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A Measure of *Grace*

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What Do You Mean By Change? *by Roger Jones*

When I showed up on the doorstep of Where Grace Abounds in 1995, I had a pretty good idea of what I was expecting: Change! It had taken me a long time to actually admit that the same-sex attraction I was experiencing was not “just a phase” that would go away with time, and isn’t admitting you have a problem the hardest part of the battle? Seeking out help the help I needed meant that the problem was serious, and I was taking it seriously.

Change is a powerful word. We heard it a LOT during the presidential campaign last year. Within ministries like WGA, the word is often used. Everyone wants some kind of change in their life. Change is an inspiring

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word that brings hope.

And yet change is a vague and unspecific word too. It is open to the interpretation of each person who is using *or* hearing it. Because of this vagueness, change is often at the focal point of many arguments: Can an addict ever really change and stop being addicted? Can an unfaithful spouse change his/her ways and stay faithful? Can the betrayed spouse change and trust again? Can a person's sexual orientation really be changed?

When people reach out for help for whatever their struggle may be, they have expectations. These are shaped by the usual cast of characters: family, friends, goals, religion, etc. As I mentioned earlier, I had a specific idea of what change was when I first came to WGA. I wanted my attractions for men to shift into attractions for women. Homosexual lust was bad and abnormal; heterosexual lust seemed acceptable and normal. Fortunately, my idea of change has been refined.

Others have very different ideas

of what change means. Some, who have no sexual feelings or attractions, define change as what another might call promiscuity. Someone else has been so promiscuous that having no sexual feelings or attractions seems like heaven. Still others define change as a life of celibacy, which, to them, means freedom from addiction.

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The reality is that we have no idea what changes can or will happen. The goals I had in mind were unrealistic. Not because they were too big; our God can do anything! If anything, my goals were too small. Could I have accomplished those goals? Maybe, I don't know. I have been around WGA long enough to realize

that heterosexual brokenness is no walk in the park, even when compared to my struggles (which always seem worse than everyone else's J). At WGA, I've learned about submitting my whole self to God. I don't fully know what His idea of "change" means, but I've finally figured out that healing and restoration do not include trading one form of sin for an-

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Lars and the Real Girl

Film Review by Mary Heathman

Lars and the Real Girl, starring Ryan Gosling, is about Lars, a single guy in his thirties who lives in a finished apartment in the garage of a home he owns equally with his brother. As the credits roll, Lars is in his room, looking out the window, and sees his sister-in-law come out of the house and head his way. He takes a step back into the shadows. She knocks on the door; he looks around as if looking for a way of escape, finally stepping up to the window in the door with a questioning look on his face. His sister-in-law says, "Lars, we want you to come to breakfast." Lars becomes agitated, shakes his head, "I have to go to church." She insists, "After church, then." Still anxious, Lars nods and mumbles, "Okay." When the scene shifts to later, Lars drives into the driveway and makes a bee line toward the house as his brother watches him from the window. He says to his wife, "There he goes. You owe me five bucks!" She rushes out the door, "Lars, you promised!" The door slams behind Lars as he retreats into his place.

With this beginning, we see Lars sinking mentally, "decompensating," a therapist would call it. In the next scene, Lars goes to work and his cubicle mate introduces him to a website where you can order a life size girl – "You can pick the hair, the face, the style. . . and Lars, they're anatomically correct!" Lars orders a doll, and after she has arrived, he knocks on his brother's door. "I have a visitor." He introduces her as his girlfriend, Bianca. His brother and sister-in-law are stunned. The next day, having convinced Lars that Bianca needs a check-up after her long travels, they take Lars and Bianca to the family doctor, Dagmar, who is also a psychologist.

I've seen this film—five times. It is worth any Christian's time to see it at least once. And for those whose "issues" revolve around broken relationships, and for those of us who love them, this film is in the "must see" category.

Lars and the Real Girl is a story about a family and a community that make it a priority to love and accept Lars and his "girlfriend"

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Booty Call

By Scott Kingry

Humans are amazing creatures. Created in the image of God, we can soar into outer space, plummet to the depths of the ocean, find cures for diseases and design amazing technology. What's equally amazing is our capacity to take this same technology and turn it into something twisted and sleazy within seconds of it's invention. The latest misuse of technology is called "sexting," which is *slanguage* for sending sexually explicit texts or nude photos via cell phones. Gosh, even phone sex is becoming less relational as it becomes more efficient.

Teenagers are probably the largest group engaging in this kind of behavior and it seems to be on the rise. According to research by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 20% of teens report that they've sent or posted lewd photos or videos of themselves. Now some people might just shake their heads with a chuckle and say, "those wacky teens," as if it's just another fad—like seeing how many people you can stuff into a phone booth or buying a pet rock. But the consequences of "sexting" are more serious with young people facing arrest and possible prosecution. One story, which hit the news earlier last

fall, involved five high-schoolers from Pennsylvania. Three female students, ages 14-15, faced charges of manufacturing and disseminating child pornography by sending nude photos of themselves to two boys, ages 16-17, who also faced charges for possession. Similar cases have been popping up all around the country.

With every story, the debate rages over the legal issues. One side wants there to be real consequences for this potentially dangerous behavior, while the other side says, "Kids with their out of control hormones are going to do what ever they want—why fight it?" What I find fascinating through all this heated discussion is that no one ever asks "why" the teens are



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doing it in the first place. What would cause these everyday kids to engage in “*exhibitionist sex**—seeking arousal through sexual attention to their bodies”? What’s the deeper issue that needs to be addressed? Is it about the need for attention? Is it the desire to be seen or known on an emotionally intimate level? Is it the desperate longing for affirmation, acceptance or self worth? We know here at WGA, that there’s always a deeper legitimate need driving the behavior. I don’t know what these kids’ home lives are like, but I’d say there’s more going on than raging hormones.

When you think of an “exhibitionist,” you probably picture a creepy old dude in a trench coat, but the reality is varied and includes both genders. This activity can be acted out in a variety of ways, exposing oneself from home, a car, a computer (and now on a phone) in public places or through choice of clothing. Surprisingly, women engage exhibitionist activities more than men and are less reported (since women in our culture are rewarded for showing their bodies). With this in mind, the risks that each gender faces are very different—Men, if found out, will usually face arrest. Women may not have as many legal consequences but might be sexually assaulted for their behavior. It’s obvious that the thrill of danger is also a piece of the addictive behavior.



Our culture these days seems to be engaging in a sort of *pseudo-exhibitionism*. It might not have much to do with sexual arousal, but we seem to be “exposing ourselves” in ways that aren’t positive. There are too many creepy, self-revealing, homemade videos floating around on You Tube. Talk shows bring estranged couples together merely for paternity tests and the airing of dirty laundry. Reality shows boost ratings by divulging nasty and embarrassing things, thereby humiliating their contestants. I’m often horrified at what people will do to be on television—they seem to be confusing *shame* with fame. Meanwhile, you can also go on line at anytime and read people’s private thoughts and diaries and know exactly what they are doing, thinking and feeling at any given moment. Do you suppose our underlying needs for attention, affirmation and to be known are applying in these cases? It’s just something to think about. While we ponder these things, we’ll wait for the next piece of amazing technology and see what humans will do with it.

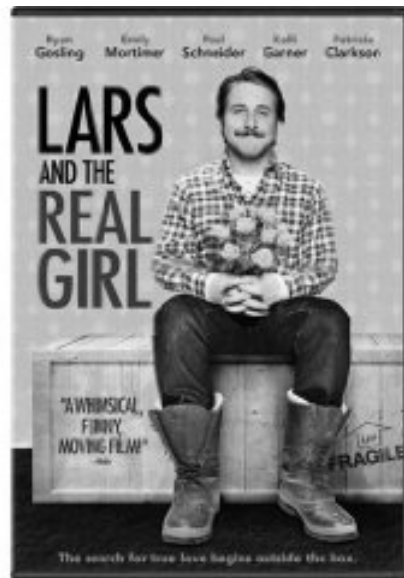
*Definition taken from Patrick Carnes, *Don’t Call it Love*.

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exactly as he is. In my opinion, it is also a compelling illustration of the power of grace—its power for change. At one point in the film when the circumstances had taken a rather unbelievable turn, I remember thinking, *“Oh, come on, that wouldn’t happen!”* But that thought was quickly followed with another as tears welled up, *“But it should, it really should!”*

Trust me, its well worth seeing, even though it opens with the purchase of a life-size “anatomically correct” doll as a bizarre substitute for a real relationship. The film isn’t at all about the seamy side of life, but actually casts vision for how an entire community comes together and creates an environment of grace, an environment for change for the good. And it isn’t just Lars that benefits from this community that kicked into action on his behalf. Each of the characters is profoundly affected by the effort to understand and love Lars.

See the film; watch it with your small group, with your spouse. You will be glad you did! And if you see it, write and let me know what you think!



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other.

Two of the biggest challenges we face are to remain open hearted to what God wants to do within us and to remain open handed to the gifts God wants to give us. In our culture, we are so quick to label ourselves and others. And there seem to be rules with the labels too. You can be straight and then become gay, but you can't ever go back to being straight or others will think you are living in denial. Bi-sexual seems to be a label some decide best describes themselves, but our culture seems to think it is just a brief layover between straight and gay.

Regardless of the label, by taking any on as our identity, we limit what we allow God to do in our lives. If I decide that living a celibate life is ultimate healing, am I still open to God bringing a woman, or marriage into my life? If I am disappointed that my attractions haven't completely changed, can I still trust God in the midst of temptation? Or will I make decisions based on my definition of change?

How do you experience this in your life? What does change mean to you? Does your definition of change hinder the possibility of growth in your life?

There is one thing of which we can be certain: God won't change us to the point that we are no longer dependent upon Him. I cannot have an ounce of growth,

or success, or change without Him at the center of my life. He is the giver of life. God isn't asking me to be more heterosexual. He asks me to follow Him and trust that as I do so, He will change me in His time and in His way. He is asking the same of you.

***Regardless
of the label,
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*Thank you God for
bringing true healing
into my life, and refining my definition of change.*





March

At a Glance

March 13th and 14th: Christians and Sexuality Seminar with Sy Rogers. We had 100 attendees!

Thursday Night Group

March 5th: 41 people

March 12th: 34 people

March 19th: 36 people

March 26th: Group Cancelled

Orientation meeting: 4 new people

April

And Beyond

April 9th and 10th: WGA presenting at Denver County Jail

April 25th: WGA Family and Friends Gathering

Wednesdays in April and May: WGA teaching on sexuality, gender and relationships at Wellspring Anglican Church

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

June 21st: WGA speaking at Little Chapel of the Hills

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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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