Your Board of Directors

At a conference several years ago I was given a thought-provoking challenge, to identify the people on the board of directors of my life: whose voices do I listen to? Whose counsel do I follow? Whose values do I respond to?

The speaker pointed out that some people ought to be kicked off our board—like parents, if their voices of shame and criticism still control and restrict us. So should voices of much of the media, especially TV. And we can replace them with wiser, more godly voices who can offer us direction and perspective. There was a discussion of categories of potential board members. They don't have to be alive, and we don't have to personally know them, either.

The Lord Jesus, of course, needs to be the #1 board member. If we're married, our spouse should be on our board. The Apostle Paul is a good board member. Peter and James are good too, as is Solomon. So are some of the church fathers and Christian writers like C.S. Lewis. Or a pastor, and not necessarily our own. (I have a friend in a distant city who has adopted my pastor as hers, and listens to every audio recording my church puts online.) Mentors are great board members, and so are wise and trusted friends.

A few weeks ago, John Townsend, one of the co-authors of the Boundaries series, was at my church. I love what he writes and listen to him on the radio show "New Life Live" whenever possible. I had a chance to talk to him briefly, so I told him about my board of directors. "John," I said, "Several years ago I installed you as a permanent member of my board. Other people have come and gone, but you're always there. I really appreciate your wisdom and godly perspective, and you have equipped me to respond to various life challenges. Just wanted you to know how you've blessed me even though we've never met."

(To my delighted surprise, he lit up and asked if he could hug me!)

Who's on your board? Who can you kick off to the glory of God? (Hint: magazines that make you unhappy with how God made you as you compare yourself to the celebrities and models inside, certain internet sites, particular TV shows. . .)

Who can you put on your board? Let's hear it.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/your_board_of_directors
in July 2009.

Zap the Lies, Hug the Truth – 1

As the scriptures tell us that King Saul stood head and shoulders above everybody else, there is one aspect of the spiritual growth process that seems to stand head and shoulders above the rest: identifying and renouncing the lies that hold us in bondage, and embracing God's truth which sets us free.

Recently, I have been blessed by the experiences of two dear friends, both dealing with the fallout of trauma, as Jesus lovingly takes them through this process.

One of them is a college student whose parents wisely equipped her in how to think through negative thoughts and feelings:

1. Is _____ the truth? [No.]

2. That makes it a . . . [Lie.]
3. Where do lies come from? [Satan.]
4. God tells us truth because He is truth. So what does He say about it?

Armed with this powerful weapon, my friend successfully handled a molestation that happened in the middle of the night while she spent the night at the home of a friend. Wounds like that are "lie factories" that pump out pain and destruction. But she was able to pull out the arrows that had pierced her heart and let Jesus' truth bring healing.

Lie #1: "You got what you deserved. It's YOUR fault, because you didn't lock the door." **Truth:** I did NOT deserve it. That man is responsible for his own sinful choice to violate me. 1 Corinthians 6:18 – Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

Lie #2: "Ha! Hypocrite! You make everyone think you're leading a pure life, but you're nothing but a soiled dove." **Truth:** I'm a hypocrite when it was something done TO me?? 1 Timothy 5:2b – [exhort] younger women as sisters, with all purity. He did not treat me with purity. I did not invite his mistreatment of me.

Lie #3: "You want your husband to be a virgin on your wedding day. Why should he be? You only have your 'technical' virginity left." **Truth:** My innocence was not freely given; it was taken. My "full" virginity has been restored. Psalm 147:3 – He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Lie #4: "No guy will want a soiled dove. That guy you are growing to love? Ha! You aren't good enough for him." **Truth:** I may not be good enough for HIM, but Jesus thinks I'm to die for! John 3:16; Jeremiah 29:11-13…

Since this was the biggest lie and the deepest wound, God also provided these powerful verses: Psalm 37:4 – Delight yourself

also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 84:11 – For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Praise God that His truth is powerful enough to show lies for what they are, and destroy their power to shackle us! His word is sharper than any two-edged sword, able to zap lies and allow us to embrace the truth that gives life and light.

Next time I'll share the way Jesus revealed truth to zap the lies binding the heart of my other friend.

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

Zap the Lies, Hug the Truth – 2

In my last blog post "Zap the Lies, Hug the Truth – 1," I shared how one of my friends faced the lies of the enemy in the wake of a molestation, and successfully stood against them in the truth of God's word.

Today I will let another friend share how the Lord Jesus has met her on prayer walks, addressing the lies that have held her in bondage since her trauma-filled childhood and then adulthood.

This is what she wrote to me:

> Jesus said, "First I will take off the lie you have

believed, then I will wash you with the water of the word of truth, then I will put on your real identity in Me."

I saw a picture, and realized it was me—as a beggar. My whole body was covered in rags and filth. The filth was garbage and dirt and waste that had been there so long it had hardened into a thick leathery shell all over my body. This shell adhered to my skin like glue, penetrating the rags I was wearing as clothes.

"This is going to hurt some," Jesus said, "and your soul will be naked and exposed before Me, but it will be all right."

I nodded my assent.

He then reached out and pulled off a piece from my shoulder to my elbow on the front side of my arm. The skin underneath was very pink and soooo tender.

Jesus: "Tell Me the lie you believe about your weight."

Me: "I'm fat and it makes me ugly and undesirable. I'm huge and when people look at me they just see the fat lady. I'm gross."

Jesus (commanding tone): "NOW, tell Me the truth I have shown you about this." (With that, He put water on the exposed skin, and it healed and tanned.)

Me: "That I'm 20 lbs. overweight, that I have a sedentary lifestyle due to chronic pain and damaged joints. That I am making appropriate efforts by walking and watching what I eat. That my body type will NEVER be 5'5″ and 100 lbs. and that is okay with You because You made me to be this size."

Jesus: "What is another lie you believe?"

Me: "That I am worthless, of no value, that I benefit no one and that people would be better off without me. I am

refuse."

Jesus: "Now what is the truth I am showing you?"

Me: *tears* "That You, Lord God, wanted spiritual offspring, and I am that. You, God, benefit, You gain a daughter. That my kids gain because they needed a mom who could make it alone (with You) with five kids. That my students benefit because others have given up on them. That my pastor benefits because he is seeing someone walk out of sexual brokenness first hand. Sue benefits because she sees how my relationship with You works. The online community of women benefit because You speak through me to encourage them."

Abba: "You are Mine, My daughter, heiress, friend. Your purchase price is set, the holy blood of the son of God. I did not find that price too high. You are precious in My eyes."

So my friend writes me these healing scriptural truths she hears from the heart of God as they go walking, and then when she forgets them, I have the privilege of reminding her what He has said. It's like that old saying, "A friend is one who knows the song of your heart, and will sing it back to you when you forget the words."

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/zap_the_lies_hug_the_truth_part_2
on Sept. 15, 2009.

Swords of Blessing

This Father's Day weekend, my to-do list included personalizing almost three dozen wooden swords. A dear friend has a wonderful boys' summer camp called "Warrior Week" where men sow love and truth (along with a fair share of messy fun) into the souls of boys. I am privileged to use my calligraphy experience to letter each boy's name and a prayed-over character trait that is a blessing for each boy concluding his last year of Warrior Week. So I lettered blessings like "Justin the Magnanimous" and "David the Faithful" and "Cooper the Strong," under which was lettered "Dangerous for Good."



The camp leaders asked each boy's father to write a letter affirming his son, in his own handwriting, and walked them through what to say. Affirmation is a mystery for many dads, who never received it from their own fathers. "You can say whatever encouraging words you'd like to in your letter," the dads were told, "but we would like for you to at least include these four points:

1. I love you.
2. I am pleased with you.
3. I am for you/in your corner no matter what.
4. God has a plan for your life."

Wow. This is powerful stuff! I rejoice in the power of a father's words of affirmation because I have seen firsthand what a difference it makes in the lives of our sons. For all our gifts and strengths, women cannot imprint masculinity on the souls of boys and men. We can confirm what we see, but we

can't put it there. And a father's voice, whether spoken or verbal, can have a "weight of glory," to use C.S. Lewis' term, that lasts for an eternity.

While I'm thrilled for the boys who will be receiving this amazing blessing, I am also reveling in the truth that my heavenly Father delights to affirm each of us. He says, "I love you, I delight in you, I am for you, and I know the plans I have for your life!"

Even if we don't get a sword. . . at least we get the letter. It's bound in a Book.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/swords_of_blessing on June 23, 2009

Try Jesus???

The other day I saw a bumper sticker: "Try Jesus." *Try Jesus?* Whoever wrote and printed that soooo doesn't get it. They don't get Jesus, they don't get the Christian life, they don't get the relational aspect of biblical Christianity, they don't understand the Cross.

Try Jesus? We might as well print bumper stickers for plants that say "Try Light." Or for appliances: "Try Electricity." Or for pens: "Try Ink."

Try Jesus. The mentality of this thought permeates our culture, and even worse, it permeates many churches: Jesus as God's best self-help tool. Jesus as an addition to our lives, like vitamins or exercise.

The other day I was having a texting conversation with a young lady when I had reason to suggest that she was a functional atheist: claiming to love God but living and thinking in ways that are no different from an atheist. She said, “Sue, how can you say that? I have God in my life!”

I responded, “YOU have God in YOUR life. . . can you see how backwards that is?” God as an additive completely misses the point of why He made us, why He calls us to be reconciled to Himself. Not so we can “have us some God in our lives,” as they say in the South, but so that we can join the love-fest of Father, Son and Spirit in an ongoing dance of friendship, fellowship and celebration.

Recently, I’ve been thinking a lot about the Trinity and how the Three-Personed God wants us to join in on Their party. It has impacted my prayer life: now, when I pray for someone, I envision her in the middle of a divine group hug, surrounded by Father, Son and Spirit loving each other with the person caught up in the middle, getting “loved on” on all sides.

It’s so much bigger, so much better than the puny “Try Jesus.”

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/try_jesus
on Dec. 8, 2009.

Turn to Jesus, Tiger

Yesterday (Jan. 5, 2010), Fox News commentator and analyst Brit Hume *became* the news with his delightfully provocative comments about and to scandalized über-golfer Tiger Woods, which instantly showed up in places like an entertainment “news” show and in several YouTube videos.

> “Tiger Woods will recover as a golfer. Whether he can recover as a person, I think, is a very open question, and it’s a tragic situation. He’s lost his family; it’s not clear to me whether he’ll be able to have a relationship with his children, but the Tiger Woods that emerges, once the news value dies out of this scandal, the extent to which he can recover, it seems to me, depends on his faith. He’s said to be a Buddhist; I don’t think that faith offers the kind of forgiveness and redemption that is offered by the Christian faith. So my message to Tiger would be, ‘Tiger, turn to the Christian faith and you can make a total recovery and be a great example to the world.’”

I love it that someone spoke the plain, un-PC truth that Buddhism offers no solution to the weight of grief and shame that Tiger is carrying.

But Jesus does.

Our culture has become voracious in its appetite for celebrity and celebrity news, which is why a man’s unfortunate and self-indulgent choices to engage in numerous extramarital affairs gets much more attention that it deserves. This isn’t just about news that sells newspapers and magazines; this is a real life train wreck, with real life trauma and pain to a man and his family. And that’s why what we believe matters, because real life in a fallen world involves pain and suffering—some because of our own sinful choices, some because of others’ sinful choices, and some because pain and suffering is inextricably linked with a world hostile to God and intent on operating independently from Him.

Pain and suffering is not optional, but we have choices in how we interpret our experiences and how we respond. Brit Hume, himself a Christ-follower, knows that God can bring hope and change and redemption out of the most painful parts of life. He knows, because he is a man forgiven by God and others for his own sins, that there is freedom and relief in the

forgiveness made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Tiger needs to know.

Would you join me in praying for the man, every time you hear or see him mentioned in the media? Pray for grace to repent and not merely grieve that he got caught. Pray that he turns to Jesus.

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

Vain Imaginations

Not long ago, I attended a retreat at which a college student, freshly discovering his call to an intercessory prayer ministry, spent hours every night praying by name for everyone on the retreat. The last morning when I ran into him, he said, "Sue! As I was praying for you, I received a word from the Lord for you."

Uh-oh. I'd heard this before. And every time I had taken it to the Lord, asking if there were anything to it, the answer was no.

My defenses up, I smiled and said, "I'm listening." He got a very thoughtful look on his face and said, "I have to get it exactly right. . . OK, the words were, 'Guard against vain imaginations.'"

I thanked him for this and promised to immediately take it to the Lord. I had barely breathed, "Lord, is there anything to this?" when the lightbulb came on in my spirit and I knew

EXACTLY what this was about.

Oh yeah. This was from God, all right.

For about a year, my husband and I had been carrying around an open wound on our souls. We had been deeply hurt by several people we had trusted and loved, and it is not exaggeration to call it traumatic. Every single day of that time I had engaged in fantasy conversations in my head with the people who inflicted so much pain—except they weren't really so much conversations as monologues, with me lecturing on how badly they hurt us and how dishonoring their actions were to us and to God. . . yada yada yada.

Vain imaginations. Yep, this word was right on the money.

And God was so incredibly tender and grace-ful to merely exhort me to "guard against" them. Not, "You bad girl, you've been sinning against my sons in your mind. Repent!" Not, "And who are YOU to set yourself up as judge and jury? Look at your own fleshly heart, kiddo!"

Just, guard against them.

So I confessed my sin of indulging in self-vindicating fantasy, and resolved not to go there again. It didn't take long, of course, before my mind returned to what had become a familiar and comforting indulgence—an emotional "binkie." I stopped and said, "Well Lord, what am I supposed to do instead?" He didn't even have to say anything, just wait for me to connect the dots since I already knew. "Oh. I should be praying for them instead, huh?"

Okay. Fleshly sigh.

The biblical pattern for changing behaviors is to replace and displace the old with something new, and eventually the temptation to indulge in vain imaginations about this issue faded with disuse. It still pops up occasionally, but I know

what to do with it.

“Vain imaginations” is a good term for a lot of popular mental sin we so easily rationalize: engaging in internal arguments with people who aren’t even there, the lusting that accompanies sexual pornography for men or emotional pornography for women (steamy romance novels). We all spend time thinking about things that are empty, fruitless, and harmful to our spirits.

And we all need to guard against them.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/vain_imaginations on February 3, 2009.

Watching Transformation Happen

Last week I was privileged to attend the annual Exodus Conference along with a thousand people coming out of homosexuality, as well as some family members and people like myself who minister to them. Nothing has built my faith in the power and the loving heart of our life-changing God like my decade-long involvement in this kind of ministry.

I got to experience the power of answered prayer as I stood in worship with a divorced couple whom I have known online for several years but met at the conference. The husband had gone AWOL for the past year, choosing to pursue his feelings instead of his identity as a beloved child of His Father. He told me “something” kept drawing him back into the light: with

a smile, I told him that Jesus has His hook in his heart because he belongs to Jesus! And there he was, reconnecting with his God and his wife in worship and the beauty of repentance.

I got to hear the testimony of a beloved young woman, deeply wounded, whom I have watched soften and become so much like her Jesus over the past several years. As we were singing the words "Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow," she suddenly and violently experienced the memory of being a sexually abused five-year-old, sitting in the tub with blood everywhere. In the pain of that moment, the Father met her there with the same words He had spoken to Sy Rogers, that evening's speaker, about his sexual abuse: "Daddy sees, and Daddy's sorry." As His compassionate love washed over her, healing came.

And I got to see actual physical transformation in a dear lady with whom I have been walking out her repentance from lesbianism. As she has dared to believe that God really means everything in His word, especially about His love for her and how He sees her as a precious, beautiful, beloved daughter, change has come. She has gone to great lengths to drink in her Abba's love in intimate ways (and has taught me what that can look like in the process). Halfway through the week, she caught a glimpse of herself in a plate glass window and was amazed to realize that her posture had changed: she was walking more upright and confidently, assured that she was "a real person" (her words). At the end of the week, she said she believed the change in her was permanent and lasting. She finally feels solid, not hollow. That's the power of God's healing love.

And that's why it is such a joyful privilege for me to serve people whose thorn in the flesh is unwanted same-sex attractions. As their SSA drives them to Jesus, transformation happens.

And it is beautiful.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/watching-transformation-happen/ on July 21, 2009.

What I Wish I'd Heard Growing Up

I have the privilege of helping to moderate an online forum for women who struggle with same-sex attraction. One of the things that all the people in this ministry share is a history of hurtful relationships with their families, especially their same-sex parent. (With some of them, the major wound came from not connecting with their same-sex peers as they were growing up, but all of them have some level of difficulty with their parents.)

Someone started a discussion thread called "Things I Wish I'd Heard Growing Up." In addition to making my heart break, I thought this list, from a variety of ladies, was also instructive about what love sounds and looks like:

Ruth, you are beautiful. You mean the world to me.
You are important in my life.
You have a gift.
I love you.

We love you no matter what.
We accept you no matter what.
You are "perfect" in my eyes.
You are beautiful to me.

I love you just the way you are!

You are important
I want you

You are smart
I love you (from my dad)
God loves you just the way you are
You are special to me
You are worth everything to me
I'd do anything for you

We wanted you
You are important
Your feelings matter
I won't drink/do drugs anymore
Your dad loves you

You matter.

Something I wish I'd seen: my parents looking happy to see me.

What would YOU like to do?
I'm glad you're a girl and it's all right to be, 'cause it's safe.
I don't need to touch you. I can just love you.
You can fail and I'll still love you.

No matter what happens to you, we will still love you.

You don’t have to be perfect, we will still love you.
I believe you.
Don’t ever be afraid to tell or ask us anything. We won’t hate you or disbelieve you. We will do our best to help you. Even if we are afraid or nervous sometimes.

Something I wish I’d seen and heard: My parents praying with each other, depending on each other, being transparent with each other.

I never met my biological father; he died two months before I was supposed to meet him. I always wish I could have heard him say he loved me and was proud of me. I wish I could have hugged him.

I wish my mom would have said, “Hey, let’s spend some time together,” and not have it be because she wanted to lecture me on something.

You are worth my time.
Let me do that for you.
You have done a great job (and not followed by a “but…” that wipes out what was just said)

I wish I was told that I was lovable and likeable

And here are mine:

I’m sorry you had polio. Tell me about what it’s like to live with a handicap. Tell me what your heart feels about that.

You are not damaged goods, and you don’t have to strive to prove yourself acceptable. You already are.

Lord, these are the cries of so many of our hearts. Let us hear You affirming us, loving us, singing over us with joy, telling us that You delight in us!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_i_wish_id_heard_growing_up on April 14, 2009.

When We Forget What is True

Sue Bohlin blogs about a conversation with a friend struggling with temptation because she had forgotten what is true.

Sunday morning as I was getting ready for church, the phone rang. It was one of the women from the online support group I help moderate for those struggling with same-sex attraction.

"Hi, Em."

"Sue, can you talk?"

"I have two minutes."

"OK, then in two minutes tell me again why homosexuality is wrong? I'm at an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] retreat and there are so many women here I could really connect with and they keep turning out to be gay. And the leader is wonderful, but she's a former nun who is just so happy and content with her lesbian partner. I can't remember why I'm supposed to be fighting against what I want."

"Oh. Well, okay. . . [*Lord, help! Give me Your wisdom here!*]

Homosexuality is wrong because it's not God's plan. Because He created man and woman to be complementary to each other. Because two women can have a wonderful friendship but were never meant to meet each other's needs in that way. Because lesbianism is about trying to fill your heart by drawing from another woman's heart, but that one's as needy and empty as yours. Because two people of the same sex cannot possibly reflect the 'unity with diversity' of the mystery of the union of Christ and the Church, where two very different, very other beings are somehow one. Because it's two of the same, not two who are different, coming together as one. Because homosexuality is idolatrous—remember, it puts the other person, or what they give you, or the relationship on a pedestal where only God should be. Because when you give yourself to what God has called sin, it costs you the intimacy with Jesus that your soul craves."

"Right. Right. . . . But Sue, it doesn't feel like it. The others here seem so happy and content, and I'm miserable."

"I'm so sorry, Em. Fighting our flesh will absolutely make us miserable. You're doing the right thing. Don't give in! Ask Jesus for help! Press *hard* into Him!"

As I turned on the water for the shower, a scripture sprang into my head, full and insistent. I called her back.

"Got a scripture verse for you, Em. I think God wants you to grab onto this for all it's worth. 'There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death.' Proverbs 14:12. Got it?"

"Got it."

I am so proud of my friend for reaching out and asking to be reminded of what she knows is true but has forgotten why. What a great example of why we need community, why we need friends who also walk with Jesus, why God doesn't want us to be "Lone Ranger Christians." *Lord, help me continue to surround myself*

with people who will speak truth to me, especially when I am tempted to forget it!

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