

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.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/leaving_christianity on
August 3, 2010.

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 me for 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/lc1nbc4m1j>

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/a_media_filter_for_the_glory_of_god
on May 26, 2009.

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?

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/blowing_past_greatness on
July 20, 2010.

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
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/ellen_and_her_wife

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!!!!!"

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/god_and_csi on October 7,
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."

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/god_on_trial
on June 22, 2010.

How Change Happens

On my recent trip to Australia (2010), one of the topics I was asked to address at a conference featuring a redemptive view of homosexuality was "Is Change Possible?" This is a controversial question because there are some loud, insistent voices in the culture who say, "Unless you never again have a homosexual thought or feeling, you haven't changed. And since no one admits to that, any claim of change is an illusion."

No one would apply that strict a standard to any other issue! Former alcoholics living sober and free from the chaos of their drinking for decades still would like a cold beer on a hot day, but that doesn't mean they haven't changed!

Is change possible? Change is part of life! But transformation

is also part of what it means to be a Christ-follower. Understanding how change happens, on the other hand, is another matter. So I have been thinking about the process for a long time as I prepared for my message.

One of my favorite explanations comes from Dr. Henry Cloud in his book *Changes That Heal*. He gives a delightful application to one of Jesus' parables in Luke 13.



"A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

"'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' (vv. 6-9)

Grace and truth in this parable are symbolized by the actions of "digging around" and "fertilizing." Using the trowel of God's truth, we must dig out the weeds and encumbrances of falsehood, sin and hurt that keep the soil of our souls cluttered. In addition, we must add the fertilizer of love and relationship to "enrich the soil."

As a Bible teacher, a lay counselor, and one involved in helping those deal with unwanted homosexuality, I have seen the truth of Dr. Cloud's suggestion over and over again. As we study God's word with an open heart and pursue knowledge of God and intimacy with Him in a personal relationship ("the trowel of God's truth"), change comes when we identify the lies we have believed about life, about ourselves, about other people, and about God, and replace them with the truth. Change comes when we repent of how our coping mechanisms have become

sin because they keep us from trusting God. Change comes when we forgive those who hurt us so we are no longer in bondage to those who left wounds on our souls. Change comes when we live in community, engaging with the Body of Christ who can be “Jesus with skin on” to us. Change comes when people love us and accept us as we are so we can be courageous to deal with our “stuff” and cooperate with God in the changing, healing process.

Dr. Cloud continues,

But the Bible tells us that in order for grace and truth to produce fruit, we need a third key element: time.

Look again at verses 8 and 9. “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, Fine! If not, then cut it down.’” The gardener, who certainly symbolizes our Lord, the “author and perfecter” of our faith, realized that his work and the fertilizer need time to take effect. In short, *it takes time to grow*. And time alone will not do it. *Time must be joined by grace and truth*. When we respond responsibly to these three elements, we will not only heal, but also bear fruit.

We live in a microwave culture that has trained us to have unrealistic expectations about time. We want instant everything, and we hate waiting. I received an email from a young man in his early 20s who hated his same-sex attractions and wondered how long it would take to get rid of them. I explained to him that it’s not like a bad case of acne, it’s far more complex than that, and that it’s our experience that for people his age, three to five years of actively “digging around” in the soil of their hearts and minds produces lasting change. He thought that was too long. I wondered, “What will your life look like in three to five years if you keep going down the path you’re on? Bless your heart!”

Change is normative. Change is expected. Change is hard work, but we have the assistance of our divine Gardener to make it happen.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/how-change-happens/
on Sept. 14, 2010

The 3rd Grade Transgender Bus Driver

It's back to school time, which usually means parents buy school supplies and start waking kids up earlier in the morning. But one elementary school just sent out a letter informing the parents that the school is welcoming a new family with a transgendered "3rd grade girl."

The letter urges the parents and students to welcome and accept her and treat her the same as any other girl. Not so subtly, the letter also informed parents that the school district does not tolerate discrimination in respect to gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability or religion.

YIKES!!!

My heart absolutely breaks to learn of this. I'm sure the school administrators (and possibly, it's just one person) are patting themselves on the back for being so progressive and politically correct. I can't imagine that they are aware of the pressure this puts on this poor confused little boy, as well as an entire school, to engage in this social experiment.

If a third grader decided brushing his teeth is a stupid waste

of time and he wasn't going to do it anymore, responsible parents would never give in to the little tyrant who is completely unable to see the long-term consequences of foolish choices.

If a third grader decided that school itself is a stupid waste of time and he wasn't going anymore, responsible parents wouldn't give in to that misguided tantrum, either.

But when a third grader is so consumed by confusion about being a boy, when his whole life is permeated with the hopeless despair of believing *It's not okay to be me*, and when his parents capitulate to his fantasy, something bigger than mere confusion is going on. This kid is driving the bus of not only his life, but his parents' as well. And just as we would never let third-graders drive a literal bus, it's equally nuts and scary to let them sit at the controls of anyone's life.

When my friend Ricky was four, he decided he wanted to be a horse. His mother wisely did not build a stable in their back yard and feed him hay just because her little boy wanted to be something other than who he was. She said, "No, you're not a horse, you're a human boy." And in time, he grew to accept who he was.

It's politically correct to affirm whatever feelings children have, such as "I'm a boy but I feel like a girl," as valid. When school administrators try to get a whole school to indulge the fantasy, it's only a matter of time before things blow up in their faces, because their rhetoric isn't powerful enough to disable kids' baloney detectors. At least some kids'. Telling children to accept a boy as a girl and expecting them to swallow it without thinking is sheer hubris, I think.

“. . . male and female He created them.” Gen. 1:27

Children know that we live in a binary world: boys and girls, male and female. And it is not good, or loving, to indulge the

fantasy that one can change the reality God created. Or that He made a mistake in choosing a baby's gender.

I pray for this confused little boy, that his parents will get him the help for his gender identity disorder now while there's still lots of hope for help. And I pray for the Christians in that school to be lovingly bold in proclaiming that it's not in this student's best interest, or the best interests of the rest of the students, to take make-believe to a scary new level.

And I pray that the Lord will gently pick up this precious, confused little boy from his bus driver's seat and place him in His lap.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-3rd-grade-transgender-bus-driver/ on August 18, 2009.

The Appeal of Twilight

Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series currently hold three of the top ten slots on Amazon's best sellers list. Her Young Adult novels about a love story between a human girl (Bella) and her vampire boyfriend (Edward) are popular with far more than just young adults. And "popular" is quite the understatement.

A friend who does ladies' nails told me that one of her 60-something clients confessed, "Don't tell my husband, but I'm in love with Edward." She also told me that when she invited one of her friends to go out to a movie, she was rebuffed with, "Oh, sorry, but I'm going to stay in with Edward tonight."

"Popular" doesn't quite describe the series. "Obsession" works well, though.

What's all the fuss about? And is it safe for young readers?

What struck me as I read *Twilight* is how much the vampire Edward displays the beauty and strength of the Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder people are attracted to him! Whether this is intentional or not—the author is a Mormon, though I don't see Mormon theology anywhere in the book—I believe it's easy to get wrapped up in the transcendent relationship of a god-like figure and his beloved human sweetheart because it echoes the love story of God and His people.

Consider the way Edward is written:

- *He is able to read minds (hearing the thoughts of those near him, with the exception of Bella)*
- *He has superhuman strength*
- *He has superhuman speed*
- *He consistently exhibits strong self-control, keeping his emotions and his great power in check*
- *He is loving, kind, and thoughtful*
- *He is self-sacrificing*
- *He is tender and sensitive, at the same time the essence of masculine strength and leadership*
- *He is lavishly generous*
- *He anticipates Bella's needs and desires and is prepared to meet them in ways that are in her best interests, even if it costs him*
- *He sparkles in the sunlight with a stunning radiance*

Edward and Bella's relationship echoes the dynamics of Christ and His beloved bride, the Church. The relationship is a mixture of agony and sacrificial love. Human and vampire are very different and very other, yet they both desire oneness and intimacy. This reflects the way humanity and divinity come together in Christ and the Church.

Bella tells Edward, "You are my life" (p. 474). This sense of connecting to and being lost in the transcendent is the

foundation of a healthy relationship with our Creator and Savior; but it is the essence of unhealthy emotional dependency in another creature. It sounds very romantic, to put all one's eggs in another's basket, but it also gives all our power away to that person since they have the power to make and keep us happy and fulfilled. This is safe in Jesus' hands, but no one else's.

I think there is a good reason for the strong reaction to the characters and the dynamics of the story. They resonate with the far larger Story of God wooing His people.

I found one passage that hints at a worldview perspective on the *Twilight* series. On page 308, Bella asks Edward where vampirism started originally. He answers,

“Well, where did you come from? Evolution? Creation? Couldn't we have evolved in the same way as other species, predator and prey? Or, if you don't believe all this world could have just happened on its own, which is hard for me to accept myself, is it so hard to believe that the same force that created the delicate angelfish with the shark, the baby seal and the killer whale, could create both our kinds together?”

However, thinking biblically, we know that the vampire “kind” doesn't truly exist. It's a fantasy. There are no “undead” people like vampires. Hebrews 9:27 tells us that “it is appointed unto man to die once; and after this comes judgment.” Transitioning from human to vampire by being bitten with a vampire's venom doesn't happen.

The book's cover features a pair of hands proffering an apple. Just after the table of contents, this quotation from Genesis 2:17 appears by itself on a page: “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.”

The author says on her website,

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. The nice thing about the apple is it has so many symbolic roots. You’ve got the apple in Snow White, one bite and you’re frozen forever in a state of not-quite-death... Then you have Paris and the golden apple in Greek mythology—look how much trouble that started. Apples are quite the versatile fruit. In the end, I love the beautiful simplicity of the picture. To me it says: choice. (www.stepheniemeyer.com/twilight_faq.html#apple)

Should tweens and teens read this series? I think it provides an opportunity for parents and other authority figures (like youth group leaders) to read and discuss the themes of the book with youth, particularly what makes Edward so attractive. People are drawn to him for the same reason that a seeking heart is drawn to Jesus. The best use of this book and series is if the reader can be pointed to the One who can actually fulfill the fantasy that Stephenie Meyer writes so well, of being cherished by a strong and beautiful Lover who thinks and acts sacrificially.

Because the heart that is drawn to Edward is actually looking for Jesus.

Note: Since writing this blog post, I have read all the books and done a lot of research, coming to a different conclusion. Please be sure and read Part 2: [A New Look at Twilight: Different Conclusion](#). Thanks!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_appeal_of_twilight
on March 16, 2009.

The Blank Pages in Our Bibles

Have you noticed how many blank pages you can find at the back of your Bible? I don't know why Bible publishers put them there, but I think we can put them to good use as a place to record milestones and aspects of our journey to maturity.

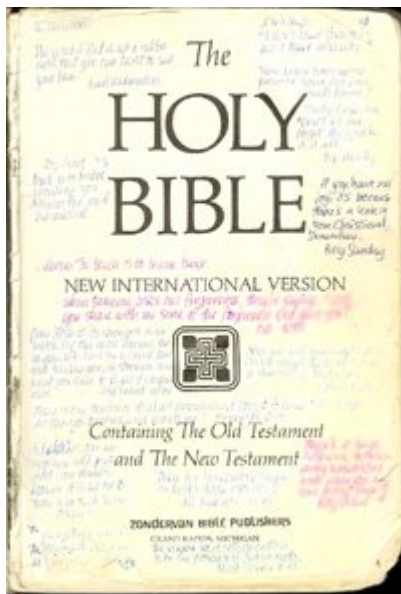
Record the results of a "treasure hunt." Over several years, as I read through the Bible, I drew a box around every name and title of God I found, and then wrote them in the back of my Bible. What a great way to worship Him now, to just read through His names to tell Him how wonderful and magnificent He is!



Record ways in which God reveals His love to us. Every day, God sends what I call "hugs and kisses" to say "Hello precious one, I'm here and I love you." Most of the time, though, we miss them because we're not looking for them. When we write down specific incidents that makes us feel loved (or at least aware that He does love us), we have a place to go back and remember the intimacies that show us Father's heart of compassion. Even the small things, and perhaps especially the small things, will help us learn to pay attention and remember

when we forget. For example, on a day when the skies were threatening to open up and I didn't have an umbrella, I got to my car just in time before the rain started. I mean literally, the second I closed the door, the deluge started. There was no mistaking the love in His timing. I'm so glad I wrote that down, because my mind is a leaky bucket and I forget!

Record "God sightings." Slightly different from His hugs and kisses, these are stories where God shows up and shows off. Here's the first entry in the back of my NIV:



4/79 This Bible itself is an answered prayer. I had been praying for a new NIV when [Dallas radio station] KVIL had a "Take Your Radio to Work" promotion. I sent in four postcards inviting them to visit me at Probe. Sure enough, traffic helicopter reporter Ben Laurie walked in and gave me a \$50 bill!

Record words of wisdom. I love to write down things that make me think, "Ooh, I want to remember that!" I started with the white spaces in the front of my Bible and when those filled up, I started a separate "wisdom journal." If my house ever catches fire, that's one of the things I'm grabbing.

What can you use YOUR blank pages for?

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

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on September 29, 2009.