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# A Measure of Grace

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## Family and Friends: Maintaining Hope

*by Roger Jones*

I had a reprieve from writing an article for last month's newsletter. Nancy Hicks, a long-time contributor to *A Measure of Grace*, took my place and did an excellent job of sharing some of the exciting things currently happening at Where Grace Abounds and some of the new things that are coming in the future. If you haven't had a chance to yet, I highly recommend giving it a read. I am confident it will encourage you as it did me.

I had asked Nancy to write in my stead, as I was in the throes of planning for my wedding and had some time off work before and after the big day (June 26<sup>th</sup>). It was a great celebration, and I continue to be grateful for the WGA community that has been supportive of me for so many years.

In the midst of the joyful occasion, I couldn't help but notice the mixture of

### *Inside this issue:*

Family & Friends	1
Forgiveness	3
Reflections	4
July at a Glance	8
Aug and Beyond	8

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(Family and Friends continued from page 1)

expressions on some of the faces present. I was particularly aware of the men and women from WGA who have a loved one who is gay. First and foremost, there was great happiness for me and Jill. But occasionally I caught a glimpse of something more. How can parents keep themselves from thinking of their hopes for their own sons or daughters when they are at a wedding? Siblings have the same experience when thinking of their brothers or sisters; friends feel this when thinking of those they care about who are struggling. This was especially true at my wedding, given my own struggle with homosexuality. But this article is not about my wedding. ***It is about maintaining hope, even when it seems elusive.***

In Chapter 3 of his book *When Homosexuality Hits Home*, Joe Dallas writes about some lessons from the story of the prodigal. I want to share with you some excerpts from the third of these lessons, “God’s Ability to Influence Our Loved One Is Still Intact.” He begins this section: “The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown commentary on the story of the prodigal makes a point that’s worth our attention. Speaking of the moment the father allowed the son his freedom, the commentators note:”

*Thus God, when His service no longer appears a perfect freedom, and when man promises himself something far better elsewhere, allows man to make the trial. And he shall discover, if need be by saddest proof, that to depart from Him*

*is not to put off the yoke, but only to exchange it for a heavy one, and one gracious Master for a thousand imperious tyrants and lords.*

Dallas continues:

The father’s voice no longer had influence, so he let go. But God’s grip wasn’t loosened. He began speaking clearly, in fact, through circumstances and consequences, after two other means of speaking had been ignored.

First, God had spoken through His Word... what the boy knew of the Scriptures was, at some point, ignored. He was forming a decision to go his own way, right or wrong.

God then must have spoken through his conscience. He knew truth, though he knew little of the consequences ignoring the truth could bring. So by the time he made his announcement to his father, his heart was already, no doubt, hardened, having rejected the truths he’d been taught, and being filled with anticipation of whatever the world held for him. Conscience, like Scripture, was by then dismissed.

Eventually, circumstances and consequences became the voices he could no longer ignore. The money squandered; the harlots long gone once the funds went dry; the revelry over; hardship closing in—these would now speak, and at full volume. Long after the father’s voice was muted, the Father’s voice

(Continued on page 3)

(Family and Friends continued from page 2)

thundered.

God has spoken in His Word, which a person may ignore. God will then speak to the conscience, which may also be ignored. God will then speak through circumstances which a person cannot as easily ignore. All of which means God has hardly exhausted the resources through which He can speak to your prodigal (*When Homosexuality Hits Home*, by Joe Dallas, pgs. 78-79).

The inevitable circumstances and consequences referred to can be scary to think about, especially when we have no understanding of what those may be. Perhaps the biggest challenge we face as family and friends of those who are gay is to trust that God is in control. His hope and His love are far greater than our own and will continue after ours has been spent.

Though written to parents, this additional excerpt from Joe Dallas' book applies to anyone with a loved one who is gay:

"Will you take a moment to review Jeremiah's words—God's words, really—to parents (loved ones) in pain?"

*Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they [your children] shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children*

*shall come again to their own border*

*(Jeremiah 31:16-17).*

"You can't miss the threefold message here: God *sees*. He sees both your beloved daughter or son, and He sees your tears. God *preserves*. He continues His efforts long after human effort has exhausted itself. God holds out *hope*, for both you and your children" (*When Homosexuality Hits Home*, by Joe Dallas, p. 85).

Dallas' words encourage me to continue in hope for myself, my wife, my friends and family—hopes that we will all become all that God created us to be. Our prayer at WGA is that families and friends of those who are same-sex attracted will find hope and encouragement in WGA support groups and especially in their times of prayer for their loved one.

Will you also continue to hope and trust?



## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

*By Patrick Maschka*

*(Reprinted from March 2003 Measure of Grace)*



*Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.*

*(James 4:14)*

We live in a culture in which people plan ahead. Whether it's scheduling a faraway vacation, waiting for a big tax refund, or looking at our calendars to see what we'll be doing on a given day, we plan our lives to suit our interests and desires, and expect things to turn out the way we foresee. I am the first to admit that when life rolls along according to predictable routines, I feel more settled, more purposeful, and even more happy and able to embrace life. It is empowering to know what's around the next corner, and I find security in that knowledge.

Addressing the boastful planning he observed in his day, James labeled it as evil (James 4:15). He declares the sobering truth that our lives are but a mist that vanishes (4:16), and that we have no claim to even the next day of our lives. Planning and preparing are activities to be surrendered to the Lord, for he can take our lives away just as he gave them to us. His will is sovereign, and ours is to be submitted to his. It is humbling and convicting

for me to look back on my life and see how the Lord's version of my journey has been by far the better course over the most promising of my big plans. I have often thought that if things had turned out in ways I had previously hoped, I could have been faced with more troubles than I had ever expected. I am also thankful for the many life events of which I had no foresight. The ones God

gave me the needed resources to surmount when they occurred, but which would have terrified me if I had known in advance they were coming.

I don't think we are supposed to sit around waiting, never making any plans and taking no action. What's important is knowing our place in the world, our smallness compared to our heavenly Father, and accepting that even our sharpest capabilities are feeble compared to his (see 1 Cor 1:20-25). When God's will is put before ours, he honors the desires of our hearts and our stepping out in faith (see Psalms 37:4, Hebrews 11).

# The Process of Forgiveness

*By Mary Heathman*

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This is the third in a series on forgiveness. In the first article we considered the question, “Why forgive?” After acknowledging that God is merciful and understands how we have been affected by sin perpetrated against us and those we love, we ultimately concluded that the best reason to forgive is that God has mandated it. In the second article, I offered the following definition: *“to forgive is to give up to God my resentment against people who have hurt me or someone I love. In other words, if I take all my negative thoughts and feelings about a person who has sinned against me or others, pour them out to God and leave them there, refusing to take them up again, then I have forgiven that person.”*

With this groundwork laid, we may now consider what forgiveness looks like in action. I will offer a biblical example and then an illustration that has been useful in my own life and in the lives of people we serve here at WGA.

For our biblical example, we will turn to the familiar story of Joseph, Jacob’s favorite son born of his favorite wife. (Note: For the whole story of Joseph’s life, see Genesis 37-50). Joseph was treated like royalty by his father, or so his brothers thought, especially when he told them about the dream he had where his



brothers’ sheaves of wheat all bowed down to his. I imagine this seemed like bragging to them. It would have been like pouring salt into the wounds of their sibling resentments, or like pouring kerosene into the smoldering hatred some of the brothers felt toward Joseph. In any case, the brothers ultimately sold Joseph into slavery and led his father to believe he had been killed by a wild animal.

Years later, Jacob sent the brothers to Egypt to buy food, and Joseph was now the chief operating officer of Egypt second only to Pharaoh in respect and authority. And it was his job to dole out the rations during a widespread famine. As his brothers approached, they didn’t recognize him, but he knew them. After some conversation and sending his brothers back for Benjamin, the youngest, Joseph ultimately told the brothers that though “you intended it for evil, God intended it for good,” and their rela-

*(Continued on page 6)*

“We must stop using the fact that we cannot *earn* grace (whether for justification or for sanctification) as an excuse for not energetically seeking to *receive* grace. Having been found by God, we then become seekers of ever fuller life in him. Grace is opposed to earning, but not to effort.” -- Dallas Willard, in The Great Omission, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006.

*(Forgiveness continued from page 5)*  
tionships were restored.

But that wasn't the end of the story. Because more years later, after Jacob died, the brothers became afraid that Joseph would now retaliate against them since Jacob was gone, so they made up the story that Jacob had said: “This is what you are to say to Joseph: ‘I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly. Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.’ When their message came to him, Joseph wept” (Genesis 50:17). Joseph responded by telling them they needn't worry because he was not God, he was not in a place to judge them.

The point that I want to emphasize in this passage is that forgiveness, neither the giving nor the receiving, was accomplished in an instant, nor even

in a short time, but stretched out over decades! And these were decades during which Joseph had plenty of practice at dealing with sins against him and probably wrestled with the issue of forgiveness. Although Joseph had already accepted his brothers with “you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good,” seventeen years later, when Jacob died, the brothers were still uncertain. They questioned Joseph's forgiveness and found it necessary to cook up a lie and use their father's influence to guarantee their pardon. After all that time, it is clear that the betrayal, the consequences, the regrets, the feelings, the fear, the need for forgiveness, was still a live issue – or the brothers wouldn't have been afraid. It was very important, or Joseph wouldn't have wept!

I am not using the story of Joseph as justification for holding someone in

*(Continued on page 7)*

(Forgiveness continued from page 6)

unforgiveness, or for saying that the brothers' lying is part of a good model for a forgiveness process. But I am saying that forgiveness of sin isn't an easy matter and takes time to work out. So, the process of forgiveness may take a long time.

When talking to people about forgiveness I often ask them to imagine that while they were out of the room for a few minutes, I had stolen some money from them. When they check, they see that five dollars is missing from their wallet. They are shocked of course, and have feelings of betrayal and disillusionment with me. And then they move into a process, as they consider the cost, the loss of cash amounted to the lunch they were going to have later, and they consider the value of our relationship. They confront me, I confess, they struggle a bit, but they forgive me.

Then suppose that they soon discover that the loss wasn't five dollars, but it was fifty. The realization of the greater cost brings up all their previous feelings—the sin was greater—it takes them longer to forgive, but they get there. Then at the end of the month, they realize the envelope with their rent money is also missing—and the same feelings, same process ensues.

The point of the story is that until we know the full extent of the betrayal, the full cost of the sin, forgiveness can't be complete. It is as if we can sometimes only forgive as much as we know for now, and as we learn more, we need to revisit, recommit, re-forgive with a greater understanding.

The process of forgiveness involves facing what has happened, counting the cost (the full cost), considering the mandate from God to forgive, talking

honestly and openly (the truth in love) with God and maybe a trusted spiritual mentor about how one has been affected. Sometimes, but not always, it is necessary to talk with the one who has sinned against us before we can forgive. When our emotions have been faced, the sin has been named and cost has been calculated (which often brings up more feelings to be dealt with), then when

forgiveness is offered, it is a **fruit** of the forgiveness process, not just a **seed**, a lip service to a process that may not yet have begun.

Another article is in order I think, to take our process and apply it in a few real life situations. I will be thinking about that till next time.

***It is as if we can sometimes only forgive as much as we know for now, and as we learn more, we need to revisit, recommit, re-forgive with a greater understanding.***



## July At a Glance

July 17th: Men's softball clinic

### Thursday Night Group

July 2nd: 28 People

July 8th: 36 People

July 15th: 41 People

July 22nd: 31 People

July 29th: 48 People

Orientation meeting: 3 new people

## August And Beyond

August 14th: WGA will be joining HIV CareLink at the AIDS Walk

August 19th: WGA participating in a dialogue with local pastors on the topic of homosexuality

September 2nd: WGA speaking at Galilee Baptist Church

September 4th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00-9:00 am

October 10th: WGA presenting during missions events at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church and First Denver Friends Church

October 15th–17th: Leadership Retreat

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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  
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all people to know and  
personally appropriate  
God's plan for their  
sexuality and relationships.

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