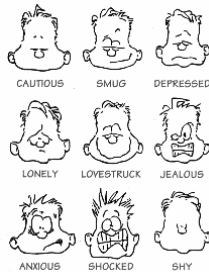




A Measure of Grace

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Why Do Emotions Affect Our Belief Systems?

by Roger Jones

In both my own journey and through my observations of many of the men and women who have come to Where Grace Abounds over the years, I've noticed a pattern in which men and women sometimes get caught up. I'll start with an illustration from my own life to explain.

From an early age, I knew and believed the truth of God's word. It was pretty much a given in my mind that if God and I disagreed about something, He was right and I was wrong. This wasn't always an easy reality to accept, but I was young

and things seemed fairly black and white to me. With my understanding of scripture, homosexuality and lust were clearly spelled out as sinful behaviors. While there were times when I thought about what it would be like to have a "boyfriend," this type of thinking seemed counter-productive to the goals I had for myself. I was wrapped up in the sins fantasy and lust which, again, seemed wrong to me. I didn't always make the best choices for myself, but in my mind, the right and

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wrong of things seemed clear.

It wasn't until college that my beliefs and convictions about my sexuality were truly tested. Of course this happened when I met a guy who was more than just an object for my lust and for whom I had real feelings of love. As soon as my emotions got involved, I began to question many, if not all, of my beliefs. "Did God really mean to say what the Bible says about homosexuality? Did the authors of the Bible somehow misunderstand or get things wrong?" My questioning went so far as to ask, "Is there even a God at all?"

For the first time in my life, my heart was sending me a message that conflicted with what I believed to be true.

We see a similar thing happening in heterosexuals as well. How many of our young Christian men and women boldly claim that they are going to follow the plan of waiting until they get married to have sex? How many actually make it that long? It seems that many of these men and women even go so far as to move in with their significant other prior to getting married. And to make things even more confusing, these same people seem to "bounce back" to their old belief system about sex outside of marriage as soon as they themselves actually get married. This can sometimes be like the person who quit smoking a long time ago and now is always nagging his smoking friends to quit too.

How many of our young Christian men and women boldly claim that they are going to follow the plan of waiting until they get married to have sex? How many actually make it that long?

When the heart and emotions become intensely involved, both God and our theology are often set aside, sometimes temporarily, sometimes for longer. So why does this dynamic occur?

Many of us have spent much time doing the type of questioning that I mentioned earlier... "Did God really mean what was written down by men and is now in the Bible?" "What I am doing feels so natural and right, so there must be an explanation which allows for this, right?" But what if we are asking the wrong questions? **Perhaps a better question for us**

to consider is, "Why am I questioning in the first place?"

When compared to the scope of history, the entrance of psychology is a fairly new phenomenon. Like many other "inventions," it came about because of a need. For many, the expression of emotions (or feelings) was deemed unimportant and unnecessary. I think that most of us would now agree that having and shar-

ing emotions are important. Psychology brought validation to the fact that, in addition to our physical, mental and spiritual natures, we are also emotional beings.

Whereas emotions were ignored for a very long time, it seems that perhaps we have gone to the other extreme now. "My feelings are valid," has become, "If I feel it, it must be true." This type of approach to decision making, where emotions are given the greatest emphasis, can similarly lead us astray. Balance is

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required, with all of our faculties being given a chance to offer input. We have minds in addition to our emotions.

At times, our emotions seem to be the most powerful force within us, which makes sense when this is the area of our life where we are starving for attention. And here lies part of the answer to the question I presented above, “Why are we questioning in the first place?” We question, because we long to have our hearts touched in a way that beliefs and convictions are unable to provide. We question, because we long for the gap between our hearts and minds to be bridged.

When we make a choice to ignore either our heart (emotions) or our mind (beliefs), we choose to shut down a part of who God created us to be. It is in that tension, which often seems “un-understandable,” where we find God. He is the bridge we seek. In our effort to “make sense” of things, we jump to conclusions which remove our need to trust in the God of the universe, our Creator.

Will you believe that God is who He says He is? Will you trust that you are who God says you are? Will you trust Him to feed **both** your heart and mind?

Abundant Life = Taking the Right Risks *by Mary Heathman*

Hearts is a familiar card game that is won by having the least points at the end of the game. As the cards are dealt for each hand, the players look at their cards and decide their strategy. There are two possibilities—either play in such a way as to take the least number of point cards, or “shoot the moon” by taking all 26 (in which case you score zero points and all the other players get 26.) The game ends when the first player reaches 100.

I almost always lose at *Hearts*. I understand the game well. And I can usually tell, when I look at the cards I have been dealt, what the likelihood is that I can take all the points, although it is rarely clear which strategy will certainly win out. Cautious players (who win much



more often than I) will usually choose to play for the least points unless their hand is practically guaranteed to take all the tricks. But I am a risk taker at heart, and if there is any chance at all—I will choose to try to shoot the moon. Time after time, I almost make it, but the point cards weren’t distributed evenly enough, or another player (knowing my propen-

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sity to risk it) makes an “irrational” play that sabotages my chances, and I rack up a score a few points shy of the requisite 26. So, the points are tallied, I get 22 and the other four points are distributed among the other players. As you can imagine, it doesn’t take long for my score to climb at this rate.

I do learn from this. . . sometimes, if my score is distressingly close to 100, I will play more cautiously. And I can do that well, sloughing cards with the best of them. But I am always aware that this feels like a place holder hand to me. In the overall enjoyment of the game, it is the most fun for me if I am playing to shoot the moon. The result is that although I lose the game more often than not, I am usually the one who has shot the moon more often than anyone else. And I love that!

The consequences of a propensity for risk-taking is relatively minor when the context is playing cards or board games. I get teased by my friends. The roller coaster of hope rises over and over again only to be dashed in defeat as I miss the mark by just a few points . . . Well, that excitement isn’t really a down side. . . that’s part of the fun.

But that default mode of mine—to assume the risk is worth taking—has had many negative consequences in my life outside of the low risk context of games. Most of what I write and teach, about the benefits of healthy choices and the dangers of poor choices, I have learned from the consequences of my own failures. I will continue to teach and counsel from that place of transparency, and am glad for the privilege to do so. But I also continue to seek God to learn how I might

live my life in a way that maximizes my pioneer spirit (that I believe God placed in me) that wants to continue to stretch forward—and to learn to do so without taking foolish or impractical risks.

In keeping with this goal, I recently read *Right Risk: 10 Powerful Principles for Taking Giant Leaps With Your Life*, by Bill Treasurer, (a.k.a. Captain Inferno).

The author makes the point that we cannot escape risk in life, it is all around us, everywhere. We can choose to do something or not do something in the face of life’s circumstances, but either choice is taking a risk. “When you act, you might fail. When you don’t act, you might miss out on a big opportunity.” The author goes on to say that the world is becoming an even riskier place to live, and that it is increasingly important to know when an action taken is “right.” He says “Be it in action, or in inaction, there is a right way and a wrong way to approach risk.” His principles outline his perspective on how to know when a risk is right or not—right for you, right for now, right in principle (p. 11).

Before I go on to share what I found meaningful about Treasurer’s thoughts, I would like to clarify what I am **not** saying about risk-taking. I have learned some things the hard way (and no, not everyone needs to learn the hard way.) Through finding myself in too many crashes, blind corners, and other dead ends I have learned that “going for the gusto,” and “reaching for the sky,” and “life on the edge without limits,” and “no pain, no gain,” and other such mottos that speak to the heart of pioneers like me, have a disastrous down side to them. The awful fact is that I am likely to adopt these mantras *assuming that I know* what the “gusto” is that I am going for, that the

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“limits” I race past have no good purpose, and that the “gain” I painfully accomplish is really in a worthwhile direction. I have found over and over again that my assumptions were wrong.

These assumptions were so costly, that I came to a very low point. At that point, years ago, I decided not to pay the price of an undisciplined life any longer. I concluded then, and believe even more strongly now, that I don’t know enough to choose the right risks for my life. The only One who knows what risk is right to take, and when it is right to do so, is the Lord Himself. The rightest risk I ever took was the day I submitted my own understanding to that of God Himself (Proverbs 3:5-6), together with the commitment that I never again wanted to make another decision without Him. That has made all the difference! Some things are not different. I still find in myself an eye for the possibilities rather than the dangers of a new idea, a new way of doing things, a new angle or perspective from which to see things. But the Limit I have placed in my life—the Lord who has veto power on everything—keeps me from falling off that edge upon which I so want to live!

I saw a sign on a church marquee the other day, “*There is no right way to do a wrong thing.*” I thought of Treasurer’s principles ... He is telling us there is a right way to do the right thing, and a way to minimize the uncertainty of choosing what risks to take. Here is a taste of his perspective:

“The distractions and diversions of today

are infringing on our ability to make good choices. While the proliferation of technology has allowed us to become continuously connected to each other, we have become entirely disconnected from ourselves. At work or at home 24/7/365, we are on call, on hold, or online. We have become a Society of the Perpetually Distracted, the result of which is an erosion of our intuitive powers of discernment and discrimination. We have become a world of fragmented thinkers, and fragmented thinking makes for ill-considered choices.” “Though mentally exhausted, our spirits and bodies thirst to feel alive again. More and more people are taking risks to turn up the tempo of their lives.” “The more ‘virtualized’ our world becomes, the more people long for a more direct and authentic experience of what’s real, not simulated real, not virtual real, but REAL real.” “Risk taking serves as a reality check.” (pp. 15-18).

In many ways, Treasurer is not telling us anything new. For example, he starts with “Find Your Golden Silence,” telling us to be still. . . sound familiar? But I think the way he presents his thoughts is useful, practical, and thus worth our consideration for a few months. Next month, I will delve into some of the specifics. In the meantime, I pray that all our risks—yours and ours at WGA—are God inspired and Holy Spirit motivated, and that our souls will be fed in the process!

***The rightest
risk I ever took
was the day
I submitted
my own
understanding
to that of God
Himself.***

Addiction in These United States

Part 2

By Scott Kingry

I had the enjoyment of attending a somewhat “old school” Christian concert recently where some pioneers of the contemporary Christian music scene were mentioned. Names like Keith Green and 2nd Chapter of Acts were brought up, dusted off and reminisced fondly over throughout the evening. What a throw back! As I amazingly remembered every word to “Mansion Builder”, my mind and memories were taken back to that pivotal moment in 1980 as a junior in High School, when the Lord crashed graciously upon my life and I became “saved”. Can I get a witness from any 70’s Jesus Movement Hippies in the audience?

Along with meeting this new found Love of my Life—a sincere and very real encounter with the personal presence of Jesus Christ, I was suddenly transplanted into the foreign culture of “American Evangelicalism”. I had not grown up in the church, so it felt a bit like being dropped onto another planet and it was my job to observe and quickly learn the ways and language so I might maneuver this new and strange land. For one, it was a very busy and on-the-go little society. There were bible studies to attend (two a week), youth groups to join, children’s Sunday school classes to teach, Christian concerts (the only kind permissible) to rock out at, witnessing at the airport to save poor lost souls awaiting their flights, and a daily “quiet time” that must be done. Wow, I’m exhausted just typing this. And in all of this flurry of

activity, it was expected that it would be done in the “joy of Lord” and with an attitude of “cheerful giving.”

Behind all the productivity and victorious smile I brandished each day, reality was tearing away at my heart. At 17, I was already a train wreck of sexual problems with a growing pornography addiction and a wide variety of emotional and relational baggage. But if missing a quiet time, or forgetting to bless my meal or hinting that I’d just rather not go witnessing—especially at the airport!—caused the subtle eye brows of concern to go up so alarmingly (along with the not so subtle questions about my salvation), then chances were this wasn’t going to be the place to talk about my hidden gay porn stash and how I was missing sex with my boyfriend.

My last article explored several cultural factors outlined by Dr. Patrick Carnes, of how our society contributes and maintains addictive behavior in our country. Besides this, we as Christ followers have yet another sub-culture to contend with—how does American Christian culture aid in allowing compulsion to continue to thrive?

Image Management

Let’s face it, just as in the case with my teen Christian friends, it’s always tempting to give people the impression that we’re more together than we really are—hiding our wounds, failures and shortcomings behind our “Sunday Best.” Jesus was constantly railing against the

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religious folks of his day—they were white washing the outside of the tomb—putting on their best game face, while their hearts were still a nasty black mess (Matthew 23:27-28). I think God really dislikes this because it's simply inauthentic and can easily lead a person (especially an addicted person) into a double life. Super Christian by day, normal everyday sinner by night. Why would a person do that?—read on.

Environment of Shame and Secrecy

Sin is shameful. There is a healthy framework of shame and guilt that we have when we violate our own value system—it's called a conscience. For the most part, this kind of beneficial guilt comes from the Holy Spirit, is clean conviction and leads a person to repentance. Shame can feel humiliating and is exacerbated by judgment, rejection and condemnation. This is usually already happening internally (beating yourself up into a “self hatred” spiral), and then comes the unhelpful external voices of finger wagging disapproval that only make matters worse. Why would you



want to share vulnerably in that kind of environment? Exactly. Thus the inducement towards secrecy. Secrecy and Shame can be the rich soil in which an addiction grows and flourishes.

Quick Fix Logic, Unrealistic and Unbiblical Expectations

Have you ever been frustrated when you've shared an ongoing life struggle with a close Christian friend who just doesn't seem to get it? At first, there can be grace given, which is relieving at the

point of confession. But as the weeks go on, the looks of empathy and care turn to impatience and they wonder (exasperated) why the problem is still persisting? Questions about your repentance, spiritual life and salvation get thrown in the mix? I'm not sure where in bible it says that sanctification is a 30 second process. Folks frequently show up at Where Grace Abounds with some hopeful yet misguided time table in accordance with their healing. Decades of belief systems, habits, behavior, wounds, unmet needs and relational problems really aren't going to vanish within a few months. Sorry. This kind of thinking can make God into the Genie/Vending Machine who's only job is keeping us comfortable and happy. So, you might as well settle in for the long haul. God's desire is to take us through a process and our job is that delicate balance of knowing when to give a butt-kicking, truthful push forward with someone or giving grace, space and time to heal—or ideally both at once?

It's a mixed bag isn't it? Even though it's a good and honest thing to admit the unhelpful things that we all do within our own camp, I know that most Christians sincerely desire to be part of the solution rather than adding to the problem. I know that's our heart here at Where Grace Abounds and we walk that difficult tightrope of truth and grace on a daily basis!



October At a Glance

October 10th - Mary spoke during the main service at First Friends Church in Colorado Springs

October 10th: WGA participated in Missions Event at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church

October 15-17th: WGA Leadership Retreat

November And Beyond

November 13th: Mary teaching at "How Change Happens" at "Conversations on Healthy Sexuality" conference at Denver Seminary

December 4th - Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 800 - 9:00 am at the WGA offices.

Financial Update

YTD Projected Income (thru Oct.31st)	\$190,950
TYD Actual Income (thru Oct. 31st)	\$182,323
Shortage	\$8,627

Early this month, we were required to spend about \$1,200 to repair the heating system in our offices. This is an additional expense that caught us by surprise. Would you consider giving a donation to help with our income shortage and our heating repair? Thanks for praying about this!

Thursday Night Group

October 7th: 35 people
October 14th: 46 people
October 21st: 30 people
October 28th: 41 people

Orientation meeting: 5 new people

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

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