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A Measure of Grace

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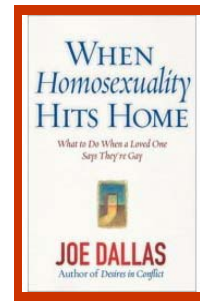
When Homosexuality Hits Home: A Book Review

by Roger Jones

Many of those who come to Where Grace Abounds are seeking support because a family member or a friend has recently disclosed that they are struggling with same sex attractions or they have determined they are gay. These conversations often leave family members and loved ones confused and concerned.

For the one who is disclosing, the experience is often freeing. A burden has been lifted. A life of secrecy and shame has been brought into the light. For the one hearing such information for the first time, it is typically a different experience. Some feel disheartened, like they've done something wrong and caused this to happen. Others feel betrayed, questioning if they have ever really known the person at all. Most experience sadness about what their loved one has had to experience and that they have been alone in their struggle.

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Many questions arise when such a disclosure occurs. What did I do wrong? Where do we go from here? And problems can arise within the relationship too. What do I do if my son wants to bring his partner home for a visit? What do I do if my sister wants me to attend her wedding ceremony? In his book *When Homosexuality Hits Home: What to Do When a Loved One Says They're Gay*, Joe Dallas addresses many of these questions and concerns.

From the very beginning of the book, the reader senses the years of Joe's experience in ministry to both the men and women dealing with homosexuality and their loved ones. Having struggled personally with the issue, Joe is uniquely informed and able to communicate the perspective of the homosexual struggler or openly gay person. This can be helpful, particularly to one who has little or no experience when relating to people who identify themselves as gay.

Chapter 1, "Now That You Know," is an appropriate beginning to the book. In it Joe effectively addresses the variety of feelings people feel, when they first discover the truth about their loved one. He describes a process similar to grieving, detailing the steps involved (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) and what to do when you find yourself in each. From the section on depression, he writes:

When depression hits, you feel as though you're walking through Jell-O. Every move, even the

slightest routine activity, seems like a marathon. You tend to oversleep, or not sleep at all. You either lose your appetite entirely, or you overeat, finding food the only source of comfort left in your life. Your attitude becomes pessimistic in the extreme; you see no hope or future. Your energy is gone, your interests are limited, and you withdraw from everyone. That's depression, and calling it "hell" doesn't seem extreme (pg. 37).

Followed by:

When we've said and done all we can-when we've argued, negotiated, pleaded, wept, and raged-our situation may still remain unchanged. That's the time to turn away from trying to change it and turn toward better equipping ourselves to live successfully (and yes, even victoriously) in spite of our circumstances (pg. 38).

He goes on to illustrate how these emotions might look in an individual's life through sharing personal experiences and stories from those with whom he has worked. As you read, you realize that you are not alone, which is a comfort.

Perhaps the most helpful and unique feature of this book is that it is broken into sections applicable to the unique situations many find themselves in. There are chapters specific to parents, spouses, siblings and extended family or friends. Again, this is a testament to

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The Way They See Us ~ Conclusion

By Mary Heathman

Quoting an earlier article, “I would like to report a few points from *UnChristian*, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, and suggest that those who are serious about reaching out to our culture in the name of Jesus, should not just read, but study this book, discuss it among themselves, and make it a key part of their prayers and planning for outreach and evangelism.”

I am even more convinced that this is so after spending the time I have lately, thinking through and writing these articles about “the public image of Christians.” If I had the time to organize and lead a discussion group on outreach, this is the book I would want to explore together.

(Note: If any of our newsletter readers do put such a group together, please invite me, I would love to participate!)

In this last article of this series, I would like to take each of *UnChristian*’s six most common points of skepticism and objections raised by outsiders, quote Kinnaman and Lyon’s solutions, and illustrate with some experiences/thoughts of my own.

Outsider’s Perception (OP): “Hypocritical. “Christians say one thing but live something entirely different.”

New Perception (NP) Kinnaman and Gabe): “**Christians are transparent about their flaws and act first, talk second.**”

What that means to Me (MH): Once when I was the token conservative speaker at a panel discussion on the biblical perspective on homosexuality, a man in the audience spoke to me through clenched teeth with no attempt to hide his contempt for my perspective. When I asked him why he was so angry, his face crumpled and he told of his experience of great pain through the hands of Christians he had asked for help. I said in my response to him, “I am so sorry that happened to you; that is not God’s heart. And I want you to understand that I do not see myself as any different from you—whatever is yet in my life that is not as God intends it to be is just as much sin and brokenness as anything that has been said about you.” After that experience, I make it a point not to allow myself to be in a position where I am speaking about sexual sin until I have clearly made the point that I myself am a sinner no

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Reflections: Thoughts from a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Transmogrification

I am so not a poet—as will become abundantly clear very quickly! But try as I might, this was the only form I could put the image in that I wanted to communicate for this article. Grace to us all.

“Mine,” my Deep whispers,
“My own sweet, dear solace.”
With affectionate musings I greedily grow it.
The Light filters through and my Precious glints coldly.
It looks strangely naked, misshapen and homely.
“No! Don’t you touch it!” I cry as I hide it.
Enveloped in fantasy, deep, I deny.

His fingers of Light continue to find me,
Warming and wooing, they gently compel.

But fiercely I clench this sin grain in resistance,
While anxiety mushrooms – shame alarms knell!

Heedless those merciful fingers continue,
Committed to love, they relentlessly pull.

At last I’m exhausted. My denial stretched thin.
I shudder surrender and Light floods my sin.

Undone and so frightened I dare a small squint
to survey the damage and measure my shame.

Twirling colors, deep luster, a rainbow of dancing!?

For while I was hiding, His redemptive Light,
was layering with grace my sin seed in my night.

And now in the place of my shame a pearl shimmers.
My Precious transformed to be gloriously His.



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different than anyone who may be listening to me.

(OP): "Too focused on getting converts. Christians are insincere and concerned only with converting others."

(NP): "Christians cultivate relationships and environments where others can be deeply transformed by God."

(MH): As I mentioned in a previous article, I made a decision long ago, that I would ask God to help me build real relationships, love people in His name, and allow Him to draw them to Him. In so far as it is within my power, I want to create an environment of grace and truth and invite people into my life in the Lord. WGA's support groups and discipleship counseling and other services are intended to be such a place, where people can come as they are and encounter authentic relationship with believers and the God we serve.

(OP): "Antihomosexual. Christians show contempt for gays and lesbians."

(NP): "Christians show compassion and love to all people, regardless of their lifestyle."

(MH): One of my favorite illustrations of this happened when Promise Keepers held their first conference in Boulder. There was to be a demonstration by local gay and lesbian activists. When the activists arrived, they were met by a number of big strapping football players whose job it was to keep the activists from entering the stadium. There was tension escalating right along with the temperature rising on that hot summer day, until a few of the athletes came out with a tray of cold drinks and snacks and served the activists. As the players held the line (no one could enter the stadium), but also served refreshments, the mood lightened. Gays and lesbians were treated with compassion and respect!

(OP): "Sheltered. Christians are thought of as old-fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality."

(NP): "Christians are engaged, informed, and offer sophisticated responses to the issues people face."

(MH): It is fun for WGA staff to speak at youth groups. Often the young people are initially barely attentive, but quickly straighten up and take notice when we quote newspaper headlines about what is happening in the world, especially the world with which they are most familiar. When a line from one of their favorite songs is used as an illustration to make one of our points, or when we show a clip from a headliner movie, they look at us with renewed respect. Clearly, we have done our homework and aren't as out of touch with their world as they might have thought we were!

(OP): "Too political. Christians are primarily motivated by a political agenda and promote right-wing politics."

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(NP): ***“Christians are characterized by respecting people, thinking biblically, and finding solutions to complex issues.”***

(MH): A friend of mine from church ran for the school board so that she could participate in the committee on reviewing curriculum and textbooks. A WGA leader volunteers for a political candidate that he believes in. Neither of these folks are beating a drum for their own way; but entering a process with others in their community, working on causes, letting their world view be a part of the discussion, not trying to drown out all other voices. I am proud to know such people who are quiet antidotes to the popular misperception of Christians, as described by one of the parents I talked with recently, “If you go on too long, they think you are homophobic and a raving Christian!”

(OP): *“Judgmental. Christians are prideful and quick to find faults in others.”*

(NP): ***“Christians show grace by finding the good in others and seeing their potential to be Christ followers.”***

(MH): There is so much to say about grace that I find myself unable to give a single illustration. I think back to a series of articles I wrote on “What Is Grace.” If the reader would like to know a bit about what I think grace in action looks like, I suggest you look on

our website, wheregraceabounds.org, do a search for the word grace and read the articles that are found there. I would also suggest that if you want to read something very helpful about grace, try a few of my favorites, *Guilt and Grace* (Tournier), *Addiction and Grace* (May), *What’s So Amazing About Grace*, (Yancey), and most importantly, dive into a study of Romans Chapter Five.

Again, I am tempted to apologize for printing all these harsh criticisms of believers. But as Kinnaman and Lyons say, *“Let me reiterate that you may not agree with the views of outsiders, but you should not ignore them. We have to deal with [them] as they are—candid, irreverent, and brazen. If we do not, it makes their criticism even more forceful because it goes unanswered.”* May the Lord who loves Outsiders and Insiders as well be so real and close to us that we simply find ourselves behaving toward one another as he intended—in truth and grace—in truth and love.

Oh, Lord, may it be so among believers first!

Excerpts taken from *UnChristian* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, Published by Baker Books, copyright by David Kinnaman and Fermi Project, 2007

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Joe's experience, understanding the vast differences between a parent's perspective and that of a spouse who has just discovered her partner in life is not who she thought he was.

Chapter 6, "Negotiating Family Boundaries," provides practical advice for difficult situations, including the following:

- When a son or daughter wants to bring a lover home to meet the family or join in holiday celebrations
- When a family member wants a gay relationship to be treated like a marriage
- When a teenager wants to join an on-campus gay-support group
- When a gay family member wants to "educate" the rest of the family on the normality of homosexuality

Joe does an excellent job of defining and describing issues of conscience (what I believe) and comfort (what I feel). Both are important in determining the best course of action for you and your family when faced with the above situations.

In Chapter 7, Joe addresses "The Three Most Common Arguments." These include:

- I was born this way.
- You're homophobic.
- Gay marriage is valid.

For each of these discussions, Joe follows the same model. He defines the *argument*. "I was born this way...and

this is the way God intended me to be." He provides *background*, including helpful information about our culture. Next, he offers *points to consider*, in which he gives rational thoughts which help the readers to better understand their loved one's perspective and clarify their own understanding of the issue. Finally, he ends each section with a *sample response*, which describes a clear way to communicate the readers' love and care, as well as their personal beliefs in a way that can keep communication open.

In the final chapter, "A Mile in Their Shoes," Joe closes with an admonition to the readers to make their best effort to understand their loved one's perspective.

But when you object to another person's behavior, your objections will carry more weight if you've at least tried to understand what led to that behavior in the first place. It won't change your mind as to what's right or wrong, but it will increase your compassion, and your credibility as well (pg. 171).

I found *When Homosexuality Hits Home* to be insightful and easy to read. If you'd like to pick up a copy for yourself, it is published through Harvest House Publishers, Copyright 2004. It is available through Exodus Books at www.exodusbooks.org.



March

At a Glance

March 7-9th: Scott and Roger attended a retreat with Portland Fellowship in Gearhart, OR

March 18th: Scott and Roger presented to staff and mentors at Save Our Youth

March 18th: Mary spoke at Tuesday Morning Joy, Abundant Life Church

Thursday Night Group

March 6th: 39 people
March 13th: 50 people
March 20th: 25 people
March 27th: 38 people

Orientation meeting: 11 new people

April

And Beyond

April 5th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 7:00-9:00 am at the WGA offices

April 8th: Mary will be speaking at Tuesday Morning Joy, Abundant Life Church

April 25-26th: WGA's Family and Friends Retreat.

July 9-13th: Mary will be presenting at the Friends United Triennial

July 15-20th: Exodus International Freedom Conference in Asheville, NC

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

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