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A Measure of Grace

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Lust and Its Consequence

by Roger Jones

Q As I considered what I wanted to write this month's article about, I was reminded of some thoughts I had recently concerning the topic of lust. I did some looking around and came upon the following quote from *Bold Love* by Dan Allender, which serves as a good introduction:

God has blessed us with much to enjoy on this earth- everything from full bellies to rich relationships that ease the ache in our souls. Our desire, or lust, to embrace all good things is perfectly legitimate because we are created to long deeply for fulfillment, ultimately through union with God. But destructive lust has a different flavor. It is a strong craving to possess the life and soul of another in order to simultaneously fill an emptiness in oneself and destroy the fullness in another. Destructive lust is the intersection of desire and destruction, and emptiness and vengeance. A person who is fueled by such lust not only sucks life out of a host in order to dim the intensity of his loneliness, but also relished mastery and power over someone or some-

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thing. Lust is obvious in the sexual realm, but its pretense is a pulsating rhythm in other dimen-

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sions of life.¹

I am so grateful that when we sin, we have an advocate in Jesus Christ. His sacrifice, made on our behalf, frees us from bearing the consequence of separation from God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

While I am thankful that He forgives and washes me from the stain of my sins, I am also aware that there are sometimes consequences to face from my choices. An unkind or harsh word from me may require work to restore a relationship. Depending on a number of things, the relationship may never be the same. Habitual sin or addiction may develop patterns of relationship and behaviors that are incredibly difficult to change. Our souls may be ultimately untarnished, but our bodies may carry a wound. Lust carries its own set of consequences.

I was recently in a situation that left me wondering about the ongoing effects of lust in my life. I was with an unfamiliar group which mostly consisted of men who were 10-15 years younger than I. Everyone was friendly, and no one was aware of how the group was impacting me. While I was not experiencing lust, there were other confusing feelings roiling around inside of me.

I felt like I was twelve years old. I felt that I needed approval and acceptance

from these men. My perception was that I was empty, and they had everything I was missing. If I could somehow be one of them, I would be complete. It is hard to make small talk and not appear to be a crazy person when these intense feelings are present. Later I became aware that while I was so wrapped up in these feelings, something important was lost. *I actually have something to offer them, and I missed the opportunity.*

The idea that I had something good to offer these men was a completely new thought. I hope this doesn't sound arrogant, but there are some simple realities which are hard to deny. Being older than they, I have more life experience. I've worked for Where Grace Abounds for fifteen years, meaning I have quite a bit of work experience. I know *a lot* about sexual issues. I'm sure at least a few of those guys could benefit from my knowledge in those areas. These are just a few of the things I could have offered, had I been in a different mindset.

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Through years of lust, I trained myself to approach relationship with the wrong attitude: "What can I get from these men?" I don't want to blame all of my insecurities on lust, but I do believe there is a connection. If you've been reading *A Measure of Grace* for any length of time, you know that I have written quite a bit about my struggle with pornography. Porn reduces a person to one dimension -- a body. It also teaches the user (in this case me) to take something

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from a person, rather than to give something to them.

While for me the focus of my lust has been towards the same sex, there is a similar consequence for those heterosexuals who have been wrapped up in lust or pornography. How much more secure would young women feel if the older men in their lives offered them something stable and loving, rather than hungry and lustful? Lust isn't always sexual in nature. Isn't a woman or a man who constantly fantasizes about being married doing something similar? People are approved or dismissed based upon their marriageable qualities when God may have other purposes for these relationships.

And there is hope! God not only wants to forgive us, He wants to heal us too.

When we find ourselves facing these types of consequences, He is there. When we have some distance from our lust and sin, they have less power over us. We can learn new patterns of relating to others which bring things into balance; we can give and receive what God intends for us.

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness
(Lamentations 3:22-23, NIV).

¹ D. Allender, *Bold Love* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1992).

Interrupting Isn't Always Rude

By Mary Heathman

The summary statement of last month's article on effective listening encouraged us all to (1) be attentive to one another in conversations . . . , (2) stop *listening to* find a way to turn the conversation to your own agenda, but instead (3) *listen for* the opportunity to understand and learn and build up one another. I also ended the article with the question, "Did you know that interrupting isn't always rude?" In answer to my own question, I propose that in order to have a good conversation we not only have to listen well, we also have to be

good at interrupting. I offer a few thoughts to support this radical opinion! (More radical for those who share my southern roots, I suspect . . . ? Who among us cannot recall the dreaded, "Don't you interrupt me young lady [or man as the case may be], right when you desperately needed to get a parent's attention?). Ah well, let's just offer a little balm to that painful memory!

Leading body language expert, Dr. Harry Witchel (2009), states "The need to wait for pauses in a conversation has been scientifically disproved. In one American

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Dysfunctional Songs in the 70's

By Scott Kingry

It was a very typical Monday off. I was doing my usual routine of dusting, sweeping and "Swiffering" my small condo, jamming to my I-pod while I moved from chore to chore. This particular day, I had chosen my 70s Soft Rock playlist (as opposed to my 70s Classic Rock, 70s R&B or 70s Disco playlists). As I washed dishes I began mindlessly humming and singing "Imaginary Lover" by Atlantic Rhythm Section. Here are few random lyrics:

*When ordinary lovers don't feel
what you feel and real-life situations
lose their thrill
--imaginary lover, you're mine
anytime*

*Imaginary lovers never disagree--
they always care, they're always
there--when you need
satisfaction guaranteed-- My
imaginary lover, you're mine any-
time.*

"Oh, my gosh!" I suddenly thought, mid-scrub. "What kind of messed up song is this? No wonder most of us who grew up in the 70s are still in therapy!" Really, I'm not too far off. A wounding background of neglect and abandonment left me self hating, extremely insecure, and above all,

controlling. My prime motivation in any relationship back then was to avoid "being rejected." Never again did I plan to feel ignored, disregarded or overlooked. Unfortunately, all this hyper-vigilance created the very thing I feared; I drove away the people I loved. When I wasn't destroying another new relationship, I escaped into all manner of false intimacy: pornography, movies, novels and a rich fantasy life. These "lovers" were manageable; they could be conjured up when needed and then conveniently put away. I never felt abandoned and little was required of me. Sounds reminiscent of a sick song from the 70s, huh?

A vivid cartoon image has stuck with me since my early days at WGA, from a book that Mary kept close at hand on a shelf in her office. There were a man and a woman decked out in all sorts of army gear—helmets, ammunition, weaponry and each was facing the other from behind a barricade made of dirt. I very much resonated with this scene. Having been so hurt by people all my life, I approached every relationship in this fashion—fortressed in, pro-

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tected with a host of artillery ready to use if I felt threatened. It seemed not only reasonable, but a wise way to live. Yet the cartoon went on for several more panels. Eventually the couple ventured out from their blockades and began pulling off their armor and laying down their weapons, till they were standing in front of each other without defenses, vulnerable.

It took many years of learning at Where Grace Abounds, but just as in the cartoon, I couldn't keep attempting to control all my relationships. To develop true intimacy what I needed was not total control, but vulnerability, an open heart and ultimately a *surrender* (laying down the weapons and coming out from behind the self protective barricade). From my oldest, closest friends to my most

recent acquaintance, I've had to continually *surrender* parts of myself. To be truly known I've had to "*yield and submit to the power and influence of another*" as Webster defines it. Of course, one should surrender in a way that is appropriate for the level of a particular relationship and incrementally as trust builds (one can give up too much, too soon). Intimacy requires being authentic, sharing not only our dreams, but also our flaws. It even risks getting hurt or having our hearts broken, which, though not my favorite thing, could be better than dying behind a barricade never having been truly known.

The other side of the coin is also true. Loving actual flawed humans (rather than our 2-dimensional creations), people who might have countless irritating idiosyncrasies that one can't control, is not a very glamorous task either. There is some tough reality to face. It's not surprising that such things as speaking the truth in love, unconditionally loving someone right where they are, bearing one another's burdens and extending a load of forgiveness daily, permeate Scripture. Who knew I could learn such valuable lessons from dysfunctional Soft Rock songs of the 70s?

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study, the average pause between speakers (only 0.764 seconds) was significantly shorter than the average pause between two successive sentences spoken by the same person (0.807 seconds)."

There it is – the permission you need to go ahead and interrupt. Do you see the implications in those scientific facts? Just as we always suspected as children, waiting in vain for a sign that it is our turn. Our fears have been validated—we really are never going to get a turn if we don't interrupt! When I was a child, the signal never came or I never recognized it. Or if mother or daddy remembered and turned to me and said, "Now, what was it you wanted . . . ?" I said, "I forgot!" because the urgency or relevance of my comment or question had long passed!

There are some cultural guidelines governing turn-taking in conversation, however, and Dr. Witchel goes on to discuss these more subtle unwritten, yet commonly accepted practices:

- "The real rules of turn-taking are much more subtle than pauses."
- "People unconsciously recognize that the baton is being handed to them when the speaker gazes over more than 80 per cent of the time at the listener, when the speaker trails off, or when the speaker says a turn-ender such as "you know" or "isn't it?"
- "More generally, questions end turns, as do statement completions, which drop in tone."
- "Interrupting successfully is more about how you use your voice."

Then there are the No-No's: flamboyant body language like waving your arms, or

speaking rapidly, will cause the speaker to appear less confident. People then take the speaker less seriously or dismiss them entirely. However, one surprising observation noted in the studies is that "fillers (um, ah, er)" (didn't we get down-graded for those in speech class?), "can make listeners think the speaker is more interesting!"

One very useful suggestion, offered in Witchel's article, is to protect ourselves from other people's inappropriate interrupting:

"In an outright battle to be speaker, surrender is not recommended unless everyone else is quietly rolling their eyes. If a conversational panzer has seized your discussion without explanation, it may be necessary to restore the topic. If there are witnesses, holding phrases (such as "Hang on" or "Can I please finish?") can be further pressurised by appealing to the alleged rules. Try "You'll have your turn in a moment" or "You can't change the subject like that."

Assuming we will never be the "inappropriate interrupter." I will turn our attention to the art of effective interrupting. The way we interrupt either as a listener or as someone walking into a conversation shows our consideration for others - shows that we think they are important - and shows our attentiveness to their needs. When we interrupt we need to show that we have really heard the other person, that we see their purpose, what they are doing. And our hearts must be engaged first and foremost—loving that person, showing them their worth. All this means that our intent is to participate and engage in conversation. We need to interrupt with respect – when others are talking or obviously in thought, or carefully listening

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to someone else—these are all times when we must be careful that our interruption is respectful.

Dr. Witchel has more practical and helpful things to say about the art of interrupting, but I will let the reader go to his website to learn more of his thoughts. It is enough for today, for my purposes to say that interrupting isn't always rude; in fact, sometimes it is absolutely necessary to enter and participate in conversation with people we want to get to know, or are working with. If we do so, and do it well, we can have a positive influence in other's lives and in our own lives as well.

One final thought for those who participate in support groups or small groups intended to help one another grow: Quoting from Brinkman and Kirschner (2002): "If you want to have a positive influence, thoughtful responses are required. It is in your best interest to (1) assume the best by giving group members the benefit of the doubt, (2) to help them break their associations to negative behavior and limiting self-concepts, and (3) reinforce their associations to the behaviors" that will help them meet their goals. This can't be done by allowing group members to continue talking along lines that are practicing their problem instead of really working on it. Effective interrupting is a verbal intervention for the good of all the group members – and good for the facilitator as well!

For Further Reading:

Dealing with People You Can't Stand: How to Bring Out the Best in People at Their Worst (2002), Dr. Rick Brinkman and Dr. Rick Kirschner provide a strategy for dealing with ten of the

most "unwanted behaviors" of colleagues. Their strategy is focused on assuming the best in others and identifying the positive intent that fuels these ten undesirable behaviors. Once we identify the positive intent, we can apply communication strategies and self-adjust our own attitude in order to "bring out the best in people at their worst" and, ultimately, make our lives easier.

Mehrabian, A. (1990). *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes*. Second Edition. Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Witchel, H. (2009). *Total Politics*. Website: <http://www.totalpolitics.com/email/life/3203/effective-interrupting.shtml>





April In Review

April 1st: The WGA staff participated in a leadership training seminar

April 16th: WGA Men's Event

April 16th Game Night

Tuesday nights thru mid June: The men's Commitment Group and the Survivors of Abuse Group (which began in January) meet. Please pray for the 16 people participating in these groups each week.

May And Beyond

May 14th: WGA helping out with Corona Clean Up Day at Corona Presbyterian Church

May 28th: Founders Day Picnic. Join us to celebrate Mary's birthday!

June 4th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00— 9:00 am at the WGA offices

September 17th: WGA 25th Anniversary Celebration. We hope you will join us to recognize this milestone of WGA history. More information will be coming your way soon!

Thursday Night Group

April 7th: 34 people

April 14th: 34 people

April 21st: 20 people

April 28th: 31 people

Orientation meeting - 2 new people

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

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