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A Measure of Grace

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Hypervigilance *by Roger Jones*

Vigilance, or being vigilant, seems like a good thing. In most circumstances, it is. In fact, we are even encouraged to be vigilant in scripture, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” I Peter 5:8-9, NKJV. The dictionary gives us a definition for the word: “keenly watchful to detect danger; wary.” Vigilance, in these contexts, makes sense. We are to be watchful and ready for our enemy’s attack.

But what happens when vigilance becomes hypervigilance? Like most anything else, too much of a good thing can create problems. When we are motivated by fear, hurt or pain, vigilance becomes about control and mistrust rather than preparedness.

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(Hypervigilance continued from page 1)

As a child and young man, I was a target for bullies. While many bullied kids experience physical violence, my torture was primarily from the words people used to describe me and the names that I was called. If you've been reading my articles for very long, you have probably heard me mention these things before and the deep impact they had upon me. Because I was smart, I learned pretty quickly to avoid situations that were potentially unsafe. There were a number of times when I walked by a group of guys and heard the usual name calling and the laughter that always followed. So I started walking the long way around where these guys would congregate so I could save myself some grief.

Somewhere along the way, something in me shifted. Being vigilant to keep myself out of harm's way developed into hypervigilance.

Definition: Hypervigilance is one of the hyperarousal symptoms of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and refers to the experience of being constantly tense and "on guard." A person experiencing this symptom of PTSD will be motivated to maintain an increased awareness of their surrounding environ-

ment, sometimes even frequently scanning the environment to identify potential sources of threat. Hypervigilance is also often accompanied by changes in behavior, such as always choosing to sit in a far corner of a room so as to have awareness of all exits. At extreme levels, hypervigilance may appear similar to paranoia (accessed from: <http://ptsd.about.com>).

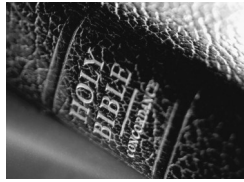
For me, the shift from doing my best

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to keep myself safe to hypervigilance looked something like this: 1) I began to assume that any time I heard laughter, it was directed at me. 2) I began choosing clothing that would help me to be as unnoticeable as possible. 3) In any given situation, I was always looking for and aware of potential threats. 4) I began to be incredibly hard on myself for all the things

about me that caused me to be teased, from the the way I walked and talked to my interest in music and drama. If I could beat the bullies to the punch by putting myself down, then it wouldn't hurt so much when they did it. (For the record, it never really worked out that way. I was hurt more; when the bullies stopped bullying, I was still treating myself badly.) 5) Simply being able to relax felt impossible unless I was in an environ-

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Love Jesus ~ Feed His Sheep

By Mary Heathman

In John, chapter 21, we listen in on a conversation between Jesus and Peter. Jesus' words to Peter that day, I believe, are also for all believers since that time.

In the first half of the chapter, the resurrected Jesus has appeared on the shore about a hundred yards from where the disciples have had an unproductive night of fishing and tells them to try throwing their nets on the other side of the boat. When they do so, they have a huge haul of fish. Miraculously, the nets don't tear with the strain. At this point, John recognizes Jesus, and tells Peter, who jumps out of the boat and swims/wades back to the shore to Jesus. Jesus had breakfast ready and they eat fish and bread together.

After breakfast, according to verses 15-17, Jesus addressed Peter directly:

*Jesus said to Simon Peter,
"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"
"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."
Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."
Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"
He answered, "Yes, Lord, you*

know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

*The third time he said to him,
"Simon son of John, do you love me?"*

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" (NIV).

There's a good bit to gain from chewing on John 21. Jesus sought the disciples out; He knew where they would be. He made Himself and the reality of His power very real to them through the huge catch of fish. Then He provided for their physical hunger and sat with them in the fellowship of the meal. Then Jesus looked at the recently disgraced Peter, likely still stinging from his denial, and engaged him in intimate conversation, "Do you love Me?"

The way of Jesus with His disciples, especially with the one least likely in the moment to feel like he belonged, is the way of the shepherd with his sheep. We would do well to meditate on John 21, pray through it often and let the model of the Lord in His min-

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Singleness

By Anonymous

Singleness. I feel like everyone is talking about it, so I decided to join in on the conversation. I'll admit though, I have a unique perspective on this issue. Hear me out. I think I might offer a different view on the issues of singleness and marriage.

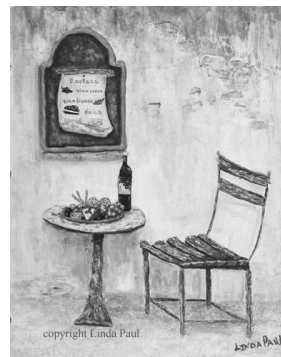
First, I firmly believe that marriage is designed by God to be between one man and one woman for life. Given my own situation, with a desire to be true to God's word, I have chosen to live a life of purity. I'm not interested in "easy," I'm interested in pleasing God. So really, I'm no different in that respect than what God expects of every person who is single. But, I feel like to many, maybe most people, "singleness" is considered just a waiting area where we can be happy and content but never truly fulfilled until that "special someone" comes into our life. Marriage is the goal, and that period of singleness is just part of the journey. But what if that is not the right perspective?

I can't help but feel like marriage is a measure of success not only in our culture, but also in our

churches. If you never get married

you are looked at differently, thought of as weird, somehow considered "less than". I believe that God created us as relational beings who want and need intimacy. One way that is fulfilled is through marriage. In fact, Jesus chose the occasion of a wedding to perform his first miracle. But even though marriage is a gift of God, can we really claim that marriage is a *promise* from God for all of us? Can we simply "walk through" our single lives waiting for God to fulfill a promise that he never really made?

I suggest that we broaden our view. Maybe we are first to live our lives married to Christ (Matt 6:33). Then if one day God brings a spouse into our life, that's awesome; if he doesn't then that's awesome too. After all, Paul was never married, but who wouldn't want the kind of walk with God that Paul experienced, living right smack in the middle of God's



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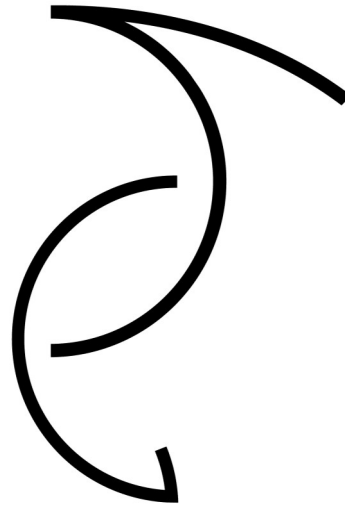
(Singleness continued from page 4)

will? If the measure of success is whether one gets married, then where does that leave someone like me who may never get married? What are my biblical options? Paul went so far as to claim that singleness actually can be a gift (1 Cor 7:7). So if you're currently single let me challenge you not put so much pressure on yourself to find a spouse. If it's your heart's desire to be married, then be honest with God about it. If not, that's cool too. God knows your heart. But I'm asking you to dare to pray bolder than that! Pray that you may know Christ in a deeper, more intimate way – that he may be the true desire of your heart (Psalms 42:1-2). And don't merely pursue God to get what you desire. Purpose in your heart, and have the faith to believe, that whatever *he desires* for you will be your deepest source of fulfillment.

And if you're married, remember your single brothers and sisters. When you got married you didn't graduate to the "next level" of fellowship. While your spouse will always come first – after all you are now one – God desires us to live in fellowship and community together as one body of believers in Christ without putting each other in categories like "singles" or

"marrieds". As a married couple, Pricilla and Aquila, partnered with a single guy, Paul. Likewise, let's continue to strengthen and encourage each other on this journey of faith. We're strongest when we are bound together pursuing a common purpose.

For more by this author, visit www.anotsostraightperspective.com



(Love Jesus continued from page 3)

istry soak into the depths of our minds and hearts.

I encourage such meditation on the whole chapter. But for this article, I want to focus on one principle that I have taken into my heart and made the model for ministry in Jesus' name: *If I am loving Jesus, I will be feeding and caring for His sheep as He did.*

It is a daunting task, an impossible one, in my own strength. And fail, I have, so many times. Sometimes I wonder if I was put on trial if there would be enough evidence to convict me . . . of loving Jesus? Will people be able to tell that I am a Christian because I love what Jesus loves, His people? Will I even seek to love as He loves, as He loved Peter (disgraced, fallen, discouraged, absent Peter?)

Yet, I find that God's grace is sufficient for even me at these points of doubt and weakness, and He gives me strength enough to keep on keeping on. One of my favorite quotations is from David Wilkerson, "The most important thing a Christian ever does is what he does right after he falls flat on his face." It's the getting up and pressing on again and again in following Jesus that testifies to a heart after God.

Jesus sought Peter out, though he had gone back to what he knew and other disciples went with him. They went

back to the fishing boats and were having a really bad day. And right in that context, Jesus showed them His power, His presence, His provision.

I believe He is still seeking us out today. No matter how far apart we are standing, no matter what condition our emotions, no matter how unqualified we are today, He is still asking if we love Him. Then tells us to feed His sheep.

I sense Him asking me today, "Mary, do you love me?" I say, "Yes, Lord, you know everything, you can see how I am loving you, not so well today, but bumbling along, trying." And He says, "Feed my sheep."

"With what shall I feed them?" I ask, and He says, "You take whatever you have, two loaves and a fish if that is all that is there. Hand it to me and I will hand it back to you to distribute, to feed the hunger of 5,000; it will be enough." Not because I have enough, but because when I offer the little I have, He multiplies it; He swells it to meet the need.

If we are loving Jesus, we will be feeding His sheep. But we are not alone; it is still Jesus who is feeding the sheep. We get to do it with Him!



(Hypervigilance continued from page 2)

ment where I felt totally safe. Those places were few and far between and often meant being alone, which wasn't always safe either.

As an adult who is twenty-ish years removed from those circumstances, I still find myself dealing with the lingering effects of hypervigilance. I still feel wary when I am around a group of men, especially men I don't know very well. I catch myself "reading the room" in any given situation, trying to determine who is safe and who is not. This would be easier to let go of if I hadn't honed the skill so well over the years. I have often been proved right about people. Yet by doing this, I am really labeling people and not giving them a chance to be themselves with me. Sometimes, I create the self-fulfilling prophecy, interpreting every action and attitude through my skewed and fearful filter.

Things that aren't about me at all sometimes cause me to feel bad about myself. While observing and interpreting people around me and their emotional states, I somehow became an "emotion collector." I can take on other people's feelings as if they are my own. Recently while driving in heavy traffic, I observed an incident where two drivers both wanted to move into the same lane at the same time. An "almost accident" occurred, followed by much cursing, yelling and vulgar hand signals. I was in no way in-

volved in the altercation but somehow left feeling like I had done something wrong.

When I think of the word "narcissism," I typically think of arrogance and pride, "I am the greatest being to ever walk the face of the Earth." What I am talking about can be another type of narcissism, "I am the worst being to ever walk the face of the Earth." While negative, this attitude is just as grandiose and still makes everything all about me. I use myself as an illustration for the purpose of this article. Don't worry! These are issues I am currently talking through with my counselor.

My prayer for you (and for myself) is that we can relax in the presence of God. In His presence, we can find healing and peace that permeates all areas of our lives, especially our relationships. I pray that we can learn to let go of the coping strategies, lingering effects of abuse, that are no longer necessary. Teach us, Lord, the difference between vigilance and hypervigilance.





August

At a Glance

August 9th – WGA event, Lakeside Amusement Park

August 11th – WGA participated in the AIDS Walk, supporting HIV Carelink

August 18th – WGA event, BBQ

August 25th – WGA event, Miniature Golf



September

And Beyond

September 6th – WGA's regular program begins, weekly Thursday night group resumes.

September 20th – Orientation Meeting – invite your friends who could benefit from participating in WGA's groups.

September 22nd – Men's event

September 29th – Family & Friends dinner, contact the WGA offices for more information.

October 6th – Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry!

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A Measure of Grace
is edited by
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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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