



A Measure of Grace

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How Did I Get Here?

By Mary Heathman

When I was a new Christian—maybe three years old in Him—I was learning about serving the Lord, loving my husband, raising my kids, teaching Sunday School. Stumbling and bumbling, but growing fast, I was trying to make up for all the misspent years. From those earliest years, I had a growing desire for God to let me do something really important—I felt an anticipation, excitement, and kept telling him, “Okay, okay, bring it on! Let’s go. A friend and I laughed then at our differences. She was one to say, “Lord, I’ll do anything for you, just don’t send me to Africa!” I was saying “Lord, please, don’t make me stay here and work things out, send me to Africa!”



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One day I was cleaning the bathroom, yet filled with my desire to do

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important stuff for God. Just when I got to the cleaning of the commode, a thought occurred to me, “*Whatever you are doing in my name is just as important as you’ve been feeling lately.*” I looked at the toilet and said, “THIS?!” And the thought came again, with emphasis, “Whatever you are doing in my name is just as important to me.”

After wrestling with the idea that cleaning a bathroom in His name was equally important to missionary work in Africa, the truth of it sank in and I believed Him. I began to try to live it out in my daily life, yet over the years failures and setbacks plagued me. In despair, I gave up and said, “God, I can’t do this: it’s impossible; if this life is ever going to get lived your way, you’re going to have to do it in me.”

That point of giving up seemed like one more failure to me, but it turned out to be the beginning of a life in the Spirit. God has spoken to me directly several times over the next few years.

Once when I presented Him with a list of ten important issues in my life and asked Him which one He wanted me to concentrate on, He said, “*None of these! You get close to me and I will take care of all those things.*”

When I was divorced as a Christian and poured out my shame to God over the sin of divorce and my inability to cope with it, He said, “*Weep over all sin; it is all offensive to me. Live in repentance.*”

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When one of my stepsons announced his choice to give up his struggle against homosexual feelings and live openly as a gay man, I railed out my disgust and revulsion to the Lord, and He said, “*I feel that way about all sin!*” As I pondered

that thought, I began to see my own sin nature as God saw it and realized we **are** all the same. Then came hopelessness. “If we’re all the same—sinners—who then can be saved?” And He said as He said to His apostles, “*All things are possible with God.*”

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Hey Kids! Want Good Sex? Try Abstinence.

By Warren Throckmorton, PhD

As a mental health counselor, I am really troubled by the numbers of adolescents that I have counseled who cried for days and hurt for years because they engaged in "safer sex" within dead end, unfulfilling relationships. Sadly, they learned that "safer sex" can be hazardous to their emotional health.

I think the current political debate concerning abstinence vs. contraceptive based sexual education has failed to include an important variable in the discussion of what to teach in school: sexual well being.

In many contemporary sexual education curricula, young boys and girls who listen carefully in health class will be schooled in the virtues of condoms. They may learn the mechanics and become involved in "safer sex" without the result of pregnancy or deadly disease. Sadly, though, such programs rarely inform them that their emotional and sexual adjustment would be enhanced if they would wait for the marital bed. What a disservice to a generation of young people.

I am raising this point because I just finished authoring a report, with

colleague David Blakeslee concerning proposed changes in sexual education curriculum in Montgomery County, MD. Among other innovations, these changes offer students a PG-13 experience in watching a condom application demonstration, featuring a female and a cucumber. Further, the curriculum explains to students that it is harmful to have risky sex (meaning sans condom) but says next to nothing about any problems associated with engaging in pre-marital sexual relationships, provided condoms are on board.

In other words, 10th graders, we will tell you that applying condoms may prevent disease and pregnancy but we will not tell you that your long term sexual and emotional satisfaction may be enhanced by saving sex until marriage. The curriculum says in places that the only sure way to prevent disease and pregnancy is through abstaining but there is no mention that one's overall well being might be enhanced by waiting.

Since you won't hear this in school, here are a few survey findings from research concerning abstinence.

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By *Nancy Hicks*

This month, Nancy wanted to share her favorite quote from Henri Nouwen. Ponder it for a few minutes and enjoy!

"To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond our imaginings. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God molds us according to God's love and not according to our

fear. The spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy, or prediction. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control."

Henri Nouwen

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According to 1996 data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, lower sexual activity among adolescents is correlated with higher levels of well being. In fact, sexually active girls are over three times as likely to report depressive symptoms than their abstaining counterparts and sexually active boys are over twice as likely to report depressive symptoms. Amazingly, these two groups report higher incidence of suicide attempts; boys in particular are at 8 times the risk for a suicide

attempt if they are sexually active.

Young women are particularly vulnerable. According to the sex survey Social Organization of Sexuality, by Edward Laumann and colleagues, "young women often go along with intercourse the first time, finding little physical pleasure in it..." The report notes that there are "dramatic costs for young women" which are "increasing as young women have intercourse earlier in the life course." (p.347). Sounds like delaying sexual involvement is a good thing both

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emotionally and sexually.

Concerning marital sex, the same report indicates that “a monogamous sexual partnership embedded in a formal marriage evidently produces the greatest satisfaction and pleasure.” (p. 364). Further, religious women are more likely to report being sexually satisfied than non-religious counterparts. These are the women who are more likely to have waited until they can follow the teachings of their faith about being “embedded in a formal marriage” before they have sex. However, presumably abstaining works for those of all faiths and those with none.

Why don’t health educators want kids to know these things? Good question. Ask it sometime at a school board meeting.

Instead, religious people and those who favor abstinence until marriage are usually portrayed as prudish, repressed folks afraid to talk about sex, let alone practice it. Rather it appears those smiles may be more than religious euphoria.

Given the positive health and mental health benefits of abstinence, it looks to me like these research findings should be prominently featured in sex

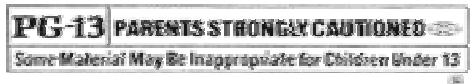
education curricula. That is unless all we want to do is get latex around the problem.

However, often the research results reported above are not even mentioned. Not in the (public education) curriculum and almost never in public debate concerning the best form of sexual education.

So kids, want great sex? Now you know what to do. Or should I say: what not to do.

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With new hope, I began to study how healing could be possible in the area of broken sexuality. I gathered info—Bible study, prayer, even reading pro-gay literature. I was lonely and isolated, not finding much but condemnation in Christian publications. And in other literature finding permission and a rationale for living a life of sexual and relational sin.

Sometime during these three years, I also worked as a volunteer doing crisis counseling for rape victims. I realized later that this experience served to prepare me in a unique way. There were two male rape victims all year. I got them both—on the same night!) I still remember their eyes—reddened with pain and shame. One reached up to me, “Help me, please.” The Lord said, “*I want to touch Him—will you touch him for me?*” I didn’t know how to help him, but I held his hand throughout the doctor’s examination.

Up until this point, I had been

primarily focused on finding God’s provision for those struggling with sexual issues so that I could help my son and his friends. I wanted to love them in Christ’s name without compromising His standards. I attended an annual PFLAG, (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays,) convention. It was at one of the workshops that I had an experience that changed my focus in prayer.

I remember thinking, “Lord, if not the church at the point of a family’s deepest pain, I don’t know what we are for!”

Just before one of the workshops, I was sitting in the second row, overhearing the conversation of the two women in front of me.

“How long have you known your son is gay?”

“Only about four months now. We are still trying to find a church that can help

us?”

“Well, you better forget about the church; They don’t have anything for us!”

I was stunned. I remember thinking, “Lord, if not the church at the point of a family’s deepest pain, I don’t know what we are for!” On the way home, the

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conversation and my feelings haunted me and I found myself praying differently, “Lord, if you will teach me what helps, I want to be part of the solution!”

When my focus of prayer changed, all sorts of resources I didn’t even know existed came tumbling to my attention. At the Mountain Area Sunday School Convention, a ministry presented testimonies from people who had come out of homosexuality. I was thrilled, and joined their support group, attended their Bible studies, met some people.

My isolation faded away—as I was enjoying these new relationships with people who understood how I felt. Then alone at lunch one day, in the midst of thanking God for these new-found friends, a thought occurred to me “*You’re leaving your first love.*”

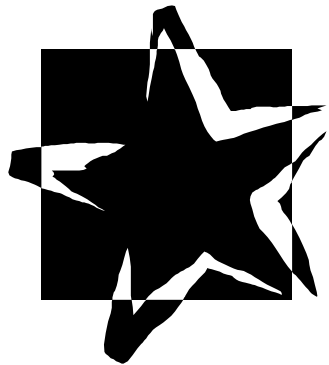
I said, “I thought You gave these relationships to me.” *SILENCE* “God, you can have them back, I don’t want anything between you and I.” *SILENCE*. The isolation settled in again.

The next time I was with my new friends, I was aware of intense loneliness. I already loved them, so I was confused. “God, I don’t

understand—I’m not supposed to have these friendships? And the Lord said, “*You can have them, just remember the Source—it is I, your God, who love you through them. It is I, the Lord, who love them through you.*”

And so it is, and has been ever since! Living out a life of loving and receiving love from people as if it was God Himself doing the loving! What a wonderful vision of the incarnational presence of Christ ministering through His people!

Mary’s personal story will continue in the February edition of A Measure of Grace...



DECEMBER

Thursday Night Group

December 2nd - 47 people
 December 9th - 60 people
 December 16th - 49 people
 December 23rd - 24 people
 December 30th - 54 people
 Orientation meeting - 5 new people

Discipleship Counseling and Mentoring

The WGA staff provided about 13 hours of discipleship counseling and mentoring each week last month.

JANUARY & BEYOND

January - Survivors of Abuse Group and Commitment Group begin. Both last for six months and are full.

January 2nd - Mary will be speaking at First Denver Friends Church.

January 11th - Mary will be speaking at a local MOPS meeting.

February 10th - 12th - Participating in the Christian Ministries Convention.
 May 6th - Sexuality and the Church, an educational seminar for pastors and ministry leaders, with special speaker Joe Dallas.

May 6-7 - Redeemed Sexuality Seminar, with special speaker Joe Dallas.

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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
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