



# A Measure of *Grace*

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## Emotional Dependency Part 1

*by Roger Jones*

**E**motional dependency is a topic which comes up regularly around Where Grace Abounds. Many of the men and women who come to us arrive in the midst of an emotionally dependent relationship. The process of moving towards health can be painful at times, and this issue is no different.

I did some research online to find a succinct, clear definition of what emotional dependency means. A secular source gave this one:

**“Emotional dependency** means getting one’s good feelings from outside oneself. It means needing to get filled from outside rather than from within.” *ezonearticles.com*

I do not believe that is a complete definition, especially when approaching this from a Christian perspective.

*(Continued on page 2)*

Inside this issue:	
Emotional Dependency	1
Public Image	3
Reflections	4
December at a Glance	8
January and Beyond	8

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(Dependency continued from page 1)

As followers of Christ, we understand that we are called to trust God with our well being, that we cannot rely on our own understanding of things (Proverbs 3:5). The problem of emotional dependency comes when we completely rely on others for our emotional well being.

I remember some of my early experiences with emotional dependency. I look back on some of my journal entries from 1995, and I have to laugh at how extreme I was. What seems funny to me now was quite real back then. I was completely wrapped up in emotional dependency with one of my roommates. "He didn't talk to me today and my feelings are hurt." "We had the most amazing conversation today and I'm so glad he is in my life." Back and forth it went until our friendship was almost ruined.

Months later, the intensity of that relationship had ebbed, and I was ready for my next emotionally dependent relationship. It was waiting for me at my job. A new guy started working with me at the restaurant where I waited tables. He expressed interest and attraction to me, and I was immediately hooked.

I found myself doing things and saying things and crossing boundaries that I never thought I would, all because I wanted to cling to the way he had made me feel at the beginning of our relationship. Over time, it took more and more of my time and effort to feel that way for a very small amount of time.

It was about this time that I first discovered a little book called *Emotional Dependency* by Lori Rentzel.

It was given to me by Scott Kingry, WGA's Program Director and my counselor at the time. The book was well worn... clearly I was not the only one in need of this book! I hated it and loved it at the same time. It was as if the author had been following me around and writing specifically about everything I had been doing.

Particularly helpful was a checklist she included to help one identify if they were in an emotionally dependent relationship. It reads:

Emotional Dependency is probably taking place when either party in a relationship:

- ❑ Experiences frequent jealousy, possessiveness and a desire for

(Continued on page 6)

*The problem of emotional dependency comes when we completely rely on others for our emotional well being.*



## Public Image ~ Does It Matter? *By Mary Heathman*

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In a recent poll, AOL users were asked, “Who do you find most annoying?” They were offered three choices to nominate, Rosie O’Donnell, Ann Coulter, and Paris Hilton. Respondents chose Rosie O’Donnell as the most annoying (57%), Ann Coulter and Paris Hilton were a close second and third at 18% and 17% respectively. I voted for Rosie, not because she annoys me all that much, but because, of the three choices, I think she would be pleased with the label. (More importantly, I wanted to see the poll results and you can’t view it if you don’t vote.)

In the brief analysis that followed the stats, it was speculated that Rosie O’Donnell was nominated because of her feuds with public figures like Donald Trump and Bill O’Reilly, and her frequent political rants. Paris Hilton’s reputation of annoyance was thought to come from her “Oompa-Loompa” exploiting, driving drunk, highly publicized jail sentence, and simply for being

rich. Ann Coulter’s ranking was said to come for one reason, her “Relentless bashing of Democrats/liberals.”

It is Ann Coulter’s ranking that interests me the most. Her main claim to fame that landed her a 1% lead over Paris Hilton’s she-nanigans come primarily from her political positions and the way she expresses them. Now, I have a problem with her name making the list – I wonder who decided to place her as one of the three choices, but that issue is for another time.

My purposes for this article are simply to point out that the public is irritated enough with the public witness of some conservative Christians that 18% of poll respondents picked Ann Coulter over two people notorious for their attention-grabbing behavior and sound-bytes intended to further their celebrity. In contrast, I think Ann Coulter, though I am often wishing she said it differently, is simply expressing her beliefs and debating the issues of the day.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

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### Bird Droppings and the Oaks of Righteousness

Where better to sit and fantasize about retribution than in a church service? I found myself doing just that a few weeks ago. I have a dear friend who has suffered an unconscionable, unremitting torrent of creative abuses from her ex-husband—things that make the hair on my toes curl in fury. I was grinding my teeth and giving God some creative ideas for justice, when the Holy Spirit gently redirected my thoughts. I was reminded of the amazing things that I have been honored to watch happen in my friend over the past few years: her low self-esteem is being replaced by confidence that is based on something other than what people tell her; her feelings of being overwhelmed are being regularly melted down by fountains of humor-filled hope; her fears that God has forgotten her are being daily diminished as she screams out to Him and then sees

His hand protecting and providing for her and her children. I am witnessing a beautiful Phoenix rising up out of the ashes of her ex-husband's fiery assaults. I suddenly realized that perhaps, the ultimate justice might not be the direct punishment of this man and his evil actions; the ultimate justice might just be the breathtaking blossoming of the woman he has tried to destroy—in spite of, and in some cases because of, the things he has done.

Could it be that in the end, justice has more to do with the magnificent resurrection and restoration of the victims than it does with the punishment of the perpetrators? Doesn't that sound like God? Doesn't that sound like Jesus being tortured and killed and coming back to life, not to punish those who killed him, but to offer those very people freedom and forgiveness and life? With His breathtaking brilliant LIFE shining in the middle of the picture, who cares about the "justice" brought to the soldiers who hung him on the cross or the "punishment" of those who mocked Him as He died?

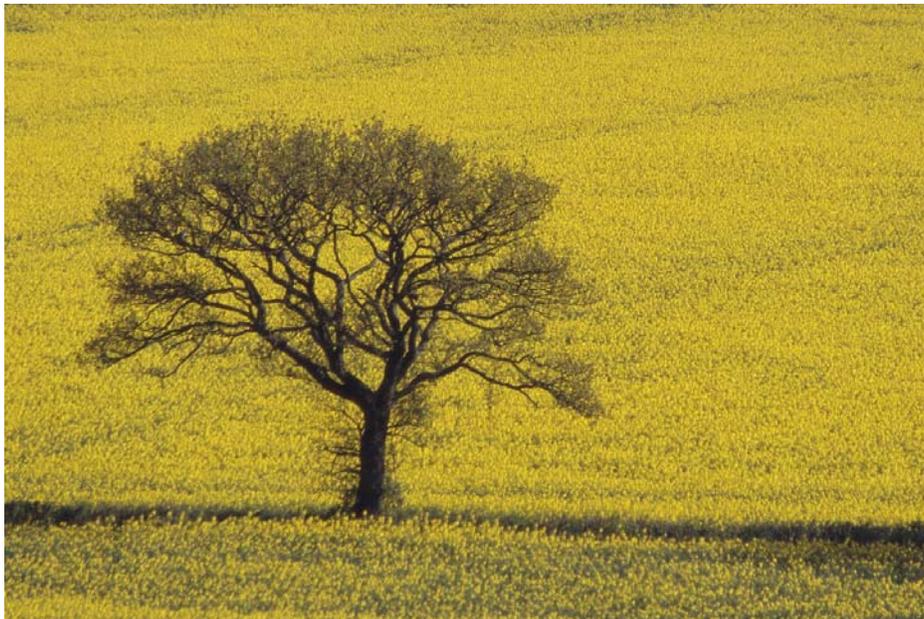
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*(Reflections continued from page 4)*

As testimony to the fact that I shouldn't be given too much free-time to think, my next thought in that church service was about bird droppings. What a bizarre plan God had there. The birds peck the heck out of every piece of fruit on a fruit tree (anyone who has tried to protect a tree from birds understands the passionate understatement of that previous sentence), ingesting the seeds as they go. In hardly any time at all, those seeds are delivered back to the earth in fertilized packages where they are hidden in the dirt and die. And then the miraculous resurrection—a sprout of life from the shriveled, dead seed! AND

THEN (drum roll)—an entire tree is growing!

I can relate to having the heck picked out of me. I can relate to feeling like I'm swimming in a big bird plop. Now, by faith, I am looking for the sprout of life. Isaiah calls the coming tree an "oak of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:1-3). Who looks at an ancient oak and wonders about the bird that ate the seed? In fact, in the end, those perpetrating birds find their very sustenance in those branches. ☆



(Dependency continued from page 2)

exclusivism, viewing other people as a threat to the relationship.

- Prefers to spend time alone with this friend and becomes frustrated when this doesn't happen.
- Loses interest in other friendships.
- Experiences romantic or sexual feelings leading to fantasy about this person.
- Becomes preoccupied with the other person's appearance, personality, problems and interests.
- Is unwilling to make short- or long-range plans that do not include the other person.
- Is unable to see the other's faults realistically.
- Displays physical affection beyond what is appropriate for a friendship.
- Refers frequently to the other in conversation; feels free to "speak for" the other.
- Exhibits intimacy and familiarity with this friend that causes others to feel uncomfortable or embarrassed in their presence.<sup>1</sup>

As I sat down to write about this topic I thought to myself, "At last! Here's an article I can write that I'm not currently dealing with in my own life!" Sadly, I was mistaken. I am pleased to report that I am not currently involved in an emotionally dependent relationship.

But, thinking through this subject has raised my awareness about how much I still rely on other people to make me feel balanced. If someone is upset with me, it is all I can think about. I will sometimes take on the full responsibility for whatever the problem is, just to bring things back into balance, so I can feel at peace.

In order to maintain good feelings for myself, I've found it is also necessary to avoid all forms of confrontation. Confronting someone, whether it is about something big or small, brings the potential for negative feelings. It can be a real challenge for me to speak up when necessary and risk the potential emotional consequences.

In next month's article, I will address the steps we can take to lead us away from emotional dependency. If you find yourself in the midst of dealing with this issue, I highly recommend getting a copy of *Emotional Dependency* by Lori Rentzel. It is only 31 pages long and very insightful. It is available from InterVarsity Press at [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com). ☆

<sup>1</sup> Lori Rentzel, *Emotional Dependency* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 8-9.

*(Public Image continued from page 3)*

Coulter is the legal correspondent for Human Events and writes a popular syndicated column for Universal Press Syndicate. She is a frequent guest on many TV shows, including Hannity and Colmes, Wolf Blitzer Reports, At Large With Geraldo Rivera, Scarborough Country, HBO's Real Time with Bill Maher, The O'Reilly Factor, Good Morning America and has been profiled in numerous publications, including TV Guide, the Guardian (UK), the New York Observer, National Journal, Harper's Bazaar, and Elle magazine, among others. She was named one of the top 100 Public Intellectuals by federal judge Richard Posner in 2001.

Impressive credentials in anybody's book! Yet, in our country, where debating issues of the day and freedom of expression are constitutionally protected and supposedly valued, many people named her the most annoying person of the three women named!

What difference does this make to me, to you the reader, to WGA group members, I wonder.

I have kept a file for years (since I became a Christian under massive resistance, myself) called, "The

Way They See Us." It is a file of articles and notes compiled to illustrate the public image of Christians in our country, the world—the media's representation of us and how we came to earn that reputation in some ways and how we are mislabeled in others.

In the next few months, I will explore this a bit. If you have illustrations or questions along these lines, feel free to contact me at [mary@wheregraceabounds.org](mailto:mary@wheregraceabounds.org). In the meantime, please pray for our public witness during this highly politicized season. May the voice of truth and grace have its way in a sea of compromise (otherwise known to my heart as politics!) ☆



## December At a Glance

**December 2nd:** Scott spoke at Corona Presbyterian Church.

**December 5th:** WGA spoke to Abundant Life Christian Youth.

**December 30th:** Scott spoke at Hope Fellowship Church missions event.

### Thursday Night Group

**December 6th:** 41 people

**December 13th:** No Group

**December 20th:** 38 people

**December 27th:** No Group

**Orientation meeting:** 3 new people

## January And Beyond

**January 23-25th:** Exodus Leaders Conference in Orlando.

**January 26-27th:** Mary will be speaking at a missions weekend at a church in Wyoming.

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

**February 12-20th:** Mary ministering in the Philippines.

**March 18th:** Mary will be speaking at Tuesday Morning Joy, Abundant Life Church

**April 25-26th:** WGA's Family and Friends Retreat. Look for more info to follow!

**September 19-21st:** Mary will be speaking at the New Hope Family and Friends Retreat in San Rafael.

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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  
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all people to know and  
personally appropriate  
God's plan for their  
sexuality and relationships.

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