

Glee-wind: Grilled Cheesus

Oct. 16, 2010

Episode background: Major character Finn Hudson accidentally burns his grilled cheese sandwich, imprinting one side of it with the face of Jesus Christ. Finn takes this as a sign to take his nominal Christianity more seriously, irony intended by the writers it seems as Finn begins to pray to his sandwich which he now refers to as Grilled Cheesus. Every trivial and selfish thing Finn asks of Grilled Cheesus comes to pass; meanwhile, Finn's Glee Club friend Kurt might be losing his father to heart disease – it doesn't dawn on Finn to pray for Kurt or his father; instead he prays that he might be quarterback again.

Most of the Glee kids turn to their faith in trying to deal with the news of Kurt's father and more poignantly, the immense pain of their friend. Kurt refuses to be comforted with his friends' prayers or anything which derives from religious faith, which he considers ridiculous, irrelevant, and ignorant.

So... Grilled Cheesus the sacred sandwich very well may be the most sacrilegious (and hilarious) thing since [Monty Python](#). But the episode as a whole really brought some very important spiritual issues to the table. Issues like: It's okay to publicly deny faith but not proclaim it. Conundrums like: You can't prove God doesn't exist and you can't prove he does. Problems like Hell; questions like: Why does it sometimes seem God answers prayers about winning football games but not about real human pain and suffering. It also highlights the fact that, for many, intellectual objections toward, and knee-jerk reactions against, religion are often on some level a shield protecting deeply painful, deeply real experiences: Sue's inability to pray hard enough to help her "handicapable" sister, Kurt's being rejected and marginalized and bullied by

those who should love him most. Sure, both Sue and Kurt misunderstand certain aspects of God's nature and the way he works in the world. But so what? That can't really be addressed until we walk with them in their pain, like Mercedes does. Mercedes didn't give up on loving Kurt even after he rejected her and ridiculed her religion out of the abyss of his pain. She wasn't pushy. She just loved him. She "had [him] at 'fabulous hat'."

This episode seems to reject Sue's wrong, but widely held, understanding of separation of Church and State. The episode seems to reject Kurt's aggressive atheism (so at least it's equal opportunity religious tolerance), growing him from this position to one that's more open – to others' spirituality and how that affects the way they inevitably relate to him if nothing else. "Grilled Cheesus" rejects the [moralistic therapeutic deism](#) rampant among Christian teens (and adults); and through Emma's talk with Finn it also rejects over-spiritualizing everything that happens. The episode affirms the reality of religious doubt and uncertainty and the often person-relative struggles of everyone's own spiritual journeying, which we should affirm. It affirms religious pluralism, which we reject. (See Bethany Keeley-Jonker's post at ThinkingChristian.com which makes [this](#) important point about Mercedes's pluralism.)

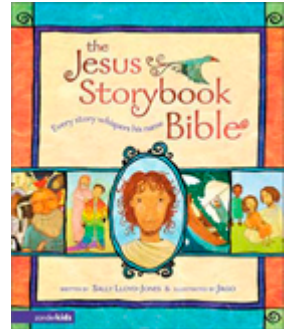
There's much, much more to dig out and explore in this episode, which isn't uncommon for *Glee*. And there are multiple possible interpretations among all that lies beneath, and that isn't uncommon for *Glee* either; things are often complicated and ambiguous. [You can't judge Glee by a single episode](#), or by what's on the surface. It's a project where characters and ideas are allowed to grow and develop in [real-life messiness](#).

This blog post originally appeared at reneamac.com/2010/10/16/glee-wind-grilled-cheesus/

Every Story Whispers His Name

May 1, 2009

I am so excited about this. It just came in the mail from Amazon, and I have been bringing it with me everywhere I go like show-and-tell because I am that pumped about it. Here's the thing; I started thinking about my first-graders and how I'd love to simply read a chapter book to them from week to week rather than individual stories. That got me to wondering if such a thing existed: a chapter-book version of the Bible. In my search, I stumbled across *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, which is pretty close. I love the byline: "Every story whispers his name." Every story in the Bible (even the Old Testament ones) whisper the name of Jesus.



Listen to this excerpt from the introduction: read it out loud; it was meant to be read aloud:

No, the Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne – everything – to rescue the one he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!

You see, the best thing about this Story is – it's true.

There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.

It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle – the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.

And this is no ordinary baby. This is the Child upon whom everything would depend. This is the Child who would one day – but wait. Our Story starts where all good stories start. Right at the very beginning. . .

I'm impressed by the style and the quality of the writing and the art in this Bible. I'm impressed by the author's use of punctuation and parallelism and alliteration to make the story come to life. I'm impressed by the way she introduces ideas like God's "Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love," ideas like Home (and ontology), Good and Evil, and the Creation-Fall-Redemption narrative. Sally Lloyd-Jones acknowledges Tim Keller for giving her this "vocabulary of faith." I'm impressed by that too. It sounds a bit high-falutin' when it's described by how it has impressed me; but I promise you, it is not. It's a children's book that young children can read themselves and enjoy. But like any *good* children's literature, it's a good read for adults too.

Literally every story in this Bible from Genesis to Revelation hints at Jesus, speaks to the *Logos*, the Center of God's Story (and ours). This children's Bible is creative; it's fresh; it's intellectually ingenuous. It's what we've been waiting for.

The Jesus Storybook Bible isn't a replacement for your Children's NIV, but it's a good place to start, and a good supplement – for your personal Bible reading as well as your children's.

Check it out [here](#) where you can also enjoy video segments where the reading is done by the masterful David Suchet!

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2009/05/01/the-jesus-storybook-bible/

Expectations in Dating: Part One

Mar. 20, 2009

Today we're going to talk about boundaries and expectations. Both of which cause us to be selective.

I have to thank Brad Paisley for a song of his which has provided me with this metaphor: dating is a lot like shopping for new clothes. The line from the song goes like this:

*When you go out shopping, you try on brand new clothes.
To see if something fits or not, there's just one way to know.
Why's it any different when someone asks you out?
You might as well just try me on before you turn me down.*

I appreciate this metaphor. I walk into a store – even ones I frequent – and sometimes I don't know how something is going to fit until I try it on. Other times I can tell simply by looking at a piece that it isn't my style or is too big or too small. There are some stores I don't even have to go into because those clothes aren't for me: they might be too trashy or too preppy or whatever. Also, having friends with me whom I trust is helpful. They're honest with me and will encourage me to try things I might not otherwise; items they know will look good on me when I may be unsure – and they're almost always

right! I also depend on them to tell me, “No, Renea. That dress doesn’t do you right; that color is not for you. Renea, seriously; put that one back.” 😊

You see where this is going don’t you? Okay, so dating, well, living really, is about risk, but it’s calculated risk – more or less. To say that it’s important to take risks... in any relationship, dating or otherwise, is not to say we should be uncritical or haphazard. Not being selective about who you’ll date is like letting a perfect stranger pick out all your clothes for you; whatever that person brings you, that’s what you have to buy, take home, and wear. You wouldn’t do that. Why would you be unbiased about who you date?

Okay. So let’s talk about dating non-Christians. How many of you think it’s probably okay to date unbelievers? You can be honest. Come on. Forget for a minute that you know what the right answers are supposed to be, or that you think you know what I want you to say. ‘Cuz let’s be real, if you’re unconvinced about what the church has to say about dating unbelievers, chances are we’re dropping the ball in some way. And hey, we aren’t right about everything; that’s impossible; maybe we’re wrong about this. So if you think we are, let’s talk about it.

Worldview. Whole persons. Intimacy. (Sorry, I did this part extemporaneously.)

The author of our book* puts it this way: “If you aim for nothing, you’ll hit it. Is that how you want to aim for your husband – with an open, blank slate? Or do you want to dream of someone who is just right for you, who complements your weaknesses, and who fulfills your hopes and desires” (63)?

And the point she’s making is the same one Brad and I were making with the shopping illustration. If we don’t have certain standards, goals, ideas and expectations for our lives, including our love-lives, we’ll be directionless. We’ll

zig and zag here and there following any story about sex and romance that's compelling in the moment. And that makes us incredibly vulnerable to believing the lies and distorted views the world has about who we are and how we should live, distorted views about who we are sexually and how we should live our romantic lives.

I'd like to take this thought a bit further, if you'll let me. I'd like to suggest a bigger target. That instead of aiming for a husband who will fulfill the hopes you've pinned upon him, we aim for the Bridegroom of the Church, Jesus, and put our hope in him. As you release your arrow in the direction of the Kingdom, if you happen to snag a husband by the shirt collar, FAN-TASTIC! More to the point, if your arrow becomes intertwined with another going in the same direction, WONDERFUL!

* Gresh, Dannah. *And the Bride Wore White*. Chicago: Moody, 2004.

Stay tuned for [part two](#), and see where we go from here.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2009/03/20/expectations-in-dating-part-one/

Expectations in Dating: Part Two

Mar. 20, 2009

(If you haven't already, see [Part One](#).)

I want to really drive this idea home, so I'd like to read a story from – yep, you guessed it – Lauren Winner's *Real Sex*.*

I recently attended a women's retreat where one of the workshops was about singleness. The speaker, whom I'll call Myrtle, encouraged the single women in the audience to think carefully about what type of guy they're looking for. "You want a Prince Charming," Myrtle said, "and Prince Charmings are attracted to modest women. You might attract certain men by sporting skimpy skirts, but you won't attract the kind of man you really want to be with."

It's encouraging to think that mature Christians are more interested in character than cleavage; yet there is something unsettling about this assurance that chastity will be the erotic mystery that will lead Mr. Right (or Miss Right) to our door. Prince Charming can begin to rival God as the object of our attentions. Myrtle ended her talk on this note: "What we single women have to do is no more and no less than faithfully pray that our perfect guy is out there. We don't need to hunt him down, we just need to wait for the Lord to deliver him to us. [Is he a pizza?] We don't need to worry about him. Instead we need to focus on ourselves, becoming the pure, modest woman that our Prince Charming will be on the lookout for. We need to devote ourselves to prayer, humility, and grace. We need to continue becoming godly women, so that when the time is right, we will have those godly characteristics that the godly man we dream about will love."

[And that sounds right doesn't it? I mean, that does sound like what we ought to be doing: focusing on prayer, humility, and grace. But this is the point:] I'm not disputing the desirability of the chaste woman or man. It may well be that one of the benefits of practicing chastity is that you attract friends and admirers that admire chastity. But attracting others is not the goal of chastity. Indeed, if Myrtle is focused on catching the eye of the guy who likes

chaste women, she may not be inhabiting chastity at all.

Myrtle seems to be working toward becoming, principally, the kind of woman Prince Charming wants, which incidentally may be the kind of woman God wants. Her priorities, I would suggest, need to flip-flop. We are to become the persons of God, and this may bear the incidental fruit of attracting a great partner. The point of chastity is not that you turn your attention away from other people to make you more attractive to them, but that you turn your attention away from sexual and romantic entanglements with other people, and orient yourself toward God. (129-131, bracketed parentheticals mine)

What does it mean to orient our lives toward God?

Right. It means we align ourselves with God's ways. Why would we do that?

[Silence.]

It's a tough question, I know, but an important one. Why does it matter? Why should we bother? Let me help you put words to what I suspect some of you know in that deep, unspeakable way. God's way is the way it's supposed to be. We talked last week about the physical reality of sex being evidence that God's creational intention for sex is good and right and true; how sexually transmitted diseases evidence the fact that when we misdirect our sex-lives, something isn't right. Look around you. Look around you and you'll see things aren't the way they're supposed to be. There's so much hurting in the world. There's so much hurting sexually; things are no longer true – or straight – they're bent. Jesus came and he began the process of righting all the wrong and healing all the hurt. Those of us who believe are called to continue the work Christ began until he returns, when everything will be made right at long last! We do this by orienting our lives toward God.

Here's where I get back to why it's important to have standards concerning who you will and will not date. Because purity, sexual purity, is bigger than sets of dos and don'ts, rights and wrongs, standards and judgments; it's about shaping our lives to the themes of the Gospel, themes such as love, mercy, justice, healing, forgiveness; themes such as defending the oppressed and supporting the weak; themes that express God's way. Learning how to do this is a life-long process. Jesus promises in Matthew 6 that if we will orient our lives toward God's Kingdom, everything else will work out. In light of this promise, let me challenge you to commit the rest of your lives invested in communities dedicated to learning what it means to pray and live out, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Marry the man who has oriented his life toward God and journey toward the Kingdom together... for as long as you both shall live.

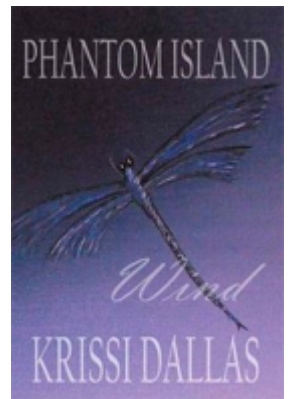
* Winner, Lauren. *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005.

This blog post originally appeared at
<http://reneamac.com/2009/03/20/expectations-in-dating-part-two>
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Finally! Quality YA Fiction from a Christian Worldview

May 30, 2009

Krissi Dallas has hit the road running with her debut novel, *Phantom Island: Wind*. It instantly found its way to the number one selling spot at Authorhouse.com as the word-of-mouth buzz about this page-turner spread like wild fire surrounding the novel's release. The novel is Young Adult fiction; it's full of drama, adventure, suspense, and romance. As a vested seventh and eighth grade teacher and the wife of a youth pastor, YA fantasy-fiction is something Krissi Dallas is an expert on and has a passion for. Her love and affinity for her students, as well as the openly autobiographical nature of much of the book, have allowed Dallas to "open a vein," and write from the depths of who she is, from the heart. This deep connection transfers itself to the reader. I found myself desperately curious; no, not just curious, committed and concerned about the characters. Reading until the end of the chapter wasn't enough: I had to find out what would happen next and would they be okay. I don't think I have ever read a book this size this quickly—not even any of the *Harry Potter* series... which I also toted obsessively wherever I went so I could read every chance I got.



Phantom Island: Wind is divided into three parts, and it's part two that really gets you. If you weren't addicted already in part one, you definitely will be when part two begins. This is also where the fantasy part of this fantasy-fiction novel really kicks in. You know how you can tell when you're reading really good fantasy-fiction? When you can't tell. If you ever find yourself questioning the reality the author's created, it isn't good fantasy-fiction. While reading *Wind* I never once caught myself raising my eyebrow thinking, *I don't know about that*. I was completely engrossed.

Wind is well written. Dallas has a captivating command of detail. Good literature is good literature, regardless of the target audience. *Phantom Island* isn't just for teenagers; it's

for anyone who hasn't forgotten how to read – how to imagine and empathize and create. The plot and character development; the intrigue, the tension, the romance, the journey, the discovery; every thing about the Island kept me turning pages when I should have been sleeping.

Wind is the first book in the *Phantom Island* series. *Water*, is scheduled to come out Summer 2010. It's always nice to have something to look forward to, especially the "small" things; I can't wait to find out what happens next. For more about *Phantom Island* visit www.krissidallas.com/.

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Glee-tastic!

May 4, 2010

I love this show. I'm not afraid to admit it. The raw talent of the cast, the character development, the geekiness, the music (duh), and the wonderful caricature of the American high school experience. I come back week after week for the clever plot lines and dialogue, and the overall impeccable artistry. I know what some of you are thinking—*Glee is just a show about sex-crazed teenagers, pushing a liberal agenda! How can you watch that stuff and call yourself a Christian?* And you're right... on the surface. If you look deeper, you'll find more depth—just like with teenagers, come to think of it. They can be a mess on the outside, seemingly concerned with nothing but what's superficial, shiny, sexy; but if you take the time to look deeper, wow: what perspective, passion, potential. (Whereas we adults tend to keep our messiness better concealed.)

Glee has such high appeal in part because almost everyone, both in and out of high school, feels like somewhat of a misfit; and *Glee* is a show which highlights that fact and how essential it is for us as unique and even flawed human beings to have a safe place to be unique and even flawed, giving us our common ground back and showcasing what the Church ought to: hospitality. The show also has lots of appeal because it's good art: it's well made and speaks to the human condition. If we don't want to forfeit our influence in our world, then we need to be more discerning about art: just because a show (or song or sculpture or painting or novel) depicts unChristian ethics or values doesn't mean it's bad art. Likewise, just because a piece of art depicts Christian values doesn't mean it's good art.

Sometimes the art we come in contact with will match up pretty solidly with the Creation-Fall-Redemption narrative of Scripture. Sometimes it represents the complete opposite ideas about what life is like and what it means to be human. But most of the time, as with the TV show *Glee*, we are presented with ideas that partly conform to Christian doctrine or ethics, or are but a shadow—"All truth is God's truth." Art comes out of the ideas in the heart and minds of the women and men who create the work, and Romans 2 tells us that God has written his truth on the hearts of all people. Certainly *Glee* is a shadow, and at times, in that shadow are moral messes and liberal agendas. So we have to watch *Glee* through the lenses of our biblical worldview. We have to watch *Glee* [with our brains turned on](#).

Watching *Glee* with our brains turned on, we can be aware of and reject what goes in opposition to a biblical framework, and affirm what is good, even if those good qualities and ideas about life fall short of what Christ gives as we pray his Goodness come; his Good be done (Mt 6:10). My favorite quality about *Glee* is the unexpected dives into full-bodied, deeply human characters. And it's *Glee*'s knack for flipping

expectations and busting through the stereotypes, stereotypes *Glee* has set up itself, that allows me to write the following as a way of merely observing while withholding judgment, because you never know when *Glee* will flip something.

So what are *Glee*'s flat places that I'm hoping will curve and plunge and flip? Well, I'm afraid they're pretty typical: a woman's choice; hypocritical, asinine Christians; "I knew you were gay when you were three"; and my personal favorite, feelings-driven love. That's where I'm going to camp out, but I will make a small note about a woman's choice. This problem goes deeper than abortion. Because regardless of whether or not we murder the child (and the good news is that more and more people [and movies and other social media] paint abortion in a negative light and [favor life](#)), when the choice is all Hers, we kill off the humanity of the father too. He becomes just a sperm donor. There's a very important episode of *Glee* admonishing young men to treat women like persons and work against objectifying them. There needs to be one about how women objectify men.

Which leads me to feelings-driven love and false romantic ideals. Have you ever stopped to think about what books and movies and TV shows and pop songs are all telling us about what love is and what ideal romance looks like? If you haven't noticed, love is a feeling. And romance is an intense, often tumultuous, chemistry-infused whirlwind affirmed by ~~good~~ sex great sex.

Already there are some elements of the romantic plot-lines in *Glee* that cause me to be hopeful that things will flip, but until they do, the following scenes perfectly expose the love = feelings definition that we know in our heads isn't right but aren't doing much to counter in our own lives.*

Before I dive into the scenes, a little Will & Terri Schuester background:

Once upon a time Will, the goody choir boy had a crush on an older girl named April. That didn't work out so he dated and subsequently fell in love with Terri. Together for many years, their marriage [sic] appeared to grow stagnant until Terri announced she was pregnant. Will was quick to step up to be the daddy despite his wandering eye for the ginger co-worker [Emma]. ([Glee Wiki](#))

Okay. Scene: Will finds out Terri's been faking the pregnancy and freaks out (naturally). After ripping the pregnancy pad from Terri's waist, Will tearfully tries to make sense of his upside-down world:

Why did you do this to us? I don't understand.

I thought you were leaving me. You're so different, Will. We both know it; I can feel you, you're pulling away from me.

Why, because I – I started standing up to you, trying to make this a relationship of equals?

No, because of the damn Glee club! Ever since you started it you just started walking around like you were better than me.

I should be allowed to feel good about myself!

Who are we kidding, Will? This marriage works because you don't feel good about yourself.

[...]

I loved you Terri, I really loved you.

I'm so sorry, Will. I'm so sorry. Do you remember at that appointment? Do you remember what we said? That at that moment, no matter what happened, we loved each other. We could get that feeling back again. You could love me back, Will. ("Mattress")

Exit Will.

Next episode. The Glee Club kicks tail (and Lea Michele does the best [“Don’t Rain on My Parade”](#) I’ve ever heard) and take Sectionals, after which Will comes back home for the first time since he left to change clothes for Emma’s wedding.

Enter Terri:

I want you to know I’ve been seeing a therapist. It’s just at the local community center, but still.

Good. I hope it works out for you.

I’m taking responsibility, Will. I mean, I’m weak, and I’m selfish, and I let my anxiety rule my life. But you know I wasn’t always that way. It’s just that I wanted so many things that I know we’re never gonna have. But that was okay as long as I still had you. Will... say something.

I’m looking at you, and I’m trying... I mean, I really want to feel that thing I always felt when I looked at you before, that feeling of family, of love. But that’s gone.

Forever?

I don’t know. (“Sectionals”)

So there it is. Love = feelings and this distorted love defines our relationships and whether or not they’re worth fighting for. At least for episodes 12 and 13... The writers have very cleverly set things up so that we experience the relationship almost entirely from Will’s perspective; and we are set up to dislike and distrust Terri and root for Emma. We soothe ourselves for hoping Emma and Will get together even though Will is married to Terri because Terri is selfish, often mistreats Will (and others), and is antagonistic toward Glee, the one thing outside of family that makes Will come alive. While Emma is adorable and caring and seems to have

more in common with Will; she's entirely the lovable underdog we love to cheer for.

But... I kind of feel as though *Glee* is setting us up to see ourselves for what we really are: unsympathetic, quick to judge and slow to search for the whole story, quick to follow and go after what feels good rather than what is good. Because while Terri Schuester says and does a lot of things that make us question her right to take up space (without the comic relief of Sue Sylvester), there are these deftly placed moments—those *Glee* -moments—where Terri is human, vulnerable and hurting. And you begin to feel sympathy and find yourself thinking... *Is this a trick?*

So we'll see what happens. With each new episode I look forward to more plot twists, magical musical numbers, Sue Sylvester quotes, and busting of social myths and categories.

*[A 2008 survey](#) on the divorce rate in America: about one in three. (And Christians? Largely the same: about one in three.) Christian porn and masturbation and the connection to [fantasy-inflated expectations](#) of real life. ["Christian" novels](#) are just as bad, if not worse, at proliferating a false romantic ideal.

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Go to the Movies. . . But

Don't Turn Off Your Brain!

Feb. 12, 2010

How many of you have seen one movie in the past month (on TV or at the theater)? Two movies? Three? Ten? How many of you, like me, see so many movies on a regular basis it's too hard to count? Do you know how many movies are made on average per year in Hollywood? Over the last ten years or so, Hollywood puts out an average of six hundred movies each year. That's almost two a day—many many more if you include Bollywood. Movies are everywhere! They show up in abundance in our culture and in our lives. On that level alone movies are important to think about and discuss in our Christian communities as we try to help one another live more like Christ.

But movies aren't only important because they're prevalent. Movies are important because they communicate ideas about what is true. We've always used art as a way of expressing our beliefs about and experiences of reality: what is true about life and what it means to be a person, why is there evil and how can we be saved from it... "Man has always and will continue to express his hope and excitement, as well as his fears and reservations, about life and what it means to be human through the arts. He will seek to express his world through any and all available mediums, and presently that includes film."[\[1\]](#)

So movies are important not just because they're everywhere, but because they tell us about life and what it means to be human. Normally, in church, when we talk about where our ideas about life and what it means to be a person and how we should live, where do we say those ideas come from? Right, the Bible.

And that's true! But God has given us art too. And we need art and science and nature and each other and the Bible to interpret what is real, what is true. We need all of these

things together to help us make sense of life; because life can sometimes be a mess. When your friend betrays you and you don't know why. When your parents divorce. When life isn't bad just uncertain, or confusing... or complicated because two boys like you at the same time or you're not exactly sure where you want to go to college... Now, the Scriptures come first among all informers of reality; but we'll come back to that.

I have to thank my friend and colleague [Todd Kappelman](#); he works with me at Probe and he is a professor of philosophy at [Dallas Baptist University](#). I'll be pulling a lot from his lecture "Perspectives on Film: What's in a movie?" Let me quote Todd:

"A film is able to convey an enormous range of human experience and emotions. A good film maker, script writer, director, producer, or actor can take us to places that we might never be able to see through our everyday experiences."

Can you think of some examples? *Avatar*. *Lord of the Rings*. Even movies like *Saving Private Ryan* or *Braveheart*. And because movies are able to involve us in situations that are outside of our everyday experiences, but that we can relate to, "[movies] may also show us things about our world that would otherwise remain hidden to the untrained eye." For example, *Wall-E*. How many of you have seen *Wall-E*? So basically humanity destroys all oxygen-producing plant life and has to ship civilization out into outer space. Everyone's on a giant cruise ship in space, lounging in these mobile recliners that take them wherever they want to go and they have these screens that pop up and they can order whatever food they want, and it comes right to them. And they've been living like this in space for years so everyone is super fat. There are a couple of underlying messages in this movie; they're pretty obvious, right? Take care of the Earth our home and discipline yourself in this world of modern convenience. But because these messages are communicated to us, not

directly in the world in which we live, but indirectly through a world with robots and space cruise ships, it's a message that's easier to swallow.

The underlying messages of *Wall-E* are pretty obvious; however, many movies have messages which are much more subtle. And unless we know what to look for and how to look for it we will miss it. We will miss what the movie is really saying behind the special effects and witty dialogue. Often movies communicate ideas about life and reality through symbols; it's like code. The movies don't often just come out and say, "This is the message about life from this movie." So we need to learn how to interpret the code.

Movies have ideas and those ideas come from the women and men who make them. Duh. Right, I know. But we don't always think about it. Every person has a [worldview](#) and that worldview is always in a person's art.

My colleague Todd gives us five basic questions to ask when watching movies:

1. How important is life to the director/writers, etc? Are tough issues dealt with or avoided? "Christian" movies come to mind when I think of this question. Sometimes these movies are really bad about candy-coating life—everything ends nice and neatly and all the bad stuff about life is kind of skipped over or neatly dealt with. This is a disservice because it isn't true to life.

2. Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your interpretation? How many of you saw Avatar? I saw it twice. It was awesome in 3D. I hear it's even cooler in XD. I'll let you in on a not-so-secret secret. Hollywood's favorite and most popular worldview right now is pantheism. Think about Avatar and look at your chart (under Cosmic Humanism). See anything that rings familiar from the movie?

3. Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to determine if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that is in agreement with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality. Let me think here... what comes to mind? Um... romantic comedies. Don't get me wrong, I like many romantic comedies, but I also go to those movies with my brain turned on, watching the screen through my biblical worldview lenses. And it's important we do that because those movies aren't just fun-loving and warm-fuzzy, they also communicate ideas about romance and marriage and dating and sex. And if we go into these movies with our brains turned off, we will begin to subconsciously absorb these false ideas. If I'm not filtering the film with my biblical worldview, I can easily begin to expect my love life to be like the movies, which when I say it out loud like that sounds ridiculous. But it happens in subtle ways and more often than we think.

4. Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film seek to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone? I think a case can be made that *The DaVinci Code* fits into this category. But you know, hostility toward Christianity is all over, not just movies, but TV too. When Christians are portrayed on the show *Criminal Minds* for example, they're often extreme fundamentalists who hate gays and repress women. And you know, that's a legitimate complaint against some who call themselves Christians. But when those are the only types of Christians shown time and time again on TV and in the movies, the whole picture isn't being shown. It's being distorted.

5. Is the film technically well made, written, produced and acted? I confess, *Transformers II* was a major disappointment. It was technically well done; I mean, the special effects were awesome. But the writing... I felt like I was getting dumber sitting there listening to that dialogue. Even the plot had some holes in it, which was disappointing because I

like action flicks.

Now as Christian interpreters, we have three more questions to ask ourselves:

1. Does the interpretation of reality in this work conform to or fail to conform to Christian doctrine or ethics? Sometimes a movie will match up pretty solidly with the Creation-Fall-Redemption narrative of Scripture. Sometimes a movie will represent the complete opposite ideas about what life is like and what it means to be human. But most of the time, movies present to us ideas that partly conform to Christian doctrine or ethics. Because movies come out of the ideas in the heart and minds of the women and men who create them, and Romans 2 tells us that God has written his truth on the hearts of all people.

2. If some of the ideas and values are Christian, are they inclusively or exclusively Christian? That is, do these ideas encompass Christianity and other religions or philosophic viewpoints, or do they exclude Christianity from other viewpoints? The case could be made that The Book of Eli presents Christian values in an inclusive way. It's subtle, and if you blinked you might have missed it. The movie isn't about preserving the Word of God. It's about preserving the religious books of the world. And it is no mistake that the Bible was placed right next to the Koran in the library at the end.

3. If some of the ideas and values in a work are Christian, are they a relatively complete version of the Christian view, or are they a relatively rudimentary version of Christian belief on a given topic? (Like Criminal Minds.)

Finally, a few cautions:

1. Just because a movie depicts unChristian ethics or values

doesn't mean it's bad art. Likewise, just because a movie depicts Christian values doesn't mean it's good art.

2. Be careful not to allow your personal perspective to dominate the description of a particular work. Try to understand as many other perspectives as you can.

3. Do not expect a non-Christian to agree with you, arrive at the same conclusions, or completely understand your perspective. At best we can hope to offer a clear and coherent insight into a work and thereby gain an opportunity for a Christian voice to be heard.

Okay. So movies are important. And so is the need for Christian interpretation. So if you like movies as much as I do, I hope you will go to the movies and keep your brain turned on because movies communicate messages about life and what it means to be human. And if we don't turn *on* our brains, we will unknowingly begin to believe untruths about life and what it means to be human. Movies are also important because they provide a good, nonthreatening way to talk about truth and worldview—ideas about life and what it means to be human—with our friends.

1. Kappelman, Todd, Film and the Christian, bit.ly/LvfUe1

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/02/12/go-to-the-movies-but-dont-turn-off-your-brain/

Should Christians Respect Obama?

Mar. 9, 2010

The email below titled "Should Christians Respect Obama?" was forwarded to me. Perhaps you've seen it too. (I have formatted the spacing to fit below; however, all emphases—bolds, italics, exclamation marks, words in all caps—are original.)

Dr. David Barton is more of a historian than a Biblical speaker, but very famous for his knowledge of historical facts as well as Biblical truths.

Dr. David Barton – on Obama

Respect the Office? Yes. Respect the Man in the Office? No, I am sorry to say. I have noted that many elected officials, both Democrats and Republicans, called upon America to unite behind Obama. Well, I want to make it clear to all who will listen that I AM NOT uniting behind Obama !

I will respect the Office which he holds, and I will acknowledge his abilities as an orator and wordsmith and pray for him, BUT that is it. I have begun today to see what I can do to make sure that he is a one-term President !

Why am I doing this ? It is because:

- I do not share Obama's vision or value system for America ;*
- I do not share his Abortion beliefs;*
- I do not share his radical Marxist's concept of re-distributing wealth;*
- I do not share his stated views on raising taxes on those who make \$150,000+ (the ceiling has been changed three times since August);*
- I do not share his view that America is Arrogant;*
- I do not share his view that America is not a Christian Nation;*

- I do not share his view that the military should be reduced by 25%;
- I do not share his view of amnesty and giving more to illegals than our American Citizens who need help;
- I do not share his views on homosexuality and his definition of marriage;
- I do not share his views that Radical Islam is our friend and Israel is our enemy who should give up any land;
- I do not share his spiritual beliefs (at least the ones he has made public);
- I do not share his beliefs on how to re-work the healthcare system in America ;
- I do not share his Strategic views of the Middle East ; and
- I certainly do not share his plan to sit down with terrorist regimes such as Iran .

Bottom line: my America is vastly different from Obama's, and I have a higher obligation to my Country and my GOD to do what is Right ! For eight (8) years, the Liberals in our Society, led by numerous entertainers who would have no platform and no real credibility but for their celebrity status, have attacked President Bush, his family, and his spiritual beliefs !

They have not moved toward the center in their beliefs and their philosophies, and they never came together nor compromised their personal beliefs for the betterment of our Country ! They have portrayed my America as a land where everything is tolerated except being intolerant ! They have been a vocal and irreverent minority for years ! They have mocked and attacked the very core values so important to the founding and growth of our Country ! They have made every effort to remove the name of GOD or Jesus Christ from our Society ! They have challenged capital punishment, the right to bear firearms, and the most basic principles of our criminal code ! They have attacked one of the most fundamental of all Freedoms, the right of free speech !

Unite behind Obama? Never ! ! !

I am sure many of you who read this think that I am going overboard, but I refuse to retreat one more inch in favor of those whom I believe are the embodiment of Evil! PRESIDENT BUSH made many mistakes during his Presidency, and I am not sure how history will judge him. However, I believe that he weighed his decisions in light of the long established Judeo-Christian principles of our Founding Fathers!!! Majority rules in America , and I will honor the concept; however, I will fight with all of my power to be a voice in opposition to Obama and his "goals for America ." I am going to be a thorn in the side of those who, if left unchecked, will destroy our Country ! ! Any more compromise is more defeat ! I pray that the results of this election will wake up many who have sat on the sidelines and allowed the Socialist-Marxist anti-GOD crowd to slowly change so much of what has been good in America !

"Error of Opinion may be tolerated where Reason is left free to combat it." – Thomas Jefferson

GOD bless you and GOD bless our Country ! ! !

(Please, please, please, pass this on if you agree.)

Thanks for your time, be safe. "In GOD We Trust"

"If we ever forget that we're one nation under GOD, then we will be a nation gone under." – Ronald Reagan

I WANT THE AMERICA I GREW UP IN BACK....

In GOD We Trust.....

Respectfully, I disagree. The person who wrote this email didn't say how to respect the office without respecting the person holding it. It may be possible to do so; however, I believe it is more important to respect people than positions. It sounds very noble to say, "I respect the office but not the man." It's like saying, "I respect my boss's position of authority over me, but I don't respect my boss." But in my

experience, this attitude makes it very difficult to “do everything without complaining or arguing.” That habit derives only from love. And love is expressed by subordinates to their authorities largely through respect (Eph 5:21–6:8; note especially 5:33 and 6:5).

It is possible not to respect the positions the President holds and still respect the President as an Image-bearing human creation if nothing else. But this kind of generosity which derives from thinking Christianly (a Christian worldview) is not expressed in this email. The tone of this email conveys contempt, not respect. I’m particularly unnerved by the way the term “embodiment of Evil” was tossed out there. Calling liberals Satan incarnate is sensationalist at best and certainly doesn’t portray the high view of human dignity that Christianity gives us.

A few other side notes to consider when viewing email forwards like this one:

- *It is highly unlikely that a PhD wrote an email in such broad strokes with such inflammatory language, not to mention so many exclamation points. (In fact, I would be cautious of anything with this many exclamation marks, whether it claims to be from a PhD or not because when every sentence is exclaiming, that’s a sign that the email is not trying to get you to think about the topic, but is only interested in goading an inordinately emotional reaction from you (as opposed to an emotionally passionate response tempered with thought-full-ness).)*

- *From Dad: “Dr. Barton’s website does not have a record of this document – so, I doubt that it is from him. I sent an e-mail inquiry to wallbuilders.com asking them to comment on its authenticity.” Thanks Dad!*

- *Thirdly, there are at least three of the President’s views/positions that have been distorted and intentionally*

misrepresented in this email. Email forwards are notorious for this, and there is very little that is less Christian than bearing false witness.

- Finally, I just want to comment that it is okay for Christians to disagree about most of the items in that list. This email implies that a Christian nation (whatever that means anyway) would resemble the exact set of beliefs behind this email; it implies that any good Christian would agree with this email wholesale.*

So, should Christians respect President Obama? We, more than anyone, should—especially if you dislike him and/or disagree with his basic platforms. It is easy to love people we like: people who are like us, people with whom we agree. But Christ demands we love those who are irritating to us.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/03/09/respect-obama/

Telling the Truth: The Gospel

as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale

Frederick Buechner is one of my favorite authors, probably top five. He's a brilliant storyteller, who, like Shakespeare, understands both the peasant and the prince and writes stories that all at once capture them both, stories that are magical yet earthy.

In *Telling the Truth*, a book about communicating the gospel of Christ, Buechner provides his readers several engaging (and true) stories to help illustrate what it means to tell the truth with our lives, including a very compelling story from the life of the famous (and infamous) 19th-century preacher Henry Ward Beecher. Later Buechner tells us the story of Jesus before Pilate, but as if it were happening in 1977. And it's real. What I mean is, it isn't cheesy. As I'm reading it I believe it could have happened in 1977 like I'm watching it happen on some old rerun. Buechner does this with several stories from the Scriptures, and I read these stories with fresh eyes and new perspective.

And this is part of telling the truth: making new metaphors and painting contemporary word pictures so that people who have ears to hear.... But I'm getting ahead of myself. Because the truth is silence before it is spoken, Buechner points out:

He [Pilate] says, "What is truth?" and by way of an answer, the man with the split lip doesn't say a blessed thing. Or else his not saying anything, that is the blessed thing. [...]

The one who hears the truth that is silence before it is a word is Pilate, and he hears it because he has asked to hear it, and he has asked to hear it—"What is truth?" he asks—because in a world of many truths and half-truths he is hungry for truth itself or, failing that, at least for the

truth that there is no truth. We are all of us Pilate in our asking after truth, and when we come to church to ask it, the preacher would do well to answer us also with silence because the truth and the Gospel are one, and before the Gospel is a word, it too like truth is silence—not an ordinary silence, silence as nothing to hear, but silence that makes itself heard if you listen to it the way Pilate listens to the silence of the man with the split lip. The Gospel that is truth is good news, but before it is good news, let us say that it is just news. Let us say that it is the evening news, the television news, but with the sound turned off.

Picture that then, the video without the audio, the news with, for the moment, no words to explain it or explain it away, no words to cushion or sharpen the shock of it, no definition given to dispose of it with... [{1}](#)

We are all of us the preacher too—we do call ourselves evangelicals, after all—and we would all do well to reacquaint ourselves with the silence that is, the silence that speaks into the silence that isn't, the silence of the rocks crying out Jesus' gospel truth. So how do we listen to the pregnant silence? How do we grab hold of the gift of truth Jesus is offering *us* as he offered to Pilate when Pilate asked after it? One way we do this, Buechner tells us, is by listening to our lives. All of it [{2}](#): the tragedy, the comedy, and the fairy tale. Your car that was stolen, your marital affair, your friend who betrayed you, the iPhone you own but can't afford, the self-righteousness you feel about someone else's affair, materialism, tax-collecting...that is the *tragedy*. And the *comedy* is that part which is both your wedding day and the day you fall in the toilet because he left the seat up, both "a kind of terrible funniness and of a happy end to all that is terrible". [{3}](#)

Finally, we must listen to our lives within the overarching framework of *fairy tale*. Because the tragic and the comic

isn't all that's there. The fairy tale is the spell lifted and the Beast becoming on the outside the handsome prince he had become on the inside; it's the beautiful step-sisters whose feet turned out to be too fat and ugly like the sisters were in their hearts; it is those moments in our lives when we give to the least of these in spite of ourselves because once upon a time we climbed up the tree a cold opportunist and climbed down a caring, and cared for, philanthropist.

This listening to life—our own lives and the lives of others, the darkness and joyousness and impossible possibility of transformation into newness that we all share—listening to all of it in the silence before we finally but restlessly fall asleep or start our car or pour our coffee; and then also listening to the rustling of our tossing and turning, the cranking of the engine, the brewing of our coffee...this listening enables us to tell the truth.

Coupled with this Buechner reminds us we must also listen to the artists of our time and the times before us:

There would be a strong argument for saying that much of the most powerful preaching of our time is the preaching of the poets, playwrights, novelists because it is often they better than the rest of us who speak with awful honesty about the absence of God in the world, and about the storm of his absence, both without and within, which, because it is unendurable, unlivable, drives us to look to the eye of the storm. [{4}](#)

We would of course add the film writer / director. Fiction is such an important informer of the gospel, I cannot image how shallow my theology would be without it. Likewise, if I didn't discipline myself to listen to others, my theology would be shallow. And I recognize that some are gifted with a propensity for listening to nature, some to microbiology, some to art, some to numbers, some to everyday chores. But we each

of us regardless of which comes more naturally can grow through the Holy Spirit in our spiritual ability to listen. More importantly, we all must learn to lean on one another: he who has ears for music learns from she who has ears for engineering, for example—and she learns from him, too.

Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale is a small book divided into four chapters that brings us a refreshing look at sharing the gospel. It's refreshing because it is the whole, honest truth, not only about the world, but about our own hearts. "So if preachers or lecturers are going to say anything that really matters to anyone including themselves," Buechner, the ordained, "part-time novelist, Christian, pig" [{5}](#) knowingly tells us,

they must say it not just to the public part of us that considers interesting thoughts about the gospel and how to preach it, but to the private, inner part too, to the part of us all where our dreams come from, both our good dreams and our bad dreams, the inner part where thoughts mean less than images, elucidation less than evocation, where our concern is less with how the gospel is to be preached than with what the gospel is and what it is to us. They must address themselves to the fullness of who we are and the emptiness too, the emptiness where grace and peace belong but mostly are not, because terrible as well as wonderful things have happened to us all. [{6}](#)

And so, Buechner being a gifted, contemplative listener to life and literature, uses everyday life to tell gospel history in fresh ways, and uses those stories together with the poetry of the prophets, the magic of familiar fairy tales, and the masterpieces of some of Buechner's favorite writers to tell the truth, which is the gospel, in hopes that his telling the truth will help us tell it too.

[1.](#) Buechner, Frederick, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as*

Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale (HarperCollins, NY, 1977), p. 14

[2.](#) Ibid, p. 34

[3.](#) Ibid. p. 6.

[4.](#) Ibid, p. 44.

[5.](#) Buechner, A film about writer and minister Frederick Buechner, directed by: Rob Collins (CustomFlix Studio, 2004) <http://amzn.to/pTUeeD>.

[6.](#) Buechner, *Telling the Truth*, p. 4.

This blog post originally appeared at reneamac.com/2010/01/26/telling-the-truth/

To Live Is Christ: On Singleness and Waiting

Apr. 9, 2010

We live in the tension between contentment and craving. Whether you are married or single or widowed or divorced; dating, not dating, wanting to date, not wanting to date—for now, forever. If you are wondering about your sexuality or your sex-appeal, your marriage, the strength of your love or your hope. . . And if you can empathize with the faith-struggle of doubt and dashed or delayed dreams (because without empathy we are nothing but the annoying, repetitive clanging of construction in the city streets) . . . Angela Severson has bravely opened a vein to unleash the power that only life-blood has for the healing and cleansing of [telling](#)

[the truth.](#)

This poem is so very well done. I've never seen anything like it. It's holistic and honest and inspiring and right on the money. The single life and the married life illustrate and teach us about life with Christ and the character of God. The story of "This Life" is one that all too often gets marginalized and left untold, or told unwell—But, we're doing better. When both stories are told (and listened to), all lives (and theologies) are enriched.

This Life

We wait, we long for, we pine after, ... we desire, we yearn.
We wait.

I wait

I am thirteen

Puberty explodes like a rash, an epidemic.

My girlfriends hold hands with boys we only months ago snickered at, turned up our noses at, as though their very essence was a disease. Now the disease appears to be, that my girlfriends can't stop gawking over these same specimen. I decide to play along and choose my crushes. I crush my way through high school, waiting to be asked out. Waiting by locker stalls during break, waiting for a nudge in the hall, a simple "hey," a nod. I wait, standing pressed against the wall, through all the slow songs on Friday nights in the darkened gymnasiums. I wait for an invitation to senior prom. I wait.

Through this waiting, I feel like it is not working, meaning me.

Something is not working with me...my friends acquire boyfriends, hold hands, kiss, and I acquire journals, stashed by my bedside, full of wonderings and waiting.

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To be ready and available}

It is July.

I'm twenty-two.

My days of being a serial "crushest" are about to end.

I am standing in a parking lot surrounded by pigeons pecking at croissant crumbs. The aroma of Newman's fish-n-chips deep fat fryers heating up engulfs me. In the slant of the morning sun my current crush tells me, that he has a crush on me.

.....finally! He likes me and I like him. So, this is what it's like to be loved, this is what I've been waiting for... this messy, dizzy, complicated, delicious, heart pounding love. We dance the dating dance for months and then on a quiet unexpected spring day he wants me to be his...asks me to be his, opens the door to the promise of forever and stamps soul-mate on my heart.

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To stay in a place of expectation of}

I am twenty-six.

I am engaged to the same fellow.

I am still waiting.

I've waited through friends getting married, through showers and bridesmaids dresses, through banquets and bouquet tossing, through Martha Stewart Wedding Magazines and honeymoon trip photos. It is now my turn. I am next in line to run from the church doors dodging birdseed and blessings. However, love is delicate, as fragile as the blossoms of spring, opening in trust to the slanting sun and quick to close in the cool of the evening, so too was this promise, one that could not take hold, a love aborted, out of fear and wisdom, full of pain, and awe. Stunned with grief, the love in my heart shrinks, evaporates, dies and God becomes small, cruel and unkind.

Hope aborted.

For what do I wait?

Am I waiting for what I want, or what I need?

For that which I desire, or believe that I deserve?
Am I longing for wisdom? ...opening myself to the God, who
loves me into this deep-down empty sorrow...

{Romans Eight}

"In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

I am 30 or 32 or somewhere in between.

I have dates that last 10 minutes or 2 years. I avoid answering calls from some and linger hours by the phone waiting for others. In and out of love, infatuation, intrigue...sometimes going through the motions, other times knowing he is.

...I'm into men, I'm tired of men. One day I'm free as a bird and content in my singleness, the next I am desperately pining away for every male that crosses my path, searching his finger for a wedding ring. I seize the day, travel over seas, take classes, switch careers, indulging in the delights and rewards of being single and still I wait. I watch my married friends build homes, families and history.

It is summer wedding season again. My cousin is getting married. I congratulate myself that I am actually excited about being there, really o.k with my place in life, o.k. that I don't have a date for this wedding, feeling genuinely happy for the two tying the knot. At the reception, between sipping white wine and sampling stuffed mushrooms, she approaches me...that token distant relative, you know the one...she has known me since birth, and kept up on me through my parents Christmas cards...and she asks "So are you going to be next?" I politely answer that I am not currently dating anyone...and she replies, "Well, what is a pretty girl like you still doing single?" Deep in my heart I have to trust

that she means well, but the thoughts in my head and the words about to fly off my tongue feel like dragon fire. I want set blaze to her lovely over-sprayed doo. I smile and shrug, and pop another mushroom in my mouth to choke down my anger and my shame. "Yeah, what is wrong with me?" A moment ago I was confident in my singleness and now I feel other. I feel like a freak of nature, an alien, a misfit. I feel shaken.

{Hebrews 11/12}

"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised, they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.....They are longing for a better country- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.....Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."

I am thirty-six.

I am single.

Singleness seems to be the new "have it all" lifestyle.

I decide to take a break in my day, a little escape from work.

I brew my cup of tea, add a dash of cream and sit back on the sofa with a magazine for some creative inspiration. I flip open into the middle and look down on the page. It is an advice column. The first question I glance at reads {Capital Q, semicolon} "Help, Please! What should I say to people who ask "why are you single?" It's so rude, I can never think of a response. (yeah, I agree and can't wait to hear the answer) {Capital A, semicolon} Shake your head, frown and say, "I loathe giving up all the fabulous sex" The answer hits me in the gut. I feel sad, disgusted, disappointed and angry. I'm appalled at the culture in which

I live and yet not surprised. What do you expect, Angela...this world is not going to encourage you in your singleness, at least in a moral sense. I've read that singleness is on the rise...more people are single now than ever before. I want to think, great, I'm not so different, not so alone, but there is a huge chasm that defines this single lifestyle. The chasm is sexuality. It is one thing to be single and living with someone, single and sleeping with someone, single and sleeping with anyone and a very different state to be single and abstinent.

Abstinent not because it feels good or is pious, but because it honors God. Choosing abstinence out of obedience and respect for the vulnerability of the human body and spirit. I am ashamed to admit that I often hide the truth that I am nearly forty and a virgin. In this culture being a virgin makes me feel small, prude, asexual. Some nights I lay in bed at night aching to be held, longing for sexual intimacy. Gravity pulls my bones toward the earth, my body fills hollow....I lay one hand on my belly and the other over my breast, not with the intention of arousal, but to be held. It would be easy to deny my sexuality and I have. But tonight I want to acknowledge that my body was designed for sexual intimacy, and although that yearning is not being fulfilled, I am still a sensual creation.

{Psalms 139}

"You hem me in – behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me."

{Martin Luther}

"This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness;

not health, but healing;

not being, but becoming;

not rest, but exercise.

We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it.

The process is not yet finished, but it is going on.
This is not the end, but it is the road.
All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”

I am thirty-eight.

There are days when I feel content knowing that I am growing in wisdom, I am awaiting the Kingdom. That my singleness is just part of my journey here, it is the color of my life. Our stories all get colored in, mine just happens to be green at the moment.

Perhaps I'll meet someone and get married and then I'll get to add some purple and red, but today it's green. I feel blessed with my greenness, alive and grateful. I love my career. I have rich, beautiful friends, and family.... my daily needs are always met, and still there is this tension. I'm driving home from Eugene, marveling over the spring grass, the baby lambs, the sinking sun...the beauty is intoxicating and warm tears roll down my cheeks. I've just come from holding my new godson. His sweet newborn smell, his fragile breath, his parents (my beloved friends) and his sisters (my other two god children) all nestled in unison. This is a family. In this moment I am so grateful to be a part of it, but now I must travel north on I-5 towards home, alone. These tears are full of sorrow and joy, so bittersweet. In my heart I hold the hope that I may one day receive the blessing of a family like this earth but I know that this earth in all it's beauty, is broken, so that for which I was made, I may not receive. There are bigger promises, larger hopes...to that I must cling.

{Hebrews 11}

“none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To look forward expectantly, to hold back expectantly.

To remain neglected or to remain in readiness.}

Today, as I write this, it is hard to wait.

I squirm. I writhe.

My skin crawls. The discomfort is visceral. Anything would feel better than here. The loneliness penetrates and all I see around me is what I don't have. I hike through Forest Park and I see love and families. I see holding hands and holding hearts. I see couples with babies and couples with dogs and couples melting into one another, sharing food, laughter, words and breath. I cry out "God, spare me from this loneliness, this waiting. I want my feelings to change. I feel guilty for not being satisfied with what I have in this moment. My head knows the gospel's truth.

The God of the Universe cares for me, loves me to the core, is for me,...and he has promised me life.

Not this life, but the everlasting kind.

The one without pain and suffering, hungering and squirming. A promise that is more than I can conceive, contain, or deserve. His grace covers the reality that my heart, at this moment, does not feel any better with this knowledge. I feel small and fragile, achy, and tired. Right now I am marred then I shall be perfect, right now I am broken, then I shall be fixed. I cry out for redemption.

{Deuteronomy 31}

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

What is it that I wait for? For what do I long? Is it Connection? Wholeness? Safety? Love?

I wait with myself, with my family, my friends,

I wait with my neighbor, the clerk at the grocery store, the lady next to me on the bus.

I wait with those across the country, across the sea, across the world, in places I know nothing of, filled with people waiting....

They wait for things that I have. They wait for warm food in their bellies and water on their lips, they wait to see their sick child healed, or the miracle of their bodies

restored, they wait for a soft place to lay down at night,
and the demon voices in their heads be stilled. The wait for
the terror to stop and the monsters slain. We all wait.

We wait for hope, for freedom, for comfort

We wait for love.

Deep, deep love that will never fail. A love that will fill
us.

We wait for Christ.

{Romans 8}

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither
angel nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor
any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in
all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of
God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Angela Severson

<http://www.imagodeiwomen.com/2010/03/this-life.html>

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