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A Measure of Grace

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

The Vision of Where Grace Abounds *by Roger Jones*

Early last year, I began leading the Staff, Board of Directors, and Leadership Team through some exercises to renew vision for what is currently happening at WGA and to build vision for the future. One of the goals of these meetings was to develop a fleshed-out Vision Statement that paints a picture of what WGA is here to accomplish. It was an exciting process to go through with the team of people who work with us every week.

You have probably seen WGA's purpose statement. It is printed in many of our materials (including the back page of this newsletter). If you have ever attended WGA's Thursday Night Group, you most likely have heard it recited. In churches, we often begin talking about WGA with the purpose statement:

Where Grace Abounds exists to guide and support men and women who seek to under-

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

Besides my desire to generally revisit the vision and purpose of the ministry (a good exercise to go through every few years), I also wanted to come up with something that better explained and “put legs on” our purpose statement. The above statement is easy to understand when it is shared in the context of a talk or a group where people can ask for clarification about a point that is not understood. I wanted to have something a bit longer for people to read that would really give them a good idea of services and resources WGA provides to the community. Of course I hope that this Vision Statement will generate excitement in others and inspire them to join us.

I want to take this opportunity to share the final version of the statement our team developed:

Where Grace Abounds Vision Statement

100% Grace, 100% Truth: No Compromise.

WGA is uniquely positioned as a third voice among those who treat sexual sin as worse than other sins and those who question traditional sexual standards. There is a standard for sexuality

set forth in Scripture which provides direction, and there are grace and unconditional love when we do not meet it. When we do not, we are reminded of grace which empowers us to persevere.

Hope

Where Grace Abounds strives to build a community in which men and women who struggle with issues of sexuality and relationship can find hope. Parents, siblings, spouses, and friends of those personally struggling are also in need of encouragement. The hope that our healing and provision come through the Lord is shared through the stories of the staff, leadership and those who participate in WGA's various programs.

Men and women are invited to share their whole lives, not just the parts they feel good about. Love is experienced through being fully known, even amidst feelings of shame. Health and healing are results of acceptance and healthy relationships. People who have experienced great shame often feel that if they were really known, no one would love them. WGA endeavors to demonstrate love to all people. It is understood that living people's stories are incomplete. Through the relationships offered, accountability and

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confession can naturally flow.

Integral to the community of Where Grace Abounds are the safety and the encouragement to ask questions about sexuality and relationships and about how these two interact with one's faith.

Relationship

Where Grace Abounds is a discipleship ministry, and is therefore committed to walking alongside men and women through the good times and the bad times. Men and women are accepted as Jesus loves them: unconditionally. Through community, people are encouraged towards holiness in their sexuality and relationships. As we pray and seek God, we understand that it is His job to convict people regarding sin, not WGA's. Transparency is modeled "from top to bottom"; that is, leaders are expected to be open and honest about their journeys, which encourages newer participants to do the same.

Education

Where Grace Abounds was formed partly due to a lack of resources and understanding regarding sexuality and relationships. Many Christians have felt condemned by the church for its lack of compas-

sion regarding these issues. Others have felt misunderstood in a secular community where one's religious beliefs are often dismissed. Where Grace Abounds seeks to educate pastors, community leaders, and others who want to learn more about a biblical view of sexuality and relationship.

I hope that you are as encouraged by the Vision Statement as I am. I would love to talk with you about any aspect that needs clarification. If the statement is exciting to you and you would like to participate with us in ministry, I would be happy to talk with you about that as well. Please feel free to contact me at the WGA office, 303-863-7757 or info@wheregraceabounds.org.



Reflections: Thoughts from a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks



The Voices in My Head

I think everyone has a series of “old voices” or “tapes” in their mind that can be triggered unexpectedly: “You’re stupid,” “you’re weak,” “you’re hopeless,” “you’re unlovable,” “you’re a foolish dreamer.” We all have shameful, painful words and ideas about our identity that have been shot like flaming arrows deep into our souls. More often than not, I think they are so buried in the hidden caverns of ourselves that we don’t even know they’re there. But they whisper their sinister lies just beyond conscious hearing, stirring anger and fear and shame that cause us to react in ways we don’t understand.

After one of these bouts of senseless reacting, as I slog through the muck of self-loathing, I often find myself asking, “So what is true about me? Who am I after all?” I am afraid that my worst fears about who I am are true. These are painfully vulnerable moments in life for all of us. But I also believe that they are holy opportunities to be transformed -- if I look

seriously for answers to these questions: Where can I go to find out what is true about me? Where can I go to ferret out the dark lies in the depths of my soul and reveal them for what they are?

The writer of Hebrews describes the word of God (the Bible) as “living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:12-13). The Holy light of Scripture can illumine these deep places of my soul, revealing what is there – lies and truth. But the Word is also Jesus Himself (John 1:1). He is the Truth (John 14:6). As I interact with the living Word of God both on paper and in the Spirit of Christ Himself, I have a flashlight, a soul-cave expert, and dearest friend to help me on this frightening and exhilarating adventure to discover what is true.

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Why go spelunking in these dark and dangerous places? Why not “leave well enough alone?” Because Jesus promises that the truth will set us free (John 8:32): free from lies about who we are, free to walk in the truth of who we are created to be, free from fear, free to love.

What might be different in your life if you knew you were loved completely? The truth is that we are loved completely. God loved us completely while we were still unrecognizable because we were covered in hopeless muck and mire and far from Him (Romans 5:8). God wants us to be free to run and jump and skip and sleep and laugh and cry in that knowledge. How might I interact with people differently if the Voice in my head continually reminded me of the truth that I am loved completely just as I am?

So how do I allow this new Voice with its Truth to saturate my thoughts? I pray and spend time with the One who is Truth. And I soak in the Bible daily. The lies are shriveling in the glorious light and the voice of Truth is getting louder.

No one puts it better for me than the group Casting Crowns in their

song “The Voice of Truth”:

The voice of truth tells me a
different story
The voice of truth says, "Do not
be afraid!"
The voice of truth says, "This is
for My glory"
Out of all the voices calling out to
me
I will choose to listen and believe
the voice of truth.

Even after 40+ years of valuing the importance of Scripture, I can still find the Bible overwhelming when I try to figure out what to read next. There is a fantastic resource for reading the Bible on Brad Hicks' webpage: www.hisgoodword.com. Go to the "Bible reading plan" tab. I have been using this guide for the past 18 months and it has really revolutionized my interaction with the Word. I intentionally recognize that God has something to speak to me through His word everyday no matter where I am reading and it is amazing how much this expectation opens up insight in unexpected places.

The Antidote for Chronic Loneliness

By Mary Heathman

WGA staff and leaders are often questioned about the purpose for social activities in our ministry. To this, we reply, “We have come to believe that sexual problems are rooted in relational problems. Therefore, the resolution of sexual problems is rooted in healthy and healing relationships. WGA is a discipleship ministry offering an environment within which group members can learn about and practice healthy relationship. Our social activities are opportunities to practice healthy relating styles taught in WGA classes and recommended reading.”

Former staff member, Karen Wood, used to say that many of the people who come to WGA can most accurately be described as “psychological orphans.” The loneliness factor that permeates this population must be understood and addressed if they are ever going to grow in relationship as they all hope they will. So, one can then understand that for WGA leaders, the antidote for chronic loneliness is of utmost interest.

Loneliness is too broad a topic for



a newsletter article, so I will address only one small part. I will limit my comments to brief comments about our culture’s part in its development and my understanding of the bottom-line antidote to chronic loneliness.

In the first chapter of his book, *Johnny Cash and the Great American Tradition: Christianity and the Battle for the Soul of a Nation*, Rodney Clapp (2008) comments: “As never before in our history, we prize individualistic liberty above all other goods, but we refuse to recognize that favoring this good so extremely may inhibit or even eliminate the

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realization of other goods. We want to be self-sufficient, yet loved and loving. We each want to do everything on our own terms, and yet simultaneously belong to a community. We desire our self-interested freedom from others above all things, and at the same time we want never to be lonely.”

These mutually exclusive couplings of goals describe the ambivalence that characterized the first 28 years of my life. I was clueless about it of course, not knowing that my yearning to be loved and understood was being sabotaged by my fierce independence. I didn’t know that my desire to belong was undermined by my equally strong desire to shape my environment (including the people around me) to my own terms and conditions. For so many years I was successfully independent and increasingly lonely.

Back then, I didn’t know yet that I was actually created to be in relationship; it was the purpose of my existence. I was to belong to God and in the security of that belonging, I would then become all that was unique about who I was created to be. It is interesting to me at this point in my life that what I

was seeking in those early years – to be my own person—has become more and more a reality for me as I quit fighting my need for God and His people. I used to resist anything and anyone who would “rain on my parade.” In so doing, I became increasingly isolated and lonely—even in the midst of people who cared about me.

The antidote? The solution? The healing? That is surrender to our purpose of course; align ourselves with God’s purposes in our lives; to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Clapp puts it well, “*When Creator, creatures, and creation are in harmony, we creatures remain dependent but not lonely. When we deny our creatureliness and try to cast off all limitations, we alienate ourselves. Put more plainly, we make ourselves lonesome.*”



May

In Review

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

May 28th: Founders Day Picnic.—Mary's birthday and graduation were celebrated

June

And Beyond

June 10th: Men's event—Rockies Game

July 2nd: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00— 9:00 am at the WGA offices

August 7th: Roger will be speaking in the morning and evening services at Scum of the Earth Church

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.

October 21-23: Leadership Retreat.—please pray for our leaders!

Financial

Update

Please pray for WGA's finances. As of the end of May, income has been less than projected by \$8,422. We need to make up this difference to meet WGA's budget for 2011.

Thursday Night Group

May 5th: 37 People

May 12th: 32 People

May 19th: 27 People

May 26th: 31 People

Orientation meeting: 8 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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