



A Measure of Grace

March 2014
Volume 18 Issue 3

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

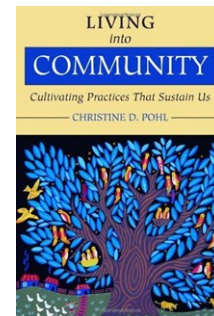
Truth-Telling in Community

by Roger Jones

Roger's Note: The church I attend, Celebration Community Church, has been encouraging everyone to read Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us by Christine D. Pohl. Since the beginning of the year, the messages have been inspired by themes from the book. Most recently, we have been discussing the importance of truth-telling in community. The "powers that be" at Celebration (i.e., my wife Jill who is the Associate Pastor) asked me write a short piece to be included in their newsletter. I wanted to share it with our readers as well, as so much of what we do at Where Grace Abounds involves learning how to be in community together.

Telling the truth is difficult, especially when we are saying something that we know the other person will not want to hear. Much of what is happening in our culture today is a reaction to people (often Christians) who have used the truth as a weapon, rather than a beacon of hope that leads people to Christ. We all do this to some extent, wielding truth against those who are so clearly, at least to us, in sin. At the same time, we are often blind to the sin in our own

(Continued on page 2)



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



(Truth-Telling continued from page 1)

lives. Or perhaps we are like the schoolyard bullies, picking a fight as a distraction from our own weaknesses and insecurities. Sometimes our accusations are not spoken out loud, but we are judging others just the same.

What if we approached truth-telling from a place of humility rather than a position of moral authority? If we lead by telling the truth about our own weaknesses, perhaps others will follow suit. This is the power of our stories. In 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, Paul writes about his weakness, which he refers to as his “thorn in the flesh”:

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (NIV).

Truth and grace belong together in community. We earn the right to speak into another’s life not simply by proximity but rather, through relationship. Relationship building requires time together and shared experiences. When we speak the truth to one another while being fully aware of how much grace we ourselves have required, then we are gaining an understanding of humility. When we approach others with grace, fully aware

of how the truth has set us free, it is then that in our weakness, He is made strong.

Roger’s Note: I encourage you to consider what community means to you. If you would like to read the aforementioned book, Living into Community, I believe you will find encouragement there. Below I quote a brief description of the book, which is available through Amazon.com:

Every church, every organization, has experienced them: betrayal, deception, grumbling, envy, exclusion. They make life together difficult and prevent congregations from developing the skills, virtues, and practices they need to nurture sturdy and life-giving communities. In *Living into Community*, Christine Pohl looks at four specific Christian practices gratitude, promise-keeping, truth-telling, and hospitality that can counteract these destructive forces and help churches and individuals build and sustain vibrant communities. Drawing on concrete congregational experiences and interacting with the biblical, historical, and moral traditions, Pohl thoughtfully discusses each practice, including its possible complications and deformations, and points to how these essential practices can be better cultivated within congregations and families.



Freedom from Anger Part 1 of 2

By Mary Heathman

At 7:02 on Monday morning, I arrived at the prayer breakfast with my face flushed, heart pounding, and mind racing with justifications and rationalizations for why I had just yelled at a guy in a car next to me. Well, I hadn't really yelled, just raised my voice . . . a lot.

I was angry. I recognized the signs; been there before!

No surprise, then, that this month I am writing about anger, the facts and causes. Next month, I will share a bit about the results of undealt-with anger and possible responses. Thinking it through and writing about it will be good therapy for me and hopefully useful to the reader.

A few generally accepted facts about anger include:

- *Anger knows no age barrier.* I remember the first time my precious, innocent baby girl screwed her face up and bellowed out of unmistakable rage. I also witnessed a mini-tantrum when my 90 year old grandmother discovered her teeth had disappeared **again** from her nightstand!
- *Anger is a neutral emotion.* There is no sense in feeling guilty about the anger itself; it is neither a good thing nor a bad thing. It is a natural response to certain stimuli we will look at a little further into the

article.

- *Anger has a purpose.* It alerts us to unresolved issues or problems that need our attention. Just as we have nerves in our hands to alert us to pain so that we take action to alleviate the discomfort, so also anger can be such an indicator.

- *Anger varies in degree.* It will range from mild annoyance to violent rage; it is to our benefit to learn to recognize it in all its forms.

From a Christian perspective:

- *Anger can be used for evil.* It can give power to the enemy. And in the hands of the enemy, it is a tool for destruction. "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26-27).
- *Anger can be used for good.* In fact, this is always God's purpose and intent. What the enemy intends for evil, God intends for our good. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).
- *Anger is powerful and incites others as well.* It is potentially dangerous and deadly: God continually admonishes us to be slow to anger (see

(Continued on page 6)

#Chastityw/truth&grace

Bringing Sexuality Back into the Dialog

By Scott Kingry

A robust yet judicious understanding of the communal nature of sexual behavior requires that Christians enact both a thicker understanding of sex and a thicker understanding of community. To return sex to its proper place within creation, to revivify a gracious and salutary sexual existence, we need to root out modern and hyperindividualistic notions about sex, and come to understand the place of sex in the Christian—and human--community. **Lauren Winner, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity***

The landscape of my life dramatically shifted in high school when I found Jesus (actually He came and got me) and, with Him, a lot to learn and navigate in the terrain of this new relationship. Bible studies became the norm, as did church. My secular music was quietly ushered to the basement (I wasn't ready for the bonfire just yet) and Christian albums now adorned my record selection, which we frequently discussed at youth group. The only subject that didn't ever seem to be on the table for discussion was **sex**. Except for some *Father Knows Best* moralizing and a long list of "do not's," mum was pretty much the word.

This seemed confusing to me as a

budding Christian teen. The world pushed sex in my face daily and, as a little pagan, I had gladly received it, unaware of the dangerous consequences. I had already been sexually active with a neighbor since age 14 and was nursing a sexual addiction with a handy stack of pornography stashed in my room. But what was I supposed to do with this new found call to chastity and even a sincere desire to live up to it? The church was silent on the issue and my internal shame was stifling. Did God know about all this sex stuff? It didn't seem to be demonstrated among His people if He did. Unfortunately, much has remained the same for youth and adults alike in our current church culture.

In my last article I stated that for someone to steer the turbulent waters of sexuality and chastity is an ongoing **collaborative** effort. God, the individual, his/her church and a supportive network of close intimates are all necessary for success. I also defined sexuality as multi-faceted with dimensions that are physical, emotional, volitional, relational and spiritual. With all that in mind the angles from which to approach and discuss this arena of sexuality are wide-ranged. Now, I'm not naïf enough to

(Continued on page 5)

(#Chastityw/truth&grace continued from page 4)

believe that we can start talking about sex in a church community just like that—jumping into the deep end of the pool. We need to splash around in the shallows a bit and get used to the water. What are some ways of bringing sexuality and chastity back into the community dialog of the church? I offer some simple suggestions:

SPEAK ABOUT SEXUALITY FROM THE PULPIT:

This should produce a “trickle-down effect”; what better way to get people to begin talking about sexuality than to preach about it on Sunday or even in a mid-week teaching series? Perhaps start with something simple, like a sermon on the topics of these past few articles (“Why sexuality should be talked about in the context of Christian community”). I imagine there might be a lot of mixed reactions to this subject, but at least people would be talking. The hope is that when there is no shame or fear expressed when the leadership talks about sexuality, it will work its way through the congregation.

TAKE AN INFORMAL CHURCH SURVEY:

If healthy sexuality and fruitful chastity are part of a collaborative effort for each individual, how do we become part of the solution for one another and not just another problem? What kind of support would the single and married people like to have within the church community? How can we help one an-

other live up to each of our individual callings to chastity? How do we support our young people in a sex-saturated culture? Is sex education the parents’, schools’ or churches’ job? With a few strategic questions in an anonymous survey, just think of the information you could glean that might prove helpful.

BOOK STUDY: An excellent resource that we use often is a book called *Surfing for God* by Michael Cusick (available through Amazon). It explores not only practical ways of dealing with an addiction to pornography but also looks at the legitimate God-given needs underlying the sexual struggle. Starting a discussion group around this material is a simple way to begin the conversation and even bring healing into the community. Due to the shame that can surround this sort of sexual struggle, I would recommend making this a closed and confidential group. (This book also translates well into other addictions to broaden the group—especially food).

DVD SERIES FOR PARENTS:

How do I raise my child with a healthy sense of self, gender and sexuality? This is a question we get often. At my church, I have pursued one simple way to help parents get the resources they need. International speaker and friend of WGA, Sy Rogers, has produced a DVD series called “Generation XXX—Equipping Youth for a Sex Saturated Culture”

(Continued on page 6)

(Chastityw/truth&grace continued from page 5)
with eight 30 minute sessions exploring these themes. These half hour presentations fit easily into a Sunday School schedule, or a group could watch two sessions for 4 weeks, with discussion afterwards. To order, go to his website at <http://syrogers.com/Resources.html#genxxx>.

E-COURSE TO USE WITH SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

In last month's article, Roger highlighted our partnership with a new ministry called "Come Arise" created by Shannon Rants, one of our leaders. Shannon's desire is to create a website that people can go to and take self-paced "E Courses" with teachings on sexuality and relation-

ship. She has finished her first class, "Understanding Our Cycle of Connection," which is broken down into five 30 minute sessions. Though meant for a personal exploration, this can easily translate into a screening for a small group to explore together, as Shannon ends each lesson with several journal questions. Check out her website at <http://comearise.org/>

I agree with Lauren Winner's statement at the beginning of this article; as Christians we need a "thicker" understanding of community and sexuality together, that we might return it to its proper place—neither glorified, nor forgotten. I hope these suggestions will "gel" things up a bit.

(Freedom from Anger continued from page 3)
Prov. 14:19, 15:18, 16:32, 19:11, 29:11 James 1:19). One Scenario: Employer blows up at man, he then blows up at his wife, she at teenage son, teenage son at younger brother, younger brother kicks the dog, dog bites the cat, cat scratches the 3 year old, 3 year old rips Barbie doll's head off!

The causes of anger are many and often rooted in deep-seated beliefs and understandings that go way back. For a fuller treatment of the causes and purposes, read *The Dance of Anger*, by Harriet Lerner. Lerner wrote it for women, but it is applicable across gender lines, I believe. I

will just share a few trigger categories for anger that I have observed in myself and others.

- *Hurts, offenses, and injustices trigger anger.* When I find that someone has spoken unjustly about me, or even spoken the truth, but with intent to put me down or belittle me, than a familiar flash of anger courses through me. We know also that when a terrible injustice is discovered, it can trigger anger on a broader scale, even worldwide. An even broader scale is the righteous anger of God Himself in whose image we are created. I believe that a part of

(Continued on page 7)

(Freedom from Anger continued from page 6)

every angry response to injustice is rooted in human beings' capacity for solidarity with God—even the wrath of God—see Romans 5,6,7 and 8. More on this next month.

- *Fear can often trigger anger.*

This, in fact, was the trigger for my anger at the driver I yelled at. His car and mine almost collided, and the reality of how close we came shook me. Of course, anger feels more powerful than fear. Who wants to break down into tears and shake all over; it feels much more acceptable to spew angry words than to actually experience how vulnerable we are. There are other kinds of fear: of loss, rejection, etc. — It's easier, safer, to be angry than admit fear. We want to maintain some illusion of control.

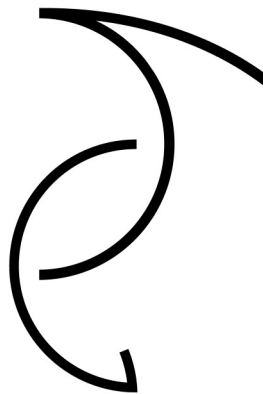
- *Frustration can trigger anger.*

This was my baby daughter's first rage. She was reaching, then grabbing for the dangling crib toy which had bounced out of her grasp several times. I was watching, admiring her persistence (she still gets that focused, set look on her face when she is concentrating), when all of a sudden she screamed in frustration. (Just about the cutest thing I ever saw, too!) I, too, when finding myself running into recurring obstacles to my plans and goals, feel a familiar slow burn. I remember once when I was a new Christian (I would never have such an attitude now, of course.), I was talking with my pastor and sharing my frustration with others in a Bible study. I burst out,

"Is there some sort of spiritual speed limit or something?" He said quietly, "No, you just have to remember there are other people on the road." I said, "Oh." (I sense a theme here: anger when people keep getting in my way; I need to work on that.)

- *Anger can come from predispositions.* People can be more prone to anger responses when they have had it modeled in their families, or have an emotionally expressive temperament. It may not be a valid excuse, but there is truth to some statements like, "He is just like his father with that temper of his."

I hope this bit of attention to the facts and causes of anger has been helpful to read. I certainly am sufficiently energized to take a closer look at my own anger! Next month we will conclude with the results of unaddressed anger and some possible responses.





February In Review

February 1st: WGA Event: Movie Night

February 24th: Friends and Family of Persons Convicted (or Charged) of a Sex Offense (FFPCSO) group

February 16th – WGA Leadership Meeting

February 28th – Come Arise Ministries Launch Party

March And Beyond

March 8th: ReNew group begins, focused on addiction

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

April 4th – WGA event, Game Night

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

April 25th: 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.

Thursday Night Group

February 6th: 28 people

February 13th: 45 people

February 20th: 36 people

February 27th: 34 people

Orientation meeting: 4 new people

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.

Printed in the USA
Copyright 2014