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A Measure of *Grace*

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Ministry for the Long Haul

by Mary Heathman

In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson talks about how following Christ is not a short-term mission trip, but a life-time endeavor. The title of his book is a good description of the WGA approach to discipleship ministry. WGA staff and leaders are committed to “a long obedience in the same direction”—walking alongside folks whose lives are torn and troubled by the consequences of sexual sin, whether their own, or that of a loved one. We are committed to walking alongside them as Jesus would.

“Paraclete,” is a New Testament word for the Holy Spirit, “one who comes alongside” as an

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advocate, a helper, a friend who would never leave nor for-

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1986-2006

20
YEARS

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sake. The seeds of the importance of that role took root early in my Christian walk. My spiritual mother, Dorothy, modeled the long-suffering tenacity of loving people as Jesus would love them. She loved me, not as a fair-weather friend, but through easy and hard times, when things got better or they got worse for me *or for her*. She celebrated when I succeeded and cried with me when I failed. Dorothy simply was present through it all, pointing me to the Lord in all circumstances, supporting and sustaining me as my roots grew down, and I grew up spiritually.

Even when Dorothy moved away, and we were no longer in touch, her influence permeated the way I viewed discipleship ministry. I didn't even know how much she was a part of the formation of the heart of my faith until she died a few years ago, and her passing shook me to the core of my soul.

It is no surprise, then, that from the moment it dawned on me that God was calling me into full-time ministry, I understood it was going to be for the rest of my life.

Of course, I knew that God could re-direct me anytime; but in the meantime, I was to be present to people as Dorothy was present to me—for the long haul.

As I got my bearings after landing in ministry full-time, it became necessary to define and develop the purpose, philosophy and approach to ministry. Throughout this process, Ephesians 3:8-21 came to the forefront as a core principle for WGA's specific call:

***WGA staff
and leaders
are committed
to "a long
obedience in
the same
direction"...***

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore,

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**It all started with
a cup of coffee . . .**

**Celebrate 20 years
of Ministry with us!**

Saturday, September 23, 2006

5:30pm

Hyatt Regency, Denver Tech Center

Dress: Semi Formal

\$50 per person

Included in the evening are dinner, silent auction,
entertainment, and the opportunity to invest in the
next 20 years of Where Grace Abounds.

We have much to celebrate!

Please contact the WGA Office
for additional information.

(303) 863-7757

Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

The Last installment on Freedom in Christ: Loving others

Christ has set us free from the tyranny of sin—I am no longer the helpless, hopeless victim of my sin. I am a free person struggling with sin instead of a slave at its mercy. I am free to invite other people to help me fight instead of hiding.

Christ has set us free from the fear of death—I am an eternal being who enjoys now and will enjoy forever friendship with the God who made me and forgave me. Instead of being afraid of other people and the threat they might bring to my life, I am excited about entering into the adventure of living this finite life together—rafting the white water together with a big grin on my face.

Christ has set us free to enjoy relationship with God—I am a child of God who experiences God's delight and learns from His correction, because I know it comes from a heart full of love for me that wants what's best for me. He teaches me more and more how to love by imitating Him.

As you can see, these freedoms naturally spill over to those around us. This gives us a picture of another aspect of life that we are freed TO.

We are free to love (and attempt to love) the people around us.

Remember what Paul said in Gal. 5:13, "It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. **Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love.** That's how freedom grows. For everything we know about God's Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That's an act of true freedom."

This love that we receive and share creates ease and movement in the relationships with those He brought me together with. Paul continues in Eph 4:16 "We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love."

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. I don't think it is a coincidence that the freedom He has provided for us enables us to do these very things! ☆

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not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this

love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

With every passing year, I am increasingly convinced that people whose besetting sin is sexual in nature are people who have not

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Community: The Worst and the Best

Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned (in Life Together)

"God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly.... He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself."

Eugene Peterson writes in Leadership,

"When we work well, our tastes, experiences, and values are held in check so that the nature of the material, or the person, or the process, or our God is as little adulterated or compromised by our ego as possible."

(Long Haul continued from page 5)

been “rooted and grounded in love.” They are men and women who are not “together with all the saints.” They became disconnected through past trauma, the consequences of their sin or that of another. Therefore, they do not have the power or ability to “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,” nor to “know this love that surpasses knowledge.” And without this rooting and grounding, without the community of the saints, they will never understand God’s love. They cannot be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

With this understanding as the foundation of what God was calling me to do, WGA was established as a community, an environment, rather than a program. There are other ministries that have programs designed for a season, and we are grateful for them. They are valuable resources providing educational and therapeutic experiences; we support these ministries and recommend that our group members take advantage of what they have to offer.

But at WGA, our ministry is one of providing rooting and grounding experiences. We provide ongoing support through our weekly

drop-in group with weekly testimony and teaching, and small groups where people can support one another. All this is in the greater context of the WGA community that works together, plays together, and seeks to follow Jesus together.

WGA leaders welcome newcomers, offering hope and friendship. People who re-enter the ministry after a short or long-term hiatus receive a warm welcome as well. We respectfully disagree with those who leave the community because they no longer agree with our position on sexual sin, but we love them nonetheless. They have become friends, and we remain in relationship with them to the extent that we are able.

Sometimes supporters ask me if it is discouraging to work in a field of ministry that appears so hard. I don’t see it as hard. In fact, the yoke is easy and the burden is light. It is where the Lord and I are yoked together, in deeply satisfying labor, and I don’t want to be any other place.

Brad Rutledge, director of the Celebrate Recovery program at Eastridge Community Church in Covington, Ga., when he was asked “whether it was depressing

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to be working with people with hurts, habits, and hang-ups," responded, "There is nothing that charges me up more than a messed-up life submitting to Christ and seeing them grow," he said. "It is absolutely amazing."

I, too, find it amazing! And as an aside, I would point out that I don't know where there are people *without* "hurts, habits and hang-ups." WGA group members are just forced by the degree of their pain to get the help they need. They are my heroes, the courageous ones who will admit their need and seek the Lord's provision. I want to be on their bandwagon the rest of my life, or till the Lord comes back, whichever comes first.

There are a significant group of WGA leaders who want the same thing. We are in it for the long haul! ☆

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Pressing On

"Failure is not fatal.
Failure should be our
teacher, not our undertaker.
It should challenge us to new
heights of accomplishments, not
pull us to new depths of despair.
From honest failure can
come valuable experience."

-- **William Arthur Ward**



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August

At a Glance

August 3-5th: Mary participated in the Iowa Meetings of Friends

August 10-12: Mary participated in the Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting of Friends

Thursday Night Group

August 3rd - 51 people

August 10th - 43 people

August 17th - 44 people

August 24th - 49 people

August 31st - 40 people

Orientation meeting - 6 new people

September

And Beyond

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

September 23rd: WGA 20th Anniversary Celebration Banquet at the Hyatt Regency DTC

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

October 8th: WGA presenting at First Denver Friends Church

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A Measure of Grace
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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.

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