

Life on the Dark Side: Evil, Sin, Cults and the Occult | Steve Russo, Ph.D.

Introduction: We have a generation today who is in search of answers to the spiritual dimension of life. This search can take on many different forms and take them in many different directions – including cults, the occult and witchcraft – as they look for power to face the tough issues of life. The influence of darkness can be found in many different places and forms – everything from prime time television to the internet to comic books. Teens are curious and want to discover things for themselves. As concerned adults we need to provide them with practical resources and a safe place where they can express their thoughts and feelings.

I. Teens and the dark side

- A. The fascination with evil
- B. It's all about experience: "What is sin? It's just 'whatever'"
- C. Spiritually hungry: "Wicca" is a rerelease of pagan witchcraft. Today is about a buffet-style religion.

II. What's the appeal?

- A. Wicca is probably the fastest growing religion
- B. Tolerance: It has been blown way out of proportion. It doesn't mean we accept anything and everything. But it is about us allowing you to do this or that but we're not going to support you on this or that. Kids are turned off by those who are "conservative". They want to be more accepting about more diverse lifestyles.
- C. Environmentally conscious. Wicca – 1950s; There's nothing wrong with being environmentally concerned. But wiccans take it to another level...but believe that we're very connected and that we are part of the earth and we worship the earth as well as ourselves. They get their theology from nature. But we're supposed to worship the creator not the creation.
- D. "Whatever experience": Some teens today don't like the way church is practiced, they want to see things changed. They want more direct participation. Not sit through endless courses and they want to interact. But a lot of teens are desensitized. They can perform their own rituals and design their own deities and control their own world – very **self-styled**. When you can design your own gods, then that's what you can do. But this plays into our culture...the "anything goes" mentality. Then who are you worshipping? You're worshipping yourselves. We gotta help teens understand who God really is.
- E. Sexual equality: the major deity of wicca is the goddess. The reason why most teens are turned off by the church is because there have been abuses in the church. They believe that there is total equality. That there is a male/female side. It is appealing to teens who have been sexually abused. This removes the whole issue with the "father" problem. How can they worship a God who is "father" if their earthly father has either abused them or have neglected them.
- F. Power: Most of the time, the initial attraction is power. It represents individual power that they desperately need. They want to feel like they matter. They want to feel like they have power over their circumstances. It's a desire to gain control. Some within the wicca that have spells over their parents or people. And the problem is that they don't think in a linear fashion (logically).
- G. Personal control: It is very personal in the way it is practiced. Trying to define "wicca" is impossible because it is so self-styled (buffet) and you can make it whatever you want it to be. You can make your own brand of wicca...design your own deities. No right and wrong...it's all up to you. There are some central things: 3 Fold Law – whatever you do will come back to you threefold. The Wiccan Rede "An ye harm non, do what ye will". But then again, it's really up to you on how you decide what "harm" is. It's pretty relative. "It's your definition of truth". And they can control their eternal destiny.

III. How to help parents and kids in your church

- A. Warning signs of involvement: How would you know if there's someone that is struggling with evil and the occult?
 - 1. Withdrawal from routine activities. It does mean that there's something in their life that something is going on.
 - 2. Fixation with Wiccan & occultic symbols.
 - 3. Possession of Wiccan and pagan publications – including a Book of Shadows (it's a wiccan diary. But this particular diary talks about encounters and spells).
 - 4. Fascination with or possession of unique ceremonial knives.
 - 5. Altars. Where would they be? They could be in a basement, barns, knives, symbols...
 - 6. Dramatic negative change in friends.
- B. What **not** to do:
 - 1. Don't deny that kids from your church could be involved. Church kids are not impervious to wicca.
 - 2. Don't underestimate the deceptive power of Wicca and witchcraft.
- C. Practical tips
 - 1. Find out what they believe spiritually and where they are coming from spiritually. Not tell them where they should be. Be Socratic...he would ask questions and answer their questions with questions. Let them tell you what they believe.
 - 2. Try to find out what unmet need is being met in Wicca. Maybe its acceptance and power. Maybe it's being special. Once you find out what that need is you can better address it.
 - 3. Be sensitive to their perspective. Don't make fun of them. Show them some respect and earn the right to be heard.
 - 4. Look for common ground. Talk about environment and sexuality.
 - 5. Highlight the differences between Christianity and Wicca: Connect & Engage. Not from a Christian worldview...but from a biblical worldview.
 - 6. Clarify terms and definitions: eternal life, sin, etc. "prayer is not the same as spells"
 - 7. Show by example that you trust in God alone. Show them how YOU trust God
 - 8. Clearly explain the issue of sin and the opportunity we have for forgiveness
 - 9. Use the Bible strategically. Don't shoot people with the bible. Guard against preying on innocent people. Guard yourself against hypocrisy
 - 10. Focus on Jesus
- D. Protecting your kids
 - 1. Show teens the way to Jesus. Help your families develop a healthy homes.
 - 2. Cultivate spiritually healthy families
 - 3. Help kids and parents develop a Biblical worldview
 - 4. Teach the basics of the faith (what & why we believe)

Soul Care Notes:

Deuteronomy 18: 9-13
Proverbs 3:5-6
Ecclesiastes 8:7
Isaiah 8:19; 41:23; 59:2
Isaiah 41: 23
Jeremiah 17: 9; 29:11
Matthew 1:21-23
John 14:6
Romans 3:23; 6:23
Philippians 2:5-6
1 Timothy 2:5
2 Timothy 3:16
Hebrews 4:12; 9:26-28
1 Peter 3:18
2 Peter 2:9
1 John 4:4

Study Questions:

1. Where does evil come from? Why is it so appealing?
2. Why is it so important to understand what unmet need in the life of a teen is being met when they are involved in the occult & Wicca?
3. Why is it important for teens to understand what and why they believe what they believe?
4. How does having a Biblical worldview affect your life?
5. Why is the Wiccan Rede – “And ye harm none, do what ye will” – a dangerous philosophy to live by?
6. How do you demonstrate acceptance without compromising the issue of sin?