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# A Measure of *Grace*

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## Enmeshed, Disengaged, and Interdependent Relationships ~ Part Two *by Roger Jones*

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Last month I introduced this series of articles, and I explained that I've been reading a book, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* by Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott. In the opening chapters, they address a number of myths about marriage. One of these is "My Spouse Will Make Me Whole." While reading, I realized that the principles in this book about marriage reminded me of things I had read and heard about having healthy relationships in general.

The Drs. Parrott describe three different types of relationships: enmeshed, disengaged, and interdependent. In the previous article, I delved into some aspects of enmeshed relationships. You can read this article on the WGA website at [www.wheregraceabounds.org/newsletters](http://www.wheregraceabounds.org/newsletters). This month, I will address the disengaged relationships.

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(Enmeshed continued from page 1)

Due to my proclivity for enmeshed relationships in which I find myself relying too heavily on another person (see last month's article for more on this), I have discovered that I often err in the opposite direction. Out of my fear of repeating the same unhealthy pattern of "too much," I sometimes overcompensate and approach relationship in a nonchalant manner that is confusing to the other person. Another quotation from the previously mentioned book by Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott is: "The opposite of an enmeshed marriage is a relationship of rugged self-reliance, often called the *disengaged* relationship. The term reflects the isolation and independence of spouses who are attempting to earn their sense of wholeness by relying on no one, even their marriage partner. These people, too, are trying in vain to compensate for their feelings of inferiority."<sup>\*</sup>

Five years ago, my fiancée Jill and I made an unsuccessful attempt at dating. It was painful and difficult to work through, and we both left the relationship feeling wounded and hurt. One of the reasons that things did not work out for us then was that I was fearful of repeating the pattern of enmeshment that I had usually found myself struggling with. I approached her in a rather *disengaged* way. In my efforts to keep my emotions in check, I

was greatly diminishing my own ability to connect with her in a way that met either of our needs.

As the saying goes, "Hindsight is 20/20." Had I realized what I was doing at the time, perhaps that first attempt at dating would have ended differently. But, as I said earlier, this was just one of the reasons things did not work out for us. I am grateful that God has brought Jill and me together again and at a time when we are both ready to move forward into marriage. "*H-frame* relationships are structured like

***Out of my fear of repeating the same unhealthy pattern of "too much," I sometimes overcompensate and approach relationship in a nonchalant manner that is confusing to the other person.***

a capital *H*. Partners stand virtually alone, each self-sufficient and neither influenced much by the other. There is little or no couple identity and little emotional connection. If one lets go, the other hardly feels a thing."<sup>\*</sup>

I have experienced the *disengaged*, *H-frame* approach to relationships within my friendships as well. Again, my fear of over-attaching kept me from appropriately connecting and bonding. I think that somewhere along the way (after my third or fourth enmeshed relationship), I decided that I would rather not be the "needy" one anymore. If I kept my feelings in check and stayed calm, cool, and collected, at least I would look good on the outside. Our culture seems to value the strong individual who can stand on his own, so I tried to fit in better. The problem was that while I spent so

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much time and energy managing how people perceived me, there wasn't much time or energy left to actually connect with anyone. It is difficult for someone to connect with me when I am bound and determined to keep them from thinking that they matter to me!

In the final installment of this series of articles, I will address the elusive inter-dependent relationship. This is the healthy option we should all be striv-

ing for in our connections with other people. See you here next month!

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\* Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott, *Saving Your marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Yourself Before – And After – You Marry – Expanded and Updated Edition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 30-32.

## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks



### Thoughts on Job

Distress is the native state of humanity. We find many ways to numb, bury, rationalize, blame-shift, and simply avert our eyes from it. We can claim that our Distress is the fault of those around us; we can drink, shoot up, snort, or sleep away the discomfort; we can shovel hours and hours of work, parties, tasks and good deeds on it in an effort to bury it alive; we can look around and say, "This is simply the state of mankind and I just need to grin and bear it like everyone else." And yet in the middle of the lonely nights, the Distress breaks through our carefully paved lives and hovers ominously, refusing to be buried or denied.

The Distress says different things to

different people: "What does God really think about me? Does He even think about me at all? Am I shameful? Am I doing enough? How do I undo the things I've done? What if I am exposed for who I truly am?"

Of course we don't like the Distress in ourselves – this isn't rocket science. But we especially detest it in others. It's like trying to give up smoking and deny the urge, and then coming around the corner to find someone puffing away right in front of us. "What are you doing!!? Don't you understand how hard it is for me to not think about this? Stop being so public about this, so I don't have to see it!" I've watched this in the church over the years. All of us clean-cut people in clean-cut cloth-

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*(Not Fair... continued from page 3)*

ing having clean-cut conversations and volunteering for clean-cut “ministry” opportunities – all the while clinging, white-knuckled as the irrepressible reality of the Distress in our gut threatens to break out into public view. Watching someone else either confess their failings or be caught in them rattles our grip. A quick panic snakes through and with sweaty palms we try to divert the attention away from ourselves. That’s how many of my friends who struggle with homosexuality or other sexual temptations and sins have been hung out to dry by the church in general: the clean-cut people say, “We are post Jesus on the cross. We are living in the age of grace. There is no Distress here. If you have it, you aren’t in the sanctified group.” And we learn from about 1<sup>st</sup> grade on that no one wants to be in the “out group.” The “out group” is where conversations stop when you enter the room and things are said from the pulpit that make all eyes turn towards you in horror. There is a cloud of shame that follows the outcast everywhere.

Here’s what’s interesting. Job was blameless (though not sinless) and feared God. He provided for the poor, prayed for his children, didn’t lust after women, considered his servants fellow human beings, supported widows, was just to the weak, didn’t worship idols, didn’t trust in his money, didn’t curse or gloat over his enemies . . . (you can find his complete resume in chapter 31). He was pretty much as perfect as any man could hope to be in this life. And still he found himself wrestling eyeball to eyeball with the Distress. “God, what do you think about me?

Haven’t I tried hard enough and done enough? Why am I feeling all this shame?” Throughout the book, Job continually begs for an audience with God so that he can present his defense of good living and protest the unjust shame and pain he is experiencing. God, his friends are eager to respond, is silent.

If the holiest man we know can’t get an audience with God to defend himself, what hope is there for any of us? And then God speaks. He says to Job, “You want to talk face to face with me? You want to argue your case with me? Then stand up like a man and let me ask you a few questions first. You consider me the judge and yourself the defendant – you consider the distance between us as small as that between a judge’s bench and the witness stand. hmmm. Let’s see what you know about this Judge. Where were you when I created the bench, the courtroom, the justice system, human beings, the earth, the cosmos, Wisdom herself?”

I imagine the ant saying to the boot, “Let me explain to you how faithfully I have carried crumbs into my anthill. I have searched far and wide to find the tiniest scraps and let my fellow ants know where they are so that we can care for our babies. I have wisely stored up in the summer for the coming lean winter months. You should not step on me because I am a good ant.” (Perhaps this conversation happens all the time as we walk through our lives – ants eloquently pleading for their lives as the shadow of our boot descends and they are left as a small smear on the path.)

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So far not so encouraging, right? But here is the good news for all people. God in His cosmic, timeless, immeasurable bootedness, has stooped to us with His magnifying glass. Our righteousness affects Him not at all. It affects our lives a great deal in our tiny whisper of a life on earth, but His essence is not changed. He has chosen to look for us and see us and care for us. Not because of any eloquent defense on our part; not because we deserve it; not because He has too. He chooses.

We find Job at the end of the book no longer demanding an audience. In response to his encounter with God he says, "My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." In other words, "Who did I think I was demanding that you admire and affirm my good deeds and righteous living? I am insignificant to the point of being invisible. You have the right and the power to do anything you want." But do you see that God is stooping even in this moment to talk to Job and to hear him? As Job shrinks in his own mind and God expands, the Distress begins to take on its own true, tiny perspective. It is a tiny dot within a tiny dot. Elihu\* puts this eloquently in the 36<sup>th</sup> chapter when he says to Job, "[God] is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction," a spacious place of resting in God's unmerited favor and attention.

A spacious place of sheer gratitude instead of fearful performance and paralyzing failure, a spacious place where the Distress whispers, "Who does God really think I am?" finds me giggling in response, "He stoops to me! He sees me! He has scooped me into the palm of His colossal palm and mutes His voice so that He can have conversation with me, and I am not blasted to bits by the magnitude of the Voice that spoke stars into existence!"

This is good news for all people. To those of us who struggle with self-righteousness and fear of imperfection God says, "Regardless of what you have tried to do, I choose to stoop to you." To those of us who struggle with crippling guilt and condemnation because of the things we have done God says, "Regardless of what you have tried not to do, I choose to stoop to you."

Good news! May He continue to woo us all from the jaws of Distress to spacious places!

\*Elihu is the fourth and last friend of Job who spoke to him in the book and the only friend of Job that God did not scold. In fact, when Elihu gets on a roll about the majesty and power of God, God Himself takes over seamlessly between chapters 37 & 38. I like Elihu quite a bit.

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man we know  
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of us?***

## Where Are You Headed?

*By Mary Heathman*



**S**o, did you hear the one about the woman from Denver who packed her belongings, loaded up her car and headed for New York? She did all the right things—the car was ready, oil changed and full of gas; she had her driver's license with her; she had reservations for motels at all the right spots along the way. But when she got to I-70, she headed west instead of east. From almost anywhere in the country, New York is east. She was traveling in the wrong direction and if she didn't turn around, she was never going to get to New York, no matter how sincerely she believed she was headed the right way.

I have been in that position before, both literally and many times figuratively. Once, when I was on the plains of Kansas, I filled up with gas at a truck stop, got back on the highway and drove two hours before I noticed that the mileage signs were all for cities I had supposedly already driven through! When I finally got turned around, I had driven 150 miles in the wrong direction; 150 miles I had already covered earlier in the day; 150 miles I had to drive again just to get back to the point in the road where I had turned west instead of east. (I don't believe I ever told my brother why I was four hours later than I said I would be!)

There are plenty of directional signs

along I-70. Neither the woman headed for New York nor I needed to get too far in the wrong direction before we got to a highway sign telling us clearly what direction we were headed. Of course, in order for the signs to be helpful, we needed to pay attention to them in the first place. We don't know what the New York bound woman's problem was, but as for me, I was listening to a book on tape, and I-70 just goes on and on without incident – I was on my way and making good time, couldn't be bothered with details like double-checking my direction!

Stephen Covey, in his book, *7 Habits of Highly Successful People*, describes the difference between a manager and a leader. As he tells the story, the team was building a road through the jungle. The manager coordinated the schedules, assigned work crews, saw to it that equipment was in good repair, and that the workers had what they needed. The leader climbed the tallest tree in the jungle to look around and yelled down to the manager, "We're in the wrong forest!" The manager yelled back, "Don't bother me, we're making great progress!"

I am so often like that leader, not getting up into the tree soon enough to plan out the project well. Or I can sometimes even be like the manager that is so interested in the work at hand that he can't lift his eyes a moment and make sure he is on the right track. A

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*(Where Are You Headed? continued from page 6)*  
portion of scripture, Jeremiah 31:21,  
taken shamelessly out of context,  
speaks to these circumstances:

*the road you take."*

Of course, a few hours lost driving  
back and forth on I-70, a few thousand  
dollars lost hacking through the wrong  
jungle, these things probably don't  
matter all that much in the long run.  
As a friend of mine used to say, "It's  
not worth worrying about; there are no  
eternal consequences at stake!"

However, there are some turns I have  
taken that seem to have far-reaching, if  
not eternal, consequences. When I was  
nine years old, I decided that God was  
irrelevant to my life—it was sixteen  
years before the consequences of that  
decision piled up enough to get my  
attention. Choices I made when I was  
thirteen that led to early marriage, de-  
cisions to divorce and remarry, all  
these still have troubling residual re-  
sults in my life and that of my children  
and grandchildren. I see the ripple  
effects, and though gratefully forgiven,  
I deeply regret those choices. If I had  
just known before I . . . well, I really  
did, didn't I? There were signs.

As for me, I don't want to miss any  
more signs. I want to be on the alert. I  
want to know how to pay attention,  
and turn back at the slightest miss-  
turn! I don't presume to know for any-  
one else what signs are being ignored  
right now or whether the direction they  
have marked out for themselves is go-

ing to take them where they ultimately  
want to go. But I do know that there is  
a Way available to all of us to check  
things out—there is another scripture  
that speaks to directly to this:

*"Stand at the crossroads  
and look;*

*ask where the good way is,  
and walk in it  
and you will find rest for your souls."  
Jeremiah 6:16*

It seems that I have lately experienced  
a rush of questions about whether the  
day to day decisions of my life are lin-  
ing up with my values and convictions.  
Maybe that's because I am approach-  
ing the season of life where one just  
naturally wants to take stock; I want to  
make sure my life is filled with activi-  
ties that will lead me to my highest  
purpose—God's purpose for me. So  
that's why I stand at the crossroads of  
my life and pay attention, and look for  
the well-worn path laid out by God for  
me. I keep on asking where my next  
step should be and walk tentatively as  
it opens up before me. The rest for my  
soul is tangible when I live this way.

I pray for this rest for WGA group  
members, supporters, staff and leader-  
ship. May we know the Way and walk  
with Him always.



You are invited to celebrate  
**Mary Heathman's Non-retirement / 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday!**

When: Saturday, May 29<sup>th</sup>  
Time: 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.  
Where: Alamo Placita Park  
3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Emerson Street, just east  
of Speer Blvd.



\*In the event of inclement weather, celebration will be held at the WGA Offices at 1532 Emerson Street - pray for sunshine!

*We will be having a picnic potluck! Please bring your favorite dish to share according to the list below.*

If your last name begins with:

A-G Please bring an Appetizer

H-L Please bring a Side Dish

M-S Please bring a Salad

T-Z Please bring a Dessert

**Fried chicken and beverages will be provided**

***Lunch will be served beginning at noon***

- *Please bring a blanket or chair to sit on*
- *There is a playground area for the kids!*
- *No alcoholic beverages or glass allowed in the park*

In lieu of gifts you are welcome to make a donation to WGA in Mary's honor. That truly would be the best present you could ever give her.



## April At a Glance

**April 2nd:** WGA presentation at Colorado Community Church's Celebrate Recovery

**April 18th:** WGA Leadership Meeting

**April 24th:** WGA men's event

### Thursday Night Group

**April 1st:** 27 People

**April 8th:** 26 People

**April 15th:** 40 People

**April 22nd:** 29 People

**April 29th:** 37 People

**Orientation meeting:** 2 new people

## May And Beyond

**May 20th:** Pastor's Training Event

**May 29th:** Mary's 65th Birthday Party!

**June 5th:** Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00-9:00 am

**June 5th:** Family and Friends Event. Please contact the WGA office for details.

**June 26th:** Roger and Jill's wedding!

## Financial Update

**2010 Projected Income (Through April 30th):**  
**\$71,950**

**2010 Actual Income (Through April 30th):**  
**\$77,465**

### WGA Staff

**Roger Jones**  
Executive Director

**Scott Kingry**  
Program Director

**Janet Moine**  
Assistant Program Director

**Mary Heathman**  
Founding Director

*A Measure of Grace*  
is edited by  
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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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