



# A Measure of Grace

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## Celebrating Regardless of the Circumstances

*by Roger Jones*

*Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ. He entered the world on a high note of jubilation: "I bring you good news of a great joy," cried the angel, "which shall come to all the people" (Luke 2:10). He left the world bequeathing his joy to the disciples: "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).<sup>1</sup>*

As I thought about what I wanted to include in the month's edition of *A Measure of Grace*, I was reminded of how Christmas and the holiday season can be challenging for many people. For others, it is also a time of great joy. And for others still, it is a mixture of challenge and joy.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to spend some time with a few of the men and women who participate in the Family and Friends group at WGA. It was a blessing to be with them, especially since my other responsibilities keep me busy in the other groups WGA offers. I don't get a lot of chances to be with them.

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*(Celebrating continued from page 1)*

We were talking about the approaching holiday season and some of the difficult situations that were being faced.

One of the families is having Christmas with all of their children (including spouses and grandchildren) for the first time in years. Their daughter and her same-sex partner will be among them. Some rifts have formed between the family members over the years, due in part to differences in beliefs over the issue of homosexuality. But there has been much healing in their relationships recently, and they are hopeful that God will bless them with a fun and easy time together. They have worked hard and deserve a time of celebration together.

Other families are dealing with similarly challenging circumstances: a marriage that is in need of restoration, a family wounded by the revelation that their loved one has been sexually abused by another family member. To label these situations as challenging is really too simplistic. These are painful, life changing times for the people involved and the results remain uncertain.

*The decision to set our minds on the higher things of life is an act of the will. That is why celebration is a Discipline. It is not something that falls on our heads. It is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living. When we choose this way, the healing and redemption in Christ will break into the inner recesses of our lives and relationships, and the inevitable result*

*will be joy.*<sup>2</sup>

In the above quote, Richard Foster makes it clear that we can choose to celebrate. We do not need all of our circumstances to be perfect in order to do so. It is not always easy, this is certain. In the chapter this quote was taken from, Foster explains that joy is a result of obedience and discipline, and reminds us that joy is one of the fruits of the spirit. We cannot “drum up” joy from nothing, but it blossoms in our lives when the right ingredients (the spiritual disciplines) are present. Celebration flows easily from that place of joy.

***The busy-ness of life can often crowd out the disciplines that have been provided to allow ourselves to stop and listen for the voice of God.***

The busy-ness of life can often crowd out the disciplines that have been provided to allow ourselves to stop and listen for the voice of God. I pray that you will take the time this Christmas season to spend time with Him, so that He can have access to your heart and spirit. And I pray that you will choose to *celebrate* and remember the birth of Christ.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

(Philippians 4:6-7, NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), pg. 190.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, pg. 195.



## What are Right Risks? *By Mary Heathman*

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The title of last month's article stated my opinion that living the abundant life involves risk-taking--taking "Right Risks." I referred to a book, *Right Risk: 10 Powerful Principles for Taking Giant Leaps With Your Life*, by William Treasurer (2003), as a practical explanation of right risk taking.

As I write this month's article, I find myself pondering Treasurer's principles and thinking how they might apply to living life and life abundant. The logical next question to consider is: "What are right risks?" To answer this question, (before diving into the next great risk that appears before us), is a wise strategy. To that end, I will discuss here two things Right Risk is **not**: gratuitous or ego-based (p. 31), and four "hallmarks of right risk" (p. 33): passion, purpose, principle and prerogative.

Right Risk is not gratuitous. The popular image of risk-takers as thrill seekers is familiar to most of us. Extreme sports athletes are sometimes (certainly not always) motivated by an addiction to adrenaline. The sheer excitement of putting themselves at risk, and the resultant elevated heart rate, the hormones that bring on a feeling of physical, emotional and

mental arousal, can be addictive. Sometimes a perceived remedy to boredom, gratuitous risk is usually motivated by an impulsive desire to escape tedium or feel more *alive*. Beyond this momentary arousal, however, gratuitous risk is primarily without purpose.

Right Risk is not ego-based. Treasurer (p. 31) says, "Ego-based risk-takers preoccupy themselves with one question: *What's in it for me?*" The operative motivator in these people is what can be gained for themselves, often regardless of the consequences to others. The risk of losing *and* desire for gain are both at work here, as the hope of financial gain, celebrity, keeping up an image, peer pressure, etc., is worth the risk to them. The ultimate importance in this sort of risk-taking is competition for their share in what they think is a "dog-eat-dog world."

So, if Right Risk is neither gratuitous nor ego-driven, then what does constitute Right Risk-taking? What are the hallmarks of a risk taken at the right time, for the right reasons, in the right way? By contrast to gratuitous and ego-driven risk-taking, Right Risk-taking is the result of thoughtful and meaningful considera-

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*(Right Risks continued from page 3)*

tion. It is “anchored to a higher purpose,” will “strengthen one’s character,” (p. 33) and is undertaken for its capacity to move us from the point at which we find ourselves to the place to which we want to be.

Although the contrast between Right Risk-taking and its alternatives are clearly drawn in Treasurer’s book, he acknowledges that people often have mixed motives in their risk-taking. For example, they may be striving for a better place in life, but also seeking the thrill of the chase. But with that caveat, we will pursue the vision of Right Risk-taking. Mixed motives notwithstanding, it is helpful to look at what Right Risks might look like in their purest form.

Right Risks are taken in pursuit of the deepest dreams of one’s heart. The issues that matter most are those that engender deep feeling, a motivating force that is often called passion. This internal drive and energy are characteristic of Right Risk-takers.

Right Risks are also recognized by the profound sense of purpose that focuses the energy of passion into a specific direction. Goals are far-reaching and over-arching. By comparison to the ego-driven risk-taker, the Right Risk-taker asks, “*How will*

*this risk further my life’s purpose?”*

Right Risks operate according to principles within a framework of “values that are both essential and virtuous.” The decision to take a risk, when put through this filter of personal ethics, values, or code of conduct, is a choice for the right reasons. These values often include principles like “*truth, justice, independence, freedom, mercy, compassion, and responsibility.*”

The principled risk-taker will nod in agreement at the sign I saw on a church marquee the other day, “*There is no right way to do a wrong thing.*” Their “prime directive,” so to speak, is to do the right thing and to do it in the right way, knowing this will minimize the uncertainty inherent in choosing what risks to take.

Right Risks, finally, are rooted in intentional decision-making—exercising one’s prerogative. Passivity melts in the face of purposeful and value-driven decision-making. Making choices along the lines of one’s passion, purpose, and principles, results in an ever-increasing ability to do so even more skillfully and quickly. Thus, the seasoned Right Risk-takers look like they are spontaneously taking risks. But that is not so; rather they know themselves, their passion, principles,

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*(Right Risks continued from page 4)*

and purpose—they know so well that their decisions can be almost habitual in choosing Right Risks in the right time for the right reasons.

So, why am I taking time and energy and space to present these thoughts on Right Risk-taking? It is because I think it is a skill that we all as brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ need to intentionally develop in order to get better and better at following Christ together in this fast-paced culture of ours.

We need to know the passion, the vision that God has placed within each of us, so that the power of that energy can sustain us over the long haul in ministry, in our relationships, in hardships, in times of temptation. We need to understand the holy purposes that God promises to fulfill, so that we can know the target, the goals toward which we aim. We need to know God's principles—the filter through which all our risk-taking choices (exercising our prerogatives) can be sorted through and measured against, so that our choices will further His principles, not that of the enemy.

I am convinced that if we all became Right Risk-takers, we will be powerfully victorious in our personal battles and extremely effective in our ministries. This is my prayer for us all.

*Note: next month I will explore*

*some of the specific ways that Treasurer suggests to prepare for Right Risk-taking.*

Treasurer, W. (2003). *Right risk: 10 powerful principles for taking giant leaps with your life*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.



## Reflections: Thoughts from a WGA Leader

*By Nancy Hicks*

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### Coming Unraveled

Have you ever innocently pulled on a dangling thread and watched in horror as the entire seam of your shirt came unraveled and split open? Have you ever watched a not-so-innocent random event or conversation or temptation begin to unravel your life? I recently had a conversation with a struggling friend who said just that, "I feel like my entire life is coming unraveled." It is frightening to come to a moment when we realize that there is no going back; there is no salvaging what we have knit together to make a life and an identity. We find ourselves exposed and vulnerable. Not only is there a great sense of loss of control, but also a deeper questions of purpose: "What am I good for? What will my life look like now?"

The Psalmist uses this image of being knit together. In Psalm 139 he says, "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." But Job speaks to our painful condition and challenges God with this same im-

agery. He says, "Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? . . . Did you not . . . clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews?" (Job 10: 8-11) Job cries out to God in a time of unraveling and demands that God give an account for the making and unmaking that He seems to be about.

Job is Everyman for us all as we suffer with pain and confusion in this life. His questions in the depth of suffering give voice to the cry in each of us. And the answer that God gives throughout the history of people is the same: "I am God and I will do as I please." His sovereignty is absolute. In Jeremiah, God uses the imagery of a potter making and remaking a clay pot: "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand." (Jer 18:1-6)

But as I pondered the "unraveling" of my friend's life, and the sovereign power of God, another image came to mind. I

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know a woman who knits hats for women with cancer – warm, colorful, soft hats to cover heads bare from the ravages of chemotherapy. She doesn't buy fresh, virgin yarn, rather she seeks out knit blankets and clothing at thrift stores and garage sales. She unravels the work and re-knits the "previously-known-as-a blanket" yarn into hats. So I started thinking about the concept of being taken apart to be remade.

Does the one who knit us together have the right to unravel us?

Wouldn't it be just like God to unravel the covering I have made for myself and my life, and to re-make it into a thing of beauty and comfort for those around me? Isn't it just like God to make beauty out of ashes<sup>1</sup>, to restore the years the locusts have eaten<sup>2</sup>, to bring life out of death? To make warm, beautiful hats to cover our pain for each other?

But now, this is what the  
LORD says—  
he who created you, Jacob,  
he who formed you, Israel:  
"Do not fear, for I have re-  
deemed you;  
I have summoned you by  
name; you are mine. . .  
Forget the former things;

do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you  
not perceive it?

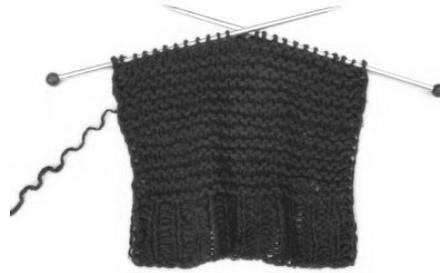
I am making a way in the wil-  
derness

and streams in the wasteland.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 61:3

<sup>2</sup> Joel 2:25

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 43





## November At a Glance

November 13th: Mary taught at “Conversations on Healthy Sexuality” conference at Denver Seminary

November 26th: Movie Marathon Day

### Thursday Night Group

November 4th: 35 people

November 11th: 37 people

November 18th: 42 people

November 25th: No Meeting

Orientation meeting: 8 new people

## December And Beyond

December 28th—January 1st: WGA participating in Friends Summit

January 1st: WGA presenting at Campus Crusade Event

January 8th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00— 9:00 am at the WGA offices.

## Financial Update

As of December 15th, WGA needs to bring in approximately \$35,000 to end the year in the black. Please pray with us about this. Would you consider a year end gift?

### WGA Staff

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

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