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# A Measure of Grace

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

## Temptation *by Roger Jones*

Recently, I was reading Henri Nouwen's book *The Way of the Heart*. In the first section of the book, about solitude, Nouwen writes:

Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered into this furnace. There he was tempted with the three compulsions of the world: to be relevant ("turn stones into loaves"), to be spectacular ("throw yourself down"), and to be powerful ("I will give you all these kingdoms"). There he affirmed God as the only

source of his identity ("You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone") (Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, pp. 13-14).

I was struck by Nouwen's insights into these three temptations: to be relevant, to be spectacular, and to be powerful. As I dwelt upon

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

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

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



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them, I began to think about how they apply to the issues we work with at WGA: sexuality and relationship.

The temptation of Jesus, as reported in Matthew 4 and again in Luke 4, comes after he has been fasting in the desert:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matthew 4:1-3, NIV).

At that particular time, I am sure that few things seemed more **relevant** to Jesus than food. Yet he responded with:

"It is written Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4, NIV).

I'm not sure, after forty days and nights of fasting, that I would have had such restraint. Were I in possession of that kind of power, I likely would have created an entire feast for myself from the stones about midway through day 1 of my fast. I am glad that Christ is the example we are to follow!

No one I know can turn stones into bread, but don't we often try? If God isn't meeting my needs NOW or in the way I WANT, I will create bread for myself through lust, a relationship, or my need to be needed by other people. How often do we sabotage what God is trying to do in our hearts and lives because we get tired of waiting? And rather than being grateful for God's provision when it comes, I view it with disdain. "That's all?" I ask. It is a resounding drop in my empty bucket, instead of the intended salve to my dry soul.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down for it is written:

" 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone' " (Matthew 4:5-6, NIV).

The temptation to show off, or to be **spectacular**, must have been strong. Again, Jesus had great power at his disposal, yet his re-

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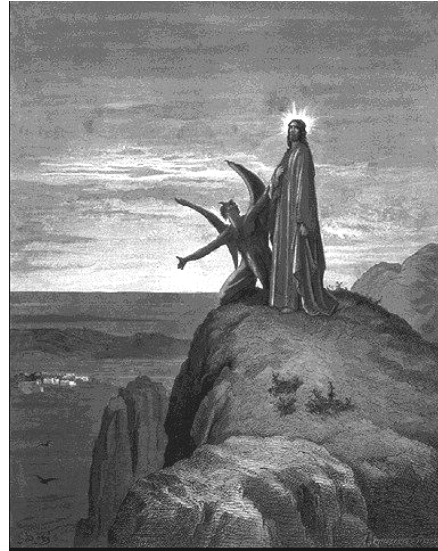
sponse was:

“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’ ” (Matthew 4:7, NIV).

This is another example of a way in which we are tempted. Christ was presumably being tempted to make a scene by throwing himself off of the temple. What a spectacle that would have been, to see angels rescuing him from a fall that would have otherwise killed him. Most of us do not believe that an angel would rescue us from such an attempt, but we struggle with a similar issue.

Christ knew better than to put God to the test, and yet it seems we test God all the time. We test God’s mercy when we repeatedly take advantage of his grace, not out of humility but rather from pride. Because of Christ’s sacrifice for us, we can easily be tempted into laziness. God’s grace is sufficient, so why try to stop sinning? This deception is perpetuated when we “get away” with sinning, with no apparent external consequences. Our inner lives and our relationship with God, however, do not go without consequence.

Finally, we read the third of Christ’s temptations:



Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this will I give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me” (Matthew 4:8-9, NIV).

The temptation of **power** is great, and we often give ourselves over to it. We want to be in control, rather than allowing God to be in charge of our lives. Regularly, our choice to turn to sin is about our desire to be in control. Through lust, we can manipulate a person with sexual fantasy. It isn’t reality, but it is still a grasp at control. We may feel vulnerable or weak, so we turn to something else we have power over,

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such as how much (or how little) food we eat. We create a safe world for ourselves through an emotionally dependent relationship.

Perhaps the most important question we should ask ourselves when faced with temptation is, "What is the cost?" There is no way to predict the future, so fully identifying the cost of sin can be unclear. There are, however, a few things that we can point to with certainty. When we sin, we feel remorse and grief for not living up to the standard in which we believe. We feel ashamed and spend time and energy trying to decide whether or not to tell someone about the secrets we may be carrying.

We sin, and we repent. This is the way set before us by God, so that we may be reconciled unto him when we fail. And in the midst of this is another trap of Satan that we fall so easily into. If we continue to be preoccupied with sin, lost in our shame and condemnation, what are we missing out on? Sin, and our response to it, can be the greatest distraction that keeps us from living our lives as God intends. Sin can keep us from fulfilling our purpose.

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' " Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him (Matthew 4:10-11, NIV).

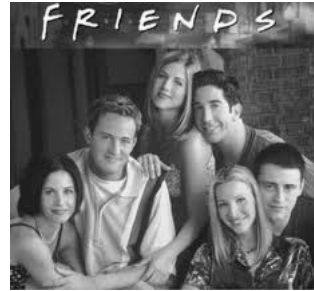
I pray that each of us will follow in the footsteps of Christ, resisting the temptation to sin, even when we feel desperate and in need. Let us give our desires over to God, walking with him daily so that we may be strong when Satan attempts to sidetrack us from our purpose.

## Addiction in These United States How Our Culture Influences Addiction

By Scott Kingry

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Not to take pot shots at a media “sacred cow,” but I still enjoy watching re-runs of the popular sitcom *Friends* on our local channel—even if for the 10th time! How can you not enjoy laughing with those six white, single 20-somethings who get into all kinds of mischief as they maneuver life and love at their favorite coffee joint—“Central Perk.” It encapsulates the 90s perfectly. But, if you take a simple step back from the Hollywood veneer and think for a moment, it’s easy to see some serious dysfunction. Each of the “friends” has a very active sex life, multiple partners and virtually without the pesky consequences of STDs or unwanted pregnancies. Sex on the show had very little to do with intimacy and was regarded merely as fun and recreation. Certain characters were “sex addicts” but never so labeled; their behaviors went unchallenged by the other friends. I was often shocked, even while laughing, by such a nonchalant attitude towards sexuality; these re-runs showed during



the dinner hour when any kid, any age could be influenced by them. I didn’t realize how desensitized I’ve become to our culture’s view of sexuality.

In his book, *Don’t Call it Love*, Dr Patrick Carnes quotes many recovering sex addicts who comment on how our culture has contributed to their addiction—

*“Our culture is set up to produce addicts and then condemns them for being such.”*

*“The culture does not support what it preaches about intimacy and commitment.”*

*“The culture supports addiction. Buys it, sells it, stuffs it down your throat.”*

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*“Commercials, television, movies—all media supports addiction. The media makes promises nobody can fulfill, and love addiction is basically the whole idea of the ‘happy ending.’”*

But how specifically does our secular culture influence the problem of addiction in our country? If we were to design a society where compulsion could thrive, how would the U.S. stack up? Here are some of Dr. Carnes’s list of contributing cultural factors that intensify addiction:

**Loss of Community, Disrupted Family Life, Exploitation**

Most of us come from some sort of broken home with the possibility of unhealthy family dynamics. Our fears and wounds keep us transient and on the run from being vulnerable and committing to any one community, especially if the injuries have been perpetuated by past experiences. The result leaves us susceptible to finding “love in all the wrong places” and open to exploitation (abuse, etc.), where human life is treated with less value. Treating people as “objects” is a key ingredient in sexual addiction.

**Convenience Oriented, Entertainment and Escapism, Breakdown in Boundaries**

We don’t have to wait for anything these days—fast food, overnight delivery, 1 hour glasses—all geared to gratifying every need immediately. We find quick gratification in the unreal scenarios of life and love portrayed by the media and allow people into our lives via the internet, Youtube, Facebook etc. in an effort to find quick answers to our relational needs. The results are living without protective limits, a lack of meaning as we experience the pain of real life and the demand of “quick-fix” logic to eradicate our discomfort instantly. Can you see how this can open the door to addiction?

**Paradigm Shifts and Sophisticated Technology**

With each new advancement of technology, our view of the world constantly changes. Some of these advancements such as nuclear power, genetic engineering, supercomputers—even simple things like cell phones, texting, etc, challenge the way we view human life and communicate relation-

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*(Addiction continued from page 6)*

ally. Because of this sophisticated technology we have the unreasonable notion that we can conquer any problem that comes upon us (disease, natural disasters, a decaying ecology, etc) without consequence. The results of this are simply that our values system, what we hold as important, becomes very confused and life with its problems becomes about finding easy solutions, rather than realistic ones.

We've got a lot warring against us on a daily basis—a fallen sin nature that gets in our way, a real Enemy who is out for our demise and our culture that influences our views and choices. Jesus claims

that there is a different way to live and a different “Kingdom” that we can participate in—but it sure is difficult to do this on your own, don't you think? Where Grace Abounds hopes to provide a place to wrestle through our wounds and fears, heal our families and relationships, create boundaries and structure in a limitless society and find practical ways we can help each other in community. Now that's what “friends” are really for.

*As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.*

*John 17: 18-19 NIV*



**A**s group members gathered for a ministry retreat in the late 1980s, a conflict developed between early arrivers and latecomers. The gist of the problem had to do with a belief of some that those who came early took the best sleeping accommodations for themselves, leaving the latecomers

## Forgiveness in Action

*By Mary Heathman*

to share the much less desirable loft area for the others. We were all in camping mode with sleeping bags, but . . . Wait a second, let's regroup here. . . this article isn't about how disappointment turned into an all-out argument with anger and hurtful words exchanged. . . that's a story for another time. For

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now, at this time and place and for the purpose of discussing forgiveness in action, I will simply focus on the reason I am even telling this story—to show the process group members went through that evening to resolve the conflict and the ultimate fruit of that work. This situation is an illustration in a nutshell of what we have been talking about—“what does forgiveness look like, and how does it work out in relationships?”

*Back to the story:* It took a bit of talking to convince them to regroup, but everyone did finally gather in the living room for our first session for the evening. As I took my place as facilitator, I looked around at still angry or tearful faces. Others looked extremely uncomfortable and tried not to make eye contact with anyone. Still others looked hopefully at me – hoping my opening exercise would be powerful enough to pull us all out of our funk.

I looked at my notes and my heart sank—I just couldn’t make myself ask the ice-breaker question: “tell a little about yourself and a favorite retreat experience.”

So, I said something like, “OK, there’s a lot of tension here; will you work with me a little to see if we can work it out?” Response was mixed, some nods, some doubts were expressed, a couple of questions, but ultimately the group agreed to address the conflict. Two hours later, the air was clear, anger had dissolved, the room was peaceful—someone strummed a guitar, cards were dealt out on the

coffee table, a few prepared snacks in the kitchen. Peace reigned.

How did we get there? How did chaos, then detachment, turn into connection and peace? As best as I can recall, it was the Lord who carried us through—I just turned toward Him and into the issue; He was

faithful to take it from there. But I do recall the process we went through—here are the steps as I remember them:

After asking God to help us, the first thing we did was get the core issues out in the open. What exactly happened and what was the core point of frustration, hurt, and disappointment? The tension actually thickened as thoughts were

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(Forgiveness continued from page 8)

spoken: “**Their** choices were selfish.” “**They** would have done the same thing.” “**I** expected to have a retreat instead of get attacked!” “**I** didn’t feel cared for; why didn’t we get two condos instead of cramming into one?”

We took the time to discuss perspectives and traded “I” messages: “When you closed the bedroom doors that shut off our access to the bathrooms, I was furious.” “When you called me selfish and self-centered, I was confused and didn’t even know why; my feelings were hurt.” The response to these comments indicated some surprise: “Oh, I didn’t know you thought that!” “I didn’t think about it that way!” The tension started to dissipate a bit.

Then we moved to “What, if anything is familiar about these circumstances and the feelings they triggered—was there unresolved hurt from the past that poured into the present?” We shared a bit of these experiences as they seemed relevant to the issues at hand. Memories came up: “I had to share a room with my older broth-

ers and they. . . .,” “Christian leaders in my life have always made all the decisions and didn’t think about how it would affect anyone else.” Tension and resistance melted into shared pain as we listened carefully to one another.

Then we took some time individually to reflect on our own part in the conflict and what we wished we had done differently—we shared these thoughts with one another. One by one, each took responsibility for what they had done, or left undone, that contributed to the escalation of the conflict. (I reminded those who had not been part of the conflict that it wasn’t required that they come up with something just to be part of the process!)

After most of the others had offered their thoughts, I shared my own regret that that I hadn’t put more thought into the venue, or asked for their input, so that the accommodations wouldn’t have been such a surprise.

It was during this last section—I have come to understand it as the time-honored discipline of confes-

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*The  
commandment, the  
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*(Forgiveness continued from page 9)*

sion—that peace finally flooded the room.

I don't recall that we actually said the words, "Will you forgive me?" or "I forgive you." But after taking a serious look at what happened and how we were affected by it, then individually looking at our own hearts, -- we confessed. And then . . . the forgiveness just naturally flowed as if it was outside, pressing at the door waiting for it to open. It was as if the work we did that night literally beat down that door.

What does forgiveness look like in relationships? I think I just illustrated it; I hope you see how powerful it is in action! Of course, it isn't usually, it is even rare, that it is contained in one evening like this illustration, but the process is the same, I believe.

Forgiveness is the stated goal of a commandment of God—it is His remedy if we simply obey it when we find that we are hurt and holding resentment against someone. The commandment, the admonition to forgive, is the motivator (when we often have no other) to press into the issue and into God who will help us resolve it, or let it go. We press into Him and He helps us see how we have been

affected and how we have complicated things by our reactions to what happened.

This work we do toward forgiveness is the battering ram that beats down the doors that shut us out of our relationships with those closest to us and that keeps us turned away from God. And finally, forgiveness is the key to release—a longed for release from so much that holds us back from becoming all that we can be in Christ, to one another, to ourselves.

As I close this little series of reflections on forgiveness, I would like to share an excerpt from a book I am reading by Dallas Willard. As always, I find his thoughts strike right to the core of the problem. As I think about how forgiveness is often seen by the world as weakness and how often victims of abuse are taught that they don't need to forgive, I am reminded again of serious limitations of self-help programs or even professional psychological help.

Most people who know me will be surprised to hear me say this, as I have studied psychology and have gained much from that study. God has used it as a mighty tool in my own life and in that of others. But, I have to say that sometimes, and

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especially this time when we see how it often works with people who have been sinned against, psychology can run counter to the ways God.

In *The Great Omission*, a collection of Dallas Willard's essays, in the section of the book called *Spiritual Formation and the Development of Character*, Willard addresses the question: "What is the relationship between psychology and spiritual formation?" Willard's response is thorough, affirming the benefits of psychological understandings. But he also discusses its limitations where spiritual formation is concerned. First written in the spring of 2000, then republished in 2006, he writes, "*It must be said that, at the present, one of the great dangers to authentically Christian spiritual formation comes from **sole reliance** upon psychological teachings and practices that simply omit the realities of Christian spiritual formation, or else substitute for them processes that do not do justice to life in the Kingdom of God. The transformation of the inner self into Christ-likeness cannot be achieved by anything other than the life of God in the soul, and anything short of this, however good and proper it may be in its place, will not be enough to meet*

*the deepest needs of the human heart or satisfy the mind and the emotions. It will leave life adrift"* (Willard, 2006).

It seems to me that the Lord continues to have me study human behavior and discover tools that He might use in the work He has called me to do. But as I do, I pray that the Lord's way will always have first priority. And I pray for us all that the Lord will continue to form in us the highest and best practices of His ways and deliver us from settling for anything less. May we continue to seek His wisdom and guidance as he shows us how forgiveness plays out in our relationships with ourselves, with God, and with others.

Reference:

Willard, D. (2006). *The Great Omission*, Chapter 6. New York: HarperCollins. Retrieved August 28, 2010 from: <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=36>





## August At a Glance

**August 14th:** WGA joined HIV CareLink at the AIDS Walk

**August 14th:** WGA Barbecue

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

**August 22nd:** WGA Leadership Meeting

**August 27th:** WGA at the Rockies Game

## September And Beyond

**September 2nd:** WGA speaking at Galilee Baptist Church

**September 17th–18th:** WGA event—camping trip

**October 2nd:** Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00-9:00 am

**October 9th:** WGA presenting at “Conversations on Healthy Sexuality” at Denver Seminary

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

**October 15th–17th:** Leadership Retreat

### Thursday Night Group

**August 5th:** 31 People

**August 12th:** 34 People

**August 19th:** 37 people

**August 26th:** 41 people

**Orientation meeting - 8 new people**

### WGA Staff

**Roger Jones**  
Executive Director

**Scott Kingry**  
Program Director

**Mary Heathman**  
Founding Director

**Janet Moine**  
Assistant Program 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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