



# A Measure of Grace

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## A Testimony Update *by Roger Jones*



As I sat to write this month's article, it occurred to me that now might be a good time to share an update of my testimony. Typically when I tell my story, I emphasize one aspect or another, depending on the setting. If you have been reading *A Measure of Grace* for any length of time, you will recall bits and pieces of my story woven into these articles. One perspective I have yet to tell my story from is with the theme of marriage in mind. As I have never been married, it has not had a place of emphasis in my story. Last month, I was engaged to be married, which changes that somewhat.

When I first came to WGA back in 1995, marriage was definitely on my "to do" list. In fact, that was one of the major reasons why I came. I was struggling with homosexuality, which did not fit with my value system or my life plan. For most of my life, I had felt different and set apart from everyone else. My struggle with same-sex attractions had been a secret for such a long time, and almost everything I learned about God was through the filter of shame I felt.

"God's blessings don't apply to you, Roger, be-  
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cause you are an abomination. I guess you will go to Hell, because homosexuals won't inherit the kingdom of Heaven." This self-talk was with me all the time. It was powerful and even backed up with Scripture (my limited understanding of it). The only thing I knew how to do as a teenager and a young adult was to pretend everything was okay. I couldn't be open about my struggles, because I might be rejected by the church, one of the few places I felt safe from ridicule and rejection.

Because of my deep sense that something was wrong with me, marriage and family seemed like an avenue to normality. I was not normal, and I knew it well. The proof was all around me... the Scripture, my attractions, the way I was teased at school. If I could somehow get married, that would fix everything. I would be accepted and loved. People wouldn't look at me with suspicion and judgment any longer, because I would be part of the marriage club.

As I was beginning my final semester of college, things reached a critical point in my struggle and in my faith. "If God is who He says He is, then all the promises in Scripture must apply to me too, right? If my problems somehow exempt me from these promises and blessings, then why am I even bothering to pursue God at all?" At this point, I was really quite disappointed in God. I had prayed and

prayed for years and years for Him to take away my homosexual feelings, and He had not done so. It occurred to me then that perhaps there were some other things I had yet to try, and soon after, I found myself at WGA... 600 miles from home and a college drop-out.

My master plan at the time was that I would come to WGA for 6 months, get everything "straightened" out, and return to Texas to finish college. If my problems were worse than I anticipated, I thought I might be in Denver for a year. Denver, WGA and homosexuality were just going to be blips on the

radar screen, a very short chapter in the book of my life. Once I was done with school, marriage and family would come shortly thereafter. My life would be perfect!

In case you have gotten lost in the little fantasy I was just describing, remember that I came to WGA in 1995. Now 15 years later, I am still here. Obviously, things did not go as I planned!

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It wasn't long after I came to WGA that I began to realize my struggle wasn't going to simply disappear. God began to reveal some things to me, lots of things actually. *Perhaps the most profound revelation was that being "normal" had become an idol in my life.* There is nothing wrong with wanting to fit in, and it makes sense how someone like me could idolize normality. Years of feeling rejected and

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ashamed can make fitting in seem like the Holy Grail.

At this time, marriage became less of a priority. I felt like God was saying, “Just follow me, and don’t worry about that for now.” The truth was that I had plenty of other things to worry about. My life and my struggles had become quite a knot that needed untangling. It had taken many years for me to develop these patterns of relating inappropriately to men, and it would take awhile to sort that out. I had an addiction to pornography that needed attention as well. It was too soon to pursue marriage and there was too much work to be done anyway.

To be perfectly honest, somewhere during the past 15 years I think I decided that marriage was not for me. I got comfortable being single. Sure there have been times/seasons of loneliness, but for the most part being single has been a lot of fun and allowed me the freedom to do some things I might not have been able to do as a married man. Despite feeling content in my singleness, I tried my best to keep my heart open to what God might bring my way. I certainly didn’t want the pendulum to swing the other direction, making singleness into an idol! And yet, marriage just didn’t seem to be a priority in my heart any more. If God wanted me to remain single, so be it.

***Despite feeling content in my singleness, I tried my best to keep my heart open to what God might bring my way.***

The one exception to my “contentedness” has always been my relationship with a woman named Jill. Since I first met her twelve years ago, something about her always caused me to wonder what it would be like to be married to her. I felt attracted to her in a way I had not experienced with a woman before, and that excited me. I saw a potential for something with Jill that thrilled me and scared me and frustrated me over the course of our friendship. We became friends and remained friends even through some difficult chal-

lenges we faced separately and together. We even tried dating about 5 years ago, but the timing wasn’t right.

I’m guessing you’ve put two and two together and figured out that Jill is now my fiancée. Like everyone does, I am certain that she and I will face some challenges together. I am so encouraged, because everything seems to be in place... love, friendship, and physical attraction, to name a few. There’s a whole different article formulating in my mind about attraction! Looking back, I see how God has been preparing me for this all along. He is good. ☆



## Holiness Impossible?

*by Mary Heathman*

It was my first pastor who introduced me to the good news that the day I was born into God's family through faith in Christ was the day I was adopted into a huge family of "saints; holy ones." Not too long afterward, my spiritual birth mom, Dorothy, reminded me that my sins were forgiven when I turned my life over to God, and there were now no walls between me and God. She was direct and to the point in the face of my shame and self-condemnation, "Mary, you're believing a lie! You are a saint, a holy one set apart for God. Guilt can never be the issue again between you and God." I believed her then, and my convictions have only grown deeper and stronger in the thirty-eight years since then.

But those years haven't been without seasons of confusion, doubt and disillusionment. What am I to do with the fact that my thoughts and behavior don't match my "sainthood" status? The fact of my position, my identity, in Christ as a "holy one" wasn't a magic cloak that took away all struggle and temptation. In fact, it seemed the harder I tried, the harder than ever it was to live a holy life. Searching the scripture was both encouraging: "God delivered me from all my troubles" and discouraging, "... anyone who wants to lead a godly life in Christ will be persecuted" (2Tim 3:10-13). Peterson's, *The Message*, says it this way, "... you also know that God rescued me! Anyone who wants to live all out for Christ is in for a lot of trouble; there's no getting around it." Really! It says it just like that—no time

to enjoy the promise of rescue before we are hit with the matter-of-fact statement, "Oh, by the way, your desire to live a holy life is going to trigger opposition, lots of it!" It is clear to me that the Bible tells the truth—no sugar coating to make it more palatable. And I have learned to be very grateful for the way the Lord 'tells it like it is', because my life has borne out the truth of it.

But, with the issue of guilt covered by the Atonement, I can be bold to approach God – 'telling it like it is' right back to Him. I can be honest about thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that don't match up with His standard; I can hold my head up—I am forgiven! It is in this state of grace that we are able to see how God has shifted his focus from our guilt (dealt with already) to the forming of our character.

As Ray Waldo says, "What defines holiness is something in the heart; It is recognized by even the people of the world! Holiness is the awesomeness of God shining through in our life."<sup>1</sup>

The "awesomeness of God shining through" us is an outcome of our walk with God. It happens within a close relationship with Him. As we press into Him, His character forms in us. The familiar terms, "sanctification" and "discipleship" become real to us. As we walk with the Lord closely and continuously, we are His disciples and He pours his life into us. The result of this relationship is our sanctification; holiness

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comes alive in us; He becomes greater and greater, while our old nature becomes less and less. This is the way we become holy. There is no other way—all other attempts are self-effort, as “filthy rags” in comparison to God’s character being built into us as we walk with Him.

Our part in the pursuit of holiness is simply to walk with Him? Yes, but anyone who has fumbled along that route will tell you that it takes concentration, focus, and obedience.

As to concentration and focus, we must stop concentrating and focusing on our own righteousness and become absorbed in His. It isn’t that we are not to work hard on this; we just change the target of our attention. To paraphrase a southern gospel song, “we don’t stop dancing; we just change partners.”<sup>ii</sup> **We must quit the pursuit of our own perspective—the focus can no longer be our own holiness, or lack thereof—but it must shift to a deliberate awareness of God and His character.** We must fight off all distractions that would pull us away from practicing the presence of God. That is our part—that is our fight—to stay focused on the pursuit of God above all else.

As to obedience, we must fight off the negative baggage that comes along with the very word. A former WGA staff person expressed it this way in a teaching, “Obedience isn’t bad news; it’s the best place to be. Like when I was five, and I had just had a bath, and was in my soft footed pajamas, sitting on the couch, swinging my legs, being good . . . it was the most peaceful place I have ever been!”

I believe this to be true. I also believe that it is normal for trouble to come our way. And believing this has changed my attitude toward “being good” on purpose--obedient. I find myself pouting and sulking less when troubles cloud the sunshine of life, and the oft-present thorns remind me that there is more to roses than meets the eye. Instead of diving into a battle for my “right” to God’s blessings, or to call for the angels to deliver me from the cross I am called to pick up and carry, I can make a different choice. I have that same choice every day, **I decide every day whether I will face into life instead of running away from it—that’s part of my responsibility in living a holy life, pressing into life instead of checking out.** God won’t do that for me; I have to choose it myself.

Why does this seem a hard choice? When the God of the Universe, who knows what we need, and promises to work for our benefit—when our good God tells us that there “must not be even a hint of sexual immorality among you,”<sup>iii</sup> why is it that we sometimes resist and feel deprived? Why would we not instead think, “Oh, this thing that looks so good to me, it must not be good—it must have hidden hooks and hard consequences down the road—or God wouldn’t tell me to avoid it. He’s got my back, so I am going to trade my understanding for His, and just simply do what He says. Doing what He says will have the highest and best outcome for me.”

I wrote the last paragraph and believe it to be true, but must admit that that attitude isn’t the first to come to mind when

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faced with temptation. But it is clearly one of the options I have every time—to choose obedience and call it good. I can choose to obey over the conflicting pressures of the moment—the familiar pull toward immediate gratification.

So, then, what is our part? To pursue the Lord and His righteousness; choose to respect and obey His commandments; confess our failures; and pursue Him again and again—continuously. ☆

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<sup>i</sup> Waldo, R. (2009). Holiness is awful. Online journal, Prophecy & Salt: <http://salt.cdntoday.com/2009/10/holiness-is-awful/>

<sup>ii</sup> *I Didn't Stop Dancing* song lyrics from the album *Crazy 'Bout You* by Del Way

<sup>iii</sup> Eph 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

***Doing what He says  
will have the highest  
and best outcome...***

## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader *By Nancy Hicks*

### Babysteps

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”

When I get to this verse in Romans 8 after coming through the dark valley of Romans 7 where I find myself wrestling enemies in the dark – doing what I don't want to do and failing at what I want to do – I almost always cry. It's such good news. And my soul knows it. NO CONDEMNATION! But occasionally my head pipes in and says, “The tears are great

and everything, but what does this mean? What does this look like in day to day living and struggling?”

I don't know. But here's my latest shot at it: The image I got this week when I read this verse was of a baby learning to walk. She struggles to her feet, reeling like drunken manikin, and with great concentration and courage pushes one foot forward. Her balance is thrown off and she overcompensates landing on her firmly padded bottom with a thud. Hopefully she looks up at a cheering

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audience, beaming at her with affirmation and pleasure, urging her to try again. Her cheerleading section has vision for where she is going – she is learning to walk. They see her progress towards the goal, not her immediate failure to reach it.

I don't mean to discount the impact and pain of sin in our lives and the lives of those around us, but I do think there is a picture here of God's vision for us.

When we struggle to our figurative feet, weave drunkenly and then crash with the weight of our sin, the voices we most often hear from without and within say, “you are a failure. You are weak. You are never going to stand much less walk. Why do you even bother to keep trying?” Those are voices of condemnation. Over time they can accumulate to a deadly weight that leaves us hunched on the floor staring at our useless feet. So what if somehow, miraculously, each time we landed with a thud, we heard a different voice, the voice of God, saying, “keep trying! You can do it! You're almost there! Don't give up!” and we looked up into the smiling, affirming face of Love itself? What if the voice we heard had vision for us overcoming and actually walking? What if there was no condemnation?

Have you noticed that most babies start to walk because they want something really badly? I haven't seen babies experiment with walking

just for the sake of walking. They want the toy that is out of their reach; they want to make it to their mother's outstretched arms. Personally, I am told that I learned to walk with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich dangled enticingly just out of my reach. (Incidentally, I am still highly motivated by great food.) So what do you want? What will motivate you to learn to walk?

The writer of Hebrews says it this way: “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

I believe that God not only has vision for us learning to walk, but He sees us running races and dancing and cartwheeling. So let us lay aside condemnation. Let us lay aside every encumbrance and sin. Let us press on staring intently into the eyes of Love and reaching for His outstretched arms. Let's learn to walk. And then, let's dance. ☆



## December At a Glance

**December 5th: Intercessory Prayer**

**December 19th: WGA Christmas  
Celebration**

### **Thursday Night Group**

**December 3rd: 34**

**December 10th: 37**

**December 17th: 38**

**December 24th: No Group**

**December 31st: No Group**

**Orientation meeting: 3**

## January And Beyond

**January 24th: WGA presenting at Cherry Hills  
Community Church**

**February 6th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from  
7:00—9:00 am at the WGA offices**

**February 4th: WGA presenting at Campus Crusade**

**February 20th: WGA presenting at a volunteer  
training for HIV CareLink**

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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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