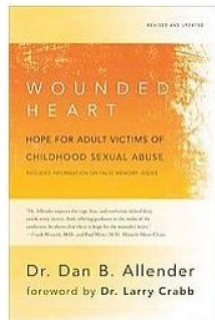




A Measure of Grace

April 2012
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Repentance for Self-Protection *by Roger Jones*

In January, I began leading a book study through *The Wounded Heart* by Dan Allender. This book was written for those who have experienced sexual abuse and has been used as the text for WGA's Survivors of Abuse (SOA) for many years. I have read it before, but this time through the book has been "sinking in" for me personally in a way that it hasn't before. Even though I have led this group several times, I continue to benefit as a participant as well.

In the chapter, "Repentance," Allender makes some significant points defining his topic:

Repentance is an internal shift in our perceived source of life. It is recognizing that our self-protective means to avoiding hurt have not ushered us into real living (the reckless abandon to God that ultimately leads to a deep sense of wholeness and joy) or to purposeful, powerful relating.¹

Repentance flows from the energy of being stunned, silent, and without excuse for the harm we've done to ourselves and others and for breaking the heart of God.²

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Allender's book is written *for* victims of sexual abuse. Therefore, I should interject here that he is **not** suggesting that abuse victims need to repent because they were abused or for their participation in abuse. He is quite clear about the fact that abuse is never the victim's fault. Rather, what he is referring to is that we need to repent of the self-protective ways in which we have responded to abuse. For example, if a person was abused as a child, he or she may decide never to trust again. While this reaction is understandable, it will not enable one to live the full life (the abundant life) that God wants to provide. We are *not* called to repent for being wounded, but rather from living in self-protective ways that limit our ability to love and be loved by God and others.

As I mentioned above, the SOA group has been affecting me deeply. It is tempting for me to minimize the abuse I experienced as a child, because when compared to the horrors that others have suffered, the incidents that occurred in my life seem small. And yet, as I read about the effects of abuse, I see those consequences operating in my life. Abuse can vary by degree, but all degrees of abuse have similar consequences.

In my childhood, I had a handful of sexual experiences with other boys. Most, but not all, of these were initiated by boys who were either older or whom I perceived to have some kind of power/influence over me. I was introduced to oral sex by a neighbor my age when I was about 8 years old. An older boy showed me pornography with the

goal of getting me to remove my clothing and pose like the women in the magazine. In separate incidents, a couple of older boys in my neighborhood exposed themselves to me. At the same time these things were happening, I was also struggling to connect with other boys at school. I was sensitive and was not athletic. Something about my demeanor elicited rejection and name calling from the other boys my age.

I was making decisions based upon all of this abuse from both my peers and older boys. Men did not seem safe to me. They either wanted to hurt me or use me. I would do everything in my power to distance myself and remain safe.

I needed, and still need, to repent of this attitude and fearful way of living. The decisions I made all those years ago make sense to me. But those ways of relating are self-protective and do not allow God to have access to me *through other people*, the most obvious way He wants to bring healing into my life. For an adult who is no longer in those

abusive situations, continuing to rely on an old coping strategy of distancing myself from men is unhelpful.

Self-protection is also self-reliance. As a child, I learned that the safest way for me to live was to avoid any situation where I might be subjected to ridicule or abuse. If I couldn't physically avoid a situation, then I would emotionally distance myself. It wasn't safe to be myself, so I shut down or became who I thought others wanted me to be. At a young age, when I was especially vulnerable to those whom I perceived

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We are *not* called to repent for being wounded, but rather from living in self-protective ways that limit our ability to love and be loved by God and others.



This article originally appeared in the WGA newsletter in July of 1998. Please keep Mary in your prayers as she is participating in the Friends World Conference in Kenya, returning to the U.S. on May 3rd.

Once upon a long while ago, I came across a book titled, Me, Obey Him? The book was about the marriage relationship, and the author acknowledged the difficulty of living up to her marriage vows. After a few years married to "Prince Charming," she wondered, "How can a smart person like I be expected to obey a man as obviously flawed as he?"

The author was asking the same question that had been haunting me for months. But my difficulty was not with my relationship with my husband. Not yet mature enough to face that issue, I was asking the question on a far more rudimentary level, "How can a sophisticated woman such as I be expected to obey a God whose existence can't even be proven?"

Dorothy, my spiritual mom, was a wise woman and made no attempt to convince me of God's existence, nor that I should obey Him. She appealed to the explorer and experimenter she knew me to be and made a simple suggestion, "Why don't you try it and see how it works?" Thus began an amazing journey with God. I experimented with obedience and found out that it works!

Like Mikey in the cereal commercial, I tried it and I liked it. It was not easy;

Obedience

by Mary Heathman

God is an exacting Master. But the effort proved worthwhile. I learned that He is never wrong, His timing is perfect, and He provides me with both the will and the means to obey Him.

Obedience to such an all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever present God yields such benefits that I want to obey Him always. And the converse is true - disobedience costs so much that I never want to rebel again. (Please note here that I do not claim to have this down pat, but I do yearn passionately for obedience to be the overriding goal of my life, and when I disobey, grief comes quickly.)

I haven't always had such an important question settled in my head and heart. In fact, I came into the kingdom kicking and screaming with my independence clutched firmly in my clenched fists. The Lord put me through a training process to teach me obedience.

This is so with all of us, it seems. Even Jesus, when responding to his parents' distress, did not claim his rightful position, but "went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them." The Scripture then tells us that "he grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:51-52). I believe Jesus was trained up into obedience, just as we must be.

My basic training as a new Christian was very clear and made sense to me, so I eagerly jumped at every new chance to obey. When I learned of God's way to discipline my children, I switched without a whimper, and life

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

by Nancy Hicks



Plan D

Matthew 17:27 "...go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them (tax collectors) for my tax and yours." (Jesus to Peter)

Doesn't this sound more like something from a fairy tale than from the Bible? What an odd, random way for God to provide. I'm sure Peter had caught thousands of fish, and I'm willing to bet he had never found a coin in any of their mouths. This had to really mess with his head.

I think God likes to mess with our heads. I think He takes great delight in reminding us that "(His) thoughts are not (our) thoughts, neither are (our) ways (his) ways" (Isaiah 55). He loves to use the "foolish things of the world to shame the wise" (I Cor 1:27). But He does it simply because it helps us to live the relaxed lives of trusting children who don't have to have it all figured out. It is for our sakes.

I had an experience along these lines a few years ago that mercifully "messed with my head": We had a payment coming due. An important payment. It was early May, the payment was due June 1 and we were broke. We had been here before and I knew the drill: let my blood pressure slowly rise, get less and less sleep, become more and more frantic in my thinking and obsessing and strategizing, and finally build to a crescendo of head-spinning, meltdown rage and panic (these were great times for our marriage). I was as tired of this drama as

everyone around me was. So I decided to take a risk.

"Be anxious for nothing," says Paul in Philippians 4, "but instead let God know what you want and need and do it with a thankful heart. Then His peace that makes no rational sense will guard your heart and your mind in Christ" (hugely paraphrased by me). I told God that I'm desperate enough to test this "theory." Every morning in May I got up and talked to God about my anxiety and fear and helplessness and how much I wanted to be able to pay this bill. As we approached June 1 I got creative in my suggestions for God: "Plan A: If we get a check today, I can get it deposited and send in the payment before June 1"; "Plan B: If we got cash today, I could get it deposited and send a check"; "Plan C: if we got enough cash for the bill and overnight delivery, I could still make the payment on time" . . .

June 1 dawned with no money. I was crushed. I felt betrayed. Then suddenly I thought, "there's always a 2 week grace period for this bill! That's what God is doing! He just wanted to stretch me to what I thought was the end. Everything is going to be OK!" I started the 14 day deadline with infused faith and understanding. But as the days ticked by and there was still no money, I found myself desperately suggesting plans to God again. Plan A passed, plan B passed, plan C passed, again . . . it was June 14 and still nothing had changed.

I woke up spitting mad. My prayer that morning sounded something like, "Well! What a great plan! I didn't

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feel as anxious as usual getting here, but there is still no money! What was the point?" About 10 am the phone rang. It was the creditor. The very polite woman said they had noticed that our bill was overdue and "wanted to check and see if everything was OK." "Everything is not OK," I told her. "I know the bill is overdue and I still don't have the money to pay it." She said, "Do you think you'll have the money by September? Because we could resume your payments then." Excuse me? Long pause . . . I said, "yes, I think we could catch up the payments in September." She said, "No, I mean you wouldn't have any more payments until September and we'll tack these three payments onto the end of the loan. Does that work, or would October be better?"

Perhaps this is commonplace in the bill collecting world, but I had never

heard of anything like it. I hung up the phone and as I sat in stunned silence, the words "Plan D" passed through my mind. Followed quickly by the thought, "My ways are not your ways . . ."

A "grownup" learns to look at a situation rationally: pros & cons, income & expenses, appreciation & depreciation. None of this "peace that makes no sense" or "magical thinking." However, for a child, what could be better than a magic fish with money its mouth? As a child, the need doesn't have to be nearly as important as the anticipation of the mind-blowing way of provision.

"But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Luke 18:17

(Repentance continued from page 2)

had power over me, avoidance may have been the best solution. *It was also about control.* If I could simply control my environment, I would be safe, and I would be taking care of myself.

I do not intend to heap more guilt and shame on myself, or on you because of the choices we have made to be safe. At this point in our lives, we need to take a look at our circumstances. If we are, in fact, safe, we no longer need to live as victims. God has more for us. Will you open yourself up to receive the blessings He has to offer you?

True repentance admits helplessness; penance presumes the ability to make amends on one's own Penance is a payback; repentance is a plea for mercy.³

Below is a prayer of repentance that fits

for me. Feel free to make it your own as you ponder how self-protection continues to operate in your life. I invite you ask God into the process with you - to change your heart and help you live the abundant life.

Lord, I repent me for keeping myself distant from other people. I have been wounded by others, but I continue to wound myself by using these old techniques to keep people at bay. I need Your mercy and Your grace to cover the damage I have done to myself and to others by refusing to trust. Please help me to trust that You will bring good people into my life though whom I can experience Your love.

¹ Dr. Dan B. Allender, *The Wounded Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1990), 202.

² Allender, 204.

³ Allender, 205.

(Obedience continued from page 3)

became much more peaceful at home. As I read about and put into practice the principle of tithing, the joy of giving took root and still gives me pleasure to this day. Disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer and fasting became habits, as I took seriously Paul's admonition to do what he does.

I believe that the Lord puts all of us through basic training, and the standards and the process are the same for everybody. As in the Army, where all new recruits learn to march in unison, become familiar with their weapons, clean everything in sight, and submit to authority, all Christians must learn the basics I described above. And the results are usually dramatic and immediate. For me, the basic disciplines made life a lot easier to live, so I welcomed their place in my life. I knew that God's love wasn't conditional, based on my obedience, so I felt free to choose to obey. Less clear and welcome were disciplines that came later.

Of particular difficulty for me was the need for swift and unquestioning obedience. I remember being angry at God when I read of Moses' punishment for disobeying God. After an arduous and thankless task of herding an unruly people around in the desert, Moses was denied entrance into the promised land because he hit a rock instead of speaking to it (Num 20:7-12). This seemed to me to be unjust punishment, and I told the Lord so.

Then, my fourteen year old stepson did the same thing to me that Moses had done to the Lord. I had said, "I will be back in about an hour and a half, and I

want you to clean the kitchen while I am gone." I arrived home only to face a kitchen in the same shape as I had left it and was furious with my son. **He, however, had an attitude!** After all, he had cleaned the bathroom, the living and dining room, and in his estimation, I was unfair in my judgment of his disobedience.

But the fact was that my son didn't know my plans. I needed the kitchen clean, so that I could put groceries away and prepare dinner. The housekeeper was coming the next day and would clean the other rooms. The only thing I asked him to do, he chose not to do. He was like Henry Ford; he had a better idea. Only it wasn't.

As we cleaned the kitchen together, I lectured my son on the importance of doing what he was asked, when he was asked. In the midst of my torrent of words, the Lord interrupted my thoughts, "And so it was for Moses and it is for you as well." In that moment, I was humbled and began to trust that God has a bigger picture than I,

and that his instructions are always right, whether I think they make sense or not. And especially good to know is, when I think I have a better idea than God's, I can be sure that I don't!

I remember one particularly frustrating episode in my Advanced Individual Training (that's the military's next phase of instruction after basic training). One of my part-time jobs had been delivering tax returns in downtown Denver. Parking was a problem, and I was in and out of the offices so fast that I learned to park in alleys, at expired meters, loading

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***When I am
obedient, it is better
than anything else
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in the long run.***

(Obedience continued from page 6)

zones and the like. This fudging on the parking laws became a habit that I indulged in even when I wasn't working.

One day, I pulled up in front of a building, got out of the car and was standing at the front door, when I had a thought, "You didn't feed the parking meter." It was five minutes to six, not a meter person in sight, and I already was closer to the office than to my car. I said, "This is ridiculous."

A question came to mind, "How can you be entrusted with big things, when you can't be faithful with small things?" I still hesitated, knowing that my eternal destiny was not at risk if I ignored the thought, but I finally hung my head and trudged back to my car to get a nickel. Of course, I didn't have any change in my wallet and had to rummage in the bottom of my purse to find only a quarter. By the time I was in front of the meter it was one minute till six. I paid a quarter to park for a minute! It still seemed ridiculous to me, and I told the Lord so.

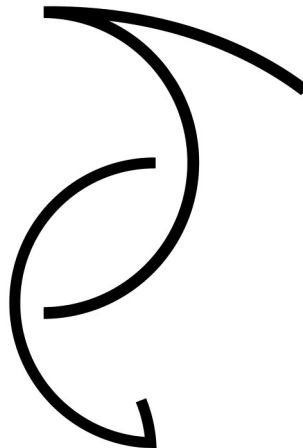
Then I remembered a story in 1Samuel 15. Saul was under instructions to destroy all of the Amelekites, including their livestock. As the story unfolds, we find Saul sparing the life of the Amelekite king and keeping all the best of the livestock. When confronted later by the prophet, Samuel, Saul said something like, "I destroyed everybody except for the king, and I only kept out the livestock at my troops' insistence, so we could sacrifice them to the Lord." In other words, Saul had done almost everything God had said, and even most of what he didn't do was for God's benefit!

It was at this point that Samuel said, "Has the Lord as much pleasure in your burnt offerings and sacrifices as in your obedience? Obedience is far better than sacrifice. He is much more interested in your listening to him than in your offer-

ing the fat of rams to him. ²³ For rebellion is as bad as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as worshiping idols. And now because you have rejected the word of Jehovah, he has rejected you from being king" (1Samuel 15:22-23). Saul lost his kingship because of his disobedience, for what I am likely to call "fudging."

When I rebel and am stubborn, this is as bad as witchcraft and worshiping idols. When I am obedient, it is better than anything else I do for God. And obedience has the added benefit of being good for me in the long run.

So, ***I am glad that I am being trained to obey God.*** I pray that we shall all confess our disobedience sooner and sooner, knowing that our forgiveness is assured. Then we can let the Lord change our hearts and make us more and more obedient. ***It is always better to obey!***





March In Review

March 3rd: WGA Activity—Games!

March 21st: WGA Board Meeting—
please keep our board members in our
prayers

Thursday Night Group

March 1st: 26 people

March 8th: 33 people

March 15th: 35 people

March 22nd: 36 people

March 29th: 39 people

**Orientation meeting : 3 new
people**

April And Beyond

**April 20th: WGA presenting at Denver Street
School**

April 25th: Administrative Professionals Day—
thanks Nancy for all you do to keep the WGA office
running smoothly!

**May 5th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00—
9:00 AM at the WGA office**

**May 5th: Family and Friends Gathering. See insert
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. See insert for
more info.**

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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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"Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!"

A presentation and discussion of the influence of siblings on emotional development.



**Join WGA Family and Friends for
dinner and dialogue**

When: Saturday May 5th, 2012


Time: 5:30-9:00 pm

Where: Steve and Jill Huston's Home
16824 E Lake Pl, Aurora CO 80016

- Main dish will be provided
- Please bring a side dish to share

RSVP to Jill@wheregraceabounds.org by 4/28/12


WGA Summer Picnic

Join us as we  celebrate all that God has done through
Where Grace Abounds since 1986.

***We will be honoring Scott Kingry
for his 20 year anniversary on staff (1992-2012).***

Date: Saturday, May 26, 2012 from 11:00 am - 4:00 pm

Location: Alamo Placita Park, 300 Emerson St.; Denver CO 80218*


We will be having a picnic potluck. Please bring your
favorite dish to share according to the list below.

If your *last* name begins with:

A-G Please bring an Appetizer

H-L Please bring a Side Dish

M-S Please bring a Salad

T-Z Please bring a Dessert

Fried chicken and beverages will be provided

Lunch will be served beginning at noon


There will be an opportunity to make a donation
to Where Grace Abounds.

*** Prints of Scott Kingry's artwork will be available. ***

All proceeds will support Where Grace Abounds.

Please **RSVP** by May 24th to

Nancy at 303-863-7757 or nancy@wheregraceabounds.org.

- *Please bring a blanket or chair to sit on*
- *There is a playground area for the kids!*
- *No alcoholic beverages or glass allowed in the park*

*In the event of inclement weather, celebration will be held at the
WGA Offices at 1532 Emerson Street.

