

# Baptist ethicist provides guidance on AI in ministry

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Artificial Intelligence already has outpaced the human ability to distinguish real from computer-generated images, audio or other [media](#). What is the Christian's responsibility in navigating this technology, and how should they interact with it? A Baptist ethicist is working to answer these questions.

Since 2021, when Katie Frugé began exploring the topic of AI within the broader topic of the future church, at the behest of former Texas Baptists Executive Director David Hardage, the field of AI has experienced rapid change.

Frugé is director of Texas Baptists' Center for Cultural Engagement and the Christian Life Commission and spoke on AI in a breakout session during the 2024 Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting in Waco.

While the church should ask questions and be circumspect, cautious and educated about AI and its uses, Frugé noted, "the reality is this is going to be a piece of the future, whether we like it or not."

AI may be foreign to older generations, but it is not foreign to younger generations, Frugé pointed out. In fact, 47 percent of college professors acknowledge today's college graduates will need to be fluent in generative AI to be proficient in their jobs, she said.

## Rapid technological growth

To explain how rapidly technology has progressed, Frugé provided some history, beginning with the first [tweet](#) sent using brain implant

technology—posted in 2021 on the account of Tom Oxley—saying: “no need for keystrokes or voices. I created this tweet just by thinking it.”

At the time, it seemed like “mind-blowing, really kind of far-out-there technology,” she noted. No one really thought it would be mainstream anytime soon, she said, until Elon Musk picked up on the idea and began working on it through his company, Neuralink.

From the concept of an interface between computers and the human brain, “now we even know the face of the first person to receive the first Neuralink transplant,” Frugé said.

He was a paraplegic who went from being fully dependent on others to now having the independence to change a TV channel or read a book in the night without human assistance. Now they are [looking for “patient 2”](#) to sign-up for the next experimental procedure, she explained.

Also, when she first started working on this presentation, NASA was recruiting people to do the first part of a mission to Mars. Now that preliminary, preparatory mission has been completed, and they are aggressively planning and [working toward sending people](#) to live there.

“Most terrifying of all, in 2021 they announced that they are preparing the research to [bring back the woolly mammoth](#).

“We saw that movie,” Frugé quipped, “and we know how that ends.”

They are still on track with that research, she noted, and anticipate by 2027, [researchers](#) expect to be able to bring back an extinct mammal from prehistoric times.

That’s the “weird mismatch” of technological advancements—computer/brain-link implants, humans living on Mars and resurrected extinct species—individuals are living with in 2024, Frugé said.

“It’s only going to get more foreign to us” from here.

Christians either can “put our head in the sand or be a clear-eyed prophetic voice” that holds companies accountable not to put profit over people.

Frugé noted there are two types of generative AI: generative pre-training and artificial general intelligence. Generative pre-training platforms—the GPT in ChatGPT—are large-language model AI.

Any currently existing chatbot falls into this category. This technology works by picking the “best next word.” They are proficient at gathering data and predicting, but they are dependent on humans for training. So, they have no ability to move into other areas without a human programming them to do so, she explained.

## **AI concerns for Christians**

Artificial general intelligence, on the other hand, is no longer dependent on the human for training. AGI doesn’t exist yet but is the stated goal of companies like [Anthropic](#) and [OpenAI](#), who are working to develop it.

“There is a real likelihood humans will no longer be the most intelligent creature on the planet” in the not-so-distant future, which raises theological questions, Frugé pointed out.

While technology isn’t there yet, Christians have a responsibility right now to be careful about what they believe and pass on.

“Our Christian witness is on the line,” Frugé noted.

Sharing AI-generated images, like [those](#) that were everywhere after the hurricanes, without verifying their veracity impacts the way Christians are perceived in the world and can have real-world impacts—like when a [fake image](#) of an explosion at the Pentagon led to a stock market shakeup in

2023.

The end does not justify the means, Frugé asserted. Christians must not bear false witness. Compromising on the truth by sharing fake media to achieve a good goal is still wrong.

While people, particularly the young, are increasingly stepping away from real, human “anchored reality” in favor of chosen identities based on feelings, AI is getting better at mirroring humans.

These concerns create an interesting challenge, but Frugé said she doesn’t think the answer is to avoid AI. Like Paul going to the marketplace of the Areopagus, Christians can meet people where they are in the technological world, too, if they do so in a way that is safe and fosters human connection.

Frugé noted algorithms also utilize AI and pose concerns. Algorithms—sophisticated sets of programming that “put in front of you what it thinks you are going to want to see the most” to keep media consumers consuming—are so effective YouTube reported three years ago that users had consumed more than 1 billion hours of content. “That’s the equivalent of 114,000 years,” she said.

“We are being disciplined and disciplined by algorithms that know us better than we know ourselves,” she pointed out.

Additionally, AI is prone to “hallucination,” which means it makes things up, leading Frugé to caution against utilizing AI in research.

Frugé urged Christians to call for transparency in AI innovation. Strides have been made in holding companies accountable, but there is still much room for improvement.

The researchers and developers of technology like ChatGPT can’t fully explain how it does what it does. They know what it’s doing, but not

precisely how it's doing it, she explained.

No AI is neutral. The values of the developer will be embedded in the technology. AI can be manipulated, and it blurs the lines of reality and the human experience. Boundaries and guardrails need to be established.

Frugé suggested contacting legislators at the state and federal levels—who also are concerned about AI's proliferation and are working to implement guidelines already—to make sure no new technologies are released without ensuring developers fully understand current technology. That should be a minimum threshold before releasing a new generation of “thinking” AI.

Frugé, a theologically trained ethicist urged Christians to reclaim incarnation.

“There's a lot of cool physicalness to the reality of being a human Christian” in a body both in the here and the hereafter, she noted. Young people need to hear about the goodness of their created, human bodies regularly and often.

“God is still on his throne,” but ask God for wisdom in using artificial intelligence ethically, she said.