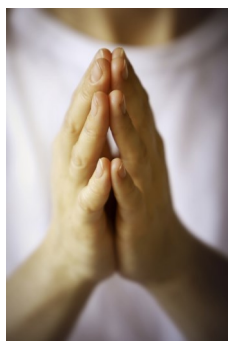




# A Measure of Grace

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## Praying through the News *by Roger Jones*

Every day we are reminded of the many issues regarding sexuality and relationships that people are facing. Sometimes it takes the form of a personal struggle. At other times it is a much larger cultural issue, such as discrimination or a public scandal. Below, I have provided a few samples of these stories that have been in the news over the last month. I will comment about them generally at the end of the article.

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### Russia's policies regarding homosexuality

Over the past several months, Russia has been in the news because of the passage of legislation that makes it illegal to use “propaganda” to promote homosexuality, particularly to minors. Additionally, there has been a surge of anti-

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gay violence in the country. As the Winter Olympics approached, much was made of LGBT issues in Russia. Many LGBT people and allies called for a national boycott of the Olympics. Some staged their own personal boycotts and refused to watch or support the Olympics.

### **Potential NFL player comes out as gay**

In preparation for the NFL draft, Michael Sam, defensive lineman for the Missouri Tigers, announced that he is gay. If drafted, Sam will be the first active, openly gay player in the NFL. In most professional sports, being gay continues to be a taboo. Several professional athletes have come out as gay in recent years, but appear to have waited until the end of their careers to do so.

### **Sex trafficking and the Super Bowl**

Regarding the Super Bowl last month, reports began to surface that this game generates more money from and activity in the sex trafficking industry than any other national event. People travel from far and wide to attend the Super Bowl, and apparently the sex trafficking industry follows. There were a number of raids and quite a few arrests made. Over a

dozen teens were freed from their captors.

### **Woody Allen sex abuse allegations**

Allegations of sexual abuse from Woody Allen's adopted daughter have resurfaced again after almost twenty years. She continues to insist the abuse did occur. He continues to deny it ever happened. We may never know the truth, yet it brings the issue of sexual abuse to light.

### **High school student expelled for participating in a porn film**

An 18 year old high school student from Florida was expelled from school after it came to light that he had been in a gay porn film. The student claims that he made the film in order to help with the bills around his house. He believes he was expelled because the school did not approve of his job, which was not illegal. The school claims that they were concerned for his safety, as other students had found out about the film and were bullying him.

### **Teacher arrested for sex with student**

A 25-year-old female gym teacher was arrested after allegations that she had sex with a male student multiple times in her own home.

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## Christian Community

by Roxanne Indermuehle

I realize that individuals have widely differing expectations and understandings of what is meant by “community.” Some people are surrounded with strong friendships and/or family, while others are mostly alone. A person’s background, place in life, and family situation influence his or her view of community. Some have learned to deal with life very independently and have only a small desire for interaction with other people. Others long for closeness and intimacy in community. Most people who have experienced a sense of true community desire to have that experience again. Unfortunately, finding a common, unambiguous understanding of community raises a major challenge.

A Christian community that fulfills the purposes of God is a source of joy, strength, and growth in the lives of its members. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-

1945), a prominent German minister imprisoned during World War II, wrote a book called *Life Together* (Harper & Row, 1954). His book explores faith community at significant depth, and I will refer to it here. He speaks of community as one of God’s gracious gifts. But he offers a challenge, “He who loves his dream of community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial” (p. 27).

At first, I felt that Bonhoeffer didn’t hold a high enough view of the role of community in our lives. But after a more thoughtful reading, I came to realize that I’ve held too tightly to the experiences I’ve had of true community. So too, I’ve failed to recognize its reality when an encounter with community has left me feeling dry and empty.

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***A Christian community that fulfills the purposes of God is a source of joy, strength, and growth in the lives of its members.***

## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

*By Nancy Hicks*

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Where there are no oxen,  
the manger is empty,  
but from the strength of an  
ox come abundant harvests  
(Prov. 14:4 NIV).

An empty manger means eventual starvation: No food for the work animals, no work from the animals, no sowing crops, no harvest, no food for anyone. I've been looking at the stable of my life recently while meditating on these words. I have observed myself bustling about sweeping everything clean, painting the stalls, making gingham curtains for the windows, moving the manger for the greatest *feng shui* in arrangement. But there isn't anything in the manger. I'm feeling the pangs of hunger as I fill my days with busy-ness.

I don't want to die here: clean, alone and starved. I want abundant harvest in my life – a feast table that overflows for everyone to share. So how do I invest in my life in a way that looks like an ox or two? There is a great price, of course, or I would have done it long ago. Oxen produce steaming

piles of stink to shovel; they require time, effort, and maintenance. They require me to leave my beautifully appointed barn and venture into the fresh air for some hard work.

This has to look different for everyone. What does tapping into new power entail in your life? Is it: Pursuing some kind of education? Checking into an addiction program? Joining a church? Leaving a church? Making choices to be physically healthy? Committing to a difficult relationship? Ending one?

For myself, I must purchase time and carve out space to be silent, to reflect, to fill my mind with truth and peace. Not "peace" that is an ephemeral, disembodied disconnection from life, but a coarse-haired, massive, living addition. I want to hear it snort, feel the powerful ripple of muscle, smell its warm breath. Oxen are not Chihuahuas. It takes dedicated work to provide for this powerful force of inwardness in my soul. This isn't great news yet for the people in my life; the smell is drifting

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outward and I have less room and energy for afternoon tea parties in the barn. Everyone is uncomfortable with the large animal acquisition plan. But I will not starve, and I have hope that I can eventually invite my neighbors to a banquet table groaning with the weight of harvest.

As for today, there is so much fresh air out here! My muscles are sore from being taxed in unfamiliar ways, but my heart is starting to whistle a little. I walk with this power and watch as the fallow ground in my life is dug and

turned. The fertility beneath the surface rolls up in a warm, loamy invitation. I haven't seen dirt that rich in my life in a long time. I scatter seed as I walk through this quiet field – seeds of thoughts, ideas for acts of kindness, clarity about the next step towards harvest. I kick the fresh manure around knowing it will eventually do some good.

At some point I will start looking for tiny green heads on the surface of this planted soil. But for now the sun on my face is harvest enough.

## **Help spread the word about a new branch of WGA's ministry!**

The vision of Come Arise Ministries is to be an educational Christian resource for all people who want to explore changes in their lives surrounding gender, sexuality and relationships.

The first eCourse is now  
available

Visit **comearise.org** today!



(News Topics continued from page 2)

While these are allegations that may not be substantiated, stories like this are appearing more and more frequently.

### **Sex parties in New York**

An upscale house in New York is the home to sex parties, sometimes with as many as 150 people in attendance. People come and go freely and legally (there is no fee, though donations are accepted).

These are just a few articles that I came across in a general web search. They are indicative of what is happening in our culture as sexuality goes “off the rails.” While the story about what is happening in Russia regarding LGBT issues is the only international story I included, there are many others concerning horrific happenings around the world.

When we read these articles or see similar stories in the news, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and/or to disengage. There is simply too much to process, and the safest choice seems to be to pretend that [fill in the horror] isn’t happening. I find myself struggling with both

extremes. There are so many hurting people in the world, who make choices they believe will bring them happiness, but only cause more harm. Many others, such as sex workers and abuse victims, have these choices made for them. Yet, I believe God wants us to remain engaged. When I find myself overwhelmed and tempted to disengage, I think the best solution is to go to God in prayer. We can actively engage our world through prayer, and it is there that we are opened to what action God may be asking us to take.

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*Dear God, there are so many hurting people making choices that only cause more pain. I do the same thing myself at times. Please open my eyes to the pain and hurt these people are experiencing, rather than the superficial facts about the stories I see in the news. Help me to reserve judgment. Please show me how I can be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem. When I am overwhelmed, help me to release those feelings to you, trusting that you are in control. In Christ’s name I pray, amen.*

Bonhoeffer refers to the experience of true community as “life together.” He evaluates its successfulness in the following: “The existence of any Christian life together depends on whether it succeeds at the right time in bringing out the ability to distinguish between a human ideal and God’s reality, between spiritual and human community” (p. 37).

I've been part of life together (Christian community) functioning in a successful manner. When it is, I see God's direction in my life more clearly; I become more acutely aware of the areas in my life where I need to grow; I have a safe place to process my doubts and fears; and I learn to interact with others in helpful ways that bring about the purposes of God in all our lives. I find myself around people who are generally worthy of my trust and will tell me things I

need to hear, even when that hearing might be difficult. There exists a commitment to helping one another to be all that God has called us to be.

On the other hand, I spent many years in the church without really experiencing spiritual community. I had friends and acquaintances that I respected and appreciated. We discussed spiritual truths, studied the Bible together, and sometimes prayed together. But the commitment and freedom to speak difficult truth to each other wasn't present. Small groups provided a great spiritual, social experience and a lot of biblical learning, but they fell short of being a life-giving, transformative community. When I finally did experience a community with a commitment to supportively challenging one another, I was challenged to make the deepest changes in my life.





## January In Review

**January 15th: WGA Board Meeting**

**January 26th: WGA Leadership Meeting**

### **Thursday Night Group**

**January 2nd: 34 people**

**January 9th: 31 people**

**January 16th: 46 people**

**January 23rd: 28 people**

**January 30th: 23 people**

**Orientation meeting—5 new people**

## February And Beyond

**February 1st: WGA Event: Movie Night**

**February 24<sup>th</sup>: Friends and Family of Persons Convicted (or Charged) of a Sex Offense (FFPCSO) group will be meeting. Please contact the WGA office if you would like more information about this group.**

**March 1st: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry**

**March 8th: ReNew group begins, focused on addiction**

**March 29th: Friends and Family gathering. Please contact the office for more information.**

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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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