

A Measure of *Grace*

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Addiction: Three Spiritual Questions

by Roger Jones

In July, I interrupted my series on addiction to talk about the Supreme Court's recent rulings and the news that Exodus International was closing its doors. In June's *A Measure of Grace*, I introduced the topic, "How do I know if I have an addiction?" with three things to consider: 1) Have there been repeated (and failed) attempts to stop the behavior? 2) Has there been an escalation of the frequency and/or intensity of the behavior? 3) Have the behaviors begun to intrude on the primary aspects of my life. In that article, I broke each of these things down a bit further. If you haven't yet read it, you can find it on our website at www.wheregraceabounds.org under the "newsletter" link.

This month, I'd like to revisit the topic of addiction and healing with three spiritual

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questions that are key to beginning recovery from addiction

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tion. These are taken from *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction* by Dr. Mark R. Laaser, specifically from the chapter, "The Journey of Healing." The questions are: 1) Do you want to get well? 2) What are you thirsty for? And 3) Are you willing to die to yourself?

Do you want to get well?

It is imperative to ask this question, as it is the starting place for many. In his book, Laaser relates the story of the paralytic man from John 5. Jesus asks him, "Do you want to get well?" perhaps knowing that this man had developed a way of life that was working. In order to be healed, he had to let go of this identity. If he was healed, he would be responsible for things in a new way. Being sick had become normal. Was he willing to accept the changes? We don't know the details of his paralysis, but we can assume that he was unable to function fully without the healing power of Christ.

Can you relate? When you think of the areas in your life where you don't seem to have things under control, perhaps an addiction, have you really asked the question, "Do I want to get well?"

There is likely a reason you resort to your drug of choice time and again. Are you ready and willing to face whatever pain you are running from?

What are you thirsty for?

Behind every addiction, there is a need for something more than any activity or substance can provide. The power of addiction is that it is intense and may even seem to meet our needs for a season. We later discover that we have only been covering up the real needs, numbing ourselves with something that made false promises. And yet we continue to believe the lie, often because the rush of internal chemicals and intensity of the addiction make us feel more alive than we ever have before. Until we can connect with the fact that our real thirst is for Christ and the blessings of true intimacy, we cannot begin to let go of addiction.

There's an old saying, "If you always do what you always did, you'll always get what you always got." And here's another one, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results." In essence, these sayings are encouraging us to try something dif-

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Ministry for the Long Haul

By Mary Heathman

(Note: Mary Heathman is on sabbatical this month. She asked that this article from September 2006 be reprinted this month in preparation for a series she wants to do Sept - December 2013. Please pray for her as she takes this time off.)

In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson talks about how following Christ is not a short-term mission trip, but a life-time endeavor. The title of his book is a good description of the WGA approach to discipleship ministry. WGA staff and leaders are committed to “a long obedience in the same direction”—walking alongside folks whose lives are torn and troubled by the consequences of sexual sin, whether their own, or that of a loved one—walking alongside them as Jesus would.

“Paraklete,” is a new testament word for the Holy Spirit, “one who comes alongside” as an advocate, a helper, a friend who would never leave nor forsake. The seeds of the importance of that role took root early in my Christian walk. My spiritual mother, Dorothy, modeled the long-suffering tenacity of loving people as Jesus would love them.

She loved me, not as a fair weather friend, but through easy and hard times, when things got better or they got worse for me *or for her*. She celebrated when I succeeded and cried with me when I failed. Dorothy simply was present through it all, pointing me to the Lord in all circumstances, supporting and sustaining me as my roots grew down, and I grew up spiritually.

Even when Dorothy moved away, and I was no longer in touch, her influence permeated the way I viewed discipleship ministry. I didn’t even know how much she was a part of the formation of the heart of my faith until she died a few years ago, and her passing shook me to the core of my soul.

So, it is no surprise, then, that from the moment it dawned on me that God was calling me into full-time ministry, I understood it was going to be for the rest of my life. Of course, I knew that God could redirect me anytime; but in the meantime, I was to be present to people as Dorothy was present to me—for the long haul.

As I got my bearings after landing in ministry full-time, it became necessary to define and develop the purpose, philosophy and approach

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Bootstraps

"You were wearied by all your ways, but you would not say, 'It is hopeless.' You found renewal of your strength, and so you did not faint." Isaiah 57: 10, NIV

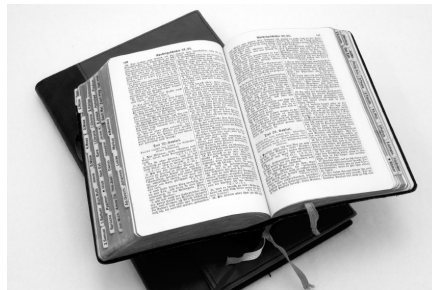
It is often possible to find renewal of our own strength in hopeless situations without turning to God. Fear of the shame of failure, or the bad opinions of others, or loss of control can drive us to "pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps." But that strength is temporary and doesn't lead us from our old "ways" that led us to hopelessness in the first place.

By contrast, Isaiah says in chapter 40:31 "Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength." God longs to make our strength new again—not just jolt it into an exhausted spasm of energy with a temporary caffeine boost.

"In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." (Prov 3:6) He longs to show us the well-worn paths of right-living so we don't wear our-

selves out trying to machete ourselves a new way through the jungle of living.

Jesus told the woman at the well that "those who worship, must worship in spirit and in truth." This passage from Isaiah 57 affirms that imperative. The Truth isn't usually polished and pretty and presentable for Sunday morning church. When we are wearied by our own ways, we must say so. When we come to a point of hopelessness, we must declare it. God is ready to meet us at that point of truth. In fact He is eager to step in and reveal that He is the antidote for our own wearying ways: He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.



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to ministry. Throughout this process, Ephesians 3:8-21 came to the forefront as a core principle for WGA's specific call:

"Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, there-

fore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may

have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

With every passing year, I am increasingly convinced that people whose besetting sin is sexual in nature are people who have not been "rooted and grounded in love."

With every passing year, I am increasingly convinced that people whose besetting sin is sexual in nature are people who have not been "rooted and grounded in love." They are men and women who are not "together with all the saints." They became disconnected through past trauma or the consequences of their sin or that of another. Therefore, then, they do not have the power, are unable to "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" nor to "know this love that surpasses knowledge." And without this rooting and grounding, without the community of the saints, they will never understand God's love nor will they be "filled to the measure

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of all the fullness of God.”

With this understanding as the foundation of what God was calling me to do, WGA was established as a community, an environment, rather than a program. There are other ministries that have programs designed for a season, and we are grateful for them. They are valuable resources providing educational and therapeutic experiences; we support these ministries and recommend that our group members take advantage of what they have to offer.

But at WGA, our ministry is one of providing rooting and grounding experiences. We provide ongoing support through our weekly drop-in group with weekly testimony and teaching, small groups where people can support one another. All this is in the greater context of the WGA community that works together, plays together, and seeks to follow Jesus together.

WGA leaders welcome newcomers, offering hope and friendship. People who re-enter the ministry after a short or long-term hiatus receive a warm welcome as well. Those who leave the community because they no longer agree with our position on sexual sin are respectfully disagreed with, but loved nonetheless; they have become friends and we remain in relationship with them to the extent that we are able.

Sometimes supporters ask me if it is discouraging to work in a field of

ministry that appears so hard. I don't see it as hard. In fact, the yoke is easy and the burden is light. It is where the Lord and I are yoked together, in deeply satisfying labor, and I don't want to be any other place.

Brad Rutledge, director of the Celebrate Recovery program at Eastridge Community Church in Covington, Ga., when he was asked “whether it was depressing to be working with people with hurts, habits, and hang-ups,” responded, “There is nothing that charges me up more than a messed-up life submitting to Christ and seeing them grow,” he said. “It is absolutely amazing.”

I, too, find it amazing! And as an aside, I would point out that I don't know where there are people *without* “hurts, habits and hang-ups.” WGA group members are just forced by the degree of their pain to get the help they need. They are my heroes, the courageous ones that will admit their need and seek the Lord's provision. I want to be on their bandwagon the rest of my life, or till the Lord comes back, whichever comes first.

There are a significant group of WGA leaders who want the same thing. We are in it for the long-haul!

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ferent when we are not happy with the results we are getting. While a scientist may be working diligently towards a cure for cancer, if he doesn't vary his experiments, he will keep getting the same results.

It is easy to say, "Turn to Christ and everything will be better." While I ultimately believe this, I realize it does not always seem to be true, especially when you are in the midst of pain. The same old sayings I used above can apply to your relationship with Christ as well. If quiet time with Scripture and in prayer isn't getting you the results you want, tweak the experiment. Try studying the Bible in a group or getting together with someone to pray. God speaks to us in a variety of ways, often through other people. Open yourself up to multiple opportunities to connect with Him.

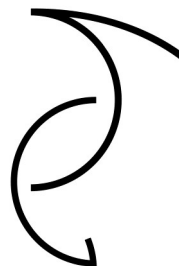
Are you willing to die to yourself?

Alcoholics Anonymous states that people must hit rock bottom, where there is no place to go but up, before they can begin to get better. I'm not sure what "rock bottom" is for everyone, but there must come a point when we recognize that our own best efforts have failed to bring the results we

hoped for. We have tried and tried to change ourselves and we cannot. Am I willing to acknowledge that and surrender myself to God?

Part of dying to oneself is admitting that I cannot make myself clean enough to ever feel worthy to be a child of God. Only He can make us clean. While it is true that we have an active part to play in our own recovery, we can easily get lost in the games of trying to do it all on our own. Self-reliance is what drove us into addiction in the first place. It is time to let go of our control and turn the control over to God.

I hope you will find these questions helpful. While it is not easy to walk away from addiction, the hope for freedom that comes from a life surrendered to Christ is powerful. I pray that God will guide each of us to follow Him more closely as we let go of the things that keep us from Him.





July In Review

July 17th: WGA Board Meeting—please pray for our Board of Directors as they steer the direction of the ministry



August And Beyond

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

September 7th: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry

September 11th: Mary will be presenting at the American Association of Christian Counselors conference

September 19th: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!

Oct 31-Nov 2: Mary will be presenting at the Hope for Wholeness conference in North Carolina

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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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