



August 2008
Volume 12, Issue 8

A Measure of Grace

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

Accountability *by Roger Jones*

When the topic of accountability comes up, lots of questions come as well. What does accountability mean? How do I get an accountability partner? How long do I need one? In theory, almost everyone wants an accountability partner, but we resist accountability as well. In part, this is due to our failure to understand the value of relationship.

We resist accountability for a number of reasons. We live in a culture that places a high value on our being strong individuals, able to do things on our own. We think that are weak if we need help. This belief system is in direct conflict with the very nature of accountability, which acknowledges our need for others. Left to ourselves, we will likely be unsuccessful in our goals.

Another reason we resist accountability is that we often hold a short term vision for what our healing process should look like. Our self talk goes something like, "Okay, I will get an accountability partner, but as soon as I have

Inside this issue:

Accountability	1
Finding the Light	3
When is God Around?	4
July at a Glance	8
August and Beyond	8

my struggle with pornography under control, I can end that relationship.

(Continued on page 2)

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

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

email:
info@wheregraceabounds.org
Website:
www.wheregraceabounds.org

wga
where grace abounds

(Accountability continued from page 1)

“ Or, “This codependent relationship I’m in is painful to talk about, but I won’t have to be vulnerable like this forever. Soon I can go back to my normal life.”

One of the core teachings at Where Grace Abounds is that all sexual and relational problems stem from a difficulty in relating correctly with other people. When we live superficial and compartmentalized lives, problems can and will arise. The key to our healing is healthy and intimate relationships with God and other people. Further, it is essential that we continue to know and be known by others in order for our healing to continue. This goes on for the rest of our lives!

A few years ago, I was at a seminar taught by Joe Dallas. During one of his talks, he told the audience that when he travels to speak, which is often, he always pre-arranges with his accountability partner to talk on the phone every night. Joe knows his areas of weakness, and staying in a hotel away from his wife and family presents an increased amount of temptation for him.

Joe’s admission about his ongoing need for accountability challenged my understanding of what healing and change means. He has been in ministry for decades now and I have always respected him, but part of me was asking, “Shouldn’t he be past this?” And therein lies the problem with our understanding of what it means to change. Healing

does not mean the absence of struggle. It means that we are better equipped to handle temptation when it arises (and it will).

In Ephesians 6:11, we are told, “Put on the full armor of God so you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” In verse 14, “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist....” When we are truly accountable, the truth of who we are (and what we are capable of) is reflected back to us. We are reminded of our weakness and of the strength of Christ within us, upon

which we must depend. When we are truly known and supported by others, we are encouraged to be the best we can be. On our own, we tend towards living in “survival mode,” forgetting the fullness of life promised to us in Scripture.

In every talk I’ve ever heard on the subject of accountability, an inevitable dilemma is raised. There is always someone who is in a dire situation – no friends

they trust enough to share with and/or the consequences of sharing their struggle seem too great. “What am I supposed to do?” they ask.

There really is no good news to offer those in this situation. Sexual and relational problems are only made worse the longer those involved continue to choose to be “unknown” to those around them. In order to heal, we must be known. In order to be known, we must be truthful and honest about the best *and* the worst

(Continued on page 6)

One of the core teachings at Where Grace Abounds is that all sexual and relational problems stem from a difficulty in relating correctly with other people.

Finding the Light

By Mary Heathman

I am taking two classes this summer, *Research Methods* and *The Psychology of the Criminal Mind*. One is an 8-week online course and the other is a one week intensive; I scheduled them to overlap for one week. I am writing from the crunch of the middle of the overlap. I did this to myself on purpose! “After all,” I said to myself, “how hard can it be to cover two accelerated classes at the same time when one is online and I can do the work in the middle of the night if I need.”

It isn’t the homework that is proving to be the problem. It is the emotional effect that the topic has on me. It exacts a heavy toll.

For *Research Methods*, I chose as my class project a literature review of empirical studies on the recidivism rates of sex offenders, a topic I have been reading about anyway and thought this was a way to kill two birds with one stone. Now, midway through the class, I am immersed in reading study after study theorizing about questions like, “Under what conditions do criminals fail to rehabilitate,” and “How often and how soon do they reoffend?”

Of course, this isn’t objective theory to me; the seriousness of the project weighs heavily on my mind and heart. I know of families whose lives have been ripped apart by such crimes, and

who are desperately seeking God’s provision—His comfort, guidance and direction. These men and women and friends of theirs have sought the support of WGA in their process. They are part of the reason I am taking these classes; I want to understand the issues better.

So, I am immersed this week in nightly four-hour psychology lectures. One of the texts is *The Will to Kill*, by Fox, Levin, and Quinet. The subtitle reads, “making sense of senseless murder.” We are over half way through the class and haven’t yet made any sense of anything that I can tell. The theories are all over the map, as theories usually are. Last night we talked about the psychological profiles of narcissists and the differences between psychopaths and sociopaths, a matter of degree, it seems. (If the question sticks with you, feel free to email me and I will provide many citations from scholarly journals that discuss such things. Or, you could simply look it up on Wikipedia!)

In four weeks time, I have moved from a place of intellectual inertia to overwhelm! It’s been several years since I took a formal class, and the perpetual student that makes up a considerable part of me is delighted and energized. At this point, however, another part of me, a more rational and reasonable part, is saying as gently as she can

(Continued on page 5)

When is God Around?

By Ed Nurge



After hearing my first testimony, someone was impressed by how I'd been able to see God throughout my life. But now, it seems I'm dealing with another, scarier meaning for WGA, "When is God Around? The question arises because in the last three years, I've experienced more failures than successes: loss of jobs, house, car, dreams, and even purpose for sexuality and life.

Strangely, maybe these are necessary adjustments -- letting go of attachments for something better. While the enemy taunts me with, "Why is God absent?" I continue seeking signs of His presence when life gives little evidence of it. And I'm forced to discard an empty shell of sexuality, along with any achievements.

Though you may not share my sexual struggle, I'm sure you've had enough meaningless experiences to ask, "Isn't there anything better?" Whether homosexual, heterosexual or other, we'd like to be known for something besides sexuality, wouldn't we? As I lose material things and 'acting out' seems pointless, I recognize that relationships are all meant to direct me to God, not feed my own ego or needs.

I know I'm supposed to be ruled by more than thoughts or feelings -- by God. Still, it's hard to shake the sense that, like my father, God's rarely active or even present in my life. I read Tom Tenney's conclusion that God, like a parent playing hide-and-seek, wants to be found (*God Catchers*). So, despite the temptation for

unfulfilling 'sexual' experiences when I feel God is MIA, I fall on my face to seek Him more diligently.

Cecil Murphey thinks there may also be a deeper purpose for seeking: "I had to find God in Babylon.... I had to discover God in the place where I was right then - deep inside the darkness" (*Seeking God's Hidden Face*, p.113). Maybe that's why the search is so painful, long and difficult. Though I may find God, it's more important to realize that my God-given purpose encompasses much more than sexuality.

Even when God seems absent, I'm still responsible to reach for Him and try to love the people around me with no strings attached. I need to fight my normal response when everything seems to be falling apart. Pushing everyone away, including God, won't help. I know I'm only reacting like the hurting child who received no affection from dad.

A married friend once told me that what I call 'sexuality' is really a tiny part of marriage (that bursts my bubble). I wonder if the same doesn't apply to all forms of sexual expression (including misplaced affection) -- that if any relationship isn't healthy and growing, sex is just a pointless exercise hiding big problems. Then I wonder if sexuality has meaning apart from connection(s) designed by God.

Maybe I really fear that a life without sexuality is also missing God. I wonder if, like me, those who call themselves

(Continued on page 5)

(When is God... *continued from page 4*)

homosexual aren't afraid they lack purpose without sex. Maybe I'm not the only person asked to leave behind a useless charade that pretends to meet a need but digs a deeper hole in my heart after I've acted out. I continue to ask, "Do I give myself to God or rely on a cheap substitute? And what if He doesn't show up when I need Him most?"

I can only admit my insecurity, my weakness, my lack of control, to God when my props are gone: car, job, money, sex to 'fill' God's place. I wonder how often sexuality is only something we believe we can count on, instead of God. Finally, I'm forced to conclude my life must find a simpler, better shape, one that does not ignore, but instead honors, my weaknesses and humanity.

I can listen when I can't solve; I can cry with or hug someone when I have no strength to offer; and I can keep coming

to group activities when I'd rather stay home in a self-induced 'coma'. I've also learned through struggles: focusing on meeting others' simple needs breaks me out of self-centered living, bringing more healing than I know. I've seen friendships grow this way. But more important, I show I believe God will heal me as I do my part helping others heal, emphasizing, "All are welcome in God's community, where God is always present, even when I'm not sure He is." ☆

(Finding the Light... *continued from page 3*)

muster, "Could you not have taken one class at a time, or picked less intense topics, or at least taken a few days off to give more time to the study?" To this I reply, "Yes, I could have, but I didn't. Here I am now; it is what it is; I will survive."

Yes, I will survive, but a break from immersion in the darkest side of life is desperately needed. Last night, I was about to burst into tears as the class ended, and knew I wasn't alone – a palpable heaviness had settled on all of us. Just then as the class was closing, our professor said,

It is easy to get focused on the dark realities of all that we are studying, and to become overwhelmed. So it is important to remember that this criminal behavior that we are discussing is perpetrated by a tiny portion of the billions of people on the earth. The question ought not to be, "Why is there so much crime, and what can we do about it?" Rather we could be asking, "Why isn't there more crime, and how can we learn from the majority of the world that are finding ways to get along without violating each other?"

Her comment diffused some of the tension and I thought about it all the way

(Continued on page 7)

(Accountability *continued from page 2*)

parts of ourselves. This cannot be accomplished until the *desire to be known* is stronger than the *fear of consequences*.

As always, we must use wisdom and discretion when we are sharing, particularly with those directly impacted by our behaviors and/or addictions. This is one of the reasons that support groups, like those at WGA, are in existence. Pastors and counselors can also provide a starting place for those who are first seeking help. Ultimately (and in due time), some of those in our day to day lives need to be let in. There really are no short cuts here.

Depending upon your individual issues, it may be ideal to try and develop an accountability group. If the idea of one accountability partner raises concerns for you about emotional dependency or attraction, gathering more people around you can be greatly beneficial. This can help increase the safety of the setting.

Below are some elements that I believe are necessary in an accountability relationship(s). Being known and loved by others is a good thing, and it is vital to our healing. As we more fully become who God intended us to be, we will impact those around us in a positive way.

Mutuality. With the exceptions of a pastor or a counselor, our partner(s) needs to share at the same level we do. The particulars of the struggles may be dissimilar, but vulnerability is the key to building relationship beyond just simply reporting facts.

Meet regularly. Consistency is important. It is difficult to share vulnerably in the best of circumstances. If you feel disconnected from your partner(s), you

may be unable to share as openly as you need.

Be specific. Give your partner(s) a list of direct questions to ask you each time you meet. This gives them permission to ask difficult questions. Avoid general questions like, “How has your week been?” A more specific question is helpful and keeps us from responding in a general, non-specific way. “Did you view pornography this week? Did you do anything to dance around the edges of pornography, like non-pornographic magazines with titillating images?”

Go deeper. Your list of specific questions will address the facts about your struggle, but what about the underlying reasons for the struggle? “What was happening just before you went on the internet to look at porn? How were you feeling then? How are you feeling about things now?”

Commit to honesty. Honesty is difficult, but it gets easier over time. The shame or embarrassment we may feel about confessing our struggles diminishes greatly once we’ve actually made the confession. The cost of keeping secrets is that we find ourselves living a double life (again). It simply is not worth it!

Spend fun time together too – celebrate. Relationships that are only about struggles get boring over time. It just isn’t fun to spend time together when the only thing talked about is pain! Enjoy one other. Ask your accountability questions in a natural setting, maybe on a hike together or between plays at a ball game. Every accountability conversation does not have to last for hours and be painful. Celebrate your personal victories together. ☆

(Finding the Light continued from page 5)

home. I remembered scriptural passages like,

“Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, 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. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Php 4:4-9)

As I relaxed into this peace, I thought of another writer who spoke to this issue. In *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck writes:

We know very well why people become mentally ill. What we don't understand is how people survive the traumas of their lives as well as they do. We know exactly why certain people commit suicide. We don't know, within the ordinary concepts of causality, why certain others don't commit suicide. All we can say is, there is a force, the mechanics of which we do not fully understand, that seems to operate routinely in most people to protect and to foster their mental health even in the most adverse conditions.

Grace was the word that Scott Peck used to define this “force.” I am grateful for this reminder of the omnipresence of God’s grace. It is in this state that I am renewed and head back to class and research, not to study the dark side of life, but to look for clues about how the Light of Life is at work among us. I pray this for WGA group members who gather tonight, for pastors who are struggling to equip their congregations to live life and life abundant in whatever circumstances within which they find themselves. I pray this for you, our friends and supporters. May the Lord richly bless you for investing in WGA’s corner of the Kingdom work. ☆





July At a Glance

July 9-13th: Mary presented at the Friends United Triennial

July 15-20th: WGA Staff attended the Exodus International Freedom Conference in Asheville, NC

July 26th: WGA Group Activity: Drive—in Movie Night

Thursday Night Group

July 3rd: 45 People

July 10th: 48 people

July 17th: No Group

July 24th: 55 People

July 31st: 43 People

Orientation meeting: 5 new people

August And Beyond

September 6th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 7:00—9:00 AM at the WGA offices

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

October 17—19th: WGA Leadership Retreat

October 26th: WGA Presenting at First Denver Friends Church

October 30th: Open Meeting. Call the WGA office if you would like to visit our Thursday Night Group

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

Janet Moine
Assistant Program 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.

Printed in the USA
Copyright 2008