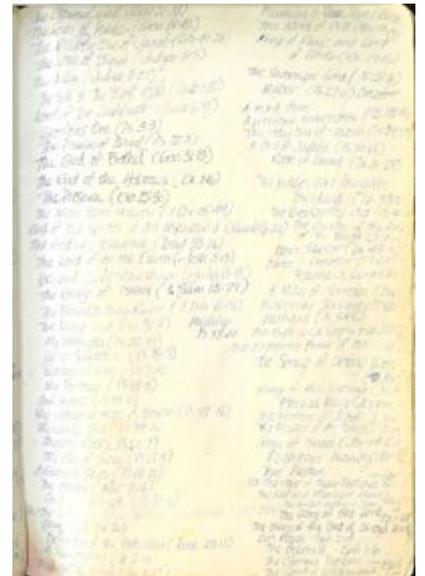


The Blank Pages in Our Bibles

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.

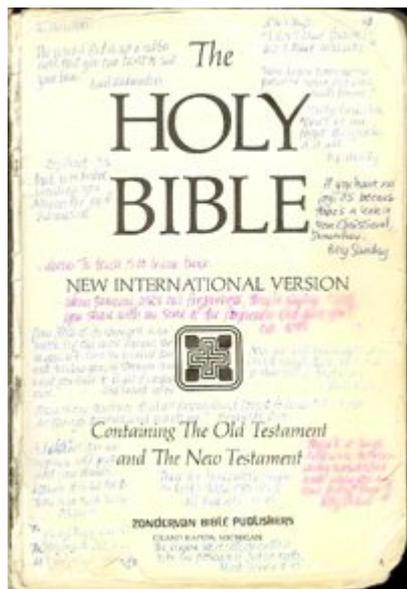
Record the results of a "treasure hunt." Over several years, as I read through the Bible, I drew a box around every name and title of God I found, and then wrote them in the back of my Bible. What a great way to worship Him now, to just read through His names to tell Him how wonderful and magnificent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

A New Look at Twilight, Different Conclusion

Last year (June 8, 2010) I [blogged about Twilight](#), connecting the dots between the supernatural vampire character of Edward Cullen and Jesus. I suggested that perhaps the reason millions of people so resonate with that character is that what they're really looking for is the glory and perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ, which Edward appears to manifest in various ways.

Since then, I have read all the books and done months of research. It's like pulling the camera focus back, back, back. . . . and finding some extremely disturbing details now in our field of vision.

I have now come to a very different conclusion.

I was stunned to learn about how the idea for *Twilight* came to the author, Stephenie Meyer. She tells this story:

“I woke up . . . from a very vivid dream. In my dream, two people were having an intense conversation in a meadow in the woods. One of these people was just your average girl. The other person was fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire. They were discussing the difficulties inherent in the facts that A) they were falling in love with each other while B) the vampire was particularly attracted to the scent of her blood, and was having a difficult time restraining himself from killing her immediately.”

“Fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire”? Consider what vampires are, in the vampire genre that arose in the 1800s: demon-possessed, undead, former human beings who suck blood from their victims to sustain themselves. A vampire is evil. And the vampire who came to Stephenie Meyer in a dream is not only supernaturally beautiful and sparkly, but when she awoke she was deeply in love with this being who virtually moved into her head, creating conversations for months that she typed out (obsessively, she says) until *Twilight* was written.

When I heard this part of the story, it gave me chills. 2 Corinthians 11:14 tells us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, which is a perfect description of the Edward Cullen character.

Then I learned that “Edward” came to Meyer in a second dream that frightened her. She said, “I had this dream that Edward actually showed up and told me that I got it all wrong and like he exists and everything but he couldn’t live off animals. . . and I kind of got the sense he was going to kill me. It was really terrifying and bizarrely different from every other time I’ve thought about his character.”

I believe that Stephenie Meyer’s dream was not your ordinary dream. The fact that “Edward” came to her in a second dream that terrified her (but she dismissed it and kept on writing), indicates this may have been a demonic visitation. I do

believe *Twilight* was demonically inspired.

But there's more.

All four books are permeated with the occult. The *Twilight* vampires all have various kinds of powers that don't come from God. They are supernaturally fast, supernaturally strong, able to read others' minds and control others' feelings. Some can tell the future, others can see things at great distances. These aspects of the occult are an important part of what makes *Twilight* so successful.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God strongly warns us not to have anything to do with the occult, which is part of the "domain of darkness" (Colossians 1:13). *Twilight* glorifies the occult, the very thing God calls detestable (Deuteronomy 18:9). This is reason enough for Christ-followers to stay away from it!

Last year I wondered if Edward was something of a Christ-figure. Now I think this character is a devious spiritual counterfeit to Jesus that has captured the hearts of millions of obsessed fans who are in love with a demonic "angel of light."

And they don't know it.

Note: My article on the Probe website is now online, with much more information than what's in this blog post: probe.org/twilight

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

Aprons and Glamour

August 26, 2008

At our son's rehearsal dinner, we invited our guests to come up to a podium for a time of addressing the happy couple. Kevin had asked for this since his now-wife's love language is words of affirmation. (But even if he hadn't, we would have planned that anyway. I'm a huge believer in helping people love and encourage each other publicly.) My husband, as the host, first welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming, then it was my turn.

I had donned a bright red, brand new apron for the occasion and spoke to my precious new daughter-in-love. "For 24 years I have been the number one woman in Kevin's life, but that ends now. Lauren, I have a gift for you. . ." I untied the apron and gathered the strings in my left hand, and from a pocket on the apron I pulled out a pair of scissors with the other. I snipped off the strings and handed them to Lauren.

Her mother exclaimed out loud, "She's cutting off the apron strings!" But Lauren's face was a mixture of bewilderment and confusion. She was clearly thinking, "What's going on?!??"

All the people in the room over 40 knew what I was doing: making a symbolic statement that I was no longer Mommy, and I would not be mothering my son the way I did up to that point in his life. But the under-40 crowd didn't have a clue. Many of them hadn't seen their mothers in an apron, and the expression "cutting off the apron strings" as a metaphor for letting a child go free into adulthood was foreign to them.

In my fantasy, it was going to be a sweet, tender and powerful moment. I was going to make an eloquent statement that would communicate to everyone there my faith in Kevin to be a full adult man and my promise to his bride that I would not interfere with the priorities of his affections.

It sure didn't turn out that way!

It was more like lamely having to explain the punch line of a joke.

Which is why we need to be aware of how culture shifts and changes, and that what is relevant to one generation may well be lost to the next. If we want to minister to women across all age ranges, we need to keep our eyes and ears open to what it's like to be 20, or 30, or 40, or beyond. My son and his wife live on a college campus where they are surrounded by youth culture, and they have already blessed me with perspective on songs I need to be aware of, and the ways college students are thinking and processing life.

Which is why, when *Glamour* magazine started arriving unordered at my house, I didn't toss it. I read it. Yikes!

And Lord have mercy.

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

Birthday Gifts FROM Jesus

Dec. 22, 2009

Christmas 2009 will forever be our most memorable, because of

the gifts we have received from God this year.

He once again showed His generous heart through the breathtaking gift of one of our donors (Ray and I raise support for our salaries at Probe Ministries) who wanted to see us in a larger home. He thought that the president of a ministry should be able to have people over without feeling cramped the moment they walk in the door. So, a week ago, we moved into a home two and half times bigger than the one we'd lived in for 25 years, the home in which I always assumed we'd live out our days.

As always, God's timing is exquisitely perfect, and He arranged for us to find this home—two blocks from Probe's new offices in the [Hope Center](#); my husband walked to work this morning!—just ten days after it went on the market. We closed in time to host three Christmas parties in this amazing house that is perfect for entertaining.

We moved in five days before the first party. That sounds absolutely nuts, but the Lord's Christmas gift had a "Part Two." One of the reasons He wants us to live in community is because He knows we need other people to "do life" with. And every day, women came over to help me unpack boxes, organize my kitchen and office, hang pictures, and decorate for Christmas. One day as I gave thanks for the lunch one especially productive and energetic friend and I were about to eat, I believe the Lord whispered to my heart, "Tammy is one of My Christmas gifts to you."

And *that* is what's really nuts. . . the idea that the God of the Universe, whose incarnation we celebrate at the core of all the "Xmas" hoopla, would give *me* a Christmas gift.

But that's what grace looks like. It looks like this amazing, lovely home we don't deserve. It looks like a friend giving up her vacation week to make sure my home was ready to bless others. It looks like women coming over to be my hands and

feet when post-polio has diminished my strength and energy reserves.

And it looks like God wrapping Himself in flesh to live among us. Happy Birthday, Lord Jesus!

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/birthday_gifts_from_jesus

Car Wrecks and God's Care

I received quite the birthday present from God this year.

My husband was in a car wreck on the way to speak at a church, and was taken by ambulance to the hospital where he was checked out because his chest hurt. A lot. (Airbags hit your chest at 200 mph!) No broken bones, just a scratch on the forehead, a lot of soreness, and a residual (but slowly subsiding) sense of fragility.

When I walked into the exam room, Ray murmured wryly, "Happy Birthday."

And it was, because my beloved husband was all right. God protected him from serious harm, and I am so thankful! That was a wonderful gift to me.

This was the second time I was called to the ER. Several years ago, Ray was "T-boned" on the driver's side by a car speeding through a red light. He received a concussion and nine months of soreness, but again nothing broken, no internal injuries. He still has no memory of being hit (or even being extracted from his totaled car or taken to the hospital by the paramedics).

There was a big “no accident” to the timing and location of that first wreck. He was hit three blocks from home, just a couple of months before our older son started basic training in the Air Force. My mama’s heart was of course concerned about what could happen to our son in the military during a war. I got the message loud and clear: “Ray wasn’t safe from danger three blocks from home, and I protected him. You can trust Me to protect Curt no matter where he is or what he’s doing.”

The Lord knew that both of Ray’s accidents were going to happen. Months before, I had been invited to speak at women’s retreat in Germany. I was excited about the invitation, but as I prayed about it, God gave me a resounding “NO!” in my spirit. I had no idea why He wouldn’t let me go, but obediently, regretfully declined. When Ray had his wreck three days before I would have been scheduled to fly to Europe, I was so grateful for God’s goodness in the timing. I was grateful for the “no.”

For years, I have been hanging into what is probably the most important truth I have ever learned in my life: ***a loving God is in control***. This year, for my birthday, God gave me the gift of saying, “Yes, I am, and let me show you once again how true that is.”

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/car_wrecks_and_god's_care
on March 16, 2010.