

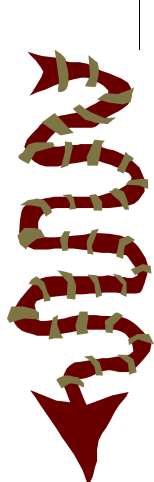


A Measure of Grace

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A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

Underneath Anger Is Pain. *By Mary Heathman*



Anger is often a rough cover-up desperately trying to protect a raw and painful wound just under its surface. It is like the quills on a porcupine—barbed, dangerous if you get too close, forming an effective shield to the soft and vulnerable body they protect.

Last month, in “The Journey Continues,” a WGA group member wrote of his anger at the Church, “ex-gay” ministries, and at God, before he responded to the still small voice of God calling him back to Truth. This month, in “It’s Not Fair,” a mother of three adult children, one of whom struggles with homosexuality, pours out her frustration with her sisters in Christ, ending with a bit of vision for how she hopes the people of God will one day treat her son and those like him.

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

Underneath Anger is Pain.	1
It's Not Fair	3
Reflections	4
Prayer Requests	6
September Activities	8
October & Beyond	8

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where grace abounds

(... Underneath continued from page 1)

At Where Grace Abounds, we want to offer grace and truth without compromise to both sinners and saints. We are not into bashing the Church for its failings. After all, we are the Church too!

We also want to tell the whole story—for every painful experience I’ve heard from a group member this week, I have also heard stories about the redemptive relationships some folks are experiencing in their Churches and small groups. Behind the scenes of every family isolated by their loved one’s sexual sin, there are the stories of Christian friends and pastors who love these families so much and are praying and walking alongside them in faith and hope on their behalf (and sometimes discouraged, disappointed, and overwhelmed by how difficult this ministry is).

Grace and truth, no compromise, is a simple concept, but difficult in its application. It is sometimes confusing to determine which should come first. Although it is the truth that convicts us of our sin, without the grace of God’s mercy we could never look at the truth without being condemned by it. Yet, but for the truth that reveals our need, God’s grace would have no appeal; we would sense no

need for its power.

God’s grace came alive to me in the first moments after realizing that God loved me, *as I was and am and may always be!* In the sustaining power of that grace I have been able, over and over again, to face the truth about myself, to repent and receive the spiritually surgical power of God’s truth changing my heart and mind. As a result, no longer am I the person I was; I am forever changed! What a miracle!

***“I was tempted to
give up on the
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there was so little
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grace here.”***

**Philip Yancey
Paraphrase**

When my son told me of his homosexuality, I looked for God’s grace for him—and the realities of the Church and its attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality caused me to stumble. Paraphrasing Philip Yancey in his book, *What’s so Amazing About Grace?*, I was tempted to give up on the church because there was so little grace here; I came back to the church because there was a little grace here.

Week after week, mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, and extended family members of sexual sinners, sit in their usual places in church, in Sunday School, prayer meetings, potluck dinners, and mission banquets. They are there with soul wounds tearing them apart from the inside

(Continued on page 7)



IT'S NOT FAIR

By Gloria

I struggle on a regular basis with being angry at the church and its response to those who struggle with homosexuality. It seems that the sins of homosexuals are singled out as especially heinous and in need of particular condemnation. On a regular basis I hear of people who are asked to leave their church because of their struggle with homosexual attractions, while at the same time the church sponsors divorce recovery classes. It's as if God is hard on homosexual sin and soft on divorce.

I can be defensive and sharp when people make the thoughtless remarks they often do (occasionally even in prayers) regarding homosexuals. **I've been asked why it is that after 20 years of dealing with this I'm still hurt and angry at the church. Well, it's because every few months, it happens again.**

Recently I was in a women's ministry meeting that I have attended weekly for several years. Everyone who regularly attends those meetings knows of my family's involvement with Where Grace Abounds and our son's struggle with homosexuality. The director of the ministry, I'll call

her Jennifer, stood up and announced that all of us should stop purchasing the products of a large manufacturer of household goods because they support an amendment to allow homosexual couples to marry. Jennifer began her announcement by stating that she didn't want to offend anyone. *(Whenever someone begins with that kind of disclaimer, I immediately prepare myself to be offended.)*

Jennifer went on to say that she knows and loves many people in the gay community and doesn't want them to be hurt but she is strongly opposed to gay marriage. I don't have any problem with that; she's welcome to her political beliefs. *(To put things in perspective, I would rather see any number of homosexual couples married than one baby killed in abortion.)*

What I did have a problem with, and I told her so, is the fact that in all of the years I've attended those meetings I don't remember another time when we were asked to boycott a product or service because its manufacturer or provider supports some issue that we as a church find offensive. This includes abortion and pornography. **If the church stands against pornography, would mem-**

(Continued on page 5)

Reflections:

Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By *Patrick Maschka*

*F*or what I want to do I do
not do, but what I hate I do
(Rom 7:15)

Feeling overwhelmed with temptation to indulge in sexual sin, I have found myself willing to disregard my family and risk my professional reputation. I have listened to people close to me share their grief over falling into sin after long periods of victory. I have witnessed children in many settings express immediate remorse over misconduct that they were not able to control minutes before. Over and over again, I see myself and others behave in ways that can only destroy us, knowing that a healthier and more fulfilling path is wide open. This human duality is to me at times almost maddening.

The strange tendency that people have to believe one way and act another is a mystery to me. I do not believe it is only confined to Christians. Granted, as Christians, we believe that living here on earth with our sights set on heaven creates understandable conflicts with our desires, but I have known people of other beliefs who experience “conviction” as intensely and commonly as me or anyone of the Christian faith. How universal is it for someone to wish

they could “take back” some cruel words they uttered? The psychologist in me wonders if we ever say or do anything we do not really want, but I think that most people recognize a standard or behavior to follow, and feel genuine regret when they fail to act accordingly.

I wish Paul’s discussion in the 7th chapter of Romans helped to really shed light on this matter. His confusion and frustration is as apparent as mine as he agonizes over the struggle between his spiritual beliefs and his fleshly desires. I can almost hear him sighing and throwing up his hands, when he finally cries, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24-25) Perhaps there can be comfort in knowing that I am in good company with this sinner whom God chose to convert many to Christianity. His choice of Paul as an apostle can only mean that he understands us entirely, and still loves us despite our contradictions.

If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31)

(Not Fair... continued from page 3)

bers be willing to cancel their cable service? I told her how I felt and she claimed to understand, but I don't think she really did.

In private conversation later, Jennifer told me of a gay couple she is in regular contact with. She professes to care about them, and I believe she does. But when they asked where she attended church with the idea that they might like to visit, she didn't get around to actually naming her church or giving them the address. Why? She said she was afraid they might not be well accepted. Would she have hesitated to give an unmarried-but-living-together heterosexual couple the same information? I don't think so.

Faced with the same situation, I would have put my church to the test, because I don't want to be part of a congregation that would mistreat anyone, regardless of their sin. For instance we let gluttons (like me) in all the time without a thought. How many adulterers do you suppose attend any good-sized congregation? How many alcoholics make their way to Sunday services every week? How often does a wife or child hide the bruises before going to Sunday school? Do you suppose there are any thieves among us? Statistics reveal that an uncomfortably high per-

centage of fulltime Christian ministers are addicted to pornography; shall we kick them out of our churches? I could go on, but I've made my point.

People with all good intentions have shown me volumes of Scripture to pass on to people who struggle with same sex attractions. And, while I genuinely appreciate their concern, I resent their lack of understanding.

Directors Note: Gloria's original article ended here with the stark statement of feeling patronized and misunderstood. When I asked her if she would comment on what would ease the pain and frustration she so often experiences, she offered the following comments:

***I would like to
see the church
stop weighing
and measuring
sin, condemning
one group and
accepting
another
(Galatians 5:20).***

It would be such a blessing and so encouraging if more churches invited Where Grace Abounds to

share the true facts about homosexuality and the path toward healing. I would love to see WGA overwhelmed with requests for education and testimonies of the work God is doing. I would like to see the church stop weighing and measuring sin, condemning one group and accepting another (Galatians 5:20). I would like the church to be a safe place for those who struggle with sexual sin. It would be so healing if "straight" men

(Continued on page 6)

Prayer Requests

Finances

We ask for your prayers for the finances of Where Grace Abounds. Over the past few months, income has been down. God has blessed us with having money in reserves to draw from during these low income months, however, our reserves are close to depletion. Please join us in prayer for God's provision and His direction for WGA.

Groups

We currently have between 45-60 people in attendance at our weekly group meeting. More come each month and we need leaders to be raised up to be group facilitators.

In January, we will be starting a Commitment Group for men and a

Survivors of Abuse Group. Currently, a number of people are preparing for these groups by reading books and participating in Discipleship Counseling. Please pray for these men and women over the next few months.



Speaking

We have a large number of speaking opportunities over the next few months. Please pray that God will use us in each environment that we find ourselves and that He will continue to provide new places for us to be able to share.

(Not Fair... continued from page 5)

and women would come alongside those who struggle. We need men and women to mentor them and help them to develop healthy same-sex relationships.



(Underneath... continued from page 2)

out. They hear the sermon, the lessons, the speeches, through a filter of their experience of how the Church has been with their family member. With notable, soul-comforting exceptions, the average experience is all too painfully familiar. We hear again that our sons and daughters, our husbands and wives, our mothers and fathers, with their sexual sins, are the worst of the worst.

The shame rises up and threatens to swallow us. Then the injustice of it rises up as well, and our pain is covered over with righteous indignation. We feel a bit stronger, because anger feels so much more powerful!

But we still would rather have the healing balm of Body Ministry for our wounds. We hope and pray for the Church to open its heart to our particular pain. We pray fervently and are encouraged by every point of progress we see. And we go back each week, hungry for the fellowship of the saints, hoping this time will be better.

How many are in the church having the experience I have just described? The best studies say that homosexuals make up 2-4% of our population. That means for every hundred in a congregation, 2-4 members struggle with same-sex attraction. Add to them 4-8 parents, a couple of siblings apiece, and a few extended family members and we easily have about 20% of our congregation dealing with a very painful issue that doesn't

get the attention it needs. If we were to add to that number the individuals and family members dealing with heterosexual sin, the number spikes dramatically!

I believe that Where Grace Abounds and other ministries with similar purpose have been raised up for just such a time as this. As sexual sin is rampant in our society and statistics just as high in the Church, the need is huge. Mothers like Gloria, and their families, need for their brothers and sisters in Christ to rise up and gather them into our fellowships with open, unqualified acceptance. We gather them, **not because they aren't sinners, but because we are also** and can offer the connection needed as blind beggars showing other beggars where to find food.

May the Lord whose provision is abundant, show us all how to help each other find the peace and provision that comes only from Him.



SEPTEMBER

Thursday Night Group

September 2nd - 56 people
September 9th - 44 people
September 16th - 50 people
September 23rd - 40 people
September 30th - 51 people
Orientation meeting - 11 new people

Discipleship Counseling and Mentoring

The WGA staff provided about 15 hours of discipleship counseling and mentoring each week last month.

September 20-22nd - WGA spoke to a high school class at Denver Christian High School

September 22 - November 3rd, Wednesdays - WGA teaching a 6 week class at a Christian Reformed Church

September 26th - WGA participated in Corona Presbyterian's Centennial Celebration.

OCTOBER & BEYOND

October 2nd - Intercessory Prayer.
Join us from 7:00 - 9:00 am at the WGA offices.

October 8th - WGA will teaching a seminar called "Redeemed Sexuality: What does it look like? How do we get there?" in Colorado Springs.

October 10th - Mary will be speaking during the main service at First Denver friends Church.

November 6th - Intercessory Prayer.
Join us from 7:00 - 9:00 am at the WGA offices.

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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
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