

Birthday Gifts FROM Jesus

Dec. 22, 2009

Christmas 2009 will forever be our most memorable, because of the gifts we have received from God this year.

He once again showed His generous heart through the breathtaking gift of one of our donors (Ray and I raise support for our salaries at Probe Ministries) who wanted to see us in a larger home. He thought that the president of a ministry should be able to have people over without feeling cramped the moment they walk in the door. So, a week ago, we moved into a home two and half times bigger than the one we'd lived in for 25 years, the home in which I always assumed we'd live out our days.

As always, God's timing is exquisitely perfect, and He arranged for us to find this home—two blocks from Probe's new offices in the [Hope Center](#); my husband walked to work this morning!—just ten days after it went on the market. We closed in time to host three Christmas parties in this amazing house that is perfect for entertaining.

We moved in five days before the first party. That sounds absolutely nuts, but the Lord's Christmas gift had a "Part Two." One of the reasons He wants us to live in community is because He knows we need other people to "do life" with. And every day, women came over to help me unpack boxes, organize my kitchen and office, hang pictures, and decorate for Christmas. One day as I gave thanks for the lunch one especially productive and energetic friend and I were about to eat, I believe the Lord whispered to my heart, "Tammy is one of My Christmas gifts to you."

And *that* is what's really nuts. . . the idea that the God of the Universe, whose incarnation we celebrate at the core of all the "Xmas" hoopla, would give *me* a Christmas gift.

But that's what grace looks like. It looks like this amazing, lovely home we don't deserve. It looks like a friend giving up her vacation week to make sure my home was ready to bless others. It looks like women coming over to be my hands and feet when post-polio has diminished my strength and energy reserves.

And it looks like God wrapping Himself in flesh to live among us. Happy Birthday, Lord Jesus!

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/birthday_gifts_from_jesus

Car Wrecks and God's Care

I received quite the birthday present from God this year.

My husband was in a car wreck on the way to speak at a church, and was taken by ambulance to the hospital where he was checked out because his chest hurt. A lot. (Airbags hit your chest at 200 mph!) No broken bones, just a scratch on the forehead, a lot of soreness, and a residual (but slowly subsiding) sense of fragility.

When I walked into the exam room, Ray murmured wryly, "Happy Birthday."

And it was, because my beloved husband was all right. God protected him from serious harm, and I am so thankful! That was a wonderful gift to me.

This was the second time I was called to the ER. Several years ago, Ray was "T-boned" on the driver's side by a car speeding through a red light. He received a concussion and nine months of soreness, but again nothing broken, no internal injuries.

He still has no memory of being hit (or even being extracted from his totaled car or taken to the hospital by the paramedics).

There was a big “no accident” to the timing and location of that first wreck. He was hit three blocks from home, just a couple of months before our older son started basic training in the Air Force. My mama’s heart was of course concerned about what could happen to our son in the military during a war. I got the message loud and clear: “Ray wasn’t safe from danger three blocks from home, and I protected him. You can trust Me to protect Curt no matter where he is or what he’s doing.”

The Lord knew that both of Ray’s accidents were going to happen. Months before, I had been invited to speak at women’s retreat in Germany. I was excited about the invitation, but as I prayed about it, God gave me a resounding “NO!” in my spirit. I had no idea why He wouldn’t let me go, but obediently, regretfully declined. When Ray had his wreck three days before I would have been scheduled to fly to Europe, I was so grateful for God’s goodness in the timing. I was grateful for the “no.”

For years, I have been hanging into what is probably the most important truth I have ever learned in my life: ***a loving God is in control***. This year, for my birthday, God gave me the gift of saying, “Yes, I am, and let me show you once again how true that is.”

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/car_wrecks_and_god's_care
on March 16, 2010.

“You Should Improve Your Article ‘A Short Look at Six World Religions’”

My name is _____ and I am a born again Christian. I have a BA in Pastoral Theology and a MA in Philosophical Theology. I believe that there could be improvements to your article [A Short Look at Six World Religions](#).

I do believe that “snapshot” looks at our neighbors’ faiths are valuable but they do have limitations. It can be difficult to convey the rich diversity of their sects, denominations, and teachings. This being the case, and given that adherents of any faith often do not align strictly to orthodox doctrine, it may be worth noting in your piece in the sections that deal with “relating with folks from these faiths” that on top of prayer and Biblical knowledge they should listen closely to the others’ perspectives. Listening at first will give more clarity to the type or specific tradition the person is a part of.

Islam has been called a religion of works, but I have found this to not be true upon both study and speaking to Muslims. They are fully dependent on Allah’s mercy and the grace of God. They will often say that even if they were perfect and without sin, God could cast them into hell if he wanted because God owes no one anything—it is His grace and mercy alone that allows salvation. This is an important facet of Islam that I feel should be included. The six tenets of faith are of course much more flexible in many Muslims’ eyes than the five pillars and this could be emphasized. I also would say that Islam is no more fatalistic than many expressions of Christian faith. As many Christians would say, God is sovereign and everything that happens is in His purview and is because He allows it. Even Satan’s and hell’s existence is

only because of His allowing it to be so. I do not think of Christianity is fatalistic because of this teaching. One Christian tradition that may deviate from this is Process Theologies of Christianity, which in my reading give more a 'participant' role to God than 'sovereign'. You write that Allah is a distant spiritual being, but again this is not how I have heard Muslims describe God. They will often as Christians do also balance transcendence and immanence. I have read of Allah being the center of all things, not 'out there'. It is we who may feel like we're 'out there' when we are distanced by sin.

I appreciate that you note Hinduism's diversity. *Star Wars*, however, I would argue is closer to Taoism.

There are some forms of Buddhism that pray, and worship divine beings. I would disagree with C.S. Lewis—Buddhism may be said more properly to be a 'reformation' of Hinduism, not a heresy. Buddha wanted to bring a more 'democratic' and less austere faith. The 'I don't exist' is the ego. A Buddhist would recognize a pinch hurts and that a pinch hurts any living creature. Buddhists would say that Nirvana is not a goal, and is not something that is sought. There is no inconsistency of no-self and karma continuing the ripple effects. Karma is just cause-effect. A Buddhist would seek to absolve all action, cause-effect. Though a person dies, the consequences of their actions will still effect the next generation and their environment.

It may be worth noting the Messianic Jewish movement—I worshipped alongside these folks in a St. Paul Minnesota Temple and they are really Jews for Jesus!

It may be more appropriate to refer to Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses as 'sects' rather than cults as this is the trend in writing, commentary, and popular usage.

I hope that some of this may be useful to you, even if to a

small degree. I do thank you for your ministry at Probe and am grateful that you write on these other religions with great love in your writing voice. My best wishes to you!

Thank you, _____.

It may be helpful for you to understand that the article on our website is the radio transcript of a week of programs I was asked to do for Moody Radio some years ago, giving a 35,000-foot overview of major religions to their radio audience in a very restricted time parameter. And that's why it's called a "Short" look at world religions.

Your excellent observations are about fine-tuning the details of an article that was intentionally written with broad brush strokes. So I'm going to add it to our website from a link at the bottom of the article, highlighted in a "See Also" box.

Thank you, thank you for "hearing" the love in my heart and in my fingertips as I wrote this article! You have greatly blessed me today!

Warmly,
Sue

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“Am I Judging When I Recognize Sin in a Friend’s Life?”

Dear Sue,

My question is about judging. There are several of us friends and we are all Christians but go to different churches. One of our friends was widowed several years ago. After several failed relationships where she became sexually intimate with each of the men, she is now in another relationship with what seems like a nice man. She is also very active in her church and is involved in a discipleship ministry. After she leaves the meetings to prepare for these discipleship events, she leaves town to go stay the weekend with her new friend.

I told one of the other friends that I did not think it was right that she was doing that and that may be why she had problems with her relationships, and that I felt it was wrong that she would be speaking before another group of women on this retreat. My other friend told me I was judging and that only God should do that and no one is without sin and that one sin is no greater than any other sin. I do not interpret the bible that way. I feel that if she is putting herself before others as a leader of God she should be striving to live sin free and be repenting when she does sin. Am I judging when I recognize a sin in another person’s life? I do not want to be a judgmental person and am very confused about this. Please help me to understand and how I should have responded to her.

You are right. There is a huge misunderstanding about judging both outside and inside the church, and it comes from not knowing what the Bible teaches about judging. Everybody seems

to stop with “Judge not, lest ye be judged” (Matt. 7:1). That is the Lord Jesus’ call not to judge hypocritically. But in John 7:24 He also calls us to judge rightly. And remember the passage about pulling the plank out of our own eye so we can see clearly to remove the speck from our brother’s eye (Matt. 7:5)? That’s about judging as well. The point there is about examining ourselves first before dealing with another’s sin, *not* to ignore other people’s behavior.

But then there’s the “big daddy” passage of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”

This passage clearly says that we are to judge those inside the Body of Christ. (News to your other friend, I’m sure!) Judging doesn’t mean condemning, though; in the case of your immoral friend, it would be a matter of comparing her behavior with what is right, and pointing out the dangers of her choices, the way we would want to warn someone in a burning building to get out, or urge someone headed toward a cliff to turn around.

It might sound like, “This is a hard conversation but I need to talk to you because I care about you. You’re making decisions that are not consistent with the Christ-follower and

the woman of God I know you want to be. Sexual immorality is still sin, and sin has consequences, and I don't want you to be hurt. But even more than that, you are dishonoring the Lord by your disobedience to His word. I am concerned that you are continuing in a leadership position while you are engaged in unrepented, continual sin. James 3:1 says that teachers will be judged more strictly, and I am concerned for what that might look like for you down the road. I just want to plead with you to choose chastity and integrity, and make choices that honor both God and yourself."

If she gets defensive and starts pushing back, making comments like, "And you're so perfect yourself?" I would counsel you to not get defensive yourself. Just say something like, "You know, I'm aware that I'm a sinner in need of God's mercy and grace every single day. I would hope that if my eyes were blinded by my own feelings and sin and I were headed toward a cliff, you would love me enough to warn me and challenge me to live consistently with who God says I am."

I'm so glad you wrote. I hope you find this helpful.

Sue

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"Is Clairvoyance Wrong?"

A lady popped into one of our meetings recently who said she is clairvoyant and has worked with tarot cards in the past. Someone in another church had told her it was wrong so she got rid of her tarot cards but wants to know if her gift of clairvoyance is also wrong and what to do about it. She said she has had dreams of disasters, etc. before they have

happened and they have been reported as she "saw" them. We are a church who operates in the prophetic but I was at a loss how to explain the difference in "layman's" terms. I know one is in the occult but have never met anyone who said they had correct predictions before as I always believed Satan could not predict the future and now I am a little confused as to how to explain it.

Clairvoyance is indeed a manifestation of the occult. Satan has all kinds of supernatural knowledge (although he is not omniscient) so we shouldn't be surprised when he feeds people knowledge of some future events. Particularly since this lady has worked with tarot cards, which is another open door to the occult, someone needs to explain to her how important it is to renounce her openness to the enemy's power and secret knowledge because if power and knowledge don't come from God, they are coming from an evil source which will prove to be harmful eventually.

The biblical standard for prophets, either fore-telling or forth-telling, is 100% accuracy (Deut. 18:22). Clairvoyance is a demonic counterfeit to the way the Holy Spirit gives knowledge supernaturally, and this lady can probably identify at least one dream or vision or thought that did not come to pass or in which she got a detail wrong because unholy and UN-omniscient Satan cannot perfectly mimic the actions of our perfectly holy God.

Concerning what to do about it, the way to slam shut the open door to the kingdom of darkness is to repent of participating in occult activities which God has forbidden for our own protection, and to "renounce the deeds of darkness" (Rom. 13:12) in Jesus' name. For further information, check out Neil Anderson's book *Victory Over the Darkness*.

So glad you wrote! I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

See Also:

["What's the Difference Between a Prophet and a Clairvoyant?"](#)

The Darkness of *Twilight*: A Christian Perspective

Sue Bohlin examines the message of Twilight from a biblically informed, Christian perspective, helping Christians understand how they should approach such popular fare.

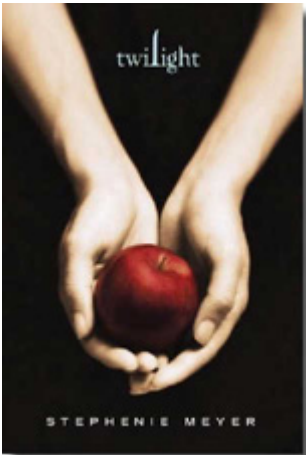
Demonic Origin of *Twilight*?

The *Twilight* saga is a publishing and movie phenomenon that sweeps tween and teen girls (and a whole lot of other people) off their feet with an obsessive kind of following. Millions of Christian girls are huge fans of this series about love between a teenage girl and her vampire boyfriend-then-husband. But it's not just a love story made exciting by the danger of vampires' blood-lust. I believe the *Twilight* saga, all four books and their corresponding movies, is spiritually dangerous. I believe there is a demonic origin to the series, and the occult themes that permeate the books are a dangerous open door to Satan and his hordes of unholy angels.

I was stunned to learn about how the idea for *Twilight* came to the author, Stephenie Meyer. She tells this story:

I woke up . . . from a very vivid dream. In my dream, two

people were having an intense conversation in a meadow in the woods. One of these people was just your average girl. The other person was fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire. They were discussing the difficulties inherent in the facts that A) they were falling in love with each other while B) the vampire was particularly attracted to the scent of her blood, and was having a difficult time restraining himself from killing her immediately. [\[1\]](#)



“Fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire”? Consider what vampires are, in the vampire genre that arose in the 1800s: demon-possessed, undead, former human beings who suck blood from their victims to sustain themselves. A vampire is evil. And the vampire who came to Stephenie Meyer in a dream is not only supernaturally beautiful and sparkly, but when she awoke she was deeply in love with this being who virtually moved into her head, creating conversations for months that she typed out until *Twilight* was written.

When I heard this part of the story, it gave me chills. Scripture tells us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, which is a perfect description of the Edward Cullen character.

Then I learned that “Edward” came to Meyer in a second dream that frightened her. She said, “I had this dream that Edward actually showed up and told me that I got it all wrong and like he exists and everything but he couldn’t live off animals

. . . and I kind of got the sense he was going to kill me. It was really terrifying and bizarrely different from every other time I've thought about his character."[\[2\]](#)

I suggest that if the *Twilight* saga is demonic in origin, it is dangerous, to Christians and non-Christians alike.

Vampires, Blood, and Salvation

I explained above how the *Twilight* saga was birthed in an unusually vivid dream that I believe was demonic in origin. So it's really no surprise that the books are permeated with the occult.

The *Twilight* vampires all have various kinds of powers that don't come from God. They are supernaturally fast, supernaturally strong, able to read others' minds and control others' feelings. Some can tell the future, others can see things at great distances. These aspects of the occult are an important part of what makes *Twilight* so successful.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God strongly warns us not to have anything to do with the occult, which is part of the "domain of darkness" (Col. 1:13) where demons reign. He calls occult practices "detestable," which tells us that He is passionate about protecting us. One of the reasons *Twilight* is so dangerous is that readers can long for these kinds of supernatural but ungodly powers; if not in real life, then in their imagination. And this is a doorway to the demonic, which is all about gaining power from a source other than God. *Twilight* glorifies the occult, the very thing God calls detestable (Deut. 18:9). This is reason enough for Christ-followers to stay away from it!

For a growing number of people, vampirism is not make-believe. In a special report on the Fox News Channel, Sean Hannity reported, "there's actually a vampire subculture that exists in the United States right now and spreads into almost every

community in this country.”{3} Joseph Laylock, the author of a book on modern vampires, explains that there are three general categories of people who “believe they have an ‘energy deficit,’ and need to feed on blood or energy to maintain their wellbeing.”{4} Some drink real blood, others feed only on “energy” they draw from other humans, and “hybrids” who are a bit of both.{5}

My Probe colleague Todd Kappelman, a philosopher and literature critic, observed that Stephenie Meyer took unwarranted liberties with the genre. Vampires are evil, and you can’t just turn them “good” by writing them that way.

You can’t have vampires strolling around in the daytime. You can’t make evil good and good evil, putting light for darkness and darkness for light [Is. 5:20]. It’s a law of physics: light always dispels the darkness. You can’t have the bad guys win. There is no system in the world where evil is rewarded with “happily ever after”; it violates our sensibilities too much. Either the extremely ignorant or the extremely childish would fall for it. And apart from the moral aspect, it’s doing violence to the genre—like putting Darth Vader in a Jane Austen novel.{6}

Writer Michael O’Brien comments,

In the *Twilight* series we have a cultural work that converts a traditional archetype of evil into a morally neutral one. Vampires are no longer the “un-dead,” no longer possessed by demons. There are “good” vampires and “bad” vampires, and because the good vampire is incredibly handsome and possesses all the other qualities of an adolescent girl’s idealized dreamboat, everything is forgivable.{7}

Closely connected to the occult is drinking blood, which is a focus of the vampire literary genre; vampires feed on the blood of humans. In *Twilight*, we are supposed to embrace the “good” vampires who have learned to feed on the blood of

animals, calling themselves vegetarians (which is an insult to all vegetarians!). Interestingly, in Lev. 19:26 God connected the occult with ingesting blood 3200 years before the vampire genre was invented.

God understands the importance of blood; in both the Old and New Testaments, He forbids eating or drinking it. Not only did this separate His followers from the surrounding pagan cultures, but it also separated out the importance of blood because it atones for sin. In the Old Testament, animals were sacrificed as a picture of how the spotless Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, would pour out His sacred blood to pay for our sins. God doesn't want people to focus on the wrong blood!{8}

Twilight is also spiritually dangerous in the way it presents salvation. When Daddy Vampire Carlisle turns Edward into a vampire, it is described as saving him.{9} He ended a 17-year-old boy's physical life and turned him into an undead, stone cold superbeing, which Edward describes as a "new birth." {10} Vampire Alice describes the process as the venom spreading through the body, healing it, changing it, until the heart stops and the conversion is finished.{11} Poison heals, and changes, and converts to lifelessness? Healing poison? This is spiritually dangerous thinking. Isaiah warns us (5:20), "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

This upside-down, inside-out way of thinking is rooted in Stephenie Meyer's strong Mormon beliefs. *Twilight's* cover photo of a woman's hands offering an apple is an intentional reference to the way Mormonism reinvents the Genesis story of the Fall. LDS (Latter Day Saints) doctrine makes the Fall a necessary step, called a "fall up." {12} At the beginning of the book you will find, alone on a page, Genesis 2: 17—"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt

surely die.”

Stephenie Meyer explains:

The apple on the cover of *Twilight* represents “forbidden fruit.” I used the scripture from Genesis (located just after the table of contents) because I loved the phrase “the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.” Isn’t this exactly what Bella ends up with? A working knowledge of what good is, and what evil is. . . . In the end, I love the beautiful simplicity of the picture. To me it says: choice. [{13}](#)

Echoing Satan’s deception of Eve with the temptation to become like God on her own terms, the heroine Bella eventually becomes a god-like vampire, glorying in her perfection, her beauty, her infallibility. She transcends her detested humanity and becomes a goddess. This is basic Mormon doctrine, not surprising since the author is a Mormon. [{14}](#)

One of the messages of *Twilight* is that there is a way to have immortal life, eternal life, apart from a relationship with God through Jesus Christ; that there is a way to live forever without dealing with the obstacle of our sin problem by confessing that we are sinners and we need the forgiveness and grace of a loving Savior.

This is a spiritually dangerous series.

A Love Story on Steroids: Emotional Dependency

Why are girls of all ages, but especially tweens and teens, so passionately and obsessively in love with Edward, the vampire in *Twilight*?

Edward is very different from the vast majority of young men today. He is chivalrous, sensitive, self-sacrificing and honorable. He wants the best for Bella, his teenage girlfriend

and eventual wife. He is able to keep his impulses in check, which is a good thing since he lusts after her scent and wants to kill her so he can drain her blood. No wonder girls and women declare they're in love with Edward Cullen!

But one of the troubling aspects of the *Twilight* saga is Edward and Bella's unhealthy and dysfunctional relationship. Yet millions of female readers can't stop thinking about this "love story on steroids," which means it is shaping their hopes and expectations for their own relationships. That's scary.

The best way to describe their relationship is emotional dependency. This is when you have to have a constant connection to another person in order for you to be okay. Emotional dependency is characterized by a desperate neediness. You put all your relational eggs in one basket, engaging in an intense one-on-one relationship that renders other relationships unnecessary. In fact, there is often a resentment of not only the people that used to be your friends, but you resent anyone in the other person's world who could pull their attention and devotion away from you.

When things are going well, it's like emotional crack cocaine. The intensity is addictive and exhilarating. When things aren't going well, it's an absolute nightmare. Emotionally dependent relationships strap people into an emotional roller coaster full of drama, manipulation, and a constant need for reassurance from the other.

When Edward leaves Bella for a time, she becomes an emotional zombie. The book *New Moon* is full of descriptions of the pain of the hole in her chest because when he left, he took her heart with him. She had withdrawn from all her friends to make Edward into her whole world, so she had no support network in place when he left. All of her emotional eggs were in his basket. Many readers see this as highly romantic rather than breathtakingly dysfunctional.

One or both people are looking to another to meet their basic needs for love and security, instead of to God. So emotional dependency is a form of relational idolatry. People put their loved one or the relationship on a pedestal and worship them or it as a false god. When you look to another person to give you worth and make you feel loved and valued, they become inordinately essential. When we worship the creature rather than the Creator as in Romans 1, what results is a desperate neediness that puts us and keeps us at the mercy of the one we worship. They have a lot of power over us, which is one reason why God wants to protect us from idolatry.

Twilight is like an emotional dependency how-to manual. At one point, Bella's mother tells her, "The way you move—you orient yourself around him without even thinking about it. When he moves, even a little bit, you adjust your position at the same time—like magnets . . . or gravity. You're like a . . . satellite, or something."[\[15\]](#) The power of story, especially this story, is that it can set up readers to mistake emotional dependency and relational idolatry for what a love story should look and feel like.

On the Credenda blog, Douglas Wilson makes a powerful case for *Twilight* also serving as a manual for how to become an abused girlfriend and then an abused wife. Edward's moods are mercurial and unpredictable, and Bella just goes along with it, making excuses and justifying his actions.[\[16\]](#)

Twilight is spiritually dangerous because of its demonic origin and its occult themes, both of which God commands us to stay away from. But it's emotionally dangerous too.

Emotional Pornography

The *Twilight* series is touted as pro-abstinence and pro-chastity because the main characters don't "go all the way" before they get married. A lot of parents hear that and give a

green light for their daughters to read the books and see the movies. But the *Twilight* books are a lust-filled series, so embedded with writing intended to arouse the emotions, that it is legitimately considered emotional pornography.

Marcia Montenegro writes,

Much has been made of the alleged message of *Twilight*, that it is one of abstinence and shows control over desire. In truth, Edward is controlling himself because he does not want to kill Bella; her life is truly in danger from a ferocious vampire attack from the one who loves her. Aside from that, a vibrant sensuality of attraction lies just beneath the surface. A TIME reporter who interviewed Meyer wrote, "It's never quite clear whether Edward wants to sleep with Bella or rip her throat out or both, but he wants something, and he wants it bad, and you feel it all the more because he never gets it. That's the power of the *Twilight* books: they're squeaky, geeky clean on the surface, but right below it, they are absolutely, deliciously filthy." [\[17\]](#)

The struggle with self-control is saturated with eroticism and lust. It's so sensual that teenage boys and young men will read it simply for that reason. The protest, "They don't have sex" is lame; the relationship is extremely sensual. One very insightful blogger writes,

To claim that the *Twilight* saga is based on the virtue of chastity is like calling the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Edition pro-chastity because the girls are clothed.

Bella gives detailed first person accounts of her "make out" encounters with Edward—everything from trying to unbutton clothing, to how loud her breathing is and how this or that feels . . . these detailed first person descriptions are designed to arouse young girls—like a gateway drug to full blown romance novels or vampire lore. How can books in which

the author has written detailed first person descriptions of actions leading to arousal help readers to be chaste? The words on the page defy chastity. Anyone who claims that the books promote chastity has to explain how a young girl can read detailed first-person descriptions of “making out” as a tool to preserving her innocence.[\[18\]](#)

The sensuality of *Twilight* is not lost on even the youngest readers and movie-goers. Robert Pattinson, the actor who plays Edward Cullen in the *Twilight* movies, was asked in a *Rolling Stone* interview, “Is it weird to have girls that are so young have this incredibly sexualized thing around you?” He answered, “It’s weird that you get 8-year-old girls coming up to you saying, ‘Can you just bite me? I want you to bite me.’ It is really strange how young the girls are, considering the book is based on the virtues of chastity, but I think it has the opposite effect on its readers though. [Laughs]”[\[19\]](#)

God’s word says, “Flee youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22). Without a strong discernment filter in place, and without a strong determination to guard one’s heart (Prov. 4:23), it will be very hard to obey that protective command when reading the *Twilight* books or watching the movies.

Recently at a youth discipleship camp, I asked the young men how they felt about *Twilight*. They booed. Real men don’t stand a chance to be *enough* compared to the too-good-to-be-true Edward Cullen. When girls use the emotional porn of romance novels or movies, they are setting up impossible expectations that have no hope of being fulfilled by limited, fallible, all-too-human beings. It’s a cruel twist on the way men can sabotage their relationships with real women by their use of internet porn. Is there much of a difference between using sexual porn or emotional porn? In both cases, fantasy creates unrealistic expectations that reality cannot satisfy.

Apart from the problem of unrealistic expectations, it is unhealthy to make such an intense heart connection with a

fictional character. Some people choose getting lost in reading and re-reading the books over having connections with real human beings in community. One lady told me that she called a friend about going out to a movie, but her friend begged off: "Oh, I'm going to stay in with Edward tonight." A nail technician had one 60-year-old client who confided, "Don't tell my husband, but I'm in love with Edward."

In the first *Twilight* book, Edward sweeps Bella off her feet with the intoxicating description of his intense desire for her and why she desires him: "I'm the world's most dangerous predator. Everything about me invites you in. My voice, my face, even my smell. . . I'm designed to kill. . . I've wanted to kill you. I've never wanted a human's blood so much in my life. . . Your scent, it's like a drug to me. You're like my own personal brand of heroin."[\[20\]](#)

I believe there is a spirit of seduction in the *Twilight* saga. Something supernatural draws millions of readers to fantasize about being desired, pursued and falling in love with a character that I believe has a deeply demonic component. It's dangerous on several levels.

The (Rotten) Fruit of *Twilight*

Twilight is one of the most successful series ever published. Readers don't just read the books; many of them re-read them, multiple times. In order to be discerning, we need to examine the fruit of this series to see its effect on readers. I believe that there is a spiritual reality of evil behind *Twilight* that explains three kinds of fruit I see.

First is the fruit of obsession. Literally millions of fans can't stop thinking and talking about the books, the characters, the minutia of the *Twilight* world. There is an addictive element of the series for many people. Addiction is bondage; why willingly submit yourself to bondage?

Some girls talk about their daily reading and study of “The Book,” and they’re talking about the whole saga—not the Bible.[{21}](#) With social networking and digital media, fans have access to an ever-growing community of other *Twilight*-obsessed people, which allows them to connect with their God-given desire to be part of something bigger than themselves. But the transcendence of connecting to the *Twilight* world is so much less than God intends for us to experience!

The second fruit is the spiritual warfare reported by Christians, especially those who disobeyed God’s leading to get rid of the books—night sweats, hearing voices and other unusual noises, being gripped by a spirit of fear, loss of intimacy with God. Some thoughtful people have reported what one woman called “a stronghold I didn’t want and couldn’t seem to overcome. I became uncontrollably obsessed over this make-believe world. And fell into a pit of manic-depressive-suicidal state.”[{22}](#)

One Christian teenager, clearly under conviction, wrote this comment on a blog:

As a 15-year-old, reading those books was a . . . strange experience for me.

I didn’t think they were too bad or morally lacking until I heard my old high-school chaplain [a thirty-something woman, I think. Never dared to ask ☐] praise them. And then something inside me clicked, because it struck me as wrong that a Godly woman would find this series good. . . .

Another problem with *Twilight* that I had is that it drives girls to think of love before they are emotionally and mentally ready for the idea. It pretty much skews their ideas of love up. I know it’s done that to me. Because what this series has done is stick Edward Cullen in one category (i.e. “pure perfection”) and “everyone else” lumped together in another as a portrayal of pure “ocker”ness. I am now not

sure to what percentage *gentlemanliness* exists in a normal, TANNED boy. So it's not really fair to guys, or girls, because of skewed expectations. . . .

Otherwise, I enjoyed the *Twilight* series, but I don't feel that I should have, so I'm going to pray about that one. [{23}](#)

The third fruit is a spirit of divisiveness. Some Christians are inordinately defensive about *Twilight*, choosing the books over relationships with other believers who take a negative view of the series. One Christian speaker who shared her deep concerns over *Twilight* at a church conference was verbally attacked at the break by supposedly mature women. Some of them still refuse to speak to her.

Of course, we hear the refrain, "Oh come on. It's just a book. It's just fiction." But all forms of entertainment are a wrapper for values and a message, and we need to be aware of what it is. Remember, what we take into our imaginations is really like food for our souls. If something has poison in it, it shouldn't be eaten. Saying "It's just a book, who cares what it is as long as we're reading," is equivalent to saying, "If you can put it in your mouth and swallow it, it must be food." What are you feeding your soul? Goodness or poison?

Readers resonate with the important themes of life and literature: romantic love, family love and loyalty, beauty, sacrifice, fear, danger, overcoming, conflict, resolution. But these themes are laced with spiritual deception: "You, too, can be like God." You hear that *Twilight* is a love story on steroids, and people—especially young girls—are drawn to God's design for a woman to be cherished, protected, and provided for. They are drawn to the way Bella responds to Edward with love, respect and submission, which is also God's design. So it is especially devious that the elements that resonate with our God-given desires for love are poisoned as occult principles are interwoven with the story. [{24}](#)

One teenage girl made this comment on a blog: "I never thought of [the books] as arousing or erotic in any way. Like many other girls, I found myself falling for Edward as I delved into the story. Before I knew it, my heart was beating faster during the mushier scenes." Like millions of others, she is unable to discern the line between emotional and sexual arousal. Swooning because you are in love with a fictional character, when you long for this character when you're not reading the book, means you've been taken captive (Col. 2:8). And God does not want us in bondage to anything except Him!

Twilight is dangerous because it subtly stretches us into accommodating that which God calls sin. People don't leap from embracing good to embracing evil in one giant step; it's a series of small, incremental allowances. Readers easily accept unthinkingly an unmarried couple spending every single night together when the Word says to avoid every form of evil and to flee temptation, not lie there cuddling with it! Readers are led to accept as heroes and friends vampires who murder human beings to drink their blood.

Commentator Michael O'Brien makes a stunning analysis of *Twilight*:

In the *Twilight* series, vampirism is not identified as the root cause of all the carnage; instead the evil is attributed to the way a person lives out his vampirism. Though Bella is at first shocked by the truth about the family's old ways (murder, dismemberment, sucking the blood from victims), she is nevertheless overwhelmed by her "feelings" for Edward, and her yearning to believe that he is truly capable of noble self-sacrifice. So much so that her natural feminine instinct for submission to the masculine suitor increases to the degree that she desires to offer her life to her conqueror. She trusts that he will not kill her; she wants him to drink her essence and infect her. This will give her a magnificent unending romance and an historical role in creating with her lover a new kind of

human being. They will have superhuman powers. They will be *moral* vampires—and they will be *immortal*.

Here, then, is the embedded spiritual narrative (probably invisible to the author and her audience alike): You shall be as gods. You will overcome death on your own terms. You will be master over death. Good and evil are not necessarily what Western civilization has, until now, called good and evil. *You* will define the meaning of symbols and morals and human identity. And all of this is subsumed in the ultimate message: The image and likeness of God in you can be the image and likeness of a god whose characteristics are satanic, as long as you are a “basically good person.”

In this way, coasting on a tsunami of intoxicating visuals and emotions, the image of supernatural evil is transformed into an image of supernatural good. [\[25\]](#)

Twilight is not dangerous because people will literally want to become vampires. *Twilight* is dangerous because, through the powerful medium of storytelling, dangerous ideas and messages go straight to the heart like a poisoned-tipped arrow, without being passed through a biblical filter. Beware the darkness of *Twilight*.

Addendum: Should I Let My Children/Grandchildren/Students Read *Twilight*?

I have read all four books in the *Twilight* series. I strongly recommend against reading these books.

But I also understand that it's a cultural phenomenon, and lots of people are going to read the books no matter what anyone says. So allow me to attempt to redeem the cultural pressure inherent in these books' popularity by suggesting how you can help the tender, untaught minds of your loved ones to think critically as they read.

If your teen or tween expresses a desire to read the books, give an explanation for why you think they shouldn't. ("Just say no" just doesn't work with most kids. They need to know why, and that's fair.) I would suggest something along the lines of, "I love you and I want what is best for you, and that means protecting you from dangers you are not aware of. This series is steeped in the occult and in demonic influence, both of which God strongly warns us against in His word. There is also a powerful emotional draw into unhealthy fantasy which could sabotage future relationships with real people. There are spiritual dangers and emotional dangers that I want to protect you from."

If you receive pushback, then you might respond by saying, "If you want to read the books, then I'll read them with you. We'll talk about them, a chapter or a scene at a time. The choice is yours." This gives your loved one the power of choice, but you remain involved in the process. What would be especially powerful for young girls is for Dad to read the books as well and talk to his daughter(s) about what's in them. Men would have a very different take on the emotional lust in these books, as well as a sensitivity to the unfair expectations of a lover that would be formed in their daughters' hearts. Girls need their father's input in this adolescent time of emotional and sexual confusion, and *Twilight* is almost guaranteed to add to the confusion.

Talk about the books' content frankly and openly; if they are embarrassed for you to know what they are reading, their well-placed shame will make a powerful statement about the wisdom of reading this kind of book. Make sure they know that you are completely aware of what they are taking into their minds and spirits, just as you would want to know if they were taking drugs into their bodies. Reframe the book's content in terms of what the Bible says, and ask questions: Does this agree with the Bible's explanation of life and reality? Does this help you draw near to God, or does it make you want to avoid

Him and His Word? How do the descriptions of Bella's, Edward's and Jacob's thoughts and feelings make you think about the people in your real life? Are you tempted to look down your nose at the "mere humans" you do life with?

Even though this work is fiction, it is still making statements about reality. What is it saying about life on earth? About God? About sin? About love? About the soul? About heaven and hell? About biblical truth?

How does the book compare to what the Bible says? For example, look together at the Ephesians 5 passage about marriage and why it is important. (Marriage is an earthbound illustration of the union of Christ and the church.) And what Jesus said about the nature of the marriage relationship in heaven in Matthew 22:30. (The marriage relationship is ended by death.) How does it compare with the ideas about marriage in *Twilight*? Look for the ways Bella relates to her father. Is it according to God's command to children to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20)? Does she get away with her deceptions and repeated acts of disobedience? (Yes.) Is this consistent with the Bible's teaching on the consequences of sin (Gal. 6:7)?

Talk about the gold standard for what God wants us to expose ourselves to: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Phil. 4:8). Look for what is true and not true, noble and not noble, right and not right, etc. The books are not without statements and ideas that are true, noble, and right; the problem is that they are mixed in with even more compelling ideas that are false, ignoble, wrong, impure, unlovely, and shameful.

"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 7:23). The things we think about by filling our minds and hearts will shape us. What are you filling your mind and heart with? Longing for the perfect lover that no human being can fulfill?

Discontent with being human and wishing you could have supernatural powers? Will that serve you well?

Lia Carlile, a teacher at a Christian school in Washington State, offered these excellent critical thinking questions to help students think through *Twilight* or any other cultural phenomenon. Lia cites many Scriptures in her notes, which I highly recommend. [{26}](#)

Question 1 – Me and God

- *How is this thing building my relationship with the Lord?*
- *How does my interest in this area compare with my time invested in my relationship with the Lord?*

Question 2 – Me and the People Around Me

- *Is this creating conflict in my family or with others?*
- *Does it offend other believers or is it confusing them in their faith?*
- *What am I saying to my non-Christian friends or what example am I setting for others?*

Question 3 – The Bible

- *What does the Bible have to say about this? Who does it glorify—God or Satan? Jesus or the things of the World?*

Question 4 – Me and *Twilight* (or whatever applies)

- *How is this affecting what I think about; my attitude, heart, and mind?*
- *Does it help me to do what is right according to God? Or,*

does it promote things of the world?

• *Does it distract me from the Lord and my relationships with others? Serving, praying, reading Bible, ministry, etc.*

• *Does it cause me to say, think, or do things that are contrary to Jesus and his life?*

Notes

1. www.stepheniemeyer.com/twilight.html

2.

www.Twilightgear.net/Twilight-news-and-gossip/stephenie-meyer-reveals-details-of-new-dream-about-edward-cullen/2493, March 29, 2009.

3. Steve Wohlberg, "The Menace Behind *Twilight*," *SCP Journal*: Vol. 32:2-33:3 (2009), p. 27.

4. Ibid., 28.

5. Ibid.

6. Personal conversation with the author, May 2010.

7. Michael O'Brien, "Twilight of the West," www.studiobrien.com/writings_on_fantasy/Twilight-of-the-west.html

8. I am indebted to Steve Wohlberg's article cited above for this insight.

9. Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005), 288.

10. Meyer, *Twilight*, 342.

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12.

http://www.truthinlovetomormons.com/basic_mormon_doctrine/doctrine/theo/fall.htm

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14. "As God now is, man can become. As man now is, God once was." James E. Talmadge, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976). See also Oscar W. McConkie, Jr., *God and Man* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Corporation of the Presiding Bishop, 1963), 5. Cited in Russ Wise, "Mormon Beliefs About the Bible and Salvation," www.probe.org/mormon-beliefs-about-bible-salvation.

15. Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2007), 68.

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17. Lev Grossman, "Stephenie Meyer: A New JK Rowling?" *TIME Magazine*, April 24, 2008, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1734838,00.html). Cited in Marcia Montenegro, "A Girl and Her Vampire: The Frenzy Over *Twilight*." www.christiananswersforthenewage.org/Articles_Twilight.html

18. spesunica.wordpress.com/

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20. Meyer, *Twilight*, 268.

21.

www.radicalparenting.com/2009/05/14/the-new-bible-Twilight-mini-article/

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23. bit.ly/aSKdwl/

24. I am indebted to the wisdom shown in the comment by Jae Stellari on spesunica.wordpress.com.

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“What Sins Disqualify Me For Ministry?”

I'm a guy in my mid twenties and a few months ago, I resigned from my work as director of a local ministry because I just can't get over my struggle with pornography. I've been "clean" for weeks and sometimes months, but it seems that inevitably I fall again. I really want to break this cycle of sin and live a life of sexual purity, both inwardly and outwardly. To do that I am seeking the Lord in His Word and through prayer (though not as consistently as I should). I have people that keep me accountable. I meet weekly with a few older men for a study on sexual purity. At the same time, I want to serve the Lord in anyway he wants me to serve. But there is some confusion...I have been presented with many opportunities to serve God (leading worship, camp counselor, teaching Bible study, and doing part-time youth ministry at a local church), but I don't know if I should serve in these ways since I haven't been able to break free of this sin. So my questions: Which sins disqualify me from Christian service and/or leadership? And for which roles would those sins disqualify me?

It breaks my heart to read your question (though I am SO glad you wrote!). Not because of your actual question, but because of the mentality that indeed permeates so many churches and ministries that one has to be perfect (especially in the area of sexuality) in order to serve God. We can't be perfect, so either we allow the enemy to persuade us to disqualify ourselves, or we can find ourselves immersed in an atmosphere of impossible expectations and standards that results in secret sin and resulting hypocrisy.

I prayed about my response and talked to a number of men in leadership at my church ([Watermark Community Church](#) in Dallas), where transparency, honesty and accountability are bedrock values.

First, let me affirm you in your decision to step down from ministry for the purpose of focusing on your relationship with Christ. It's also essential to listen to your accountability group to determine whether and when you are ready to resume a leadership position like the ones you list in your email.

From what you describe, it sounds like you may already have components in place for successfully achieving sexual purity, which is a process and not an event:

1) It's essential to actively pursue intimacy with Christ through prayer, the Word, and developing the habit of daily surrender and dependence on Him. Meditate on the truth of 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 until it soaks down into your soul and you "own" it:

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **power is perfected in weakness.**" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for **when I am weak, then I am strong.**

(This is the part that differentiates trustful empowerment from “white-knuckling” it.)

The fact that you admit inconsistency in your time in the Word and in prayer is really key. Allow me to strongly encourage you to make these disciplines your highest priority in this time of learning to become an overcomer. Otherwise, it would be the equivalent of trying to train for a marathon without eating or drinking regularly!

2) It’s also essential to build an accountability support system as you live in community with other Christ-followers. Naturally, there are different understandings of what constitutes accountability, but what works very well at Watermark is a network of people with whom we can be honest, on whom we can depend to show us grace at the same time that they speak the truth to us, and who are safe people to whom we can confess our sins immediately before getting caught in a downward spiral of secrecy and dread that allows sin to continue, unrepented, for a period of time. Even people in leadership, when they confess immediately and ask for help, prayer and continued accountability, do not lose their jobs or, for volunteer leaders, their opportunity to serve through leading, if they are proactive in confessing and repenting to their accountability “safety net.” One of my pastors wrote, “There are times when we need to step back from leadership positions to devote all our energies to focusing on Jesus so that we can deal with the sin that sometimes entangles us. That has happened to a number of our staff who are back in leadership positions today.”

Watermark has the largest Celebrate Recovery ministry in the U.S., so some of the recovery vocabulary spills over into the rest of the church culture. We are all familiar with the phrase “struggling well,” which means actively denying our flesh’s tendencies and desires to stumble and sin, and when we do fall into sin, we immediately confess and repent, receive forgiveness and cleansing from the Lord (1 John 1:9), and get

back up again. And we get that struggling is just an expected part of living in a fallen world, and we all struggle against various temptations. One of the pastors I talked to in preparation to answer your email stressed that what disqualifies someone from serving in leadership is not “struggling well,” which is good, but engaging in continuing, unrepented sin—which also includes a rebellious, increasingly hard heart. That doesn’t sound like it describes you, but that’s something you and your accountability team would determine.

The CR Men’s director wrote, “His struggle with pornography sounds like it has been ongoing with consistent defeat. I am saddened that he felt the need to resign, instead of “sitting the bench” for a season. This indicates to me that he couldn’t be honest with his employer (my assumption, of course). In the future, I hope and pray that _____ will see his struggle with porn as a platform of authenticity that God can use in his life to relate to and minister to others. As he relates to and ministers to others, he will experience freedom and fellowship like never before (1 John 1, 2 Cor. 1). He just needs the opportunity to begin sharing. I would highly recommend CR or some other Christ-centered recovery program.”

You asked for a list of disqualifying sins and “off-limits” places of service and leadership. I don’t know that such a list exists, although I do think it’s important to keep in mind Paul’s command and statement in 1 Cor 6:18—“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.” Sexual sin (defined as “illicit intercourse,” the meaning of *porneia*, translated “immorality”) is in a different category than other sins. For example, if a man or woman in church leadership has an ongoing sin problem with having sex with anyone they’re not married to, they need to direct their energies into learning chastity and purity, learning to keep their passions under control (1 Thess. 4:3-5), rather than continuing to minister

to others in the name of Jesus while practicing the hypocrisy that Jesus condemned.

One of the themes that runs throughout the gospels is the importance of the heart as opposed to outward appearance. What grieved the Lord Jesus was not sinners who came to Him with a broken, contrite spirit (Ps. 51:17), but religious leaders with a hard, rebellious heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, He revealed the way God sees the sinfulness of the heart, even if it doesn't manifest in outwardly apparent sin. So I would respectfully suggest that what disqualifies someone for a position of responsibility is a hard, rebellious heart.

This may have been more than you expected when you wrote, but I do hope you find it helpful.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

Update 2018: Watermark is no longer using the Celebrate Recovery curriculum, though we parted from the CR folks on very good terms. We have written our own program called "re:generation," which a growing number of other churches have brought to their congregations: www.regenerationrecovery.org/.

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"Marijuana is a GOOD Thing!"

I know your article "[Is smoking marijuana okay for Christians?](#)" It's misleading and untruthful. You don't take into account of people's lives and their suffering. You don't care to think that maybe marijuana relieves depression, anxiety, stress, other mental illness symptoms, and other ailments. If marijuana is a sin to partake, then God made one

when he made marijuana. To say marijuana is a sin, is to say God is a devil because he put right in front of our noses and didn't say anything. It's not an intoxicant because it does not poison us, it works with us. Please explain to me exactly where in the bible it says we can't make moral decisions? My point I'm trying to say is this, if it weren't for marijuana I would have been in jail or dead from alcohol. You can't overdose on marijuana.

Let me respond to your email one point at a time.

I know your article "Is smoking marijuana okay for Christians?" It's misleading and untruthful. You don't take into account of peoples lives and their suffering. You don't care to think that maybe marijuana relieves depression, anxiety, stress, other mental illness symptoms, and other ailments.

Actually, marijuana doesn't relieve these troubles; it medicates the symptoms. It's a cover-up, but it doesn't solve anything. Medicating the negative parts of life does not make them go away, even if it gives a feeling of relief in the moment. They're still there when the high wears off.

There are lots of things that people can do to relieve stress and anxiety. A large number of men feel better after they've taken their stress and anger out on their wives and girlfriends by beating them. Simply relieving symptoms doesn't justify using that method.

Then you've got the lingering effects of pot smoking. I did an informal survey of a wide range of people to answer your question, and several shared their experiences of self-induced ADD, muddled thinking and forgetfulness, overwhelming paranoia, and brain changes that resulted in a permanent state of schizophrenia. And then there's the damage to the bronchial passages and lungs. Several told me heartbreaking stories of family members whose lives were ruined as a result of their

pot use.

The problem with marijuana is that it can temporarily numb emotional pain, but it can leave even bigger problems in its wake.

If marijuana is a sin to partake, then God made one when he made marijuana. To say marijuana is a sin, is to say God is a devil because he put right in front of our noses and didn't say anything.

God made a number of plants that He never meant us to ingest. Consider poison ivy and hemlock. Plus, we don't know the impact of the Fall of man (when Adam brought sin into God's perfect creation) on plants. It's possible some plants were very different before the Fall.

It's not an intoxicant because it does not poison us, it works with us.

Google "marijuana intoxication." You will find almost half a million entries. The DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) disagrees with you:
www.justice.gov/dea/marijuana_position.html

Please explain to me exactly where in the bible it says we can't make moral decisions?

I don't think this is what you mean to say. We make decisions all the time. God gave us the gift of volition (the ability to make choices) and then calls us to use it well. Using marijuana is a choice that we are free to make, but since it's illegal, that makes it a moral choice. Legal or illegal, there would be consequences to smoking marijuana. See above.

My point I'm trying to say is this, if it weren't for marijuana I would have been in jail or dead from alcohol. You

can't overdose on marijuana.

I'm glad you didn't go to jail (though you could have, since it's illegal) and especially that you're not dead from alcohol. But you did have other choices for handling your stress and pain. And while you can't overdose on marijuana, that doesn't make it wise.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin

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Ash Plumes and the Sovereignty of God

Sunday, April 18, 2010 – This is not a story with a happy ending, because the story hasn't ended yet. Ray Bohlin, Todd Kappelman and I, along with millions of other travelers stranded around the globe, are in Frankfurt, Germany far longer than the eighteen hours we expected to be here on our way home from Minsk, Belarus.



For two weeks, we were privileged to share some of Probe's worldview and apologetics material with young adult believers and future church leaders in Belarus. This country was part of the former Soviet Union, located between Poland and Russia. Until

“freedom came” (their term) in 1991 with the fall of the USSR, it labored under the oppression of communism. The spiritual darkness of this country is part of the oppression as well. One of Ray’s spiritual gifts is discernment, and he feels the weight of oppression and darkness from the moment we get off the plane. Even though God has blessed me with a sunny disposition, the unending ugly gray, featureless, monstrously huge apartment buildings thrown up by the government to house millions of citizens as if they were animals, depresses my spirit as well.

But it was a good, rich time with our friends in Belarus; they appreciated our teaching styles, the (very different!) material we presented, and the way we loved them. The warm reception from those we spent time with last year was encouraging to us, as were the tears at the farewell ceremony from this year’s new friends. We have been invited back with opportunities to expand our ministry there, and we look forward to returning next year.

Belarus is not kind to people with disabilities. As one now living in the throes of post-polio syndrome (muscle weakness, fatigue and pain), the ubiquitous stairs make getting around more difficult than I am used to in the U.S., especially since many of my supporters and friends gave generously to allow me to buy a mobility scooter. Neither a scooter nor a wheelchair are of any use in a country with lots of stairs but not elevators or usable ramps, so we don’t bring them to Belarus.

Our time with Belarusian believers was wonderful, but we gladly flew to Frankfurt, where we were grateful for simple things that are easy to take for granted, like absorbable and flushable toilet paper, and safe tap water. Before leaving Minsk we learned about the volcanic eruption in Iceland, but it was too far away to have any impact on our flight. We checked our bags all the way through to DFW from Minsk, since we only had a one-night stay in Frankfurt. My small sack with nightwear and a change of clothing was inadvertently stuck in

one of the checked bags instead of a carry-on, but I shrugged it off since it was only one night.

That's what we thought.

The Frankfurt airport was closed to air traffic at 8 a.m. Although the lines to rebook flights were impossibly long, Lufthansa (my new favorite airline) designates an office and waiting area for special needs passengers, especially those with handicaps. They got us confirmed seats on the next day's flight, and Lufthansa gave us vouchers for hotel rooms and that night's dinner in the hotel restaurant. Since the rooms would not be available till after 2 p.m., we enjoyed a leisurely lunch in the airport. There were so many people it reminded me of being at Disneyland on New Year's Day.

A shuttle took us and a bus full of other passengers to the hotel, ten minutes from the airport. And here we stay, so grateful to have been provided a bed to sleep in and three meals a day when thousands of people are stuck at the airport because their airline does not cover these needs, or their visa does not allow them to leave the transit zone.

As the world now knows, the ash plume continues to push its way into Northern Europe, at the same high altitude as the jets fly, where they can suck in small, jagged pieces of volcanic rock and glass that also conduct electricity and cause total engine failure. No one knows when it will be safe to fly again. No one knows when we will get to our destinations. And there is no one to get angry with, no one to blame, no one to sue.

Processing this experience through the grid of a biblical worldview colors the way we think about our "adventure."

We know that God is in control of volcanoes, and eruptions, and winds, and the timing of it all. He is in control of the world's flight systems. He is in control of our schedules. He knew when He allowed us to be stranded in Germany that Todd

had classes to teach at Dallas Baptist University, that Ray had a number of events and meetings scheduled in his role as president of Probe, that I had several Christian Women's Club luncheons to speak at in New Mexico this week. And He allowed us to be stranded in far-easier Germany, not in Belarus; twenty-four hours later, and our flight out of Minsk would have been cancelled. He provided food and shelter for us. He has given grace for Ray and me to have our laptops with us with easy internet access from our room, and He helped me find and disable the virus that infected Ray's computer last week.

We don't know how long we will be here, or when we'll see our luggage again. We DO know that God is good, and the fact that we have been blessed with so much favor doesn't mean that He loves the people stuck inside security at the airport any less. Or that any of us did anything wrong to have Him punish us.

And we are aware that the more the world grows flat and interconnected, the greater the fragility of the systems. So much of our comforts and our technology relies on everything continuing to run smoothly without interruption. It is good for us as human beings to be reminded that we are *not* the masters of our fate or the captains of our souls, as the obnoxiously humanistic poem *Invictus* declares. God is bigger and more powerful than we are; a nature that has been impacted by the Fall, producing things like the disruptions from volcanic eruptions, is bigger and more powerful than we are. We are tiny and insignificant in the face of something like Iceland's exploding mountain; and yet, God still counts the hairs on our head and is still Immanuel, God with us, whether in an "adventure," or a disaster, or the blessedly uneventful days of blessedly uneventful routine.

The bottom line: God is still good. He is still loving. He is still sovereign.

And we rest, as trustful children, in these wonderful truths.

All the way to the end of the story, however it ends.

Addendum: April 20, 2010

It *is* a happy ending!

Late yesterday afternoon, Lufthansa summoned their international passengers to the airport because they were going to let a handful of flights depart. One of them was to the U.S., and Ray said, "It doesn't matter what city it is, if it's on American soil. We can always get to Dallas, if we can just get out of Germany!" Although this flight to Chicago was fully booked, not all the passengers made it to the airport, and all three of us were given seats. We arrived in Chicago at midnight, and to our amazement, all our bags were on that flight. Since they were tagged for Dallas/Ft. Worth and there was only a small window of time from when we received our boarding passes, we were amazed and delighted to see them.

We were able to get some of the last seats on a 6 a.m. flight to Dallas, and a few hours later we were back at home, grateful, blessed and tired.

And ready for a shower and a change of clothes!

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