

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/god-on-

[trial/](#)

on June 22, 2010.

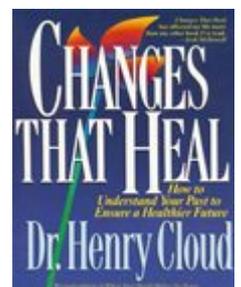
How Change Happens

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.

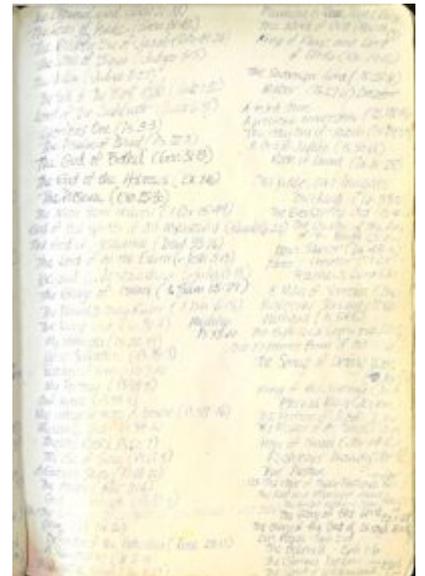
Note: Since writing this blog post, I have read all the books and done a lot of research, coming to a different conclusion. Please be sure and read Part 2: [A New Look at Twilight: Different Conclusion](#). Thanks!

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.

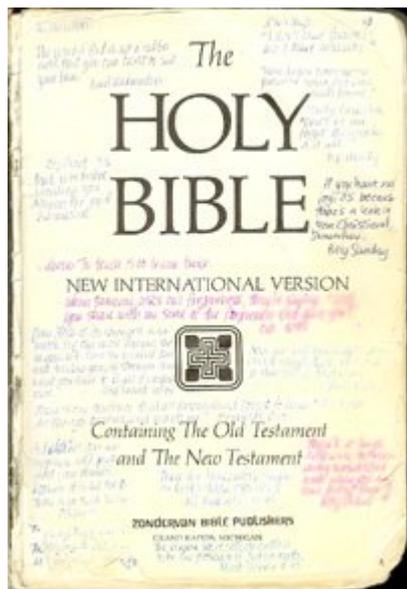
Record the results of a "treasure hunt." Over several years, as I read through the Bible, I drew a box around every name and title of God I found, and then wrote them in the back of my Bible. What a great way to worship Him now, to just read through His names to tell Him how wonderful and magnificent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

The Hum of a Ceiling Fan

September 23, 2008

A dear friend of mine is a writer of songs and a writer of words. She went through a period of time when all the songs

she wrote were all the key of F.

“I wondered why I could not write songs in any other key,” she wrote. “It really bothered me. Not everything in F was the best range for my voice, or fit the song I was trying to convey.”

She thought she was in a musical rut. She prayed to get out of the rut, and still wrote in F. She got frustrated that nothing changed.

“But as one season changed into the next, I started writing in other keys. I thought maybe it was the lovely colors of fall, and maybe they evoked different keys in me.

I got so happy that I was writing in other keys. I thought, ‘I’m over my rut! Yay!!!’

But one day, the heater was too much, and I went and turned on the fan...

...and I started playing even the new pieces I had written back in F.”

What’s up with *that*? She looked up and had this epiphany. The ceiling fan’s mechanical “hum” was in the key of F!!

All through the summer, she could only write in F because the background noise of the fan was her internal tuning fork. She kept going back to the F major key because the music in her head was tuned to the fan! She turned off the fan—and was able to think in other keys.

In Romans 8, Paul tells us to set our minds on the spirit instead of the flesh. And when we do that, the music of our lives is in the key of Jesus.

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

What Not To Say When Someone is Grieving

Last week my dear friend Sandi Glahn wrote another boffo [blog post](#) about the myths of infertility, which included some of the dumb things people say.

It may be insensitivity or a lack of education that spurs people to say things that are unhelpful at the least and downright hurtful much of the time. I still remember my own daggers to the heart after our first baby died nine days after her birth. And for the past several years, I have been collecting actual quotes said to those already in pain.

So here's my current list of What Not To Say when someone is hurting:

Don't start any sentence with "At least. . . ."

- "At least you didn't have time to really love her."
- "At least he's in heaven now."
- "At least you have two other children."
- "At least that's one less mouth you'll have to feed."
- "At least it didn't have to go through the pain of birth."
- "At least you've had a good life so far, before the cancer diagnosis."

Don't attempt to minimize the other person's pain.

- "Cancer isn't really a problem." (e.g., Shame on you for thinking that losing your hair/body part/health is a problem.)
- "It's okay, you can have other children."

Don't try to explain what God is doing behind the scenes.

- "I guess God knew you weren't ready to be parents yet."
- "Now you'll find out who your friends are."

- “This baby must have just not been meant to be.”
- “There must have been something wrong with the baby.”
- “Just look ahead because God is pruning you for great works.”
- “Cancer is really a blessing.”
- “Cancer is a gift from God because you are so strong.”

Don't blame the other person:

- “If you had more faith, your daughter would be healed.”
- “Remember that time you had a negative thought? That let the cancer in.”
- “You are not praying hard enough.”
- “Maybe God is punishing you. Have you done something sinful?”
- “Oh, you're not going to let this get you down, are you?”
(Meaning: just go on without dealing with it.)

Don't compare what the other person is going through to ANYTHING else or anyone else's problem:

- “It's not as bad as that time I. . .”
- “My sister-in-law had a double mastectomy and you only lost one breast.”

Don't use the word “should”:

- “You should be happy/grateful that God is refining you.”

Don't use clichés and platitudes:

- “Look on the bright side.”
- “He's in a better place.”
- “She's an angel now.” (NO! People and angels are two different created kinds! People do not get turned into angels when they die.)
- “He's with the Lord.”

Don't instruct the person:

- “This is sent for your own good, and you need to embrace it to get all the benefit out of it.”
- “Remember that God is in control.”

- “Remember, all things work together for good for those that love God and are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28 is powerful to comfort oneself, but it can feel like being bludgeoned when it comes from anyone else.)

What TO say:

- “I love you.”
- “I am so sorry.” You don’t have to explain. Anything.

What TO do:

- A wordless hug.
- A card that says simply, “I grieve with you.”
- Instead of bringing cakes, drop off or (better) send gift certificates for restaurants or pizza places.

And pray. Then pray some more. It’s the most powerful thing we can say or do.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/what-not-to-say-when-someone-is-grieving/ on January 20, 2009, and you can read the many comments there.

What Not to Say: Adoption

The power of words to hurt and offend seems limitless, as Sandra Glahn and I have learned both in life and in the comments from our blogs about “what not to say.” [See [Infertility: People Say the Dumbest Things](#) and [What Not to Say When Someone is Grieving.](#)]

I came across a new list of What Not to Say About Adoption from a single dad blogger. With some editing, here is his contribution:

[Single Dad Laughing’s Guide to Adoption Etiquette.](#)

1. Never, ever, ever, ask how much a child costs. This includes the phrase, "How much did you pay for him?" First of all, it's none of your business. Second of all, if you're interested in adoption, research it through the appropriate channels. Speak with an adoption agency. Adoptive parents don't purchase children. They simply pay legal fees and agency fees. Just like biological parents pay hospital and doctor bills. Don't turn the child into nothing more than a commodity.

2. Never ask if a celebrity inspired the adoption. Believe it or not, Tom Cruise, Connie Chung, and Angelina Jolie did not convince me one way or the other in the biggest decision of my life. Are you serious?

3. Never ask "Where is his real dad?" Forget the fact that it will hurt *my* feelings. How do you think it will affect my son's feelings to feel like I'm not a real dad to him? Adoptive parents *are* real parents. The term you're looking for is "birth mother" or "birth father."

4. Don't say things like, "As soon as you adopt you're going to get pregnant" when you find out somebody is adopting. First of all, there are usually many, many years of pain and financial burden strapped to infertility, treatments, and heartache. Do you really think that what you're saying will help them? Secondly, while it is funny when it happens, it's rare.

5. Never say, "Why did she give him away?" Do I really need to explain why this one would hurt a child? The proper term is "placed." A birth mother and birth father *place* their child for adoption. And again, it's personal and none of your business, so don't ask if you aren't my BFF.

6. Don't say, "It's like he's your real son." This is similar to number three, but worthy of mentioning. He *is* my real son.

7. Don't say, "Do you love him as if he was your own?" Ummm... probably more than you love your little terror, that's for sure. And again... he *is* my own.

8. Never say things like, "You're so wonderful to adopt a child." I am a parent. Just like anybody else with kids.

9. Don't start spewing your horrible adoption stories. "This one time, my friend's sister's aunt's dog's previous owner's niece adopted a baby and the real dad came back and they took the baby away after they had him for two years." First of all, it probably isn't true. Second of all, how would you feel if I told you about all the ways you could lose your child? Adoption is permanent. And in the extremely rare circumstances that something like that happens, it's not something you should spread because the hurt that exists for all the parties involved must be immeasurable.

10. Don't say things like, "Is it hard for him to be adopted?" Well, it wasn't, until you asked me that right in front of him, you thoughtless soul.

11. I don't want to hear about your second cousin who was on a waiting list for twelve years and never got a baby. Granted, this one was much more annoying when we were going through the adoption process. Nobody wants to know that some people never get chosen. Show some kindness. Even to ugly people.

Some of our dearest friends have grown their families through adoption, and they have their own contributions to make, such as, "How can you ever love your adopted child as much as your biological children?" (Because the heart just grows bigger that way. Because the same God who adopted us into His family loves us just as much as the natural kids. Because love grows from the heart, not from the uterus.)

I am grateful for the input from people who have been on the receiving end of thoughtless comments and questions to help

the rest of us be more loving in the way we interact with others.

Do you have anything to add to this list?

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_not_to_say_adoption on Sept. 28, 2010.

What Would You Say to Your 8-Year-Old Self?

Recently I watched Disney's *The Kid* again. This is a movie recommended by a counselor friend of mine, and I have heard of several other counselors who assign people to watch it because of its insights into why we can become the adults we are. Bruce Willis plays a not very nice man who meets up with his 8-year-old self, and the two have some important information to give each other.

There is a scene where a friend helps him process what it means to be talking to his little boy self, and asks, "What would I say if little Deirdre turned up, bursting out of her St. Mary's uniform, asking me what comes next?" Suddenly, my eyes welled with tears at the thought: what would I say if little 8-year-old Susan LeClair appeared in my living room? What would I want her to know, after 30+ years of intentionally seeking "wisdom beyond my years," the prayer the Lord instructed me to pray for myself right after becoming a Christian?



Here's my first pass:

"You are not damaged goods. You are not the ugly crippled girl you think you are. God made you beautiful, and He put you in a handicapped body to greater put His glory on display. Your frailty will make your gifts, and your intensity, less threatening to others. When His joy radiates out from you, He will get the glory, and you will love that. It's OK that you had polio. One day, your scars will be beauty marks, and you will see that your ever-present limp simply *is*. It's not a shameful thing. Jacob's limp was the souvenir Yahweh chose for his nighttime wrestling match with Him.

"Your purity is a precious gift. Don't let anyone steal it from you.

"Your intellect doesn't make you better than anyone else. It's like the color of your hair or eyes. It's just part of the package God put together when He made you. Yes, you're smart. Don't be a show-off about it. That's ugly. And nobody will figure out, especially seventh-grade girls who will leave a deep wound on your soul, that you're desperately trying to cover up a core of shame by proving you're not hopelessly rotten, damaged, not-OK. Speaking of which, you ARE hopelessly rotten, damaged, and not-OK in your flesh, the part of you that operates independently from God. That part of you deserves to die, and one day you'll recognize that and it will be crucified with Jesus. Then He'll give you a new heart and a new spirit that is whole and perfect and indescribably lovely—just like Him. You will realize that all the parts of you that you really like are all gifts from Jesus or His character shining through you.

"Oh, and Mom tells you that since your eyes change color depending on what you're wearing, you have hazel eyes. You don't. They're green. Mom doesn't know everything, but it will take you 40 more years to learn that."

In the movie, Deirdre says she would answer little Deirdre's question by saying, "Baby, don't you worry about a thing. Everything's just going to be great!" If it were me, I'd cup little Susan's face in my hand and reassure her, "Sweetheart, I'm not going to spoil the adventure by telling you how it's going to play out. I can just promise you that because you'll put your trust in Jesus in college, He's going to give you a life so full of joy that you can't begin to imagine it right now. He's not going to make your dreams come true; He's going to give you new and better dreams, and make those come true. There will be pain, but the joy and richness will far outpace it. It's going to be a delightful life, sweetie. I promise."

What would you say to *your* 8-year-old self?

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_would_you_say_to_your_8_year_old_self on June 9, 2009.

35 Years and Counting

Yesterday (August 3, 2009), Ray and I celebrated 35 years of marriage. My good friend and fellow Engage blogger Gwynne Johnsons wrote on my Facebook, "Congratulations . . . got you beat by 15 years :) ☺ ...Good guys are the BEST of God's gifts . . ." Amen to that!

We've been privileged to walk through almost all those years with our dear friends and fellow Probe Ministries staff Kerby and Susanne Anderson (whom you may recognize from the national radio show Point of View), who were married the same day. Last night, as we visited together, I asked the Andersons and Ray what they had learned over our 35 years, and we were all in agreement about the basics.

The non-negotiable part of a successful marriage is to continually love, accept and forgive the other. That starts with the absolute commitment to mean and to live out our wedding vows. It's a covenant, a "promise on steroids," that goes far beyond "I promise to be here as long as love shall last."

I've been thinking about what I've learned for sure over 35 years.

As one of our pastors once said, "The AIDS of marriage is justified self-centeredness." Selfishness is a oneness-killer. God intends to use our spouse to shape us and mold us and give us daily opportunities to crucify our flesh, our self-centeredness, as He forms us into the people He intends us to be.

It's helpful to see marriage as two "forgiven forgivers." Extending forgiveness as we have received it from God, as quickly as possible, keeps the oneness and intimacy flowing.

We need to keep a balance between what we overlook and let go from a heart of grace, and what we need to address because it is big enough to cause us to withdraw from the other. [Godly conflict resolution](#) is essential for living well with another sinner.

Cultivating an "attitude of gratitude" and verbally expressing gratitude for the small things the other does to serve and love us, goes a long way.

There is no substitute for creating habits of kindness toward our spouse. And we are just as pleasant and courteous to each others as we are to strangers, which is simply a habit as well as a character issue.

Learning about communication skills truly enhances the marriage relationship. The most powerful tools I've ever come across, and which we have made a part of how we live with each

other, are:

1. Don't interrupt the other person.
2. Tell the other what you heard to make sure you understood them right.
3. Avoid being a **WENI** (sounds like "weenie"): **W**ithdrawing, **E**scalating when arguing, **N**egatively interpreting what the other is saying, and **I**nvalidating the other.

God has been good, and we thank Him for His blessing of a great friendship and relationship with each other!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/35_years_and_counting