



A Measure of Grace

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WGA: A Resource for Speakers and Presentations

by Roger Jones

Among the many things we do at Where Grace Abounds, we are often a resource for pastors, teachers, lay ministers, and anyone else who is seeking information and guidance about presenting/speaking on a particular topic. Just in the past couple of weeks, we heard from four different people looking for statistics about sexual issues in our culture and/or direction for a talk they were preparing to give. I am so encouraged that these men and women found WGA as a resource.

Three of these contacts were local to the Denver area (one of whom is presenting to churches in Colorado and Wyoming) and the fourth was calling all the way from Wisconsin! Each of them had some kind of

personal connection to WGA, whether through participating personally in the ser-

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vices we offer, or vicariously through a loved one.

The impact of what God is doing at WGA goes beyond just our weekly groups and discipleship. People are taking the lessons they learn here and multiplying our efforts by sharing in their churches, places of work, and within their own families and other relationships.

With her permission, I would like to share with you some of the comments that one of the people requesting assistance made to us via email. Sherry attended our weekly support group several years ago. I've changed her name, since she is working in a sensitive field.

"Hi all! The incarcerated youth I work with asked that I talk about homosexuality. I wanted to see if I could get a copy of your talk on "The Purpose of Attraction." I remember a lot (you all are THAT good!) but not enough to hold 15 minutes. J Thanks...I appreciate you and pray for your continued great work! Sherry"

From a follow-up email:

"The 2nd most frequently asked question I get is, "Do homosexuals go to hell?" (1st has been, "Are we all going to die in 2012?"). Most of the kids I work with are struggling

in this area so I am continually grateful for all you & WGA have given me to allow me to minister in this area. :)

I would love, love, love to have you (Scott) or Mary come as a guest speaker...would that be something you would consider? There is a very fine line with "The State" on what we can and cannot say, but by God's grace, I have managed to walk the line fairly well so we could discuss what is & is not allowed if you wanted to speak.

At any rate, I'm always grateful for you friend! Stay cool! :), Sherry

And finally, in response to our request to use some of her comments:

"Yes, please feel free to use any quotes for your newsletter. I would estimate 80% of the youth I work with are on the continuum of homosexual/bisexual but the question underneath "Do homosexuals go to hell?" is "Can I trust you with my story? And, are you going to judge me?" A large portion of the State (of Colorado) staff I work with are also in on that continuum so, like I said, it's a tricky line to walk. I generally respond with, "The good news is I am not your judge, Jesus is. Salvation isn't about sexual orientation, it is

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New Group for Family and Friends

By Mary Heathman

(Reprinted from October 2012)

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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Got Change? (Part 2)

By Scott Kingry

God's Kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help; first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps—harvest time!

Mark 4:26-29

In my last article, I talked about the “movie montage” as being Hollywood’s way of portraying the passage of time, or a character’s sudden transformation. Within the few beats of a pithy pop song, movie heroes effortlessly let go of addictions and bad break ups, are completely made over, and gain new jobs and happy lives. I also made the case that in reality, a whole evaluative and cognitive thought process occurs before we ever take the risk of changing anything. And unlike a film’s sanitized version of “life in transition,” when such a risk is taken there are loss, grief, overwhelm and just a simple feeling of being lost in blowing, shifting sand. Thankfully change is only a temporary gig and life finally balances out again.

This month’s montage is taken from Disney Pixar’s *Up* and its sweet and thoughtful first 10-minute journey with Carl and Ellie. They meet in childhood, grow up, fall in love and marry. We, too, fall in love with their relationship as it goes through various joys and sorrows, then eventually withers in the winter of the death that leaves Carl a grieving wid-



ower. Though just a montage, this one feels closer to real life, for we all wrestle with hopes, dreams, changing expectations and the pain of desires that simply aren’t met or are left unfinished. Where is God in the midst of all this turbulence—when life throws the unexpected curve ball? This question is vented in my office almost daily.

It’s a legitimate thing to ask. Men and women come to Where Grace Abounds with a huge longing for things to be different in their lives. We engage God in a “change process,” or perhaps in spiritual terms we could call it “transformation” or the “sanctification process.” I’ve met many sincere Christians who want to align their lives with Christ, have a desire to be more conformed to His image and to let go of all things which get in the way of these goals. But since life isn’t simply linear, and sexuality and relationships aren’t mathematical equations, just doing all the right things doesn’t exactly mean $A + B$ always equal C . When a wrench is thrown into our well-crafted plans and expectations, God is the usually first to hear our shrieking. In our lamenting (to use a nice biblical term), God almost always ends up on the losing end of things. The change we long for is happening too fast, or agonizingly too slowly. We didn’t expect it to come with some effort, or pain, or any sort of sacrifice on our side. And if the outcome

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isn't exactly what we anticipated—there's hell to pay! It's as if we've believed that Christianity is merely a contract, and God isn't living up to his side of the bargain.

Shrieking (or lamenting) aside, there are still real questions to ask. What is God's part and what is mine? I can't just wait around for God to magically transform me with a wave of a wand, but I know I can't strive and force change in just my own strength either. It's because of these reasonable questions that I particularly like Jesus' parable from the book of Mark. We get a sense from this little story that God is the one in control of our development; like plants, we are created and designed to "grow," and not just physically. Our growth is as whole persons—our mental understandings, relational abilities, emotional capacities and our desires to engage God spiritually all grow. Like the man who spreads the seed, goes to bed and forgets about it, we too can go through endless days of routine. One day we wake up to realize that something is different about us and we can't mark the exact day or time the shift or change occurred.

But we do have a job in tending the gardens of our lives even if we can't control the process. We need to water and nurture the plants, take care of soil, weed out anything that's going to damage our plants and keep those pesky critters away. Yet rather than just making a check list of "chores," this is about a relationship with God. Sometimes it can be as simple as making some space for Him and keeping company with Jesus. Note this wonderful quotation from Adele Ahlberg Calhoun in *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*:

Wanting to work with and watch Jesus is where transformation begins. Willpower and discipline alone can never fix your soul. Striving, pushing and trying harder will not recover your life. Unforced rhythms of grace depend on something more than self-mastery and self-effort. The simple truth is that wanting to keep company with Jesus has staying power that "shoulds" and "oughts" seldom have. Jesus wants us to recognize that hidden in our desperations and desires is an appetite for the Lord and Giver of Life. ... The very first thing Jesus asked his soon-to-be disciples was, "What do you want?" (bold mine, p. 16).

So God seems to be in, around and through our daily pursuit and desire for transformation. His Spirit is the "change agent" that causes the plant to even begin to bud, and He is our Rock we cling to for survival when change involves all kinds of stormy chaos. In the end, the tired adage still holds some truth: the point is not so much the destination or end product, but experiencing and learning from being together on the journey. In the film *Up*, a grieving, elderly Carl sets off on a journey with young stowaway Russell in order to fulfill the adventure he once promised his wife Ellie. The unlikely pair begins to realize that what they seek is not found in faraway lands or wild escapades, but in the profound beauty of everyday friendship.



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about knowing Jesus." The kids respond favorably to that since, when they read scriptures about Jesus, they like Him. It is my job to love them and connect them to Jesus, He does the rest. :)

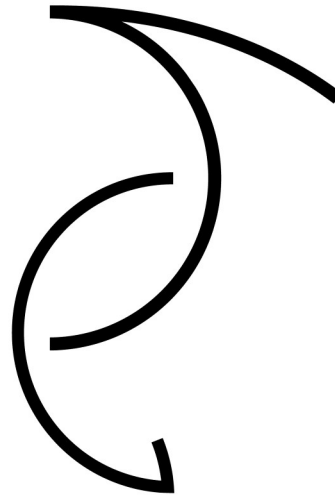
I hope to come back to WGA sometime but I'm usually doing bible study on Thursdays. I have a volunteer doing one coming up so maybe sometime soon...are you still at 7pm at the same location? Sherry"

I love the way Sherry describes how she responds to the young women she works with, pointing them to Jesus. He is where our hope lies. And I hope we get to see her sometime soon at our weekly meeting. Email is a good way to stay in touch, but it is no substitute for seeing someone face to face.

In closing, I would like to offer thanks to those of you who support WGA in all the ways that the support comes... through prayer, through donations, and through telling others about what happens here on a daily basis. Without you, people like Sherry would not be able to attend our Foundations classes, learn from the talks we offer, and eventually share the information with others. Thank you so much!

For those of you who are interested, I am so happy to report that WGA ended 2012 with money in the bank. This is quite a blessing, since in the

Summer, the financial situation here was looking pretty discouraging. Thank you God for continuing to provide for WGA. And thank you for those who have chosen to be a part of supporting the ministry here.



(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) has been formed. 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. Volunteer training is planned for March 8-10. Please call the office for details
- 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



December In Review

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

December 19th: WGA Staff, Board and Leadership Team gathered for a Christmas celebration

Thursday Night Group

December 6th: 28 People
December 13th: No Group
December 20th: 14 People
December 27th: 21 People

Orientation meeting - 4 new people

January And Beyond

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!

February 2nd: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry!

Financial Update

2012	Income	\$267,584
	Expenses	\$245,260
	Difference	\$22,324

Praise God for His provision. Thanks to everyone who donated in 2012!

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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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