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A Measure of Grace

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To Bake or Not to Bake?

by Roger Jones

@ number of significant national shifts regarding same-sex marriage and gay rights occurred in 2013. As we end the year and prepare to move into 2014, I thought it would be good to review some of the specifically legal decisions and how they affect life at the local level.

In the spring of this year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) is unconstitutional. DOMA defined marriage as being between one man and one woman. Additionally, the Supreme Court justices declined to rule on California's Proposition 8, which also affirms marriage to be between one man and one woman, because a lower court had already deemed Proposition 8 unconstitutional. They decided to

(Continued on page 2)



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(To Bake or Not to Bake? continued from page 1)
let that ruling stand.

These two decisions, as well as the presence of many similar cases throughout the federal and state court systems, have paved the way for the legalization of gay marriage in all the states. As of today, 16 states sanction same-sex marriage and 33 states maintain some sort of ban. New Mexico alone has neither a ban on nor a provision for gay marriage. Most of the states with a ban are facing lawsuits. These suits will likely be decided in favor of gay marriage, at least once they reach the U.S. Supreme Court. The decisions may take a while, but we are talking a few years, rather than decades.

We are witnessing the changing tide of public opinion within our culture. Conflicting attitudes regarding homosexuality and gay marriage have surfaced everywhere, including our ministry. Many believe that same-sex marriage is not okay, but a growing number are uncertain about it or have decided that it is a legitimate option. Still others make a distinction between what they would choose for themselves vs. what should or should not be legal. "I don't think it is okay for me to

marry someone of the same gender, but I also don't think the government should restrict people who believe differently than me from getting married," is an example.

Recently, across the country, business owners who have refused to provide services for gay weddings have been sued. A photographer in New Mexico and a baker here in Colorado have been sued, both for declining to participate in something they proclaim is against their beliefs. So far, the court rulings have gone against them and likened their stances to discrimination against someone because of the color of their skin. The baker in Colorado has stated that he is not discriminating against gay people, whom he frequently serves in his shop. He just does not

want to participate in a gay wedding, something he sees as a sacred union between one man, one woman, and God. The court ruled that if he makes wedding cakes, he must make cakes for gay weddings too. Only time will tell what the baker will do.

Cases like these will continue to proliferate, particularly in the wedding industry. For now it seems

***We are
witnessing the
changing tide
of public
opinion within
our culture.***

(Continued on page 7)



Prone to Wander, Lord I Feel it...

By Mary Heathman

In September, I introduced a little mini-series of articles addressing the question, “What is the part of the believer in tapping into God’s availability—how do we draw alongside Him?” In the first article, I emphasized the context we must be in: *“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 . . . God has designed it so. . . .”*

In October, I wrote about *“The Five C’s of Sabotage.”* It was a reminder to all of us that we can sometimes get side railed through our own attitudes and behaviors: Carelessness, Comparison, Complacency, a Critical Spirit, and Compromise. In the antidotes to these five attitudes, we considered how to resist the pull of the enemy.

And in November, writing about how to align ourselves with God’s purposes, I mentioned the importance of *mindfulness*, saying, *“We will align ourselves with God’s purposes when we carefully look*

for Him in all things and when we ‘lean not to our own understanding’ⁱ even on our own hearts, and then submit to His teaching. He will take it from there—of this I am very confident!”

This month, even in the midst of the advent season, where we are often most *“mindful”* of the wonder of His coming to us, it is easy to see our propensity to wander away. I am hoping that a little attention to this will call us all into an even closer alignment with God and His purposes.

It was amazing, and a great relief, to me years ago, when I discovered in an old hymn a statement that confessed the condition of my own heart. I was amazed, because I didn’t yet know that this was true for all of us; I was relieved to find we could say it out loud and God had already known and forgiven! The hymn was the last verse of *Come Thou Fount of Many Blessings*:ⁱⁱ

*O to grace how great a debtor,
daily I’m constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,*

(Continued on page 6)

Reflections: Thoughts from a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Putting on My Big Girl Pants

I'm one of the lucky ones. My earliest concrete memory of believing that God loved me and saw me was when I was 4 years old. I have lived my life with the unwavering belief that I am seen by God and loved by Him. Don't get me wrong – it has been a real relationship: I've been furious with God, disillusioned, heartbroken. I've stood in a hospital shower and screamed into the cascade of water that I wanted Him to leave me alone and get the hell out of my life. I've journaled miles of ink and tears telling Him that His plans make no sense. But I'd never doubted that He saw me or loved me, until this past summer.

As an American woman entering the wilderness of mid-life, I have felt my identity as a fertile, attractive creature drain away. In our culture, the spotlight of value is pointed at that small square on the stage of a woman's life hedged in by two questions: first, "Are you old enough yet?" followed, it would seem, 10 minutes later by

the second question, "Are you too old now?" I'm officially too old now, so I've found myself for a while wandering around on the rest of the stage feeling pretty invisible. That notion soaked into my thoughts about God in my deep depression this past summer.

God has always been my ace-in-the-hole. Everyone else may walk out, but never God. He'd always had my back ... until this past summer. I felt like the boy in the plastic bubble – watching the world go on around me, banging on the invisible walls and shouting, but no one could hear me. Not even God, apparently.

I finally faced Him down in my journal accusing Him of sidelining me, considering me useless, past my spiritually performing prime, not even worth looking at. The only thing that came to me in the silence that followed was this, "So what if that is true? What are you going to do now?" It felt like a punch in the gut. I know that he's God and he can do whatever he wants with whomever he wants for as long as he wants. I dragged

(Continued on page 5)

(Reflections continued from page 4)

the thought around behind me like a sack of rotting potatoes for a week. The stench of it overwhelmed me every time I slowed down. Now what?

I examined my life. I weighed a few possibilities and was startled to discover that not much would really change in my life with this new idea. I would continue to love the people I love as well as I could, fight the hatred I felt for the people I hated, clean house, make jewelry, and find opportunities to play.

So the first time I sat down again to be quiet with God, I didn't know what was going to happen. I sat. He was there. And I felt a peacefulness sweep over me like a picture of an old married couple sitting by a fire at night. She's knitting and he's stroking the dog's head and staring into the fire. No words. There is just a familiar and comfortable being together. God hadn't changed. But I had. I was no longer a small child trying to dance and smile and perform to get Daddy's attention. I no longer needed him to look at me to know that we were ok. I was free to just be. I could put on my big girl pants and tend to my life.

Being past my "spiritually performing prime" turns out to be a great relief. I can get on with the things I love and the people I love. I don't have to go out of my way to find things to validate why God should love me. Going to go play now.

Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

**The Lord is the
everlasting God, the
Creator of the ends of
the earth. He does not
faint or grow weary;
his understanding is
unsearchable.**

Isiah 40:28



(Prone to Wander continued from page 3)

prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it,
*seal it for thy courts above.*ⁱⁱⁱ

I went online to YouTube to listen to the song by several artists, and it is great in many styles. But none were as beautiful as when I first heard it sung years ago. It was with the energy and enthusiasm of the little band of believers on a Sunday night hymn-sing at First Denver Friends Church, in the summer of 1972.

This will be the shortest article of the series—I've already made my first of two points: believers, including me, have a propensity to wander away. The second point I want to make is that the only way to prevent wandering away is to keep in touch—in prayer—and the only antidote to wandering away is confession and repentance—recognizing it, naming it, and turning back toward Him.

I wish I could be with you and circle up and pray together. If we could, I would pray:

- that our prayers will be frequent and consistently include: **“Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee.”**
- that when we find ourselves taking the slightest step away,

our confession will be: **“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.”**

- that our hearts will ever submit to the Lord and ask for His antidote to our wanderlust: **“Here's my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.”**
- **May this season be filled with the joy and meaning of Christmas—celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.**

Next month, I will wrap up this series, starting out the new year with an article on *Christ in You, Hope of Glory*.

ⁱProverbs 3:5-6

ⁱⁱCome Thou Fount of Many Blessings, Text: Robert Robinson, 1735-1790; Music: Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music.

ⁱⁱⁱ<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FG5ZhFN1DXk>

(To Bake or Not to Bake? continued from page 2)
that ministers who believe that same-sex marriage is not part of God's design will not be required to perform same-sex weddings, but for how long? What about a church that opens its chapel to the public for weddings? Who will determine what sorts of ceremonies can take place in private space that has been publically rented?

Just this past week, I was discussing the Colorado baker with some friends. Several questions were raised which I thought might be helpful to you as you try to think through issues like this.

Do you think the baker discriminated against the gay couple who wanted him to bake a cake for their wedding?

Is it discrimination against gay people to decline to participate in a gay wedding, but not in other events, such as birthdays?

Is the baker himself being discriminated against because of his religious beliefs?

Is there a problem with refusing to bake a cake for a gay wedding but accepting an order for a heterosexual couple who are living together before marriage?

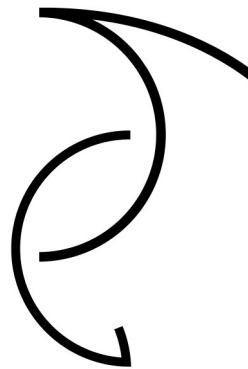
Does providing a service for a

wedding, such as baking a cake, imply that one is blessing the union?

How would you feel if you had tried to order a cake for your wedding and you were refused in this way?

How would you feel if you were the baker?

As with everything, it is a good practice to remember there is always more than one side to a story. Whichever side we find ourselves on, let's take a moment to reflect on that fact that these not just "issues" to be discussed. There are real people involved and real emotions. May we learn to show God's love to those with whom we disagree.





November In Review

November 7-8: WGA spoke at Front Range Christian School

November 15th: WGA Donor Appreciation Event

November 29th: WGA Event—Movie Marathon Day

December And Beyond

December 6th: WGA will be presenting at a Celebrate Recovery Meeting

December 16th: WGA presentation for students visiting from southwestern Colorado

January 16th Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!

Financial Update

As of the end of November, WGA has experienced a significant financial loss for the year (\$37,000 as of the end of November). Fortunately, generous donations at the end of 2012 have helped to cover this loss. As we approach the end of 2013, there is little cash in reserve to cover what is typically a lean first quarter. Would you pray with us about WGA's finances and consider giving a gift to help us enter into 2014 with extra funds? I am praying for a great end to 2013 so that 2014 can begin with a great start.

Thursday Night Group

**November 7th: 36 people
November 14th: 36 people
November 21st: 27 people
November 28th: No Group**

Orientation meeting: 5 new people

WGA Staff

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Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

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Chaplain/Church Liaison

Jill Huston
Family & Friends Coordinator

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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