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A Measure of *Grace*

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Enmeshed, Disengaged, and Interdependent Relationships ~ Part Three

by Roger Jones

In April, this series of articles was introduced, and I shared my experiences as I read a book titled *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* by Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott. In the opening chapters, the authors address a number of myths about marriage. One of these is “My Spouse Will Make Me Whole.” I was reminded of many of the topics I have read over the years, not necessarily just about marriage, but relationships in general.

In their text, the Drs. Parrott discuss three different types of relationships they encountered

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while working with people: enmeshed, disengaged, and interdependent. In previous articles, I explored some of my experiences with enmeshed relationships and disengaged relationships. You can read these articles on the W G A website at www.whergraceabounds.org/newsletters. This month, I will look at interdependent relationships.

As I began to write about interdependent relationships--the "healthy" ones, I found myself struggling to find examples to share. It isn't that I don't have good illustrations of positive relationships, because thankfully I do. Perhaps it is because I have spent so much more time analyzing my unhealthy styles of relating and not much time examining my healthy relationships. I suppose this is the way of "health." It often goes unnoticed. When I am feeling well physically, I don't really notice that my throat is *not* sore. I do however notice when my throat feels rough and scratchy. Our "wrongs" get much more attention than do our "rights."

Last year, as Jill and I reconnected and were considering the possibility of dating again, it was with much fear and trepidation that we approached one another.

A quote from *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*:

"A sense of wholeness can never be achieved either in an enmeshed or in a disengaged relationship. Both are deeply flawed and dangerous. Instead, wholeness is found in an *interdependent* relationship, in which two people with self-respect and dignity

make a commitment to nurture their own spiritual growth, as well as their partner's."*

While I think it may be too far to say, as the authors have, that "wholeness is found in an *interdependent* relationship," I think they are making a valid point. Perhaps a

better way of saying this is "Wholeness is found through our relationship with Christ." Interdependent relationships, where neither partner is looking to the other for completion, help to give us our best chance at feeling whole."

Another quote:

"*M-frame*" relationships

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rest on interdependence. Each partner has a high self-esteem and is committed to helping the other partner grow. They could stand on their own, but they *choose* to be together. The relationship involves mutual influence and emotional support. M-frame relationships exhibit a meaningful couple identity. If one lets go, the other feels a loss but recovers balance.

Like separate strings of a lute that quiver with the same music, there is beauty in a marriage that respects the individuality of its partners. In an interdependent marriage, joy is doubled, and sorrow is cut in half.”*

Last year, as Jill and I reconnected and were considering the possibility of dating again, it was with much fear and trepidation that we approached one another. Our past experience(s) in dating had not worked out so well, including a failed attempt with each other about 6 years ago. Much of what is described in this quote was missing from our relationship. I am pleased to share that I believe our current relationship seems more like an interdependent one than the enmeshed or disengaged relationships. I know that there will be



challenges for us in the years to come, but it is good to recognize that all the work she and I have done individually, through groups and counseling, has had some positive results!

I’m not sure if there is a nice, neat way of moving towards interdependency. In a perfect world, we would all have good self esteem. We would have a balanced view of ourselves, knowing our strengths and weaknesses, but not feeling prideful or ashamed of either. We wouldn’t be looking to anyone else to answer the question for us, “Who am I?” We would already know the answer. Relationships would be meaningful and important, but not the sole source of our identity. God would be the central figure in our lives.

The only way I have seen the interdependent relationships develop in my life is through trial and error. We over-attach and then become

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Little Steps of Obedience Are Heroic Love

By Ed Nurge

I've had a little time to reflect on affirming the statement, *'Every act of obedience is an act of love'*. To apply that specifically to those with sexual struggles, each time we make the right choice, no matter how big or small it is, we've really obeyed, and therefore, loved Christ. I'd also like to pair this statement with, *'Each act of humility is an act of worship'*. Humility becomes important as we come to God often for repentance whenever we fail in our choices. Love and worship are two things that seem to get misplaced as we struggle with broken sexuality. I certainly have seen this in my own life. My faulty views on God have usually led to cheap substitutes for love and worship.

If you're like me, you can turn to things you think will be reliable, predictable or consistent – even if it's simply a form of broken sexuality. Many of us have had years building bad patterns of relating, along with mistaken understandings of sexuality. Our lives can begin to revolve around these



idols we've made for our safety and comfort. But, God isn't content to leave us with this predictable numbness. He desires to reveal the truth about who He is and His design for sexuality properly—not referring only to a marriage relationship, but also using the energy that could so easily move towards addictive behavior to relate with others in non-sexual but fulfilling ways.

To do this doesn't mean looking for big payoffs, dramatic changes or huge sacrifices – it can mean

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focusing on doing whatever little things God asks of us. This can be something as small as a smile, a kind word, a handshake, a pat on the back, an offer of my time or food or comfort, or just listening. Obedience is simply about agreeing with God that something must be done and following through. I'm hoping that as my relationships with God and people around me improve, I'll become less inclined to look for cheap substitutes that are clearly unsatisfying.

Humility and love don't have to be dramatic, but instead, can be small choices to care for others while setting my pride aside. As someone said recently about a hero, *'What he did that day was the result of many little things he did every day before that'*. Every little choice we face daily matters. When we take little steps in walking away from our temptations and towards loving God and others, we become heroes in His eyes, and show our true love for Him!

And this is love: that we walk in
obedience to his commands. As you
have heard from the beginning, his
command is that you walk in love.

2 John 1:6 NIV

Why Forgive?

by Mary Heathman



After hearing a testimony/teaching on Thursday nights, WGA small groups gather for discussion. When I facilitate group, I often open up with a brief discussion about how group members were affected by the talk before we dive into sharing about “how sexuality and relationships have affected your life this week.”

One speaker some time ago shared his experience of the power of forgiveness. Just as we were gathering into our small group circle, before I even had a chance to open the discussion, one man blurted out, “Why should I forgive someone who hasn’t even taken responsibility for what they did to me? Why should I let him off the hook? He doesn’t deserve it!” Other group members nodded their agreement, some in tears. We skipped the preliminaries that night and simply moved into a discussion of the consequences of abuse and how such deep soul wounds continued to interfere with life and relationships. Toward the end of the discussion the same man who had opened the sharing time with his

questions said, “I know God says to forgive; I just don’t understand how it works; and I certainly don’t know what that would look like in my life.”

In subsequent discipleship counseling sessions the group member wrestling with issues of abuse and forgiveness came to the understanding he was seeking and was able to forgive his abuser. He came to this on his own as he worked and prayed through his skewed understanding of forgiveness and its place in his own healing.

I have walked that same journey. Wrestling with the continued effects of past experiences that wounded my soul, I wondered if God even cared. I distanced myself from those who hurt me, wrapping myself in self-protective attitudes and behaviors designed to keep me from further pain. But instead of life getting better, I was getting worse; my life was characterized by isolation and a profound emptiness that threatened to swallow me up. I remember the crippling loneliness that drove me to

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reconsider the decision I had made when I was ten that “God’s not going to take care of me.” And I remember the day I sat before God filled with anger, hot tears blurring the words I had just read, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14-15).

They were Jesus’ words, just after the familiar “Lord’s Prayer.” I realized with horror that God seemed to be saying that my lack of forgiveness of others was keeping me in an unforgiven state. I didn’t think in terms of doctrine then, just reacted—my thoughts raced, my emotions raged against the words I had just read, and I was horrified.

I almost walked away from God again; I’m glad I didn’t. I learned a few things by hanging in there and wrestling with him over his words (I still am!) In the next few months, I would like to share a few things I have learned about forgiveness: its definition, its effect in our spiritual growth, and how it looks in relationship.

In the meantime, I invite you to pray for our group members who come on Thursday nights; they need to experience God’s provision for their lives. Pray also for our leaders who still need the same. And pray for the staff; we are also in need of continued growth in understanding of God, ourselves, and others. I ask God regularly to bless us so that we can bless others. May it be so also for you who are reading these words.

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enmeshed. Once we become aware of that, we disengage for a season. We ping pong back and forth between the two. Hopefully, our pendulum swings get closer and closer together, so that we are able to rest within interdependency more and more.

Thanks for exploring these different types of relationship with me over the past few months. Bless-

ings to you in all you do, including your relationships!

* 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



May At a Glance

May 1st : Intercessory Prayer

May 15th: Clean-up day at Corona Presbyterian Church

May 20th: WGA staff participated in a discussion with local pastors about homosexuality and the church

May 22nd: Men's event - softball

May 29th: Mary Heathman's 65th Birthday/Non-retirement Party

June And Beyond

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

June 26th: Roger and Jill's wedding!

July 3rd : Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00-9:00 am

Financial Update

Projected Income (thru May)	\$92,450
Actual Income (thru May)	\$95,772
Amount over projections	\$3,322

Thursday Night Group

May 6th: 22 people

May 13th: 39 people

May 20th: 33 people

May 28th: 41 people

Orientation meeting: 5 new people

WGA Staff

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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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