

Touched by a Vampire

Discovering the Hidden Messages in the Twilight Saga

Leaders' Guide

This guide is designed to help you lead a group in discussion of the themes embodied in the popular Twilight Saga, using *Touched by a Vampire* by Beth Felker Jones as a starting point and discussion base.

Each section covers one chapter of *Touched by a Vampire*. You can do as many or as few chapters per group meeting as you like. For each chapter, this guide contains the discussion questions from the end of the chapter, as well as follow-up questions, a key Bible verse or two, and other prompts and questions to facilitate conversation. There's also a short introduction you can use to start dialogue. The discussion questions don't usually cover every aspect of the chapter, so it's a good idea to ask the group if there are any specific statements or ideas they want to talk about, as well.

It's important to remember that this is just a guide. Due to the popularity of the Twilight Saga, it's likely discussion will be healthy and robust. Let it develop organically, using the questions in this guide to direct it or stimulate it when needed.

The Twilight Saga has touched millions of lives. We hope that in the pages of *Touched by a Vampire*, you'll find ways for it to touch your soul.

Chapter One

Forbidden Fruit

The Allure of Dangerous Romance

In *Touched by a Vampire's* introduction, the author says:

“I’ve heard many suggestions that Christians should embrace Meyer’s series. Because the universe she writes about is a moral universe, maybe Christians can find our own morality there. Because her couple waits until marriage to have sex, maybe Christians can draw an encouraging word about purity and self-control.”

As an introduction to the topic, ask your group how they first heard about the Twilight Saga. Did the fact that it’s billed as a “clean” teen romance play any part in their decision to read the series?

What did they like best about the series? What drew them to it? Was there anything they didn’t like?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are your favorite romance stories? What makes them so compelling?

- The Twilight Saga is first and foremost a love story. Romance is something almost everyone desires in their life in some form. Why is that?

2. Who can you turn to for accountability?

- Why is it so easy for romance to consume us, to cloud our judgment?

3. Who can you offer accountability to? Who can you help to see what kind of choices will serve God’s glory?

- When people come to you for relationship advice, how do you usually respond? Are you reassuring, conciliatory, even if you don’t agree with their choices? Do you tell them the truth?
- Note: This comes down to realizing the influence we have on the people in our lives. Friends, siblings, family members. People at school, co-workers. Our words and opinions have more impact than we think, often more than we’ll ever know.

4. Even with no vampires around, how can romance become dangerous in our lives?

- Why do so many people end up in dangerous or unhealthy relationships? What do you think draws them there?

5. What would it look like for romance to be about glorifying God?

- The author says, “No human being, however, can fulfill us. No human being can complete us. No human being can give our lives meaning.” (Pg. 26) Does that sentiment conflict with your idea of romance?
- Have someone read Mark 12:30. (Pg. 22) “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” What does that have to

do with romance? What does it look like to balance an earthly romance with a right relationship with God? Can you think of any couples you know who stand as an example of this?

6. Talk about the concept of the soul mate. Do you think it is a problematic concept? Does it have a lot of power in your life?

- Do you believe in soul mates, the idea that God has one person in mind for you?
- What did you think of the author's assertion that it's a harmful concept?
- What elements in our lives support the idea that only true love can fulfill us? How much of our culture is built upon this belief? (Movies, televisions, songs, books...)

Chapter Two

Dazzled

How Love Works in the Twilight Saga

The love story of Bella Swan and Edward Cullen is the main plot of the Twilight Saga, and for many people, has become one of the Great Love Stories.

What couples do you consider some of the Great Love Stories? How do you think Bella and Edward stack up to them?

What about Bella's relationship with Jacob? How would you describe it? How does it compare to her relationship with Edward?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you want from love?

- Do you see Bella's and Edward's love as something ideal, something to be desired? Or are there aspects to their interaction you don't like or find unhealthy?

2. Is there a part of you that thinks "real" love acts jealous and controlling?

- What do you think of these aspects of Edward's character?
- How would you respond to someone treating you the way Edward sometimes treats Bella?
- Why do some women find jealousy and controlling behavior attractive or a proof of love (at least initially, or in part)? Where do you think that belief comes from?
- The author provides a list of key signs of abusive relationships (Pg. 38), then points out that Bella and Edward's relationship contains most, if not all, of these signs. What do you think about her conclusion?

3. Where do we get our ideals about love? From media, books, family?

- Can you pinpoint where some of your ideals about love have come from?

4. What aspects of love, as described in the Bible, are most compelling to you?

- Have someone read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 (Pg. 42-43).
- Make a list of the virtues of love outlined in these verses.
- How many of these virtues are visible in Bella's and Edward's relationship? How many are included in your ideal love? Would you add anything?

Chapter Three

Body and Blood

Twilight's Take on Abstinence and Sex

Though Bella and Edward wait until they're married to have sex, the series is filled with sexual tension. Sexual tension is part of all romantic relationships, as much as some ways of thinking would like to pretend it doesn't (or shouldn't) exist.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you have someone you can talk with honestly about the way “waiting” for sex does or doesn't happen for you and your friends? How can we find ways to wait that don't increase temptation?

- What can we learn from the way Bella and Edward manage—or don't—their sexual tension?

2. Describe God's faithful love. How is sexual purity a witness to God's faithfulness?

- Take turns reading Ephesians 5. What do these verses say about sex? What does that, in turn, say about God?

3. Reflect on Bella's feelings about the connections between vulnerable intimacy and lifelong commitment. How can intimacy without commitment cause pain?

- The author quotes Bella on this subject on page 51: “How did people do this—swallow all their fears and trust someone else so implicitly with every imperfection and fear they had—with less than the absolute commitment that Edward has given me?” [Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 83.]
- How strong is this as an argument against premarital sex?

4. Do you agree that faithfulness is rare in our culture? Who has been an example of faithfulness in your life?

- What does that faithfulness look like?
- If you agree that it's rare, why do you think that is?

5. What are your expectations, whether you're married or not, for sex within marriage? Do you expect perfection? Do you see sex as fearful or shameful? What are the good things about married life that look different from the picture of endless and intense sex we get from movies or married vampires?

- If you are married, were your pre-marriage expectations fulfilled? How have you adjusted your expectations?

6. What messages about sexuality have you gotten from church, family, friends, and society? Is sex seen as something good? as something shameful?

- How do these messages shape your own view of sex?
- Which viewpoint do you find yourself aligning with most?

Chapter Four

The Superhero and the Girl Next Door

Gender Roles in Twilight

This chapter discusses gender stereotypes and ideals as represented by various characters in the Twilight Saga. The differences between men and women and the contention this causes affect every one of us throughout our lives. We've all been accused of being a stereotype or been measured against an ideal and found wanting.

What's the difference between a stereotype and an ideal? What are some examples of both?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you identify with certain characters in the Twilight Saga in the ways they live their lives as male and female?

- Alternately, did you dislike any of the characters because they embodied a particular gender stereotype?

2. How do characters in the books perpetuate gender stereotypes? How do they challenge those stereotypes?

- Is it always bad to be a stereotype?

3. How can stereotypes cause harm? Have you seen this in your life or in the life of a friend?

- Can you pinpoint where some of these stereotypes come from?
- Stereotypes are usually at least partially founded in truth. Does this increase or decrease their harmful possibilities?
- What about ideals? What gender ideals are harmful? Where do they come from?

4. The concept of sin making it difficult to see what God intends for us is an important one. Brainstorm a list of things we tend to believe are "natural." Are they really natural? Do they reflect God's will as we see it in His Word?

- Note: This discussion can go off-topic, expanding to things beyond gender.

5. How do you think about living as created male or female? How can we glorify God as girls and boys, men and women?

- Read Genesis 1:27-31, paying most attention to verses 27 and 31.
- The author says, "We know from the very beginning of Scripture that the simple fact that we exist as male and female is God's intention, part of the good plan He has for us. It means that God created us to live with each other and to be different from one another." (Pg. 78)
- Does knowing God created men and women differently on purpose affect your perception of gender differences or what it means to be a woman or man?

Chapter Five

Baseball and Loyalty

Twilight and the Ideal Family

Bella and Edward may be the main characters of the Twilight Saga, but Edward's family plays a strong role in the story, as well. His "siblings" and "parents" inspire almost as much affection from readers as Bella and Edward do. Exceptionally beautiful and supernaturally talented, they are everything we want our families to be.

In contrast, we have Bella's family—a "real" family. Divorced, scattered, uncommunicative. Most of our families resemble Bella's much more than they resemble Edward's.

Make a quick list of the differences between Bella's family and Edward's. Does Bella's family possess any positive attributes that Edward's doesn't?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you have an image of the "perfect" family? Does your family try to put on a perfect face to the world?

- Do you think there is such thing as a perfect family?
- Why do families try so hard to seem perfect? What standard do we feel we're being measured against? Where does this standard come from?

2. Have you, like Bella, experienced the family as a disappointing place?

- Do you still place hope in your family, or have you given up ever receiving what you need from them?

3. Are you tempted to "check out" of your family life when it disappoints and annoys?

- What are some common ways people avoid or pull away from their families? Do you think these actions are always intentional, or are they sometimes an unconscious response?

4. Have you ever experienced God's grace through weakness? Through opportunities that ordinary life provides to care for and love other weak people?

- What are some opportunities to care for and love other weak people?
- What are some opportunities *in your family* to care for and love weak people?

5. How can ordinary, weak people reflect God's goodness to the world?

- Have someone read 1 Corinthians 1:27–29. "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." (Pg. 90)
- What does this mean to you?

Chapter Six

For Eternity

The Good, the Bad, and the Reality of Marriage in Twilight

Marriage provokes strong feelings in most of us, whether good or bad. To some of us, marriage is our deepest desire, the one thing we *know* will complete us and make us happy. To others, marriage is a one-way ticket to misery and a loss of freedom and identity.

Bella's authentic insecurity about marriage appeals to many of us. So does her fairy tale wedding and perfect, passion-filled marriage. With so many conflicting ideas about matrimony in the world, what does God feel about marriage?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are your own feelings about marriage? Are they, like Bella's, mixed? Do you despise or romanticize marriage?

- How much do these feelings stem from experiencing your parents' relationship, whatever it may have been?
- Marriage is a polarizing issue. How do you respond when you encounter someone whose beliefs about marriage are the opposite of yours? Do you ever feel that you're being judged for your beliefs, or are unconsciously judging others?

2. What are the dangers of looking down on marriage? Of focusing all our dreams on marriage?

- Where is fulfillment being sought in each of these views?

3. Do you know any inspiring examples of Christians who are devoted to God in the single life? in marriage? How might their lives serve as models for you of how to witness to God's love?

- What about their lives reveals their devotion to God? What aspects of your life do you think reveal your love for God?

4. Are there differences between a Christian understanding of marriage and the understandings we run into in the world? How does God intend for marriage to be good?

- Discuss Augustine's "goods" of marriage: the faithfulness God creates between married couples, children, and the way marriage can direct people toward God. What order would you rank them in? What do these "goods" look like in our lives?
- Have someone read Matthew 19:4-6.
- What does "two become one flesh" mean to you? How does this phrase encapsulate God's intention for marriage? How does it contrast with the world's intention for marriage?

Chapter Seven

Monster Spawn or Precious Child?

Children in the Twilight Saga

Pregnancy and children, like marriage, spark strong feelings in each of us. Whether we're drawn to the babies and young children we see at the grocery store or terrified when someone hands us their infant child—or perhaps a bit of both—we all know that children are a serious issue. Bundles of love and responsibility, they're not to be taken lightly.

In this chapter, the author says, “Bella gets pregnant on her honeymoon, and the baby, whom she loves, threatens to destroy her. The situation and her response to it raise a lot of questions for readers about our own feelings about parenthood and prompt us to think about God’s gift of children.”

When you think about God and children, what are the first words or phrases that pop into your head? How do these words differ from the ones you think of when pondering *your* child, whether they exist in your past, present, or future?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you react to Bella’s surprise pregnancy in *Breaking Dawn*?

- The author says, “Meyer’s loyal audience has had mixed reactions to this plot twist.” Do you have any friends who reacted to Bella’s pregnancy differently than you did?

2. When you think about the possibility (or reality) of being a mother, do you tend toward romantic daydreams? terrifying fears?

- What are your expectations of motherhood? If you’re a mother, how did your expectations compare to reality?

3. Does reading Bella’s story make you think differently about Christian attitudes toward life? about societal attitudes about abortion?

4. How should the portrait of children in Scripture influence your actions toward the children in your life?

- Have someone read Matthew 18:2-4.
- In what ways should we be like children?

5. Can you take comfort in the promise that you’ve been made a child of God?

- Have someone read 1 John 3:1-2.
- What does this mean in your life?
- What privileges belong to God’s children?

Chapter Eight

Inhuman Strength

Twilight and the Good Life

Everyone strives to be a good person. Part of what makes the Cullen family so sympathetic is their daily struggle to do the same. Despite their superhuman abilities and eternal life, they have the same desire to be good as we do.

As it turns out, “being good” is one of the most integral aspects of Christianity, though not in the way you’d instinctively think. The whole point of Jesus’s life on earth is that we *can’t* be good—at least, not good enough.

This sounds depressing on the surface, but really it’s the most glorious aspect of our relationship with God. Despite our inability to ever measure up, God loves us anyway and pours out His grace so that, in His eyes, we’re as perfect as His Son.

It’s pretty amazing stuff, and examining the Cullens’ quest for goodness helps show us just how amazing it is.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What’s your reaction to the idea of vegetarian vampires? What does it say about what it means to be good?

- Do you ever feel like your faith has turned you into a “vegetarian vampire”? That you’re missing out on aspects of life because of your desire to be good?
- Or, to put it another way, what “natural, instinctive” aspects of humanity do we give up as Christians?

2. Does the Twilight Saga help you rethink your attitude toward violence?

- When reading the series, did you think it glorified violence or spoke against it?

3. What are the key differences between the good life in the Twilight Saga and the good life God promises in Scripture?

- Use the chart on page 139 as a starting point. What other differences can you come up with?

4. In what ways is your life affected by constant effort and striving?

- What are some side effects of the constant striving we all experience? (Guilt, exhaustion, depression, rebellion...)
- Based on these side effects, would you say this constant effort is actually bad for us, or just unnecessary? Or does it perhaps depend on the personality or specific goal strived for?

5. How does God set us free from sin?

- Before discussing this question, have someone read Romans 3: 22-24: “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Chapter Nine

My True Place in This World

Bella's Search for Purpose

In *Breaking Dawn*, Bella finally gets her wish to become a vampire like Edward. Her longing to be more than she is most likely resonates with all of us.

But what does this longing have to do with God? What can we learn about him through Bella's transformation?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you identify with Bella's dissatisfaction with her ordinary life?

- Where do you think this dissatisfaction comes from?
- If anything were possible, what would you change about your life? In what ways would you make it different?
- Returning to the bounds of reality, what things would you like to change? What things can you *actually* change?

2. Spend a few minutes thinking about the truth that human beings are created in the image of God.

- Have someone read Genesis 1:27.
- List some ways this should change the way we think about our own lives and the lives of all humans.

3. Where have you witnessed God's transforming power? God's power to bring light out of darkness? goodness out of sin? life out of death?

- What are some examples of this from the Bible?

4. What are the features of Bella's transformation? Which ones might help us think better about Christian hope?

- Compare your list of features of Bella's transformation to the list Paul gives of our transformation in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44. What are the similarities, the differences?

5. How does the Christian promise of transformation—the promise of the resurrection of the body—change the way you think about your life? your body? your purpose?

- Re-read the last paragraph on page 152 (which carries over to page 153). It starts, "The pinnacle of Christian hope..."
- Then read the last paragraph on page 156 (which carries over to page 157). It starts, "Our meaning and purpose are found in Jesus."
- How do you define your purpose?

6. What would it look like, in day-to-day life, to "bear the likeness" of Jesus? What specific things about His life could be reflected in your own life?

- Who in your life bears the likeness of Jesus?

Chapter Ten

Passion for God

The Power of Desire in Twilight and in Real Life

What's your greatest desire?

Whether you're able to put your finger on the answer or not, this question provides the motivation for almost every decision you make in life.

Bella's greatest desire was Edward, and every choice she makes in the Twilight Saga can be traced back to her desire to be with him no matter what. This sort of passion is appealing to all of us—a desire that strong gives life purpose and meaning.

God made us this way for a reason. Our problem is that most of the time, we don't desire what we should.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of desires make the Twilight Saga tick? What role does desire play in other stories you love?

- Read the first paragraph of the chapter. How many of these desires are what you'd consider universal desires? How many of them do you share?

2. Describe Augustine's idea that there are two kinds of love. Does his explanation give you insight into your own life?

- Make a quick list of things you love for use and things you love for enjoyment. Ignoring for a moment Augustine's assertion that we should love all things with the love of use, do these lists look about right to you? Should something be in a different column than you've put it in?
- Now, apply Augustine's principle to your loves of enjoyment. How can you love these things and people for the purpose of God's glory?

3. Where do you see people who are passionate about God? How can you learn from those examples?

- How do you feel when you interact with these people?
- What's most appealing about them? (Or, possibly, what's most off-putting about them?)

4. What would your life look like if your love story were *first* about loving God? What unexpected things might God do?

- Have someone read Psalm 42:1-2, Psalm 73:25, Psalm 145:16, and Isaiah 58:11. How do these verses describe loving and desiring God?