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# A Measure of *Grace*

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## The Not-So-Steady Incline of Growth

*By Roger Jones*



Growth and change are topics we often discuss at Where Grace Abounds. In the midst of walking alongside men and women who are intensely struggling to make their lives better, the inevitable question comes up... “Why does it seem like things are worse now than they were before I started this whole process?” Heaviness and disappointment accompany the question.

I feel for the person asking the question, because I remember my own journey. When I first began seeking help for my same-sex attractions and my addiction to pornography, I thought I was simply dealing with a couple of nasty habits. As I delved deeper, I began to uncover the horrible truth. These weren’t just unhealthy routines I had gotten myself accustomed to living

*(Continued on page 2)*

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### *Inside this issue:*

Incline of Growth	1
Purpose of Law	3
Reflections	4
Oct at a Glance	8
Nov and Beyond	8

*(Incline of Growth continued from page 1)*

with. There were deeply rooted reasons why I was turning to these coping mechanisms. To let go of these behaviors and relating styles, I would have to face the most painful parts of myself and my past.

In theory, this seems simple. You remove a coping mechanism (such as pornography) and see what comes to the surface.

Whatever it is, you face it head on. Once that is dealt with, you see what surfaces next. Maybe you realize that you have another coping mechanism that needs to be let go of (such as anger). You let go of this and see what comes to the surface. Whatever it is, you face it head on. Repeat, repeat, and repeat! See how easy that is!

While the strategy seems simple, in reality the process is quite difficult. When the painful feelings begin to surface, all you can think about is returning to your coping mechanisms. Temptation seems stronger than it has been in years... for pornography, food, sex or that special someone to take

care of you. You have trained yourself to avoid pain at all costs, and there is a lot of “undoing” to do.

When temptation arises, we have a choice. Scripture tells us that there is always a way of escape.

*“...And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a*

*way out so that you can stand up under it.”* I Cor. 10:13, NIV.

And yet we are pretty smart too. We’ve learned that pain feels bad and that avoiding pain feels good! When the inevitable choice arises, to sin or not to sin, we find ourselves in a quandary. What God says is good for us may not feel very good at all in

the midst of pain!

And this is why growth doesn’t usually happen in a beautiful, unbroken line that reaches steadily upwards. While we have the capacity to say, “No!” to sin, sometimes we say, “Yes!” We move ahead a few steps then take one (or two) backwards. Our progress can be bumpy, to say the least!

*(Continued on page 3)*

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*(Incline of Growth continued from page 2)*

The question I began with, “Why does it seem like things are worse now than they were before I started this whole process?” begins to make more sense. Not only are we fighting against our history and habits, we also have an enemy who seeks to destroy us. Satan is quite happy to see us comfortably living in squalor and unaware that God longs for us to have so much more than a life filled with different ways of avoiding pain. You can be sure that as we begin to look further into “issues,” temptation will increase.

From my office window, I have a view of the distant Rocky Mountains. From this vantage, their surface appears smooth and unbroken. However, if I were to climb one of those mountains, things would look quite different. I would soon realize that there are many obstacles in my path. Some I may be able to go around or climb over. Others may require me to remove some debris or to find an alternate path. Sometimes, in order to ascend, I may have to descend for a few steps, or I may make a wrong turn and need

to retrace my steps. Weather may delay me or cause me to get lost. If I am persistent, I will eventually make it to the top of the mountain!

As I look back over my healing journey, I am encouraged when I look at the “big picture.” I have made wrong turns and temporarily turned back to old things. But, God has continued to woo and beckon me towards Him. He is faithful and trustworthy, even when I am not. I may not have reached the mountain top yet, but I have definitely grown and changed. And, I’m still ascending. Will you climb with me?

***Satan is quite happy to see us comfortably living in squalor and unaware that God longs for us to have so much more than a life filled with different ways of avoiding pain.***

*“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:12-14, NIV*

## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

*By Nancy Hicks*

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### Bootstraps

*"You were wearied by all your ways, but you would not say, 'It is hopeless.' You found renewal of your strength, and so you did not faint."* Isaiah 57: 10, NIV

It is often possible to find renewal of our own strength in hopeless situations without turning to God. Fear of the shame of failure, or the bad opinions of others, or loss of control can drive us to "pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps." But that strength is temporary and doesn't lead us from our old "ways" that led us to hopelessness in the first place.

By contrast, Isaiah says in chapter 40:31 "Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength." God longs to make our strength new again—not just jolt it into an exhausted spasm of energy with a temporary caffeine boost.

"In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." (Prov 3:6) He longs to show us the well-worn paths of right-living so we don't wear our-

selves out trying to machete ourselves a new way through the jungle of living.

Jesus told the woman at the well that "those who worship, must worship in spirit and in truth." This passage from Isaiah 57 affirms that imperative. The Truth isn't usually polished and pretty and presentable for Sunday morning church. When we are wearied by our own ways, we must say so. When we come to a point of hopelessness, we must declare it. God is ready to meet us at that point of truth. In fact He is eager to step in and reveal that He is the antidote for our own wearying ways: He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.





## The Purpose of the Law by Mary Heathman

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Recently I had occasion to think back to my Sunday School teaching days. One memory in particular stood out. The kids in my fourth, fifth, and sixth grade class always competed vigorously with one another over the parts in the role-plays—but nobody wanted to be the hero of the Bible stories. They all wanted to be the unfaithful servant who cheated his boss, or the ungrateful debtor who, after having been forgiven a great debt, refused to forgive his brother a lesser amount. Nobody wanted any of the “good guy” parts.

As I abandoned the lesson plan in favor of a discussion about why it was more interesting, or more fun, to be the bad guys instead of the good guys, the kids chattered animatedly about their boredom with the good guy roles. When I asked if that was true in real life, too, if it was boring to be good, there was a stunned silence. They hadn’t

been connecting those dots like I had!

Anyone who has ever wrestled with temptation, or picked their way along the narrow path of obedience, plodding past wide tantalizing roads forking off into what appears at first glance to be much more interesting territory, can readily identify with the kids in my class.

And so it was for young Saint Augustine it seems. In book two, chapter four of his *Confessions*, he tells of how he and his companions stole forbidden fruit:

*“Yet I had a desire to commit robbery, and did so, compelled neither by hunger, nor poverty, [but] through a distaste for well-doing, and a lustiness of iniquity.” “There was a pear-tree close to our vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was tempting neither for its color nor its flavor. To shake and rob this some of us wanton young fellows went, late one night . . . and*

*(Continued on page 6)*

*(Purpose of Law continued from page 5)*

*carried away great loads, not to eat ourselves, but to fling to the very swine, having only eaten some of them; and to do this pleased us all the more because it was not permitted."*

Years ago, I listened to *Insight for Living* on the radio every day on my way to work. I remember one program where Chuck Swindoll was talking about an experience he had when he was thinking through a message on the purpose of the law. His daily commute took him through public orange groves on both sides of the road. Morning and night he drove the route without the slightest thought of the oranges. But one day he found out that it was against the law to pick the fruit from the orange trees, or even gather any fallen fruit off the ground.

The next time Swindoll drove past the orchards, he glanced at the fields and thought, "Those oranges sure look good; and they're just going to waste out there." The next trip through, he reflected on the silliness of the law. On another trip past the fields, he found himself thinking, "I think I'll stop and gather some of those oranges." As each day



went by, he was plagued more and more by impulses, then temptations, to take the fruit. In his resistance of the temptation, he found himself actually breaking the speed limit as he drove through that section of the highway. Then came the day when he no longer needed the visual stimulus to awaken the temptation. As he was preparing to leave home, the thought occurred to him, "I think I'll take a bushel basket with me for those oranges!"

Chuck used this experience to describe the purpose of the law. He never even knew there was this thing inside of him that

*(Continued on page 7)*

*(Purpose of Law continued from page 6)*

wanted to disobey the law. Finding out about the law against taking oranges from public oranges brought out and exposed in him the desire to disobey the law. Just as did young Augustine and my Sunday School students, he found within himself a preference for the forbidden.

These three examples are nothing if they are not common experiences of most people of God. What honest sinner turned saint will deny finding within himself, or herself, the same condition that Paul confesses in Romans Chapter Seven: *“the good that I want to do, I don’t do, and the bad I don’t want*

*to do I do anyway! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”*

Paul goes on to answer his own question with the cry, *“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

So, God in His kindness sent the law to make sure that we wouldn’t miss the fact that there lies within us a heart bent toward sin

(Romans 7:7). Then, together with an honest confession of this fact, sinners cry out to be rescued, knowing that they cannot escape the snare without help. And then the God who exposed the sin in us through the law, shows us the way to be forgiven, to rise above it, to walk in holiness: Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

***So, God in His kindness sent the law to make sure that we wouldn’t miss the fact that there lies within us a heart bent toward sin (Romans 7:7).***

In the next couple of articles, I want to write a bit about walking in holiness, what that really looks like for me and for WGA group members. As I prepare for this, I hope you will be praying. And, in the coming weeks, maybe you will pray with me the prayer of Augustine: *“What is*

*the fact? Who is it that can teach me, but He who illuminateth mine heart and searcheth out the dark corners thereof.”* Yes, Lord, search my heart and see if there be any wicked way in me. I acknowledge my sin and yearn for you to cleanse my heart. Thank you for your forgiveness.



## October At a Glance

**October 9-11th: WGA Leadership Retreat**

**October 11th: WGA participated in missions event at First Denver Friends and Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church**

### Thursday Night Group

**October 1st: 36 People**  
**October 8th: 36 People**  
**October 15th: 33 People**  
**October 22nd: 38 People**  
**October 29th: 21 People**

## November And Beyond

**November 19th: WGA Pastor Training Event**

**December 5th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 7:00—9:00 am at the WGA offices**

**January 16th: WGA presenting at a volunteer training for HIV CareLink**

## Financial Update

### 2009 Income/Expenses thru Oct. 31st

<b>YTD Income</b>	<b>\$188,329</b>
<b>YTD Expenses</b>	<b>\$212,307</b>
<b>YTD Loss</b>	<b>\$24,307</b>

**Please lift WGA's finances in your prayers as 2009 comes to a close. Would you consider making a donation to help WGA continue offering groups, discipleship counseling, speaking, and other services?**

### WGA Staff

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*Where Grace Abounds*  
exists to guide and support  
men and women who seek to  
understand sexuality and  
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personally appropriate  
God's plan for their  
sexuality and relationships.

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