



A Measure of Grace

January 2004
Volume 8, Issue 1

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

Recognizing Signs of Sexual Abuse in Children *by Mary Heathman*

Note: A slightly different version of this article first appeared in A Measure of Grace in August of 1999.

Soften receive questions about sexual abuse. One of the most common questions is, "How can you tell if a child has been sexually abused?" Before I dive into this subject, I feel compelled to make a couple of precautionary points:

1. As you are no doubt aware, we are dealing with a sensitive topic when we address sexual issues. I have made every effort to be careful to keep my comments as inoffensive as possible. However, I do need to be explicit enough

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

Recognizing Signs ...	1
Reflections	4
Types of Sexual Abuse	7
December Activities	8
Upcoming Events	8

Where Grace Abounds
P.O. Box 18871
Denver, Colorado 80218

Office: 303/863-7757
Fax: 303/863-7769

email: Wwga@aol.com
www.wheregraceabounds.org

wga
where grace abounds

(Sexual Abuse continued from page 1)

to help you understand the issues involved and how to help someone affected by them. Before you read on, please ask the Lord for His guidance, direction, and protection as you explore some hard issues.

2. Sometimes during reading material such as this, readers may realize for the first time that some of their own childhood experiences were incidents of sexual or emotional abuse. If you begin to have an inordinate emotional response to the material presented, I encourage you to put down the article and write down what you are thinking and feeling. It would also be good to talk with someone and receive prayer for comfort and guidance as to how to proceed. WGA is available to provide referrals and resources to help you address any issues that may come up.

I would like to make it clear that I write as a non-professional. My experience is as a lay counselor, trained in the early days of Larry Crabb's Institute of Biblical Counseling, and Gary Sweeten's Discipleship Counseling Training, and years of independent study in the field of

sexuality and relationships. My experience includes two years as a volunteer for the crisis rape counseling program in a local hospital, and fourteen years in full time ministry to people with sexual problems. To that, I add my own experience as the mother of a survivor of sexual abuse.

I have been privileged to see much healing in my own family and in the lives of many others. Yet, even after all this time, I still cannot even think about these issues without deep grief. But, **think about them we must**, for sexual abuse is a significant problem in our society, even within our churches. We are called to bring light and comfort to people in dark and lonely places.

Albert Einstein has said, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when they were created." I challenge us all to a deeper level of thinking about sexual abuse, so that we may minister effectively.

A way to begin to challenge our thinking is to explore some definitions and terms. "Sexual abuse," defined by Dan Allender, "is any contact or interaction (visual, verbal, or psychological) between a child/adolescent and an adult when the child/adolescent is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or any other person." (For a specific description of contacts and interactions that qualify as sexual abuse,

(Continued on page 3)



(Sexual Abuse *continued from page 2*)
please see page 7.)

Another helpful eye-opener are the statistics surrounding sexual abuse. From the Center Against Sexual Abuse¹ we find that:

- 38% of girls are sexually abused before the age of 18.
- 16% of boys are sexually abused before the age of 18.
- In 1994, 345,400 sexual abuse incidents were reported to Child Protective Services.
- 90 to 95% of all sexual abuse cases go unreported to police.
- In most cases, the child knew the sex offender. With girls, 29% were relatives and 60% were acquaintances. With boys, 16% were relatives and 44% were acquaintances.
- 70% of child sex offenders had between 1 and 9 victims. 23% had 10 to 40 victims.

So how are these children affected by the sexual abuse they suffered? For our purposes today, I will describe some symptoms and effects in the lives of children who have experienced trauma from sexual contact, sexual interactions (see page 7), betrayal and powerlessness

Sexual Contact: Young children who have experienced overt sexual contact will often exhibit sexual preoccupations (sometimes compulsive), masturbation (beyond normal self-discovery), and will make attempts to engage their peers in sexual activity. The confusing feelings (including

pleasurable ones) generated by the way they have been touched will often motivate a child to return to the activities that brought the feelings about in the first place. Just as a young child hears a new word and repeats it over and over, s/he will often re-enact behaviors that have been done to them.

Sexual Interactions: Children who have experienced covert sexual interactions will often feel guilty and ashamed, exhibit low self-esteem, and feelings of isolation, as if s/he was different than other children. One woman remembers how embarrassed she was when her father seemed to think of nothing else but the way her body was maturing. She was confused and felt unexplainably ashamed of her body, as if there was something wrong with her.

Betrayal: When a child is violated by a trusted person, s/he may become overly dependent, sometimes becoming uncharacteristically clingy. This behavior is often directed toward the child's mother, but also may even be directed toward the person who is doing the abusing (especially if the abuser is the mother). It is as if the child is confused, and trying to make things right by clinging to the person who is abusing him/her.

Powerlessness: When an older person has abused a child, the child learns helplessness. A child often has nightmares and other sleep disorders, irrational fears, and becomes

(Continued on page 6)

WGA has invited Sy Rogers to present at two seminars this Spring!

Where Grace Abounds has invited Sy Rogers to speak at two events in the spring of 2004. Regarded as a gifted international communicator, award-winning talk show host, recording artist and pastor, Sy has served for over two decades in ministry, and 17 years as a pastoral care specialist regarding sexuality. Mark you calendars and call the WGA office if you need more information. Plan to join us!



Sexuality and the Church 2004

The morning of April 2nd

This event is structured for people who wish to learn more about how to minister to those struggling with sexual and relational issues. Make it a point to invite your pastor!

WGA Seminar

Friday evening, April 2nd and Saturday April 3rd

This seminar will address issues of sexuality and relational brokenness and is open to everyone! Contact the WGA office for more information.

Your Invited! A Retreat for Family & Friends 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.

Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Patrick Maschka

Forgive as the Lord forgave
you (Col 3:13)

It is easy to find reasons to hold grudges against other people. Even without digging into childhood, where it is common to find fault with parents, most any person could make a long list of the offenses endured from day to day. I recently found myself in conflict with a co-worker in a situation that I felt I was in the right (of course). I brooded over the cruel verbal retaliation I wanted to deliver, fueled by the anger that smoldered within me. It was difficult to think of anything else.

Forgiveness of others is classically associated with Christianity. Jesus, while teaching us to pray, called us to forgive those who sin against us, just as God our Father forgives us (see Mt 6:12, Lk 11:4). So, with gifted spiritual clarity, we are to recognize and correctively point out the sins of others by offering a condescending “I forgive you” as an example of righteousness? Wrong. Jesus did not clearly explain that we must forgive to gain freedom for ourselves from the harm done to us. The forgiveness has nothing to do with changing the other person, but with releasing ourselves from the pain inflicted so that we have more room in our hearts for

love and intimacy. I speculate that the most unhappy people without deep, quality relationships have not found the way to forgiveness for others. You can know that you have sincerely forgiven someone when the harm done by another is no longer a barrier to your relationship with them. You can spend time with them, and enjoy them, without experiencing a surge of intense emotion as you are flooded with painful memories. When forgiveness happens, you can say, as Joseph did to his brothers “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (Gen 50:20). Trusting that the Lord has a bigger and better plan makes it possible to forgive (see Jer 29:11).

The outcome with my co-worker? The next day, I spoke to the person calmly, explaining how I was hurt and angered by what had happened, and seeking reconciliation to move on from the problem. We found neither of us to be right or wrong, and we understood each other better for the exchange. Afterwards, I heaved a sigh of relief, and got back to work.



(Sexual Abuse continued from page 3)

hyper vigilant - always on the lookout in order to protect her/himself. A child who feels powerless will also sometimes have sleeping disorders - either too much sleeping or an inability to sleep well.

Another symptom that can point to abuse in a child's life is if h/she is chronically complaining of physical ailments. Although this symptom is usually much more developed in adults, a child also can show these signs. Our spirits, minds and bodies affect one another. Physical symptoms are often a sign of deep inner struggle. Dan Allender (speaking about adults) says, "Chronic physical complaints that do not respond to medical intervention should be considered and treated from the perspective of probable past abusive trauma." It is my belief that this symptom shows itself first in children who are experiencing or have experienced sexual abuse.

Another symptom that is readily apparent in children who have been sexually abused is their lack of joy. They seem to have lost their child-like spontaneity, and approach life with a serious countenance, smiling less and less often. Of course, in some cases they do just the opposite and become the clown of the family.

The key to interpreting these symptoms is to pray earnestly, and watch

for any symptoms that represent a change or departure from the child's normal way of responding. If a previously calm, sedate little girl becomes inordinately frenetic, there may be cause for concern. If a little boy who has been curious to the point of being obnoxious, suddenly becomes clingy and reticent, then something may have gone awry.

It is with relief that I finish this article. The bad news is indeed hard to hear - it is hard for me to tell.

Fortunately, there is much that can be done to help a child. If such symptoms exhibit themselves in a child in



your family, church, or neighborhood, I encourage you to seek counsel, pray for them and ask God *if* and how you might intervene. Of course, in some instances it will be necessary to report your concerns to the

authorities. My caution is that one should always pray thoroughly, then seek counsel from someone who has worked with these issues. Your pastoral staff will usually be willing to discuss these matters with you. You can always call WGA as well. We will be glad to help when we can.



¹Sexual Assault Statistics from
CASA, Center Against Sexual Abuse,
2333 N Central Ave, #100
Phoenix, Arizona 85004, (602)
254-6400

Types of Sexual Abuse: Contact and Interaction

Contact

Any type of touch that is physically or psychologically designed to arouse sexual desire in the victim or perpetrator

Very Severe: Genital intercourse (forcible or nonforcible); oral or anal sex (forcible or nonforcible)

Severe: Unclothed genital contact, including manual touching or penetration (forcible or nonforcible); unclothed breast contact (forcible or nonforcible; simulated intercourse

Least Severe: Sexual kissing (forcible or nonforcible); sexual touching of buttocks, thighs, legs, or clothed breasts or genitals.

Visual: Exposure to or use for pornography; intentional (repeated) exposure to sexual acts, sexual organs, and/or sexually provocative attire (bra, nighties, slip, underwear); inappropriate attention (scrutiny) directed toward body (clothed or unclothed) or clothing for purpose of sexual stimulation.

Psychological:

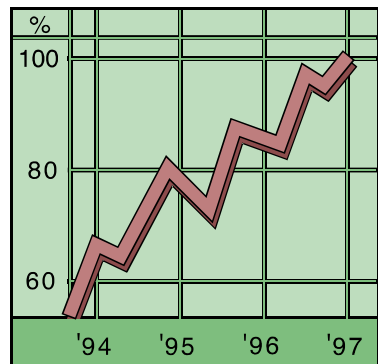
Physical/sexual boundary violation:
Intrusive interest in menstruation, clothing, pubic development; repeated use of enemas;

Sexual/relational boundary violation:
Intrusive interest in child's sexual activity, use of child as a spouse surrogate (confidante, intimate companion, protector, or counselor)

Interactions

This type of abuse is harder to acknowledge - doesn't involve physical touch, but sexually abusive words and attitudes produce as much damage as sexually abusive contact.

Verbal: Direct solicitation for sexual purposes; seductive (subtle) solicitation or innuendo; description of sexual practices; repeated use of sexual language and sexual terms as personal names



DECEMBER

Thursday Night Group

December 4th - 58 people
 December 11th - 50 people
 December 18th - 46 people
 December 25th - Christmas
 Orientation meeting - 1 new person

December 7th - Going away reception for Karen Wood, whose last day was December 24th.

December was filled with various holiday events for the WGA community.

Discipleship Counseling and Mentoring

The WGA staff provided about 8 hours of discipleship counseling and mentoring each week during October.



UPCOMING EVENTS

February 12 - 14th - Christian Ministries Convention, WGA booth and speaking.

April 22-24 - Restoring the Glory Conference at First Presbyterian in Boulder.

April 2nd - Sexuality and the Church 2004, stay tuned for more details!

June 25 - 27 - Family & Friends Retreat More information coming soon!

April 2 - 3 - WGA seminar with special speaker Sy Rogers. Stay tuned for more details!

WGA Staff

Mary Heathman
 Executive Director

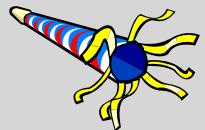
Scott Kingry
 Program Director

Roger Jones
 Operations Director

Sheila Knudtsen
 Resource Development

Purpose Statement

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
 is edited by
 Elodie Ballantine Emig.

Printed in the USA
 Copyright 2004