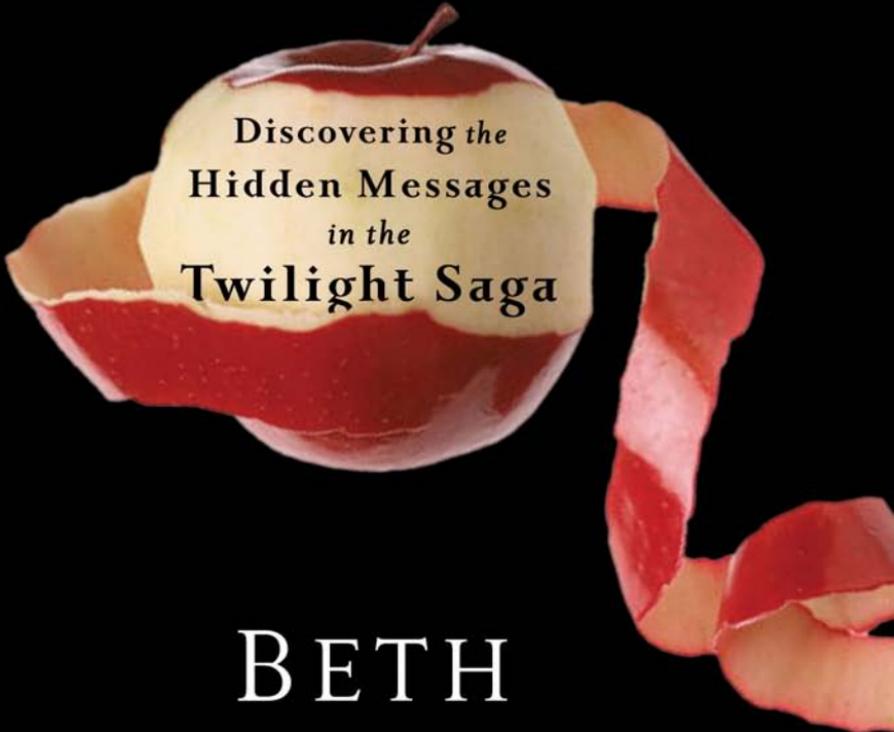


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Touched
by a
Vampire



Discovering the
Hidden Messages
in the
Twilight Saga

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Vampire

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For my girls



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A Note from the Author: Resources for Using This Book

Before we start talking about the Twilight Saga and the messages it contains, I want to point out a few helpful resources you can use to start discussion about the subjects this book covers, be it in a youth group, Bible study, Sunday school class, or just a group of friends.

First of all, at the end of each chapter, you'll find questions for reflection. These questions will prompt thought about the way each chapter's theme relates to our own lives, leading to discussion about what we should take away from the Twilight Saga—and what we shouldn't.

Second, in the back of the book, there's a book-by-book discussion guide that addresses the events of each novel in the Twilight Saga and the themes and messages they portray.

In addition to these two discussion guides included in the book, there is also a leaders' guide online (www.waterbrookmultnomah.com), which will give you ideas about how to use the book's discussion guide in your group.

With these resources, I hope you'll be able to discuss the topics we'll cover in this book in even more depth. This is great opportunity, not just to talk about books you love, but to draw closer to God.

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Introduction

I love a good story.

I love the way stories electrify my children. Some days, my son is a monster out of a storybook, threatening his sisters with terrifying growls. My daughter, maybe, acts out a fairy tale and flies through the house with sparkling wings. Or they all go outside and join the neighbors in a game of *Star Wars*. Good battles evil under the apple tree in the front yard.

I love the way a story can carry us into another world, a world of imagination and mystery. When a story captures our hearts, we dive into it. We sink deep into the waters of the world the author has created for us and learn its geography. We fear what the characters fear and love what the characters love.

Most of all, I love what happens when we come out of the story world. We come up from under the water of imagination and take a deep breath of the air of our own world. But it isn't the same world it was before we dove into the story. The story world changes our world. It helps us imagine possibilities we couldn't possibly have seen before. It suggests new dreams to guide us, new fears to horrify us, and new hopes to inspire us. The stories we love have power. They change our lives.

The power of stories led me to write this book. Maybe you've read Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*, and you were drawn into the story she tells. Maybe your friends have read

them and told you how much they were absorbed by the world of Twilight. Maybe you're a parent and you want to know about the stories your daughter loves, or you're looking for guidance about what you want her to read.

The books are massive bestsellers. The series is popular partly because it deals with issues most of us identify with. It's about romance. It's about finding, losing, and keeping love. It's also about sex and desire. It's about family. It's even about the meaning of life. And the series is especially popular with girls and women because it's about all these things from *a girl's perspective*. There are important male characters in the books, of course, but it is through a girl's eyes, Bella's eyes, that we view the world of Twilight. It's through a girl's eyes that the story makes us think about these powerful subjects—romance, desire, sex, love, family, and meaning. I wrote this book because I'm passionate about the way these themes matter in our lives. Because I'm a Christian, because my life is shaped by the love of Jesus Christ, I especially care about how we can think about these issues through Christian eyes.

I want us to deal with the powerful themes that make the world of Twilight run, and I suggest we do so in a thoroughly Christian way. The themes of love, romance, sex, family, and meaning are central to who we are and how we live. That means we need to deal with them thoughtfully and biblically. In this book, I offer some tools and questions and ideas to help you do just that.

The themes of *Twilight* are all about what it means to be female. I want us to think about what it means to be female and to love God.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STORIES

Before we dig into these interesting themes, I'll give you a brief outline of the *Twilight* Saga. If you haven't read the books and you don't want me to ruin any surprises for you, stop right here.

Meyer's novels are fun to read. The plots take surprising twists and turns, and the four novels come together to tell a compelling love story. Bella, the heroine, is a girl-next-door teenager. She sees herself as ordinary and unremarkable. Edward is an impossibly good-looking classmate who turns out to be a vampire. In *Twilight*, they find each other and enter into unlikely love. In *New Moon*, their love seems lost. They are reunited in *Eclipse* and build a life together in *Breaking Dawn*. Along the way, they must face the dangers and darkness of the vampire world.

Twilight

Bella, whose mother wants to travel with her new husband, moves to a small, rainy town in the Pacific Northwest to live with her dad. Always one to avoid the spotlight, she isn't excited about life at her new school. A number of local boys find her very attractive, but Bella is not interested in them. Not, at least,

until she becomes aware of the gorgeous and mysterious Edward. Once Edward enters her thoughts, he never leaves.

Bella sits next to Edward in science class, and his reaction is bizarre. He looks at her with hatred and utter hostility. Bella is frustrated and annoyed. What has she, an ordinary girl, done to evoke such a strong reaction in this beautiful boy?

Then Edward uses his body to stop an out-of-control van from crushing Bella in the school parking lot. He denies what Bella has started to believe—that there is something extraordinary about him. With a bit of help from her friend Jacob and the Internet, she realizes Edward is a vampire. She has discovered his deep secret, and the stage is set for the two to fall in love.

We learn that Edward is a member of a family of “vegetarian” vampires. They deny their desire for human blood and live instead by hunting large animals. Bella learns, though, that Edward’s strong and horrified reaction to her when they met was because the scent of *her* blood is exceptionally tempting to him. Just sitting next to him threatened to undo his years of self-control. In the context of this danger, they begin their secret romance.

That danger increases when Bella is exposed to some ordinary murderous vampires while spending time with Edward’s family. James, a vampire whose talent and sport is in tracking his prey, sets his sights on Bella, determined to hunt her down and kill her. Edward and his family craft a plan to save Bella.

They send her to Phoenix, but James lures her into a deathtrap in a mirrored dance studio.

Edward saves Bella just in time and destroys James. But Bella has suffered a bite, and Edward manages to suck the vampire venom from her blood. At the end of the novel, he refuses Bella's pleas to change her into a creature like him so she can share his life.

New Moon

At Bella's birthday party at Edward's house, Bella accidentally gets cut, and the scent of her blood topples the shaky self-control of Edward's brother Jasper. He rushes to attack her and has to be stopped by his family. This incident shakes Edward to the core. Convinced that he cannot love Bella and keep her safe, he leaves her.

Bella sinks into a dark depression. Much of the novel is about the depths of her sadness and brokenness in the face of lost love.

Eventually, Bella finds some comfort in her growing friendship with Jacob. She and Jacob fix up a pair of old motorcycles, an activity her father has forbidden because he has seen so many motorcycle accidents. The thrill of riding the motorcycle causes Bella to hear Edward's voice in her head, which motivates her to try more dangerous activities in an effort to be closer to him.

Strange happenings in Jacob's community lead to the eventual disclosure that he has become a werewolf. In the world of *Twilight*, these werewolves exist for one specific purpose—to protect human life from vampires. As a werewolf, Jacob protects Bella from the vampire Victoria, who seeks revenge against Bella for the death of James in *Twilight*.

In another dangerous moment, Bella tries cliff diving and nearly drowns. Though Jacob rescues her from the ocean, Edward is misinformed. Believing Bella is dead, Edward goes to Italy to commit suicide by provoking the Volturi, the leaders of the vampire realm.

Bella and Edward's sister Alice set off in a dramatic race to get to Italy in time to save Edward. Though they succeed, the Volturi learn of Bella's relationship with Edward and pose a new threat to her safety. Because she knows about them, they decree that she must either be killed or become a vampire herself. Becoming a vampire is exactly what Bella wants, but Edward continues to refuse her.

Bella realizes that Edward left her in order to protect her. Their relationship is cemented more tightly than ever before.

Eclipse

Bella agrees to trade something she doesn't want to do—getting married—for something Edward doesn't want to do—turning her into a vampire.

Edward and his family suspect that a number of murders

in Seattle are being caused by uncontrolled vampire activity. Victoria's threat to Bella still looms, as does the question of whether and when Bella will become a vampire. Suspense builds on both counts. In addition, Bella has to negotiate her love for Edward in light of the loving friendship that grew between her and Jacob while Edward was gone.

The threat in Seattle is uncovered. Victoria is creating an army of vampires to destroy Bella, Edward, and his family. We learn that "newborn" vampires, those who have only recently been turned, are especially strong and vicious.

Though they are natural enemies, Edward's vampire family and Jacob's werewolf pack form an unlikely alliance to defeat Victoria and her army. Bella is forced to deal with the tensions in her relationships with Edward and Jacob. She realizes her love for Jacob, but she chooses Edward. At the end of the novel, Jacob, unable to deal with his sadness over losing Bella, runs away.

Breaking Dawn

Bella and Edward have a beautiful wedding at his family's home, and they travel to an island paradise for their honeymoon. The trip is cut short when Bella discovers she is pregnant and that the baby seems to be growing at an alarming rate. Edward, concerned for her safety, wants her to end her pregnancy, but Bella, haunted by dreams in which a beautiful child who looks like Edward is in danger, is determined to protect the baby at any cost.

For the next section of the novel, the pregnancy makes Bella incredibly weak. As though she doesn't have the strength to continue her story on her own, the narrative shifts into Jacob's voice. Jacob and Edward are united in their horror at what the vampire baby is doing to Bella. When it seems she will die, they manage to buy her time by getting her human blood to drink. At the moment of her death—the baby's violent birth—Edward finally changes Bella into a vampire.

After her painful transformation, Bella makes tentative steps into her new life. Her new vampire family is intent on protecting her from taking human life during her vicious, bloodthirsty newborn phase. Bella, though, surprises everyone with her self-control and her vampire skill. She is able to enjoy her relationship with Edward and their daughter, Renesmee. She even finds some peace in her friendship with Jacob.

The Volturi believe that little Renesmee is an illegal “immortal child.” Vampires are prohibited from turning human children into vampires, because the little ones never learn to control themselves and threaten the secrecy and stability of the vampire world. Like the other books, *Breaking Dawn* culminates with a threat and a showdown as the Volturi threaten to destroy Edward, Bella, and their family.

The family gathers friends around them in an attempt to make the Volturi pause long enough to listen to the truth. Bella trains for a fight and practices a “shield” power that helps protect her family. The Cullens manage to convince the Volturi that

Renesmee is not a threat to their society, and the series ends with the family able to look forward to peace and happiness together.

USING THIS BOOK

Now that you're familiar with the story, this book will be your guide through some of the most pressing themes of the *Twilight* Saga.

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.

I'm hesitant about these suggestions.

I think Christians can draw plenty of goodness from non-Christian stories, but I'm doubtful about the way themes of morality and goodness work in the *Twilight* Saga. Meyer is Mormon, and her books paint a deeply Mormon picture of the universe. The books also reflect the values and assumptions of American popular culture in some ways that we as Christians will want to notice. I'm here to help you ask questions, to help you look at the themes of the *Twilight* universe from a Christian point of view.

As I said, Meyer's stories are fun to read, but not everything that compels us is healthy. I hope you'll use this book for

discernment. I hope you'll learn to see what builds you up and what tears you down. As Christians, we need to develop skills that will help us to see what is healthy and what is not. Some stories will nourish us, will help us to grow strong in faith, and will encourage us to know and love Jesus better. Other stories may be less like a balanced meal and more like a can of soda and a candy bar. Junk food won't hurt us once in a while, but it won't help us grow strong either. Still other stories may function more like poison. They may turn our hearts away from loving God and toward other kinds of desire.

I'm not here to tell you what stories you should or shouldn't read. I'm not going to prescribe a list of books that are wholesome versus those that are candy. But I would like to give you some skills that will help you stock the fridge for your own life of reading and imagination.

I'm also not here to give you *the* final interpretation of the Twilight Saga. Reading the stories, you may notice very different things than I noticed. You may not agree with my reactions to the characters or the plots. I am here to raise questions that occurred to me while I read, to point out the way things seem to work in the Saga, and to give some insight into how the themes of the Saga relate to the Christian life. I hope my questions will help you ask questions too.

The chapters in this book are organized around the themes of the series, which I mentioned earlier. In each chapter, I'll talk about the way a theme operates in the Twilight story, and I'll

give some suggestions for addressing the theme thoughtfully and biblically.

I hope you'll use this book for personal reflection. Maybe you have a group of Christian friends who can help you reflect on the powerful themes we're going to discuss. Maybe you can read it with a youth leader or with a group of Christians who meet together for discipleship and accountability. I'd love it if moms and daughters read this book together.

I know you care about the themes that drive the Twilight Saga. They're compelling and affect all our lives on a daily basis. Whoever you read this book with, I hope you'll discuss these themes with other Christians. They're too important to deal with alone.

Chapter I



Forbidden Fruit

The Allure of Dangerous Romance

SUPPOSE THAT EACH PERSON POSSESSES A certain amount of energy for wanting and hoping and wishing. This energy represents our deep longings. If we picture that energy as a pile of golden coins, we can imagine the ways we “spend” it. For many girls and women, we pour most of these coins out on romance. We spend the coins on imagining a true love, on hoping that we will meet Mr. Right, our Prince Charming. We sigh over “the one,” our soul mate, the romantic love who will finally understand us, who will match up with who we are.

When we’re little girls, we watch Snow White sing, “Someday my prince will come,” longing for the day when she will meet the man of her dreams. According to the song, when she meets Prince Charming, it will be love at first sight. Snow White and her cousins, the princesses of all our favorite fairy

tales, gladly spend their golden coins on yearning for that prince. We've been encouraged to share this longing, to make it our own story.

Bella's romance in the *Twilight* Saga fits with our tendency to spend our wanting and hoping coins on romance. This romance defies the rules and rushes forward despite all dangers. It is also completely absorbing—it demands everything from Bella (and from many readers of the books as well). Most of all, this romance is fated. Edward and Bella are soul mates, meant for each other. The forces that draw them together are more powerful than the difficulties and dangers that would keep them apart.

Intense and dangerous romance defines the *Twilight* Saga.

DANGEROUS ROMANCE

When Bella first sits down next to Edward in science class, he tenses up and looks at her with revulsion. She had noticed him earlier that day but doesn't yet know him. Bella can't imagine why she has provoked such horror from the boy next to her. His strong reaction makes her think about the phrase "If looks could kill."¹ She senses the danger between them.

We later learn why Edward looked at her with such disgust. For him, the lure of Bella's flesh, the particular scent of

1. Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 24.

her blood, is uniquely tempting. It is so tantalizing that he has to run away to keep himself from attacking her and undoing all the years he has spent protecting human life. Even though he has practiced restraint for decades, developing self-control, he must flee. For him, Bella is that enticing. Running is the only way to stop himself from ripping her to pieces then and there.

In *New Moon*, Aro, one of the Volturi guardians of the vampire world, is baffled at the way Edward can resist the “call” of Bella’s blood when it speaks to him with such intensity. Why would Edward *want* to resist such a tempting lure? Why, when something is *that* desirable, *that* delicious, would Edward steel himself against the urge to bite?

At the beginning of *Twilight*, we meet a quotation from Scripture. In Genesis 2:17, God instructs human beings that they “must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” The book’s striking cover art, a ripe red apple, is the forbidden fruit of dangerous love. The romance at the center of *Twilight* is forbidden because it is so very dangerous.

As Christians, though, we need to pause before we romanticize the knowledge of good and evil. In Genesis, God gives the people many, many good things. They have all they need for joy and happiness and a great life. The choice humans make to disobey God and eat the one “forbidden” fruit is, literally, a fatal choice. It brings sin and death into the world. All of that happiness and goodness come crashing down around them.

Romance threatens to destroy Bella. The books create a constant, suspenseful awareness that Edward is always in danger of losing control and biting her. Every moment that Bella and Edward are together, he struggles with his desire to drink her blood. Bella's friend Mike expresses his distaste for her growing relationship with Edward. "He looks at you," Mike says, "like...like you're something to eat."²

Before spending time alone with each other, Edward prepares carefully, taking precautions to keep Bella safe. He makes sure that he isn't overly hungry. He does all he can to fight against the temptation of her very presence, especially if they leave the watchful eyes of others. He must prepare because his nature is, for Bella, life-threatening. Bella, though, seems unconcerned about her own danger. Instead, she worries that it would cause trouble for Edward if she were murdered on his watch.

Bella does admit, at least at moments, to finding Edward frightening. When he drops his "carefully cultivated façade"³ of humanity, he is both frightening and beautiful to Bella. Her attraction to him is tied up with the fact that he is dangerous.

Repeatedly, Bella confuses Edward by embracing the danger that lies in being with him. He tries, again and again, to warn her off for her own good. She refuses, again and again, to remove herself from this perilous situation.

2. *Twilight*, 221.

3. *Twilight*, 264.

Romance in the series is something dangerous and illicit. That is, it is against the law. Every rule of both human and vampire society is working against the couple. He threatens her existence with his thirst for her blood. She threatens his existence when she discovers his secret life. Bella and Edward want what they simply shouldn't have.

So how should Christians view illicit romance?

To start with, we don't exist alone. God has created us to live in community, and we do that as the church. The church exists as both the body and the bride of Jesus. Christians, then, are never rogue agents. We're parts of a body. Paul, in 1 Corinthians, puts it like this:

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!"
And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need
you!" (12:21)

We need each other. We need each other in the area of romance just as in every other area of life. Other members of the body can help us to see things that we couldn't have seen on our own. They can help us discern whether our romantic interests are really in our *best* interests. They can help us to discern whether our romantic interests are in *God's* interests. Parents, pastors, Christian friends, and youth leaders can *be* the church for us in helping us to think about romance.

This idea that the church should have a role in our romantic stories is a grating one. I understand if you'd rather head for a long, painful visit to the dentist than ask for someone else's opinion about who you should or shouldn't dream about.

The idea of romantic accountability irritates us because we think of romance as a very private thing. Bella and Edward certainly do. Bella hides the truth about Edward from her parents. She ignores Jacob's feelings about the dangers of her relationship. Though Edward's family eventually grows to love Bella, he deliberately ignores their early worries about the complications involved with him loving a human girl. He breaks the vampire taboo against revealing his world to a human. Their attraction to one another is so very strong that it seems there is nothing for them to do but ignore the rules meant to keep them safe.

Yet nothing in the Christian life is truly private. We belong, after all, to God and not to ourselves. While this idea seems to go against the way we want romance to be, it is actually one of God's very good gifts. God made us so that we shouldn't be alone, and God didn't do this to annoy us. God doesn't give us the church to impose a bunch of arbitrary rules on us. God gives us the church as a blessing. The fact that you are not alone is a good thing. It means you're not at your own mercy.

You and I both know that the church is not a perfect place. It is a place for sinners, so we can't expect the church's efforts to help us be discerning about romance to be perfect either.

It helps, though, to remember that the church exists for a reason. It exists for God's glory. It exists to be Jesus's holy bride.

When we ask the church—parents, friends, leaders—to hold us accountable about romance, we're not giving people license to control us with whatever their own preferences might happen to be. We're not asking, for instance, if someone else thinks this or that person is physically attractive. I can imagine all kinds of really bad reasons why people might think we shouldn't be attracted to someone. If someone dislikes a person because of his race or because he isn't from a wealthy family, we as Christians wouldn't find any help for accountability there. Still, we *need* accountability. We're asking other people to help us *be* the church, to glorify God and become His holy bride, in every area of life. Including romance.

As we look for accountability in the area of romance, we have a way to tell what good romance or bad romance is like. If attraction to someone else glorifies God, this is a good sign. If the person who captures our romantic interest is good at serving Jesus and helps us be good at it, this too is a good sign. When we're caught up in romantic feelings, these good signs may be the kind of thing we miss. Worse, we may miss bad signs, like our attraction to someone pulling us away from God or encouraging us to be less than the people God wants us to be. We may even miss it if our attraction is actually putting us in danger.

Step outside of Bella's shoes for a moment, and imagine you were her best friend. Would you have been worried about

the danger involved in her romance with Edward? Romance should not be dangerous. We have jokes and stereotypes about girls being attracted to “bad boys,” but the truth is that those attractions often cause a lot of pain. Bella’s disregard for her own safety is a warning sign, one we should pay attention to if we see it in ourselves or our friends. We especially need accountability when we might be putting ourselves in danger.

CONSUMING ROMANCE

The romance in *Twilight* is all-consuming. When she falls in love with Edward, Bella doesn’t have space for anything else in her life. The books use words like *obsessed* or *consumed* to describe Bella’s feelings for Edward. Edward influences everything Bella thinks and does. She is willing to surrender her entire life for Edward, ready, in his words, “for this to be the twilight” of life, “...ready to give up everything.”⁴ Readers of *Twilight* are consumed by this romance too. I’ve heard plenty of accounts of the series eating up all of someone’s time and energy, almost swallowing her up.

As Christians, we have to be immediately suspicious of an account of romance that consumes our entire being. One of the strongest warnings in Scripture is against idolatry. Again and again, the people turn away from God’s commandments:

4. *Twilight*, 497.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God. (Exodus 20:3–5)

In the New Testament, Paul describes the sad state of living in idolatry. We human beings have become fools and “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:23). We’ve made a bad trade, Paul is saying. We’ve traded in God’s glory for sad images. While you and I probably don’t pray to an idol carved to look like a bird or a reptile, we are still tempted to idolatry. We’re tempted to trade the most amazing, priceless, astounding thing in the world—the glory of the immortal God—for images. We trade God’s glory for illusions.

Is there anything that demands you give allegiance to it before you give glory to God? That thing is an idol. Is there anything that wants to consume your whole life, to take from you all your energy and longing and wishing and hoping? That thing is an idol. It is easy for romance to become such an idol.

Paul continues his description of idolatry in the first chapter of Romans. Not only do human beings make this bad trade, but the trade has consequences. What happens to human beings

when we trade in God's glory for something else? We're handed over to our sinful desires. We're trapped.

The message of the Bible is that God should be the center of our lives. Jesus highlights this message when He quotes from the book of Deuteronomy:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and
with all your soul and with all your mind and with
all your strength. (Mark 12:30)

Jesus is not talking about loving God halfway. He's not talking about spending half of your energy on God and half on other things. Jesus repeats the word *all* four times in the verse above. How should we love God? With all that we are. With heart, soul, mind, and strength. With passion, longing, thought, and energy. With desire, time, attention, and activity. In Jesus, we see someone whose whole life is about God. He offers us the chance to have the same kind of life.

FATED ROMANCE

More than anything else, romance in the Twilight universe is something fated. Bella and Edward are meant for each other. They are the ideal of what romantic soul mates should be. Their connection is powerful, immediate, and irresistible. They are drawn to each other, pulled together as though by a magnetic

force. Bella seems to exist just for Edward. Her very makeup, who she is at the core, is a perfect match for his desire.

In addition to Bella and Edward's romance, the series portrays another strong instance of fated romance. In Jacob's werewolf pack, werewolves find romance through "imprinting." When he meets the "one," the fated love, the werewolf immediately imprints on the other person. Jacob describes this in strong terms. He explains to Bella, "It's not like love at first sight, really. It's more like...gravity moves. When you see her, suddenly it's not the earth holding you here anymore. She does. And nothing matters more than her."⁵ Imprinted pairs experience "peace and certainty."⁶

Sam, the leader of Jacob's pack, has imprinted on a woman named Emily. Sam accidentally harmed Emily when he was in his wolf phase. Before he imprinted on Emily, though, Sam was in a committed relationship with someone else, Leah, but when he imprints, he has no choice but to leave Leah behind. The treatment of Leah's situation in the series is incredibly frustrating. Her rage and pain at Sam's rejection isn't handled with much seriousness. Sam, in the romantic world of Meyer's series, has no control over this rejection. The bonds of a loving relationship cannot hold him when fate steps in and he imprints on Emily.

5. Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007), 176.

6. Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 153.

Emily also receives very little attention in the narrative. We see that the injury Sam caused her is a source of pain, particularly for him, but we don't see much about the difficulty of living with and loving a werewolf who unintentionally scarred you. We don't hear much of Emily's voice or about what choice she had in loving Sam. She would, presumably, have had very little choice if fate truly meant her to be with him.

We hear even less of the voices of other characters imprinted on by werewolves. Jacob's friend Quil imprints on a child named Claire. The reader is assured that there is nothing inappropriate in his loving devotion to the toddler. Quil will not desire her romantically until she is a grown woman. For now, he is a devoted baby-sitter. But the narrative doesn't address the question of the inherent imbalance of power in a relationship between a girl and a man years older than her. Even if Quil would still be physically young when Claire grew old enough for him, he'd still have years of experience she wouldn't. It would be difficult for there to be much that was mutual about such a relationship. Quil would always have the upper hand, the stronger voice.

The assumption that romance is fated is very widespread, and it's portrayed in a compelling way in *Twilight*. What are the consequences of accepting this idea of romance? First, if romance is determined by fate, if my love has to be my soul mate, the one I am meant for, then the possibilities of choice and accountability disappear. I'm no longer free to make good choices about who I want to share my life with. Instead, I am

bound by fate. Also, I can no longer seek the good advice of other Christians about my romantic life. Fate is the only advisor I need.

Fated romance thus not only destroys our freedom to choose at the beginning of a relationship, but it also threatens our freedom to *continue* to choose love in the face of difficulties and distractions. If I were bound by the idea of the fated romantic soul mate, I would follow him whenever I found him, even if that meant leaving someone else behind, like Sam leaves Leah for Emily. The idea of fated romance destroys good marriages in just this way. If I become convinced that someone other than my husband is actually my soul mate, then I lose the freedom God gives me to keep on loving my husband through thick and thin. I lose the freedom to continue to choose love daily, to keep my commitments, and to enjoy all the rich blessings of a steadfast love.

The idea that you belong with a soul mate, then, robs you of your freedom. It steals from you the power God gives you, through the Holy Spirit, to make good choices, choices that are for God's glory. The idea of a soul mate binds us. It wraps us in chains.

Why, then, are we so captivated by this idea? I think it's because we want to be loved by someone who is just for us, someone who really fits with who we are. We want it desperately. We're hurt and we're broken, and we want someone to meet us exactly where we are.

No human being, however, can fulfill us. No human being can complete us. No human being can give our lives meaning. If what we hope for from romance is fulfillment, completion, and meaning, we are going to be sadly disappointed. We'll demand something from another person that he or she cannot possibly give.

The good news is that we don't have to give up our hopes. But we do need to put them in the right place. God is so much more than human beings can ever be. This doesn't mean that God will do whatever you want or that you can mold God to be the way you'd like Him to be. It does mean, though, that God has a really beautiful way of meeting us exactly where we are.

God knows exactly what human need is and knows exactly what to do about it. God jumped right into the world with us. God became "flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). God-in-the-flesh fits what we need so perfectly. Jesus is God there for us, experiencing what we experience, struggling with our struggles. He's been tempted. He's known need.

We needed to touch and see God's love for us, and God came to us as the touchable, seeable, Jesus. We needed to be healed, and Jesus took on all of our mess, all of our guilt, to heal us. We needed to know who God was, and Jesus came so that we could see "his glory" (verse 14).

This is more compelling than a consuming romance. This reaches right into the depths of our being to touch us as we truly are.

✚ THINK ABOUT IT/TALK ABOUT IT

1. What are your favorite romance stories? What makes them so compelling?
2. Who can you turn to for accountability? Wait. Don't skip over this question. I hope, if you're young, that the answer might include your parents, but if there are reasons it can't right now, do some brainstorming. A family friend? Someone at church? at school? down the block?
3. Who can you offer accountability to? Who can you help to see what kind of choices will serve God's glory?
4. Even with no vampires around, how can romance become dangerous in our lives?
5. What would it look like for romance to be about glorifying God?
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?