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**WHERE
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WGA and the Great Commission

by Mary Heathman

(Note: This article is adapted from Mary's remarks at last month's 20th Anniversary Celebration.)

Parables in the Gospel have always tugged at my heart. In my mind's eye, I see myself on the look-out with the prodigal father who is watching for his son to come home. I am inspired by the tenacity of the woman who turned her house inside out until she found her lost coin. My heart beats as one with the shepherd who leaves the rest of the flock to search far and wide for his lost sheep. When there is "great rejoicing" over the return of the son, finding of the coin and lost sheep, my heart leaps. It is good cause for rejoicing, when a lost one is found.

With these parables in mind, my thoughts also turn to the Great Commission:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing, (immersing),

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them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Mt 28: 19

So, with all this already in my mind and heart when first called to ministry, I assumed I would go out into the “highways and byways” to find lost sheep and love them in Jesus’ name.

Loving in Jesus’ name has been part of how the call has worked itself out. But except for a few memorable experiences, notable for their infrequency, the “going out” has not been part of the picture. The Lord has not yet taken us out much into the world; we have been occupied instead with the care of souls damaged and burdened, but nonetheless already in the kingdom.

Sometimes we get to introduce people to Jesus for the first time, but most often they already know the basics of the Gospel message. They already know the standards, the laws, and the responsibilities of being a Christian. What they don’t know at least not experientially, is that God’s love and grace covers them too.

As they pick up the phone to call

WGA, their prayer is often like words straight out of Psalm 119, “*I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.*” It seems the Lord has WGA focused on providing support and ministry to men and women who already know Him, but have gotten off track through the consequences of sexual sin, their own or another’s. I have often pondered this and prayed frequently that the Lord would show me what WGA’s place is in the Body of Christ, what our role is in fulfilling the Great Commission.

It seems the Lord has WGA focused on providing support and ministry to men and women who already know Him...

With that question heavy on my mind, a passage comes to mind. Jesus had just likened “*harassed and helpless*” people to “*sheep without a shepherd*”(Mt 9). And right after He said this, He called His disciples to Him, gave

them spiritual authority, and sent them out with instructions: “*Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near!’*” (Mt 10:6-7).

Jesus sent the disciples to the lost sheep of Israel, the home front, with the good news that the kingdom of heaven is near!

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When I landed on the doorstep of First Denver Friends Church in March of 1972, I was harassed and helpless. I had it pretty well covered up; just a professional woman looking for a preschool for my 4-year-old stepson. But my life was a mess. Over time, God grew me up in that environment. And it didn't happen in a vacuum either, though I tried my best to get God to handle things just between Him and me.

Have you noticed that God most often works through His people? When God wants to make eye contact with someone, it is through one of us, isn't it? When He wants to comfort, nurture, feed, or simply be with someone, it is often through His people that He meets those needs and makes Himself known. It was through a few folks who came alongside, who had compassion on me, who could see that I was *"harassed and helpless, and needed to be taught many things."* It was through His people that I came to know and experience God's truth and grace.

Fourteen years later, I had an encounter with God that permanently etched on my heart and mind a specific call, a call to come alongside people who struggled with life-controlling sexual and relational sin. With my background, it isn't much of a surprise that I wanted to create the same environment for them that I had experienced when I was trapped in my own brokenness. What was

needed was a place of grace without compromising the truth; what was needed was the teaching of the truth without compromising God's grace.

100% Grace, 100% Truth; No Compromise.

In Isaiah 57, the first twelve verses cause a sexual sinner to tremble. It speaks of the wantonness of Israel who had, in the words of Eugene Peterson, in the Message, *"made your bed your place of worship."* But sometimes people don't read far enough—for the next five verses offer hope. Again the Message reads: *"But anyone who runs to me for help will inherit the land, will end up owning my holy mountain!"* Someone says, *'Build, build! Make a road! Clear the way, remove the rocks from the road my people will travel.'* A message from the high and towering God, who lies in Eternity, whose name is Holy: *'I live in the high and holy places, but also with the low-spirited, the spirit-crushed, and what I do is put new spirit in them, get them up and on their feet again. When I looked again and saw what he was doing, I decided to heal him, lead him, and comfort him, . . . Peace to the far-off, peace to the near-at-hand, says God, and YES, I will heal them.'"*

How will God lead and comfort folks—if not through the compassionate ministry of His men and

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

When I landed on Where Grace Abounds' doorstep six years ago, it was the farthest thing from my mind that I would ever be on this side of things. With this irony in mind, I think back on that time, now from my perspective as a WGA leader.

It was October of 2000, while participating in the worship program at my church, that I became emotionally dependent on the director of worship. She and I first connected through music, then our emotions, and quickly became enmeshed in an emotionally dependent adulterous relationship. After a short time, we knew that what we were doing wasn't right. We approached the pastor and confessed our sin.

Well, our pastor wasn't exactly sure what to do with us. He formed a committee to address our situation. In the end, they decided to terminate the director's employment and asked her not to attend there for a year. I was told that I could continue to attend, but was asked not to be involved with any ministry within the church for

one year. We were both told not to discuss this with anyone else within the church.

The announcement was made to the congregation that the director of worship had been terminated. She was asked not to be in contact with me or anyone else from the church, though many people were distressed. My husband and I tried to continue to attend, but under the mandate of strict secrecy it just didn't feel right to us anymore. It became apparent that my family could not continue with this church. We sought help through counseling and were referred to the ministry of Where Grace Abounds (WGA). Thank goodness!

At WGA, I shared my story with a woman in leadership who invited me to come to church with her. My husband came with me and we both felt like it was a good fit. After a season of settling in, we became involved in the music program, serving communion, doing all the things we loved doing in service to our Lord through the church. We started new relation-

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ships and became involved in small groups. Over the past few years we have built some meaningful and fulfilling relationships.

Well, just this week, I find it odd to witness a familiar situation unfolding at our church. An inappropriate working relationship developed between a man and a woman involved in leadership, both of whom are very close friends of ours. Now our new church family has to deal with this, and it seems that the Lord has my husband and me in this church for just such a time as this. We were privileged to share our testimony last year, and are in position now to offer support.

We are blessed to see how graciously the situation is being handled. A formal announcement was made bringing everything into the light, followed by prayer at the regular services. There was no secrecy, no trying to hide anything. The truth is out there in the open for all to know. It is healing to see God's grace and truth working through the leadership of our church.

I am so thankful for God's gracious mercy regarding my husband's and my relationship as

well. It is a fact that we wouldn't still be together if it weren't for the many blessings we have received from the ministry of Where Grace Abounds and the leadership of our church family.

Another point of healing--God has worked on my relationship with my former church. He has filled me with understanding and grace toward them, and I know they have come alongside WGA with both prayers and financial support as well. I have learned that God truly works everything for good! ☆



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women? How will they know that the Lord is with them when they are “low-spirited, spirit-crushed”—if it isn’t through the presence of His people, His love poured through His men and women?

Isn’t it our jobs to “build the road,” “clear the way,” and “remove the rocks from the road His people will travel?”

In the story of the raising of Lazarus, after Lazarus had been in the grave for four days, Jesus directed the people to remove the stone, and raised His eyes to heaven and prayed, then He shouted, “*Lazarus, come out!*” And he came out, a cadaver, wrapped from head to toe, and with a kerchief over his face. Jesus told them, “*Unwrap him and let him loose*” (John 11).

The stone over the opening to Jesus’ tomb was moved supernaturally; Lazarus’s was moved by the people gathered around. Jesus left His burial cloths behind; Lazarus came out of the tomb still bound up in his grave clothes.

I believe that it is our job to gather around those who are drowning in the dark side of their sexuality—if there is the slightest indication they want to be

rescued. I believe that it is our job to gather around those who are sorely tempted to give up on God’s standards and dive into the deep-end of their lust—if they are at all willing to have us around.

Sometimes sin is simply rebellion, wanting something other than God’s provision. But often sin is also complicated by a lack of understanding about sexuality, relationships, and God’s provision. With this dearth of

knowledge, folks are cut off from the community of faith as surely as Lazarus was lifeless and locked away in his tomb. I believe God would have us roll away the stone and let the light of Christ shine in!

And when, like Lazarus, people come out into the light, still all wound up in their grave clothes—

- the consequences of their own sin, (or the sins committed against them by another)
 - habitual destructive styles of relating
 - unresolved trauma
 - unmet developmental needs
- I believe it is our job to “*unwrap them and let them loose.*”

In their season with WGA, it is our hope that people find a place to be

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I believe that it is our jobs to gather around those who are drowning in the dark side of their sexuality—if there is the slightest indication they want to be rescued.

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“unwound,” a place to receive the blessing of relationship with others who love and care for them as they are. In an atmosphere of grace and truth, we hope that people will come out of the darkness and into the light, on their way to becoming the men and women God created them to be.

In a prophetic passage from Isaiah, 42:3, we read that the Messiah, when He comes, will approach people gently. . . . “*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.*” Picture that! Jesus is walking out into the fields, finding a damaged reed, tenderly straightening, holding and supporting it until it heals. Or imagine Him walking into a room all stunk up with smoke from a candle almost ready to give up the ghost, and Jesus cups

His hands around the wick, breathes on it gently until it bursts into flame again. That’s what WGA is to do for folks, to hold and support the almost fatally broken ones; to breathe fresh air into the stale environment of those whose flame of life is sputtering badly.

What does all this have to do with the Great Commission? Many of God’s men and women are harassed and helpless when it comes to their sexu-

ality and relationships. They are active in their churches **and** nearly paralyzed by life-controlling sexual feelings and behaviors that sap all their energy. They are leaders in their youth groups **and** privately wondering if God’s grace is for them as well as for the sinners outside the church walls. These people cannot sustain the tension; they eventually collapse under it.

People cannot fulfill their part in the Great Commission until they themselves are no longer the lost sheep, disconnected from the body and in need of intensive care and healing. Nor can they take their place as mature men and women of God, when they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

WGA is part of the Body of Christ, like an intensive care unit, where lost and broken people find rest, hope, and renewal—much of what it takes to keep on keeping on. They find truth, vision and accountability—much of what it takes to keep growing; and they find companions who will walk with them along the way so they need not do it alone. ☆

Many of God’s men and women are harassed and helpless when it comes to their sexuality and relationships.



September At a Glance

September 10th : Scott Kingry presented his testimony at a local church called The Ridge.

September 17th: Mary Heathman spoke at Little Chapel of the Hills

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

October And Beyond

October 6th: Mary Heathman is presenting to a local MOPS group

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

October 8th: WGA presenting at First Denver Friends

October 15th: WGA is participating in a missions fair at Colorado Community Church.

October 15th: Mary Heathman will be presenting at Arvada Covenant Church.

October 20-22nd: WGA is participating in Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church's Domestic Missions Weekend.

Thursday Night Group

September 7th - 51 people
September 14th- 47 people
September 21st- 45 people
September 28th- 48 people

Orientation meeting - 5 new people

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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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