



A Measure of Grace

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I Need a Savior *by Roger Jones*

From time to time, I think it is a good idea to return to the basic, foundational principles that guide us as Christians. I sometimes find myself bogged down in the mire of everyday struggles and busy-ness, forgetting how amazing and powerful God is. I need to be reminded that He is much bigger than the challenges I am facing, not to minimize the problems and difficulties in my life, but to keep things in perspective. God is in control and has a much bigger picture in mind than what I can see right in front of me.

I can still remember sitting in the pew with my short legs swinging, at the young age of eight, next to my parents and brother. When the pastor of the First Baptist Church began the altar call, I felt compelled to go forward. Something inside of my young heart was inexplicably drawn by the message from the pastor. "Jesus Christ died so that you could be free from the weight and burden of your sins. If you invite Him to live in your heart, you will be washed white as snow, and He

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will remember your sins no more.”

Even at that age, I was carrying a weight of shame over my sin. Not long before, I had been introduced to the world of sexuality by another boy my age. I felt ashamed and guilty, even though I did not fully understand what had happened. The pastor’s promise of Jesus and a life of freedom seemed so sweet that I desperately wanted Jesus as my Savior. The shame I was carrying was in fact lifted. The act of submitting myself to Christ worked a miracle in me, and I was relieved and thankful.

My story did not end there, at age eight. My relationship with Christ changed much within me, but it did not alter all of my circumstances or my memory. The kids at school who teased and rejected me were not slain by the glory shining from inside of me, nor were they even mildly scolded. The sense of connection to the mysterious world of men that I had felt during my first sexual experience was not obliterated and replaced with something perfect, good and healthy either.

Yet, something kept me bound to my belief in Christ.

As I grew older, my relationship with God grew and matured as well. My struggles with homosexuality and lust and eventually pornography increased too. Ironically, it was those very struggles that kept me on my face before God, fervently seeking His will and healing. I am in wonder at that now, that God was

using the darkest, most shameful parts of me to draw me closer to Him.

Now I am in my mid-thirties. I have not arrived at any magical, wonderful place in life that is free from temptation or struggle. But so much has changed! Where I once felt out of control and void of any ability to choose anything but sin, I feel the freedom and power of choice. So much of the pain and struggle has been resolved. I am thankful and blessed.

And I have grown complacent.

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Without the everyday-ness of struggle and my constant awareness of the need for God to intervene in my life of sin, my passion to pursue Him has waned. The times I have felt closest to God have most often been after I have sinned and am on my face before Him. Have I trained myself to believe the only way to connect with God is in repentance for something “big?”

The sins I commit now are more internal than external, and they seem to be more acceptable. I am a glutton at times, but no one seems to mind. I am judgmental and critical, but it is just in my mind, so that is okay. I am sometimes filled with lust, but at least I’m not acting out my feelings with another person.

Iiicckkkk! I shudder to see my own justifications and entitlement written down! All of this garbage makes me miss the intensity of the struggles I described earlier, when I was fully aware of

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The Lamb's War ~ In Action

by Mary Heathman

Last month, I wrote that, “The staff and leadership at WGA are waging war according to the guidance and direction we get from the Lord in our prayer meetings, and in our leadership planning meetings. Among the weapons of our warfare are *“the word of truth, the power of God, the armor of righteousness on the right hand and the left”* (2Co 6:7). In addition, we know we work only in the power and authority given to us as His ministers of grace and truth. In His strength, we fight with tenacity, and with a passionate commitment to the calling the Lord has given us.”

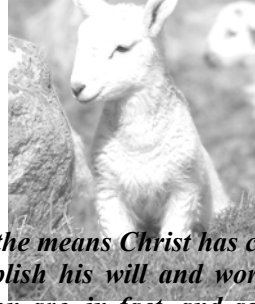
I said that I would write a bit about what the Lamb's war looks like in action at WGA. I will table that until next month and give you instead this month a couple of illustrations of how I see others waging this war. I hope you will read Joe Dallas' response to Ted Haggard's interview on Oprah—it is included in these pages. Joe is a great friend and colleague, and I was encouraged to read his blog comments—our hearts are often united in battle—I enjoyed his humble warrior's heart.

Another illustration—the Lamb's war looks like Mother Teresa early in her ministry scratching out a few lessons in the dirt of the alleyways in India—teaching the children of the poorest of the poor. From this obscure begin-

ning, the Lamb's war marched on until decades later, it brought that same small, but mighty, woman to such a place of influence that she could speak to the nations, begging them “don't kill the babies; give them to me.”

I have a print in my office that I bought at the Cherry Creek Arts Festival several years ago. I don't know that I like the image so much as I do the words written by the artist at the bottom: “I want to guard your hopes and dreams.”

That's what I am fighting for—for God's original intent for the lives of the men and women who come to WGA. I want to stand against the deception that eats away at their minds. I want to stand in the gap against the crippling loneliness that comes from isolation and rejection. And I want to declare and demonstrate the good news that God's grace and truth are sufficient to overcome and heal the world—including them!



“ . . . the means Christ has chosen to accomplish his will and workout his salvation are, in fact, and against all appearances, victorious.” Eugene Peterson

Will the Real Sex Addict Please Stand Up?

By Scott Kingry

The topic of sexual addiction has made several appearances in the media lately. Some of this current interest might be due to former X-Files star, David Duchovny's admission of a problem with internet pornography that sent him into a rehab facility late last year. Strangely, these personal issues mirrored those of his character, Hank Moody, on HBO's "Californication." Hank is basically destroying his life with sex that is out of control. Unfortunately, after rehab, Duchovny and his actress wife Tea Leoni split up and became the highlight of every tabloid for a season. So in true form, sexual addiction had its fifteen minutes on most news shows and the talk show circuit.

Tyra Banks, of "America's Next Top Model" fame, recently interviewed a gentleman on her morning talk show who professed to be a recovering sex addict. Now I have to say, that I don't think Tyra is a very compassionate talk show host. She's as hard on her guests as she is her young model wannabes. As the man shared his story about how far down his sexual addiction had taken him, Tyra appeared as if she'd gotten a whiff of some old cheese and the audience members' faces showed similar disgust. Why? Was this a crusty, *pervy* looking old man with no teeth in a trench coat? On the contrary, he was a young, clean-cut family man in a suit, the guy you'd live next door to in suburbia or sit next to in church. With all the judgment coming from the audience towards this gentleman, I couldn't help but think he was

probably the most honest one in the room regarding real sexual brokenness. How then, in a culture where sex has been seen as mostly recreational, boundary-less and frequently necessary, do we define the lines of addiction?



Some definition of the components of addictive sexuality can be found in Dr. Patrick Carnes's book, *Don't Call it Love*, a resource we use regularly here at WGA. He maintains that addictive sexuality often feels shameful, usually because one's values are compromised. It's frequently about conquest, power and seduction, so it's exploitive and feeds on fear for excitement. A world of unreality is created, so the sexual behavior becomes more dangerous and self destructive, disconnecting one from self. The primary purpose addictive sexuality serves is to medicate and kill pain. With such a grim definition, it's easy to relegate this sort of behavior to smarmy, anonymous encounters in back alleys or bathhouses. But if we look more at the heart level, at bottom-line motives, we'll find these dynamics in any type of relationship, including marriage. In our brokenness, aren't we looking for control, power and having our own needs met?

We, in our work here at Where Grace Abounds, are aware that sexual addiction is usually about medicating some sort of

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pain. So recovery involves more than just eradicating the destructive behavior. God wants to do a healing work to resolve the deeper issues that caused the pain in the first place. These issues can include long histories of broken relationships, gender confusion, self hatred and abuse. We hope to provide a safe environment where such issues might be addressed and where people can experience their sexuality in a healthier way--a way that originates in integrity, relies on safety, is in line with their convictions and values, and is mutual and intimate.

I recently found an internet article, "More Women Seeking 'No Strings' Sex," which collected data from 315,478 users of the international dating site Plentyyoffish.com. Since 2004, the number of women seeking only an "intimate encounter" has risen from 9 to 18 percent. And while men seemed to outnumber women 10 to 1 in the quest for a casual tryst in 2004, today's ratio is only 5 to 1.

Equally horrifying as this data are the responses from the men and women at the end of the article. While the men, not surprisingly, cheered the fact that women have finally caught on to sex without commitment, one woman responded, "Yes, I think more and more women are enjoying no strings sex. Why should we go without sex because Mr. Right hasn't come around? And some of us aren't even looking for him. We have needs too." Opening oneself up to possible disease and violation, while simultaneously using someone else for selfish gratification, is now being encouraged and touted as a good thing. So who are the real sex addicts, Tyra?



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my need for God, seemingly every minute.

I have to ask the question, "Do I really want to be holy and Christ-like, or do I just want to be merely average and acceptable in the eyes of men?" I wish I could answer, "Christ-like!" and fully mean it, but my actions and thoughts prove otherwise. Complacency has taken the place of my fervent need for God.

My prayer (for you and me) is that we will not settle for being average in our walks with God, and that we will not comfortably settle into our "acceptable"

sins. *Lord, let us feel the weight of each sin, not to be burdened by shame, but to become increasingly aware of our need for you as Savior.*

**Ted Said: After Thoughts on Ted Haggard's
Interview with Oprah
Guest Post by Joe Dallas on January 29, 2009**

Rev. Ted Haggard broke his two year silence on Oprah's show yesterday, his first media appearance since a catastrophic fall from the pulpit of New Life Church in 2006, when his longstanding relationship with a male prostitute was exposed. The details are still fresh: Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, was condemning gay sex publicly while paying for it privately, until accusations from male escort Mike Jones cracked the dam of Ted's denials ("I *never* had gay sex!") and trickles of half-concessions leaked out ("Well, yeah, I bought some meth from a gay escort, but threw it away") followed by voice mail recordings irrefutable as Monica's blue dress, and the inevitable confession, contrition and exit. It was as tawdry as it was achingly familiar in this era of public falls, and many of us hoped the story was played out.



Enter the sequel. An HBO special titled *The Trials of Ted Haggard* premieres Thursday January 29, and by way of promotion, Ted granted interviews to Larry King as well as Oprah, revisiting those dark days with his own insights and explanations. If there's a redemptive twist to all this, it lies in what can be gleaned from the Reverend's experience and, to an extent, his statements about Christianity, homosexuality, church life and human nature. A typical spectator, I cheered and booed throughout the Oprah interview, shouting criticisms or praise while knowing nothing of what it was like for the man under the bright lights being grilled about his worst failures and private agonies. So I'll concede, a la Roosevelt's famous observation about the man in the arena, that it is indeed the guy in the ring whose performance matters far and above the critic who wishes he'd done *this* or said *that*.

From that deferential position, then, let me offer some thoughts on what Ted said, what I wish he'd said, and what still needs to be said:

Ted said: "I'm a heterosexual with homosexual attachments."

What prompted it: Oprah's predictable but relevant question: Are you gay, straight, or bisexual?

How it played: Clumsy. Most people look for a one word summation of sexual preference (gay, straight or bi) or a description of sexual feelings. ("I'm attracted to men, women or both.") And while I appreciate Ted's aversion to gay/straight labels, this phrase only muddied waters that he was hoping to clear.

What I wish Ted said: "I'm a married man who's at times attracted to other men. I'm attracted to my wife as well and, more important, committed to her and my family. So

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when I'm attracted to someone other than her, I resist those attractions. And isn't that what most married men do?"

Ted said: "I cannot deny who I am."

What prompted it: Oprah's claim that when Ted resisted his homosexual attractions he was denying who/what he really was, versus Ted's belief that *who* he was, was in fact, more than that.

How it played: Earnest. Ted rightfully challenged the inevitability approach Oprah was taking (as in, our feelings inevitably define us, dictating our actions and identity.) But who we are is also defined by what we believe, and when feelings clash with conscience, we are being true to ourselves when we say no to them.

What I wish Ted said: "When you do something you don't feel right about, you're not being true to yourself. To me, sex with a man didn't feel right, even if it felt good, so I made a choice between my conscience and my attractions. You may not agree with that choice, but I'm sure you'll agree that we all need to know not only what we desire, but what we believe as well. And if we're smart, we'll say no to the desires that clash with our beliefs."

Ted said: "I believe that Christ accepts everyone."

What prompted it: Oprah asking, "Do you believe Christ accepts homosexuals?"

How it played: Correct but incomplete. Oprah's question insinuated that if Christ accepted someone, He approved of them as well. Ted's answer affirmed that Jesus turns no one away, but omitted the messy question of sin.

What I wish Ted said: "Jesus accepts all of us, but He doesn't accept all that we do. If what we're doing isn't in line with His will, no matter how deeply it's ingrained in us, He'll call us to give it up. And if we say no, then we're not really following Him."

Haggard was in a tough spot. Any Christian calling homosexuality a sin (much less one who struggles with it himself!) is going to walk into a cross examination when he's interviewed—and who looks good under cross examination? So, given the volatility of the subject and Oprah's openly pro-gay position, I appreciate Ted's efforts. In the coming years, who knows how many other believers will find themselves pointedly asked, "Is homosexuality really a sin? Doesn't God love gays? Shouldn't we all just accept who we are?" To which I hope we'll all have the grace to say, in our own words:

"Everyone sins, and God alone decides what sin is. That's why He inspired men to write the Scriptures, so we'd know what's expected of us. And someday all of us will answer to Him for how well or how poorly we've met those expectations. I received Christ because I knew I'd never meet them on my own, and He promised to pay the price when I fell short. So is homosexuality a sin? Sure, look it up. Does God love gays? You bet. But should we all just accept who we are, as we are? Only if that means accepting that we're loved by God, called to follow Him, and willing to surrender our will to His."

This article reprinted from Wifeboat www.wifeboat.com and www.joedallas.com
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January At a Glance

January 10th: Growth Group started

January 10th: Survivors of Abuse Group started

Thursday Night Group

January 8th: 35 people

January 15th: 35 people

January 22nd: 38 people

January 29th: 48 people

Orientation meeting: 6 new people

February And Beyond

February 19th & 20th: WGA presenting at Barclay College

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

April 6th & 13th: WGA speaking at CU Annex in Boulder

April 24-25th: WGA Family and Friends Gathering



**Where Grace Abounds Presents:
Christians and Sexuality**

Date: March 13 & 14

Guest Speaker: Sy Rogers

Cost: Friday night is free
Saturday \$50/full or \$30/half day

Join us for a two day seminar that will explore sexuality from a Christian perspective: why we have sexual struggles, what we can do about them, and how to support those around us struggling.

Have more questions? Call the WGA office :
303-863-7757, or check our website at
www.whergraceabounds.org

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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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