



A Measure of Grace

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The U.S. Supreme Court and Exodus International *By Roger Jones*

Last month, I expressed my intent to continue an article about sexual addiction. Due to some national developments, I will postpone that until next month so I can address some of the items that have been in the news. - Roger

On a national level, much has changed during the last month, particularly in regards to gay rights issues. It has seemingly been everywhere in the news. Some of the highlights, as they relate to Where Grace Abounds are: The US Supreme Court struck down a portion of the Defense of Marriage Act and refused to make a ruling on the Constitutionality of California's Proposition 8, and Exodus International offered an apology for hurting people and announced that it would be closing its doors. Many of WGA's friends and supporters have been asking what these things mean. I'll do my best to break them down for you here.

While we don't yet fully know the ramifications of the Supreme Court's rulings, here are a few facts. The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was signed in 1996

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

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

Email:
info@wheregraceabounds.org
Website:
www.wheregraceabounds.org



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by President Bill Clinton. The portion of the law in question was section 3. In essence, it forbade the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages, defining marriage as an institution consisting of one man and one woman. While individual states are allowed to determine whether or not they will allow same-sex marriage, the federal government did not recognize them and as such; same-sex married individuals were not allowed benefits or the ability to file federal taxes as “married.” Even if a gay couple were married in a state where it was legal, issues such as inheritance taxes were not treated in the same way at the federal level. A heterosexual spouse would not have to pay inheritance tax on any money left to them by their deceased spouse. A homosexual spouse was not protected from the inheritance tax as their marriage was not recognized. The Supreme Court determined that section 3 of DOMA was unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court refused to make a ruling on California’s Proposition 8, which was passed by the voters in 2008 and barred same-sex marriages. California has a convoluted history with gay marriage. In brief, the state began allowing same-sex marriage licenses in 2008. Later that year, Proposition 8 halted the state from issuing same-sex marriage licenses but allowed those who had already been married to continue on as such. The constitutionality of Proposition 8 was called into question and determined to be unconstitutional by a US District Court. This decision was upheld at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The US Supreme Court decided they would not hear the final appeal, as it was being brought forth by individual sponsors of Proposition 8, rather than by public officials. So, the ruling from the District Court stands, and gay marriage has resumed in California.

In June, at their annual conference, Alan Chambers (President of Exodus International) announced that Exodus would be closing its doors. This was following a public apology in which Alan acknowledged the harm that people involved with Exodus had been caused over the years.

While WGA had been a part of Exodus as a member ministry for many years, we determined in 2008 that it was time to drop official membership in the Exodus network. This was due, in large part, to some concerns we had about the direction the leadership seemed to be taking. Mary Heathman had served on the Board of Directors for Exodus for a number of years, as both a member and as the President. While WGA is no longer officially affiliated with Exodus, the announcement was difficult to hear.

Most of what we have heard from Alan Chambers has been via television broadcasts and interviews. The trouble with these is that we often only get snippets of what has actually been said and sometimes the “heart” behind the message is lost. That being said, it seems that by taking responsibility and apologizing on behalf of Exodus (and therefore its membership), all the good that Exodus and its

I have been grateful for my experiences at WGA, where we are encouraged to tell the whole story, the good and the difficult.

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Small Victory? Maybe Not So Small!

By Chris D.

[Editor's Note: *Some of you know about a new program, Beyond Containment, that is taking root under the WGA ministry umbrella. One new support group, Families and Friends of Persons Charged with a Sexual Offense (FFPSO) has been meeting monthly to provide support and resources. In an email exchange with one mother who has been in touch with us, she shared a "small victory" she experienced recently. I asked permission to share with our supporters. Here is Chris D's "small victory" that seems huge to me! –Mary Heathman]*

During the last year I have been struggling with a destructive emotion called "shame". The Webster definition of shame is "a painful emotion caused by a strong sense of guilt, embarrassment, unworthiness, or disgrace." There have been definite points in my life where I have struggled with feelings of shame but this battle has been different.

I know the exact moment that this all-consuming shame began to take hold of my life. It was the day my daughter showed up at our door to share with us that she had tried to commit suicide because she had been in an inappropriate relationship with a young teenager. It was in that moment she looked at me and said; "I really loved him, Mom," that fear, guilt, embarrassment and disgrace began to overshadow and challenge the faith, self-worth, love and forgiveness I had always professed to have through my relationship with God.

Guilt consumed me. I must have done something so terribly wrong as a mother for my daughter to have allowed her heart to take over her head in such a way. I was in such complete shock, and these feelings of fear, shame and guilt were so much easier to believe in that moment than the redemptive power of God's love for me through Jesus Christ. And, so, a battle waged within me that I still fight.

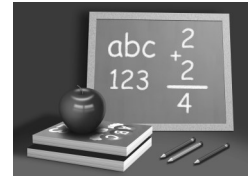
I must confess that shame was definitely winning on most days over this last year as I walked with my daughter through her depression, her arrest and her many court proceedings that resulted in a four year prison sentence. Yet, I still spent countless hours poring over scripture to remind myself of what God has done for me, how much he loves me, how much he forgives me, and that all He asks is that I believe in Him...grace and nothing else. He doesn't expect me to be perfect. He just asks me to do my best and trust Him. He is what defines me...He is my identity... He is all I need.

I constantly shared these truths with my daughter. The legal system was defining her as nothing more than a sex offender that needed to be contained, but I prayed she would accept and receive the truths that God does not define her that way, and that He forgives and loves her. He restores and redeems. He wants to give her a hope and a future. In those moments of alone time with God, I would believe all that I was telling my daughter and I would feel empowered by those words for myself. But then, as I would

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The WGA School Year

By Scott Kingry



I have just the right temperament to be the Program Director of Where Grace Abounds. I'm a planner, interested in the details, and am content to ride the ever-moving wave that keeps our Thursday Night Group consistent and available weekly. Sometimes my tasks (scheduling speakers and group facilitators, setting up/tearing down, sitting in small groups and creating endless flyers—let alone serving the people who attend) feel like managing a bunch of poles with spinning plates on top of them. Keep everything endlessly turning and moving, don't let anything slow down or crash to the floor. A good deal of the time, I'm gratified by this week in and week out rhythm and the tedium is even peaceful. But, Lord (and I do mean that as a prayer), even I need some novelty after 20 years! With this quiet prayer in mind, I suddenly had a revelation about my vocation—if I'm bored with my job in any way, *I'm the one who's responsible*. So, I'm very fortunate to work with a ministry staff that will let me be as creative--within reason, of course--as I'd like.

I thought the move to experiment with a new summer schedule last year would provide a perfect opportunity for creativity. Having a lighter and different schedule June-August would allow the rest of the nine months (September-May) for a more focused and structured year. Our hearts beat to provide the best educational talks and resources on issues of sexuality and relationships, so last August I surveyed our Leadership Team and Group Members on 200 topics related to

Emotional, Relational, Sexual, Psychological and Spiritual health. From their answers, I used the most popular topics to build the curriculum this past "school year." These are the themes we explored and disciplined folks with over the past nine months:

SEPTEMBER: Transformation Month

Discovering Your Desires
Defining the Change Process
Surviving Life in Transition
Re-Storying Life

OCTOBER: A Look at Core Issues

Living with Longings and Desires
Shame Basics
Taming the Shame in Your Life
Bridging the Gap of Head & Heart

NOVEMBER: Improving Communication

The Benefits of Conflict
The Art of Self Disclosure
Healthy Assertiveness
Spouses Panel

DECEMBER: WGA Christmas Care Package

Self-Care during the Holidaze
Sacramental View of Nature, Gender & Sexuality
Random Acts of Kindness
White Elephant Party

JANUARY: Addictions Month

Technology Addiction
Your Brain on Porn
Love Addiction Pt 1 & 2

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(WGA School Year *continued from page 4*)

Addictions Panel

FEBRUARY: Sexuality and Relationships

God's Purpose for Attraction
Testimony

Love Languages

Six Types of People You Need in Life

MARCH: Lenten Season "Yield"

Simplicity, Fasting, Silence & Solitude
Radical Love
Redemptive Responses to Suffering
Lenten Service

APRIL: The Way We Relate

The Relational Dance of Intimacy
Resolving Relational Ambivalence
Establishing Healthy Boundaries
Understanding Emotional Dependency

MAY: Wrap Up

Healthy Attachments
Restoring our Identities as Men & Women
Subtle Differences of Health & Unhealth
Interview with HIV Carelink
The Power & Strength of Introverts

(Supreme Court / Exodus *continued from page 2*)

members did was minimized. I have no doubt that harm was done to people over the years, not with malicious intent, but harm nonetheless. One of the things Alan mentioned in his apology was that he and others had only told part of their testimony, the victorious sounding parts. The ongoing struggles and temptations with same-sex attraction were left out. This was misleading and needed to be faced honestly and directly.

At WGA, we have always tried to be upfront about the realities of the Christian walk. Just because a person accepts Christ does not mean that temptation will be eradicated. For those who struggle with same-sex attraction, this temptation will often resurface. For those who struggle in their heterosexual attractions, temptation will likely surface there as well, where they are weakest. I am grateful that it is in our weakness that He is made strong (II Cor. 12:9). I have been grateful for my experiences at WGA, where we are encouraged to tell the whole story, the good and the diffi-

cult. As the Executive Director of WGA, I can understand the pressure to present a perfect testimony of healing and change. I believe a more realistic testimony comes from a person who follows Christ despite their struggles and not only because of some change, or hope for change, in their sexuality. Change that occurs, to be sure, but it has not yet been perfected. Will it be on this side of Heaven? Maybe... Time will tell. Regardless, I will do my best to follow Christ.

While many are celebrating the Supreme Court decisions and the closing of Exodus, many others continue on faithfully, trusting in God for their provision. Please pray for all these men and women, that the truth and love of Christ will guide them.

(Victory continued from page 3)

face the realities of my life, I found I wasn't acting empowered by these truths in God at all. Instead, I believed the lies the world was feeding me, and I was allowing myself to be driven by those lies and by that shame. I wanted to hide, and the more I hid from friends and family the more shame I felt.

A few weeks ago something really changed inside of me. This change began to take shape when I visited my daughter for the first time in prison. There are many things as a mother that you worry about for your children. I worried about illnesses, accidents, broken hearts, loneliness, discouragement and financial struggles, but NEVER did I worry about one of my children facing life as a felon and serving a sentence in prison. I never worried that one day I might be standing in line at a prison visitation center anxious and nervous just praying they would let me in to see my daughter.

I must have read the rules for visitation a hundred times. I was so worried I was going to do something wrong and not be allowed in. To my great relief, after a few questions and a pat down by a security guard, I was allowed in. I was going to get to see my daughter!

I sat at the table assigned us and waited for Sarah to come in. That place made me nervous and uncomfortable. That place made me feel ashamed...I thought, "Mothers that raise their children right don't have to visit their daughters in prison...they are going to lunch or shopping or getting manicures together!!!"

Finally she came in. It felt so good to hug her, to hold her and to give her a kiss. I just kept looking at her like a mother looks over her newborn for the

first time. Checking to make sure everything was perfect! In that moment it didn't matter to me that I was in a prison, it was just so wonderful to sit across from my daughter and have a conversation where I could see her face, look into her eyes and enjoy her smile. She has the best smile! We talked, we cried, we laughed and there were moments we just shared silence together.

Our time together was so precious. During those two days of visiting with her it was so obvious to me how far my daughter has come. She has battled through her depression and the desires she once had to end her life; she has taken responsibility for her choices. She is facing prison with courage and is working hard to be a model prisoner. She was open and honest about where she is at in her relationship with God and she made it so very clear how grateful she is for our love and support. What more could a mother ask for in a child! I was so incredibly proud of my little girl!!!

When we arrived home, I was cleaning up all the emails that had accumulated while we were away. I came across an email from friends who are excited about our youngest daughter's upcoming wedding. These friends, like many others who are invited to this event, have no idea what really has been going on in our lives over this last year; I have worked hard to "hide" details from everyone.

That hiding has been driven mostly by my fear and shame. Some of my discretion has been to protect my family and that I don't regret. But if I am truly honest with myself, many times my silence was rooted in fear and shame. My friend's email was filled with updates on everything "perfect" and "wonderful"

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(Victory continued from page 6)

that was going on in each of her children's lives. At the end of the email my friend asked me to please let her know how we were all doing and to give her updates on each of my kids.

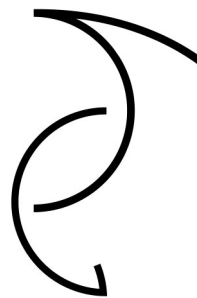
If this email had arrived before my visit to Sarah, I confess I would have deleted it and pretended I never saw it; but something was different. I realized by "hiding" I was giving power to the fear and the shame that I was battling. I realized by "hiding" people might think I was ashamed of my daughter and that is NOT at all true. I am not ashamed of her; I am very proud of her! I clicked reply and began to write a message back updating my friend on each of my children's lives. When I got to my Sarah this was what I said, "Our sweet Sarah is still in Colorado. She is no longer teaching. She has been struggling and going through a really difficult time over these last two years. She is working very hard to put her life back together and we support her and are so very proud of her. Dave and I talk to her weekly and travel to see her as often as we can."

I finished the email, and when I pressed the send button I felt so empowered...I felt so much stronger. I realized in that moment that truth is freeing. I realized I have been giving power to fear and shame within me by hiding. I didn't feel it necessary to share specific details in this email, but I shared truth, plain and simple.

When I pressed "Send", I felt shame and fear weaken within me and I felt this incredible strength well up inside. On this day, I won the battle over shame. I am sure the war will continue to wage within me, but I feel stronger. I know it pleases God that I am supporting, en-

couraging and walking with my daughter as she is trying so hard to do the right thing. I know God is using me and countless others to help Sarah through this difficult journey. I am thankful to God for putting so many wonderful people in our lives this last year who have shown my family a true glimpse of unconditional grace and love. I look back and I see how God used each and every one of these dear friends to help me get to this place. I know I am doing God's will when it comes to supporting my daughter so I am done hiding because I have NOTHING to be ashamed of...

[Editor's Note: *Chris is one mother; hers is one story. Each situation is unique and Jesus guides and directs each one of us in unique ways. This story is shared simply to show that in the darkest of times, God is at work on our behalf, and He sends people to walk with us. We are privileged to be some of God's provision for Chris, Sarah, and other like them. Please pray for our Family and Friends groups.*]





June In Review

June 9th: WGA Leadership Meeting

June 22nd: WGA event at Lakeside Amusement Park

June 30th: WGA presented at a Youth for Christ gathering



July And Beyond

June - August: We have a modified schedule for our Thursday night group over the summer. Call ahead for more info

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

August 15th: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!

Prayer Requests

Please pray for WGA's finances.

Please pray for our staff this summer as they each take a month sabbatical: Roger in June, Scott in July and Mary in August.

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

Steve Huston
Chaplain/Church Liaison

Jill Huston
Family & Friends Coordinator

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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