



A Measure of Grace

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Are We Helping or Hurting Abuse Survivors?

by Roger Jones

In conjunction with the Survivors of Abuse group that just began here at WGA, I have been doing a re-read of Dan Allender's book, *The Wounded Heart*. In the prologue of his text, Allender addresses a few points about ineffective paths to healing for abuse survivors. These are usually offered with the best of intentions, but in the long run can often cause more damage and pain to the abuse survivor: denial-based forgiveness, pressured demands to love, and dramatic spiritual interventions.

Denial-Based Forgiveness

"An abused woman was told by her pastor that she was to forget the past and stop pitying herself, because many people have had a lot worse things happen to them than being abused by their father. This advice made any reflection on the effects of abuse selfish and illegitimate. His comment felt as painful to her as the original abuse."¹

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thinking is pervasive in Christian culture. The “forgive and forget” approach may be effective when a minor, petty offense has been committed, but with the issue of abuse, this is unhelpful. To “forgive and forget” is the equivalent of saying that what happened to the abuse victim did not matter. Likely, this is how they were made to feel by their abuser, so this type of advice does not help them to move through and beyond the consequences of the abuse, but rather continues the warped view of themselves that the survivor has carried since the abuse originally occurred: “I am worthless.”

Pressured Demands to Love

“A woman was told by her friends that she was tempting the judgment of God because she was taking her abuser to court. She was told that her desire to bring him to justice was unloving and vengeful. She wryly remarked that a friend had recently received a sizable out-of-court settlement for an accident, and no one batted an eye. It appeared to be acceptable to use the court system for a damaged car, but not for a damaged soul.”²

This point of Allender’s is difficult. The illustration of taking an abuser to court does not apply to every situation, but I believe it speaks to the attitude present in many of those in an abuse survivor’s support system. “If you could just learn to love your abuser, then this would be easier for you,” seems to be the thought behind the attitude. Scriptures about God’s direction to us to love our enemies

are often used to make the point. While love is a part of the equation and needs to be addressed, it is an oversimplification of the problem when this becomes the focal point of the advice given. It is often offered without thought to the cost or an acknowledgement of the past.

This is complicated by the fact that the majority of abuse is perpetrated by someone who is known by other family members, often a member of the family itself. If the victim could just love their abuser and move on, it would keep the family from having to be uncomfortable. More

often than not, I would venture to guess that love is already present in the relationship. This is part of why the pain goes so deep... a person they love and trust violated that love and trust.

Dramatic Spiritual Interventions

“I recently worked with a woman who was part of a charismatic church connected to a national healing and miracle ministry, which makes an assumption that sexually abused persons are

demon-oppressed. The memories may be the concoction of the demons, thus discounting the validity of the past abuse; or the memories may be actual events that are kept in the mind by the evil host that inhabit the victim. In either case, the strategy is to cast the demons out through the ritual of exorcism.”³

I don’t think that Allender’s point is to criticize charismatics or to minimize the possibility of spiritual warfare in the abuse victim’s life. Rather, I think he is

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To “forgive and forget” is the equivalent of saying that what happened to the abuse victim did not matter.

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making the point that assuming that the effects of abuse the victim is experiencing (memories, fear, etc.) are only the result of demonic oppression can potentially damage a person further. If a person has gone through an exorcism and still finds themselves experiencing effects of the abuse, then another demon must be to blame, rather than a different approach to healing. The real issues may never be addressed if the person and their church environment continue to assume demonic-oppression.

“Quick cures never resolve the deep damage.”⁴

It is not only exorcism that fits the category of Dramatic Spiritual Interventions. Using the power of positive thinking or other ways of changing one’s ways of thinking and feeling, without adding the component of addressing the abuse, can have similar results. The abuse victim is avoiding the fact of the abuse and therefore cannot move forward in their life as long as the abuse goes unacknowledged and unaddressed.

The Better Path

In counterpoint of the above, Allender also offers what he calls “The Better Path.”

“What is the better path? The argument of this book is that *the best path is through the valley of the shadow of death*. The crags of doubt and the valleys of despair offer a proving ground of God that no other terrain can provide. God does show Himself faithful; but the geography is often desert-dry and mountainous-demanding, to the point that the path seems too dangerous to face the journey ahead...

The journey involves bringing

our wounded heart before God, a heart that is full of rage, overwhelmed with doubt, bloodied but unbroken, rebellious, stained, and lonely. It does not seem possible that anyone can handle, let alone embrace, our wounded and sinful heart... The Lord has promised He will not put out the smoldering flax or break the broken reed (Isaiah 42:3).”⁵

All of the unhelpful solutions described by Allender in his book and by me in this article demonstrate something that is helpful at its core: our desire to see abuse victims freed from the burden of the past. In our attempts to love and help, we can offer misguided support with the best intentions. I pray that you and I will choose to journey into the valley of the shadow of death with those God brings across our path. This journey through (and out) of the valley is only possible if we travel together.

¹ Dr. Dan B Allender, *The Wounded Heart* (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1990), pg. 15

² Allender, pg. 17

³ Allender, pg. 19

⁴ Allender, pg. 19

⁵ Allender, pg. 20

And it was Good...

By Scott Kingry



"Imaginary evil is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring. Imaginary good is boring; real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating." --Simone Weil

A few years ago I attended an art show of a friend who was receiving his Masters of Fine Arts. He and his fellow graduates were displaying several different pieces in a variety of media they had worked on during their years of school. Not to sound like the most judgmental person, but as we strolled from piece to piece through the gallery, I could feel my "inner critic" giving his less than glowing reports. Most of the art was dark and "angsty"—filled with dread, anxiety and a sense of hopelessness. Now, I don't mind "dark" art, when it has a point and purpose, but these students simply seemed to believe that it's cool and hip to be gloomy, foreboding and brooding. But "gloom for the sake of gloom" only makes your art simple, easy and contrived; anyone can do it. Gee, that "inner critic" is sort of crusty isn't he?

A similar problem arose as I began my quest for "Christ-Centered" art. I started at my local Christian Book Store. I felt the same disappointment as at the art show, but from the other extreme. Instead of finding the breath-taking paintings, drawings and sculptures that have been the focal point of the church throughout history, I found schlocky

"hang-in-there" kitty posters with Bible verses. The small amount of art that was present, seemed overly sentimental and sugary. This "inner critic" sounds like a snob too, huh? All this critique aside, I believe we as Christians -- artists, musicians, preachers, writers, etc. have the same burning question and dilemma, "How do we portray a loving, glorious, just, merciful and beautiful God to our dying world?" How do we somehow at that perfect place of balance, of "realness," without landing on sugary sentiment or shallow brooding? I'm still never sure if my own art has found that sacred place. Ned Bustard, in his essay, "God is Good Like No Other" speaks to this theme for Christian artists:

As believers making art to the glory of God, goodness is not merely something to strive for in our morality, but is also something we should attempt to communicate through our aesthetic efforts. Portraying 'good' well, however, is excruciatingly difficult. The efforts of most artists who attempt to present a picture of 'good' tend toward dishonest, sugary sweet propaganda. They ignore the implications of the Fall, and paint the world as a shiny, happy place. Also 'goodness' can be ignored in favor of pursuing negative themes or motifs. Much of the energy of our culture of artists has gone into debunking, dismantling or deconstructing all that is good, beautiful, and respected, to be replaced with the shallow, the ugly and ephemeral.

What about the arena of gender and sex-

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uality? I believe the same conclusions could apply here. Being formed in the image of God as male and female (which God deemed as *very good*--Genesis 1:27) should be a mysterious and transcendent sort of thing. Each of us, as a man or woman, reflects uniquely His presence in the world. But we settle for self-protective stereotypes and caricatures of gender roles that I believe diminish His glory for the most part. God's intentions for love, intimacy, sex and relationship aren't faring very well either, relegated, as they often are, to teen vampire novels, Hallmark Channel romance movies and porn. Truly, pornography, for all its time consuming hype and internet popularity, has got to be one of the most boring things on the planet. I remember in my old sexual addiction days running home, with some X-rated DVD in hand waiting to binge the night away. But within minutes I found myself fast forwarding through most of the scenes. Realistically there are only about 5 things you can do with the human body, so porn has to be inventive to keep it even mildly interesting. Evil is truly monotonous as Simone Weil said.

Regarding the divine aspect of sexuality, Christopher West in *Theology of the Body* says—

*Sex isn't just about sex. The way we understand and express our sexuality points to our deepest-held convictions about who we are, who God is, the meaning of love, the ordering of society, and even the ordering of the universe...As bodily creatures, the only way we can experience the spiritual world—is in and through the physical world, in and through our bodies, by taking on a body through the **Incarnation**, God humbly*

meets right here—in our physical human state. The human body itself is in some sense a “sacrament”...a sign that makes visible the invisible mystery of God. We can't see God. God is pure Spirit. Yet Christianity is the religion of God's self-disclosure. God wants to reveal himself to us. He wants to make His invisible, spiritual mystery visible to us so that we can “see” Him. The beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator and yet what is the crown of creation? The answer is man and woman and their call to fruitful communion.

This sounds marvelous and intoxicating, doesn't it? At least it should. And this is the question that we face daily at Where Grace Abounds: “How do we articulate the intent, purpose, design, and especially beauty, of God reflected in our gender and sexuality?” That just as His creation—light and water, animals and flowers, stars and planets—our gender and sexuality mirror something absolutely gorgeous about our Father's love and character. This is a tough vision to convey, when most of us have only been wounded in these areas and we're surrounded daily by the ugliness of it all. And yet we're giving it a respectable attempt. Did you know that WGA speaks in Church services, Sunday school classes, Bible studies and youth groups? We'd love to come and share with you what we're learning about these things, not in a gloomy or sugary sort of way, but hopefully with something that's true and beautiful. Please give us a call.



Dreading Valentines Day?

By Mary Heathman

Valentines Day, the annual celebration of romance, serves as a catalyst this year for me to remember that God has a purpose, even for singles, in the powerful pull toward special relationships that is experienced by most men and women. For those of us who are experiencing a culturally driven heightened awareness of our singleness, and it seems everyone around us is coupled-up, it might be a good time to think a little higher, a little deeper about what God's purposes might be for the universally celebrated phenomenon sometimes called, "the urge to merge."

"The urge to merge" is most often understood to describe just one aspect of attraction—the sexual energy that propels two people to come together in a sexual relationship. But I believe that God's purposes are so much broader, so much so that it includes all relationships. Over the years of ministry as I sit with people who are inquiring of the Lord about their longings and desires, and am aware of my own ambivalence about being single and what God's purposes might be for the powerful movement of attraction within me (that doesn't seem to dissipate with age, I might add!), I have come to understand that 1) God has a purpose for relationships, all relationships; 2) we can cooperate with God's purposes individually; and 3) We can help one another, in fact that is God's primary design, that we should help one another grow up in truth and grace and wisdom, including in how

we approach our relationships with one another.

I would like to offer a few thoughts that I hope will help seekers of God's purposes in their journey toward His purposes and provision in their lives. I believe that the purpose for our existence is to know and be known by God and one another, and to enjoy those relationships forever. In support of that statement, let's take a look at some scripture.

First, let's take a look at Jesus' two commandments for some insight as to our purpose in life. As we read the scripture (from three of the gospels: Matt 22:36-38; Mark 12:29-31; and Luke 10:26-28), we find that Jesus made an astounding statement. After affirming that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and that the second was to love our neighbor as ourselves, Jesus said, "upon these two commandments hangs the whole of the rest of the law."

According to Jesus, the relational commandments, loving God and loving each other is foundational to fulfilling his entire purpose for us. If we loved God and one another as he has said, then we would fulfill all that is to be fulfilled.

As far as his purposes for the fulfillment of our hearts desires, the ultimate satisfaction of our deepest longings what does the scripture say about such specifics?

Jesus prayer for the disciples in John,
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Chapter 17:

vs 11b - ...protect them in the power of your name, that they may be one as we are one.

vs 13b - ...I say these things,...so that they may have the full measure of joy within them.

vs 20b - that all of them may be one, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (It is our relationship with one another in Christ that is to cause people to believe!)

vs 22 - I have given them the glory you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me..

All of this talk of closeness comes near to the heart of our yearnings, don't you think? The desire for relationship (no matter how skewed it has become) at its root is a God -given drive for a purpose, not a side issue or a curse of the enemy! My corrupt expression of my desire to become one with people, cannot change God's original intent for it. (and yours can't either) What you and I intended for evil, God intended for good and He still does, I believe.

Joel 2:21-27 particularly, "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten."

I believe that God's purpose is to fulfill us, to complete us.

Phil 1:6 - "being confident of

this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

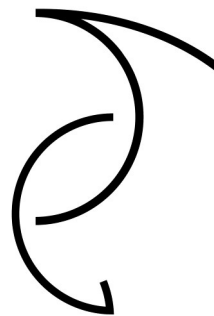
Luke 6:21 - "blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied."

Ps 57:2 - "... God who fulfills his purpose for me."

Ps 145:18-19 - "The Lord is near to all who call on him. . . . in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them."

Ps 37:4 - "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."

So then, why aren't we fulfilled yet? And WHY DOES IT SEEM SO INTENSE AND DIFFICULT? That's another teaching, for another time. For now, let us draw close to the God who has a purpose for our relationships and in Whom our deepest desires and longing find their source and their fulfillment.





December

In Review

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

December 25th: Merry Christmas!

Thursday Night Group

December 1st: 18 People

December 8th: No Group

December 15th: 24 People

December 22nd: No Group

December 29th: 30 People

Orientation meeting: 3 new people

January

And Beyond

January 7th: Survivors of Abuse group begins. Please pray with us for the 6 people in this group

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

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

February 4th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00—9:00 AM at the WGA office

February 28-29th: WGA will be presenting a seminar in Casper Wyoming

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

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