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# A Measure of Grace

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

## The Power of Secrecy *by Roger Jones*



Secrets are powerful. I'm not talking about the little bits of information and gossip that we inadvertently or surreptitiously obtain about one another. The secrets I'm referring to are the ones we keep about ourselves, the parts of ourselves we perceive would create chaos and damage our lives beyond repair if anyone found out the truth.

Because this is an article for Where Grace Abounds' newsletter, I'll focus on the topics of sexuality and relationship. Secrets can be about anything really, from a sexual fantasy that has never been acted upon to a full-blown double-life, delicately held together with deception and lies. Big or small, secrets can begin to control our lives.

What is it that causes men and women to feel driven to keep a secret? Somewhere in their lifetimes, they received (or perceived) a message that something about them was shameful. Within the church, a message of shame is unintentionally communicated rather often. We hear from the

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Where Grace Abounds  
P.O. Box 18871  
Denver, Colorado 80218-0871

Office: 303/863-7757  
Fax: 303/863-7769

email:  
[info@wheregraceabounds.org](mailto:info@wheregraceabounds.org)  
website:  
[www.wheregraceabounds.org](http://www.wheregraceabounds.org)



*(Secrecy continued from page 1)*

pulpit a message about our sexuality, for example. In the message, we hear a very clear list of all the things we should NEVER do. Without a message of hope attached to this list of “no no’s,” many feel that they are essentially bad people, because they have made some of the choices we are not to make. Or they have had choices made for them. Or they simply want to do something sinful and cannot understand why.

Growing up in church, I learned at an early age that homosexuality was not an acceptable behavior. It was an awfully powerful word which I was afraid of before I even knew what it meant. As I entered adolescence and began to realize that my attractions were for the same sex, I was horrified and terrified. The people in church were like my family. I was afraid to talk about my homosexual feelings, because I was convinced that I would be rejected.

I can clearly remember being in a church service with a special guest speaker. He claimed that God had given him a special spiritual gift. According to him, different sins had a unique odor to them. He went on to say that homosexuality was the most foul smelling of all the sins. I am not trying to spark a debate here about what is a spiritual gift and what isn’t.

My point is that when I heard this message, I was again terrified. I didn’t know how to process the information I was hearing. God’s grace seemed to be for everyone but me. Needless to say, I stayed downwind of the speaker after that!

My purpose here is not to criticize pastors. They are given a weighty task - to communicate the Word of God. The Scripture clearly describes some things as sinful, and it is a pastor’s task to discuss these issues. Was the truth of Scripture shared with me without the

message of love and grace attached? Perhaps sometimes it was, as in the example above. More often, I think I was so wrapped up in the fear I was feeling that I was unable to hear any accompanying message of hope.

The point I am trying to make is that I had a BIG secret that I didn’t feel I could tell anyone about. Left to myself and my

perceptions, I developed an incredibly skewed view of who God was and how other people felt about me. I believed that if anyone knew the truth about me, I would be rejected. God already knew the truth (because He knows everything), and I didn’t know what to think about that. If I was going to be sent to Hell for having homosexual attractions, there didn’t seem to be much I could do about it, except to try and manage other people’s per-

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*(Secrecy continued from page 2)*

ceptions of me as best I could. So I kept my homosexual feelings a secret for a really long time. I wish I could take what I know now and go back and have a conversation with the younger version of myself.

We are all guilty of sin, and all sin is equal in God's eyes. I'm not always sure why some, like me, take that guilt and turn it into shame. Feeling guilt is an admission of wrong-doing. Feeling shame can take on an identity of its own. Where guilt says, "I did something bad," shame says, "I am bad."

When people are buried in secrecy and shame, they can feel unworthy of legitimate love, care, and acceptance. Even though they may have lives filled with family and friends, because no one knows the things they keep to themselves, they are incapable of receiving love. "I love you," is heard through the filter of, "You don't know the real me. If you really knew me, you would hate me and reject me."

With this in mind, we are better able to understand how a person can turn to any number of behaviors to bring comfort: pornography, drugs, alcohol, and anonymous sex, to name a few. These things do not bring life, but they can offer comfort for a time. These things never reject us, and they work to numb the pain every time.

I remember what led me to WGA. My

life and my faith had reached a crisis point. If God's promises were true for other people, then they had to be true for me too. Otherwise, what was the point of following God at all? It was through my questioning and prayer about this that God brought me to WGA in 1995.

WGA is far from perfect, but we do our best to create a safe place for men and women to share openly. Often this is the first place where a woman is able to share about her same sex attractions, or a man can share about his secret thought life or addiction. What they receive

from us and the others in our group is acceptance and understanding, rather than the rejection they've feared for so long.

That is exactly what I experienced at WGA. I shared those deepest secrets that I was certain would bring me rejection. What I experienced was love. The truth of who I

was in Christ was reflected back to me in the eyes and words of the staff and leadership. The love went deep into my soul, in a way that I had been unable to experience for a very long time.

I opened this article by saying that secrets are powerful. There is truth to that, but secrets are only as powerful as we allow them to be. The power of secrets is silence.

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promises were  
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**Reflections:**  
**Thoughts From a WGA Leader**  
*By Nancy Hicks*

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Psalm 33:16-22 (kind of)

No king is saved by the size of his army;  
no warrior escapes by his great strength.  
A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;  
despite all its great strength it cannot save.

No one is saved by the size of their retirement account;  
no amount of knowledge and education can keep away death and difficulty.  
A great job cannot protect from upheaval;  
despite all its great perks, it cannot save.

But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,  
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,  
to deliver them from death  
and keep them alive in famine.

We wait in hope for the LORD;  
he is our help and our shield.  
In him our hearts rejoice,  
for we trust in his holy name.

May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD,  
even as we put our hope in you.

hope

## Confused by Feelings ~ Again?

*by Mary Heathman*

*(This article is reprinted from 2/2000)*

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*“Ignore your feelings.”*

This advice came from my teacher in religion class when I was nine years old. I was just completing my lessons and preparing for the ceremony that would induct me into a faith that I didn't yet own. I tried to talk with my teacher, but she was busy with too many children, and didn't catch the intensity behind my question. When I told her that I didn't have any sense of God's love for me, or even that he heard me when I prayed, she said that my feelings didn't matter, that I was to believe anyway, that that was all there was to it.

But my feelings mattered to me. I had pursued my studies with real interest, and I earnestly wanted to know God. I tried hard to believe, but it just wasn't there, and I couldn't pretend. On the church steps, after the ceremony, I thought to myself, “Nothing happened. God might be real, but He isn't going to take care of me. I'm going to have to do that myself.” As a ten year-old agnostic, I turned my heart away from Him for 17 years.

*“Your feelings can sabotage your career.”*

It was my boss talking this time. It was 1969, and I had just been promoted to management. I was one of the first women managers outside of the office administration department of my company. It was an honor to be singled out for this position and I was ready to take on the challenge. Eager for any tips for success, I took in my boss's advice hook, line and sinker. In my performance review, he complimented me on my ability to keep my feelings out of the workplace. He said it was critical to remember that my emotions would always betray me if I relied upon them. I remember thinking, “Well, that matches what I've learned so far in my personal life.” It was easy to follow this advice, as I had already shut down most of my feelings the previous year when my father died. It was another five years before I gave any place to emotions again.

*“Vent your feelings.”*

The workshop leader told us how important it was to express our anger. Twenty of us stood around the room, holding our pillows, avoiding eye contact with one another, and listening carefully to the in-

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*(Confused from page 5)*

structions. We were all to think of a situation or a person that was frustrating us, and “f-e-e-e-l our anger.” At the leaders command, we all placed the pillow on the floor, dropped to our knees, and pounded the pillow furiously, shouting out our anger.

At first, I beat on my pillow and shouted as furiously as best of them. (I was very much concerned about being a competent and successful participant.) I tried my best, but it didn’t seem to work for me. Yet, I wasn’t willing to give up, nor to admit that this exercise resulted in irrepressible giggles rather than anger welling up in me. Nonetheless, I refused to be embarrassed by my “wrong” emotion. I buried my face in the pillow and convulsed with laughter. The instructor complimented me afterward for my freedom of expression. I left the workshop still confused about emotions, but refreshed by the laughter.

*“Be ye angry, and sin not.”*

In 1972, I encountered my Creator. I was in despair over my personal circumstances and facing my own powerlessness to change anything. When I cried out to a God I still wasn’t sure cared, a sense of His presence washed over me. In that moment, what I had studied and still believed about God since

childhood became fused with a fully emotional, fully cognitive response to Him and I knew I was no longer lost or alone. The relief was immense, and a hunger followed on its heels – I couldn’t get enough of His word.

Before long, I came across scriptures about emotions, and the confusion began to lift. I learned that we were created in God’s image, and He had feelings – even anger! To be human was to feel, to weep with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice. Jesus even wept when he didn’t have to – knowing He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, he cried for his friend, for Mary and Martha, and probably for the lost state of humanity. Jesus was angry when the fig tree didn’t have any figs, when the moneychangers desecrated the temple, and when Peter tried to distract Him from His mission.

As I read through the Bible, stories of real people with real emotions leapt straight from the page right into my heart. And my own emotions began to find their place. According to God’s will, I was to be angry and sin not. I learned it was possible to pay attention to my emotions without letting them dictate my course of action. I could learn something from my feelings – what I cared about, for instance.

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(Confused continued from page 6)

But I found it took my mind to help me figure things out and a sometimes adamant exercise of my will to do the “sin not” part.

My emotions sometimes still confuse me, but it doesn’t worry me much anymore. When I’m overwhelmed with feelings, whether pleasurable or painful, I’ve learned to give them a place without making any drastic decisions, then bring my head into the picture and listen and think carefully. On the other hand, if my brain is racing compulsively on some mission of analysis and there are no feelings anywhere around, I have learned to sit quietly and watch and wait for them, for they have much of importance to say.

I also have come to know that thoughts and feelings, even working together, cannot be trusted to give me a full picture of reality. I can testify from experience that they do much better together than either one ever did alone – but the only way we can know we are closest to reality is when our thoughts and emotions are Spirit-controlled.

The day I read, *The Spirit-Controlled Temperament*, by Tim

LaHaye, I gave God permission to do whatever it took to harness my emotions. The day I memorized Proverbs 3:5-6, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your paths,*” was the day I told God I never wanted to make another decision without Him.

It’s been almost [forty] years now, and I have never regretted those commitments. I’ve had plenty of mixed emotions about the whole deal, and I think sometimes that I must be crazy for following the path I’ve chosen. Sometimes others walk the path with me, sometimes they don’t. But whether I walk in community or I walk alone, I wouldn’t trade the peace and contentment I’ve found.

To paraphrase Robert Frost, “*I took the path less traveled, and it has made all the difference.*<sup>1</sup>” I like the difference!

<sup>1</sup>Robert Frost (1874–1963). The road not taken.

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## February At a Glance

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

**February 21st: WGA Leadership Meeting**

### Thursday Night Group

**February 4th: 37 people**

**February 11th: 43 people**

**February 18th: 26 people**

**February 25th: 29 people**

**Orientation meeting: 3 new people**

## March And Beyond

**March 9th: WGA presented at Younglife**

**March 13th: Men's Event, Women's Event**

**March 16th: WGA hosting a Pastor/Ministry leader training on the topic "Transparency in Ministry"**

**April 3rd: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00-9:00 am at the WGA offices**

## Financial Update

**Through February, we predicted income of \$30,450 for 2010. What actually came in was \$21,860, a budget shortfall of \$8,590. Would you please pray of 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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