



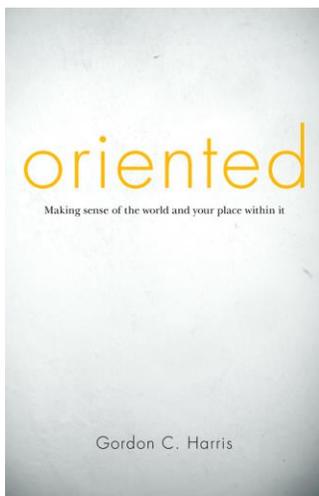
KAREN CAMPBELL

M E D I A

Teacher and Theologian Gordon C. Harris Writes a Spiritual Guide for the Disoriented

Oriented: Making Sense of the World and Your Place Within It *is a stream-of-consciousness book that explores the Genesis stories in the context of modern life*

It's in the mundane – vacationing, painting a wall, waiting to board a flight or waking from a nap—that Gordon C. Harris primarily draws parallels from his own life with those described in what he calls, “The Book”: in this case, the opening chapters of Genesis. This gentle, stream-of-consciousness reflection, titled *Oriented: Making Sense of the World and Your Place Within It* (Catch The Fire Books, November 2015), offers a window on Harris's life as a father, husband and teacher and his lifelong fascination with the stories that make up Genesis.



Initially drawing on the Hebrew creation stories—though other characters and stories from Genesis also make an appearance here, including the story of Noah and the flood, as well as an ancient Hebrew genealogy—Harris ponders the deeper meanings of nearly everything in light of Genesis, including time, work, family, world events, and the unrelenting pace of modern life.

Using Genesis as a springboard, Harris often wonders about the big-picture implications of the text before taking readers into the minutiae of his daily life. “I meditate on the words, trying to understand the Hebrew, the ancient mindset. The one before science bleached the world mechanical. For them, the world made sense,” he writes. And yet for Harris—like us—the world seems only to be increasing in complexity, which is perhaps one reason these ancient (and ordered) creation stories still command so much interest.

Harris, a Canadian who wears many hats professionally, is, among other things, a PhD student in theological studies, the curriculum director for Catch The Fire Toronto School of Ministry, a ministry training school formed in the wake of the charismatic revival in the 1990s known as the “Toronto Blessing” or “Father’s Blessing,” which became a global movement. But even with his academic and spiritual background, Genesis still confounds him.

“I fool myself a lot when I read the beginning of the Book. I think I understand it. I’ve read the experts, the giants on Genesis. Got the degree, which sits in the window. But the truth is, I only



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get some of the theology, the bits that are easily communicated across culture,” Harris writes. “But I don’t get the ancients. Their mindsets... And I don’t get why they wrote this the way they did. I want to live in two worlds. But, at best, I am merely peering in from outside.”

Yet by the end of *Oriented*, Harris can say that there is something in the book which—despite all its incongruities and strangeness—points the way forward, particularly for Christians who understand Genesis to be more than just an ancient curiosity. For Harris there is “purposefulness in God’s interaction,” there is “restoration,” and ultimately, “light at the end of the tunnel.”

Gordon C. Harris is a Canadian teacher and Christian theologian and lives with his family in Toronto. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Old Testament studies from ACU and is currently a PhD student in Old Testament studies at The University of Toronto, Wycliffe College. Gordon is the curriculum director for Catch The Fire Toronto School of Ministry.

catchthefirebooks.com/oriented



Oriented: Making Sense of the World and Your Place Within It

By Gordon C. Harris

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Suggested Interview Questions for Gordon C. Harris, author of *Oriented*

- 1) Why did you decide to write about Genesis, and what is it about this book that has intrigued you for so long?
- 2) What is it about Genesis that still commands *our* attention in 2015?
- 3) What have you learned about God, and life, through studying Genesis?
- 4) Why is this book called, “Oriented”? How does Genesis give our lives direction – something to *orient* ourselves by?
- 5) You seem less interested with the literal meaning of the Genesis creation stories – *God did this, then this, etc.* – than the spiritual implications of these stories. Can you say something about why this is so?
- 6) While you are a Christian your interest seems to lie more with the Old Testament than with the New Testament. Why, in your view, is it important for Christians to understand and know the Old Testament as much as the New?
- 7) To whom is this book primarily addressed? Did you have a reader in mind as you worked on it – a particular type of person, or someone in a certain situation?
- 8) Is there a particular story, verse, or event in Genesis that you find particularly meaningful personally? If so, why?
- 9) What were you going through in your life as you wrote this book, and did immersing yourself in Genesis cause you to reassess any previous assumptions or understandings about your life, Genesis, the Old Testament, or God?
- 10) What do you hope someone might come away with having read this book?



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Excerpts from *Oriented: Making Sense of the World and Your Place Within It*

“I think about the beginning of the Book, about Sarah and all the other ones who live with chaos on the inside. With a nameless fear hanging over them, pressing through the walls and leaking from the closets of the mind. The ones who awakened in the night to the sound of angry voices. Who desperately feared the creak of floorboards and turning of doorknobs. Who will never get the memory of alcohol-laden breaths from their minds. And cigarette burns and fists. The ones with the ancient struggle inside of them. This is not the world they were built to know. But it is the one that has invaded them with serpent and bite and poison fruit. Into this, the God speaks soothing, rhythmic words of order, stability and safety. They tame the chaos. They come in lullaby waves. Strong hands tucking us in, deep and tight in the truth. They are first words spoken in the childhood of the earth. They breathe steadiness into the world of ancient farmers and fishermen, of stockbrokers and housewives, of victims and lost boys.” (39-40)

“Every morning is a variation on that last. Beginning in darkness, rising into light. But I am now thinking about Time and God and the beginning of the Book, about yesterday and all the similar days. I am struck by how much my life is lived “on the clock,” ordered by time’s calendars and plans and reminders. I think it all started with a wristwatch I was given as a ten year old. It was a small silver Timex, with simple hands in a round face. I loved it. It was a little piece of man jewelry. Its hands were pointers to where I was in life. Or where I should be. Like a parent directing a child to choices or demands with their arms. Calling. Pointing. Reminding. My Timex was a drill sergeant ordering me about. Wake up! Eat! Get dressed! Go to school! It forced me to give up dawdling on the way to class and prompted me to come home to do my homework. My little watch taught me that the boundaries of time were the boundaries of the day. And it was efficient. Insistent.” (49-50)

“If the writer of Genesis had given them an origin account based on what we teach in our high schools and universities, he would have been staked out under the sun. Or had rocks thrown at his head. At the very least they would have taken him to the local priest for a dietary check-up. Our mechanistic, scientifically oriented theory of origins would have been incomprehensible to them. They not only didn’t have the technical and cultural back-ground to understand it, but it wouldn’t address their biggest questions. And their questions are not the two questions we keep asking of Genesis One: ‘What mechanism was used in the formation of life?’ and ‘How old is everything?’” (76)

“Reading it all, I feel the forward movement, the purposefulness in God’s interaction. He is moving toward something: an undoing of what has been done. The first words that seed hope into the ears and hearts of those who follow. That restoration comes through sweat and calluses, the groaning push of childbirth and through combat with the serpent. What is broken will be fixed. This is the echo, the shadow; the symbol of something good coming. Eden. A return. A remix. And light at the end of the tunnel.” (235)