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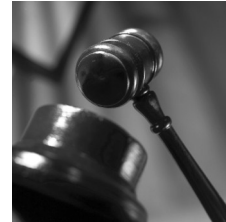
A Measure of Grace

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

The Effects of California's New Law, Banning Reparative Therapy for Minors *by Roger Jones*

A few weeks ago, Jerry Brown (California's governor) signed a bill (SB 1172) into law that makes it illegal for therapists in California to offer reparative therapy to anyone under the age of 18. From the bill's text on the California Legislative Information website, "This bill would prohibit a mental health provider, as defined, from engaging in sexual orientation change efforts, as defined, with a patient under 18 years of age. The bill would provide that any sexual orientation change efforts attempted on a patient under 18 years of age by a mental health provider shall be considered unprofessional conduct and shall subject the provider to discipline by the provider's licensing entity." As it currently stands, this new law will take effect on January 1st. A number of therapists and other organizations are already challenging the law, which will

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work its way into the court system in the coming months and years.

Although we rarely address political issues, I think it is important to share a few thoughts about the passing of this law, and what it might mean for Where Grace Abounds in the future.

Such a law has quite a few implications. Typically, once something like this is passed, a ripple effect begins. Already, similar legislation is in the works in New Jersey; other states will follow. Proponents

of the ban on reparative therapy believe that efforts to change one's sexual orientation are not only a waste of time, but also harmful and can lead to increased depression and suicide. It is making a promise to change something (sexual orientation) that cannot be changed (in their opinion) and should not need to be changed. Opponents

of the ban believe this is an infringement on parental rights (and a minor's right) to seek therapy for their children that is consistent with their values and beliefs. For the sake of clarity, it is important to point out that the current law does not restrict a parent from seeking help for their child through pastoral care, such as a church or a ministry that is not providing licensed professional therapy. But the door to that restriction is now cracked open, with possible

ramifications regarding religious liberties. The current law is to "protect" minors. "Don't vulnerable adults need the same protection?" is the next logical place to go.

Initially this law will not affect WGA, for a number of reasons. The most obvious of these is that we are in Colorado and not in California. SB 1172 does not apply to anyone here. If a similar law were to be passed in Colorado, which is a real possibility, WGA would be protect-

ed. We do not provide therapy as a service, but rather refer those in need of a professional counselor to a group of trusted therapists we have built relationships with over the years. If a therapist were to be accused of practicing reparative therapy in a state where it is illegal, the licensing body(s) to which the therapist belongs would take disciplinary action,

possibly suspending his/her license. Legal action pursued by the one who received the therapy would also be a possibility.

Where Grace Abounds does not provide reparative therapy. But when you look at how "sexual orientation change efforts" is defined within the law, it is not much of a stretch to see a similar law in the future that does restrict what organizations like WGA

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New Group for Families and Friends

By Mary Heathman

Most friends of WGA know that my role at WGA changed several years ago. No longer the Executive Director, my title changed to Founding Director. In this new role, I have continued most of the ministry responsibilities as always:

- Orientation of newcomers
- Teaching: two Foundations classes; periodic talks at Thursday support group meetings; WGA seminars and pastors trainings, for example.
- Discipleship Counseling
- Leading other groups annually: Survivors of Abuse and Going Deeper With God.
- Participation with staff in speaking at churches, Sunday schools, etc.

Even with all these ongoing activities, there has also been the freedom to do research and consider new ways of doing ministry more effectively and identifying and pursuing new avenues of ministry. In this pursuit, the Lord has opened my eyes to a new mission field that He wants to move into. Of course, when the Lord wants to move toward people, that means He gives His people an urgent call and touches their hearts with what He sees and feels. I have felt that many times over my years of being a Christ-follower

and this time was characterized by an even stronger and urgent call. The call came, as often is the case, in the form of a need presented to us.

The need first presented itself several years ago in the form of a couple coming to our support group. This happens regularly, but this time was different, because their issue was different. This man and woman were living with the aftermath of their son being arrested and convicted of a sexual offense. As do all parents in pain, they were seeking support and resources to help them understand and cope with the disintegration of their world as they knew it. Almost overnight, a family exploded—their son's children who had been close to their grandparents were no longer allowed to visit (and seven years later, they still have no contact with them); extended family distanced themselves from the couple because they allowed their son to live with them while the case was in process.

Confused and broken, the man and his wife didn't know what to do. They shared with their small group at church, asking for prayer. One of the others in the group used to be part of the WGA leadership team and she called me on their behalf, wondering if there was something we could do for this family, and for the son who had

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Stressfully Exhausted vs. Happily Tired

Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Ps 127:1

Exhaustion, sleep disturbance, anxiety, adrenal fatigue, stress headaches: Contrast these common complaints with the word of Jesus in Matthew 11:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

I’m examining the exhaustion in my life and asking God how to take on his yoke; it sounds a great deal less cumbersome than the hefty one I am currently plowing my life with.

Obviously, the first step is to come to Him. I must value the time I spend with God in prayer, reading and meditation as the breakfast for my soul. His presence is my high protein, fiber rich, nutrient packed infusion that I can’t get through the day without. I must believe that and act accordingly.

Secondly, I must trade my yoke for his. It is impossible to wear two yokes at the same time. Currently, I tend to add his voice to the list of other demanding voices in my life and my mind responds, “yes, dear. I’ll get to you too.” His still small voice becomes a burden added to the weight I choose to carry instead of a

welcomed call to come away, to shed my load, and to find rest.

Practical reality check – I can’t just drop everything and become a monk sitting and listening for God. So how do I go to work, shop for food, make meals, drive to soccer, meet with friends, attend church, clean the garage, tend the house, keep the lizard in crickets and the dog in kibble -and somehow make this exchange for an easier yoke with Jesus? That’s the real question isn’t it?

I’ve been examining some of the obstacles that keep me from this exchange:

1. Perfectionism. Yes, I need to keep up with my responsibilities and love the people in my life well, but do I need to personalize every crème brulee for my dinner party of 12 in addition to 5 days of table decorations and complex menu items? Am I doing that for the enjoyment of my guests or because I want to be perfect? Am I willing to re-assess my self-inflicted list of things to do with the Holy Spirit and cut out the things that are not necessary?
2. Christ complex. “If I don’t do it, no one will. If I don’t help them, no one will.” Is the Holy Spirit prompting me to do this? Or am I looking for the silent applause of people around me as I slave over spending time, money and energy I don’t have to help someone so that I feel great about myself? In fact, if I am jumping in where God has not told me to

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go assuming that I am indispensable, am I blocking the way for what God really wants to do in that person's life?

3. Identity crisis. Is my definition of who I am dependent on what I do? Do I draw my identity from God's definition of me, or from the definition I hope exists in the minds of those around me? If I am not spending time in God's presence in communion with Him, how do I know how He views me? I am left to frantically decide who I want people to think I am, figure out how I can be that to each person, and live in anxiety never knowing if I am consistently hitting that moving target.
4. Fear. What will happen if I let go of all of these things? What if really important things don't get done? What if people don't like me? What if my partner gets mad at me? What if people I respect are disappointed in me? What if I'm not safe? So where is my safety?

Bottom line – am I going to trust God or not. I've just finished reading the meticulous details from God for the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus and the same detail for the building of the temple in I Kings. God is so specific about measurements and colors and materials. No gray area. No extra storage closets or room to build on another wing later. Paul says that the earthly temple is a type and shadow of a much greater one in heaven (Heb 9). He also says that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 6:19). Could it be that God has specific reasons for asking me to take on certain things in my life and let go of others? Could it be that He has a masterfully designed and perfectly constructed plan for me? What happens when I try to

add an extra closet or scrimp on materials? He has been convicting me lately that he has given me everything I need to complete the daily work he has in mind for me: time, money, energy and mental strength. I am pilfering from the supplies for the work. When I use a time of rest to "get just a few more things done," I have used the energy needed for his next instruction. When I use these resources for my own projects, I am actually stealing from God.

His goal for me in all of this is rest for my soul. I am starving for that. But do I want it badly enough to lean on him and learn from him? I want to want to.



(New Group *continued from page 3*)

been cut off from many of his former relationships.

The parents were invited to our family and friends support group. Roger and I visited the son at his place of employment and set up periodic meetings. And I began to look into what was available in the way of support services.

My initial search for ministries or organizations that could help revealed that resources were few. I began to question what the Lord's provision was for people in this family's situation. My heart alternately ached and raged—I prayed, "Who is going to come alongside these folks?" Over time, the state of my mind and heart took on a familiar focus—God was calling me into this field!

Since that realization, I entered a Master's program to study the field of sexual offending and secondary victims (families of victims and offenders are traumatized, and yet often left without support). Upon completion of my degree, which included a final project that outlined what ministry might look like in this field, I started working toward developing a program to meet the needs of families. Much has happened in the last few years:

- WGA has established a new support group for family and friends of persons who have committed a sexual offense. We meet monthly at the WGA offices; several volunteers help me with this group

- A pilot program of Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) is in the forming stages. COSA is designed to mobilize community volunteers to come alongside offenders released from prison in order to help them succeed at healthy integration into society—thereby making society safer from re-offenses. (More about this in another article).
- I have been collaborating with a network of volunteers and corrections and treatment professionals to form a new non-profit, Colorado Circles of Support and Accountability (CCOSA), that will encourage the development of COSAs throughout the state.

I am hoping you will pray for this new effort. Pray for me in the various roles I serve with WGA, with our new Family and Friends Group and the new effort with Circles of Support. I know that the true work of the ministry is in the prayer effort—and I am so grateful for your intercession and support on our behalf!

I am also hoping that you will write me with your questions. I need to know how the greater Body of Christ is thinking about and working in this field. Maybe you know of ministries I could connect with or of families who need our support. My email is mary@wheregraceabounds.org; or write to 1532 Emerson St., Denver, CO 80218.

Blessings to you all!
Mary

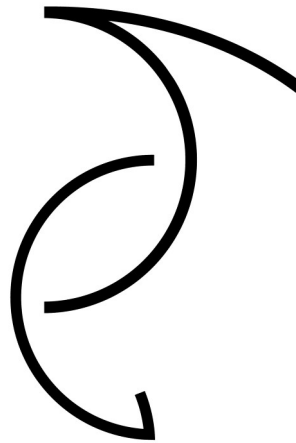
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can do. The definition reads, “‘Sexual orientation change efforts’ means any practices by mental health providers that seek to change an individual’s sexual orientation. This includes efforts to change behaviors or gender expressions, or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of the same sex.”¹

A restriction from efforts to “reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings” is *very* broad in its scope. While we do not emphasize a need to change one’s sexual orientation (as opposed to sexual behavior) here at WGA, we do believe in helping men and women to achieve their goals of congruence between their sexuality and their faith. Sometimes a person has a goal of reducing their attractions to the same gender. We are clear that we don’t know what the likelihood of this will be for them. We do our best to point them towards God, the only source of true change. In the meantime, learning to build and maintain healthy, close relationships with both genders can help a person to live a fulfilling, happy life.

Arguments surrounding SB 1172 will continue. We do not yet know all of the implications of the law. Most of my thoughts shared here are speculation. We certainly need to pray and seek God’s guidance and wisdom for the future. Will you join with us in these prayers?

For further reading about SB 1172:
http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120SB1172
<http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/State-bans-gay-repair-therapy-for-minors-3906032.php#ixzz28FdGRXFN>

¹ “Sexual orientation change efforts” means any practices by mental health providers that seek to change an individual’s sexual orientation. This includes efforts to change behaviors or gender expressions, or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of the same sex (Senate Bill 1172, California Legislative Information website).





September In Review

September 15th: Going Deeper with God group began—continues through December

September 22nd: Men's event

September 29th Family & Friends dinner

Thursday Night Group

September 6th: 35 people
September 13th: 37 people
September 20th: 42 people
September 27th: 36 people

Orientation meeting: 2 new people

October And Beyond

October 19-21: WGA Leadership retreat

October 21st: WGA will be participating in the Domestic Missions Event at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church

October 14th: WGA presents in 4 Sunday School classes at First Denver Friends Church

October 31st : WGA will participate in Harvest Festival at Corona Presbyterian Church

November 3rd: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry!

November 4th: Mary will be speaking at First Friends Church in Colorado Springs

November 28th: WGA will be presenting to youth group at Celebration Community Church

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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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