

## Questions People Ask

*By Joni Eareckson Tada and Nigel M. de S. Cameron*

*As authors of the book, How to Be a Christian in a Brave New World, Joni and Nigel have been asked a lot of questions on topics like stem-cell research, cloning, genetic engineering and biotechnology. In this paper, they will share some of their answers. However, bear in mind that short answers can never provide the complete response with such complicated human issues. We encourage you to apply them in the context of the other information and personal stories you've encountered in Beyond Suffering. Joni and Nigel would challenge you to move into a position to get your own answers, as well as share them with others. They want you to join them in teaching the church how to live for God in the special world of the twenty-first century!*

### **“Does a Clone Have a Soul?”**

Yes, of course! God doesn't give souls to some people and not to others. Genesis 1 says that every human being, every member of our species, is made in God's image. That means they have souls. We have souls from the moment we become human (which is when our biological lives start, as fertilized embryos or cloned embryos).

The fact that bad things were done to begin the lives of cloned people does not affect their status as people. Never doubt that even tiny embryos are fully human. Not only are they members of the human species (just like chimpanzee embryos are members of the chimp species), but we know that Jesus took human form as a zygote, a tiny embryo. That's when his human life began, and it's when ours begin as well.

If one day cloned babies are born, they too will be totally human, even if they resulted from the kind of planning and manufacturing that should never be used to make people. “Designed” humans are still human; but to the extent that they result from someone's planning, their human dignity is compromised.

Sometimes people say, “But the cloned baby is not unique; he or she is a copy.” In genetic terms, that's true. But so are identical twins! Twins happen naturally, so there is nothing wrong with being a twin. Clones happen unnaturally, and of course instead of twins or triplets, you could have ten thousand “identical clones,” all different ages, copies of a celebrity profiled in *People* magazine.

But genes are not everything. Even in the womb, twins become different in important ways: they have different fingerprints; their brains form in different ways. So the identical twins we know (and perhaps you are a twin!) are often similar in uncanny ways, but also different—sometimes very much so.

### **“What Can We Do?”**

People often ask this question with a sense of resignation, feeling that bad things are inevitable and that our efforts will go nowhere. That's not true!

Christians have made a huge difference in history precisely because they were not defeatists. They believed in a great God! And they could see opportunities all around them to make a difference.

Whether you make a difference in one person's life, or a nation's life, it's a huge difference. We can see today the impact Christians have made at high levels in politics. We can also see the difference they have made at ground level. The pro-life movement early on learned that we can do both, must do both—so we have Crisis Pregnancy Centers and we lobby Congress to push through laws to end “partial-birth abortions,” defending the unborn victims of violence.

We need exactly the same approach on these wider issues as we have taken on abortion. We need to live distinctive lives, to testify to our friends and neighbors and coworkers, and to work to defeat evil and promote what is good at every level in the culture. If we get discouraged, we need to remember the great example of William Wilberforce and his lifelong campaign to abolish slavery. And we also need to get better informed, because whatever discouragements we meet, there are always other places where things are going better. The media will not always help. Not many Americans know that “therapeutic cloning,” such a huge issue in U.S. politics, has actually been banned north of the border in Canada.

So there is something *everyone* can do! You need to think and pray and work out what it is for you.

### “Should We Use In Vitro Fertilization?”

Christians take different stances on that question, and we can understand why. Catholics have been taught to avoid in vitro since it involves too many moral problems. Evangelicals often haven't thought about it at all. Some who have, agree that it is wrong. Others conclude that it all depends on what you are doing with the technology. It's ultimately a question of conscience—making up your mind in the Lord's presence, after you have studied the pros and cons.

But some things seem clear to us. This is *not* a routine medical procedure; it is filled with moral problems. We don't think you should select the “best” embryos and discard the others. We don't think you should create more embryos than you are going to implant, nor that you should implant more than can be safely carried to term if they survive. We don't think it is ever right to freeze embryos; they are human beings, and pro-lifers do not stick other human beings in the freezer. We don't think that unmarried women should ever use in vitro; babies should be conceived in the context of marriage. We don't think surrogate mothering is ever justified; carrying someone else's baby for money (a womb-for-rent) or even for friends and family. And, of course, we don't think that “donor gametes” should be used—sperm and eggs from people other than the couple concerned.

Some people use in vitro to have their own babies, carefully restricting the use of the technology so that these evils can be avoided. Whether you do so is up to you, once you have prayed it through and talked it through and read all you can on the pros and cons of having a test-tube baby.

### “We Have Used In Vitro and We Have Frozen Embryos; What Should We Do Now?”

You know the story of the traveler in Ireland who asked the way to Dublin? He was told: “You can't start from here!” In a fallen world, we always have to deal with situations we wish we had not gotten ourselves into.

The key is to remember *who* your frozen embryos are. They are not things; they are not part of your body; they are people: tiny, unconscious, frozen people. So what should you do? You should give them every chance of life. That will usually mean taking responsibility for having them implanted, and carrying them to term, if you are (medically) able to do that, as with every baby. It may be possible for them to be “adopted” by another couple, and programs like Snowflakes help make that possible. Using a “surrogate” mother to rescue an embryo who would otherwise perish is of course completely different from deliberately setting out to use in vitro for surrogate mothering—as different as adopting an orphan is from kidnapping or buying a baby.

## “Are Tiny Embryos Really Human?”

When the press quotes pro-lifers, they often suggest that our beliefs are simply incredible. How can a tiny, microscopic embryo really have the kind of human dignity that brings the “right to life?” How can it be a he or a she, “one of us?”

When you put it like that, it *can* sound incredible. Early embryos—zygotes, blastocysts, various technical words describe them at different stages—are tiny, they are unconscious, they have no organs or nervous system or brain—and since the 1970s they have been available for experimentation. Some Christians who are definitely against abortion have their doubts. In fact, one of the most disheartening experiences in the debates about cloning and embryo stem cell research has been that some “anti-abortion” politicians have decided to trim their sails and come out in favor of destroying early embryos.

There are two basic answers to the question. One comes simply from science. While tiny embryos appear to us to be very different even from later embryos and fetuses (we use that word from eight weeks of gestation onwards), the problem lies with us. Our imagination is at fault. Every fact we have learned about genetics and embryology suggests that we are wrong to harbor these doubts. All it takes to turn an embryo into a college student is two things: a suitable environment and food. So when someone says, “That doesn’t look like a human being to me,” the answer is, “That’s exactly what human beings look like when they are young; it’s what you and I looked like too at that age.” A famous philosopher once wrote an essay with the title, “Was I a zygote?” The answer, of course, is yes!

Many, many big shifts in human development turn a zygote into a voter. Some people have suggested that the biggest ones come after birth, when the new human being becomes self-aware and able to communicate, or when he or she becomes able to take care of himself or herself (teens? after college?). The point is that we are biological beings who go through many changes. Unless we focus on what is special about the human species, we leave ourselves open to racism and other kinds of discrimination against the handicapped, the elderly, and whatever group of humans it becomes fashionable to regard as less than human.

But Christians have another answer. For us, it’s easy! We believe in Jesus. And we know that Jesus became one of us in the incarnation. As soon as his mother Mary conceived him, miraculously, by the power of the Holy Spirit, his human life as the Son of God began. Read the Christmas story at the start of Luke’s gospel, and remember that Luke was a physician. He tells how when Mary was only a few weeks pregnant, she met her cousin Elizabeth, six months pregnant with John the Baptist. John “leaped” for joy in Elizabeth’s womb at the presence of the tiny Jesus in Mary’s giving his first testimony to Jesus. And, of course, we read in Genesis 1 that every member of the species is made in the image of God. That’s how Jesus could take human nature, because we are already made in God’s image. And it’s how he could become incarnate as a zygote.

## “Shouldn’t Christians Be in Favor of Cures?”

The embryo research debate has sometimes degenerated into a shouting match—at least, from the other side. However reasonable we try to be, we get shouted at. We try to make a reasoned case about the need for ethical science, about the dangers of mass-producing humans for experiments, about the fact that science has in the past done terrible things (remember Nazi Germany). They yell back: “We can get cures!” It can be a strange thing to be a Christian in public debate today; we are always accused of being irrational, but we are the ones with the reasoned case!

Of course we favor “cures.” We may be skeptical of hype, and there never has been hype like the extravagant and often very dishonest language used by scientists and biotech lobbyists in their search for federal money and their desire to avoid any kind of ethical regulation on what they do. We favor cures that come from ethical research. And the wonderful thing about recent discoveries in the life sciences is that there are many possible ways of coming to the same results. Not many people know that *all* of the

applications of “stem cell research” to human beings have not come from using embryos at all, but what are called “adult” stem cells—the cells hidden away in your own body! Check out the websites we list below for the latest details.

### **“I’m a Pastor, and I Am Concerned That Our Church Not Get Into Politics.”**

We agree! Churches are not meant to be party affiliated, and only rarely should they get into anything on the political agenda. Christians come to different decisions on issues of party politics, and our churches need to remain places where you are free to be Democrat, Republican, or to join smaller parties that uphold human dignity and freedom. Catholics have tended to be more Democrat (though the abortion issue has been pushing many of them to vote for the GOP). White evangelicals tend to vote Republican. African American evangelicals tend to vote Democrat. We make our political decisions for many reasons, and it’s important that pastors and teachers in the churches don’t tell us, “If you are a real Christian, you need to vote for X.”

At the same time, churches need to teach the values of Christian living for the twenty-first century. They should not tell us how to vote, but they do need to tell us that we *should* vote and get well-informed about the issues behind elections. Sometimes there will be a big single-issue campaign (like the ballot initiatives in California on euthanasia and embryonic stem cell research) on which Christians have a very distinctive view, not party political. This may happen on a local issue, such as a plan for gambling. The church does not suddenly become “political,” but it needs to give a lead so that its members feel encouraged to act as Christian citizens, have the best information, and feel confident that it’s right for believers to take a lead in the culture and campaign for good things and against evil ones. That is what being “salt and light” in a democracy is all about.

Many Christians think only two options exist: turn the church into a political campaigning group; or opt out entirely and live as if you were on the moon. Neither of these is the Christian way. A key task of the church is to educate believers to become informed citizens and to exercise their citizenship for Jesus Christ. That will never be more important than in the brave new world.

### **Recommended Resources** (*Magazines, Websites, and Organizations*)

*Ethics & Medicine* magazine offers unique Christian perspectives on the bioethics/biotech debates. [www.ethicsandmedicine.com](http://www.ethicsandmedicine.com)

*The New Atlantis* magazine broadly surveys issues of science and technology, though with a special focus on the biotech agenda. [www.thenewatlantis.com](http://www.thenewatlantis.com)

The Center for Bioethics and Culture is a Christian network with centers in several states that help educate non-specialists. [www.thecbc.org](http://www.thecbc.org)

The Wilberforce Forum's Council for Biotechnology Policy emails a monthly biotech update newsletter. [www.biotechpolicy.org](http://www.biotechpolicy.org)

The Institute on Biotechnology and the Human Future, based at Chicago-Kent College of Law in the Illinois Institute of Technology, brings together Christians and secularists, conservatives and progressives, in addressing the challenges of biotechnology. [www.thehumanfuture.org](http://www.thehumanfuture.org)

#### **Other groups that include some biotech related materials on their websites are:**

National Right to Life Committee ([www.nrlc.org](http://www.nrlc.org))

Family Research Council ([www.frc.org](http://www.frc.org))

Concerned Women for America ([www.cwfa.org](http://www.cwfa.org))

Focus on the Family ([www.fotf.org](http://www.fotf.org))

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### **About the Authors**

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**Joni Eareckson Tada** is a global Christian stateswoman and an internationally renowned advocate for people with disabilities. She is the Founder and CEO of Joni and Friends International Disability Center, a nonprofit organization with a worldwide outreach to people with disabilities and their families. A diving accident in 1967 left Joni, then 17, a quadriplegic in a wheelchair. Since then, Joni's wisdom and influence have been shared with the world through Christian books, the media, speaking, and her service in disability advocacy. She served on the National Council on Disability under two U.S. Presidents; during her tenure, the Americans with Disabilities Act was drafted and passed into law. Joni has also served on the Disability Advisory Committee to the U.S. State Department. Her driving desire is to see every person with a disability find hope, dignity, and their place in the body of Christ. Joni and Ken Tada have been married since 1982.

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