



A Measure of Grace

December 2012
Volume 16, Issue 12

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

2013

Things to Consider for 2013

by Roger Jones

It is almost a new year, and while some are fearfully anticipating the world's destruction with the ending of the Mayan calendar on December 21st, I am planning for 2013 as if life will continue. If you are reading this, the world did not end. Or at least the mail was still delivered through the chaos. I sincerely hope that you have been blessed through the Christmas season.

Thinking ahead to the new year, many will be recovering from the overindulgences of the holidays: overeating, a full schedule, and difficult and/or wonderful family gatherings, to name a few. With January come the backlash and the resolutions "to always do something," or "to never do something else again." I'm anticipating a very full gym for the first few weeks of 2013 (for the record, I began working out in August). Even those who claim to be "anti-resolution" are likely attempting some sort of change, even if it

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is as simple as getting back into a regular schedule again.

For those dealing with an addiction or a besetting sin, birthdays, a new year or any significant milestone often bring with them the hope of freedom. I turned forty years old in November and found myself making my own list of “never agains” and “from now ons.” As you consider goals and changes for your life, consider the caution below from Gerald May in *Addiction and Grace*:

Reformation of behavior usually involves *substituting* one addiction for another, adapting to a new, possibly less destructive normality. Sometimes substitution is intentional, sometimes unconscious. An over-eater adapts to jogging and yoga; a smoker adapts to chewing gum or eating; a television addict becomes dependent upon guided meditations; an aggressive person becomes accustomed to ingratiating behavior; an alcoholic becomes addicted to AA. Many substitutions are used intentionally as temporary aids in making the transition from one normality to another. They are meant to lessen withdrawal symptoms by making the behavioral change as

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small as possible. If I can gradually shift small segments of my old normality, the addicted systems of my brain will undergo less stress than if I make a sudden radical change. This way of fighting addiction is like weaning; it is an attempt to make the transition to independence as painless as possible. Sometimes it works; often it does not.

In addition to minimizing withdrawal symptoms, the substitution of one normality for another allows us to avoid the open, empty feeling that comes when an addictive behavior is curtailed. Although this emptiness is really freedom, it is so unconditioned that it feels strange, sometimes even horrible. If we were willing for a deeper transformation of desire, we would have to try to make friends with the spaciousness; we would need to appreciate it as openness to God.

... Every struggle with addiction, no matter how small, and no matter what our spiritual interest may be, will include at least brief encounters with spaciousness. Through the spaciousness will come some homeward call, some invitation to transformation? If we answer yes, even with the tiniest and

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Holidays are for Getting Together

By Mary Heathman

Ps I was growing up in various parts of the country and the world, I remember one thing that remained constant—the rhythm of celebrations—gatherings of people sharing special days together. My parents made friends quickly wherever we went and it wasn't long before there were parties: birthdays, promotions, baby showers, anniversaries, rejoicing over winning ballgames and commiserating over lost ones. It seemed like one or another of the families who were our neighbors were often in our home or we were joining them in theirs.

I remember especially the holiday events. My mother loved the planning and anticipation of family gatherings for holidays. Once I came into the kitchen after a particularly large Thanksgiving gathering—many of us were still mostly comatose in the living room watching or pretending to watch a ballgame. I reached for the coffeepot and asked my mom what she was doing. She had notes spread all over the table and her favorite cook book open. She looked up and said, “I think I’ll have ham for Christmas.” For my mom, the point of all her planning, cooking, and scheming to get us all caught up in the event, was to get the family together. And

she never quit thinking about it—her highest goal it seemed.

We generally liked getting together, although we had some interesting not-so-fun times. I remember the time my mom thought it would be great to rent an A-Frame just off the ski slope in Steamboat Springs and we would all gather there for the weekend. Well, picture a typical A-Frame with four couples and a sundry children – none of us skiers, too cold to be out doing anything else. There was room to sleep everyone, but once out of our sleeping space, there was no where to stand or sit that someone else didn't have to move to make room for us. We gave it a good shot, but left there pretty much aggravated with everyone including ourselves—the longest weekend ever! My mom said in her next planning musings, “Well, we *won't* be going to a cabin again!”

I miss my mother a lot. She's been gone ten years now, but when a memory floats forward, my throat closes up and tears come. The hole in my life where she used to be is still so raw, especially during holidays. I would give anything to be together for even a weekend too tightly packed in a mountain cabin. And I miss my brothers and sisters most intensely during the holidays – we don't get

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Reflections: Thoughts from a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Seedtime & Harvest

It was spring and time for planting. The farmer stood in line chatting with his neighbors as they waited to get their bags of seed from the master. He especially liked this day every year because it was so full of promise and new beginnings. He had already plowed his field: walking behind his faithful plow horse; staring at her swaying rump up and down the rows; and watching the tired, hard dirt peel back to reveal straight waves of dark chocolaty loam.

He took his bag of seed from the master's hand, glancing up at the kind face, and stepped back into the circle that had formed to wait for the master's prayer for blessing and abundance for this year's crops. The soil looked extra rich this year and he was eager to plant. He planted all day, sowing seed by hand with a practiced and methodical rhythm. The ground was carefully tamped over the seed and then the waiting began.

Even though he knew it would take weeks before the seeds woke up and started sending their first scouting shoots to the surface, he still nonchalantly walked by the field that first morning after planting and scanned carefully for any sign of green stubble emerging across the ground. There was nothing, of course. But he couldn't help the smile that spread across his face as he imagined the waking of those seeds.

He maintained a calm and casual exterior that first day he saw a tiny sprout, but on the inside he was leaping with excitement and joy. Only his

thumping heart would have betrayed his embarrassing thrill to his fellow farmers who commented carelessly on the beginning growth of all the crops.

All through the increasingly warm days that followed, the crops grew. The farmer couldn't be sure, but it looked like his crop was just a little taller than his neighbors'. He chided himself for this childish competition and glee, but he felt the warm pride nonetheless.

As he strutted proudly to the field one morning, he saw a spot of red from a distance and his curiosity turned to befuddlement as he approached and saw a brilliant crimson flower sitting in his field of green just as proud as could be. It really was stunning, and as much as he hated to pluck it, there was hard agricultural business to be attended to, so he bent and carefully plucked the bloom with enough stem so that his wife could put it in water in her window. He chuckled at the anomaly as he walked back to the house.

The next morning, from a great distance as he approached, he could see crimson dots throughout the field. He quickened his pace in alarm and arrived at the edge of the plot with his heart racing. But this time there was thin edge of panic in that dancing heart. The merry brothers, sisters, and distant cousins of the single bloom that graced his windowsill at home stood with their beautiful faces lifted to the warm sun. As he walked the rows, gathering these interlopers, he racked his brain trying to remember any flowers like these that might have bordered his field the year before

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spreading their uninvited seeds into his good earth. He was glad it was early morning so he could remove these vibrant witnesses to the imperfection of his planting. His wife was thrilled with his gift of flowers and found vases to fill for the table, the chair and even to set on the front porch.

Weeks later, the overwhelmed farmer was taking cart loads of the now fragrant flowers to sell at market. He rose early every morning to pick the field clean and was exhausted with the urgency to keep this burgeoning secret from his fellow farmers. In vain, he scanned his field every morning for any sign of a crop growing out from under these irrepressible flowers, but he slowly came to accept that they had taken over his field and choked out any possibility of reaping a harvest at the end of the season. He knew his master was a patient and forgiving man, but that made his shame even greater. He would inevitably disappoint this kind overseer when it came time to harvest. How could he have failed to see this coming? How could he have failed to keep his rented plot free from this beautiful invasion.

The day finally came. The master was due to visit each farmer and check on their crop before the harvest. The farmer didn't sleep that night, and finally give up the attempt as the first rays of light began to pierce the dark horizon. He trudged down to his field; his only hope was to have the field picked completely clean of flowers before the master arrived and hope that the master quickly walked by and saw only that the green field was testament to the faithfulness of the farmer to plant something. He bent and picked the first flower. He gazed at its beautiful face and its sweet fragrance filled his nose with pleasure. Once again, he couldn't find it



in his heart to blame such a thing of joy for its will to live – even if it was in his field.

Hours later, after harvesting the biggest crop of flowers yet, the sweating farmer hurried his wife off to market with the heaping cart and sat down to wait. He comforted himself in his shame by remembering the happy faces of those who bought his flowers; he remembered the women who would wait for him at market singing the praises of the most fragrant, long-lasting flowers they had ever encountered. He remembered giving the remaining blooms to the children who waited eagerly at the end of the day for his gifts.

The master approached. The farmer's heart was heavy and his mouth was dry. He didn't look up to see the kindness in the face that gazed down at him. He only heard as the master got down off of his horse. He only heard the master say, "Well, what have we here?" As the farmer turned, he saw only the ring-laden hand that bent to pluck something red. Shame and sadness and regret flooded the farmer until he was almost as

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crimson as this betraying bloom.

“Spectacular!,” said the master. “These are even more breath-taking than I had hoped!”

“Than you had *hoped?*” stammered the farmer. “You mean you knew about these flowers?”

“Well, of course!” laughed the master. “This was the seed I gave you in the spring. I’ve been checking on their progress as you’ve brought them to market all summer. I couldn’t be happier with the work you have done here.”

“But, I thought I had failed you,” blurted the farmer. “You gave everyone else important crops that will feed everyone during the winter, why did you give me flowers?”

“Because of all my farmers, I know that you have true love for everything that grows. I knew these flowers would be safe in your hands. I wanted my people to know beauty this summer, to be reminded that their lives are to be enjoyed and celebrated. Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” Galatians 6:9.

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most timid voice, our struggle becomes *consecrated*. Consecration means dedication to God. It occurs when we claim our deepest desire for God, beneath, above, and beyond all other things.

Everything we do involves some kind of dedication. When we simply try to reform a troublesome addiction, our struggle is dedicated to minimizing the pain that addiction causes us and others. But in consecration, we dedicate our struggle to something more; consecration is our assent to God’s transforming grace, our commitment homeward (Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace*, 1988, excerpts from pages 147-150).

Lord, I pray that as we struggle to become more Christ-like, you will help us to become comfortable with the spaciousness created as we release addictions and behaviors that are destructive. Teach us what freedom feels like and help us to embrace it. Show each of us how to consecrate our lives and our struggles to you, so that we may seek our ultimate healing and connect with our deepest desire for You. Transform us, Lord, so that we may be healed rather than trading one addiction for another.

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together – our own children have children and we have lots of family around – but in quiet moments when the food is cleared off the table and my grandchildren are becoming restive, the urge rises up in me to start a game, or gather a few friends for a movie, or . . . anything to keep us together for little while longer. My siblings and I have started to attend family reunions in Ohio and South Carolina. I look forward to those with increasing pleasure—but I am not planning the menu already!

The desire and need to connect is true for everyone—whether they have family to gather with or not. Another characteristic of my parents was the inviting of strangers to our holiday dinners. And they didn't remain strangers long, my mom's hospitality wouldn't allow it—southern to the core, she fed people till they couldn't take anymore. My dad was open-hearted as well. I remember one Thanksgiving that Daddy had too many guys from his company that he wanted to bring home, so our dinner was cancelled and the whole family went out to his company, at the Jungle Warfare Training Center, where he was the supply sergeant, and we all had dinner at the mess hall. We loved it – food piled high, monkeys swinging in through the open sides of the mess tent stealing bananas

right off our plates. And I remember the room full of what seemed like a hundred guys – all eyes on “Sarge’s” family. Daddy couldn’t bring them all to us, so he brought his family to them.

Over the next few days, besides the family gatherings, I have a few plans with some folks who can’t gather with their families. Can’t bring my family to theirs, but I can bring a little of the spirit with me as we sit together and chat. That is what seems to be the

holiday season for me—taking care to be with family, taking care to be family to someone else. It is my prayer that the blessing of this sort of rhythm finds its way into many hearts this season.

Holidays are for connecting. I hope that our WGA friends and supporters have plenty of time with their favorite people. I pray that the times will be rich and full

of love – even the commiserating you do over not-so-fun times, I hope will turn to honoring and blessing the people in your life. I have heard it said that “family is where you go when you have nowhere else to go and they have to let you in.”

I am glad that we are all part of the Family that always has room for more. May the spirit of the season, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and cause you to bless others!

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November In Review

November 23rd – WGA group activity – Movie Marathon Day. Over 30 people joined us throughout the day for one or more of the 5 movies we watched together.

November 28th – Roger and Scott spoke to the youth group at Celebration Community Church. The topic was “Why Do People Struggle?”

Thursday Night Group

November 1st: 37 People
November 8th: 31 People
November 15th: 29 People
November 22nd: No Group
November 30th: 39 People

Orientation meeting: 7 new People

December And Beyond

December 13th – WGA group members will celebrate Christmas together at the annual White Elephant gift exchange.

January 5th: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry!

January 11th – Monthly Family & Friends of Sex Offenders meeting. Contact the WGA office for more info.

January 11th – Men’s Commitment Group begins. Please be praying for the 5 men participating, plus the two leaders.

January 12th – Survivors of Abuse group begins. Please pray for the 4 participants and the 2 leaders of this group as well!

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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.

Printed in the USA
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