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A Measure of Grace

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Being a Third Voice in Our Culture

by Roger Jones

When I think back over news headlines I've seen about homosexuality the past few months, I begin to feel overwhelmed. Just a few examples: 1) President Obama made a statement that he has changed his position and is now in support of gay marriage. 2) A new bill has been introduced in California which would make reparative therapy illegal for minors. 3) Dr. Robert L. Spitzer retracted his research study from 2001, which stated that "highly motivated gays could successfully change their sexual orientation."

When I read headlines like these, I feel concerned. Having worked with the men and

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women at WGA for these many years, I feel the weight of each story and the impact they bring. Obama approving of gay marriage brings confusion to many people. Though many disagree with him on many topics, his voice carries a lot of weight and authority. And his is not the only “celebrity” voice sending this message.

The bill being discussed in California about banning reparative therapy for minors raises more concerns. WGA has never offered reparative therapy to minors or anyone else for that matter. We aren’t therapists. Yet I know men and women who have experienced this type of therapy and had positive experiences. I know some who claim to have been damaged by this as well. When I think about the long-term consequences of a law such as this, I worry what the impact for WGA will be down the road. Is it inevitable that what we offer, a place for Christian men and women who feel conflicted because of their sexual orientation, will someday become illegal? It is impossible to predict.

Spitzer’s retraction of his study affects us too. Several men and women from WGA participated in his study, which followed their progress over several years. Does this retraction invalidate their experience? No, but regardless of how “real” one knows their experience of change to be, it can certainly feel invalidating to hear that the time and energy spent participating in a study have been discounted. Their stories of change are discounted as well.

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Some people read these headlines and get stirred towards actions. They rush out with markers and poster board to picket somewhere. They feel inspired to gather signatures to try and fight the change they anticipate and disagree with.

These are important to our legislative process, and I encourage them. While I do believe activism is important, I am not an activist.

When I remember what we here at WGA are called to do, I find myself less overwhelmed. Our goal has always been to be a third voice in our culture. Our motto has always been 100% Grace, 100% Truth: No Compromise. It

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Same Questions; Different Continent

By Mary Heathman

In a recent trip to Kenya and Rwanda, Africa, I had occasion to facilitate conversations, teach or talk with about 100 men and women, some of them teens. In the conference in which I led group discussions, there were 48 attendees representing 22 different regions of my denomination, from five different continents. My themes at the conference and all contexts in which I was able to share, were all related to *Sexuality—God’s Gift; What’s Broken?; What Would God Have Us Do?* The picture (on page 7) is of the group of teens in Rwanda who attended my talk on *The Purpose of Attraction*. I know I am hard to pick out, but if you will look hard you will see me in the middle of the crowd—looking very happy, and I was **very** pleased to be with these young people.

I was so pleased the entire time I was there, because I found in Africa a people eager to hear about God’s intent for their sexuality and how they might cooperate with His purposes. Africans ask the same questions as people do

here—but such a different context they live in! Imagine talking of God’s redemptive and healing presence, His love and grace, with people who are genocide survivors, to women widowed during the conflicts in their countries, to teens who were orphaned and grew up in a society traumatized by the violence in their countries. One friend, a teacher in Rwanda, told me, “The whole country suffers from PTSD.”

Yet, the questions on their minds and heart are about survival, growth, the future:

How can I talk with my children about sexuality?

How do we protect them from the destructive ideas from the internet?

How can I follow God faithfully after my husband’s affair?

How will God heal my daughter from many men raping her; how can we forgive such evil?

What ideas can you give us to help us resist temptation?

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WAGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks



Mark 11:12-14

There's an interesting story in the middle of Mark 11 involving Jesus and a fig tree. I'm always intrigued by odd little vignettes like this that seem to be included by sticky note in Scripture. They often end up being uncracked geodes. Masquerading as plain old rocks, they often reveal hidden beauty once they're cracked. In Mark's account Jesus was hungry and approached a little fig tree in leaf for something to eat. Although it was not the prime season for fruit, often these trees had early figs, but Jesus found none. He cursed the fig tree and moved on.

The job of the fig tree in this story was to feed Jesus. But it was all leaves and no purpose. When Jesus talked about false prophets (prophets that have the appearance of truth, but instead deceive) in Matt 7:15-20, he compared them to trees: "every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit." He said we will be able to recognize these imposters "by their fruit" (not their leaves). John the Baptist used the same metaphor when he told the Pharisees to "produce fruit in keeping with the

Spirit" (Matt 3:7-12).

The placement of this story is intriguing as well: Just before the story of the little fig tree that couldn't, Jesus had experienced his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. Mark tells us that Jesus was lead into the city and hailed as the Messiah by the people as they waved verdant Palm branches. They made a leafy show as they proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ & Messiah. But one week later, this same crowd was screaming, "Crucify him" and demanding that his life be taken. They were all Sunday morning show with no Friday night fruit.

Right after the fig tree account, Mark tells that Jesus went into the temple and angrily cleared out the money changers and vendors while declaring that the temple was not being used to fulfill its purpose: "My [Father's] house will be called a place of prayer . . . you have made it a den of robbers." The temple had the bustling appearance of a productive establishment, but no fruit of holiness and prayer. (After Jesus cleared the temple, there was room for the sick and the lame to enter and be healed by Je-

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sus. The children in the temple respond with a sincere “Palm Sunday” that recognized the true purpose of the temple being fulfilled.)

The big message here is that purpose matters, fruit matters to Jesus. So what does my fruit look like? Am I bearing any? Am I allowing God to cut off branches in my life that only make me look good but bear no fruit because the healthy fruit is more important? Am I tending my life for the growth of the fruit or for the beauty of the leaves?

I’ve been meditating on the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5. Which ones are weak in me or non-existent? What might be in the way of their growth? Am I willing to pray in keeping with the Holy Spirit that mountains in my life be moved out of the way to bring life and purpose? What about you?

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - Gal. 5:21-23.

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is not always easy to be that voice, to hold to both grace and truth at the same time, but it is worth doing our best to achieve this goal.

So what does it look like to be a third voice?

First, the most important thing we can do is pray. I do believe in the power of prayer to influence the world we live in and the people we are in relationship with. God is powerful and He is not surprised by anything happening in our world. Perhaps the most powerful effect of prayer is how it influences the one praying. When

I am connected to God through prayer, it changes the way I view circumstances and how I approach conversations with others. When I am relying on His understanding of a situation, it helps me to avoid the common pitfalls of engaging in conversation... arguments and the need to be right. If we approach everything prayerfully, we have a much better chance of being effective.

It is also important to remember that the issues are not just issues. There are people involved in each and every headline. Unfortunately, when everything gets reduced to a sound bite, it is easy to forget

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about the men and women involved behind the scenes. This is true whichever side of the argument you find yourself on. On one side of the gay marriage debate you have a gay couple who wants to be treated the same as heterosexual couples and feels rejected by what they see as an exclusive definition of marriage. On the other side of the debate you have a man or woman who is doing their best to uphold what they believe to be truth about their faith and scripture. Without stopping to prayerfully recognize and listen to one another, we are reduced to assumptions that both sides hate each other.

I find it disappointing when I see some of the ways we draw lines in the sand and take stands. In recent months, I have heard about the gay community boycotting Target and Chick-fil-a because of contributions to politicians who are against gay marriage. I have also read about Christians boycotting JC Penney because Ellen DeGeneres was chosen as their spokesperson and they most recently showed a gay couple in a Father's Day ad. Boycotts definitely send a message, but I wonder if we are missing the point. Are we addressing the root of the

problems or just drawing more attention to the symptoms rather than the cause?

Rather than saying, "Let's talk and try to understand each other," through our actions, we often communicate that we don't want to hear or try to understand a different perspective. I'm not suggesting anyone should have to change their minds in the process, but I do believe it should be hard. If you've never found yourself in the voting booth with tears in your eyes, feeling the weight and potential consequences of your decision, then I would like to challenge you to consider whether or not you are engaged enough in the conversation.

Father, we need your guidance to help us to be effective in engaging our culture. I know you are not surprised by anything that is happening, but sometimes I am. Please help me to experience the peace that passes all understanding, so that I may approach challenging conversations with Your love and care for others. Help me to hold to what I believe within a culture that seems to contradict You at times.

(Same Questions continued from page 3)

I always feel closer to God when I am in these conversations—so in touch with His desire to give a warm affirmation, to comfort, to give a gentle corrective word, and a vision for a hope and a future. I am grateful for the opportunity God gave me to go on this trip. I am just beginning to catch glimpses of how he will use the experience to grow me and to serve others. I praise Him for His constant faithfulness here in Denver in

WGA groups, and around the world.

I am also blessed and grateful for you, our intercessors and supporters who sustain this ministry so faithfully. I hope this little picture of cross-cultural ministry will encourage you in your faith and affirm your investment in God's work around the world.





May

In Review

May 5th: Family and Friends Gathering

May 5th: WGA event—Game Day

May 26th: WGA Picnic - Thank you to all who came to celebrate 26 years of ministry and honoring Scott Kingry for his 20 years of service. It was so good to see all who came!

Thursday Night Group

May 3rd: 29 people

May 10th: 26 people

May 17th: 30 people

May 24th: 32 people

May 31st: 43 people

Orientation meeting: 4 new people

June

And Beyond

June - August: We have a modified schedule for our Thursday night group over the summer. Call ahead for more info

June 21st: Orientation Meeting - this is a great introduction to the ministry and a requirement to participate in WGA's groups

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

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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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