



# A Measure of Grace

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## Grace Is . . . . For Giving *By Mary Heathman*

Most Christians can quote the scripture that says it is by grace we are saved, not of works, a gift from God so no one can boast. We know that grace is a gift that we cannot earn. But the profusion of grace that God lavishes upon us is not so easily explained. I think it is just too big for us to grasp; we don't get it.

C S Lewis, writing about love, writes that "we are far too easily pleased. Like children busily making mud-pies, we cannot fathom what a vacation at the beach might look like" (C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, "The Weight of Glory," William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Glasgow, 1965, p. 94 ). So, we cling to what is right in front of us, never seeing or knowing that there is so much more.

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Grace is a gift to us -- an extreme abundance, an over-the-top, poured-out-to-overflowing, more-than-we-could-ever-contain, seemingly extravagant gift. And when we have soaked in Grace, been baptized, immersed in grace and it has done its work in our hearts, then the Lord intends it to overflow into the lives of others, splashing onto them the same lavish treatment for what ails them in order that they may be drawn to Him.

**If that's the way it is supposed to be, then why aren't we living it?** (Or maybe you are; please write and tell us how to get there!) I am reminded of one of Erma Bombeck's books, *If Life Is a Bowl of Cherries, Then Why Am I In the Pits?*

There are likely a myriad of reasons why we are experiencing less than the abundant, grace-filled life for which we know we were created. The usual maladies come to mind: unconfessed and/or unrepented sin, unresolved breaches in our relationships, refusal to follow where the Lord is obviously leading, spiritual harassment, not keeping God in the loop (otherwise known as prayerlessness).

Any of these conditions can clog up our receivers and leave us on the edge of grace, scrambling for crumbs, and I know that I must address these circumstances with the

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## Thoughts to Remember

"At the height of my arrogance and un-Christ-likeness, an undeserved gift was bestowed upon me. And the power of it changed my heart and mind forever." What is Grace?, *A Measure of Grace*, August 2002

*"The grace of God envelops us when we least deserve it, when we have run away from Him, when we exhaust all our own resources before turning to Him. In face of our rejection, He draws us close to His heart, sustaining us, filling the vacuum of our weakness with His strength."* Grace is Power in our Weakness, *Measure of Grace*, March 2003

# Forgiveness: What Does It Look Like?

*excerpted from a talk given  
by Mary Heathman*

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**Forgiveness is active, not passive,  
and it is always our turn!**

*If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift (Matt 5:23).*

*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony*

*of two or three others (Matt 18:15-16).*

**Forgiveness is clean, not complicated.**

No need for long explanations. Just simply make your statement, speak the truth in love, and keep it simple.

**Forgiveness is humble, not high and mighty.**

*...Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you (Romans 12:3). ✠*

## A Psalm

*by a WGA Group Member*

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Lord my heart fills with rage, yet I lift it to you.  
Lord my heart fills with sorrow, yet I lift it to you.  
Lord my heart fills with brokenness, yet I lift it to you.  
For you alone, O Lord, can make it whole.  
Lord fill my heart with happiness.  
Lord fill my heart with love.  
Lord complete my heart.  
For you alone, O Lord, can make it whole.  
For you alone, O Lord, can complete.  
Lord, let me loose from this despair.  
O Lord, break these chains.  
Lord, for you alone who is mighty can make me complete.

## Clergy Ratings at Lowest Point Ever

*Survey finds low trust in the church*

The Roman Catholic sexual abuse scandal has sent the public's view of clergy to its lowest point ever, 12 points below last year's rating, according to a new Gallup poll.

Asked to rate the honesty and ethics of 21 professions, just 52 percent of Americans gave high marks to clergy, down from 64 percent last year. Confidence in clergy reached its peak at 67 percent, in 1985. Catholics gave lower honesty ratings to their clergy than did Protestants. Both ratings are down from five years ago.

Gallup pollsters said clergy ratings also dropped between 1992 and 1994, the last time the Catholic church wrestled with a sex abuse scandal. Overall, clergy ranked fourth among all professions, behind nurses (79 percent), military officers (65 percent), and high school teachers (64 percent). Business executives, who

also suffered this year in the wake of the Enron, WorldCom, and Martha Stewart scandals, drew just 17 percent approval ratings, down from 25 percent last year. At the bottom of the professions list were car salesmen (6 percent) and telemarketers (5 percent). The telephone poll of 1017 adults has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

✦

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**"Christianity without discipleship is always  
Christianity without Christ."**

***Dietrich Bonhoeffer***

## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Patrick Maschka

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**I** have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation (Phil 4:12)

It is very satisfying for me to gain insight concerning a problem in life, and to have the knowledge that if similar circumstances arise again, I will be ready to face the challenges and come out a winner. Unsuccessful relationships are like that: learn from experience and avoid the same pitfalls from the last disaster, move toward someone without the same qualities, and narrow the playing field by knowing what you want. I have had the distinct experience of entering into a new relationship and thinking, "Well, I sure won't do *that* again," as I recall the mistakes I made or the mistreatment I suffered. Knowing what to do next is comforting and empowering.

Paul claims to have found guaranteed fortification in every life situation, and that he can be content whatever the conditions (Phil 4:12). Hearing that a man has found the secret to happiness is enough to capture anyone's attention, but I wonder if the answer revealed is always exactly what we have in mind. *"Oh, of course, living in the Lord's strength is the secret (4:13)...I know that, I'm*

*a Christian...."* I suppose I am not alone in admitting that, at times, I wish there was a better answer, one my eyes could see, perhaps, or one that was a little easier to grasp and put into action. Some of us may hope that the right person will come along, and with him or her, happiness. We live in a world that offers many attractive answers, some of them "quick fixes," so it really is no wonder that the discipline and surrender involved in leaning on Christ seems too complicated, too tenuous, or even too boring.

Funny, I hear more people excitedly anticipate winning the lottery than jumping for joy about the gospel. The small odds of winning a million or so dollars inspires more anticipation and hope than the 100% assurance that God loves us, cares for us, provides us strength here on earth, and gives us eternal life in his heavenly kingdom. What is often our last resort in times of trouble is our relationship with the Lord, which is the best secret known to humankind.



(Grace continued from page 2)

spiritual tools available to me. But I also know that when I am in the pits, it is sometimes because I have lost my vision, or have refused to offer grace to others.

How do we lose our vision? Well, maybe “lose” isn’t the right word. It really doesn’t go away, it just gets clouded with all the vision the world offers. After all, according to our financial advisors, abundant over-the-top, no-strings-attached giving isn’t very smart, is it? A wise money-manager makes investments with the best return in mind—even gifts are carefully planned to minimize our taxes. And we have to take care of ourselves, don’t we? The goal is mutual relationship—you meet my needs and I will meet yours, right? Giving without expecting something in return isn’t just dumb, it is outrageous, offensive, co-dependent. Isn’t it?

Is it? Well, we are to be wise as serpents, as well as innocent as doves, and Jesus seems to have commended the unfaithful servant for his shrewdness in planning for his future. So, I applaud planning, careful investment and management of our time and resources. But there does come a time when the vision the world offers will cover up the way of the Lord. And

when it does, I find myself living somewhere else than in the fullness of His grace.

***The antidote:*** *As C S Lewis has said, “gaze on God.” My vision usually returns when I have spent significant time sitting in His presence yearning for the vision only He can give.*

The other condition that clogs up the grace-works comes when I am refusing to offer grace to others. In a previous article in this series, writing about Victor Hugo’s story, *Les Miserables*, I made the point that when his silver had been stolen, “Instead of offering judgment for the crime, the priest ministered to the heart of the [thief] and lavishly dispensed grace.”

It was a different story for the constable in Hugo’s novel who was offended by the priest’s grace-full witness to the thief. The law dictated

that the thief pay for his crime and return the stolen goods. The keeper of the law spent decades seeking retribution. As the film progressed, the constable’s face became increasingly sour, dour, condemning, all giving miserable evidence of the killing nature of the demands of the law he was trying to fulfill. Ultimately, the constable couldn’t destroy grace, yet re-

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fused to accept it and finally destroyed himself.

Sour, dour--that's what it feels like to me when I begin to withhold grace from people in my life. It is often subtle, I may say to myself, "When they apologize, I will forgive them." Or I may begin to fill my time only with people who build me up instead of spending time with those who can't (or won't) give me anything in return. Both of these self-serving attitudes and a horde of others serve to contain grace, keep it to ourselves, or allow it out only into circles that will come back to us. And when that is happening, we begin to slide out of grace ourselves.

***The antidote:*** *after confessing your attitude and asking God to change your heart, look around and lavish some time, attention, a meal, whatever. . . on someone else without thought to what it costs or what you might get in return. Of if the thought occurs unbidden, refuse to entertain it.*

In an attempt to describe grace, some use the word extravagant, a word that carries with it a negative connotation—of over-the-top, excessive, even wasteful. I am reminded of the biblical story of Jesus, receiving an anointing of expense oil, while his disciples criticized the extravagance, the waste of this oil that could have been sold to feed the poor. And Jesus rebuked them, "The poor will

always be with you, but I . . . "

It isn't too far fetched to interpret Jesus' words as saying, "I am worth it; there is nothing over the top or excessive about this woman's worship of me; It is appropriate to pour out the best you have in worship of me, for I am the Lord."

The miracle is that Jesus turned right around and did the same for us. Steve Green sings a song, "Broken and Spilled Out" in which he describes Jesus' sacrifice as "broken and spilled out, for the love of me, Jesus. God's greatest treasure lavished on me; broken and spilled out and laid at my feet, poured out and used up. . . .wasted for me."

Grace is for giving—God lavishes grace upon us—He lavishes it upon others through us. It is my prayer that we will grow in grace—the receiving and the giving.





## APRIL AT A GLANCE

April 10th - Rick and Barbara Wise spoke at WGA's Thursday night group on the topic of HIV/AIDS.

April 11th - 13th - Mary Heathman was invited to speak at a retreat for the staff and volunteers of Prodigal Gatherings.

### **Groups, Discipleship Counseling, and Mentoring**

#### **Thursday Night Group**

April 3rd - 33 people

April 10th - 39 people

April 17th - Easter Service

April 24th - 45 people

The WGA staff provided about 10 hours of discipleship counseling and mentoring each week during April.

## **MAY AND BEYOND**

May 4th - WGA Leadership Meeting

May 14th - Sexuality and the Church Seminar at First Denver Friends Church.

May 20th - Scott Kingry will be speaking at a men's group at Bear Creek Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

May 24th - Growth Group, a WGA group focused on resolving issues with the opposite sex, ends.

June 18th - Commitment Group, a WGA group focused on resolving issues with the same sex, ends.

July 21st - 26th - The WGA staff and others from WGA groups will be attending the 28th annual Exodus Conference in Orlando, Florida.

*A Measure of Grace*  
is edited by  
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### **WGA Staff**

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*Where Grace Abounds exists to guide and support men and women who seek to understand sexuality and relationship, and to inspire all people to know and personally appropriate God's plan for their sexuality and relationships.*

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