

9. But he was just a normal bloke.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Ever since the shooting, there have been many attempts to work out what led an apparently normal man to commit such an extraordinary crime.

It's not just out of curiosity. There is also an understandable desire to find out something about Derrick Bird that distinguishes him from the rest of us.

After all, if he really was just an ordinary West Cumbrian, how do we know that other ordinary West Cumbrians are not capable of doing something as bad? More pressing still, how do I know I won't lose it – what ever 'it' is – and do something similar?

These are questions for a later date. What I want to do today is to hear what the Bible says about normal human beings.

There was an exhibition in London a few years ago called, *Body Worlds*. It showed actual human bodies without their skin on. It was sensational, and highly offensive to some people.

Imagine an exhibition that revealed us more deeply still. This exhibition would show the human heart, the inner me, the control centre of my personality, from which I think, dream, hope and imagine.

If we took the cleanest living person we could think of and exposed them in this way, the exhibition would cause a scandal. Visitors of the gallery would see on display motives for self-promotion that are usually associated with history's psychotic megalomaniacs. Even the best person would be exposed as someone determined to edit God the creator out of the world he has made.

Our heart is a factory of self-promoting and God-rejecting longings. That's why we can sometimes be difficult to live with and take offence at other people so easily. It's quite logical. If I follow my selfish heart and you follow yours, we may collide. Then it will boil down to a question of who can exert the most power.

Jeremiah 17:9 is not flattering, but it is surely true: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

I am very grateful for the expertise of psychiatric professionals. But in the days after the shooting, as they tried to explain Derrick Bird's behaviour, I was struck by Jeremiah's question. Who can understand the human heart? Ultimately, no one can.

There may be reasons why his sinful heart flared up and acted in the way it did on the day it did. Hopefully some of those reasons will come out more clearly. But the underlying culprit is the *incomprehensibly* selfish – more precisely, sinful – human heart. I've got one of those as much as the gunman.

Thankfully, the one person who does fully understand our hearts, Jesus, is the one person who can give us a brand new one. If we ask him, he will exchange our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. His Spirit will cleanse us deep inside.