



A Measure of Grace

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Loving Those Who Disagree *by Roger Jones*



This past weekend, I was asked to co-teach a workshop at a symposium held at Highlands Church in Denver. This is the third year that this church has hosted a gathering, themed “The Evangelical Church and Homosexuality.” Highlands Church has taken an inclusive position with regards to homosexuality, meaning that they accept different sexual orientations as natural variations in God’s creation. Their belief is that the scriptures commonly understood as dealing with homosexuality actually address such things as temple prostitution and rape, rather than committed, monogamous, same-sex relationships. Sexual intimacy is reserved for reserved for committed, lifelong, monogamous relationships. I hope I have described them fairly and accurately.

I (and Where Grace Abounds) have a different perspective about what the scriptures say with regards to homosexuality. As I am sure you are aware, we believe that God has reserved sexual intimacy for one man and one woman within the context of marriage. So, why would they ask me to come and teach at this event? And why

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would I accept such an invitation? These are two very important questions!

The emphasis for this year's symposium was "Bridging the Gap." So much weight gets placed upon this one area where Christians disagree, that we forget about all the areas we do agree upon, such as the lordship of Christ. I was asked to co-teach a workshop with Joe Quillin, a member of and leader within Highlands Church. The conference organizers asked me to participate because of my position on homosexuality. The goal was to have a discussion in which we could demonstrate how to disagree respectfully and show Christ-like love to each other. I am pleased to say that we accomplished that goal.

I had mixed feelings accepting the invitation. I wondered if the people there would be hostile towards me, or if I was stepping into some kind of a setup. My fear and anxiety were in my face, so I prayed about it and felt a sense of peace about moving forward. I met with Joe a couple of times and had a few telephone conversations as well. We agreed that we would defend each other if attacked. I felt good about that. Joe became my friend during the process of all this.

As a representative of WGA, I wanted to go into that environment and demonstrate the love of Christ. I know that there are people out there who have made a lot of assumptions about us and what our purposes are. I hoped to challenge the misperceptions and offer a glimpse into the heart of what WGA tries to provide: a safe place for people to wrestle with God about some difficult issues in their lives. I also knew that there would be some people there who had once participated in WGA's program

and/or groups. I hoped to remind them that we are still here and available if they ever want to visit, and that we still love them, regardless of where they are now.

Personally, I wanted to face some of my own misperceptions about gay Christians. While I do my best to stay open hearted and loving, I still wrestle with an "us

versus them" attitude from time to time. It isn't just with gay Christians that I wrestle with this, but with anyone whom I perceive to be different from me. At the core of this for me is fear. I am afraid that I will be rejected or hurt. I am afraid that I won't be able to defend myself or represent WGA adequately, and that my weaknesses will reflect poorly upon those I am trying to serve.

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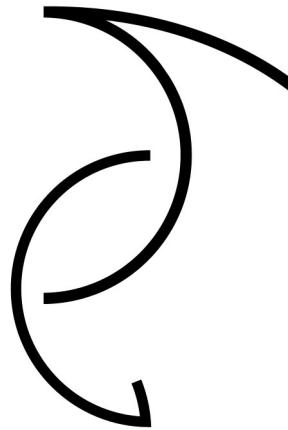
Once I realized that my main reason for not wanting to participate was my fear, I decided that I needed to “press in.”

During one of the workshops, I became aware of a point of difference that is painful. I made a statement about how the church often treats homosexual sin as different than other sins. It disqualifies men and women from leadership and service in a way that lying, cheating, or even adultery may not. By singling out gay men and women, are we not pronouncing ourselves as free from sin? I am not sure what to do with that. It confuses me.

In his own words, Joe “bristled” at my statement. He was hurt that I had compared sexual intimacy, in the context of his relationship, to lying, cheating and adultery. Joe would describe the relationship he has with his same sex partner as Christ-centered, committed, lifelong, and monogamous. He doesn’t believe that sexual intimacy in the context of his relationship with his partner is a sin. While I believe that Joe and his partner are committed and love each other, my understanding of scripture has not changed. This went straight to the core of the matter. The mood in the room was tense and uncomfortable. We moved to a different topic. Joe and I still disagree, and we still love each other.

The experience was positive, and I am glad I did it. There were a few chal-

lenging questions of me that I did my best to respond to in a loving and compassionate way. Being in that environment reminded me that, like me, the men and women at this conference were still pursuing God. They have made choices that I would not make. I know I have made choices that they would not. We are all still in the refining fire of God’s love. I trust He will continue to refine me as I trust He will continue to refine those who disagree with me on the issue of homosexuality.



Men and Intimacy

By Zach Rawlings

I recently watched the movie *I Love You, Man* where the main character, Peter, gets engaged to the love of his life. In the midst of his great euphoria, he soon realizes he has no male friends close enough to be his best man. As a result, he embarks on a series of “man dates” to bond with men and find someone to fulfill that very important best man role. As he sets out on his journey to find male friends, he bonds with a guy named Sydney. The two are complete opposites and begin a friendship by spending countless hours together. However, the closer the two become, the more tension results in his relationship with his fiancée. Peter’s new problem becomes learning how to balance his relationship with his fiancée with his newfound desire for male intimacy.

Despite the comedy and quirkiness of the movie’s plot, I couldn’t help but contemplate the underlying truth the movie surfaced: men need other men. Peter’s predicament is a microcosm of a larger issue in society. Men aren’t experiencing relational connectedness with other males, and often fill that void by isolating themselves or turning to women to fill all their relational needs. Both result in a longing and dissatisfaction. There has to be a better solution, right?

In his book, *The Friendless American Male*, David Smith formulates three

stages of male friendships: acquaintance, companionship, and established friendship. Acquaintances are usually based upon where two individuals live or work rather than on common values or goals. The key term associated with this type of relationship is convenience.

The second category, companionship, occurs when two acquaintances hit it off, are able to communicate, and share something in common. Unlike acquaintances, companions schedule time together. They enjoy each other’s company and express genuine concern for the wellbeing of the other individual. This is usually the extent of most men’s relationships. However, this companionship-level friendship does not withstand emotional stress or interpersonal conflict. There is still no real commitment here.

Smith proposes a third type of relationship that few men achieve. It is the established friendship. The word that marks this type of relationship is commitment—commitment to working through conflict, commitment to openly expressing thoughts, emotions, and struggles, and commitment to sharing accomplishments and hardships with the other person. This sounds a lot like a marriage or romantic relationship, right? That’s because all relationships of depth and substance require much of the same things.

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If you are struggling to move your relationships from the companionship level to an established friendship, let me suggest a few steps to aid you on the way:

Choose the men you want to share yourself with wisely. Many men aren't willing or capable of entering into an established friendship. Observe their other relationships and how they respond to conflict and emotional distress. Of course no one is perfect; however, you should be able to get a feel for which men in your life are capable of entering into such a friendship with you by observing the other facets of their lives.

Make contact. Be accessible to those around you and initiate spending time with the men already in your life.

Model vulnerability and intimacy. Unfortunately, men aren't the best initiators. If you want more fulfilling

friendships, you will most likely have to make the first move. Share something causing you anxiety or fear at your next weekly racquetball match. Make an effort to move the relationship deeper.

Take a sincere interest in your friend. Often times we men can be task-centered instead of people-oriented. Make an effort to genuinely care about your friend when spending time together.

There it is. I let the secret out of the bag, men: we really do need each other. Initiate deeper relationships now. I'm challenging you to something scarier and more intense than lighting yourself on fire or playing nut-ball. I'm challenging you to intimacy, real intimacy. It's scary and intense, and totally worth it.

Compassion Without Concession

by Mary Heathman

Reprinted from November, 1999

During a recent symposium addressing the Church and Homosexuality, I experienced familiar conflicts intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Extending the break from my series on The Adequacy of God's Provision, I want to reprint this article from several years ago. It seems so timely with all the debate that rages in the Church of how to minister to those who are same-sex attracted and want to fellowship and worship

openly as gay men and women in their Church. As I reread my words from 1999, I find them still representing my position and my heart.

A familiar pressure builds, manifesting itself in an uncomfortable tightness in my chest, a dull throbbing in my head, and a knot taking up residence in my throat. I have just read another story about Christian men and women who

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struggled with their homosexuality until they believed they heard the voice of God telling them that their “homosexuality is a gift” and that God “created me this way.” Though my understanding of scripture does not allow me to accept their conclusions, my mind and heart identify thoroughly with how and why they have come to this place. Compassion and commitment to the Law are at war within me.

There are days that I know why people compromise their own values — “hope deferred” has made their heart grow sick. It wears them down to go on living month after month, year after year, without any recognizable signs of God’s provision for what feels like their deepest, most basic needs; it just hurts too much to live with the tension between God’s standards and their experience. And as I hear what they have lived with and through, even **my** hope for them is shaken and I find myself wishing I could agree with them.

Yet, I remember the mandate that God has given me: “100% grace, 100% truth, no compromise.” I curl up in a fetal position, let the tension flow out through the tears, and pray, “Lord, what is truth; what is grace; and how in the world can I be your messenger for both?”

In his song, People Need the Lord, Steve Green sings, “We are called to bring Your light to a world where wrong seems right.” In a very real sense, WGA is called to bring light into situations where the darkness has had its way for generations. Maybe you, like I do, find it hard to be a light where darkness is the preferred environment. (Talk about feeling vulnerable and exposed!) Yet, the Lord has taught me some things — **I can’t not**

know what I know. So, I read the stories and I react - praying that I will have compassion without conceding to that which is not true.

In a recent magazine article, a lesbian woman writes: “*My first step toward healing was to undertake a life of celibacy. But after a few years of avoiding intimate relations at all costs, I was so deeply depressed that I needed psychiatric medications. At that point, I eliminated celibacy as an option.*”¹ For those of us who have experienced God’s healing in the area of our sexuality, we look at this statement and cringe.

Now it certainly is a good first step toward sexual healing to commit oneself to abstinence from sexual activity, and, if not married, to accept one’s singleness (celibacy) as a legitimate way to live. However, spending years “avoiding intimate relations at all costs” is a sure-fire recipe for failure. No wonder the woman became depressed. God’s plan is to teach us what real intimacy is, how to establish and maintain healthy relationships, to learn the joys of emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and non erotic physical intimacy. We don’t heal through avoidance of what is perceived as wrong, but by finding and accepting God’s provision for what is right.

I have compassion for this woman, even weep over the dearth of resources available to her to meet very legitimate needs. My heart aches knowing that she has lived with such pain. But I cannot compromise biblical standards on the altar of her pain, or my own pain on her behalf.

In the same article, the woman describes her next attempt toward healing: “*....my family and friends enthusiastically en-*

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couraged me to date men. So off I trekked to the Christian singles scene, where I met a kind and gentle Christian man who desired to date and eventually marry me, notwithstanding the full knowledge of my homosexual history. At last, a light in the lonely darkness.” In good faith, and at the urging of people who meant well but were sadly mistaken, the woman in pursuit of healing made a costly blunder. She jumped into marriage, tried to work out an intimate relationship with a man, while she was still struggling with deeply rooted unresolved issues with her own gender. Compassion dictates that I admire this woman’s commitment to healing, and I am horrified with her at the cost of her efforts. But even so I cannot concede the dictates of scripture.

The author describes the failure of her marriage, *“First came a trickle of dishon-esty, conflict and guilt. Intimacy with my new husband, both emotional and sexual, became increasingly difficult. I cried out to the Lord, ‘Oh, my God, I’m failing! Please help me!’ My husband and I sought Christian counseling, spent endless evenings pleading with God to make our marriage work. All to no avail. My inner pressure continued mounting until a full-blown avalanche roared out the words, ‘You cannot live a lie.’”* By the time I get to this place in the story, compassion wants to scream out an avalanche of its own, “What else could she do under the circumstances?”

And I have other questions like, “God, what is your provision for this woman? Where are the men and women who would give her wise counsel regarding her same gender attractions? Where are grace and peace and deliverance and comfort and all your other promises for your children? Where is the Church when people

like her are looking so desperately for a safe place to heal?”

This article is not an attack on the Church for mishandling sexual sinners. I believe God’s people want to know what His heart is, and once they learn, their hearts will change accordingly. As people hear about what WGA is doing and as we answer questions during presentations, we often see the hearts of the people turn toward ministry and we are gratified. We praise God for the men and women who have volunteered to work with WGA, and for those who support us financially. And we are so encouraged by the many that have new attitudes — attitudes of uncompromising grace and truth toward co-workers or family members who are homosexual.

No, I don’t condemn the Church. But I do want to challenge her to do more excellently that which the Lord has commanded us to do — to love as Jesus loves. We are mandated to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves — to have compassion without concession. It is clearly within scriptural guidelines to love the sexual sinner, just as God loves any sinner, to welcome them into the Church, to pray for them, to seek God’s provision for them, to invite them into our lives. For you see, they are not “other” than us. They are more like us than not; we are all sinners everyone.

May the Lord help us all to pursue his grace and truth without compromise.

i. The Odd Christian Out, by Ann M. Amideo, THE OTHER SIDE, September & October, 1999, pages 16-19.



October In Review

October 9th: WGA participated in Cherry Creek Presbyterian Mission Event

October 14th: WGA taught at “Understanding Broken Sexuality” Conference

October 16th: WGA participated in First Denver Friends Mission Event

October 21-23: WGA Leadership Retreat

Thursday Night Group

October 6th: 18 people

October 13th: 37 people

October 20th: 25 people

October 27th: 31 people

Orientation meeting - 3 new people

November And Beyond

December 3rd: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00—9:00 AM at the WGA office

November 5th: ‘Homosexuality and the Evangelical Church’ Symposium at Highlands Church

**November 25th: Movie Marathon Day—WGA Event
Contact the office for more information**

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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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