

The Blogger's Road Guide

Make your blog benefit your life, so you can love both



BLOGGER BEHAVE

Make your blog benefit your life, so you can love both.



LAURA BOOZ

Laura Booz

<http://www.LauraBooz.com>

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Introduction

Blogging is like a road-trip.

It takes us from here to there, with a different stop every day, and provides lots (and lots) of personal growth in between. Some days are full of photo ops, tales to tell, and surprising discoveries. Other days are marked by setbacks, embarrassing moments, and detours. Nonetheless, we each embark on the journey because we catch a glimpse of its potential to improve our skill-set and widen our sphere of influence. Not to mention, there's something about blogging that's just downright *fun*.

The most important thing about your blog is the brave traveler: *you*.

This includes all of the life-experiences that have shaped your powerful messages, quirky jokes, and snap-shots. It's the family and friends who surround and love you. It's the stuff you do that might never appear on the computer screen, but keeps your life rolling. At the end of the day, your blog is just a part of your bigger picture. It's an opportunity that you can learn to manage well, so that it benefits your life and offers a sweet destination.

From one traveler to another, here are the secrets that
have helped me to enjoy the journey.

This eBook is a compilation of what inspires me to
blog well and live well.

I hope it inspires *you*.

“A Cop, an English Teacher, and a Blogger Walked into a Bar...”*

The year I taught twelfth grade English, I felt like a cop whose beat was the part of town where all of the grammatical infidels hung out. I adored my students, but their confiscated love notes were bland, their cell phone texts were vacuous, and their handwriting was illegible. Their worst offense was that they didn't *love* what they wrote. They weren't proud of their writing.

I tried to inspire them by reading the poets of old who cherished their own writings as if they were their offspring. Needless to say, my students did not understand this sentiment. When it came to writing, they needed me to lay down the law.

So I set up my speed trap. At the start of each class, my students would write in their journals in response to prompts that I'd post on the board: What were their thoughts about the weekend? What impacted them about the last dozen pages of *Beowulf*? What was their opinion about the rise of socialism in America? Most days, I didn't collect their journals. But over time, their writing would get sloppy and careless. Their thoughts would be as thin as Abe Lincoln, and their paragraphs as short as Stuart Little. And that's when I'd pounce. I'd wait until they were writing empty words just to fill the page, and I'd say, "Oh, by the way, I'll be collecting your journals today."

Suddenly, an entire room of teenagers would gasp in unison, raise puppy-dog eyes of dismay, and sigh with the regret of being caught. They'd return to writing with a newfound commitment to put the brakes on their runaway blather and craft something worthy of their evil teacher's eyes. It was awesome.

I like to think that I built character into my paranoid students. In time, they began caring about the quality of *everything* they wrote - even if it might

not end up in my hands. And, I must say, they wrote some good stuff. At the end of the year, they stood in front of an assembly of parents and friends and proudly read excerpts from their compositions as if they *were* introducing their own beloved children. (What more could an English teacher want?) Knowing that I might read their work at any time, they took care with their writing in general and, over the course of the year, their writing improved immensely. I realized that by parking my proverbial “hidden cop car” in their literary lives, I encouraged them to behave, to take care of their words, and to love their work. After all, it only takes a handful of costly speeding tickets before a driver sits up straight and takes her driving seriously. (Don’t ask me how I know.)

I think about those students from time to time when I am blogging. Because, like them, I’m often tempted to yammer on - just to fill a post - rather than invest the energy and self-control to write something that I love. What’s worse is when I write those meaningless posts at the expense of my faith, health, and relationships. Sometimes I shoo my kids away in order to write a pointless post to fill the space, or I forgo a game of “Lost Cities” with my husband in order to write a hasty opinion piece that I’ll eventually delete anyway.

Then, there are times when I get under the weather, life gets too demanding, and I fail to organize my time so that I *can* blog. If I don’t write for days on end, I lose my oomph.

Trade-offs like these eventually make me resent blogging... *and* my real life responsibilities. I take no pleasure or pride in my blog when I’m not producing meaningful posts or when my blog is sucking the living-daylights out of my real life. When either my blog or my life is a mere obligation, something is out of whack and needs correction.

I have plenty of good intentions: I want to write things that are brilliant, inspiring, and tweet-worthy. It’s just that in the day-to-day upkeep of a blog, sometimes the content is delinquent. I want to use my time wisely so

that I spend most of my best time with my husband, children, and friends, but it's just so easy to waste my time - and theirs - on meaningless blogging. I want to honor my readers by offering edifying content, but sometimes my posts don't even deserve my reader's effort to click on the post. I *want* that enjoyable road-trip with the scenic vistas, exciting pit-stops, and unforgettable destination, but I won't enjoy myself or get to where I'm going if I don't respect the law of the land.

So, I've set up my own hidden cop cars in order to protect my family, my readers, and me. Respecting these boundaries has made blogging thoroughly enjoyable for almost 10 years. This eBook is a compilation of the lessons I've learn along the way. I hope these ideas help you as you embark on your bloggy road-trip.

First we'll figure out what you're driving and where you're heading. After that, we'll discuss the principles that will help you love your blog and love your life.

(* Just for the record, there is no closure to that joke. Yet. If you think of one, send it to me pronto. Even *I* am wondering what happens next...)

What are you driving?

Create a vision statement that will keep your blog on track...

I knew it must have been a spectacular conference. My husband came home from work that evening all charged up like a two-year-old fresh out of bed in the morning. He sat down to dinner, cut into his steak, and launched into his plan: our family was going to have a Family Vision Statement. It would be short and direct, and would help all of us - even our youngest members - to evaluate our daily choices and pursue God-honoring lives. The conference speaker had encouraged each business to develop a vision statement that would increase employee faithfulness and productivity; Ryan was determined to reap those benefits at home.

That's why, if you stopped over for dinner tonight, we might not be serving steak, but we'll be dishing out the Booz Family Vision by heart: "We exist to glorify God with our thoughts, words, actions, and resources." It has become a standard by which we measure our days. When we tuck the children in bed for the night, we ask specific questions about how we followed through on our vision statement that day. Our six-year-old might talk about how she's glad she helped her little sister feed the cat. Little Sister might talk about how she worked hard to be grateful for what was on her dinner plate. I might fess up to spending \$5 on a decorative dishtowel that we don't even need, while Ryan might explain that prayer really helped his stressful day go more smoothly.

As a wife and mother, I love having a Family Vision Statement. Knowing - and remembering - what is important to my husband and to me makes all of the difference in the world. I'm not spinning my wheels trying to please everybody in a million ways; instead, I know which direction we want to go, and I can help to move us there. With this vision statement in my back pocket, I can make daily decisions with confidence. For example, I read Scripture to the children at the Breakfast table so that our thoughts are filled with God's Word. I bite my tongue when I want to complain so that my

words are uplifting. I help the children make “welcome” cards for our new neighbors so that our actions are gracious. And I keep a cash-envelope system for our grocery budget so that I am responsible with our financial resources.

I believe in the vision that Ryan cast for our family, and we are a strong team in accomplishing our goals. Our children, too, seem to respond well to being a part of a team that has a purpose. They understand the vision, think seriously about their role in our family, and *love* Daddy’s humble stories about how he wanted to knock someone’s block off, but chose to be kind instead.

For the past five years, this vision statement has helped to regulate my blogging, too. I use it to evaluate what I write about, the amount of time I take, and the ambitions I have for my public platform.

My positive experience with a Family Vision Statement encouraged me to cast a *Blogging Vision Statement*. I figured, if a vision statement could unify and mobilize my family, it could do the same thing for my blog.

When I sat back and summarized the purpose of my blog in a brief, memorable statement, here’s what I came up with:

“I share real-life stories and beneficial words of wisdom to help other people enjoy life and worship Jesus Christ. I also use this space to keep in touch with my family and friends.”

So, if I’m suddenly over-dosing on give-aways or product reviews, I’ll know I’m working outside of my vision statement and possibly jeopardizing the value of my blog. The hope is that I embrace my vision statement so deeply that I think long and hard before breaking it.

If blogging is the road-trip, then a vision statement is your vehicle: it determines what you look like and how you roll. Be it sleek or clunky, zippy or groovy, your vision statement will remind you about who you are and who you are not. At the end of the day, you’ll know whether or not you

blogged according to your true identity and you won't get side-tracked by all of the good stuff out there that just doesn't advance your cause or look like *you*.

Take it on the road!

Make time to think deeply about your blog.

What do you need or want to write about?

Who is your intended audience?

What does your audience need or want from you?

Use these thoughts to craft the first draft of your blog's vision statement. Print it out and set it somewhere near your computer. For one week, read that vision statement every time you work on your blog. Does it still suit you? You can modify the statement from here.

Eventually, you will have developed a vision statement that will carry you – and your blog - through a great adventure.

Your Travel Log

Remember where you've been: it will guide where you're going...

I have a big, fat binder on my shelf filled with pages of someone's writing. On lazy summer evenings, I enjoy pulling it down and meandering through it for an hour or two. I must say, the writer is absolutely hilarious. I chuckle over the antics of her children and read passages aloud to my husband while he dries the last of the dinner dishes. We both agree: these are some *adorable kids* and this lady is a *great writer!* I underline meaningful passages, correct grammatical mistakes, and try to overlook the rotten chapters. Mostly, I like to follow along as the writer grows. I smile through the stories that she wrote from the mountaintops, and I take my time through the pieces she wrote in life's valleys. When I've read enough to reconnect with the writer - to recall her history and her dreams - I gently close the book and heave it back onto the shelf. Then, I sit down at the computer and continue writing that big, fat book one post at a time.

I began printing and keeping my blog posts when I realized that my blog is really a journal of my personal development. I don't often write in a diary these days, so my blog is my keepsake. I nestle so many personal thoughts in my posts; I find bits and pieces of my heart everywhere. I don't want it all to fly off into cyberspace and be lost forever, only to be uncovered with specific search words. **I want it at my fingertips, so I can page through it one day at a time, and see what a long, wonderful trip it's been.**

It would be a shame not to savor our blogs. After all, we work hard to develop our craft and make the most of the journey. When we go back and read posts from long ago, *we learn so much.*

This process bolsters our vision statement and helps us to fall in love - again - with what's important.

After browsing through your own blog, you'll notice a profound affect on your writing. You'll remember the bigger picture. Each written word and

uploaded photograph gains dignity and history as it attaches itself to the years that came before.

If blogging is the road-trip and a vision statement is the vehicle, regularly reviewed archives will be the scrapbook of your journey. It's the sweet part that causes you to look back and say, "*Man! I've come so far. That was good.*"

Take it on the road!

Set Online Stopwatch for 20 minutes to peruse your blog archives. Jot down what you observe from this experience...

Where are you going?

Write a list of expectations that will bring you to a worthwhile destination...

There's a large black trunk in our attic packed full of my childhood memoirs. On the top of that heap lies a Jamaican rag doll that a dear friend brought home for me from a missions trip. Stuffed down the sides of the trunk are intricately folded notes of all shapes and sizes with "For Laura's Eyes Only" written on top. (This was before texting.) Stacked in the middle is a collection of art and worksheets that I completed in elementary school. I recently noticed that most of this stack is from second grade. I must have been awfully proud of my accomplishments that year. Honestly, it *is* some good-looking work; I can see why I chose to preserve it for the admiring eyes of my children and grandchildren. (They're going to *love* my sketch of "Toosle"; an odd combination of a turtle and a moose.)

This stack of keepsakes indicates that there was something special about second grade. I think it was my teacher, Miss Cender. She was so neat and tidy, with short brown hair and polished spectacles that circled her big eyes just perfectly. She ran a tight ship and I loved every minute of it. She expected a lot from us seven-year-olds, and we rose to the occasion.

I blossomed that year because of Miss Cender's high expectations. My mental muscles became fit and flexible. My self-control improved. Most importantly, my personality unfolded as I discovered I could be witty, serious, playful, or thoughtful. Evidence of that growth is tucked in my treasure box, but its fruit affects my life to this day.

The power of high expectations changed my life forever.

It hasn't been accidental that I've applied the Miss Cender Principle to my blog. Just like my second-grade-self, my blog rises to the occasion when I keep my expectations high. This is extremely satisfying.

Truth be told, I didn't set off *writing down* my blogging expectations, but I've always had them in the forefront of my mind. From my first post until now, I've been a tough master to my blog; if it doesn't offer a sweet return, it gets bumped. Of course, on occasion, I've lost sight of my expectations and my blog has gotten demanding and fussy. That's when I've had to shake some sense into myself, remember the important things in life, and roar, "*I'M* the boss around here!"

At any rate, thanks to Miss Cender, I know now to keep my blog in line by asserting some high standards.

- I expect my blog to improve my writing skills, develop my voice, and make me a more honest person.
- I expect it to help me think twice about my opinions, and five times about my facts.
- I expect that the feedback from my family, friends, and enemies makes me confess, buck up, or move on.
- I expect my blog to influence, help, and encourage other people whom I'd never be able to influence otherwise.

The beauty is that, over time, my blog has met my expectations.

Receiving so many personally enriching treasures keeps me positive about blogging. It also keeps me in control of my blog, and not the other way around. If I didn't benefit from my blog on a regular basis, I sure hope I'd stop blogging.

If your blog is the road-trip, a vision statement is the vehicle, and a big fat binder is your scrapbook, then a list of wholesome expectations is your map. It will make your blog stay on the roads of your choosing and assure that you arrive at the destination of your dreams. When we say the word, our blogs should do what we want... and never the other way around.

Take it on the road!

Go on and jot down *your* high expectations for blogging. What do you really want out of your blog?

Make Your Blog Benefit Your Life

Blogging is my own personal venture. No one is holding a grade over my head or dishing out assignments to determine my understanding of symbolism. I can select my own topics, writing schedule, and deadlines. Why then, do I tend to regress as if I'm back in high school again, all hung-up on obligations? Why do I write about topics that drag me down? Why do I cancel my daily run, forget about dinner preparations, shoo my children away, ignore my husband, and fail to return phone calls when I'm working on my blog? And *why on earth* do I let this go on for days and days as I transform into a zombie and my family and friends clamber for my attention?

I'll tell you why.

Because I lose sight of the magnificence of life. I lose sight of my husband who works so hard, kisses like a dream, and saves the day over and over again. I lose sight of my children who giggle, and ride bikes, and crawl into our bed when the sun comes up. I lose sight of my friends who pray for me, swap child-raising tips, and share a PB & J while our kids run around in dress-ups. The truth is, my real life is worth infinitely more than my blog. Even the frustrating days that make me want to eat a pound of chocolate have a sweeter reward than surfing the Internet, updating affiliate links, and writing a post about the ideal peaceful home.

So, when my blog is running rampant and real life is on the back burner, I need to notice. And I need to change.

It's times like these when I remember a revelation I had in graduate school. This revelation dawned on me when I was about to tackle a 15-page paper for my "Women's Rhetoric" class. It was such a light-bulb-moment for me that I stared at the wall of my 3-square-foot office for thirty minutes without moving. I was about to spend hours writing a paper, so I wondered *why not write about something I care about in my real life?* I gnawed on

my pencil as I thought it over. *Is it too good to be true, or can I find a relevant topic that I am naturally interested in? Could I somehow craft all of my hard work to benefit me in the long run??*

After years of writing countless papers that ended up in the recycling bin for lack of any personal investment, this was such an epiphany. I felt like a woman fresh out of jail. I wanted to whoop, but I kept it down, since smart literary peers were typing frantically in the cubicles all around me.

Well, I can whoop now because that revelation has been *life changing*.

If I struggled through graduate school for that revelation alone, it was worth it. Because now I'm a blogger, and I live-and-breathe this principle:

My blog must benefit my real life.

That's why I currently blog about marriage, motherhood, homeschooling, and Bible study. Writing about the content of my life makes *me* - and not just my blog - *grow*.

I'm happiest when I deliberately choose topics that simultaneously improve my life. For example, when I post updates about our homeschooling curriculum, I'm encouraged to do some research, gain some wisdom, and consistently teach my children with the highest integrity. When I post child-raising tips and tricks, I'm encouraged to practice the tips in our own home and keep my ears open for more. When I write about our latest farming exploit, I gain insights into things like slug-control, corn fungus, and delicious salsa recipes.

My life inspires my blog, and my blog enriches my life.

Of course, this will look different for every writer in every season of life. You don't have to write about the actual goings-on of real life in order to benefit your real life. Perhaps you'd rather not write about your family, even though it is highly important to you, but you *do* want to write about cooking - one specific part of your real life. You love sharing your recipes

and foodie photos. If cooking is important to you, inspires your family, and blesses your neighbors, blog about cooking, my friend! Or write about theology, politics, frugal living, education, health, or fashion and knock it out of the park! But while you're blogging, consider how you can shape your content so that it simultaneously benefits your faith, your health, and your relationships. As you do, I think you'll notice less competition between blogging and everything else.

While I'm at it, I thought I might also encourage you to invest 90% of your blog in your strengths, and the other 10% in your weaknesses. This way, you won't be constantly forcing yourself to do what you *hate*, nor will you become stagnant. It's *your* blog and it should reflect your strengths. That's why your readers love you; there is something about *you* that they need. So give it freely! For example, if you're fantastic in front of the camera, do lots of vlogs. Your readers will adore your personal touch and will recommend your work to all kinds of friends. Spend most of your time and energy on your strengths and blessing the world with the abilities God has given you. Then, every so often, explore how you can improve upon your weaknesses. For example, if you struggle with writing openly and honestly, challenge yourself to write one transparent post every couple of months. You may cringe when you hit "publish", but in time you will grow in this area as you gain experience, and receive both supportive and critical comments.

Take it on the road!

Invest thirty minutes today to let yourself relish the beauty of your real life. Write down every topic that is important to you during this season of life. Then brainstorm how your blog can enrich you in these areas, post after post.

Live it Out, First

When we moved to our farm, the first thing we set up was our composting system. We wanted some nice, rich soil and we were going to use our own kitchen scraps to get it. We invested in the compost bins that rotate around in a circle so wimps like me don't have to hover over a stinky pile of rotting banana peels and stir them with a shovel. (For those of you who don't know much about composting: the secret to turning a banana peel into a half-cup of soil is *action*, my friend. When that peel snuggles up to some dead leaves and gets tossed around under the hot summer sun, it surrenders to the decay and transforms into a handful of garden compost. It's quite beautiful, really, that the daily shells, seeds, and shucks from our menu become the life-giving component of next year's vegetable garden.)

During our first summer on the farm, we collected our kitchen scraps in a large bowl on our countertop and dumped them in the compost bin every night, spinning it a couple of times to mix things up. By August, the fruit flies were coming in droves, feasting on the open bowl of egg shells, nectarine pits, and tea bags. It was gross. Nonetheless, we were committed to composting and I needed to find a solution. I told my husband that I would be a much happier composter if I had a cute little counter-top pail *with a deodorizing lid*. So, I now have a shiny composting pail sitting next to my sink instead of an open bowl of rotting scraps. The best thing about the pail is that the lid keeps the flies away and the smell contained. The worst thing about the pail is that the lid helps me to forget all about the slops I tossed in there yesterday and the day before that. So the scraps just sit there and rot.

Recently, after ignoring the pail for several days (or was it weeks?), I finally decided to face the monster and empty the pail outside. I opened the shiny compost pail and gagged at the sludgy mass of webby white mold. It was in such bad shape, I couldn't even dump it in the compost bin. Instead, I held my breath and tossed it into a weed pile on the farthest border of our

property. Kitchen scraps only become useful in the garden if they are regularly mixed around in a compost bin in the sun.

I want my blog to be like a nice helping of compost. I want it to encourage and fuel *life*. I want each post to take root in my readers' hearts and make them strong, vibrant people. But, like my forgotten pail of scraps, sometimes even the best intentions produce no life. When I first started blogging, I used my online space as a soapbox, a place to introduce concepts and theologies that I was exploring, and a place to preach. One of my more memorable posts solved - once and for all - the sensitive controversy over birth control. Or so I thought. As it turns out, other people have agonized over this issue just as much as I have and they've come to different conclusions. My theorizing caused strife amongst my readers and within myself. Over time, I discovered that although these posts were relieving to *write*, they were not beneficial to my readers, or to myself in the long run. Sure, my readers might feel a pang of guilt as they read my opinionated post, but I was burdening them with a standard that even *I* wasn't meeting. Would my hours of research and writing result in better living? Would my work result in a better understanding of Jesus Christ? Would it result in a luxurious bath of *grace*? Decidedly not. In fact, the posts I wrote kind of stank and failed to produce fruit. Without the energy of real life to mix them around, my convictions were like a pail of rotting fruit.

After I got a whiff of that moldy mess, I realized that some things needed to change. Sure, I still wanted to influence my readers to live rightly before God and to enjoy His friendship, but I didn't want to *preach* about it any more. So, I sat back, tucked a pencil behind my ear, and thought about my dilemma.

Here's what I came up with: instead of hashing out *theory*, I'd just blog about how my life looks with that conviction on. So, if my husband and I happen to opt out of birth control, I'll replace my diatribes with lots of colorful posts about the babies we welcome into our home. I'll be honest

about the trials and triumphs: the projectile vomiting and the Crayola love-
notes, the messy floors and the sweet snuggles. Then, if any of my readers
are wondering if they could handle a third child, they could consider our
little story as they make their personal decision. That way, I won't be
ostracizing, judging, or burdening my readers. Instead, I'll be enjoying "the
real me" posts as I privately aim to live out my faith in my daily decisions,
and write about how these convictions affect my reality.

So, when I share a story like the tragedy of losing our prenatal 20-week old
baby, a precious reader might be encouraged to say "no" to a tempting
abortion. I don't have to stay up late composing a five-point argument
against abortion, I just need to say, "We loved her. We named her Juliette.
Even at 20-weeks gestation, she already had her great-grandmother's chin."
To write life-giving messages, I need to let my beliefs spin around and
bump up against humanity for a while. I'm much happier when I blog like
that because I grow as a person, and I notice from my reader's comments
that they grow, too.

The stories of our lives are more powerful than our theories. When we
write about the specific and personal application of my convictions -
instead of about the convictions themselves - we bear fruit that will last.

Take it on the road!

List the Top 10 Theories or Convictions that you'd blog about.

Then, jot down *how* you came to believe those theories or convictions.

What happened in your life to convince you that these things are worth sharing with other people? When you live according to these convictions, what does your life look like?

As you write about the development and outworking of your convictions, I bet you'll see some great blog posts developing... blog posts about real life.

Include Your Family

I'm *still* embarrassed about this story, but I'll tell it anyway. A year ago, my daughter, Vivienne and I got into making short cooking vlogs together. Viv would demonstrate simple recipes for other little girls, so that they could start helping out in the kitchen. It was super fun because, in the process, Viv learned how to make the recipes *and* present a project step-by-step. We had a hoot working together and we made lots of people happy. (To this day, I go to baby showers and meet someone's Great Aunt Hilda who saw a Vivi Vlog and just loved it!)

Anyway, one particular vlog become a favorite amongst our small following of viewers: Vivienne making Tuna Fish Salad. People loved how she recommended that the girls buy a vegetable chopper from Wal-Mart, and how she accidentally dropped tuna blobs on the counter and confided with the camera, "That's okay. If you make a mess, your mom can clean it up." It was a hit.

Now, for the story's sake, it's important to know that Vivienne made the tuna fish with Vegenaïse, our family's favorite alternative to mayonnaïse. After posting the vlog, I watched the numbers of viewers grow and grow, and thought maybe we could make a buck or two. (Shameful, I know.) I was new to the concept of advertising, but I decided to use this opportunity to pursue a possible sponsor. I emailed Follow Your Heart, the company that makes Vegenaïse, and asked if they wanted to use the video in some way for advertising. A representative emailed back explaining that they thought the video was adorable, but couldn't use it to advertise the product. She explained that Follow Your Heart is a *vegan* company and can't promote its product being mixed with meat. I blushed in front of my inbox. How in the world did I miss that?! With a name like "Vegenaïse", they aren't exactly *hiding* that fact. I apologized all over the place, and the rep freely forgave my over-sight. She sent me a handful of incredible coupons

and a vegan Vegenaïse recipe book (in case we wanted to make another cooking vlog).

Once my cheeks stopped burning from embarrassment, I shared the news with my family at the dinner table. We all got a good laugh out of my blunder. As my husband hooted and my daughters asked “What’s a *vegan?*”, I realized that this was what makes blogging so worthwhile. I was working on a project with my daughter, asking my hubby for editing advice, and sharing the ups and downs with the people I love the most.

By inviting them into my blog, I infinitely increased its value.

Somehow, it changed the way I look at my blog, once and for all. We were in it together. I could confide in them about my important posts, ask their advice on sensitive topics, and laugh with them over the comments that would otherwise send me to bed bawling. We bloggers need these flesh-and-blood relationships to tether us to the earth. When we invite our families into our blogs, we end up loving both better. As it turns out, I didn’t need to make a buck from advertisers; I was already rich.

Take it on the road!

Today, consider how you can include the people closest to you in your blog work.

Can you ask someone for advice?

Can you work on a post with a friend?

Can you send a draft to your husband for editing?

Can you send an oldie-but-goodie to a friend simply to share a good memory?

Budget Your Blogging Time

Let's face it: blogging requires lots of time. When I began blogging at a rate of three casual posts per week for a handful of readers, I was investing a couple of hours a week. Now that I'm sharing more complex ideas with more readers, I'm investing more time. All the while, little children need me, piles of laundry need me, a handsome man needs me, and 17 chickens need me. If I let my blog take all of my time, it seems as if the children, laundry, handsome man, and chickens freak out. And when they do, there's always good reason.

I'm convinced that if we don't budget our blogging time, it will consume far more of our lives than we want it to. After all, the possibilities online are endless, so if we don't create deliberate limits, we will zip through life, missing all of the sweet spots along the way.

I, for one, have spent far too many hours online. I've been sucked into the social media vortex, and have been startled by how quickly an hour or two has flown by. I've ignored my children, opted out of special family times, and gone to bed way too late. Our home operates much more smoothly when I keep my screen time on a strict budget. Why, even now, I am trying to work out a new blogging budget so that I can write this eBook, record some vlogs, and update my blog without letting the Internet take over my life. And I better get it all ironed out soon, because every time I sit down for my golden "one hour of online work a day", most of it gets used up on emails and blog posts, all the while this fantastic book is just waiting to be written. My children enjoy their one-hour quiet time, but once I start squeezing in "just one more paragraph" they seem to turn into something like over-cooked noodles wriggling deliriously on the floor.

How much time do we really want to be spending with our computers each day? Better yet, how much living could we gain by budgeting our blogging time? Regardless of who we are and what we do with our blogs, we must

work efficiently and keep a close eye on the clock in order to get the most out of our work.

I've noticed some commonalities amongst women who are happy and successful bloggers.

Create Office Hours.

First, they help their families understand and appreciate their blogs by defining specific “office hours” during which they crank out blog posts, develop the business aspect of their blogs, and complete other online work. Because they commit to specific office hours, these women seem to overcome the temptation to escape to the computer at other times. They therefore don't seem to feel guilty or hard-pressed when they do sit down to work. I like this because it honors the craft of blogging. After all, we are writers and artists; it's *good* for us to invest an appropriate amount of time into our work. Setting aside time to craft a meaty paragraph or two helps.

Schedule multiple posts ahead of time.

Also, these women write and schedule posts up to two weeks in advance. I've tried this on for size, and I love it. I'm not tempted to cram a blog post in every night when I could be spending time with my husband or enjoying a hobby. It helps me to be more organized, and to shape my posts around weekly themes. (It also gives me a couple of days to tweak anything I've written before it goes **live**.)

Acknowledge your personal capacity.

Successful and happy bloggers ask themselves tough, but necessary questions like...

- Can I afford all of the time that I give to my blog?
- Does my blog require or deserve all of the time I give it?

Some women have lots of time to invest in blogging and can freely create online wonders. Some women *have* to invest lots of time into blogging because it's paying for their mortgages or grocery bills. Others must manage a blog ministry or a public service upon which thousands of readers

rely. Still others enjoy blogging, but don't make an income or provide regular ministry work.

I think I'm in the last group. Where are you?

At this point, blogging is my craft and outlet, often offered as ministry to my small group of readers. Though my blog is important to me, it is unnecessary to my family's basic, every day needs. I have significant time-constraints, human resource constraints, and many other responsibilities that cannot be over-shadowed by blogging. I love to write, but I can't justify spending hours upon hours on blogging. With four homeschooled children and a desire to minister in my community, I can afford about one hour of blogging a day. This determines the amount of work I expect from myself. When I sit down to blog, I try to focus and type fast.

There are women who seem to be able to meet all of my responsibilities, keep an Etsy shop, make organic yogurt, redecorate seasonally, sew life-size dolls out of felt, and still dedicate a couple of hours a day to a thriving blog business. These women rock, but even *they* must keep a sharp eye on the clock. Of course, no one can do it *all*, but some women really can do more than others.

It's important to be completely honest about what our blogs are and what they aren't, according to our talents and circumstances. Then, we've got to wisely give them the time they truly deserve... and no more.

Acknowledge your personal writing speed.

If you're a speedy writer who can craft a beautiful post with affiliate links and photographs in fifteen minutes, keep on, my friend. This is a valuable blogging quality. Enjoy it! And enjoy the time you are saving by investing it in your real life.

If you're a slow writer who searches for just the right word and edits furiously back-and-forth and over-and-back again, I commend you for caring about your craft. Aim to pick up the pace a bit, but don't give up!

The best thing you can do is to create reasonable expectations that match your abilities, recognize that you are a slow writer, and develop strategies that will help you succeed.

For example, it may help to think about your posts during down time. I've increased my writing efficiency by thinking about my blog posts during the day when I'm doing the dishes or driving. By the time I sit down to write a post, it has simmered in my crock-pot brain for at least a day (if not 20 years) and is ready to be served! I keep a notebook nearby and jot down ideas and phrases that will make writing easier when I sit down at the computer.

Also, consider writing shorter posts. Short posts are easier to read, write, and remember. There have been times when I've poured an hour or two into writing an epic post, only to realize that I could have divided it up into a week's worth of posts. Better yet, the shorter segments increase the chances that my readers will enjoy all of my thoughts from start to finish.

Finally, challenge yourself to stop editing at the appropriate time. I spend way too much time editing my posts. After a while, we picky editors need to be content with our writing and just click "Publish". Then, we need to do one quick read-through, and walk away. Whether our posts solicit tens, hundreds, or thousands of page-views, very few readers will be as critical as we are. Most readers will overlook or forget our mistakes and they'll forgive our occasional grammatical errors. I've discovered that the time I invest in editing can quickly transition from "profitable" to "problem" if I don't draw the line.

Budget your blogging time.

At a recent blogging conference, I met a woman who owns and writes a popular and successful "money saving" blogs. She is married, has three young children whom she home-schools, and has a vibrant ministry. Because of these demanding responsibilities, she has developed a strict schedule for herself. She budgets four hours a day for her computer work. She works efficiently to get all of her work done in that timeframe. (Quite honestly, I don't know how she gets everything done in only four hours, but

she's a machine.) Because her time is limited, she portions out all of the things that she wants to do on the computer: respond to emails, contact advertisers, create vlogs, upload photos, and write new blog posts. She recommends using Online Stopwatch to budget the amount of time we invest in each task. The stopwatch is a fantastic source of accountability. I took her advice, and it's true: if I portion 15 minutes for email correspondence and 30 minutes for writing, the stopwatch lets me know how I'm doing and it encourages me to use my time wisely.

If you love to blog and you love your life, you might have to make tough choices when it comes to your time online. I've had to. When we kept the computer downstairs, I was way too tempted to sit down at the screen at all the wrong times. So I had to turn it off unless I was working at a scheduled time. Then, we moved the computer upstairs, where it's not as tempting. (Out of sight, out of mind). This allows me to keep the computer turned on throughout the day for the occasional email, quick-fix recipe, or research question. Of course, now that I have a smartphone, I need to handle that wisely, too. During the day, I usually keep it tucked away in its charging station so I don't get distracted from my job as a homeschooling mother.

I don't want to be checking my phone or computer every 10 minutes, or even every hour. I want to be present when I'm at home with my husband and children; I want to be present when I'm spending time with friends; I want to be present at church, in nature, and when I have the opportunity to pray. The opportunity to indulge online is always available, but my budget boundaries help me to focus on the work I want to do, when I want to do it.

So, if you want to enjoy the blogging road trip of a lifetime (and you do), choose the amount of time you will give to your blog and other online endeavors.

Take it on the road!

Today, you'll create the first draft of your Blog Budget.

What do you need or want to accomplish through your blog on a weekly basis?

How many posts do you need or want to write each week?

How much time can you allot to accomplishing these goals?

When can you make the time to blog so that it will best complement your real life?

Try this budget for one week. Then, evaluate how it went. Did you accomplish the work you expected? Do you need to evaluate your expectations?

Aim to budget your blog week, after week. You'll find a rhythm and will be satisfied with your discipline.

Quit, if You Must

Travel back in time with me to my college days, when I was delighted to be the musical director for our campus' only female a cappella group. Our concerts were always sold out, and we loved our work. Each year, dozens of starry-eyed freshmen auditioned while only two or three were accepted. We were a tightly knit group of talented young women who embraced each new member as if she were family. So, you can imagine, once a girl was accepted, she considered it a privilege and was *committed*. However, our illusion of the *a capella dream* burst one Thursday evening when Claire, a junior at the time, blurted out that she quit.

Our funky, book-loving, outdoorsy alto, just *quit!* This was unheard of. There was more to the shock as she explained that she was quitting *everything*: her promising business major, her sorority, the Christian club, the campus newspaper, everything. We stared at her in disbelief, as we collectively thought, *She's crazy!*

Claire took a deep breath and explained that she needed to listen to God without the static of a packed agenda and obligations.

She said she was quitting many of the *good* things that were keeping her from the *best* thing.

Our little musical group was sobered that evening.

As Claire graciously answered our questions, I got the feeling that she had entered another universe. Like Lucy Pevensie walking past the fur coats into the magical world of Narnian snow, Claire had somehow stepped out of our competitive collegiate environment into a world where she was free to slow time down, to say “no” whenever she needed to. She was not just *resisting* the status quo; she was *living without it entirely*.

In time, her life became beautifully *quiet*. I'd stop by her apartment on my way to a meeting (juggling a stack of binders and a cardboard cup of mocha latte in hand), and she'd be sitting on the couch, a Bible on her lap, smiling up at me. She was available to spend the rest of the evening sharing what she had been learning. That is, if I didn't have to run off to a meeting...

Though I too, at times, felt a tug at my heart to pursue a quieter lifestyle, my brain was so deeply ingrained with the virtues of "Commitment!" "Accomplishment!" and "Approval!" I could not entertain the possibility of quitting anything – let alone *everything*. The way I figured it, if God needed my time or attention, He would just have to keep up with me or shout louder to compete with my exhilarating schedule.

Several years marched by as I reveled in accomplishments, checked things off my extensive "to-do" lists, worked hard to please people and achieve the American Dream. As the clamor of my life grew increasingly louder, the only thing that seemed to grow fainter was God's voice.

Eventually I got married and had a baby. I tried enthusiastically to pull these two new people into my spinning, selfish lifestyle, but before I knew it, we crashed into a marital crisis so tragic that it would have ended in a divorce if God hadn't graciously reordered our lives for us.

And that's when *we quit*.

Everything.

We quit staying up late, going to bed at different times, watching television, bringing in two incomes, and trying to publish a book that just wasn't happening. We quit competing with one other, and using the same old murderous words in every argument. We quit prioritizing bosses, friends, extended family, and strangers over each other. We quit not talking to each other, not knowing what the other one was looking at on the Internet, not reading aloud in the evenings, and not enjoying each other's company. We quit not holding each other and saying, "thank you".

And life. slowed. down.

And got wonderfully quiet.

And very, very small.

There is a time and place for the slow, quiet life, and it worked wonders for us in that season of life. It gave us time to build a kind of “front porch” around our home – you know, like the lemonade-and-creaky-swing front porches that went extinct with the Waltons – on which we sat in the evenings, just rocking back and forth, appreciating the fruits of our labor, the glories of creation, and the beautiful humans who lived right there with us in our home.

I can’t begin to know all that God did to restructure our lives, but I do know that He had to tear down ugly addictions that had locked me into a distracted lifestyle. The demolition project looked something like this: in order to respect my husband, I had to get rid of selfishness, pride, and unhealthy independence. In order to stay home with our children, I had to surrender my love of accomplishment, compensation, and approval. In order to love God truly, I had to sacrifice my aspirations of “making it big for God”, because all He truly desires is for me to love mercy, do justly, and walk humbly by His side. At times, the sacrifices *hurt*: I turned down a book offer, speaking opportunities, teaching positions, friendships, and a favorite TV series. But the painful rebuilding process was all worthwhile because through it, God gave us the freedom to appreciate the work He asks us to do and the courage to decline anything else.

We never want to lose what we learned from that experience. Ten years later, we still spend lots of time and attention on God himself and our family, believing that we’ll never regret the investment. These days, we’re figuring out how to protect the simplicity while giving ourselves fully to the ministry work that God wants us to do. We’ve taken on a few more commitments, but we try to do most things *together*, praying, and working side by side. We are learning what it means to be busy like Jesus was: with

an eagerness to serve others, but with a quiet, devoted love for God. Honestly, we'll probably spend the rest of our lives learning how to do this the right way. That's okay: it's worth the rigorous learning curve.

I guess I could say that over these past few years, God has broken down my heart – only to rebuild me through His Word - so that I could write to you today, utterly convinced that our walk with God and our Christian love for others is worth all of our attention for the rest of our lives. If my sphere of influence only extends beyond the walls of our home by way of my well-respected husband, our well-loved children, and our cared-for neighbors, I will have lived a fulfilling life. Because here's the mystery that I am counting on: by walking away from a busy, accomplishment-oriented society into a quiet world of deep relationships, service, and home-life, I will establish a far-reaching legacy that extends throughout many generations. I don't want this conviction to fade from my daily choices. So, if I must quit or drastically change my blog in order to protect my relationship with God, I hope I will. At the same time, if I need to grow my blog and increase my influence in order to obey God, I hope I will.

I guess that's the essence of a happy blogger: one who surrenders her time and abilities to the posts that *God* is writing. It's His story, anyway, and for one sweet moment, we get to be the scribes who record His marvelous works.

Take it on the road!

Respond to this chapter in writing. What impacted you? What are your first thoughts and feelings?

Be the Real You

The well-loved musician David Crowder wrote a one-page article for a Christian magazine that I will never forget. It taught me about the power of transparency. I'll tell you the gist of the story, but first you need to know a couple of things: David Crowder has a super-long dark-brown goatee. He's skinny, close to seven feet tall, and wears dark-rimmed glasses. There. I think that is enough information for you to enjoy my retelling.

In the article, Crowder wrote that his wife wanted the two of them to go to a couple's spa. She begged for years while Crowder put his unmanicured foot down and refused. But one day, something in him changed and he agreed to go. When they walked into the spa, he was surprised to be whisked off in the opposite direction from his wife. Understandably, he had assumed that they'd be together the whole time. But that was not to be. The attendant showed Crowder the men's locker room and left him there as if he were a spa-going expert. He self-consciously looked around, got undressed, wrapped a towel around his waist, and entered into an enormous room with waterfalls and pools of all shapes and sizes. He was the only one there, and he was totally out of his element. He had no idea what he was supposed to do. Eventually, he decided to try out one of the lap pools. His strategy was to place his towel at one end of the pool, run quickly to the other end, and swim down to meet his towel. So, he dropped his towel at one end of the pool, and just as he arrived (buck-naked) at the other end, he stepped in only to discover that it was an ankle-deep wading pool - not a lap pool at all. At that very moment, the locker door opened and a large naked man walked into the room. David Crowder's initial reaction to this surprising company, was to squat down quickly. So there he was, crouching in a few inches of water, all folded up like a naked goateed accordion, watching the other man walk about with all of the confidence in the world. The naked man stretched lazily and stood under a waterfall, enjoying every uninhibited moment.

Crowder explained that seeing this man helped him to lighten up a little. He suddenly felt *permission* to be there; he realized that it was appropriate to be naked, and okay to enjoy the spa and relax a little.

Believe it or not, this hilarious scene made for a demonstration of Crowder's big point: that sometimes we need the example of other people to embrace the spiritual nakedness that is required in wholehearted worship of God. When we see other people singing from their hearts, we are encouraged to do the same. When we see other people lifting holy hands in adoration, we feel permission to do the same.

We need one another's example in order to feel comfortable in our own skin.

I return to that story time and time again because it so unforgettably depicts the power of another person's example. When someone is transparent in any aspect of life, I am more encouraged to be transparent, too. Scripture is *packed* with examples of "naked" people who have removed their masks of perfection, their robes of self-righteousness, and their garments of self-reliance in order to enjoy transparency before God. Think about Paul's honesty about his sinful past; King David's open repentance before God; and Mary Magdalene's unabashed gratitude to Christ. These saints have encouraged me to get real about my own sinful past, to repent, and to worship God wholeheartedly. But they are not alone in their legacy. There are people in my own life - alive right now - who encourage me in the same way... many of them are bloggers who have written about the depths of their sin and the redemption of their Savior.

Like Paul, David, and Mary, these modern-day saints have squandered all of their pride in order to proclaim God's power to forgive all of our sins, heal all of our diseases, and redeem our lives from the pit.

Their stories strengthen people who are in the throes of temptation; they stand next to the tortured sinner and say, "God *will* provide a way out for you. Here is the wisdom I have gained from being reconciled to

God through Christ. I'll bare it all in order to show you the way; in order to spare you some of the pain I have felt."

Like the Apostle Paul says, they comfort others with the comfort they have received. God then uses it to transform lives and bring Himself glory!

In the light of such courageous examples, I have embraced this lifestyle of transparency. Over the past fifteen years, I've tried to become an open book, full of both shameful and redemptive chapters. I've written about foolish choices, being mistreated, parenting struggles, and marital strife. Sometimes I've done transparency right; other times I've botched it up. As any "open book" knows, being an "open book" requires a ton of wisdom.

There is a "right" and "wrong" way to be transparent.

There's a beautiful "naked" and there's an offensive "naked".

I know both from personal experience.

Although I am not a transparency expert, I've come a long way.

Over the years, I've learned five important things that a writer must consider before joining the ranks of naked saints. Whenever you want to write a transparent story, simply take it through this filter to make sure it is as beneficial and un-regrettable as possible.

The Five Point Filter

Because I'm currently in the kindergarten business at home, I've come up with an easy way to remember these five guidelines. To get started, all you have to do is hold your left hand up in a fist and read along.

I. Write from a whole, healed heart.

(Point your thumb at yourself. It's all got to start with you.)

The expression, "Don't air your dirty laundry" has stuck around so long because it's just good advice. A story that is fraught with bitterness,

unconfessed sin, and selfishness STINKS. It usually reeks of gossip, divisiveness, and slander. Sure, when we are in the midst of a hurtful story, we can hash things out with our close, godly friends, but we should not yet write for the public. There is a time to be silent, and this is it. When we wait until God has disciplined our sin, refreshed our hearts, and restored our relationships, we have a much more powerful story to tell.

That being said, it is often good and helpful to write in the midst of tragedy. Tragedy is *not* dirty laundry. After all, when we walk through life's valleys, we need many people surrounding us with prayer and encouragement. Over the years, my blog readers have bolstered me with such kindness and support whenever I've written about current hardships. I want my readers to know about my trials as well as my triumphs so that they can know the real me and join me in my journey. But I don't want them to read either angry missives about the past. I don't want to rant about bloggers who make me jealous. I don't want to post self-righteous reports about my best friend's besetting sin.

In order to tell good stories, we must distinguish between circumstantial tragedy and sinful relational struggles; we need to be transparent in the former and discrete in the latter.

II. Write to glorify and thank God.

(Point your index finger upwards.)

I am thirty-seven years old. I lie in bed at night and think about how close I am to forty. Then I think about how, once I'm forty, fifty is going to come in a blink. In no time, I'll check off sixty, seventy, eighty and *maybe* ninety if God wrote a lot of days in His book. These thoughts sober me. Though the crickets are singing outside and the summer thunder is rolling in the distance, the night gets quiet and the air feels still. I've got a lot of loving and living to do in a very short amount of time. I stare at the ceiling and think about our brief lives. I think about how this side of Heaven - this

particular opportunity to bring God's message of reconciliation to a broken world - is a brief moment that happens only once.

That's why you and I must blog with all of our might to please God. We also glorify God through our stories when we celebrate *Him* - not ourselves. Here's what this looks like in real time. Let's say my six-year-old daughter wrote an emotional opinion piece for the local newspaper describing how I am the best mother in the world. (She didn't, but I wouldn't stop her if she did.) Of course, I would want to share this with my readers; they know how seriously I take my job as a mother, and they'd be delighted with the sweet story on my behalf. And so, a cute little post sharing this awesome moment with my readers would be fine. But imagine how stunning it would become if I imitated her writing. What if I realized that her article is a gift from God? After all, He is the One who puts us in families and teaches us how to honor one another. Imagine how powerful my transparent story would become if I, instead, imitated my daughter and publicly honored *my Heavenly Father*; if I said thank you for the awesome experience and the sweetness of being loved far beyond what I deserve.

Then, my readers and I would praise God instead of me... and I'm a much happier blogger when that happens. Aren't we all?

You and I will be head-over-heels for blogging when we use our brief moments on earth to write about God's glorious gifts and generosity. Even our most mundane posts about daily living will shine like stars in the dark void of cyberspace if they are full of gratitude and contentment.

III. Do not curse anyone in your writing.

(Hold up your middle finger. But don't let anyone see you, or you may hurt some feelings.)

Remember the David Crowder spa story? Remember the naked guy? It's tough being the naked guy, the writer who takes the risk to be transparent. But it's *really* tough being the naked guy's mom. Or his best friend. Or his child.

Telling a personal story - even one that has a redemptive ending - is complicated because it will always involve the feelings of other people; and we must treat the other characters in our stories with the utmost respect.

Though *we* may be ready to let it all hang out on the rooftops of social media, the people involved in our story may not be as ready. That doesn't mean that they are wrong or chicken; it just means that we must handle them gently and respectfully. It doesn't mean that we are wrong in telling our story. It doesn't mean that we must back down.

I've struggled in this area (many, many times). I've lost sleep over legitimate guilt as well as undeserved shame. I've been blindsided every time I've received negative feedback from the other people in my stories. It's not that I've wanted to smack anyone in the face with my account of God's miraculous work in my life, but sometimes I have. Sometimes I've said too much; sometimes I've said too little. For example, in response to the same story, one person asked me to remove her involvement altogether, while another was upset that I didn't include her *more*. Honestly, sometimes the negotiating is enough to make me want to run back into the spa locker room screaming, "Never mind! Never mind!" But then I remember how valuable it is for all of us to see the full redemptive story of real, live humans, so I stay put, and ask God to give me wisdom and grace.

Of course there is a point at which other people must realize that it is *my* story to tell; the negotiation must end and I must own the rights to my tale. They may certainly tell their own stories if they'd like, so I aim to write about them the way I'd like *them* to write about *me*. This is a tricky road to navigate because I want to protect the people involved in my stories, while helping the people who need to hear the details.

Of course, the other folks who can really take a beating from our stories, are our readers. (A transparent story can be tough on everyone involved!) We might have the best intentions, and still come off cold, judgmental, and insensitive.

There is an art to composing a true story, and it seems as if readers most appreciate when we offer:

- encouragement over correction,
- insight over instruction, and
- hope over despair.

Not knowing our readers' hearts or circumstances, these choices will keep us from hurting them unnecessarily.

Another important thing to realize is that our stories cannot be used as revenge. Chances are, if we are writing as healed people who want to tell others about God's miraculous work in our lives, we will not be secretly hoping that so-and-so is finally convicted by our post. We should always question the motives of our hearts, as it is easy to deceive ourselves with the excuse of being 'honest'. The bottom line is that we simply cannot tell a life-giving story and curse others at the same time.

IV. Honor your husband in your writing - even if you don't know him yet.

(Because it's virtually impossible to hold up the ring finger independently, you can just touch it with your thumb.)

Proverbs 31:12 rocks my world every time I read it. Basically it says that an excellent wife does *good* towards her husband all of the days of her life. This includes the early days, when they are growing up on opposite sides of the country - she's in pig-tails helping Pa on a dairy farm out west while her future husband is being raised by vegetarian hippies in NYC. This includes the *pinning* days, when every young lad seems like a possibility and she's writing romantic poetry in her free time. And this includes the *married* days, when she learns the ups and downs of respecting and promoting her man, even if he still won't eat a real burger.

An unmarried blogger must always consider how her online writing would affect her husband, should she marry some day. Would her transparent stories about boy-craziness honor him? Would he *really* like to read her

compelling posts about all of her collegiate exploits? Would the way she dresses in her accompanying photographs please him?

Similarly, a married blogger must also consider how her transparency is affecting her husband. Is he comfortable with the details she shares about their financial struggles? Does he support her series about “Finding Healing from Premarital Sex”? Does he think it’s wonderful that she’s writing guest posts for the local Recovery House? He may. He may not. But he should not wince every time he reads his wife’s blog, wondering, “What did she write about *this* time?” Even if it means waiting to publish a brilliant post until your hubby has a chance to offer feedback, his trust is more valuable than thousands of readers’ praise.

V. Honor your children in your writing - even if they are not born yet.

(Wiggle your pinky finger, remembering all of the little people who look up to you.)

When I was in high school, I didn’t smoke because of my kiddos. I didn’t want them smelling like smoke when they went to school in the morning and I didn’t want them associating Christmas time with the smell of smoke instead of the smell of cinnamon. So, I followed the advice of Nancy Reagan and just said no. But my kiddos weren’t even a twinkle in my eye yet! In fact, they were years down the road. And yet, I made big lifestyle decisions based on their precious little lives.

With gentle thoughts about my “someday” children, I wrote in journals, recording thoughts, poems, and quotations for their sakes. I stored the journals in a big box, and saved my athletic awards, dried flowers, and notes from my BFF’s, just so they’d have treasures to touch, read, and smell when they were wondering about my childhood. I made countless decisions in the past that affect my children today.

Our blogs are no different. When we decide which stories to tell, we must consider the thoughts and feelings of our children. Their reputation is on the line with each post we publish. Their respect for mom and dad hinges

on the way in which we handle the tough, public stuff of ministry. Did I write about my mistakes in a way that my teenage daughter can read, respect, and learn from? Will she read my story and praise God for his grace? Will she feel closer to me because my writing is warm and compassionate? Or will she hold her breath in embarrassment and wish her mother would just shut up?

When we tell our stories, we must remember how difficult it is to be the child of someone on a platform. By investing in lots of conversation, using discretion, and emphasizing God's complete and beautiful work, we will win our children's hearts and teach them how to tell their own redemptive stories some day.

Take it on the road!

Jot down 3 possible stories that come to mind that would be considered “transparent”. Take them through the Five Point Filter. Can you see a helpful post or two emerging? Record your thoughts...

Pray Along the Way

The first year I attended a Christian blogging conference, I was honored to own the podium for a bit. It was just a ten-minute introduction for another speaker, and yet, the conference host asked me to be in the picture with all of the speakers at the end of the conference. She said, “Come up front after Ann Voskamp’s keynote address”. I was thrilled! To wrap my arms around the likes of Sally Clarkson, Sarah Mae, Courtney Joseph, and Ann Voskamp would be such a delight!

But I missed it.

I forgot all about it.

It was Ann Voskamp’s challenge, you see, that had gotten under my skin and pushed out all other thoughts. She asked us to think long and hard about *why* we write. She said things - as only Ann can - about writing for Christ alone. She told us to run to the keyboard and pound out words because we adore Jesus Christ, and for no other reason. In an hour’s time, she crafted a stunning appeal to the Christian writer’s heart. Who else but Ann Voskamp could weave together stories about a sacrificial mother duck, a boy’s effort to carve a perfect wooden spoon, and a blogger who writes for an audience of One? Needless to say, the atmosphere in the hotel conference room was silent-yet-sizzling. The Holy Spirit was working in the hearts of 200 women writers, and we all knew it. I remember looking around the room at the other bloggers, who were eagerly listening to - and tweeting - every word Ann spoke.

It wasn’t just Ann-worship; our hearts were sincerely responding to the challenge that we blog *for* God’s pleasure and *from* God-pleasure. Her message was not falling on deaf ears: we were women who had already spent hours praying about our blogs; who considered our blogs to be God-given ministry, employment, and recreation. We knew what Ann was talking about. We knew that God brings fruit from a blog that is

surrendered to His hands. We cared deeply about the souls of our readers, and knew that words have an eternal effect. I was sitting in the midst of some mighty writers, but I felt the peculiar nudge. Sitting there, on the last night of the conference, looking around that room, listening to Ann's soft voice share the perfect blogger's prayer, I was struck to the core with this sobering reality: *I had never once prayed about my blog.*

That's how I missed the photo shoot.

Immediately after Ann's speech, I scurried back to my hotel room and curled up with my Bible, praying something fierce about my blog. I was totally taken aback that I had never talked to God about this hobby that I enjoyed so much! In reality, I invested lots of time and heart into my blog, and yet, I didn't pray about it because I believed it was "just a blog" - and a *small* "just a blog" at that. As odd as it sounds, I subconsciously thought, *If humans aren't reading my writing, why would God bother with it?* But the truth is, blogging was important to me. I used it to sharpen my writing skills, communicate with my family, and flesh-out some thoughts. Once I admitted that God would certainly be interested in the work of my hands and the thoughts of my heart, I was able to talk to him about my blog for the first time. I prayed about my blog.

And I've kept at it.

So far, praying hasn't changed my blog on the outside much at all. But it did begin to change some things behind the scenes. I've begun to trust God with my work and to believe that He actually cares about each post. My heart for my readers is growing. My confidence is growing and I'm taking a stab at writing eBooks (ta-dah!). My ideas are blossoming.

The best outcome of my praying has been more intimacy with God. I'm amazed that God wants me to include my *blog* as a part of our relationship. This assures me that He is - as He has said - very, very close. It has been one of those things that keeps catching my heart with awe: *He cares about my work.*

Take it on the road!

Today, invest 15 minutes to pray about your blog without giving up.

Let this be the beginning of an ongoing decision to see your blog as something that matters to God.

This will be the biggest, most profound thing you will ever do concerning your blog because regardless of what happens with the blog itself, your relationship with God will grow. And *that* is what life is all about.

The Ultimate Road-Buddy

This is the most important part of the entire book...

In the end, the best part of any road-trip is the company we keep along the way. The same can be said of blogging. In my estimation, Jesus' companionship is second-to-none. His guidance is perfect, His way is righteous, and His personality is completely *captivating*. It's true. No one has ever been able to tame or explain the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, but no one ever regrets traveling through life with Him. In fact, that's why it's so important that we embark on our blogging journey wisely: Jesus will navigate the ride of a lifetime.

Every day that we blog, we travel into a realm that has very few boundaries. The territory is vast and uncharted. There is unlimited space for darkness and just as much space for light. With our finite minds and vulnerable hearts, there is so much that we don't know. There are both dangers *and* blessings that we cannot foresee. We desperately need a companion with divine insight, who knows exactly how to navigate through social media. If we hit the road with the Creator of all time and space, we will truly be amazed by what we learn, who we meet, and how we grow along the way.

As we fall in love with life and learn to appreciate blogging's proper place in it, we'll realize that the source of that love and order is God Himself. We'll find ourselves spilling forth words about how we came to travel with Jesus. We'll celebrate how He has given us something meaningful to say about farming, child-raising, politics, cooking, literature, running, and crafts. Hundreds of people will check in on our blogs to see what it's like to be with Him at the vistas *and* the pit-stops. He'll give us platforms, ideas, and connections that will keep us passionate about our work. Our souls will relish the beautiful journey and our delightful Friend.

I'd love to conclude this eBook with a slam-dunk promise that in 10 Easy Steps, readers will love you, advertisers will throw money at you, your

family will support you, and no one will ever give you any negative feedback again. But that hasn't been my experience.

The truth is that without God's companionship, our own efforts will deceive and disappoint us. Even with the best intentions, we'll still blow it from time to time. We simply cannot pursue this craft without Jesus Christ who loves us, and even understands our odd penchant for networking, giveaways, and links.

What matters is that we make the effort to live and blog beautifully with God's blessing, for His glory, and showered in His grace.

What matters is that we do all of these things *with* Jesus Christ, working, resting, writing, listening, and living as His beloved children.

Now let's hit the road!

Invite other bloggers to love their blog and love their lives, too:

Tweet your thoughts: [@LauraBooz](https://twitter.com/LauraBooz)

Like It: Visit the facebook page

Write a review. Send your readers to <http://www.LauraBooz.com> so they can pick up their own copy.

Grab the button. Do you have some free space in your side-bar? I think some bare-feet would look nice there! With a link to this book on your front page, you'll remember to travel well, and you'll encourage your readers to do the same. [Click here](#) to get the sidebar image and link it to <http://www.LauraBooz.com>.

Thank you...

...to Ryan for keeping me moving when I lost my nerve. But mostly, for making this book *happen*. I love you.

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...to Andy Mylin for the brilliant cover design. You gave this book the face it always wanted. (Yes, hire him, too: <http://www.andymylin.com/>)

...to Joe Mayo for the brilliant trailer. As one admirer said, your work is "big league." (Enjoy more of Joe's work at: <http://vimeo.com/josefilms>)

About the Author

Laura lives with her family in the Pennsylvania mountains. She has blogged at <http://www.10MillionMiles.com> (also <http://www.LauraBooz.com>) since 2007.

Because of the current joys in her life, most of her topics focus on marriage, motherhood, and ministering in the local church. She loves to discover the real-time application of the Bible and write about it. The goal of her blog is to encourage her readers to live and love well.