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A Measure of Grace

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Reflections on One Year of Fatherhood *by Roger Jones*

It is difficult to believe that it has already been one year since Julia Rose came into our lives. We celebrated her first birthday on May 2nd. Even being as “prepared” as Jill and I thought we were, we had no idea what was in store for us with a new baby. Talk about a life changing event! The one thing that we both have said several times is that we had a pretty good understanding of all the elements of parenting a baby: changing diapers, late night feedings, doctor visits, etc. What we didn’t factor in was that most of these things are ALL THE TIME. There comes no break from the responsibility. Even when Julia is with a trusted caregiver, we are still her parents. You may be thinking, “Well, duh!” I think that myself. I just didn’t know what it would be like until I was in the thick of things.

In some ways, the year has gone by quickly. In oth-
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er ways, it has been a very long year. Jill and I decided it would be a good idea to move right around the time of Julia's birth. It was supposed to happen this way: we buy a house, we move in and get settled, Jill goes into labor one peaceful night; we go to the hospital, Julia is born (pain free for Jill), cigars are handed out all around, and we bring baby Julia to her new home that is perfect (room set up, painted, etc.). Well reality is rarely like the fantasy! Julia arrived about three weeks early via an emergency C-section surgery, because Jill got preeclampsia and Julia was breech in the womb. All our perfect plans flew out the window! Our condo was a disaster and we had barely begun packing. We were set to close on our new home the following week; I went to the closing by myself and signed for both of us (still having hand spasms from that day LOL). Fortunately, thanks to some dear friends and Jill's mom, we got the house painted and everything moved over in a timely fashion.

The other big thing that we really hadn't planned for was having a baby with some medical difficulties. By comparison to so many others', Julia's problems have been minor and correctible. Because she was "frank breech," the natural resting position for her legs was right next to her ears. We have some very interesting looking pictures

from those first few days! Her position in the womb caused some issues with the way her hips developed, so for the second and third months of her life, she had to wear a corrective harness that restricted her leg movement. As of her nine month check-up, everything is looking good. Most recently, we had some concern over the growth of her head. At about 10 months, her head circumference had spiked off the charts. This raised some worries that something bad was causing her rapid head growth. An ultrasound and an MRI let us know that she is a healthy

baby girl whose head is just a little bigger than average. At her last appointment, she was back on the growth chart with the rest of her body catching up.

While I feel so blessed that neither of these health concerns are likely to have lasting effects on Julia, my experience of fear, anxiety, and concern was startling. I love Julia in a way that is new for

me. Everyone else in my life I choose to love. I chose my wife, and I choose to continue to be in relationship with and care for her. My love for her is entirely voluntary. The same is true for my friends. With Julia, I love her simply because she exists. She is a part of me. I suppose she has granted me a tiny glimpse into how God loves us as his children. There are tedious aspects to being a parent, such as changing countless diapers (sometimes

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When the Unthinkable Happens

By Mary Heathman (reprint)

Author's Note: Victims of abuse and their families are on my mind a lot these days. Last night, in a support group discussion, one of the group members mentioned that she had been a victim of a sexual crime and although she knew God's grace and forgiveness was for everybody, even perpetrators, her heart always leaned toward protectiveness of the victims and their families. Mine does too. Even these days when the direction of my ministry has taken me into the world of ministry (support and accountability) for persons charged with a sexual offense, and facilitating support groups for their families, yet my mind and heart are never far from the victims. I know how they feel; I've lived it; my family carries scars that remind us of the trauma – and increasingly these days, I see the blessings of God's provision and healing comfort. In July of 1999, I wrote an article about one mother's experience. I reprint it this month in respect and prayerful concern for victims of sexual abuse and their families.

"It was a typical Saturday morning, rushing about to get chores done. The mother of six was making beds and planning her menu for the barbecue that evening. Her nine-year-old daughter followed her around trying to get her attention. Finally in the master bedroom, with her brothers safely out of earshot, she said, "Mommy, can a little girl get pregnant?"

The mother tried not to show her sudden alarm. She thought of the neighborhood boys who were prone to harass any girl

within earshot, of the stepbrothers who lived with her. Had one of them molested her little girl? Her heart raced, but she presented a calm face and voice to her daughter. "Why do you ask, honey?"

"My daddy."

". . . . Your **daddy**. . . . ?"

The girl's head nodded vigorously, "My daddy got in bed with me and he thought I was asleep and. . ."

The mother could feel her blood leave her face, then rush back. She listened, barely comprehending her daughter's words as they rushed out, tumbling over themselves as she tried to explain what had happened to her and what she was afraid of.

And the mother struggled to stay present. She tried to answer her daughter honestly; she wanted to hold and comfort her and reassure her that the girl wasn't at fault and that God was going to help them understand and know what to do. But she also wanted to run away from this; she didn't want to hear these terrible words. It took all of her strength to listen; to ask questions and answer her daughter's.

Finally, the little girl's words were spent. A plan was made to talk to her daddy. The mother assured her that she would take care of her. The little girl went back to her chores with a much lighter mind and heart.

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#Chastityw/truth&grace

Intimacy & Our Culture's Dysfunctional View

By Scott Kingry

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments -- Matthew 22:37-40.

Finally after several months of articles, my hope is that I've established some foundational views on the topic of sexuality (and not wearied our readers *too* much). After one more, brief recap, I promise we'll move onward to our new topic. Sexuality within Christian culture is simultaneously both **communal** and **personal** (a shared theme of community discussion, teaching and support to live out, yet still a sacred thing to be discussed only with those who have proven trustworthy with our vulnerability). Our sexuality is **multi-dimensional**—including biological, emotional, relational and spiritual components. And to live as a holy and whole person within this arena is a **collaborative effort** necessarily involving God, the person, the church and a few close intimates.

Sexuality defines an aspect of who we are in essence, created in God's image and as part of His Body. But if it also describes the garage, car and the mechanics so to speak, what is the gas that actually runs the vehicle—that drives it? What is it our hearts long for given the way we were created and designed? It is **Intimacy**. Perhaps even more than sexuality, intimacy is a multi-layered, com-

plex and distorted by secular and Christian cultures.



As a teen and young twenty-something, I thought that I was learning about sexuality from pornography. Twenty five years of consequences and therapy later, I realize how wrong and naïf I was. Pornography created many of my wrong beliefs and unreasonable expectations of the human body and sex. The same could be said about intimacy. None of us has really been taught about this area of our lives. We are members of generations who have acquired our education from the media surrounding us. Years of Disney princes and princesses, who are supposed to "live happily ever after"; Hallmark movies and romantic comedies, where characters desperately and luckily find their *other halves* with the triumphant words, "You complete me"; and young adult novels like *Twilight* that conjure visions of lying on the grass for hours lost in mutual intensity with a hot vampire boyfriend, have each contributed to the pitiful relational guidance we've received. May I suggest that we all have grown up (and yet another new generation is growing up) with a somewhat adolescent view of love and intimacy? We are left unprepared for the real difficulties and work that relationships take. One only needs to glance at the statistics on divorce to get an answer,

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and, sadly, the statistics aren't much better in the Christian community.

- 50% of marriages end in divorce.
- In America, there is one divorce every 13 seconds, 6, 646 per day, 46, 523 per week.
- The average length of a marriage is 8 years.
- The average age for couples divorcing is 30.



Yet, it's not only married folks who are basking in all this dysfunction; singles aren't faring any better. As a single person in America, I've heard the frantic mantra of "*finding my other half*" for most of my life. Unfortunately for those of us who never find this blessed fraction, or are choosing to live celibately, we may be saddled with the haunting feeling of being an ungrounded, untethered $\frac{1}{2}$ a person. We may feel unwanted, not chosen by anybody (or perhaps chosen at one time but rejected), mostly invisible and "destined to live & die alone." What a death sentence to haunt our futures. If this sounds dramatic, you haven't sat in church as a single person for a long time. To combat this dismal picture, we need a more robust understanding of community and sexuality; we need a thicker, richer understanding of intimacy and God's intent for it. I think the above Scripture in Matthew gives us a good starting point and foundation.

Jesus is once again confounding the Pharisees, this time their tricky question about God's greatest commandment. His reply sounds just like an old, 70's soft-

rock song—"love" is the answer. But it is not quite with our society's definitions of love: "getting along with," "feeling attracted towards," or simply "liking or tolerating" someone. The Jesus type of love goes deeper than warm fuzziness; it is active with words like: trust, enduring devotion, fidelity, loyalty and selflessness. We have an opportunity to experience this sort of love in our wide-range of relationships (including "our neighbor," whom Jesus defines as everyone). We share a self-interest that is corrupt, but also a proper self-love—a self-care that maintains the welfare of our own souls and bodies. And of course, love should be rooted in and flow out of our whole-hearted, surrendered love for God. Perhaps it wasn't exactly Jesus' intent, but love of God, neighbor and self establishes fertile soil for growth of intimacy. We'll explore all of this together in the next series of articles.



(The Unthinkable *continued from page 3*)

But in the solitude of her bedroom the mother's mind froze with the enormity of what had happened. She lay on her bed and made herself face the facts. Rage washed over her; she wanted to strangle her ex-husband. She wanted to scream at God for not protecting her baby. "How could He let this happen? What good did it do to surrender her life and her children to Him? Where was He when her little girl was violated?"

And the worst feeling of all - the mother who wanted most in all the world to keep her children safe was overwhelmed with her own powerlessness. Her daughter's innocence lost. . . , and there was no way to make it right. It felt like something precious was broken that could never be fixed. Something priceless was irretrievably lost. She curled up in a fetal position and wailed into her pillow.

The next few days passed like a dream. Calls to the police and social service left the mother feeling powerless and discouraged. "Not enough evidence to pursue," they said. (It was years before mandatory reporting laws were in place.) The little girl seemed okay, but didn't want to talk about it anymore. The father was confronted and he agreed to go to counseling. The children did not stay overnight at his house for a few months. Other than that, life went on as usual.

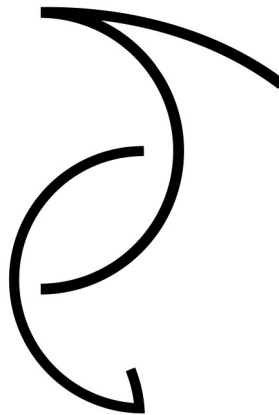
But it really never was the same after that."

Author's comment: When the unthinkable happens it changes everything. The effects of childhood sexual abuse affect one's life in various ways and intensities, but it changes everything in its wake. At Where Grace Abounds, we have had a

Survivors of Abuse support group for over 20 years. And we will speak wherever we are allowed about how to minister to children and their families when this horror hits them.

As always, I hope you will be praying for us as we minister to adult survivors of childhood abuse. And in the last few years, your prayers are also covering us as we provide support and accountability to persons charged with a sexual offense **so that they can be successful in never offending again.** It is some of the most intense and rewarding work we do. It is a privilege to see the Lord take tangled emotional lives and free them up. It is hard to see the pain involved in the process, but it is a joy to be a part of His provision for these men and women.

Thank you for your behind-the-scenes support. The prayers and financial gifts keep our doors open



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while trying not to breathe). Yet all of the tedium fades when we are faced with a health crisis. I would change a million more diapers if that would keep Julia healthy. (But please Lord, don't test me in this way.)

There are so many things about Julia that I love. She wiggles in a particular way when she sees me. There is something really amazing about being one of the people who gets to care for her. There are times when no one but Jill or I can comfort her. We are her parents, and she accepts us despite our flaws. I feel so proud when she reaches a new milestone. She hasn't decided that she is ready to crawl yet, but she sure can stretch and reach a long way. She can pick up tiny little things and put them in her mouth. She is talking all the time; we rarely know what she is saying, but she is talking. Her first word was, "Dada," which I am convinced means she knows that I am "Dada," even though she says it when I am not around.

Julia has a developing personality. She loves to read books with us, especially turning the pages. She does not like bananas. She can play with the same toys every day, and they seem just as fascinating each day. She loves to go to bed and immediately pulls her blanket over her head when it is time to go to sleep. She is an observer, taking everything in. She doesn't laugh very often, but when she does, it is the best sound ever. She has a grip of steel, especially when she gets hold of something she isn't supposed to have.

It is privilege to get to parent Julia. I have irrational fears, especially at this stage of her life. I am afraid that she won't fit in at school or that she will be bullied. I watch the news on TV, and I wonder how we could have ever brought someone so innocent into this world. I am afraid for the bad choices she has yet to make for herself. When I feel these things, I do my best to take them to prayer. My prayers are that she will grow up to know and to love Jesus; that she will be kind to other people; that she will continue to be healthy; and that Jill and I will be good parents to her, being sensitive to her particular gifts and abilities. Will you pray with me for Julia? And for Jill and me and our communities that will be raising her together?





April

In Review

April 5th: Intercessory Prayer meeting

April 16th: WGA Board Meeting

Thursday Night Group

April 3rd: 32 people

April 10th: 30 people

April 17th: 35 people

April 24th: 33 people

Orientation meeting: 5 new people

May

And Beyond

May 10th & 17th: Mary Teaching at COSA Training

May 24th: WGA Annual Picnic in the Park. Join us as we celebrate all that God has done through Where Grace Abounds since 1986. Please call the office for details.

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

June 8th" WGA Leadership Meeting

June 8th: WGA presenting at Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting Youth Camp

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Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

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Chaplain/Church Liaison

Jill Huston
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is edited by
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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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