



A Measure of Grace

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Self-Protection through Contempt

by Roger Jones

This month, I have continued to lead a study through Dan Allender's book *The Wounded Heart* with a group of men and women participating in our group for Survivors of Abuse. There are 6 of us in the group, and we will meet for the next few months. Please be praying for this group as we delve into some painful areas of our lives and ask the question, "How is my past abuse affecting me today?" Our goal is never to dredge up the past in order to relive it and stay "stuck" in it, but rather to prayerfully consider the ways in which we allow abuse (sexual, emotional, verbal, and/or spiritual) to limit or control our current relationships.

One of the chapters in Allender's book is "Deflection: The Clash with Contempt." In it, he explores how those who have experienced sexual abuse often protect themselves through the use of deflection, specifically in the form of contempt. He says:

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Contempt is condemnation, an attack against a perceived cause of shame. The attack is laced with hatred, venom, and icy cruelty, though it can be as insidious as a warm smile and gentle rebuke. The condemnation can be against the person whose eyes are penetrating our façade or against the element of our being that is the cause of the shameful revelation.¹

like, “These people are mean.” Over time, this changed to, “There must be something wrong with me, because I keep hearing the same message over and over.” This wasn’t overt sexual abuse, but it certainly was abusive and harmful. This message affected me deeply in several ways. I felt fear and shame every time I walked past a group of guys, I began to dress and act in ways that would draw the least amount of attention to me, and my self image/esteem was very low.

While Allender’s text is specifically written to those who have been victims of sexual abuse, contempt can be a response to any type of abuse. Being belittled or humiliated causes shame. Some internalize the shame with self-contempt; “There must be something wrong with me,” is the message. Others turn their contempt outwards, “There must be something wrong with you.” Sometimes we do both.

While Allender’s text is specifically written to those who have been victims of sexual abuse, contempt can be a response to any type of abuse.

I can certainly relate to both internalizing contempt and its outward expression. As a young boy, as early as 5 and 6 years old, I began hearing a recurring message from my peers. I was called a “sissy” and a “fag” more times than I can count. This started before I even knew what the words meant and continued through college. At first, my reaction was something

I experienced other-directed contempt as well. I was getting many mixed messages about my gender and my sexuality. The consensus seemed to be that I wasn’t a real man or that something was wrong with me. As I said above, I had self-contempt and shame. At the same time, I began to have contempt for others who seemed to fit the

stereotypes of what “real” men were like. I wasn’t simply disinterested in football and other sports; I hated football and I thought something was wrong with anyone who enjoyed it. I grew up in a community where most of the men were involved in farming and/or ranching. I wasn’t interested in either. Rather than an opportunity to enjoy people who had differing interests, this became another way I was different, and I was teased more. I began to have hostile/contemptuous

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feelings towards small town/rural community life. People had contempt for what I liked, so I responded in the same way.

Contempt is a poison in our souls. Rather than relying on who and what God says we are, we are giving our abusers the power to tell us who and what we are, regardless of how long ago the abuse took place. In the examples I shared above, I was responding to painful circumstances in the only way I knew how. Now, 20+ years later, I still find myself struggling with my self-image, particularly when I am around men who are my peers. I am still afraid that I will be verbally assaulted at any moment, even though this hasn't occurred for a long time. As I have matured and felt more safe, I have actually grown to enjoy watching football on TV (playing it is another story). As I have learned to release the holds that my past experiences have had on me, I have become more able to freely explore what I like and dislike free from all those negative messages that have haunted me for years.

In closing, I'd like to share another quotation of Allender:

Whatever its form or function, one thing can be assumed. *Contempt hinders the work of God.* It directs our sight away from our deepest longings and deflects the focus from our depravity and need for a Savior to an attack against our own or

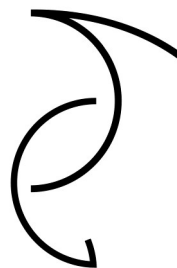
another's dignity.²

When we continue to live in ways that are self-protective, long after our need for self-protection is gone, we are cooperating with the enemy's purposes for us. Rather than being fully alive and living out the beauty and joy that God offers to us, we limit what we will receive of those gifts by living with closed hearts and minds.

If you are looking to read or study more about the effects of abuse, I highly recommend Allender's book. It is a difficult read, because it deals with raw and painful issues. If you choose to read it, I recommend doing so with another person or in a group. It is helpful to process the feelings that the book stirs up in the company of fellow wounded ones.

¹Dr. Dan B Allender, *The Wounded Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1990), 61.

²Allender, 71.



Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Do Overs

My daffodils just poked through the snow. It's mid-February and spring is coming. I know the portent of these little green sprouts; foreshadowing life out of frozen, barren ground; the distant drum beat of a great party of abundance that's on its way. In my mind's eye I can picture the riot of color and growth that my flower beds will barely contain in a few short months.

My friend just had her baby. Out of the ashes of a devastating first marriage this tiny little beacon of hope and love filled her lungs with new air and let her voice be heard on the earth for the first time. She is an unexpected renewal, a gift of life springing up out of the barren ground of grief and pain.

A man died last week. At his funeral, his widow told of the day in his mid-life that he came home from work and said, "What am I doing with my life? All I really want to do is talk to people about Jesus." And that is exactly what he spent the second half of his life doing. The 1,000 people at his funeral were testimony to the impact his second season of life had had on



them; it was a renewed season of riotous love. These are signs for me, reminders of what is true, what is possible, what is as well as what is to come.

The heart of the message of this Gospel is one of "do-over." Children, who don't perform as they had hoped in a game (and if they can convince their friends), can have a "do-over" to go back and try again as if they hadn't messed up the first time. It doesn't take long in the growing up process to realize that "do-overs" outside of childish games are much harder to come by; in fact, almost impossible.

Do-over is at the core of the Gospel: re-birth, forgiveness, grace, a

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fresh start, life rising out of death. But this Gospel message doesn't pretend that the hatred and sadness and despair never happened; it isn't a vivisection of our past life that leaves us with a moronic smile on our faces. It is a Goodness so great that it covers and encompasses the past, bringing new shoots of life out of its dead ground.

For years I struggled with the passage in Revelation that speaks of the New Jerusalem that replaces this first earth and heaven. The perfection of our complete unity with God is described in beautiful language, and then it says of that time that God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4). This sounded like a lobotomy to me. The history of mankind is riddled with horror and injustices that cannot be simply forgotten, that should not be forgotten. My personal sorrows and griefs are testimony to the violations of what is true and right—violations I have experienced, and that I have perpetrated. But I have been introduced to an idea that enlarges my perspective. Rather than diminishing the sorrows and horrors of this human experience, I am challenged to stretch my understanding of Goodness to such a great radius that all present suffer-

ings might pale and be made right in its shadowless light. I think of my friend laboring through the night to have her baby. I've done that too. In the midst of the pain of childbirth I never thought anything could be worth the struggle, until . . . until I saw my baby's tiny, radiant face; until a goodness beyond my imagining filled me with unutterable joy and all was right. (In fact it was so right that I committed to doing it two more times!)

God in his love labored for us. The Goodness of his Gospel is not a negation of justice or minimalizing of pain; rather, it is the glorious incorporation and redemption of it. Isaiah says it beautifully in chapter 16:4 & 5: "The oppressor will come to an end, and destruction will cease; the aggressor will vanish from the land. In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it-- one from the house of David -- one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness."

In love a throne has been and will be established; flowers, babies, lovers . . . the proof in small pictures constantly nudges us towards hope in the vastness of the great Goodness of God.

God's Provision: Rebooting the Series

By Mary Heathman

Five months ago, I started a series, *God's Provision: Adequate, or . . . ?* For various reasons, all rooted in my procrastination and inconsistency (that's a story for another time), the series has been knocked out of the newsletter lineup three out of five months. This month, I am picking it up again, starting with a revisit of key concepts, with a hope for wrapping it up in the next couple of months.

The impetus for the series was a recurring theme in the lives of Christ followers wrestling with mixed feelings as we wait on God for His provision. In August 2011, I had read several articles that troubled me—they seemed to be complaining in ways that I sometimes do. In my first article, I identified a pattern that described a thought process:

"In my reading this past week, several times the authors seemed to follow a pattern something like this: 1) Identify and discuss a need or desire that currently isn't being met, 2) explore what God's provision might be for that need or desire, and 3) decide whether God's provision is adequate. From that point, the conversations take different directions depending on whether the author has decided

God's provision is adequate or not.

"If God's provision is considered adequate, the conversation almost always moves to an exploration of how to manage oneself in light of having not yet experienced God's provision. Questions are considered like: how one might live with unmet needs and desires while waiting on God's provision; how to discover if one is blind to God's provision because it doesn't match one's expectations; or a myriad of other questions that arise out of an honest examination of the incongruity between one's belief that "God's grace is sufficient to meet all our needs," and the stark reality of one's experience of yet unrealized provision. It has been my experience that this direction, though painful, has the result of aligning one more intimately with God and His purposes.

"If, on the other hand, God's provision is concluded to be inadequate, the conversation moves quickly to an exploration of how one might "help" God to meet one's needs, or even to turn from God's provision as irrelevant in "this particular need or desire," and pursue other resources that might have something to offer. The outcome of this direction seems to be less painful, at least in the short

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-term; in fact, it promises fulfillment in a variety of ways, but has been my experience that one's relationship with God suffers. When I turn from God and look elsewhere for provision that is independent of Him, then distance is created and intimacy with God diminishes."

In that first article, I also stated my bias right up front and my own failure to live up to it:

"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." "I am not always at this point of faith and commitment to wait for God's provision. . . . I am currently chafing a bit under the discipline of waiting in some areas of my own life."

The second article, *Abraham, Sarah, and I*, explored the story of Abraham and Sarah, and how Abraham, a man of great faith, was such an inspiration for me as, in obedience to God's call, he *"left his home with all his family and set out for an unknown destination (Read about this in Gen.12:1; Heb.11:8; Acts 7:2-6)."* AND, we looked at how Abraham while he was on his journey, sought shortcuts rather than waiting on God to provide what was needed. (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 my-*

self 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."

The consequences were great, of course, for Abraham and Sarah's detouring to their own plans, but that wasn't the point of my focus in this series, Rather, I want to point out that Abraham was still called a man of great faith, held up as an example in the book of Hebrews. He was called, "friend of God."

I wrapped up the second article with the statement: *"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). This 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."***

May we all return again and again and again to a focus on the Lord's provision to the exclusion of all shortcuts or distractions. Lord help us to follow you well in this!



January In Review

January 7th: Survivors of Abuse group started

January 15th: Roger spoke at Celebration Community Church

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

February And Beyond

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

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

March 3rd: WGA Activity— Games

May 5th: Family and Friends Gathering. Stay tuned for more info!

May 26th: WGA Picnic - come join us to celebrate 26 years of ministry, plus we will be honoring Scott Kingry for his 20 year of service. More info soon!

Thursday Night Group

January 5th: 32 people

January 12th: 37 people

January 19th: 37 people

January 26th: 37 people

Orientation meeting - 3 new people

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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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