

A Tribute to Sharon Johnson

A COLLECTION OF HIS COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS

OUR REMEMBRANCE OF DR. SHARON JOHNSON

By Dr. Richard Martinez

On May 14, 2024, Dr. Sharon Johnson, founding editor of the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*, went to be with the Lord. In recognition of his service and gratitude for his friendship, the journal is pleased to publish a small collection of tributes to Dr. Johnson by some of those who knew him best.

No one who thinks of Dr. Sharon Johnson, having known him, can help but smile in remembrance of how he made us all laugh. He made us laugh in ways that we did not anticipate. He made us laugh at ourselves and enjoy it. He made us laugh at him, which he enjoyed even more. The self-deprecation of a man named Sharon. It all had a purpose.

The serious side of Sharon Johnson was that of a man who loved his family deeply—his faithful wife, Cathy; daughters, Arriel and Abigail; son, Andrew, and their families. It was the side of a man who loved his Savior. He was passionate about combining his love of business with his love of scriptural truth—teaching it and writing about it.

While this particular remembrance may not be the place to explore the depths of Dr. Johnson's specific writings, more generally we are especially thankful for Sharon's many acts of *creatio ex nihilo*. Sharon was among the OGs who followed God's prompting to create and develop an organization that allowed Christian business faculty to coalesce their ministries around fellowship, scholarship, and mutual encouragement.

What mattered most in this endeavor was the uncompromised attention to biblical values that Sharon faithfully and consistently instilled in CBFA culture alongside his brother in Christ and friend, Richard (Dick) Chewning. If not for the insistence from Drs. Johnson, Chewning, and others that the CBFA organization, journals, and ecumenical membership would rest first and foremost on solid biblical principles, CBFA would be a very different—and likely less faithful—body today.

While the establishment of CBFA in the early 1980s was monumental, Sharon went a step—even a leap—further in establishing the journal outlets through which so many of us would learn how and why to do integration with excellence. Sharon took on the role as founding editor of the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business (JBIB)* in 1995.

In the 20th anniversary celebration issue of the *JBIB*, Dr. Johnson (2015) shared with us some valuable insights in what he called “The *JBIB* Journey,” noting, “Before there was a *JBIB*, there was a CBFA. And, before there was a CBFA, there were many Christian teachers and a few Christian scholars” (p. 79). Sharon acknowledged God's grace in providing the CBFA and *JBIB* ministries laid before him. All the same, make no mistake about it: By God's grace, Sharon Johnson built the *JBIB ex nihilo*. Sharon stated, “I must admit that my favorite years were these pioneering years. I have always enjoyed being on the front end of innovations. We were creating new procedures, exploring new ideas, and being involved with a whole new variety of publishing process issues...” (Johnson, 2015, p. 80).

Dr. Johnson continued to build out the *JBIB* for its first 10+ years and was instrumental in the establishment of CBFA's next journal, the *Christian Business Academy Review (CBAR)*. He took on the role of CBFA director of publications and worked with founding *CBAR* editor Dr. Kent Saunders to expand CBFA's scholarly footprint.

As he wrapped up his 20th year retrospective on *JBIB*, Dr. Johnson shared four salient lessons he felt were important to consider as CBFA goes forward. We would do well to re-visit these insights as we assess whether we have made progress along these lines.

First, Dr. Johnson acknowledged, “**There is much more to be explored and discovered**” (emphasis in original) in the “faith and business” educational journey. You will want to read the original article in *JBIB* (Johnson, 2015) to see what he considered some of the most relevant questions to be asked in 2015 and think through whether we have made much progress in that exploration.

Second, Dr. Johnson believed, “**Christian universities need to discover more robust ways to support the pursuit of scholarship by their faculty.**” I know that Sharon would be proud that some of our institutions have made the jump to AACSB accreditation and received the scholarly support that has accompanied that shift. That said, in the age of pending demographic doom scenarios, many Christian business faculty might still be overwhelmed by unrealistic scholarship expectations underneath the weight of too many hats. One thing is sure Sharon would be encouraging us to conduct a research study to determine if, in fact, anything has changed with regard to institutional support in the era of ACBSP vs. AACSB accreditation for Christian business scholars.

Next, Dr. Johnson noted, “**Christian faculty must learn more effective ways to help their students learn how to engage in faith-business integrative thinking.**” I think that we can safely say that the work of CBFA scholars, thinkers, and teachers has led to the development of a valuable body of work from which we can all draw as we walk our students through the minefields in the business ministries into which they are being called. This work is available in the *JBIB*, the *CBAR*, and across the numerous CBFA conferences through which Dr. Johnson’s legacy is continually being played out.

Finally, Dr. Johnson felt strongly that “[m]any academic fields need to create their own academically sound and Biblically faithful publication spaces.” That is, CBFA and *JBIB*-type journals need to be replicated across other academic disciplines throughout Christian academia. To date, little progress has been made in other professional disciplines, and it may fall to us to spur our non-business colleagues and provide a template by which these efforts might proceed. However, they would need to provide their own Sharon Johnsons.

One more point should be relayed from Dr. Johnson’s (2015) retrospective. He—back in 2015—was concerned that “[t]he CBFA has grown under the influence of baby-boomers; we must find ways to encourage the younger generation of teacher/scholars to begin assuming responsibility for ‘carrying the baton’ of faithfulness into the 21st Century” (p. 82). Well, friends, here we are. Dr. Johnson has passed on to glory. Dr. Chewning is with him as we speak. The first generation of CBFA founders and scholars is well represented around the throne of grace, and while we all look forward to joining them at some point (likely singing hymns and the Doxology), Sharon Johnson has challenged us to receive the baton his generation has passed to us and to run the next legs

of the race faithfully. CBFA—and its valuable journals and conferences—will not run themselves. We are not creating *ex nihilo* as they were; we have been handed a legacy. If you have met these gentlemen—and Sharon Johnson, in particular—you know you do not want to let them down. If you have not met them, you are in for an amazing blessing when you do. Let us redouble our efforts to know God’s will for CBFA, for Christ-centered business scholarship, and for our role in preparing the next generation to represent Christ in the marketplace. Let us honor the memory and legacy that Sharon Johnson has left for us. Let us look forward to hearing our friend say about our efforts, with his customary smirk and dry humor, “Well, he tried his best.”

REFERENCES

- Johnson, S. G. (2015). The *JBIB* journey. *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*, 18(2), 79-82. <https://doi.org/10.69492/jbib.v18i2.415>

THE IMPACT OF SHARON JOHNSON ON MY LIFE

By Dr. John Duncan

Sharon Johnson was the founding editor of the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* and a long-time member of the Board of Directors of the Christian Business Faculty Association. Many of our current CBFA members never had the privilege of knowing Sharon and personally interacting with him. I am fortunate to have been able to call Sharon both a colleague and a dear friend, and I am a much better faculty member and administrator today because of the years I was able to spend working with him.

Because he served so many years as the editor of *JBIB* and as a CBFA board member, Sharon may have had a more indelible impact on the CBFA than any other member. His wit, his humor, and his sarcasm were legendary. The first time I ever heard Sharon give a publications report at a CBFA business meeting, I thought he had to be a stand-up comedian!

In my opinion, Sharon Johnson was one of the most outstanding faculty members to ever work in Christian higher education. Sharon was a man of the Word. He spent countless hours studying the Bible. He loved teaching, writing, and working to continuously improve the institutions that he served. His personality could somehow turn bad days at work into good days. I do not

know that there was ever a day that I worked with Sharon that he did not make me laugh. He may be the funniest man that I have ever known.

I thank God for the impactful life that Sharon lived and the impact that he had on his students, the academic institutions that he served, the CBFA, and on me. I have a sneaking suspicion that since the day that Sharon went to Heaven, the saints of old have busted a gut laughing while hanging out with a man named Sharon. I rejoice in knowing that Sharon is now at home with our Savior, whom he loved and faithfully served in this life.

SHARON JOHNSON: EDITOR, SCHOLAR, FRIEND

By Dr. Yvonne Smith

“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:5 NAV).

Editor. As the founding editor of the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* (1995-2010), Sharon Johnson benefited every Christian scholar who is interested in how the Bible impacts business. First, he gave us a place to publish and set the journal standards high so we could put the publications on our *vitas*. Then he understood that academic writing is hard, so he began the tradition so valued in the CBFA of reviewers being partners with authors in creating strong papers. He also provided many opportunities for new scholars, from joining the review board to writing *JBIB* dialogues and media reviews.

Scholar. Sharon’s scholarship was impressive. As a new Ph.D., I was attracted to CBFA because people like Sharon and Dick Chewning were so obviously deep thinkers and were willing to help other people develop integration scholarship. I will never forget the day that *SHARON JOHNSON!!* walked quietly into my CBFA presentation and sat down in the back row. My eyes got big, and my heart started pounding, and yes, the questions he asked at the end (kindly) confounded me. But his suggestions immeasurably strengthened the paper. And he was not only generous as a scholar but was outrageously funny; the show that he and Larry Lindeman staged at one CBFA conference lives in legend.

Friend. When I was elected to the CBFA board, Sharon became a friend. We were both going through career drama, and I learned that in private Sharon Johnson was serious, quiet, and almost shy. He loved the

Lord Jesus very much, he loved his family very much, and he loved his students very much—usually. Always ready for a good discussion, Sharon would argue with me for hours about philosophy and epistemology and the best way to teach strategy. He had the ability to go to the heart of an argument and give it a good twist, usually with alliteration. He was also genuine. One pleasant afternoon, this accomplished man sat in the shade with me and we sang Sunday School songs.

Mentor. When I became *JBIB* editor, Sharon was on my speed dial. He was the founding and long-term editor of the journal, and I was, naturally, nervous about stepping into his shoes and onto his toes. It turned out my qualms were unnecessary. Sharon was generous with his thoughts, as always, but, like the good teacher he was, he refused to reach conclusions for me or do my job. As a mentor, he encouraged me and prayed for me, but he let me find my own way with “his” journal, and never criticized what I did, at least to me. The closest he came was over a controversial manuscript that I sent to him for review. Against his recommendation, I published it. Speaking of it later he said, “Well, I wouldn’t have, but it did spark some good discussion.” And that was the end of the subject.

Teacher of Faith Integration. Through the *JBIB* and through his scholarship, teaching, and writing, Sharon demonstrated to at least three generations of scholars that the Bible speaks into a wide range of business topics. He also taught us that faithful integration is personal. It rests upon personal commitment to Christ, and that unless we allow the Scripture, the Word, and the Spirit to work in our hearts and minds, we will not understand what true biblical integration in business is. His faithfulness to his Lord kept the *JBIB* on target and helped many of us grow in our Christian walk.

Sharon can truly echo the words of Paul: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.... There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord...will award to me on that day” (II Tim 4:7,8 NAV).

Thank you, Sharon, for everything.

SHARON JOHNSON TRIBUTE

By Dr. Doyle Lucas

Dr. Sharon Johnson was committed to the development of Christian higher education in business. One of the ways he lived out this mission was his

intentional involvement in the growth of faculty members at CBFA member institutions and also the cultivation of business faculty who are Christians at all types of higher education institutions, whether public or private. It was a privilege to have him serve as an integral part of the faculty of the Doctor of Business Administration Program at Anderson University (Indiana). For more than 20 years, Sharon was the key “guest” faculty member for the Advanced Application of Ethical Reasoning in Business course and served more than 200 doctoral students during that time. His wit and humor, but also his serious reflection on Christ’s impact on how we approach ethical issues in business and, especially, in our teaching of business to our students, was the foundation of his approach to the subject. Many of our current CBFA members serving as faculty in many different faith-based colleges and universities benefitted from Sharon’s insights, his leadership, and his commitment to Christ in all areas of his life. We are forever grateful for Dr. Johnson’s ongoing impact on all of us.