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# A Measure of Grace

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## It's the Holiday Season

*by Roger Jones*

**T**he holiday season from Thanksgiving to Christmas brings with it a variety of experiences for many people. For some, it is a wonderful time with family and friends, when all the hurts and painful experiences are set aside for a while. For others, it seems like the holidays are simply too difficult, and they cannot wait until January rolls around. All the advertisements and shopping reminds one of how blessed they feel and reminds another of how much they have lost.

These two extremes of how people experience the holidays (and everyone in between) have clashed a few times within WGA's groups. Those who love the holidays often don't want to be around WGA during this season, as it can be a "buzz kill" to hear others complaining about their families or how they hate the

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materialism that seems to go hand-in-hand with Christmas. Those who struggle with the holidays often find their painful family relationships seem to be highlighted this time of year. Hearing from those who have good or decent relationships with family and friends is just another reminder of the difficulties & loss within their own lives.

And there is another tension as well. Some people have no place to go for Thanksgiving or Christmas, some because of choices they have made, others because they are truly alone. And then there are others who have too many places to go and too many people to try and please. This causes stress within marriages, trying to decide which out of town family gets visited when. There is potential for hurt feelings everywhere! Those with no place to go often are bothered by all the options others have and wish they would appreciate it more. Those who feel overwhelmed by all their options yearn for a simple holiday season. Being alone starts to sound pretty good to them. It is a miracle that any of us can communicate with each other at all!

In a completely different context, I was recently given a good reminder by a friend of mine. I was expressing my fear to him about a

challenging situation I was facing. He said something to me like, "Roger, it is all about Christ. As long as your purpose is to show the love of Christ as best you can, you do not need to fear." That was exactly what I need to hear in that particular moment. I believe that approaching the holidays with this attitude and the goal of expressing Christ's love can be helpful.

As you are aware, WGA works with many individuals and families who are struggling with how sexuality and relationship problems are affecting them. My prayer is that God's word will shape and form these men and women (including you), so that your security may come from Him, not those around you. May we turn to Him with our pain and hurt, so that He may bring healing into our lives.

As you find yourself navigating the holidays and the days following, I hope you will find comfort and peace in the following passages of scripture:

"For who is God besides the LORD?

And who is the Rock except our God?

It is God who arms me with strength

and keeps my way secure.

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He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights.” Psalms 18:31-33, NIV

“You are my strength, I watch for you; you, God, are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely.” Psalm 59:9-10, NIV

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Matthew 22:37, NIV

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35, NIV

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 15:5-6, NIV

“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and

strengthen you in every good deed and word.” 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, NIV

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Hebrews 12:14-15, NIV

“Amen!

Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” Revelation 7:12, NIV

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16, NIV

Blessings to you this Christmas season!



## God's Provision: Abraham, Sarah, and I

*By Mary Heathman*

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**I**n my September article, I introduced the topic of the sufficiency of God's provision. I let my bias be known, (see sidebar), but I also said, *"I am not always at this point of faith and commitment to wait for God's provision, so I am especially grateful for biblical stories that both (1) help me understand that I am not alone in my confusion and impatience with God, and (2) teach me principles to live by as I follow Christ."*

As we face the end of the year with a larger shortfall than we have had in years, I am particularly in need of the insight and encouragement that can be gleaned from *"biblical examples of waiting (or not) on the Lord, and how that played out in the lives of biblical characters like Abraham and Sara, Joseph, Saul/Paul, and others."* As I read these stories, I am wrestling with the realities of my personal life as well as that of WGA's financial well-being. *"Chafing a bit under the discipline of waiting in some areas of my own life,"* it helps to remember

It is my conviction that *"God's provision is adequate; I just may not recognize, or may not be ready for it yet. He will meet my true needs and holy desires that He has placed within me; but I often don't even know what they really are and I need for Him to teach me."*

that "there is nothing new under the sun" and ,and "there is no temptation that has overtaken us that is not common to man." It is good to remember that, *"We're all in the same boat, you know!"*

As I think about being in the same boat with heroes of the faith, I find myself considering Abraham's own inconsistency in his faith and commitment to waiting on the Lord. If you are familiar with the story of Abraham's life, you will remember that at God's calling, he left his homeland, took all his family and possessions and

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set out for an unknown destination (Read about this in Gen.12:1; Heb.11:8; Acts 7:2-6). What great faith! What an inspiration—his obedience, his willingness to sacrifice all that he knew, in submission to God! This story always gets to the heart of things for me—I am always impressed, challenged, inspired, and encouraged in my faith.

However, later on in Abraham's story, we find that when it was to his advantage—to gain good favor and gifts from Pharaoh, and when he thought his life might be in danger—he told a half-truth, that his wife, Sarah, was his sister. (Read about this in Genesis 12:10-20, 20:1

-18, 26:6-12.) Abraham did what I am so tempted to do, even catch myself actually doing—just a little truth withheld, just a little twist, maybe, and I can protect myself or gain some perceived good for me or my family. And in the process, Abraham and I don't wait on the Lord; we seek provision through a shortcut, what looks reasonable and good in our own eyes.

***Read about  
Abraham and  
Sarah in  
Genesis 12:10-  
20, 20:1-18, 26:  
6-12***

This article isn't about consequences, but there are plenty—read the story, it's fascinating (like a horror story fascinates) how life gets complicated when we have left the best path—waiting for God's provision—and forged out on our own plan.

We could draw other examples from Abraham's life to illustrate the complications that come into

play when we go our own way and make our own provision outside of or even alongside of God's: we could talk about the golden calf fashioned to “worship Jehovah” in a new way—turns out God wasn't pleased with this idol placed alongside Him in his people's worship. Or what about when Abraham

and Sarah decided to help God fulfill his promise of a son to them—their plan was that Abraham would have a son, Ishmael, by Sarah's hand-maiden, Hagar. Of course, when the real promised son, Isaac, arrived on the scene, the story gets really messy—still is, if you think about the likelihood that the Arab/Israeli conflicts can be traced back to sibling rivalry between the descendants of

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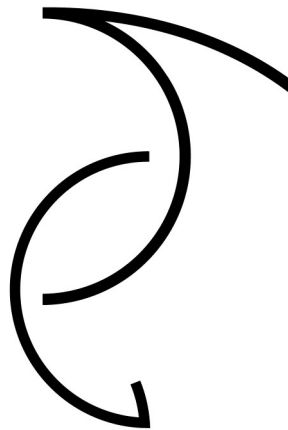
*(God's Provision continued from page 5)*

Ishmael and the descendants of Isaac.

My fascination isn't a morbid delight in Abraham's failings; I am sad for him and for his family, and for us their descendants in the Lord, as I read how much trouble we could have avoided if we had only waited on God's provision in the first place. But I am also encouraged—not as an excuse for my own lapses in obedience or commitment—but in the fact of God's grace and unfailing love throughout the whole story. Abraham is a hero of the faith; he was called the friend of God, (Isa 41:8).

It is a constant wonder to me to see that God's provision is not only sufficient in the first place—(of course we should have waited on it—but God's provision is sufficient **again, and again, and again** as he works all things for good . . ." (Romans 8:28). There is His grace in action; his provision forever pouring out toward us for our good. **I am again impressed, challenged, inspired, and encouraged in my faith; this time impressed with God, not Abraham.**

More next month . . . Praying for a blessed Christmas for you all and your families!!



## Reflections: Thoughts from a WGA Leader

*By Nancy Hicks*

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I heard this song by the group U2 for the first time this week and just loved the words. I think it's appropriate for Christmas time — a time when we celebrate God's grace given freely to the world. I especially love the comparison of Grace and Karma. Karma carries the sense of "getting what you deserve" -- which is exactly why God inserted Himself into history and outside of karma to save us from the death and punishment that we each deserve. His grace "traveled outside of karma" for our sakes. Bono says it beautifully:

*Grace  
She takes the blame  
She covers the shame  
Removes the stain  
It could be her name*

*Grace  
It's a name for a girl  
It's also a thought that changed  
the world  
And when she walks on the street  
You can hear the strings  
Grace finds goodness in every-  
thing*

*Grace, she's got the walk  
Not on a ramp or on chalk  
She's got the time to talk*

*She travels outside of karma  
She travels outside of karma  
When she goes to work  
You can hear her strings  
Grace finds beauty in everything*

*Grace, she carries a world on her  
hips  
No champagne flute for her lips  
No twirls or skips between her  
fingertips  
She carries a pearl in perfect con-  
dition*

*What once was hurt  
What once was friction  
What left a mark  
No longer stings  
Because grace makes beauty  
Out of ugly things*

*Grace makes beauty out of ugly  
things*

**Merry Christmas and  
Happy New Life**

**Grace** © 2000 Universal-Island Records Ltd.,  
Music: U2, Lyrics: U2



## **November**

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## **In Review**

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

**November 25th:** Movie Marathon Day

### **Thursday Night Group**

**November 3rd:** 35 people  
**November 10th:** 30 people  
**November 17th:** 34 people  
**November 24th:** No Group

**Orientation meeting:** 2 new  
people

## **December**

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## **And Beyond**

**December 14th:** WGA Staff, Board, and Leadership  
Party

**January 7th:** Intercessory Prayer. Join us from  
8:00—9:00 AM at the WGA office

**January 15th:** Roger will be speaking at  
Celebration Community Church

**January 18-February 8th:** Wednesday nights—  
discussion group at Celebration Community Church

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

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