



A Measure of Grace

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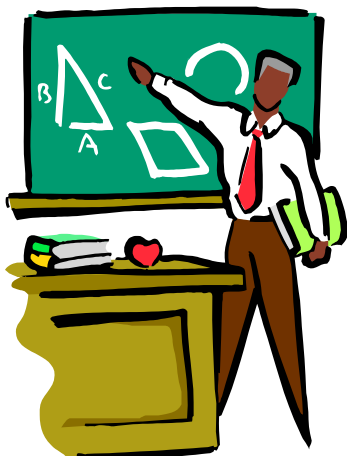
A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

What Have I Learned?

By Mary Heathman

The first two months of this year, I have written about my call to ministry in two articles addressing the question, "Where Have I Been?" For the next couple of months, maybe more, I would like to share some of the lessons I have learned in the past two decades of ministry.

As I thought and prayed about how to begin this series, it occurred to me that I already had begun. In January, my pastor concluded a series of messages on truth and grace. I was asked to share with the congregation on the following Sunday, "Lessons I have learned from making grace and truth a simultaneous priority." The following is adapted from that message.



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First a story: "Friend's Grace Motivates Change," by Bill White, Paramount, California,

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(What Have I Learned?... continued from page 1)
as quoted in *Leadership Weekly*,
March 18, 2003, and used by
permission:

*Recently I witnessed an unusual
accountability partnership at my
church.*

*In an effort to break his habit of
using profanity, Paul started meeting
with another guy from church, and
they set up an aggressive plan for
holiness. Each Sunday, Paul would
report to William how many times he
cussed during the week,
and he'd put \$5 in the
offering plate for each
incident. The first week
cost Paul \$100.
Although following
weeks improved
somewhat, he wasn't
having the success he
wanted and was losing a
lot of hard-earned cash.*

*After the fourth week,
William told Paul he had
unilaterally changed the
deal for the coming
week, but he wouldn't tell Paul how.
Paul wanted to know, but all William
would say was, "Trust me. It will
cost you both less and more."*

*The following Sunday before
worship, Paul was looking a bit
down, obviously having failed again.
William put a hand on his shoulder
and said, "Paul this will cost you
both less and more. It's called
grace." At that he took out a check*

*made out to the church, dated and
signed by William. Only the amount
was blank.*

*"Your sin still costs, but for you it's
free. Just fill in the numbers. And
next week there will be more grace."*

*That first week of grace cost William
\$55, but the second only cost him
\$20. There was no third week. It
cost Paul too much to fill in those
checks, so he quit sinning.*

***"Just knowing
somebody loved
me enough to
talk with me,
even when I am
so rebellious,
gave me the
strength not to do
what I was bent
on doing."***

The reason I like this
story is that it illustrates
truth and grace in action.

THE TRUTH IN ACTION:

When Paul wanted to
clean up his speech, he
was responding in
obedience to God's word
in Ephesians 5. If he
was like most of us, he
probably tried pretty
hard on his own. And,
like many of us, he
found it impossible to

live up to God's standards in his
habits of speech.

When he asked William to
hold him accountable, Paul was
complying with James 5:16, where it
says to "Confess your faults to one
another."

When William agreed to help
Paul in this way he also was applying
the truth, the Word, in his life. He
knew that he was called as a fellow

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Be Kind...

By Scott Kingry

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.”

-Philo of Alexandria

My annoying morning alarm goes off at six. I bargain with the “powers that be” for just 5 more minutes of sleep, while my head is already filling up with the urgent to-do list of the day. The morning news is on while I get ready. More murders since yesterday, more disasters, more tragedy—it’s hard to fight against the despair sometimes. Time to head for work. Rotting in slow rush hour traffic again. Amazed that it takes me 30 minutes to travel seven miles down Broadway. I sure hope there are no cars in heaven. Lunchtime already. Time to fight against the lunchtime crowd just to scarf down some fatty, artery clogging fast food. Circling the block looking for a parking place. Waiting in a long line again. I hate waiting for my turn. That lady who took my order sure was rude. Time to head home. Rotting in rush hour traffic. Alarm set and ready to do it all again tomorrow.

This daily, inner-robotic monolog was gratefully interrupted by the above quote. It wasn’t found in some

wise book I was studying or heard somewhere on the Christian airwaves. I came across it on a humble little bookmark stuck in a borrowed paperback lent to me by a friend. God, in about a million scriptures, has made his desire known for how we should treat one another. This simple sentence, spoken by what I assume is some ancient desert father, packs a wallop. When thought about for even a second, it comes in handy for re-filtering my day.

More murders since yesterday, more disasters, more tragedy.... These tragedies have a ripple effect on many people close to the situations. Instead of internalizing the despair, perhaps a prayer on behalf of these people could be offered up—what a thought.

Rotting in slow rush hour traffic again...waiting in a long line again.... One of the biggest revelations of my life (sad to say) was while I was grumpily waiting in some slow line or traffic. “I’m not the only person waiting.”

Instead of being an inconvenience or an obstacle to getting what I wanted, those around me were just poor harassed souls, trying to get home,

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By *Nancy Hicks*

Forgiveness Part I

In recent stirrings of my relational “pot,” I have discovered pockets of unresolved pain from people in my life. Old injuries have sprung to life with a fresh ache and I find myself sad, angry, full of revenge, insecure In the process of trying to sort through these emotions and figure out what I need to do to resolve things in myself and with the people who hurt me, I was given a marvelous booklet called *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*, by Neil T. Anderson. There is one part in particular that is freeing me increasingly:

No amount of revenge towards my perpetrators or penance from them is going to change the reality that my life is affected by what has happened.

“Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person’s sin. Forgiveness is costly. You pay the price of the evil you forgive. You’re going to live with those consequences whether you want to or not; your only choice is whether you will do so in the bitterness of unforgiveness or the freedom of forgiveness.”

These words are working a great freedom in my heart and a deeper understanding of what I must do for myself and what Christ has done for me. It is simply true that my life has been dented, scarred, and mangled in places by the consequences of the sins of others against me—directly and indirectly. The truth is that the consequences are here and they are

now. They are not going away; they cannot be undone. They can be redeemed and transformed, but they cannot be undone. No amount of revenge towards my perpetrators or penance from them is going to change the reality that my life is affected by what has happened. When I can let go of this longing to return to the innocence of

the past, I am stepping towards freedom; I am freed from the bondages of revenge and regret.

This definition of forgiveness is revealing some of the lies that have blocked my freedom in the past:

1. “That’s his problem, not mine.”
The piece of this that blocks me is

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(Reflections... continued from page 4)

my lack of willingness to acknowledge that the consequences of someone else's problem can and do affect me. If I deny that there are any consequences in my life, I am not free to forgive.

2. "What I do on my own time is my own business—sinning in secret doesn't hurt anyone else." My sin affects the people around me. My guilt, insecurity, or pre-occupation with my sin affects every relationship I have. There are consequences in the lives of the people around me when I sin. Period.

3. "If only . . . they would apologize; if only it never happened; if only I

had done it differently; if only they would recognize how much they've hurt me." Agreeing with the reality of what has happened in my life gives me the freedom to move forward, to begin to build around it instead of spending all of my energy pushing at an unmovable obstacle.



(Be Kind...continued from page 3)

trying to get something to eat, trying to pay for their groceries—just like me.

That lady who took my order sure was rude... Besides the general crabbiness one feels having to work at any vocation that disrupts our sleep or fun, who knows what is going on in the lives of those we encounter for those few moments each day. I know the deep personal pain, horrific circumstances or overwhelming emotions that I grapple with on a daily basis. Perhaps remembering *that* and realizing those around me are making similar attempts could arouse a bit of empathy. Be kind Scott, for everyone you meet is just trying to survive the day sometimes.

Seems like the point of the Christian life can be so simple. God would like us to get outside ourselves long enough to think about somebody else for a change. Luckily (or unluckily), we have plenty of time and opportunities to practice this each day. But I wonder if good ol' Philo of Alexandria wouldn't be just as cranky if he had to sit forever in grid locked traffic because of road construction.



(What Have I Learned?... continued from page 2)

Christian to come alongside and help his brother.

GRACE IN ACTION

Both men were applying truth in their lives, yet it appears that the truth by itself couldn't eliminate, but only illustrate, the problem—something was missing.

William seems to have known what it was, for he came up with the new plan—that the payment for Paul's sin, though rightly Paul's own responsibility, would be paid by William. The power of that grace was too strong for Paul's heart to ignore, and his heart was changed as grace soaked its way into the deepest regions of his heart, and then the habits of thought and behavior were broken.

This story reminds me of a man who came to WGA with a life-controlling sin habit. He did well in the first months as he learned about himself and God's provision for him. He even made some important decisions, established accountability relationships, and he was free of his sinful behavior for a couple of months.

But one day, the phone rang and I heard his voice, agitated, angry, *"Mary, I just want to know one thing. If I go and act out tonight, will you still talk to me tomorrow?"* I said, *"Ronald, you know you don't have to do this thing. . . . But if you do, I will still be here tomorrow to talk with you as usual."*

Slamming the phone down, he said, *"That's all I want to know!"*

I had mixed feelings – could I have talked him out of it? He would have listened to me, did I do the right thing? Did I just give him permission to sin?

The next day, the phone rang again, Ronald spoke before I finished saying "hello."

"Mary, I didn't do it!"

"Didn't do what?"

"I didn't act out!"

"What made you change your mind?"

"Just knowing somebody loved me enough to talk with me, even when I am so rebellious, gave me the strength not to do what I was bent on doing."

Grace and Truth Applied: 1 John 2:1

"My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin, but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one.

Five Lessons I have learned:

Lesson # 1: Grace and truth are two sides of a coin, not two different coins. If you try to spend one without the other, it becomes something else entirely; it isn't truth or grace, but a pseudo-truth, pseudo-grace.

Pseudo-truth is rigidity, legalism, one dimensional adherence to the letter of the law without concern for God's compassion and mercy.

Pseudo-grace is a license to "go on sinning so that grace may

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increase” (Romans 6:1), effectively rendering the truth irrelevant, compromising God’s standard of holiness.

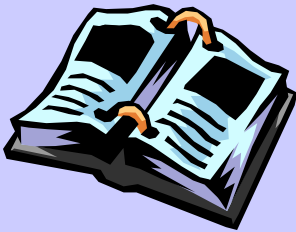
First lesson: Grace and truth, are two sides of a coin, not two different coins

Lesson #2: Grace and Truth are not incompatible, or unmixable like oil and water. They are intricately complementary and compatible like two well-trained skaters on ice,

moving together in synchronized rhythms and patterns. But it takes training and practice—how many times did they run into each other and work at cross-purposes before they got it right?

Second lesson: Grace and Truth are complementary and compatible.

Next month, we will pick up where I left off with Lesson #3.



Upcoming Events

Family & Friends Retreat

April 29th - May 1st

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 info@wheregraceabounds.org.

Sexuality and the Church 2005

Featuring Joe Dallas

The morning of May 6th

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! Brochures are available from the WGA office (303-863-7757, info@wheregraceabounds.org).

Redeemed Sexuality

Featuring Joe Dallas

May 6-7th

This seminar will address issues of sexuality and relational brokenness and is open to everyone! Contact the WGA office for a brochure at 303-863-7757 or info@wheregraceabounds.org.

FEBRUARY

Thursday Night Group

February 3rd - 41 people
February 10th - 47 people
February 17th - 32 people
February 24th - 40 people

Orientation meeting - 3 new people

Discipleship Counseling and Mentoring

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

February 4th - Introduction of WGA to a group of pastors in Greeley, CO.

February 8th - WGA presentation at a Missions Dinner Party sponsored by Arvada Covenant Church

February 10th - 12th - Participated in the Christian Ministries Convention.

February 25th - Participated in the annual missions banquet at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church.

MARCH & BEYOND

April 22-23rd - WGA Art & Faith Weekend. Contact Scott at the WGA office for more info.

April 29 - May 1st - Family and Friends Retreat. Contact the WGA office for more details.

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
is edited by
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