



A Measure of Grace

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Disclosure *by Roger Jones*

Disclosure is a topic that regularly comes up at Where Grace Abounds. Whenever a person is dealing with an issue or a circumstance that could alter a friend's or a loved one's perception of them, the questions come to the forefront. What will my friends think of me if they find out about my struggle? How will my parents respond when I tell them? Should I tell them at all, and/or when is the right time? I'm dating someone now ... how and when do I need to talk about my past? These are all important questions. While every situation is different, there are some helpful things to think through when considering disclosing personal information.

Most apparent are the reasons why we *don't* want to share a personal struggle or something we experience shame over. We are afraid of being rejected. Once we share something, we can't take it back. We have no idea what the other person

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Where Grace Abounds
P.O. Box 18871
Denver, Colorado 80218-0871

Office: 303/863-7757
Fax: 303/863-7769

email:
info@wheregraceabounds.org
website:
www.wheregraceabounds.org



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may do with the information; even people who seem trustworthy sometimes break our trust. The timing may not ever seem to be right. We can't control others' reactions and therefore, we can't control what they think about us. The list of reasons not to disclose is long. Sometimes this list prevents us from ever sharing with anyone, and we keep secrets from those who think they know us better than they do.

So why would a person wish to disclose something so deeply personal as a struggle with homosexuality or pornography, or something as shameful as sexual abuse? There are quite a few reasons to consider. Perhaps the most important reason is to honor our desire to be known. When we have a secret, particularly from those to whom we are closest, it is difficult to receive their love. Whenever love is expressed, we feel ashamed. If my wife/parent/friend really knew what I was like, I believe they would feel differently. We talk ourselves out of being loved as we are, because no one really knows the whole story. The hope is that with disclosure we will be known, accepted, and loved. Without ever sharing, we may never be able to experience these things.

There are other reasons to disclose as

well. We cannot journey towards healing in our lives without other people being involved. Sharing our stories allows others to walk alongside us and pray for us. Disclosing our stories helps to fight the enemy's purpose in our lives -- to convince us that we are unworthy of love. Secrecy is his biggest tool. A refusal to live in secrecy and shame helps to move us towards freedom. Also, we are encouraged to share our stories in Scripture: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" Rev. 12:11 (NIV).

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Another thing to consider is, "Who needs to know this information?" A mistake people dealing with sexual issues often make is approaching every situation with an "all or nothing" attitude. Because of the secrecy and shame associated with these types of struggles, a healthy

choice to move towards openness and transparency can go too far. Suddenly a person who has never shared anything personal is sharing everything with everyone. While this can feel freeing in the moment, there are often unintended consequences. This is particularly true of casual relationships and those that are growing, but not yet deeply reciprocal. Close friends and family (our inner circles

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Turning to Faith *by Mary Heathman*

S was recently asked why I rejected my early religious training and wandered without faith for so many years. I have been thinking about my response and concluded that it would make a good statement about the imperfection, yet critical importance, of early religious training.

Unlike some people who turn away from their early religious training, I didn't leave my childhood faith because it couldn't answer my questions. In fact, I wouldn't say I *left*, as much as I just didn't connect to begin with. As I think back, I realize I turned away because it didn't give me what I thought I needed, and I didn't ask anyone any questions about my experience.

In my early religious training, from ages five through ten, all of the questions were given to me in weekly classes and I memorized all the answers, which were also given to me. There were two ceremonies, one at age five and another when I was ten. I understood these to be the steps to connection with God. But when I marched along all the steps, got to the end and the ceremonies were over, the promised connection with God didn't happen in any way that I could recognize.

I had already learned that there was no room for other questions, because I was one of those intellectually curious

children that often are considered problem kids in a time-constrained class—the one who was always asking the “why” questions, or trying to change up the answers. For example, once the class was asked, “Did God create all things?” I knew the expected answer was, “Yes, God created all things.” But instead of replying by rote, I said, “God is the only creator of everything.”

The teacher considered this a discipline/attitude/rebellion problem. To be fair, I'm not sure that he wasn't right. I still like to challenge the status quo; it is my way of testing, examining, and learning—but it wasn't well-received by this teacher. He wasn't mean, but I remember he stopped the class and made an issue of my nonconformity. I still remember the shame I felt—as if I had done something very wrong by asking questions and speaking differently than did the other children. And I was also afraid—panicked that I would somehow never get connected to God if I did it again, so I didn't! The consequence of this, of course, was I learned by rote, but didn't get what I needed to internalize or apply what I was learning.

Also, my motivation for doing all the memory work word-perfect was very personal, which I shared with no one. I was in a situation as an oldest child where I had to take care of

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Got Change?

By Scott Kingry

“Hey, where’s my movie montage!?!” exclaimed Scott Kingry to no one in particular.

Our Thursday Night Group kicked off a new series for the month of September on the topic of “Change & Transformation.” For four weeks we explored several variations on the theme: How change happens, When life is in transition, and Surviving the change process. People attending Where Grace Abounds are here for a myriad of reasons, but the main thing they all have in common is a desire to be different in their lives—to “change.” As I stood before our group doing my little intro for the first talk, I asked the sea of faces before me the question, “*What is one way the ‘change process’ is portrayed in films?*” After a barrage of many good responses, someone piped up with the answer I was looking for, “*The movie montage?*”

Aw, the movie montage, that cinematic vehicle which portrays the passage of time or a character’s sudden transformation. Two main characters might be having the best day, restoring a home or falling in love when a pithy pop song begins to play. Vignettes roll past our eyes of them talking, laughing, high fiving, sweeping & painting, or sharing the same hot dog. We get to see the relationship or make-over develop in mere seconds. If it’s a Chris-



tian movie this will usually involve a rockin’, contemporary Christian song, Bible reading, laying prostrate on the floor praying and several push-ups (see *Fireproof* for reference).

Recently with this teaching series on my mind, I was watching the film *Bridget Jones’s Diary* starring Renée Zellweger. Bridget’s affair with her boss spectacularly blows up when she catches him cheating on her. A pity party and several shots of vodka later, Chaka Kahn’s “I’m Every Woman” begins to play as Bridget decides to retain a shred of self-esteem and come out of her funk. Cigarettes, empty booze bottles and self-help books fly into the trash can. Bridget begins exercising, circling want-ads in the paper and replacing her old self-help books with new ones. By the end of the sequence she has a new job, a new outlook and is walking confidently with hair and scarf blowing serenely in the wind. “*Hey, where’s my movie montage?*” was all I could say to the screen after this quick, easy, not to mention, painless transformation.

Meanwhile back in *my* reality, changing anything, whether it’s tackling an

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addiction, surviving a death or break up, adding a new spiritual discipline or moving and changing jobs can be a long, hard and arduous process. Sometimes we have a choice about the changes in our lives like starting a diet or quitting smoking. Yet other times, change comes careening into our lives without our permission and is foisted upon us -- perhaps the announcement of a terminal disease or natural disaster. No matter how we become aware of the catalyst of change, we respond with some sort of progression of thought. What are the facts about changing? What is true? What will the change gain me: honesty, relief or freedom? What will it cost me: pieces of my identity or relationships? And even after the ambivalence sets in with its "I want to change and don't want to change" monologue, we might even risk giving it a try.

But all this cognitive work is still done on the front end of considering a change. What blows up *emotionally* when you're smack dab in the middle of a transition? Oh, everything does. You can feel lost, confused or disoriented for a season, as if you're in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. There are layers of legitimate sadness, loss and grief to work through. Complete overwhelm may overtake you when it feels too much to deal with and you want to yell "uncle" and crawl in a hole to take an emotional breather. It can be worse when the reality of the change hits hard; maybe I didn't get the outcome I expected and I feel angry or disillusioned. Like most things in the emotive arena, I might pop in and out

of these various states of feeling over weeks or minutes. Geez, no wonder no one wants to change anything. Still, the bottom line when you feel like an absolute crazy person is that all these are natural ways of reacting and feeling when facets of life are dramatically shifting. There are ways of getting through it. And don't forget the hopeful side of the definition of the word "transition"; this is only a temporary phase—life will balance out again eventually.

But where is God in the midst of upheaval? That is a very good question, and one we wrestle with daily here at WGA (as well as many accompanying questions and frustrations), some of which I will explore in my next article. As you ponder the topic of change in your own life, perhaps you might choose your own personal, pithy pop song to go along with your life movie montage. Mine will not be Chaka Kahn's "I'm Every Woman"; since I came to WGA with a ton of gender issues, this proves that *change is possible*! See ya in the movies!

Taken from the teachings:
"How Change Happens" and "Life in Transition" by Mary Heathman

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of support) are the people that likely should be first of those to whom we talk about our struggles. As I stated earlier, it is difficult to receive love when a person does not feel known.

Important questions to ask ourselves when considering to whom and when to disclose are, “Is this someone I want to have a closer relationship with?” If yes, “Am I matching the level of sharing in the relationship?” There has been quite a bit of study by a number of people on the topic of levels of communication. One source is *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* by John Powell. Each study has its own set of labels, but the essence of the information is similar: Level 1: Reporting facts and events, Level 2: Offering opinions, Level 3: Sharing feelings, Level 4: Exposing conflicts/questions, and Level 5: Laying bare the heart/secrets.

If you have a relationship where a friend (one with whom you want a close relationship) is regularly sharing at Levels 4 and 5 but you are unwilling to go deeper than Level 2, perhaps it is time to consider disclosing more of what is going on in your life. When a friend feels safe enough to share with you the heart level issues they face (abuse, sexual struggles, relationship difficulties) and you only respond with facts or advice for them, never revealing something personal about yourself, true intimacy cannot be developed. This can set up a counselor/counselee type of dynamic. A relationship this out of balance will not likely last long

and certainly will not meet your need for love and acceptance.

Disclosure is risky, particularly if what we are choosing to disclose directly affects the person with whom we are sharing. A husband who is telling his wife for the first time about his use of pornography will affect the way she feels about him and possibly how she views herself. A daughter telling her parents about her homosexuality can blindside them, because it might be something they never considered. They feel overwhelmed by their own fears and confusion around an issue they do not understand. It is helpful to remember that a person’s first reaction to what they hear is not the whole story. People can react out of surprise and fear and later regret their reaction. An issue you have struggled to come to grips with, perhaps for years, will require time for others as well.

When we are unwilling to take the risk of disclosure, we pay the price. The cost is that we are never fully known by anyone. Our hearts, which long for connection, are unable to truly be open when we harbor secrets from everyone. I ask that you prayerfully consider if God is leading you towards more openness and transparency in a specific relationship in your life.

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younger siblings while parents were gone to the club three to four nights a week. I had decided when I heard in my first classes that "God is all-powerful," that He would be the one to take care of me—and the way to get there was through completing the classes and celebrating the rites of passage—the ceremonies that came after successful completion of the training, followed by weekly attendance at worship services.

So I did all that was expected of me—all the while simply by faith expecting the gut level emptiness to be gone when I got connected with God. But, the anxiety that kept my life perpetually on edge didn't go away as I expected it would after the last ceremony. So, I turned my attention away from Christianity as irrelevant and decided I was going to have to take care of myself.

I returned seventeen years later, not to the faith tradition of my childhood, but to another Christian tradition's way of expressing faith. Somehow within the first fifteen years of that new beginning, my childhood memorizations and my study of the Scriptures merged and I realized I had been taught well as a child—taught fundamental truths about God and Jesus and me. But these truths had just never sparked anything in my heart, probably because of my expectations and never asking anyone about the problem I was

having connecting with God.

Having connected, with the expected peace finally having set my heart at rest, I then taught my children, and later talked to my grandchildren. I wanted them to know the importance of always at the very least asking God to help them understand their relationship with Him. I also told them how good it is to ask and talk with a few others about their internal experiences as well, as it could make all the difference. We don't all have to spend seventeen years of wandering faithlessly as did I, enduring a spiritual loneliness we were never intended for.

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I'm glad I finally did turn with my questions, and profound need, to the God who created me. I pray that I will always turn to Him first in whatever tradition of worship I find myself.

This is also my prayer for all the men and women who sometimes return to a faintly remembered faith of their childhood through their

experience in WGA groups. May they find, at WGA, people who will listen to their questions and walk alongside them as He supplies all they need.

This article was reprinted from A Measure of Grace - September 2009, Volume 13, Issue 9.



October In Review

October 19-21: WGA Leadership retreat

October 21st: WGA participated in the Domestic Missions Event at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church

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

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

November And Beyond

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

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

November 23rd: WGA Event—Movie Marathon Day

December 1st: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry!

Giving

Would you prayerfully consider making an end of year donation to Where Grace Abounds? You may do so by mailing us a check at PO Box 18871 Denver, CO 80218 or visiting our website, wheregraceabounds.org

Thursday Night Group

**October 4th: 33 people
October 11th: 32 people
October 18th: 47 people
October 25th 34 people**

Orientation meeting : 5 new people

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

A Measure of Grace
is edited by
Elodie Ballantine Emig

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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