



A Measure of *Grace*

October 2007
Volume 11, Issue 10

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

WGA and the Ministry *Of Reconciliation* *by Roger Jones*

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 1 Corinthians 5:17-21

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As Christians, all of us are called to be Christ's ambassadors for reconciliation. Where Grace Abounds' place in the ministry of reconciliation lies within three categories:

1. Being reconciled to oneself
2. Being reconciled to God
3. Being reconciled to others

Being reconciled to oneself is about having a healthy self image and identity. Many of those who come to WGA do not have a strong enough sense of "self." Most of their lives have been focused in either of two extremes, pleasing everyone, or thumbing their noses at everyone around them. When a person's identity becomes more secure, they are not tossed around by the emotions and whims of everyone around them. They can make decisions for themselves and not feel threatened when someone disagrees with their choices.

Recently, Mary and I met with a man who has been around WGA for awhile. He was filled with questions and doubts about his life

and his choice to live celibately until such time that God should bring him a wife. These questions had been triggered by an old friend who was convinced he would be happier if he would express his sexuality in whatever way he wanted.

Often, being reconciled to oneself means revisiting decisions made long ago and recommitting to the

path God has laid before us. We cannot forget that we have an Enemy who wants to destroy each of us, and he will attack in the areas where we are weak. This man we met with needed to be able to talk through his confusion, and remember the reasons and recommit to those decisions long ago.

Being reconciled to God is something that each of us need to do every day. Many of the men and women who come to WGA have lived a long time under a mountain of guilt and shame. They have forgotten that God loves and accepts them as they are. We don't need to clean ourselves up to come to God. He cleans us up after we come to Him! One of the

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I Can Only Imagine By Mary Heathman

Fantasy gets a lot of bad press in Christian circles these days. Recently, I gave it a few hard knocks myself when I led a workshop at the annual MOPS convention called, *Pornography: What's a Wife to Do?*

Certainly, the misuse of our imaginations can catapult us into all sorts of trouble that most of us would never sign up for if we knew where we would end up. The folks in Noah's time (story told in Genesis 6-8), ended up so lost—that we read "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination, all the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." *God sent the flood and wiped them all out!* I am convinced that God chose to take these drastic measures because people could no longer see Him. They had lost the true use of their imagination. Their capacity to think of good things was completely crowded out by their "vain" or "evil" imaginings. Humankind no longer had the vision through which they could know and respond to God.

All this is an *awful* truth that must be faced and dealt with in confession, repentance and submission to God's purposes rather than our own. If we do not do this, we risk losing our very ability to keep Him in mind. How then will we repent, if we don't even have a thought of Him anymore? I pray that I never get so far down the path of my own way that I lose any sense of His presence; I pray this for all of us.

Nonetheless, all the bad news associated with the misuse and abuse of our imaginations does not change the fact that our ability to day-dream, the God-given gift of our imagination, has potential for good as well as for evil. In fact, I believe that the appropriate use of our true imaginations is the bedrock upon which we can dare to even hope to obey the biblical mandate to "renew your minds."

A simple definition of imagination is "the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never wholly perceived in reality." This act or power is critical in important functions like remembering, calling anything at all to mind, and

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Self Care in Action

By N.D.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28

I believe this passage in my head, but I wish I could embrace it in my heart. I wish that I could remember it when I'm in the midst of circumstances that seem to have no possibility of turning out well. This is the case in my lesson on how to nurture myself. As I learn, I find myself stumbling along the way.

A couple of months ago my youngest son's daycare center posted an opportunity to attend a day of pampering for moms. I quickly dismissed it thinking I didn't have the time or desire to do something like that. But after some prayer and encouragement from friends, I stepped out of my comfort zone and signed up to attend.

I arrived very nervous and not knowing what to expect. I was hoping to see some of the moms from my son's daycare, but there ended up being only a couple of them - who I did not know. The house was set up with different "stations" for hair, nails, hand waxing, make-up, and a bou-



tique with donated clothes. As I progressed through the stations, I started listening to the other moms talk about the details of their lives. I realized that this was an outreach event for single moms in hard times (battered, recently released from jail, poor, in-between homes, etc.) – and everyone there assumed that I was in the same situation. By the time I figured all this out it seemed like it was too late to leave. I felt so uncomfortable - like a fraud. I kept telling myself that it would be OK – that I could turn this into a good experience, and that I would stay for lunch and then leave.

I made it through lunch and the worship service without anyone finding out much about my situation. Then I made my get-a-way. I drove home feeling disappointed. The whole

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point of going was to do something nurturing for myself and instead it felt more like torture. Once again I had that all too familiar feeling of not fitting in and being the outsider. I wanted to connect with these women, but just couldn't because of my own insecurities about myself. I felt let down by God. *"Boy, did I miss the boat on this one God – I really thought I felt your guidance on this. What a blunder."* I was almost home when I realized that I didn't have my wedding ring on. I had put it in my pocket earlier in the day for the hand waxing. So, just to make sure the ring was still there, I felt into my pocket and...it wasn't there! I pulled the car over and searched everywhere, but still did not find it.

With tears streaming down my face, I drove back to the meeting place. I was overwhelmed with both embarrassment that I had to return after sneaking out, and sadness that my ring was lost. Upon returning I looked in a few places that I thought my ring might be but didn't find it. I finally had to ask for help. *This was my first step of the day in accepting care from someone.* In tears, I found the director and told her that I had lost my wedding ring. She made an announcement and the whole group looked for my ring and prayed that God would lead us to it. I retraced more of my steps from the day and decided to go outside and look at the driveway where I had walked. I looked down on the gravel drive-

way... and saw my ring! I felt such a surge of emotions – relief, happiness, comfort, and exhaustion all at once. The director and other volunteers and moms all hugged me and doted over how pretty my ring was. *Here was another step in letting others care for me; accepting their compliments and interest in what had happened.*

As I left for the day, this time not sneaking away, I had a very clear sense that God had been with me. Even though the day seemed like a total nightmare – I still felt like God was taking care of me. *He sent me back to get my ring...He wasn't finished with me for the day.* The worship leader's prayer was that each of us would feel the love of God that day. God honored that prayer. It just took me losing my ring and letting down all my defenses for me to actually let Him and others in and to experience His wonderful love for me. That is the most important kind of nurturing I could ever get.

Thank you Lord for your ever present love. I pray as I rest in the comfort of Your love that I can learn to let others in to nurture me and trust that you will turn what I perceive as blunders into blessings.

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introductory classes WGA offers to new people is called “Identity in Christ.” The message taught in this class is so important. We are *not* what we do. We are sons and daughters of God, reconciled to Him through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Those who have not been introduced to Christ learn about Him. Those who already have a relationship with Christ need to be reminded who they are and who God is, and how He wants to be in close relationship with us.

Being reconciled to others is another important element of the ministry of Where Grace Abounds. So much of the brokenness that each one of us faces involves other people. At a core place, sexual issues involve how we relate to others. Some have been wounded so deeply that they will not allow anyone to get close. Others know they need connection, but only use [their] [sexuality] to get that need met. And others want to turn to one person to have all of their emotional needs met. All of these people need to learn how to be in right relationship with one another, and receive the gifts God wants to give through healthy, intimate relationships.

WGA is here to help men and women who have been derailed because of sexual or relational issues. Whether a person is struggling personally, or they are being impacted by the choices of a loved one, WGA is here to help them find their way. It is a privilege to serve God through His ministry of reconciliation. ☆

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creative thinking as in an architect's picturing the building in his mind before the plans are ever drawn. The definition of fantasy is "... the free play of the creative imagination; the power or process of creating especially unrealistic or improbable mental images." Fantasy often functions as a "response to psychological need."

There was a time I didn't have much to draw from mentally during worship. My mind was blank at best, and often filled with images I knew weren't right—sort of filling the void with "unrealistic or improbable images" without any vision for what could be. I remember when Amy Grant's song came out, *I Can Only Imagine*. I was a new Christian, and the words of her song triggered my first experience in "seeing" God; it helped me get my mind's eye around the concept of Him and me as an "us." Remember the lyrics?

Surrounded by Your glory
what will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you, Jesus?
Or in awe of You, be still?
Will I stand in Your presence
Or to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing 'Hallelujah!'?
Will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine!
I can only imagine!

**All day long I have held
out my hands to an obsti-
nate people, who walk in
ways not good, pursuing
their own imaginations—**

Isa 65:2

The incredibly good news is that it is possible to choose what we think about. (See Philippians, especially chapter four for a good treatment of this.) "...*whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things. . . . And the God of peace will be with you.*"

It's been over twenty-five years since I learned that lesson. Yet there are times I wonder if I have learned it at all. It seems good to me to review what is good about our imagination and how to seek God's original intent for it. To that end, I would like to highlight two important functions of our true imagination: it can teach us about ourselves and our imaginations can be a tool in therapy to heal what ails us. ☆

To be continued next month



September

At a Glance

September 1st: WGA presented at Here's Love Christian Fellowship

September 20-22: Mary spoke at the MOPS annual leadership training convention

September 25th: Scott spoke at Tuesday Morning Joy

October

And Beyond

October 7th: WGA speaking at First Denver Friends Church

October 13th: WGA participating in Missions activities at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church

October 16th: WGA presenting at Corona Presbyterian Church

October 18th: WGA Orientation Meeting

October 19-21: WGA Leadership Retreat

November 2nd: WGA speaking at a local small group

Thursday Night Group

September 6th: 35 People

September 13th: 46 People

September 20th: 46 People

September 27: 39 people

Orientation meeting: 4 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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