

# E-MANUAL

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### Michal

by Kristie Ristey-Mandel

Daughter of the King  
how many Israelite maidens  
watched you with envious eyes through your  
youth?  
Though you were born into privilege,  
Your tale is tragic  
and its ink runs from the drops of your bitter tears.  
Would you have traded your royal position  
for the lineage of a peasant  
if the choice had been given to you?  
Did it feel like a dream  
to be given in marriage  
to the one your heart yearned for?  
When the sages of your people  
sighed for you in pity  
as they saw through the facade to your father’s  
selfish scheme,  
did you just shrug and grin at your brother

who was equally delighted  
that you were marrying his best friend?

And did David love you...  
Ever?

Tell me there was a time  
when the two of you  
were so in love  
that nothing else mattered...

Did he ever thank you for saving his life?

You were brave, Michal, to  
intervene in your father’s plans,  
To warn David

and buy him time at your own risk.

I hope that memory stayed with him for all of his  
days.

He could never thank you enough...  
but did he ever try?

How many days elapsed before the separation  
infiltrated your soul?

With your husband still alive  
you were given to another.

How did you teach your heart  
what to hold  
and what to let go?

But what a gift when this new husband LOVED  
you!

Were there any fearful premonitions  
that it couldn’t last?

How many times  
did you curse your youthful ignorance  
and wish you could erase the past?

If only  
the lines of David and Saul  
had remained  
forever un-entwined

No one could fault you  
for resenting his greed.  
Six wives and children

couldn't satisfy the appetite of a King  
whose pride demanded  
that what had once belonged to him  
be returned.  
Your husband's pleas for mercy  
fell on deaf ears  
and your heart  
never entered into David's consideration.

How many tears  
did you let fall from your eyes, Michal?  
Did you lull your heart  
into hibernation  
or focus your affection  
solely on your nephew--  
the only family you had left?  
Did you wear the scar  
of your empty womb  
as divine judgment  
against the criticism you voiced  
(born from your pain)?  
Or did you embrace it  
as a divine mercy--  
the one part of yourself  
that could be kept out of the reach  
of Israel's lustful King?

There is one who also felt every arrow that pierced  
you.  
May every wound you suffered  
have been healed with His love  
when He welcomed you into eternity.



## **God and the Big Bang Theory Retraction and Expansion in God's Kingdom** by Matthew Ingersoll

The vast majority of the scientific world today believes that the Universe had a beginning. This is a recent scientific conclusion. Before then, science assumed that the Universe always existed and was static. Albert Einstein postulated that the Universe is in a state of constant expansion or retraction, but he hadn't had the proof until a scientist by the name of Edwin Hubble discovered that the

Universe was much larger than the Milky Way Galaxy, and it appeared that the Universe was expanding, and much older than was previously thought.

Now, I am not a scientist, nor do I pretend to know more than a cursory "Big Bang for Dummies" that anyone could learn from a few hours of YouTube streams on The Big Bang. Nor do I here advocate a "young" Earth or "old" Earth approach to looking at our Universe and how God created it. Whether you believe God created the Universe in 6 days and that occurred some 5,000 years ago, or believe that God created it in a process that began over 16 billion years ago does not matter much to me. This is something that I think we can agree to disagree on. As long as we agree that God created it, and God created us in His image with a divine purpose, I think that we are on the right track. My purpose in writing this essay is to use the imagery given to us by the Big Bang to explain God's redemptive plan for our salvation as revealed through Jesus Christ.

According to the Big Bang Theory, the Universe began about 13.8 billion years ago. At this time there was no space or time. All that existed was a microscopic speck. So small was this "speck" that thousands of them could rest on the head of a pin. This was all that existed, so in essence nothing existed. Then, quite suddenly, this "speck" exploded with an unfathomable amount of energy as the Universe began to expand at a rate faster than the speed of light. Eventually things began to cool, light separated from darkness, and galaxies began to form as the Universe continued to expand to this day. How big is the Universe today? Just starting at our own galaxy, The Milky Way, we have over 300 billion stars. Just how big is that? Well, traveling at the speed of light it would take around 100,000 years to travel the Milky Way's diameter. And how many galaxies are in our Universe? It is estimated that there are anywhere between 100,000 billion to 200,000 billion galaxies out there! So how long would it take to cross the Universe? According to CNN's science and space, the Universe is about 156 billion light years wide! With this in mind, I humbly

reflect upon the Psalm, “When I look at our heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:3-4) And yet God does. In fact, he cares so much for us that He became one of us. And this is where the true Big Bang begins.

Just about two thousand years ago, the very same God who created all the cosmos decided to enter into it in a very personal way. This is like taking all the energy of the universe and trying to bundle it up into the size of a pinhead. So think Big Bang, just backwards. Instead of an infinite amount of power expanding, here we have the image of an infinite power contracting. It is easy to think of God in terms of power and might, but it is almost unthinkable and scandalous to think of him as small and humble. It’s one thing to raise your fists in the air and shout, “God is Great!”, but it is quite another to whisper “God is Humble.” And that is precisely what He did! It would be humbling for God to be reduced to any human form. Even as a mighty king with thousands of worshipers and riches unimaginable, this would be less than a grain of sand compared to the glory and riches afforded the God of the Universe. So just in the process of incarnation alone, God is becoming infinitely small. But just how small did God decide to become? He decided to be born to a rural virgin girl whose pregnancy would be gossiped about. He decided to be born of royal pedigree, coming from the lineage of David, but of no status or wealth gained from it. He was raised in a small rural town to working class parents trying their best to eek out a living under the weight of an oppressive Roman regime. And when it was finally time for his ministry, it only lasted roughly three years. Additionally, all of it would have been within a stretch of walking distances on dusty roads in Palestine. Even with all the miracles He performed, He didn’t attract much attention outside of Palestine, which was only a tiny fraction of the size of the Roman Empire at the time. Look at a map of the world today. Israel is so small, on many maps the word ISRAEL doesn’t fit across it! Even preaching to his largest crowds he wouldn’t

have sold out a modern sports arena or an amphitheatre in Ancient Rome. So during Jesus Christ’s life on Earth, God became small. Paul expresses this in Philippians when he says that Jesus “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:6-7)

God becomes, “Immanuel” and in doing so He becomes incredibly small, but yet compactly powerful. Remember the image of the Big Bang? That of a tiny speck containing all of the Universe’s energy and matter, just waiting to explode? That is what happened when Christ fulfilled His mission on Calvary. When those nails were pounded into his hands and feet, and he hung there taking on the weight of the world’s sin an explosion more powerful than any other Big Bang was about to happen. In Christ’s death, burial and resurrection God’s glory exploded! In fact, time itself was ripped in half. Time became known as B.C. and A.D. Christ had proven victorious over the grave and the Gospel had prevailed. Sin was dealt a final blow and God had redeemed His people. This explosion continued to expand as we read about the early church in Acts. The Holy Spirit is poured out on Christ’s church on Pentecost and about three thousand people come to know Christ in a single day! The Big Bang of the Holy Ghost is expanding rapidly. “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were saved.”(Acts 2:47)

The Great Commission that Christ commanded had begun, and Christ’s church continues to expand to this day. We are a part of this Big Bang. We at Emmanuel Mennonite Church are a part of this heavenly body of Christ that continues to grow. Since I began attending Emmanuel about three years ago I have seen how we are increasing as a visible manifestation of God’s “Big Bang”. I have witnessed more regular attendees and people joining us in covenantal membership. I challenge us to think of the Gospel as a Big Bang as we do work around discerning who we are as a church, how we do evangelism, and what we are looking for in a pastor.



**Book review of  
*Jesus Feminist* by Sarah Bessey  
(2013)  
by Amy Kroeker**

I want to love Jesus like Sarah Bessey loves Jesus.

In *Jesus Feminist*, Bessey tackles the issue of gender roles, both within and without the church. “Tackles” is the wrong word, though. This isn’t a battlefield; instead, this is exploration, invitation, and redemption.

Bessey weaves her own story into a discussion of biblical teachings about women and, more importantly, an examination of the way Jesus treated women and explores, as she puts it, “God’s radical notion that women are people, too.”

Gently and with a great deal of care, Bessey considers the way the Bible has been used to define (and confine) women. She touches on the “through the glass darkly” way Scripture is necessarily interpreted. She suggests that the way certain verses (you know the ones) have been interpreted in the past doesn’t match the larger truths of redemption she has seen and experienced.

If you are looking for in-depth, close readings of verses and arguments based on so many scholarly articles that the footnotes take up more space than actual text, then you will be disappointed by this book. Bessey provides an overview of some of the “problem” texts and egalitarian readings of them, but ultimately and intentionally this book is not dry, reasoned refutation.

Instead, there are stories. Stories of her experiences in mainstream churches where the leadership team was all boys and the leader of youth ministry was “Pastor Brian” while the leader of children’s ministry was “just ‘Lisa.’” Stories of her own marriage, where traditional gender roles seemed to stifle both wife and husband. Stories of women in early church history and her own history that each contribute to the definition of “biblical womanhood” (which, she notes, “isn’t so different from biblical personhood”).

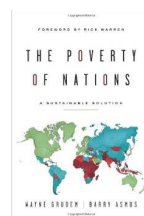
There is a call here, too. A call to women to claim their personhoods and to refuse to be satisfied with the clinking of teacups and the fashion shows of dresses made from toilet paper (or am I the only one who grew up with “women’s ministry” like that?). This is a call to be bold, to be courageous. To see needs and to fill them. To embrace the world and its needs and to respond with joyfully exuberant love.

And this is where the book goes beyond being “simply” a book about women. This is a book about being a follower of Jesus. No more “his role” and “her role” but “OUR role” – our role in God’s already-but-not-yet here kingdom. Our role in peacemaking and living as God’s redeemed in a world so desperately in need of redemption.

It is above all a call for each person – woman and man – to claim her or his freedom in Christ. Bessey’s words are the breath of the beloved. She knows she is loved and she is chosen and she is free – free to be the person God has created her to be. And this love, this being beloved, this freedom has captured her heart. Like the woman in the Bible who poured precious incense on Jesus, Bessey pours out her precious heart at the feet of the one who has redeemed her and called her beloved.

You can find *Jesus Feminist* in your friendly neighborhood church library and at fine bookstores.

Interested in more Sarah Bessey? Check out her lovely blog at [sarahbessey.com](http://sarahbessey.com) (although she is taking a bit of a break right now, so spend some time in the archives). Really interested? It just so happens she is coming to town on September 19 and speaking at Christ Presbyterian Church in Edina, details TBD.



**Book report: *The Poverty of Nations*  
by Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus  
by Jack Janzen**

Except for tiny elite the vast majority of people on earth lived at a very low level of existence with

little growth and little improvement from pre-history until about the 16th century. At that time some nations took off but many didn't. In some places, even today, people's standard of living is barely better than their Iron Age ancestors. Why? And why with enormous help from the developed world hasn't there been more progress? Why does anyone have to live in squalor?

There are many books on the subject as to what is required to provide all people with a decent living. Some emphasize the wise use of foreign aid. Others promote the expansion of free market globalization. This book explores all of these but adds the element of culture and religion. One of the authors, Wayne Grudem, is a theologian and the other, Barry Asmus, is an economist. As Christians we are instructed to do something for the least of these. This book does not proscribe a course of action but rather addresses how economics, values and religion interact for better or worse.

The economist discusses the well-known elements of good government policy—a stable currency, strong property ownership laws, strong labor laws and low taxes. The infrastructure must contain good transportation, energy availability and all the other items that government does best. There's not much new here.

Where the book really gets interesting is the elements that good values provide. It has been noted that the nations which have done the best in recent centuries are the protestant Christian nations. It's the values that are the fabric of the religious values which have made the difference. While it's widely agreed that nations employing capitalist elements have far and away been most successful in bringing people out of poverty than any other system, however, without values of a good work ethic and honest dealings the free market capitalist system can degenerate into a crony capitalist system which is anything but free and only benefits a handful of elites.

In many countries the legal system is corrupt at worst and very weak at best. In some places extortion is common with the police participating

in the extortion. Such conditions completely undermine the possibility of progress and the least of them bear the brunt in the form of deep poverty. Reforming such societies requires the transformation of society by instilling values which support good institutions. Many secularists have underestimated the contribution of religion in achieving this. This, of course, is easier said than done and can take generations to accomplish.

Along with the values of virtue are other values which we in the developed world take for granted. There are other virtues which are lacking in many cultures, such as valuing progress and innovation, valuing merit over seniority to name a few. In some cultures, personal saving of wealth is frowned upon. Any extra that a person receives is expected to be shared with the extended family. In order for an economy to work there must be a healthy practice of saving and investment. Again the cultural practice undermines the possibility of progress and investments are invariably misapplied.

There are two appendixes at the end of the book. One is a list the key elements required for progress. The other is all the scriptural references supporting the principals of economics as well as the key elements of values.

It can be seen that the work of transforming a nation to eliminate poverty must be largely done by the governments and peoples of the countries. The book does include some approaches that the developed world can do to contribute such as eliminate trade barriers with the poorer nations—textiles for example. Wise investment by wealthy countries in the private sector of the poor countries can also have a significant impact.

I have read a number of books on world poverty and found that adding the element of values and faith as this one does, fills a void in understanding the shortcomings and failures, as well as successes, to the approaches in addressing world poverty.

I will be donating this book to our church library.