannot imagine trying to think about or comprehend the human condition without it. A few specific books within The Good Book that merit note: Genesis and Exodus, the Psalms and The Book of Wisdom, the Gospel of John, and Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

2. [Confessions](#), by St. Augustine of Hippo. I've read it several times now, and I am always amazed by the depth of Augustine's thinking and emotions, as well as by the clarity and profundity of his expression.

3. [Summa Theologica](#), by St. Thomas Aquinas. It would be a mistake to assume this seminal work of theology/philosophy is dry or merely didactic, because a careful and reflective reading reveals an understanding of man's origin, nature, and end that has rarely been rivaled.

4. [The Sonnets](#), by William Shakespeare. I've enjoyed and profited from many of Shakespeare's plays, but am drawn again and again back to the sonnets, which express not only the depths of human love, but what it means to be human in the simple and small ways.

5. [David Copperfield](#) or [Oliver Twist](#), by Charles Dickens. I first read them as a young boy and they brought to life a range of characters and aspects of humanity—the good, the bad, and the ugly—I had never seen or experienced before.

6. [Four Quartets](#), by T. S. Eliot. The Wasteland got (and gets?) more attention, but this mature, post-conversion poem is, I think, the greatest poem of the twentieth-century, and one of the most moving descriptions of life, death, and spiritual awakening ever written.

7. [My Name Is Asher Lev](#), by Chaim Potok. Certainly my most personal pick, a book I first read as a ten-year-old boy, and then several more times thereafter. An aching portrayal of a Jewish boy and his struggles with faith, family, and personal aspirations.

8. [The Abolition of Man](#), by C. S. Lewis. My favorite book by Lewis, a short but penetrating work about the nature of man. If you want to read it in fictional form, check out Lewis' "Space Trilogy": *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*.

9. [Lost in the Cosmos](#), by Walker Percy. A bit quirky, but more than a bit brilliant, full of wit, wisdom, caustic charm, and some very challenging questions about what it means to be human in a post-Christian, post-modern culture.

10. [Redemptor Hominis](#), by Blessed John Paul II. The late Holy Father's first encyclical (March 1979) is essential for anyone who wishes to understand his thought and his Christ-centric understanding of humanity: "The Redeemer of Man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history." Amen.

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