



A Measure of Grace

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Conquerors Unawares *By Mary Heathman*



All episodes of a television show called Touched by an Angel portray angels interacting with people who see them as strangers for most of the story. But the viewers are in on the secret that the human characters are really “entertaining angels unawares.”

The familiar phrase, “angels unawares,” from Hebrews 13:2, still leaves our modern minds a bit perplexed. In the Authorized Version of the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews says in chapter thirteen, verse two, “*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*” The New International Version translates the same verse, “*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some*

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people have entertained angels without knowing it."

"Angels unawares" are angels unrecognized by the men and women around them.

In the early 70's, Bob Friedman wrote Benjamin Alexander Sheep, a story about a young sheep who tried all sorts of ways to get his fleece white enough to deserve to get into the great sheep pen in the sky. Ultimately he found himself in sheep-heaven, surprised at who had made it in **and** even more surprised by who he thought for sure would be there, but weren't! Some of his fellow sheep-saints were even surprised they made it in themselves.

That's how I believe many Christians are—clueless about what makes us conquerors, not even believing in our own status. These "conquerors unawares," are people of authority and conqueror status who are looking and acting as if they are the vanquished rather than the victors. In fact, these men and women are themselves clueless about their status as conquerors, not even knowing who they are!

According to Scripture, we are already conquerors, whether we know it or not:

"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave

him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:31b – 39)

All the work that Jesus did accomplished this fact for us. There isn't anything else to be done, its **DONE**, all done. As Jesus said as he died on the cross, "It is finished."

So, then, if our conqueror status is a done deal, why is it many of us often don't know who we are? We

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WGA Staff Member Moves On

By Mary Heathman & Karen Wood

Karen: I have been sensing a call to go deeper in my commitment to God for some time now. As some of you already know, the direction that is taking me is into an exploration of monastic life. To further move in this direction, I will be leaving the staff of Where Grace Abounds the end of this year.

Mary: I am sure many of you can relate to my sadness at Karen's leaving the staff of WGA. What Karen has brought to us in her creative thought and her concern for people has been a real blessing to Where Grace Abounds. We as a staff and community will feel the loss of Karen in our midst.



WGA staff member, Karen Wood, will be leaving the WGA staff at the end of the year.

Karen: Needless to say, this move is not without its trauma for me as well. Where Grace Abounds has been my primary community since 1987, and I have been on staff now for more than eight years. As I sort through my belongings, determining what I will keep and what I will let go, I occasionally need to take a crying break. But I am not gone yet! I am spending time (often over lunch) with more people and I am trying to wrap things up in the office so I leave a legacy, not a mess!

Mary: As Karen and I have talked and considered this change of direction, it has felt increasingly appropriate to both of us that Karen make this move.

Karen: There's been a little nun running around inside of me for a long time. I tend toward the contemplative and I cut some of my spiritual teeth in my early twenties on writers such as Saint John of the Cross, Saint Therese of Lisieux, and Brother Lawrence. I even came to Denver from Nebraska in the early 70's to visit a Franciscan convent. Obviously my venture into a monastic way of life was thwarted by my getting involved with a woman and by my venture into a new age organization. But it seems it has come

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full circle and I am again moving in that direction. This time, however, I am looking at becoming a nun in an Orthodox monastery.

Mary: Over the course of the eighteen years of WGA's existence, we have seen many staff members and leaders move on. Our work with people in the area of sexual and relational brokenness carries with it some of the same dynamics as that of a family. As people learn, through the teachings and community experience provided at WGA, to open up to God's love, they begin to grow in areas where they had been shut down. The result is that people, after months or years of soaking in God's grace, can find themselves drawn to other places where they can continue their growth and service. They "leave home." Where Grace Abounds is, for many, a temporary family setting where they can heal and grow. It seems that this is what's happening with Karen.

Karen: So here I go, leaving the home away from home that WGA has provided for me. People are asking me a lot of questions, the answers of which I don't know yet. The main thing I know is that this is the direction my heart is leaning. All the whats and what ifs are yet to be seen. I am exploring my options and may go into a monastery to try it out as early as January. But this depends on other things besides myself, such as availability of space. I am not aiming

for a place where I will not have access to the outside world, although it may be more limited than it is for me right now. Time will tell. "Stay tuned," as Scott would say.

Karen and Mary: We both welcome your prayers as we go through this transition. If you have questions about anything, please feel free to contact us. Both of us are more than happy to talk with you.

No one will take the place of Karen in the WGA community and we will personally miss her. But the environment of God's love and grace will continue to be extended to group members. As Scott is fond of saying when we pray before Thursday night group, "Holy Spirit, do the miracle you always do, and touch the hearts and lives of people that come to group tonight. If it wasn't for you, with all the mixed bag of wounds and conflicts people bring with them every week, this evening would blow up in our face! Help us, God, represent you."

You are a group of people who have walked alongside WGA, some for years. I encourage you to pray with us as we go through this transition. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the WGA office.



Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Patrick Maschka

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion (Phil 1:6)

Sometimes we just have one of those days. Or weeks, or even longer. The world seems to come crashing down and there seem to be nothing but obstacles in the way of healing. Along with the psalmist, we cry "How long, O Lord, how long?" (Psalm 6:3) and we can think of nothing but the burdens that weigh upon our heavy souls. All of the work prior to reaching such anguish seems like a waste; sin looks easier and certainly more appealing, and the walk of faith does not appear to offer any of the promised rewards that could have been joyfully listed not so long ago.

I think it's easy to forget that God never loosens his grip on our lives, and that we are his special works-in-progress. We let things go in our lives, leaving business and projects unfinished, so to transfer our human ways to the Almighty is a natural mental step in times of trouble. Our Lord, however, is not like us. Even in our wisest moments, we have no wisdom compared to God, and it follows that our most passionate perseverance is like the first five steps in a marathon compared to God's inex-

haustible endurance (see 1 Cor 1:25). God does not give up on us, and he will finish what he started. I am convinced that if we could hear his voice in those aching times, he would say something like this:

My dear, precious child! I love you and created you as a beautiful and unique person. I know that you have suffered many hurts in your life, and that you have been deprived of many emotional needs. It is not my way to make sure that parents treat their children perfectly, and I do not prevent people from hurting each other, because then I would be a coercive and controlling god. But I grieve when my children are hurt, and I weep when they are suffering. I will not take away your history, but I will never give up on your future even if you do. I plan to turn your sad story into one that shines like the brightest star in the heavens. For the rest of eternity I will make up for the pain you have endured.



are like the prince in the children's story, *The Sword and the Stone*. Though he was the rightful heir to the throne, the prince had been raised as a peasant boy. He, like the other children, had grown up in the kingdom, and had heard the legend of the sword in the stone. Everyone knew that one day, when the rightful heir came along, he would pull the sword out of the stone, and that act would identify him as the king, and he would then take his rightful place upon the throne.

The boy watched and waited, as did everyone else in the kingdom, for the right one to come along and pull out the sword. The legend had spread far and wide; many tried; but no one could pull it out.

We could imagine that the boy might have stood there many times, watching as conquering heroes came by and pulled mightily upon the sword, but to no avail.

All along, from the moment of his birth, he was the prince, the rightful heir to the throne. But he had grown up never knowing that he had the power to pull the sword

We are like that boy. We live as peasant kids, because we don't know we are children of the King. According to Romans Two, some of us even go so far as to exchange our royal heritage (the truth about ourselves) for a lie. The result is, if we ever had any idea, we have long since forgotten who we are.

***“...we remain
powerless, not
because we are
powerless but
because we
used to be, and
we don't know
how strong we
are now, or
who we have
become.”***

Another good example is that of the baby elephant who learns from birth that a rope around his foot tied to a stake in the ground renders him helpless. Though he grows big enough to pull grown trees out by the roots, when the rope goes round his ankle, he doesn't even try anymore for he learned as a baby that he is helpless against the restraints and he never

pulls against it again.

We are like the baby elephant. We learned as children that we have limitations and restraints. Some of those don't have the power to hold us anymore, but we don't even attempt to pull against them. And we remain powerless, not because we **are** powerless but because we used

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to be, and we don't know how strong we are now, or who we have become.

So, that's the dilemma: we don't know who we are. What's the solution? How do we find out who we are and what we can do?

Let's go back to our **prince un-awares**. How did he find out who he was? The story says that the prince finally walked up to the stone, grabbed the handle of the sword firmly, pulled on it, and it slipped out easily, proving who he was, even to himself!

I believe it is the same for us. We need to be pulling on swords; attempting the improbable, even the

seemingly impossible, in order to discover who we are.

What are the "swords" in our lives? Next month I want to share what the swords have been in my own journey and a few of my ideas about how to go about stepping into and living up to our conqueror status. In the meantime, how about praying that the Lord will give you an appetite for knowing who you really are? If you want to read something along those lines, I recommend a book, Christian, Do You Know Who You Are, by Needham.



Family & Friends Retreat June 25th-27th, 2004

WGA will be hosting a retreat for family and friends in the spring. Mark the date on your calendars. More information will be available soon. If you are interested in attending, please contact the WGA office at 303-863-7757 or email us at wwga@aol.com.

SEPTEMBER AT A GLANCE

September 13th - A WGA group began, *Going Deeper with God*

September 23rd - A Where Grace Abounds representative spoke at New Heights Community Center

September 22nd - 25th—Mary spoke during the chapel time at Barkley College.

Groups, Discipleship Counseling, and Mentoring

Thursday Night Group

September 4th - 48 people

September 11th - 48 people

September 18th - 48 people

September 25th - 54 people

Orientation meeting - 16 people

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

OCTOBER & BEYOND

October 1st - Mary Heathman will be speaking at the Aurora campus of Colorado Community Church. "Mending a Relationally Broken Society" is the title of her talk.

October 14th - December 9th, Tuesday evenings - Teaching an 8 week class on sexuality at The Next Level Church.

October 5th - Participating in Missions Service at First Denver Friends Church.

October 28th - Speaking at New Heights Center, a local church.

October 29th - Mary Heathman will be speaking at the Englewood campus of Colorado Community Church. "Mending a Relationally Broken Society" is the title of her talk.

November 13 - 15th - Restoring the Glory Conference at Lookout Mountain Community Church.

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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.

A Measure of Grace
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