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A Measure of *Grace*

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

WGA—A Healing Environment *by Mary Heathman*

In last month's newsletter, the third of five in a series (see side bar on page 5 for key points from previous articles), I described how "sometimes behind the scenes, sometimes center-stage, WGA provides resources, referrals and direct ministry to individuals, pastors and other Christian leaders." This month, I would like to give our readers a picture of the direct ministry WGA provides.

Currently WGA staff and leaders provide an environment of grace and truth for about fifty men and women in our weekly drop-in support group, and for eleven more participating in our six month commitment groups. For the individuals who struggle personally with sexual and relational problems of various kinds, and for the family members who love them, WGA offers comfort, encouragement and hope, through support groups and other points of contact. The staff spends time mentoring

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where grace abounds

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WGA leaders (currently about fifteen active leaders), who work alongside us as we care for folks in weekly discipleship counseling and spiritual direction sessions. To round out the picture, all of these activities are interwoven with basic discipleship and community building activities.

Support Groups: A weekly drop-in group and various annual commitment groups provide a consistent source of hope, support and encouragement. With a simple structure: ice breaker question, speaker and small group sharing time, the drop-in group experience provides the participants with a place to look for and cooperate with what God is doing in their lives. After they hear a speaker share, group members are numbered off into small groups where a WGA leader helps them to face sexual struggles they may never have talked about anywhere else. They confess their sins, share their hopes and dreams, and often pray for each other. In six-month commitment groups, the element of accountability is stronger, with group members working on self-selected goals and objectives. WGA leaders as teachers and group facilitators offer examples of healthy relationships with God, self and others. In these ways, group participants are sup-

ported, encouraged and inspired toward healthy sexuality and interpersonal relationships.

Mentoring Leaders: WGA staff members and leaders have mentored group members, seminary and college students, other ministry leaders, and interns who want to learn the WGA model for ministry. From the very beginnings of a person's journey, there are meaningful ways in which people can serve, from welcoming first timers, to hosting a social event, teaching a class, speaking

at a ministry presentation, etc. At the current time we have about fifteen active volunteer leaders and several alumni who volunteer in a variety of ways. Some lead support groups, others write for the newsletter, support the ministry financially, attend ministry events, and fill in for staff when we are on vacation or sabbatical. Developing

leaders is a key function of the WGA staff; without these important folks, the WGA discipleship ministry would be spread too thin to be effective.

Discipleship Counseling: When a group member has finished the first twelve weeks (Foundations) and read four recommended books, they become eligible for a series of sessions

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Mountains and Molehills

“Stop making a mountain out of a molehill!” As a child with “worrying tendencies,” I heard this command many times growing up. I don’t think I’m alone in my skills of taking a small possibility of disaster and turning it into an epic horror movie within minutes in my mind. For example, after 20 years of marriage my husband and I can finally joke about my ritual of planning for his imminent death every time he leaves on a trip.

Not surprisingly, God works in exactly the opposite direction. He makes molehills out of mountains! As the Israelites wearily returned from 70 years of captivity in Babylon to a decimated Jerusalem, God started speaking to them about rebuilding. They were overwhelmed with the task—a true mountain of a job. But God assured them (and us), “You can’t force these things. They only come about through my Spirit,” says God-of-the-Angel-Armies. ‘So, big mountain,

who do you think you are? Next to Zerubbabel you’re nothing but a molehill. He’ll proceed to set the Cornerstone in place, accompanied by cheers: Yes! Yes! Do it!” (Zech 4:6+7 The Message)

When the Cornerstone (Christ Himself) is in place, hold onto your hat!

The hand of God never tires, nor are its movements aimless. It makes all things subservient to its designs, and, at every turn, disappoints the calculations of man, causing the most insignificant events to expand to the mightiest consequences, while those that have the appearance of mountains vanish into nothing.

John Lanahan

Sabbatical Update

By Roger Jones

From January 1st through March 31st, I was blessed to be able to take a sabbatical. A number of years ago, the WGA Board of Directors instituted a policy which allowed for staff members to take a three month sabbatical after ten years of service. The timing worked out very well for me during this season of transition, as Mary stepped into her new role as Founding Director and I became the Executive Director, effective April 1st. Prior to beginning my sabbatical, I was able to completely wrap up my old job as Operations Director, so I could return to a fresh start.

I've been asked by a number of people about what I did during my time away. Here is a bit of a re-cap: I spent about a week in Orlando, partly for a conference and mostly for fun. Theme parks were definitely the "theme" for me there, as I went to Epcot, Magic Kingdom, MGM Studios, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure! It was an exhaustingly fun time!

I made two trips to Texas. My first trip was a road trip to Dallas with a friend of mine. We spent a few days with my friend's family just hanging out. On the way to Dallas, we stopped in Amarillo to see my old school (West Texas A&M), old apartments, old jobs, etc... It was a fun walk down memory lane.

My second trip to Texas was to Seminole, where I grew up. I had a nice time seeing family and old friends as well as visiting the church my parents attend,



Family Harvest Church. The church is very supportive of Where Grace Abounds so it is always a blessing to connect with the people there.

For much of my time, I was at home in Denver. I slept in and rested. I read a number of books, mostly for fun (including a great book about zombies). I went to some coffee shops, and I cleaned out my closets. I went to the movies and shopped (too much). I exercised and ate better. I even lost a few pounds!

One of my goals was to spend some time with God. It seems that when things get busy in life, time in prayer and studying Scripture are the first things to go out the window. I've become an expert at praying in my car or in the shower over the years! I really wanted to slow down and just do one thing at a time. I met regularly with Chuck Orwiler, the pastor of First Denver Friends Church. He challenged me to do a Daily Examen, which consists of times of thankfulness, confession, asking God what He would like me to do each day, and just sitting in the presence and love of God. This was and continues to be a great exercise for me. It helps me to stop and be present to what God is doing in my life and all around me.

Now that I am back in the daily-ness of ministry, I find myself struggling to keep those good habits in place. It is much easier to spend time with God when it is the only thing on the schedule for the day! I have missed a few of my morning

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prayer times over the past several weeks, and I can definitely tell a difference in the way my day goes when I do. It is a trap for many to get so wrapped up in the “doing” of God’s work, that the “being” part of our relationship with Him gets neglected.

These are the highlights from my sabbatical. I appreciate your prayers for me while I was gone, and for those who were here carrying an extra workload so

that I could be away. I am blessed and rested and excited about what God is doing here. Please keep us in your prayers as we continue our transition. Please remember Mary as well, who will return from her three month sabbatical on July 24th.

Key Points in Series By Mary Heathman

Few would deny that illegal sexual behavior is a problem. But in discussions about how to address it, there is often a tremendous resistance when it comes to [addressing] the precursor to these extreme behaviors—rampant expression of sexuality outside of biblical parameters.

The public is outraged and demands more and more protection against sexually motivated crimes, while at the same time the majority view any talk of abstinence or biblical standards for morality as archaic, irrelevant, and oppressive.

There is great distress among believers over the sexual immorality in our society, yet the statistics for sexual impropriety are almost the same among believers as they are for the population at large.

It is my firm conviction that the Church cannot fulfill its call to be salt and light in our world while so many brothers and sisters are entangled in sexual darkness themselves.

We need people who are called by His name to humble themselves, pray, and experience healing in their sexuality and relationships. We need such people to bring a prophetic voice into the Church and into our culture with a call to repentance over sexual sin, a call to holiness, to a restoration of God’s original intent for sexuality.

It is my hope and prayer that Where Grace Abounds is a rooting and grounding place for such people; a place first to heal, then to be sent by God to the Church and to our society as missionaries to the sexually broken, proclaiming the good news of God’s grace and truth, His forgiveness and restoration, His peace.

(Healing Environment continued from page 2)

designed to address their particular needs or concerns. In these sessions a team of staff or leaders (ideally consisting of a male and female) meet with a person for 6-12 weeks. The first session starts out with a discussion regarding expectations and goals (set by the group member.) These sessions are not a substitute for professional counseling, but are rather like life coaching, or mentoring, depending on the needs and goals of the group member. These sessions are also often used to prepare a person for participation in Commitment or Survivors of Abuse Groups.

Spiritual Direction:

Knowing that WGA's purpose is to guide and support people toward God's plan for sexuality and relationship, group members often ask for counsel and direction regarding their relationship with God, understanding the scriptures, and guidance in finding a church that will support them in their healing journey. This sort of emphasis goes on sometimes during discipleship counseling, but also in a commitment group held annually, called Going Deeper With God. And it is often true that the most profound conversations take place before and after group or at social functions. In all these ways it is always a privilege to walk alongside

people in their pursuit of God and His provision for them.

Basic Discipleship: I have coined this phrase to help describe how a group member learns from leaders. Our model is taken directly from Scripture, the example of Jesus and His disciples. Jesus spent lots of time with them, traveled, ate, hung out in the garden, prayed, and I believe He played with them. I imagine that the scene where Jesus tells His disciples to let the little children come to Him

was filled with the chaotic fun of children at play. One of my favorite scenes is from the Gospel Road that depicts Jesus laughing and playing with children, splashing them with water. It is in these informal, living-life-together scenes, that teachable moments present themselves, where leaders are living out their faith and healing, and group members are there to see, hear, participate in the process.

Basic discipleship includes teaching at the right times and places, but involves so much more than that. I am grateful for all the leaders at WGA who join the staff in this constant positive presence among our group members.

Community Building: An article describing the direct ministry of WGA

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(Healing Environment continued from page 6)

would not be complete without some attention paid to the process of community building. WGA staff and leaders know that many of the folks who attend WGA do not have a community where they are known intimately, nor do they often know other Christians deeply enough to trust them. At least not to build the trust necessary to risk sharing who they really are—the nitty-gritty of their lives, including their sexual struggles, and their hopes and dreams for the future, their yearning for true intimacy with God and His people. At WGA, we provide a place where people can become “rooted and grounded in love, and together with all the saints,” where they can experience and understand the heights, depths, and width of God’s love. We are created for relationship with God and one another. People don’t grow without a nurturing community where they can belong.

For many folks, WGA is the place for this process to begin, or to grow stronger. Many of the activities that build community have been described above—it takes sharing deeply together about our hopes and dreams as well as the pain of our failures and disappointments. It takes working together on our own issues and getting outside of ourselves enough to help others with theirs. And it also takes having fun together. WGA has a social activity at least once a month, everything from game nights where we play dominoes or strategy games or sit around and talk about lighter topics like movies or music. We have

held campouts, hikes, sing-a-longs, gone to plays, movie marathons, and attend birthday parties and graduations. Life is meant to be lived together in a community held together by a common purpose – to be formed into Christ’s image—the grand goal of every believer’s life. At WGA, the focus is on a little narrower part of that greater goal –to find God’s provision for healthy sexuality and to inspire one another to holiness in our relationships.

In conclusion, it seems important to say that I have just given an overview of what goes on at WGA in direct ministry to people. I believe I have done a decent job, but can already think of many more words I could use to describe it better. Nonetheless, I will close, trusting that in this bit of space and time I have cast vision and understanding for how the Lord is working through WGA to meet the needs of people.

One final category of people that are vital to this process: WGA supporters, both financial and intercessory prayers are the stuff of which the backbone of our ministry is made. None of it exists without them, as we do not charge for any of our services. “Freely, freely we have received, freely freely give!”

Thank you! Thank you!



April

At a Glance

April 15th: Mary and Scott presented to Corona Presbyterian Church youth on sexuality and culture

April 22nd: Mary and Scott presented to Corona Presbyterian Church youth on the purpose of attraction

April 29th: Mary and Scott presented to Corona Presbyterian Church youth on homosexuality

Thursday Night Group

April 5th: 37

April 12th: No Group

April 19th: 44

April 26th: 39

Orientation meeting; 6 new people

May

And Beyond

May 29th: Scott presenting at Jubilee Church

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

June 26th—July 1st: Exodus International Conference—Irvine, CA

July 17th and 24th: WGA will be presenting at the Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting Youth Camp

September 20-22nd: Mary will be speaking at the MOPS annual leadership training convention

September 25th: Scott will be speaking at Tuesday Morning Joy

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A Measure of Grace
is edited by
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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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