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A Measure of Grace

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The Grass is Not as Green Over Here as I Thought it Would Be

by Roger Jones

S In May, my wife Jill and I bought our new home (we'd been living in a one bedroom condo). We needed more space with a baby on the way. The plan was to move before Julia arrived, but as she came early, those plans had to adjust! With a new house came more chores to do around it. The yard has become my domain. When we decided to buy this particular place, the lawn was so very green and lush, at least from the street view. Now that I have mowed it a number of times and walked its every inch, I am aware of patches that really aren't so green. And some of the green we saw from the street isn't grass at all. There are weeds in my lawn.

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I was recently talking with someone whom I see regularly. As people often do, he asked me how I was doing. Rather than answering with the typical, "I'm fine," I was a bit more honest. I told him that I was tired, because our new baby had been keeping us up at night. I mentioned the stress I felt about buying a home at the same time as bringing a new baby into the world. I said that I missed having a schedule that was flexible and allowed me to spend more time with friends. Yes, I was complaining a bit, but I was also attempting to express some of the real emotion I was feeling in that moment.

His response to me was, "You don't know how lucky you are to have all of those things."

Ouch! I didn't really know what to say to that, so I came up with something like, "You're right. I am blessed to have all of those things." And that is true; I am blessed. Although it hurt a little to hear it put so bluntly, it was ultimately helpful for me to be reminded of my blessings. Still, I

sensed that his commentary on my life was actually more about his. My best guess is that he was really saying, "I am lonely and there is no end in sight for my loneliness. I would give anything to have a wife and a family."

When I try to think from his perspective, I get it. The grass does seem greener on the other side. While I entered into marriage, fatherhood and homeownership

with my eyes wide open, I couldn't fully know what any of them would be like until I was in the thick of each one. From the other side looking in, all I could see were green lawns. The major issue is that whether I am single or married, a father or childless, or a homeowner with a yard

or not, I am still me. I bring all of my strengths and flaws with me wherever I go. And when I get there, I am still surrounded by other people who are in the same boat; we are all flawed, broken people.

As a single person, I was well aware of the yellow patches and

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You may remember the opening of last month's article, *Ministry for the Long Haul*. I used the title of Eugene Peterson's book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, to describe "the WGA approach to discipleship ministry—walking alongside folks as Jesus would" -- for the long haul.

This long-haul approach to ministry is one of the ways I understand that God has made Himself available to His followers. He has made Himself available and will "never leave nor forsake us" (Deut 31:6) and is constantly watching over us (Psalm 121:3-4), and at work on our behalf (Isaiah 64:4). This is how God has already come alongside His people—for the long haul, way longer than we could ever do for each other, so long in fact, that it stretches to eternity.

For the next few months, I will write about the part of the believer in accessing this availability of God. I want to write about 1) our part in aligning ourselves with His purposes, 2) how we stay aligned against the pull of the enemy and our own propensity to wander away, and 3) I want to write a bit about the Hope of Glory that makes all that perseverance worth the effort.

Coming Alongside God

By Mary Heathman

For this introduction to this mini-series, I would like to reprint the last part of a keynote message I gave at the Exodus conference in June of 1995. It represents what I believe is the bedrock of our life in Christ:

If I could reduce my talk to one paragraph it would be "Christian, don't ever forget who you are, step in and take your place among believers. Be part of the "together" within which we shall all have power to understand and know God's love. The context for [developing a sense of] belonging is in the Body of Christ. Whether we feel like it or not is beside the point. The fact is, God has designed it so, and if we cooperate with His design, we will attach to the Body of Christ in various ways; to support [and small] groups, to churches, to the Holy Spirit.

We attach to support groups, individual ministries and we are understood. Doesn't it feel great to talk with someone who's been where you've been? God wants you to have that support. Some needs will be met, but that's not enough. People with the same kind of problem can only help each other so far. We need a step beyond our peers; we need to attach to a body of believers, a church, whose members need us as much as

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Sexuality American Style: Public vs. Private

By Scott Kingry



Vulnerability is based on mutuality and requires boundaries and trust. It's not oversharing, it's not purging, it's not indiscriminate disclosure, and it's not celebrity-style social media information dumps—*this may be desperation or woundedness or even attention seeking*, but it's not vulnerability. Vulnerability is about sharing our feelings and our experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them. Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly*.

Oh, America. As long as there are television, music, movies and social media, there will always be things to write about and endless fodder for newsletter articles—especially when one works for a ministry like Where Grace Abounds. All I can say is a sincere “thank you.” Recently of course, while the world was concerned with Syria and other grave matters, America's contribution to the global conversation regarded the now-all-grown-up childhood star, Miley Cyrus “twerking” with Robin Thicke on MTV's Video Music Awards. What is up with the rash of young female celebrities and their very public meltdowns?

“Twerking” according to the *Urban Dictionary* (at least a definition I can print here) is “also known as dirty dancing. When a woman slams her bottom on a man's pelvic area while dancing.” Beyond this, I promise I won't bore my gentle reader with yet another tedious commentary on such show business craziness. I'm personally worn out by the media hoopla it generated, due mostly to her having been the fresh face of Disney youth at one time in her life. I'll just throw my condolences in with those on the Twitter feed mourning the death of her character; Hannah Montana RIP.

But as usual, when anything sexually charged goes viral to that degree and everyone on the planet's inane comments about it are in, one needs to step back and make a few observations. The first one might be—in contemporary culture, **sex is a public phenomenon**. As Lauren Winner states in *Real Sex—the Naked Truth about Chastity*, “Sex is public—moms go on talk shows and confess to sleeping with their daughters' boyfriends, Calvin Klein models expose their body parts in magazine ads. But if sex is public,

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it is not communal.”

What’s very sad about this, as Brene Brown so wisely points out, these daily, public displays of sexuality in our society have little to do with anything as honorable as vulnerability or intimacy. They’re basically gratuitous raunch for the sake of raunchiness, acts of desperation that probably have their source in woundedness or needy attention seeking. This has given me a new filter for most reality television, unfortunately.

And what’s ironic, on the flip side of all this sexuality splashed in our faces, is that **sex in our nation is also considered very “hands off” and private**. I can hear the American mantras even as I type, “What I do sexually is no one’s business but my own”; “It’s my body, I can do what I’d like”; and “Consenting adults can do whatever, as long as it’s not hurting anyone.” Winner’s



quotation, begun above, continues:

Americans consider sex a fine topic of public disclosure but we insist that sex is also private, nobody’s business but mine and the person with whom I’m doing it. I can show you my midriff in public, and I can make out with my boyfriend on a park bench, but there is no communal language that allows you to talk to me about this body I am exposing in front of you.

Of course, she makes a valid point, especially in a society that over the last 50 years has watered the seeds of individual choice, freedom, comfort, desire and belief taking priority over those of the broader community.

Our culture seems a bit naïve to believe that sex and our choices concerning it can be so tidily compartmentalized by autonomy. **Sex has impact**—there are consequences for unboundaried sexual behavior. Health may be compromised, lives destroyed; sex simply does affect those in the community around us, especially children. We don’t live in a vacuum—it matters what we do with our bodies. I believe Winner is correct in asserting that we’ve lost the language to talk about sex, particularly in the context of each other’s lives. Even in

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(Sexuality American Style *continued from page 5*)
our Christian communities when it comes to sexuality, we struggle to decipher what is truth rooted in sound theology and what are merely the American ideologies we've bought into for the last half of the past century.

One thing that remains is that sexuality should be about connection and intimacy. Again, as Brene Brown puts so eloquently, sex should be about a vulnerability that is offered to those who are trusted and have earned it. Seeing sex in this relational context, instead of the extremes of public or private, we'll explore the traditional Chris-

tian perspective that sexuality is both **personal and communal** in my next article. Meanwhile, I was hoping that poor Miley might be getting some therapy, but a fresh look at the daily media indicates that it may be getting worse, before it gets better. We'll see what's happening with "Sexuality American Style" next month.



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we need them. More needs will be met—but that still won't be enough. People, no matter how godly, are still finite and we have infinite needs and desires.

Our ultimate attachment must be to God, to His Spirit, whose ministry fills in the gaps, salves the wounds when we fail one another, and increases our joy when we succeed and minister life to one another. And when we are properly attached, with peers and a church family and walking by the Spirit, thusly attached, we will grow. And, over time, one of the results we will experience is a peace and a settled-ness that comes from belonging. (As much as we can when

we are on our way somewhere else—citizens of another world; we at least can belong on a journey through this world and into the next--together!)

I closed my message by reading Ephesians 3:17-19 from the Message:

*“With both feet planted firmly in love,
you will be able to take in
with all Christians
the extravagant measures of
God's love.*

*Reach out and experience the breadth!
Test its length!
Plumb the depths!
Ride to the heights!
Live full lives, full in the fullness
of God!”*

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weeds in my lawn, but sometimes I wistfully forget those days of struggle when Jill and I are trying to get our schedules to coordinate. "It was so much simpler when I was single!" I say to myself. Perhaps that aspect of singleness was easier, but there are many advantages I have now that I didn't have before. Rather than being grateful for what I have, I can find myself fantasizing about some idealized version of my old life. It was a good life for a single person, but it certainly wasn't perfect! I now have companionship with my spouse (but I miss my alone time). I have more financial stability (but I can't just go out and buy whatever I want). I get to wake up in the morning with someone there in the bed next to me (but I sure miss sleeping diagonally across the bed). Whenever things get difficult or challenging, the other side (whether it is something new or something old) starts to look greener.

I have to confess that I do the same thing that my friend did to me. Usually, it is in my heart and mind rather than verbalized so boldly. For example, it is difficult at times for me to hear someone with more money than I have

talk about their financial stresses. "You don't know how lucky you are," I might say to myself. "I'd give anything to have your life." This is when I realize that I have succumbed to the belief that money can buy happiness, as if there would be no problems if I had more cash. More money means greener lawns!

There are two things that I hope to see develop within me: gratitude and empathy. I want to practice being grateful for what I have, because I have been very blessed in many ways. Even in the times when life isn't easy, I want to foster gratitude. I want to be empathetic to those around me, forgoing my judgments that they may be a "have" and I a "have not." I think these two things go hand in hand. If I am truly practicing gratitude in my life, I can approach others with more empathy. When I am thankful for what I have rather than focused on what I do not have, my heart is more open to walk alongside others who also experience real stress and pain, regardless of their life circumstances.



August In Review

August 10th: WGA participated in the AIDS Walk in support of HIV Carelink

August 24th: End of Summer BBQ



September And Beyond

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

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

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

September 29th: WGA will be presenting at a Youth For Christ event

October 10th: WGA will offer a training for leaders at Providence House

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

November 7-8: WGA will be speaking at Front Range Christian School

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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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