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A Measure of Grace

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Forgiveness

By Roger Jones

Christmas is a season for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. For many, it can also be a reminder of painful family dynamics and memories. I'm reminded of difficult stories I've heard from those who have come to WGA over the years. With those in mind, I want to discuss the topic of forgiveness with sensitivity.

Scripture admonishes us to forgive. In fact, our own forgiveness is often tied to our act of obedience in this area. *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."* Matthew 6:14, *"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."* Mark 11:25

There are times when forgiveness is a one-time, package deal, and we are able to move on without a second glance. A minor car accident is a good example of this. If someone rear-ends me while I am sitting at a stop sign, I have clearly been wronged. Barring no long-term physical injuries, I will not really think much about the accident after my car is repaired. Of course,

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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



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the act of forgiveness may still be challenging in these instances, especially if it connects our emotions to other times we have been treated unjustly.

There are other times when forgiveness requires more from us. It is difficult to forgive some things, especially when restitution is not available or possible. Twenty dollars taken from your purse or wallet is easily forgotten, if noticed at all. Other victimizations, such as abuse or rape, bring ongoing consequences. Forgiving may be more of a process for a person who has experienced these types of things, as new costs are revealed over time.

Recently, I was in a discipleship counseling appointment with Mary Heathman and one of WGA's ministry participants (we meet with people in pairs). The topic of forgiveness came up and Mary used the following example. "If I were to leave the room for a few minutes," she said, "and when I came back, I realized that Roger had stolen \$5 from my purse while I was out, that would be easy to forgive. I might not leave my purse alone with him again, though." She went on, "If later that day, I realized that Roger had actually taken \$50 from my purse, I would feel the sting a bit more. Now I won't be able to eat out like I was planning to this week. I have to forgive Roger for more than I originally thought." She finished with, "If at some point, I realize that Roger also found the \$500 in my purse that I had set aside for my mortgage payment, I am really going to have to scramble to pay my bills on

time. I may have to borrow some money from a friend. Forgiving Roger for that will be even more difficult."

First, let me reiterate that it was only an example. For all you "opportunists" out there, keep your eyes and hands off of Mary's purse! She doesn't actually carry that much cash with her. Secondly, your purses are safe with me!

The reason I like Mary's illustration is that it paints a clear picture of the cost to forgive. You can't get much more specific than dollars and cents. It also shows how she would have to forgive again as new information surfaces. When she forgave for the \$5 theft, she had no idea what she would later find out. At the point where her story ended, she would likely find herself a little anxious about what else might come to the surface later on. Would she find out later that I had stolen even more from her?

This is the dilemma that many of us face, particularly when something precious, such as our innocence, has been robbed from us. We can forgive a person for what we know about so far. We can commit to forgiving what we do not yet know, but we will still have to feel the loss as the ripples continue to impact our lives.

If a man or a woman is sexually abused as a child, he or she may find that they are able to forgive the person who abused them. Carrying the weight of shame that comes from abuse is a big burden, which can cause bitterness and

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resentment to build. While these feelings may seem justifiable, they are also poisons to a person's well-being. One of the definitions of the word forgive is "to cease to feel resentment against." Forgiveness is the act of letting go of the burden of resentment.

When a person decides to forgive, can they forgive what they do not know yet? Over time, more consequences may arise. A woman who was abused as a young girl may go through a process of forgiveness in her early twenties and fully mean it. In her early thirties, she may realize that she is ending yet another relationship with a man, because she is unable to trust. She is afraid of letting a man close enough to hurt her. At this point of realization, she is faced with letting the old resentments and bitterness sweep her away, or she can choose to forgive, with a clearer picture of what her abuser has cost her.

As I mentioned before, I believe we need to commit to forgive, even knowing that more consequences may surprise us later. Making this commitment early on in our process will help us to approach the new revelations with a healthy perspective: *God is on my side, and I don't need to carry the burden of resentment.*

Our wounds matter to God. He is our Savior and wants us to forgive so that we can live beyond our woundedness. But He is also our healer and knows what it takes to really heal. God is not

like the leaders that the prophet Jeremiah referred to when he said, "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14; 8:11). God knows that sometimes a serious wound must be carefully probed and cleansed; He knows that some injuries must not be covered over quickly, but need to heal from the inside out. Is it possible, then, that complete forgiveness may also evolve in layers as well?

Perhaps this is part of what Christ meant when He said the following: *"If anyone*

would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

It seems the Lord is telling us that as we follow Christ, taking up daily the "cross" of our burdens and pains as they unfold before us – He will show us the cost as we are able to bear it. He will take our willingness to forgive and help us through

the process, forgiving and forgiving and forgiving again, until all is finally forgiven!

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God's Plans or Mine?

By Ed Nurge



When I began attending WGA, I was intrigued by some things the leaders said and wrote. What stood out most was Mary Heathman's concern that some leaders seemed too concerned about outcomes and goals for healing. I wondered, "What's so bad about looking for certain results and setting goals to mark our progress?" As I prayed and continued thinking, I realized one problem is this: my healing and everything that makes my life a success is ultimately in God's hands, not mine! I think I'm in control; I think I have 'veto power' on what God wants to do, with a focus is on me, not God! Knowing that where ideas lead can be more problematic than the ideas themselves, I had to agree with Mary's wise concern.

How does this all relate to sexuality? Is there really any form of sexual brokenness that is disconnected from our desire to be in control, to do things our way, to trust self and not God? If I define healing to mean that I'm a married heterosexual passionately in love with my wife, I would miss God's best in my life, if that doesn't include marriage.

I can also be looking for things to happen in my own time and way and ignore God's desires to work character into my life. What I can so easily miss is that God may have very good pur-

poses He accomplishes by healing my broken sexuality slowly, through a long process.

How often was it true in biblical times that when people prospered they forgot God? Couldn't God be saying in my sexual brokenness, "Son, this is for your good. I want you, through this problem, to see and love people as they are, not as you want to look at them." I've seen many examples in my own life where God challenges me to look beyond a person's appearance to their heart, to work hard to find the best in someone else as I also strive to see and show the good in me.

Most important, and something subtle many Christians overlook, God wants to rid us of every form of pride, whether it shows up in our sexuality, our knowledge, our looks, or anything we think might make us superior to other people. Is it really that illogical that God could use broken sexuality to break my pride, to cure me of looking down on any other human being, but instead to appreciate my own humanity as something precious to Him? Any time I demand that God heal me now, instead of being patient with His time and plans, I'm really saying that I want to be in control and that I know better than He does how things should work out in my life. I have the same problem with programs that give steps but don't

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give place for God to move as He wishes in someone's life.

If I want God to deal with lust in my life, I must include the lust for power, the lust for control, the lust for making myself perfect apart from God, all of which disgust Him just as much as broken sexuality. It's a huge blow to my pride to accept anything God chooses to send my way, without anything more than, "Not my will, but yours be done." In short, I must let go of the ridiculous idea that I call the shots in my life, not God.

So, if God can use my broken sexuality, or anyone else's, to drive us face-down to the foot of the cross to cry out for His forgiveness, mercy and love, isn't that far better than simply being healed now? Don't misunderstand me; if God wishes to heal me right now,

and that's His plan, I'm not going to stand in His way. I'll welcome that healing with open arms and great joy! But if my suffering and slow, gradual healing of broken sexuality brings Him more glory, why can I not greet this with the same kind of rejoicing that the other elicits?

And if God can receive more honor from my being single and giving my love to friends, family and community, must I argue with His purposes? The bottom line, I think, is that my sexuality can glorify God, whether I am married or single, completely healed or mending slowly, successful or struggling in whatever measures mankind uses to judge me. As long as I'm growing in my love for others, especially God, I am pleasing Him. What could possibly be so bad about that?



Question I've been asking lately, "Do you want to live a life of holiness?" often gets an initial response something like, "Define holiness." The conversation then moves into a discussion of the meaning of the word and we never get back to whether a life of holiness is really desired. But one thing I know—holy living is an important topic, well worth passionate discussion. I can tell because just mentioning it raises the

The Holiness Mandate

By Mary Heathman

intensity of the conversation, if not the temperature in the room!

In last month's article, I said that I wanted to write a bit about walking in holiness, what that really looks like for me and for WGA group members. As the time for writing came about this month, I launched into a top of my head treatment and ran into a snag. Just as in the conversations mentioned before, it seems that the definition of holiness, at

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least as I understand it, is a prerequisite to my saying anything credible on the subject. And to set us back further, holiness isn't easy to define. So, in the interest of starting my article on solid footing, I took a look to see what Scripture and a few reference books say to help us understand holiness.

According to *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, "Holiness in the highest sense belongs to God." Webster's also offers a few thoughts in defining holiness: "(1) The state or quality of being holy; perfect moral integrity or purity; freedom from sin; sanctity; innocence; (2) The state of being hallowed, or consecrated to God or to his worship; sacredness; synonyms for holiness are: piety; devotion; godliness; sanctity; sacredness; righteousness. When I turned to definitions for "sanctified" and "sacred," I found that these words carry with them a sense of being separated, set apart for the purposes of God.

When we turn to Scripture, we read of the holiness of God in familiar passages. "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and lifted up; . . . heavenly hosts singing, 'Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory'" (Isa 6:3-4), and "Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy" (Rev 15:4).

A final helpful resource quoted Charles C. Ryrie, who defines holiness, "In respect to God, holiness means not only that He is separate from all that is unclean and evil, but also that He is positively pure and thus distinct from all others" (Ryrie, 1986, p. 38).

Okay! That's what holiness means when

it is describing or referring to God. But what does that have to do with you and me, who are **not** God?

The connection is simple—I can explain it with one breath-taking, mind-boggling passage of scripture: "*But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'*" (1Peter 1:15-16). This New Testament verse is quoting Leviticus 19:2, where the Lord was telling Moses to "*speak unto all the congregations of the children of Israel, and say unto them, ye shall be holy; for I Jehovah your God am holy.*"

God's people are to live a life of holiness—it is His mandate!

It's starting to become a bit uncomfortable about now. Just to be sure I haven't misunderstood this Scripture, I look further and find:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight (Eph 1:4).

. . . rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and discipline (Tit 1:8).

. . . let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2Cor 7:1).

. . . to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:23,24.)

I could go on to convince myself further, or to convince you, but I'm going to assume from this point on that God is holy,

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and those of us who are Christ-followers are mandated to live a life of holiness. Let's just sit with that a few months and see what the Lord will do with our hearts, shall we?

In the rest of this article, I will offer my thoughts on the importance of holiness. In the next two months, I will write about the **impossibility of holiness** and the **journey of holiness**.

It has been my observation and experience that the crucial importance of holiness is most easily and powerfully understood in its absence. A couple of illustrations will explain.

When I was in the fourth grade, I eagerly learned about the major food groups and that proper nutrition and washing hands before eating was necessary for healthy growth of minds and bodies. Then there entered the sudden absence of purity (holiness). I found out somewhere, that there was an acceptable or safe level of insect parts in the flour we bought from the store. "*Acceptable*" and "*safe*" levels of insect parts would be baked into my birthday cake and biscuits and gravy? I was so grossed out I couldn't eat anything with flour for . . . ; well, I remember the grossed out part, not how long it took me to accept a lower standard of purity in my food!

Another illustration comes from a sermon my pastor gave a few years ago. He was talking about holiness and told the story about loading his backpack for a trip into a canyon for a few days of fly fishing. He said that each item that went into his pack had to be very important; space was limited, and he didn't want to carry any more weight than necessary. He had been given a water purifier that

weighed a pound, which after careful consideration he decided not to take. After all, he had never had any problems before with the water in this area.

However, in light of the severe consequences of a bug he picked up in that water, his attitude toward the purifier changed! On the next trip it went into the backpack first, and he considered it the lightest item in his pack.

The FDA approved levels of insect parts in food are not likely to take us down. The consequences of drinking unpurified water are much more serious. But neither holds a candle to the consequences of living life without holiness; that is another matter entirely.

God is holy and we too are to be holy. According to the writer of Hebrews, "*we may share in His holiness*" (Heb 12:10), and He calls us "*to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord*" (Heb 12:14).

I think I've made my point for now. Being holy as God is holy is a mandate for Christ-followers; and the consequences of life without holiness are very serious.

I hesitate to leave the conversation at this point, because it isn't the whole story. We all know the impossibility of perfect, holy living, and that there is His grace. But let's just leave it there for now. It will be good for us to ponder the holiness of God and our part in living holy lives!

Ryrie, C. C. (1986). *Basic Theology*. Wheaton: Victor Books.



November

At a Glance

November 10th: Roger and Mary did a presentation for the staff of Open Door Fellowship

November 19th: WGA Pastor Training Event

November 22nd: WGA men's event

Thursday Night Group

November 5th: 34

November 12th: 37

November 19th: 43

November 26th: No Group

Orientation meeting: 4

December

And Beyond

December 19th: WGA Christmas Celebration

January 2nd: 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 and Expenses

Actual Income (thru Nov.)	\$209,901
Actual Expenses (thru Nov.)	\$233,267
YTD Loss	\$23,366

Please join us in prayer for WGA's Finances.

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Janet Moine
Asst Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding 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.

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