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A Measure of Grace

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WGA ~ In Context

by Mary Heathman

In this last of five articles on the need and purpose of WGA, it seems fitting to write about WGA within the context of its place among a network of ministries and organizations that have a similar purpose—to address the sexual issues of our day. I will describe the WGA approach in relation to how we are alike and different from other para-church organizations, illustrate our approach as it compares to those of recovery programs in general. A closely related issue, WGA and public debate, is addressed in another article, A Third Voice. (See page 3)

WGA has much in common with other para-church organizations. We are all specialists in one aspect or another of the Great Commission. Many are social service organizations offering a variety of services. Within

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this vast array of efforts, WGA stands out as one of a few

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Where Grace Abounds
P.O. Box 18871
Denver, Colorado 80218

Office: 303/863-7757
Fax: 303/863-7769

email: Wwga@aol.com
www.wheregraceabounds.org

WGA
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that specialize in addressing sexual and relational issues. WGA staff and leaders are some of the “few” workers mentioned in Luke 10:2 “He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” One particular distinction of ministries like WGA is its need for close partnership with the Church. Healing for broken sexuality and relationships must be set in the context of healthy relationships; it is ideal when those relationships are with people who are also our brothers and sisters in Christ. So, WGA must operate more closely with the Body of Christ than do many other para-church organizations.

Among other recovery programs, there are similarities and differences when compared to the WGA approach to recovery. For secular support programs, like twelve-step programs, professionally led treatment programs, etc., WGA offers literature and resources, a support-group environment that offers opportunities to

talk with others in recovery. Unlike many of these groups, however, WGA is an environment that is friendly to those whose motivations for recovery are rooted in their values and the dictates of their faith communities. For those who have other motivations, but want to attend our group, we hope that our witness is that of salt and light to the flavorless and darkest moments of whatever it is that keeps them from being all that God created them to be. We also pray that the truth and grace of God’s love will permeate their experience and they will be drawn to the Father through the witness of WGA leaders and other group members.

There is a growing recovery movement in the Church as well. One of these, Celebrate Recovery, has several groups in our area, and WGA refers people to them, and some of their leaders refer to us as needed. These groups are an answer to prayer for many of us who have prayed for an openness in the Church to provide just such support for struggling Christians. It

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WGA is an environment that is friendly to those whose motivations for recovery are rooted in their values and the dictates of their faith communities.

WGA ~ In the Debate

By Mary Heathman

Within society's polarized attitudes and opinions about sexuality, particularly in battles over gay rights, Where Grace Abounds sees itself as a third voice. WGA stands in agreement and disagreement with both "sides" of the debate.

One side of this debate advocates for and celebrates freedom of sexual expression; abstinence is viewed as unhealthy, repressive, even damaging to people. To the folks who hold this position, if God is brought into the picture at all, He is said to love and accept all His creation as they are, that He created some people homosexual. They would say that it is mean-spirited, even doing spiritual violence, to say that homosexual behavior is contrary to His standards.

The other side of this debate condemns the expression of sexuality in any form outside of the boundaries of heterosexual marriage. To these people, homosexuality is a violation of God's standard. They would say that homosexuality is a threat to marriage, a sin that must be condemned.

The third voice: agrees that people are free to make their own choices, including what they choose to do about their sexual attractions, but we

disagree that abstinence is damaging to people. WGA also agrees that God loves and accepts anyone exactly as we are; but we disagree that He leaves us there. And, we agree that God's standard is heterosexual marriage; but we disagree that homosexuality is any more a threat than are adultery, pornography, or any other sexual sin.

In summary, WGA believes all sexual sinners are in the same boat, whether heterosexual or homosexual, and that God's forgiveness is available to us all. We also see the sin of self-righteousness as equally heinous in the eyes of God and those who condemn others as equally in need of redemption as any of the people they accuse.

May the Lord of grace and truth bring hope and peace to those who struggle, and bring a spirit of conviction upon those who would judge others. ☆

Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By JK

“My process” of healing has been.... impossible to describe. Not because it has been so unique or so typical. It’s because healing at the deepest parts of me is indescribable. My rational mind tries to put boundaries and explanations around it, tries to quantify what has happened and is happening in me...but it’s just not possible. The Healer knows that I want to share what He’s been doing and so He makes a way for me. Here’s the metaphor God used to help me understand and tell about one small part of “my process”.

I’m not a soldier. I didn’t grow up in a soldier’s family. My grandfather wasn’t a soldier, my father wasn’t a soldier, my brother wasn’t a soldier, I’m not a soldier.... I know nothing about defense strategies or warfare. So it makes no sense that I would dream about warfare.... but the dream itself makes perfect sense to me.

I wasn’t a warrior in my dream but I saw many people huddled in trenches on a battlefield. They weren’t fighting. They were waiting. It looked like they were resting before they took up their weapons, climbed up out of the trench, and moved forward. The soldiers advanced into smoke and con-



fusion, believing there would be another trench, another place to rest protected from the battle. They crawled on their bellies, they ran, they walked hesitantly forward but they didn’t look back. Their faces looked scared but also strong with determination. Not one of them stayed behind in the trench.... every soldier moved forward.

That was the entire dream, not long but very intense, and then I woke up. I remember lying in my bed with my eyes still closed and wondering why I would dream such a weird scene... I started to think about the trenches and wonder why soldiers would leave the safety of their trench? If they were safe shouldn’t they stay there? They could hear the battle, not have to experience it. But....if they stayed they could never advance, they couldn’t “win”, they couldn’t move into the place they were supposed to take.

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I'm a relatively intelligent person but it took a while for me to see the application to my life. The dream is a picture of my healing path. I am one of the soldiers and in my healing process I have fought to stay in my trench ... in my nicely decorated trench with the well-groomed lawn and the beautiful flowers. I was "safe" and unaware of the battle raging for me, for my heart.

In different seasons of my life members of the "army" invited me forward and I would begin to advance only to run back in fear to my trench. There were reasons I valued the safety of the trench but it wasn't meant to be my lifelong haven. In fact, in my trench I lost confidence in God's provision and in my ability to be a soldier. God saw the desire in my heart to be a soldier, an advancer, a grower. Lying there in my bed with the dream playing over and over in my mind I saw the circumstances that brought me to WGA as the "filling in" of my trench. How cruel to force someone out of a trench and into a raging, smoky, confusing battle, right? No- how loving. God knew I was more than my trench and my heart desired to be shown worthy of the battle, the advance, the growth.

With a filled in trench, I really had no alternative but to move forward. And at first it seemed I was the only advancer -- alone-- no comrades in arms. I wanted to retreat but the

trench was gone. So I inched forward, much of the time on my belly—desperately looking for the next trench—some place of safety and comfort. There were (and still are) trenches provided for me... friends who cared for me, said they understood and provided confirmation that my battle path was good and right. God also provided comrades to advance with... WGA, Survivors of Abuse, a good counselor, friends from my church, friends at work, my family. All of these comrades cared for me, walked forward with me into the raging battle, into my smoke and my confusion. They allowed me to rest but also encouraged me to advance.

Have I wanted to camp out in one of the new trenches? Absolutely! Have I longed for my old deep, decorated, flower-filled, and well-groomed trench? No question! Is my battle over? Nope. Do I still fear the battle? I'd be an idiot if I didn't... but I have greater confidence that God will protect and give respite as I advance. I also have greater confidence that I am able, that I am a worthy soldier. I now know there will be trenches of refuge—just none that allow me to move in, sign a long-term lease, and redecorate. ☆

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remains true, however, that even within these groups, for people struggling with life-controlling sexual and relational issues, there is a need for a time for a focus on the roots of this brokenness. It is at these times that WGA's program is often the best fit for folks for a season.

WGA belongs to several networks within which we receive resources and offer our particular voice as opportunity affords. One of those is the American Association of Christian Counselors, (of which I am a charter member.) Each of our staff and many WGA leaders are also active in their own denominational networks, receiving and giving of time and resources to further healing for broken sexuality and relationships. WGA also belongs to the coalition of ministries called Exodus International, which holds an annual conference that provides workshops and an opportunity to connect with other leaders in our field of ministry. All of these venues are important to us and we are blessed to be partnered with them. I believe that the WGA

For people struggling with life-controlling sexual and relational issues, there is a need for a time for a focus on the roots of this brokenness.

perspective and approach is a good complement to each of the networks of which we are a part.

For example, professional Christian counselors refer their clients to WGA for group support and opportunities for fellowship and practice in healthy relationships; we refer group members to professional counselors when therapy is wanted or needed. Increasingly, the home denomi-

nations and churches of our staff and leadership folks are partnering with WGA. (See the May 2007 newsletter article for a fuller treatment of how WGA works with the Church.)

WGA's membership in the Exodus International network of ministries is the most controversial relationship in which we participate. Among our group members, and within the gay activist community as well, there are mixed feelings about WGA's role in the Exodus community. Some prefer us not to be involved at all, because of the increasingly political nature of Exodus' public presence. Others are not so concerned about that issue, but wonder why

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WGA, with its emphasis on all forms of sexual and relational brokenness would be in such close partnership with Exodus, whose purpose is clearly narrower—to address homosexuality specifically. The reader may also be aware of open hostility expressed by gay activists (and often secular media) toward any speaker, organization, ministry, books, just about anything that is committed to a biblical standard for sexuality, and calls others to do the same.

It would probably be good to write an entire article to address the various concerns that these mixed feelings represent. However, for the scope of this article, I will limit my comments to simply say that WGA belongs to Exodus because it is still the community that most closely matches our calling: to be a presence for Christ in a particularly dark side of our society, both within and without the Church. While we are in agreement about many things, we do not always see eye to eye. Each Exodus Member Ministry varies in its approach to issues such as public policy and communication. The Exodus International headquarters have their own approach as well. The diversity amongst us is one of the

things I like the most about the community. WGA benefits greatly from the relationships we have among other Exodus leaders; we hope they also benefit from our involvement.

It has been a good experience at this juncture—leaving for a three month sabbatical—to think through all the why's and wherefore's of WGA's purpose and place. I hope it has been helpful to our readers as well.

I return in three months; (I admit I am already champing at the bit a little) to take up the full-time role of Founding Director, with all its familiar responsibilities and some new projects as well. May the Lord bless you all for your interest in and support of Where Grace Abounds. ☆



May

At a Glance

May 4th: Roger and Scott attended the Exodus Regional Leaders Meeting

May 18th: Scott gave his testimony at Grace Place

May 19th: Men's Event: Rockies Game

Thursday Night Group

May 3rd: 44 people

May 10th: 42 people

May 17th: 35 people

May 24th: 43 people

May 21st: 43 people

Orientation meeting: 5 new people

June

And Beyond

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

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

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

September 11th: WGA will be presenting at Save Our Youth

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

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

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

A Measure of Grace
is edited by
Elodie Ballantine Emig

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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