

Are You a Pickle?

A pickle used to be a cucumber, but when it sits in a brine solution of vinegar and spices, it absorbs the flavors of the brine and turns into a pickle. That's fine for cucumbers, but it's terrible for people. When we live immersed in the "brine" of our culture, we can easily absorb its values and philosophies. Instead of thinking and living like Jesus, we look and sound and live just like the rest of the surrounding culture.

Alarmingly, this is true of the church as well. The divorce rate of evangelicals is no different from that of our culture. The number of our men struggling with a secret pornography addiction is astronomical (one pastor told me he thought it was upward of 70%). The vast majority of our high school students have [mentally disconnected from the church, and often their faith](#), before they've graduated.

Paul exhorts us in Colossians 2:8-9,

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Translation: Don't be a pickle.

What does a culturally captive pickle look like? Particularly a "pink pickle"?

One of the highest values in our culture is sex. If you think of sex as a right or a need like eating or sleeping, and you're not getting any (or as much as you want), you might be angry. If you think God's antiquated policy of keeping sex within marriage means He's holding out on you (see Psalm 84:11), you've been pickled. If you dress to make guys look twice at you (your body, not your face), buying into the "if

you've got it, flaunt it" philosophy, you're a pickle.

Some mothers will do anything to keep her children from being angry or unhappy with them. They believe their job is to make and keep their children happy, especially if they feel guilty because of working or being a single mom. Some mothers will do anything to insure their children's popularity. Instead of seeing our children as belonging to God, and over whom He has made us stewards, children's approval and popularity can become idols. There are lots of pickle-flavored mothers.

What's your perspective on entertainment? If you sit in front of TV or movies, watching and listening without thinking, "How does this compare to what God says in His word?", then you are absorbing the world's brine and you're a pickle. Are you one of the women secretly addicted to the [Twilight](#) books or to romance novels that are actually emotional pornography? The purpose of porn is to arouse desire for something that God has not given: sexual pornography arouses physical feelings for someone other than a spouse, and emotional pornography arouses emotional feelings of longing for a relationship other than one's spouse.

Speaking of other kinds of pornography, how much time do you pore over catalogs and ads in magazines and newspapers, arousing the lust for materialism? American culture highly values "stuff" because 1) we deserve it and 2) it will make us happy. Meanwhile, storage rental facilities keep popping up because we don't have enough room for all the stuff we already have that apparently didn't make us happy because we keep buying more.

So. . . are you a pickle?

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The Mother Heart of God

Two days ago we observed Mother's Day in the US. I think Mother's Day matters to God because mothers matter to God. And I think mothers matter to God beyond their necessity for bringing new life into the world, but because women reflect an aspect of God's heart in ways men cannot.

Every aspect of our femininity, it seems to me, comes from God originally. He made females in His image with the feminine attributes and strengths that come straight from the Father heart of God.

The essence of our femininity is expressed in two main ways: responding and nurturing.

One of the most wonderful promises in God's word says, "Call to Me, and I will answer." He says this multiple times, and multiple ways! God is a responsive God. And it honors and glorifies Him when WE respond—to Him, and to others.

Nurture shares the same root word as nurse. I am fascinated by one of the Old Testament names for God, El Shaddai. El means "strong one," and Shaddai is a form of the word for the breast. El Shaddai means "The strong breasted one. "

El Shaddai is the mother heart . . . of God the Father. It's from the Father we receive a mother's heart.

I acknowledge that Mother's Day is painful for some women, especially those who long to be mothers and aren't. But the heart of a mother isn't about having given birth. It's an attitude of the heart, a desire and willingness to nurture others.

El Shaddai longs to nurture and nurse us, if we'll let Him,

and He longs to draw us into an intimate embrace with Him.

I have seen Him bring healing to the hearts of many people as they pressed hard into His breast to receive nurture and comfort. . . and identity. His love is powerful enough to transform a heart that is so riddled with holes that it's like a spaghetti strainer, and when His love functions like Super Glue to plug up the holes, people's hearts are transformed into vessels that can hold His love—as well as people's—instead of draining out. As they receive nursing and nurturing from The Strong Breasted One, He loves and provides for them. I've watched it happen multiple times.

I am so grateful for the responsive, nurturing “Mother heart of God”!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_mother_heart_of_god

[Listen to Sue's message on this topic given at a Dallas-area church](#)

When God Does Nothing About Injustice

“If God is so good and loving, why does He allow pain and suffering?”

This one question is probably the biggest obstacle to faith in Christ for most people. There are [good answers](#), but since we are very limited in our perspective, many people continue to

stumble over the problem of evil.

Because we are made in the image of a just God, our souls long for justice in the wake of injustice. We want *someone to pay* for hurting us or hurting others. We want to exact our pound of flesh. We wonder why God doesn't *do something* about bad people doing bad things, especially when it invades our personal space.

For years, when addressing this issue, my husband has cautioned his listeners that immediate justice may sound good when we think about dishing it out, but we wouldn't like to be on the receiving end of it.

Recently we had the privilege of teaching at a couple of church leadership conferences in Burundi, Africa. Ray asked his audience to consider what it would be like if God zapped us with an electric shock every time we thought or said or did a bad, or even uncharitable, thing. He said, "You're probably sitting there thinking, 'I wish that speaker would just be quiet and sit down. It's been a long day and I'm tired of listening.' But that's not very nice, and let's say you got buzzed with a shock for your thoughts."

Then he got off the platform and stood before one of the men. "I don't like your shirt. I don't like your jacket. I don't like your FACE!" And then he pretended to get a gigantic electric shock, flailing his arms and head, and fell down on the floor. The men roared with laughter. Ray stood up and said, "*Now* aren't you glad God is patient? We need to be careful, thinking that justice in the moment would be a good thing. None of us would survive!"

Lots of smiles and nodding heads. They got it.

But we also experienced a terrifying example of why immediate justice would not be good.

On our two-hour drive from the capital city to the city where

the conference was held, it had grown dark. Ray was in a taxi carrying him and one of the interpreters, along with some of our luggage. As our convoy made its way through one of the villages where a lot of people were gathered along the road, a man that the driver thinks was drunk ran out in front of the speeding car, and the driver hit him. He was thrown onto the hood of the car and smashed into the windshield. As the driver slammed on the brakes, the injured man fell off the car and lay motionless on the pavement.

Horrificed, Ray could say or do nothing as the driver backed up and then drove around the man, leaving the scene—and a man who was either seriously injured or dead. The onlookers swarmed the taxi, and that of the car behind them, also containing our people, and started banging on the doors and windows. To the amazement of us Americans, all the drivers just kept on going, leaving the crumpled man and the angry crowd behind.

When we got to our destination, the horror was explained to us. If the taxi driver had gotten out of his car to check on the man he'd hit, the crowd would have killed him on the spot, and possibly Ray and our interpreter as well. In that culture they practice immediate justice—"mob justice," it was called. Our Burundi host said that in that culture, the drivers did the right thing to protect the visitors by not stopping and not opening the door to check on the man.

This experience was deeply disturbing to my husband (who was thankful that I was in another taxi ahead of him and didn't see anything). We prayed together about the awful images burned into his memory and asked the Lord for peace.

And we can both appreciate, at a whole new level, why God's patience in not dealing with evil and pain when it occurs is a measure of His grace and mercy. He *will* bring resolution one day, and we can rest in that. That He is patient beyond our understanding is a good, good thing.

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Why I'm the Lady in the Hat

It's pretty easy to find me at our church; I'm the one always in a hat. Someone always makes an affirming comment like "Love the hat!"—and probably the biggest reason is that I'm the only one wearing one. Even in a church of 5,000 people. Most people assume it's a fashion statement, but I wear a hat after wrestling with God over the issue of headcoverings for six years.



For years, I dismissed 1 Corinthians 11 as culturally bound and obsolete: women don't cover their heads in worship anymore because. . . well, because we just don't. Slam dunk.

Then I discovered that it had been a worldwide practice in the church for almost 2,000 years until just a few decades ago. As the result of an inaccurate reporting of the proceedings of Vatican II (as I understand it), it was like a rumor swept through Christianity: "no more covering." And since the fashion of wearing hats in public had changed, it was nothing more than a pointless relic to most churchgoers, gladly dropped.

Then I came across an argument for 1 Corinthians 11 that I couldn't counter. In this passage, there are three glories:

man, who is God's glory; woman, who is man's glory, and the woman's long hair, which is her glory. When a woman covers, she is covering two glories—her own, and the man's. This leaves only God's glory—the man—uncovered during worship.

That was pretty powerful, but it wasn't enough to get me to cover my head. It was, however, enough to get me to feel increasingly uncomfortable worshipping. With the sense of missing something. For six years.

Finally, there was one verse in that chapter that clinched it for me: *10 For this reason a woman should have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.* Ohhh. . . the angels. The beings present when we worship, who “long to look into these things” (1 Peter 1:12) like forgiveness and reconciliation and grace and redemption.



My son walking me up
the aisle at his wedding

So I looked for someone to tell me what that symbol of authority should be, if not a physical symbol. A wedding ring? Doesn't work for unmarried women. Hair? That's already standard issue for women, even unsubmitive rebellious ones. I asked my husband what he thought, and he gently replied, “I can't see any other conclusion from the text. I've always thought wearing a covering is what is commanded.”

So I gave in, and started wearing a hat because of the angels. I don't understand what difference it makes to them, but they know why I'm the lady in the hat.

I was not prepared for the personal blessing that came as a result: I love feeling so feminine! I've also been blessed by the way men seem to have a visceral, positive reaction to the sight of a woman in a hat.

It's all good.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/why_i_am_the_lady_in_the_hat on Oct. 13, 2009

Leaving Christianity

Last week (August 3, 2010), writer Anne Rice—author of *The Vampire Chronicles*—publicly renounced Christianity, but not Christ, on her Facebook page. In 2004 she had come back to her Roman Catholic roots after a foray in atheism, during which time she wrote her vampire books. She later identified these books as reflecting her quest for meaning in a world without God. Embracing Jesus as her Savior, Anne announced that she would henceforth “write only for the Lord.” Her next two books were *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* and *Christ the Lord: Road to Cana*, chronicling the life of Jesus.

But now she's had enough of the church:

“For those who care, and I understand if you don't: Today I quit being a Christian. I'm out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being 'Christian' or to being part of Christianity. It's simply impossible for me to 'belong' to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group. For ten years, I've tried. I've failed. I'm an outsider. My conscience will allow nothing else.”

A few hours later, she followed up her post with this:

“As I said below, I quit being a Christian. I'm out. In the

name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-secular humanism. I refuse to be anti-science. I refuse to be anti-life. In the name of Christ, I quit Christianity and being Christian. Amen.”

She reaffirmed her faith in Christ with a lack of faith in Christianity an hour or so later with the following post:

“My faith in Christ is central to my life. My conversion from a pessimistic atheist lost in a world I didn’t understand, to an optimistic believer in a universe created and sustained by a loving God is crucial to me. But following Christ does not mean following His followers. Christ is infinitely more important than Christianity and always will be, no matter what Christianity is, has been, or might become.”

This breaks my heart, for several reasons.

First, she has a valid point about what “Christianity” has been shaped to look like in many churches and in many individuals: that it’s more what we’re *against* than what we’re *for*. See the book [*unChristian: What a New Generations Really Thinks About Christianity. . . And Why it Matters*](#). Shallow discipleship has created an ugly characterization of what the Church, and Christians, are supposed to look like.

Second, she doesn’t understand that while Christ is the Head, the Church is His Body. No one can take themselves out of the Body of Christ without harm, just as a physical body is harmed if one hand chops off the other. Christianity is about Jesus, not the unfortunate misunderstandings of what it means to follow Him. But God calls us to do life in community, not on our own. Maybe Anne needs to find a different faith community than the one she’s been in.

Third, in a battle between her cherished beliefs and values

and the Bible's, hers are winning. Spiritual maturity means we submit ourselves to the authority and power of the Scriptures and of the Holy Spirit, resulting in our transformation. And that includes changing the way we think when our thoughts and desires collide with what God has revealed as truth. No one wins, in the end, when we refuse to be informed and formed by what God says, but Anne Rice cherishes her beliefs more than those of the Jesus she wants to follow. That is tragic.

I'm praying for her eyes to be open on several levels. I invite you to pray for her as well.

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A Media Filter for the Glory of God

I've spent the last several days preparing a Powerpoint with extensive video and image illustrations for high school students. The hope is to get them to install an internal media filter that will stay in place whether they are watching TV or YouTube, Twittering or uploading photos to their Facebooks, playing video games, or texting on their phones. We are called to glorify God in everything we do (1 Cor. 10:31), and that certainly extends to processing media messages.

It was most enlightening for me to find illustrations for this presentation. The naturalistic worldview that characterizes our society runs from the merely godless (most of the *Harry*

Potter books, up to the shock of the Christian elements at the end of the last book) to the openly hostile (*House, M.D.*'s contempt for all things and people of faith). When I read the lyrics of the top iTunes songs, I couldn't help but wince at the potty-mouth sexism of "Boom Boom Pow," the glorification of "Waking Up in Vegas" (hungover and married???), and the total insipidity of the "No Boundaries" song our brother Kris Allen was forced to sing on *American Idol*.

Finding illustrations for the way the media desensitize us wasn't hard. Consider that most high school students have a "ho-hum, yawn" apathy about same-sex marriage; they've been desensitized to the whole issue. And there is more blood and gore in the opening credits of *CSI*: than most people would have seen in a lifetime a generation ago, but we munch on chips through it all while not blinking an eye.

Nor was it hard to think of ways in which the media present an unreal view of our world. Girls are still in love with [Edward, the vampire hero](#) of the *Twilight* series. And back to *CSI*: the last time I was called to jury duty, during the *voir dire* process we were told of the "CSI Effect" that now leads juries to have unrealistic expectations about how crime evidence is harvested. Solving real-life crimes is harder than it appears to be in a 60-minute show. (I mean, c'mon, don't we all just know that every partial print is going to show up in CODIS?)

We will be calling students to glorify God in their media consumption by engaging a filter comprised of questions through which they view and experience images and messages:

- * What is their view of life? Where do they say life is found?
- * Can you discern the philosophy of those pumping out images, information, or music?
- * Are they telling the truth in what they're saying?
- * Is there hostility to certain values and beliefs, especially Christianity?

* How does this compare to what God tells us to keep in mind? (What is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy)

Come to think of it, maybe that's not such a bad thing for all of us to do!

Note: I zipped up the Powerpoint and all the videos (plus an audio clip) in a folder which can be downloaded here: <http://www.box.net/shared/muz26dhvch>

Ray and I are providing the curriculum for Super Summer Arkansas, a youth ministry of the Southern Baptist Convention of Arkansas, and several other people will be teaching the messages we compiled. So each slide has information in the Notes view for other people to teach the material.

We just ask that if anyone ever uses this presentation, that Probe Ministries receives credit. ☐

Warning: it's 72 MB! Hope you have broadband!

Addendum: here's a link to just the Powerpoint: <http://www.box.net/shared/lc1nbc4mlj>

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Blowing Past Greatness

I recently went to a wedding of some friends in Fort Worth. The pianist was a good looking young man who provided lovely

music as we came into the church, and accompanied the vocalists during the ceremony. At the end of the wedding, as people got up to leave the sanctuary to get to the reception, he played an incredible piece that was ignored by everyone around me. Only a very small handful of us knew that he had recently earned his masters in piano performance from Julliard, and is a concert pianist of the highest caliber. But as an unknown friend of the groom, he was playing in a nondescript church in Fort Worth, Texas, and hundreds of people blew right past the greatness of what he was doing to get to iced tea and punch and cheese and crackers and cake that wouldn't be cut for another hour.

It reminded me of a similar story that received much more attention. Three years ago, the *Washington Post* arranged for Joshua Bell, arguably the best violist in the world, to stand in a Metro station playing a priceless Stradivarius for 45 minutes. The point of the experiment was to see if people would recognize greatness, or hurry right past yet another "street musician."

They didn't.

Over a thousand people hurried past this master musician as if he weren't there at all. Seven stood for any length of time to listen and watch. The *Post* article says,

"A onetime child prodigy, at 39 Joshua Bell has arrived as an internationally acclaimed virtuoso. Three days before he appeared at the Metro station, Bell had filled the house at Boston's stately Symphony Hall, where merely pretty good seats went for \$100. Two weeks later, at the Music Center at Strathmore, in North Bethesda, he would play to a standing-room-only audience so respectful of his artistry that they stifled their coughs until the silence between movements. But on that Friday in January, Joshua Bell was just another mendicant, competing for the attention of busy people on their way to work."

(www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/04/AR2007040401721.html)

Watch the *Post*'s YouTube video:

A senior curator at the National Gallery offers an interesting perspective on why Joshua Bell's genius went ignored: if you were to take a piece of great art out of its "this is significant" frame and hang it in a restaurant instead of a museum, all the cues that announce "This is extraordinary; pay attention!" aren't there.

I think we may be just like those Washington commuters, oblivious to evidences around us of genius, of gifting, of extraordinary, supernatural touches of grace—because the cues aren't there. God doesn't give us nametags—frames around the art, if you will—that proclaim:

- World class teacher
- A meal as finely cooked and presented as the best restaurants offer
- Best-ever school crossing guard
- Excellent factory worker
- Supernaturally cheerful and faithful mail delivery person
- Soul-shaping youth pastor
- Greatness in mothering

What greatness in others might you be blowing right by today, unless you ask for God to open your eyes to see it?

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Ellen and Her “Wife”

Yesterday's (November 10, 2009) Oprah featured Ellen DeGeneres and her “wife,” actress Portia di Rossi. I watched the show with the perspective of one who, for a decade, has helped women come out of the bondage of lesbian relationships. Let me share with you the meaning of what I saw and heard.

Oprah is enthusiastically pro-gay, so I was not surprised that she oohed and aahed over her guests' romance and wedding, which we saw in video and gorgeous photography. And I wasn't surprised that Ellen and Portia said they were glad to be “married” because it gave validity and legitimacy to their relationship. That perspective is part of an agenda about normalizing homosexuality, not the one-flesh union of male and female God intends marriage to be.

In her excitement to embrace the unreality these two women have formed, Oprah could not see the threads of commonality that tie most lesbian relationships together:

Hearts looking for their home. Both Ellen and Portia spoke of how they had found their home in each other: a place of rest, of sensing that the search was over. Many women who long for same-sex relationships speak of the sense of a gaping hole in their hearts, looking for someone to make them complete. They are looking for continual reassurance and safety, the security of being loved forever. God's plan for baby girls is that they find this nurturing and reassurance in their mother's love and attention, with a strong connection with Mom that grounds them as human beings. All the lesbian women I know have sustained a life-altering “mother wound.” Either their mothers weren't there for them, or something was broken in receiving their mothers' love. They are longing for the unconditional and all-consuming mother love they never felt when they were babies, and they try to find it in the hearts of other women (or girls: growing numbers of teens are struggling as well).

Connection. Both of Oprah's guests reported an immediate, electric connection to each other, even though it took some time for them to become a couple. (Interestingly, neither of them revealed during the interview that they were both in relationships with other women at the time, and they both dumped their respective relationships and moved in together. Abruptly leaving one girlfriend to hook up with a new one is typical.) In our [online discussions](#) of women dealing with their unwanted homosexuality, the word *connection* probably shows up more often than any other. *Connection* defines life for them. God created women to be relational, so it's not surprising that connection would be so important, but there is an element of desperation to the connection that characterizes lesbian relationships.

Intensity. Intensity is a substitute for intimacy. Lesbian relationships are marked by intensity; one counselor calls it "emotional crack cocaine." Intensity plus connection feels so overwhelming, so powerful, so intoxicating, that it is like a life-controlling drug. But God never intended for us to have that kind of human relationship, because it is idolatrous. People can never fill a heart-hole that God designed to be filled by Himself. So the cycle of lesbian relationships is: *infatuation* (reveling in the intensity of connection), *disappointment* (realizing the relationship does not satisfy, because idols never do), *breakup* (since God never intended same-sex coupling, it can't work), and *heartache*. . . leading to looking for someone new to be infatuated with.

Lesbian relationship usually last only 3-4 years. (There are long-term relationships, but that's usually because the women don't know how to live without each other. It's not the same as a stable heterosexual marriage relationship.) And when the breakup comes, it's horrifically painful. I pray for Rosie O'Donnell and Kelli Carpenter, who have separated with 5 kids between them, to turn to the Lord for comfort and truth and peace.

And I pray for Ellen and Portia, when their ride is over as well. I pray for grace, and peace, for them to know Jesus. . . and for their eyes to be opened to why we use quotation marks for the word “wife.”

This blog post originally appeared at
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God and CSI:

At our house, conversations about ID usually aren't about “identification.” It means “Intelligent Design.”

My husband Ray's entire education is in science, including a Ph.D. in molecular biology. Early in his Christian walk, learning there was evidence against evolution lit a fire under him that has only grown in the 35 years since. Today, he is thrilled by advances in science that on an almost-monthly basis reveal more and more evidence that an intelligence is the only reasonable explanation for many aspects of the natural world.

But that doesn't sit well with people who don't want to be accountable to the God they know perfectly well is there, but spend endless hours and countless books (and YouTube videos) denying it.

The anti-God attitude was well known to the apostle Paul, who said in Romans 1:19-20, “. . .that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

Eventually, it poisoned the very core of most science today. The early scientists like Galileo and Newton made important discoveries about the Creation because their starting point was a belief in an intelligent, orderly Creator who wove orderliness into His creation. They believed that the orderliness and principles of the natural world were knowable because our God is knowable. But then, Darwin's theory of evolution allowed people to embrace science without buying into the "God part" of it. Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) said that "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." And today, it is now assumed that the very nature of science excludes anything supernatural. This has nothing to do with the evidence and everything to do with people's hearts.

When we "X" God out of our thinking, we feel free to redefine things any way we want, since we no longer feel beholden to His view of reality. I was thinking the other day that if Las Vegas decided it didn't like its crime statistics, all it needs to do is define crime away. Can you imagine if the city went to the CSI investigators and said, "You know all those dead bodies you deal with? From now on, you need to find a natural explanation for those deaths."

And Gus Grissom would say, "But most of the deaths we investigate aren't naturally caused. They are caused by human beings."

LV: Not any more. If all people die from natural causes, then we've done away with crime. And we are totally committed to doing away with crime in Las Vegas.

GG: But we're committed to following the evidence no matter where it leads. If the evidence implies a killer, we can't say it's a natural death.

LV: Our commitment is eliminating crime. If you can't come up with natural causes for these deaths, we'll bring in CSIs who

can.

GG: So when we find someone face down on a desk, with a wound indicating something long and sharp was stabbed from the back of the neck into the victim's mouth. . .?

LV: Keep researching until you find a completely natural explanation. And stop using needlessly prejudicial words like "victim." There is no more crime in this city because we have declared it so. Your findings have to be consistent with the new city policy.

And that's what it's like to be a scientist these days. Don't believe me? Watch Ben Stein's movie *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* when it comes out on DVD in a few days.

And go "Arrrrrgggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!"

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2008.

God on Trial

Recently my friend, a good and decent man, was on trial because his daughter accused him of sexually abusing her from age five to twelve. His attorney amassed so much evidence of his innocence that he kept saying, "You'll never see the inside of a courtroom," but he did. For several years we prayed faithfully for God to vindicate him of these heinous charges, along the way learning of the depth of their daughter's troubled adolescence. She had accused him of sexual abuse once before, right after her parents committed her into an adolescent psych hospital after some particularly violent

behavior, and she threatened them with "You'll be sorry." None of the mental health professionals believed her, and even though her behavior and arrests for theft screamed "I am not a truthful person," she manipulated the prosecutor into painting her as a poor, abused child whose acting out was perfectly justified because of the horrific wounds on her soul.

In the courtroom, I watched this master manipulator at work. Not only did she give a fine performance on the stand, but she got her sister to testify on her behalf, proffering stories of invented violence and meanness from both parents. Her mother and father could identify the incidents she referred to, with some aspects embellished and others that provided context and important details conveniently left out. As I listened to the testimonies, not even knowing yet what had really happened, my spirit was struck with an awareness that only grew as the testimonies went on: *we're seeing a lying spirit at work here.*

I was really surprised that my friend's defense attorney didn't address these vicious attacks on his character, even though they would have been easy to counter with the truth, so the judge was left to believe that they were true. And I was also surprised that the judge was also left with other wrong impressions because of what I suspect was inadequate defense strategy.

Nonetheless, with pounding hearts as the judge rendered his verdict at the end of the two-day trial, we were relieved to hear him announce "Not guilty." But first, the judge fixed my friend with an intense look of disapproval and basically yelled at him for being a terrible father and awful disciplinarian, telling him that he thinks he really is the monster his daughter portrayed him to be and that he did do the horrible things she accused him of, and God help him if he did. But there was sufficient evidence of his innocence to justify a "not guilty" verdict, and we thanked the Lord for it.

As I continued to think about this very difficult experience and emotionally charged time, I was struck by how we can easily put God on trial for terrible things we think He did or didn't do. There is an enemy with a lying spirit, Satan and his hordes of demons, who slander God to us, twisting and manipulating details to make us judge Him guilty of being an unfair or uncaring or impotent or sadistic God who has wronged us. A big part of the problem is that we don't have all the facts, and we are not hearing the countering truth that answer the lies or the twists that have been offered so enticingly. That's what is at the root of the problem of pain and evil and suffering in our world: we don't have all the facts, and we are hearing slanderous lies, many unanswered, from a spirit who hates God and wants us to hate Him too.

In the end, my friend heard the precious words "not guilty," and in the End, God will also be proven to be righteous and true and good. But in the meantime, we need to be aware of the evil work of a lying spirit. And when we hear a lie about God, stand up and speak the truth so people hear the other side of the story. Proverbs 18:17 says, "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." May we equip ourselves to be able to answer the slanderous lies against our God from "the first to present his case."

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