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A Measure of Grace

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More on Repentance from Self~Protection *by Roger Jones*

In last month's newsletter, I discussed the topic of self-protection. While understandable when a history of abuse is present, ultimately self-protection hinders the work that God wants to do in our lives. Whereas self-protective behaviors may serve a purpose when we are in unsafe circumstances (such as ongoing abuse), continuing to live as if we are victims, when we are not, is unhealthy. We need not repent for abuse that was out of our control. However, continuing behaviors that limit personal and spiritual growth need to be released. I encourage you to read the April newsletter for more information on this. It can be found on the WGA website. This month, I would like to return to the topic of repentance and share with you a few additional points from Dan Allender's book *The Wounded Heart* as well as a few of my own thoughts.

Allender discusses the difference between repentance and penance in his text. "Repentance
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decreases shame, increases passion, and welcomes restoration. Penance increases contempt, decreases life, and resists involvement.”¹ This distinction is important. Often it seems that when we are repenting, we are actually trying to make amends on our own. While some type of amends or restitution may be part of the healing process, this is not repentance. We must accept that we have hurt ourselves and others through our self-protection. We may or may not be able to make things right and see relationships fully restored, as those we have hurt may be unwilling to accept restoration. True repentance hopes for the best. Penance says, “Look at everything I have done to make things right! You are selfish for not forgiving and forgetting.”

Allender points to three internal shifts of repentance: 1) a refusal to be dead, 2) a refusal to mistrust, and 3) a refusal to despise passion. I will let him describe each and try to unpack them a little as well.

A Refusal to Be Dead

“To live with a dead soul makes deep sense to an abuse victim. It seems natural and reasonable. It numbs the ravages of the past abuse, it quiets the demons of contempt, and it simplifies current relationships by destroying the desire for more.

Deadness, however, is the choice to rob others of our God-given humanness. It dehumanizes relationships, making the response to oth-

ers robotic and mechanical. Most of all, it is an assault against the Creator God, who is the Author of life. To live as a dead being before the living God is to say that death is preferable to life with Him. In essence, the choice to be dead is the choice to turn one’s back on the Author of life, to deny Him the opportunity to touch our lives deeply and to use us fully according to His good purposes.”²

Living as if we are dead keeps the pain at bay. Unfortunately, it also keeps away joy. Shutting down the negative feelings that seem to haunt us and leaving them unaddressed robs us of the ability to experience happiness and joy. When someone asks how I am doing, do I really even know? By refusing to face into our pain so that we may heal, we choose death over life.

Repentance and movement towards life in this situation will look and sound something like this: “Lord, I

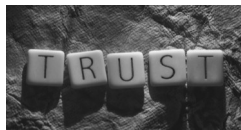
have been hurt by other people, specifically _____. I know I need to let others close to me so that I can more fully live the life you intend for me. Please help me to let down my guard and to face the pain I need to address so that I can freely give and receive love. I refuse to live as though I am dead any longer. Please breathe life into my soul.”

A Refusal to Mistrust

“Repentance in the area of trust is difficult to explain. The opposite of mistrust would naturally seem to

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***Do I want
to see my
abuser suffer
or do I want to
see him/her
become the
person God
created him/her
to be?***



God's Provision : For WGA

by Mary Heathman

Since I started the series of articles on the adequacy of God's provision, we have had two major holidays, been through Lent and Easter, and I have traveled to Africa and back. It seems like such a long time ago that I first presented my questions – the oft-considered questions among people of faith, “God will provide, . . . won't He; . . . will it really come in time; . . . will it really be enough?”

In a previous article, I wrapped up some thoughts about Abraham's faith and God's provision for him by saying, *“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 . . .***

After considering the life of Joseph in the context of God's provision, I wrote, *“Is God's provision adequate? Yes, ultimately! In the meantime, can I immerse my mind and heart in reading about His provision for the Israelites, for the believers who have gone before, for the saints who testify to His goodness? Can I trust in that witness while I wait? I think I can. Will I? I think I will, ultimately, with God's help! Praise be to the Lord, Jehovah-Jireh, our Provider!”* BUT TODAY . . . !

Today WGA is at the bottom of the barrel—nothing in reserves—still on target

for our projections, because we projected losses for the first quarter, but still a worry. Because we started last year with more on hand than this year, and the steady decline of general fund giving has left us closer to the edge than we have been in a long time.

And my faith quivers—what does it mean? “Is God taking us a different direction and we haven't noticed it (but we have been praying big time and listening together, surely we would have discerned a major re-direction!)” “What if we run out before mortgage and payroll is due. . . Should we put salaries on hold?”

“What about debt—we never have borrowed for operating expenses—is that an option, or would that be abandoning our faith and looking outside of God's provision?”

It is truly frustrating to find that I can think deeply about God's provision, research and study the Word, pray individually and with others, write articles that make great statements of faith and commitment, travel around the world and share the stories of God's faithfulness to those who earnestly seek Him, and then come home only to receive the news of our financial situation with a fearful heart and weak, trembling spirit! I find that I, like Elijah, who ran in fear of his life right after he and the Lord had defeated the prophets of Baal (Elijah 18 and 19) in a massive demonstration of God's power, am wondering again, so where are you now, Lord?

I am really embarrassed and disappointed in myself. As the Apostle Paul wrote

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Reflections on 20 Years of Ministry: A Zillion Grateful Thank Yous

By Scott Kingry

Twenty Years?! Where in the world does the time go? After attending Where Grace Abounds for 5 years, I joined the staff in 1992. I was 29 then, fresh faced and naive with an enthusiasm that would make Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm nauseated—ready to tackle the world in the name Jesus! The reflection in the mirror these days is a little more gray, tired and plump. I have a lot more battle scars, and hopefully my idealism has been replaced by a bit of wisdom & compassion, a greater acceptance of my strengths and flaws and a deeper daily reliance on the Lord. Roger asked if I would write some historical references to my twenty years of ministry within the WGA community. To mark this occasion I'd rather not talk about myself but extend many well deserved thanks to those who have supported and loved me these past couple of decades.

The Where Grace Abounds Staff

Thank you Mary, Roger and Nancy for being a constant in the “daily-ness” of life and ministry. Grace does truly abound, along with wise counsel, discipleship, ongoing challenge and butt kicking when badly needed. I truly love and value each of you and the essential laughter when the heaviness of pain and bro-

kenness feel overwhelming. I've been part of many amazing and creative “staff teams” over the years and can honestly say that each of these folks has generously contributed in specific ways to who I find myself to be today.

Leadership Team and WGA Board

My thoughts are flooding fondly with the faces of the 50-60ish people who have served as volunteers and leaders over the last 20 years, or have helped steward the ministry by being part of our Board of Directors: retreats, bad skits, fun parties, sorrowful seasons and impactful ministry all pleasantly come to mind. Some of us began together as the 20-somethings who drove the staff crazy back then (sorry, Mary), but somehow we all grew up just enough to become the leaders who were the stabilizing factor around the ministry for several years (I'm glad to still know most of you in this later season of life!). Our current team brilliantly carries on this tradition. As the Program Director of WGA, I find the expanded ministry you all bring only makes my job shine brighter. What an honor to serve alongside you all. You are dear friends.

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Corona Presbyterian

Thank you to my “church family” at Corona Presbyterian for making me feel accepted and loved every time I walk through the doors. Thanks, too, for being the first church to support me as a local missionary when I began this odd career. We are grateful to you all for letting us take over most of the building and classrooms every Thursday Night for the last 2 decades (which I’m sure has had some trying moments). I’ve been proud to represent Corona, and the stand it has taken, at many of the PCUSA General Assemblies where I had the opportunity to share my story and discuss sexuality from a biblical perspective.

WGA Group Members

You are the main reason I get up every morning! I’m imagining (with a smile on my face) the hundreds of men and women who have bravely walked through the doors of Where Grace Abounds while I have worked here. I’m humbled by your constant courage and tenacity, no matter what part of the journey you are currently in. Thank you so much for trusting me with the delicate and fragile parts of your lives, for sharing your private thoughts and emotions in our one-on-ones or simply grabbing a meal together. I’m privileged to be traveling along with you!

Donors

Finally, I give a heartfelt acknowledgment to all of you who have sup-

ported WGA with your prayers, gifts and care throughout my tenure here. This is a ministry that few people want to talk about and even fewer understand, so the fact that you have joined together with us is evidence of God’s heart for hurting people and families. Your generosity continually enables us to fulfill the mission to which God has called us and for that we are grateful. Thank you for making my twentieth anniversary even possible!

I’ve shared my testimony so many times over the years, and though it can feel rather rote to me, somehow the Lord always seems to make it fresh again. The one and only thing that will never change is the point of even sharing my story. At some place in my very sad life, Jesus chose to graciously intervene. I had an encounter with a real and living presence of God. This is all I ever want my message to be about—that God cares, heals, comforts, loves and saves us. He is the One for whom my heart overflows with gratitude, to Him be the glory forever and ever, Amen. Here’s to 20 more years, God willing!



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be trust. Therefore, it might seem that an abuse victim ought to trust those whom she currently doubts or suspects of harm. Nothing could be further from the truth. The problem with mistrust is that many persons are not worthy of trust, or at least deep trust; therefore to encourage an abuse victim to trust is tantamount to asking her to more deeply doubt her intuition and to open herself up to more abuse.

The opposite of mistrust is not trust, but *care*. When we view a person with mistrust, it is as if their life no longer matters. We 'write them off.' Mistrust prejudges their every word and deed so that they cannot ever reach our heart. A protective shield descends whenever we're around them, and relationship is severed.

...Repentance, or a refusal to mistrust, reengages the God-given desire to care, to be kind, to comfort, and to be concerned about the temporal and eternal destiny of those who have harmed us."³

This one is hard. I appreciate Allender's acknowledgement that some people are not worthy of trust and that sometimes we need to honor that intuition that seems to be telling us to run away. To replace our mistrust for care means that we have to let go of our desires to punish and withhold. I don't believe this means ignoring or forgetting the wounds that have been caused or the consequences of abuse. It is in our attitude where this will most likely show up. Do I want to see my abuser suffer or do I want to see him/her become the person God created him/her to be? As I said, this is hard.

"Lord, whenever I think of _____ I

want to protect myself by judging his/her every action. Please help me to let go of my desire for vengeance and self-protection. These feelings and behaviors keep me tied to the past. What he/she did to me was wrong and should never have happened. Yet, I know that You love this person. Please help me to be free of bitterness and resentment so that I can continue to grow and move forward. I refuse to mistrust. Please replace that with genuine care for others, even those who have hurt me."

A Refusal to Despise Passion

"Passion, for most abuse victims, is dangerous. Passion is a door that, if opened, may allow rage and lust, violence and promiscuity to pour out like to opening of a Pandora's box. Passion can be defined as *the deep response of the soul to life: the freedom to rejoice and to weep*. One of the most difficult commands to fulfill is to 'weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice' (Romans 12:15). It requires open-hearted, other centered, reckless involvement. Passion is tasting pleasure with delight, brokenness with tears, and evil with hatred."⁴

Passion is scary, particularly when one has experienced abuse. Feeling too much of anything (good or bad) feels in direct conflict with the goal of remaining dead. But the cost is too great. Can I celebrate the birth of a new child and grieve with a friend who has lost a parent? When we live as zombies, going through the motions with people, we are robbing them (and ourselves) of who God created us to be. When we despise passion, it is difficult to even know what we like and dislike. We are created for

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amazing things: to love and be loved passionately, to feel things deeply, and to be able to express these passions to others.

“Lord, one of the ways I continue to protect myself is by living without passion. The very word frightens me! I am afraid that if I feel something, anything too deeply, I will be hurt by it or someone will use my passion to manipulate me or use me. Please help me to pursue You, other people, and my own heart with passion. Help me to know myself so that I can freely share with others, inviting them towards their own deep passions and a deeper love for you.”

For further reading on this topic, I recommend picking up a copy of *The Wounded Heart*. Additionally, Dan Al-

lender has written another book called *Bold Love* that also offers some helpful insights into this subject matter.

¹ Dr. Dan B Allender, *The Wounded Heart* (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1990), pg. 206

² Allender, pg. 207

³ Allender, pg. 210

⁴ Allender, pg. 213



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in a different context, “who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24) In his case he was referring to his recurring tendency to do evil when he intended to do good. In my case it is my default mode to doubting God’s provision when I really want to simply trust Him; I so long to simply trust in His plan.

Apparently the scriptures that tell us that it is “the Spirit within that inspires both the will and the deed, (Ph 2:12-15)” and, “without Him we can do nothing, (John 15:5)” apply to living up to our convictions as well. In this context, I turn from looking at our circumstances and “fix my eyes on Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

I am tempted to send this article to my journal as I so often do when my musings have turned to working out my own

frustrations – I often refer to my journal as my garbage dump—but I think not this time. I need to admit to this lapse in faith and wrestling on the very things I have testified so positively to. I also want to be faithful to let you, our supporters, know the reality of our situation. Several have said to me, “How can we pray and support you appropriately if you don’t tell us what’s going on?”

Well here it is, I have told of our immediate situation. But that isn’t the end of the story—we all know that. Having confessed my faithlessness, I will stand back up into my convictions, into my life in Jesus Himself, and look expectantly for what the Lord will do next. I will say with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, “God can deliver us from the fiery furnace, but if he does not, yet will we serve Him!”

Blessings and gratitude to all of you who



April In Review

April 7th: New Comers Breakfast and Game Day

April 15th: Leadership Meeting

April 20th: WGA presented at Denver Street School

Thursday Night Group

April 5th: 30 people

April 12th: 24 people

April 19th: 34 people

April 26th: 40 people

Orientation meeting - 2 new people

May And Beyond

May 5th: Family and Friends Gathering

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. We hope to see you there!

June 2nd: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 8:00—9:00 AM at the WGA office

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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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