



A Measure of Grace

May 2009
Volume 13, Issue 5

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

Loneliness *by Roger Jones*

When Christ said: "I was hungry and you fed me," he didn't mean only the hunger for bread and for food; he also meant the hunger to be loved. Jesus himself experienced this loneliness. He came amongst his own and his own received him not, and it hurt him then and it has kept on hurting him. The same hunger, the same loneliness, the same having no one to be accepted by and to be loved and wanted by. Every human being in that case resembles Christ in his loneliness; and that is the hardest part, that's real hunger.

---Mother Teresa

Loneliness is a universal feeling we can all relate to in one way or another. Whether alone or in a crowd, there are simply times when we feel uncom-

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fortably disconnected from those around us. In the void left within each of us, opportunity to turn to unhealthy coping and addictive behaviors is present.

In our modern culture, there are many distractions. When I am home alone, I often find myself eating dinner with the television on, bustling around during commercials with some other diversion...cleaning or reading, folding laundry or playing a game on my phone. I live alone, contentedly for the most part, but there are times when my aloneness turns to loneliness. These distractions keep the emptiness at bay for awhile.

Except for the occasional evening I have at home alone, my life is filled with people. My job at Where Grace Abounds is mostly about people, so I interact with men and women regularly. I am blessed to have coworkers who are more like family than most experience in their workplace. I have friends I see regularly, several times each week. And there is family, the blood kind, who love me deeply.

Yet somehow, even with all these people, I am still afraid to be alone and without distraction. Perhaps this is partly due to the residue of addiction I still carry. Pornography was something I always turned to in my times alone. Busy-ness is one of the strategies I have used to fight this addiction. When I stop all the activity, temptation often returns. What is the motivating force behind the temptation though? What is it that I am running from? In the midst of the stillness, I am faced with a choice. It is a choice I believe we all must face:

***Will I stop
and feel the
loneliness
or will I run
from it?***

Will I stop and feel the loneliness or will I run from it?

I am not sure that there is a “cure” for loneliness. There are

healthy ways to make our lives more full and enriched, and we certainly do not need to feel lonely all the time. If you find yourself in that situation, there are many things you can do which can help. Other than encouraging the building of relationships, I am not going to expand further upon this here. Loneliness is part of being

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human, and we must learn to manage it and to face it. Until this is accomplished, our fears will always drive us to comfort or distract ourselves, rather than feeling the emptiness of loneliness.

God Himself understands loneliness. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ went to pray. The Son of God was going to spend time with his Father, and yet he felt the need to bring his disciples. He specifically asked Peter, John, and James to enter further with him. He even checked to see if they were awake. Jesus knew what was about to happen, His purpose

about to be fulfilled. He wanted human companionship in his greatest hour of need.

There is an aspect of God that we will never connect with until we can sit and wait upon Him. That place of waiting can be lonely. Graciously, we are invited to wait with the fullness of our hope and with the fullness of our despair. God is there.

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.” Mark 14:38

“Be still, and know that I am God...” Psalm 46:10



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Reflections:
Thoughts From a WGA Leader
By Nancy Hicks

This month Nancy shares a poem:

**Eternal One,
Silence
From whom my words come;
Questioner
From whom my questions arise;
Lover
Of whom all my loves are hints;
Disturber
In whom alone I find my rest;
Mystery
In whose depths I find healing and
myself;
enfold me now in your presence;
restore me to your peace;
renew me through your power;
and ground me in your grace.**

From *Guerrillas of Grace* by Ted Loder



Child Abuse Case Study: Thoughts on Prevention

by Mary Heathman

Child abuse is often a story left untold until years, even decades, after the fact. The effects of abuse can derail a child's development, with ongoing effects affecting relationships and quality of life sometimes for the rest of the victim's life. In many cases, however, the abuse could have been prevented, or interventions could have been made. This article will present a brief case study of child abuse and a discussion of possible ways the abuse may have been prevented. We will look at prevention from the perspective of the abused child, the parents, family, and close neighbors, and other institutions in a position to influence the child and his perpetrators.

Case Study - Sammy

Sammy's mother had married young, to the first man to show an interest in her. He drank heavily and beat her regularly. Alcoholism and family violence escalated until the mother finally left the father and moved back to her parents home. It was then that she realized she was pregnant and she went back to Sammy's father. Soon she left again and was remarried by the time he was three. Another child was born. Sammy was the unwanted child between two favored sons. (His mother told him

this story when he was forty, saying, "If abortion had been legal in 1958, you might not have been here.")

When Sammy was nine, he was no longer allowed to sleep in the house. He slept outside when the weather was nice; in winter, he found shelter under the house, pressed up against the chimney for warmth. His fifth grade teacher took notice of Sammy's dirty and smelly presence by making him the butt of lectures on hygiene and spraying him with air freshener. He remembers the cold drops hitting the back of his neck as his head hung low and the rest of the class laughed.

Sammy's story never got any better. He lived a male version of the Cinderella story, as his family's servant. He was beaten regularly, and sexually abused by his older brother from age eleven to seventeen when he ran away from home. Sammy has no good memories. When pressed, he says, "Sitting in the dark dusty dirt under the house with my back against a warm chimney is actually one of my good memories. I don't sleep at night, I sleep during the day. I like the night too much to sleep it away. When I was a child, the night was the only time I was free."

Causes of the Abuse

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The social system within Sammy's family operated to "maintain, increase, or decrease" (Wallace, 2008, p. 15) the intensity of abuse within the family. In Sammy's situation, it is clear that it wasn't just his parents, siblings, or grandparents, individually, that perpetuated his mistreatment, but the entire system worked together to keep the cycle going.

The cycle might have looked like this: Sammy's mother and father were likely from backgrounds that were immersed in a "culture of violence" (Wallace, 2008, p.12). They brought that culture into their relationship. Sammy's father's abuse of his wife instilled in her a fear and hatred of him, which she then transferred onto Sammy (as the product of that marriage and the reason she went back into an abusive environment only to be hurt again). As she kept Sammy at a distance, one of her goals—to forget about the abuse—was served by his isolation within the family. Siblings grew up with Sammy in this role, probably never questioned it, and treated him the same way that they observed their parents behaving toward him. They probably learned early that when Sammy was too close, Mom was upset, so it served their own interests to keep him at bay as well. Sammy, left without any alternative messages, gradually took on the identity of servant and outcast in the family.

Prevention

What could have prevented the abuse in Sammy's life? It is apparent that the abuse went so far back (indicated by the grandparents behaviour) that it would be difficult to see exactly where the cycle started and how it could have been prevented from ever starting. However, as far as the circumstances of Sammy's life, there must have been people who noticed what was going on. He went to school. They visited grandparents. There must have been neighbors. If even one of the people that were in Sammy's environment had intervened, the cycle might have been broken, or even reversed. One wonders how these people missed, or ignored Sammy's condition. His fifth grade teacher had an opportunity that she instead used against him. What could have been done differently?

The grandparents were in a position to help. What was going on in their minds when their daughter came home? It seems they could have intervened on behalf of their daughter, even before Sammy was born. Yet, our class lecture notes tell us "there is considerable research to support the theory that children who are victims of physical or sexual abuse are predisposed to repeat that violence upon their own children" (Note 2:7). It is possible that Sammy was caught up in an intergenerational cycle of abuse, which would explain the grandparents inaction.

Sammy's teacher, however, was out-

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side that system. She had a good chance to intervene. She obviously noticed the conditions Sammy was living in, yet chose to not only ignore his plight but also exacerbate the problem when she could have intervened.

For example, the teacher could have visited the family to follow up on what she was observing in Sammy. She would have then found out that he didn't even have a room to sleep in in the house. She might then have called Social Services, who would have done a welfare check, an investigation, and Sammy could have been removed from the home. The family then would have had opportunity for counseling, educational services, while Sammy was being cared for in a loving home. Whether the family ever cooperated or not, Sammy would have had a chance for a different life.

Sammy's life seems not to have been even a blip on the radar screen for his parents, sibling, his school and the community within which he lived. His life is truly an example of how child abuse lives "in the shadows of privacy and secrecy; it lives by inattention" (Perry, Mann, Palker-Corell, Ludy-Dobson. & Schick, 2002, p. 197-202). It doesn't have to be that way. If people who care are willing to bring child abuse out of the "shadows of privacy and secrecy," it can be dealt with and children and their abusers will be better off.

Note: Report child abuse or neglect to your local county department of social services. If it is after normal business hours and the child is in imminent danger, call 911.

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April At a Glance

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

April 25th: WGA Family and Friends Gathering

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

Thursday Night Group

April 2nd: 41 people

April 9th: 31 people

April 16th: 35 people

April 23rd: 48 people

April 30th: 48 people

Orientation meeting - 5 new people

May And Beyond

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

June 6th: 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.

Printed in the USA
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