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A Measure of Grace

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Welcome to the Neighborhood

by Roger Jones

When my wife Jill and I moved into our new neighborhood with our weeks old baby just over a year ago, we were excited to discover that there were two couples across the street from us who were expecting babies of their own. One of the things we hoped was that we would find an area where we could connect with those who lived around us. We did connect, and in fact, we have traded some baby sitting with one of the couples and are listed as the emergency contact at the other couple's day care center. While I wouldn't necessarily yet say that we have made lifelong friends, we have definitely all been good neighbors to each other. When the first set of neighbors and then, soon after,

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the other told us of their intent to move, we were sad at the news.

Just this week, we have a new set of neighbors. Through the former ones, I learned that the new couple has a baby about the same age as ours. How cool! In anticipation of their arrival, Jill and I talked about how we could welcome the new family to our block. We could cook them a meal or help them unload their truck. We could offer to babysit or unpack boxes. Maybe they will need some help with yard work while they settle in. We will be the best neighbors ever! They will love us, because how else could they feel about people so invested in making them feel welcome?

On the day of the closing on their new home across the street from us, they stopped by for one last look before signing on the dotted line. From our living room window, I watched them go inside the front door. Jill and I (along with Julia) went over to say hello. When they came outside, we were warmly greeted by the new family which consisted of two women and their very cute little baby. One

would think that after all my time at WGA, a same-sex couple would not surprise me. Well, I was surprised! I think I did a fairly decent job of keeping it from showing on my face; I hope so anyway.

Instantly, I felt my hopes for an easy, simple relationship with our new neighbors seriously challenged. I didn't feel this way because they seemed at all unfriendly; quite the opposite actually. But I suspect I know that when we

meet the next time, one of the first questions we will be asked is, "So, what do you do for a living?" Jill will answer, "I am the Associate Pastor at our church." Then they will know we are Christians and whatever that means to them will need to be sorted through. They may be Christians

themselves, so it may not be a barrier. Then I will say, "I work at a non-profit." "Which one?" they will ask. With a little trepidation I will respond, "Where Grace Abounds," all the while watching their faces to see if they have heard of WGA before. If not, they will want to know more about it. That is good, because I can explain who I believe we truly we are. If they

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Progress Report: Recovery and Reality Checks

by Mary Heathman

Since Roger's newsletter report on my auto accident in May, I have heard from so many, letting me know of their prayers and support and asking for news of my progress in recovery. So I thought I would write a bit of an update this month.

Some of you may know that I share a home with my sister and brother-in-law, Tom and Bonnie Bousman. Bonnie was recovering from shoulder replacement surgery during the weeks I was laid up with various broken and damaged parts of my body. At one point we looked at one another across the room, each of us in our respective recliners, and I said, "Well, we did talk a few weeks ago about finding a way to spend more time together, but I don't think this was what we had in mind." Chuckles tugged hard at some painful places, so both of us winced, but the laughter was good for our souls.

We have been the recipients of many ready-to-eat and ready-to-freeze meals brought in to our home, gift cards from grocery stores and restaurants that offer take-out service, and snacks and drinks to stock our fridge and pantry. Our families and friends have cared for us well. They repaired swamp coolers, sorted and moved boxes still not yet unpacked from our

move, sat in the living room and enjoyed each other's company while Bonnie and I zoned out on our pain meds.

My personal care could not have been more sensitive and consistent. My daughter and one of my granddaughters took the early morning and later evening shifts of helping me get ready for my day and ready for bed—no easy task, since I don't accept help very well (more about that later). One Saturday my daughter sat with me a few hours and helped organize and deal with a mountain of paperwork on my desk. My bills are current thanks to Deb! My son brought his truck and worked on the yard and helped move boxes.

I have been humbled by so many of my friends and supporters who came and did yard work, ran errands, picked me up for church, took me to my doctor's appointments, and moved furniture around so our living room could be more comfortable, then moved it again after I decided it wasn't quite right yet . . . (*Dwayne and Blake, it's perfect now, thanks, except for that one tan recliner that's been moved three times – maybe it belongs downstairs again? Relax, I'm kidding.*)

And every day that has passed since the accident, I have been recovering.

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks



A Cautionary Tale

In April, the Sewol ferry was the last watery resting place for 304 people, a majority of whom were high school students. A few weeks ago, the South Korean business man, who included the Sewol in his vast array of lavish investments, was found dead in a weedy patch surrounded by trash. Greed, overextension, and lavish extravagance were hallmarks of his lifestyle.

The fate of the Sewol encapsulates the metaphor for this cautionary tale. The water ballasts in the bottom of the ferry that were needed to balance the ship and keep it at the correct depth in the water were increasingly siphoned off to provide more space for more paying passengers. More passengers necessarily entailed more cargo, which was inadequately secured because storage spaces were overflowing. The upper deck cabins and art gallery were enhanced with marble adding to the weight of the top of the ship. \$2 was spent on emergency preparedness for the crew in the form of a poster. It was a disaster waiting for the perfect storm: a turn taken too tightly, a shift of unsecured cargo, no counterweight below to balance the top heavy shift, and

misguided instruction to the passengers to “remain in your cabins until help comes.” Rescuers were unable to access the trapped passengers in a ferry that toppled and submerged in less than two hours.

More concerned with self-aggrandizement than safety. More invested in making money, than in protecting human life. Willing to ignore danger signals and warnings to pursue profit. Siphoning off what is balancing to satisfy an appetite for more. Placing appearance above danger to anyone else.

Sounds like many people I know. Sounds like me. Siphoning off time alone, in the deep and the quiet that balances my soul, so that I look busy and important and needed. Seeing people as opportunities to my own ends. Ignoring failing health issues to pursue my pursuit of more. Refusing to take time to reflect, examine, assess my life and plan for my resources of time, energy and money.

It’s important. It’s important what goes on in the dark keep of my life. It’s important that I remember that my life is not just about me. I carry passengers who lean on me, watch me, ride in my wake. If I need to pull

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away and stay in the harbor for awhile and get things “shipshape,” then I’d better do it. My life and others’ lives depend on it.

We have a great example from the man who “ferried” more people than anyone else in history, “The news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him

and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:15&16). There are many references to Jesus withdrawing. Is it time for you to withdraw and take account?

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My x-rays a couple of weeks ago revealed completely healed bones—left clavicle and both bones in my forearm—the metal is secure and doing its job well. The scars from my arm and elbow surgery and head injury have healed completely and are responding well to scar treatment ointment. The jammed right leg is also showing great signs of progress – it is less and less stiff and painful when I get up from sitting a while. The muscles and ligaments in foot and knee seem stronger and my right hip aches only after prolonged inactivity (*it will scream after this session on the computer for instance*). I am released to drive and I have purchased a car and can make my own way to church and office and such; *I’ll miss the company, though!* I am grateful for the way the Lord has made our bodies to heal and for the way trauma surgeons and the medical profession can facilitate that process! I am also grateful for insurance that has spared me the stress of astronomical medical bills.

What remain as issues in recovery are

both physical and spiritual and were brought into sharp focus by my physical therapist LeeAnne, last week. Though she only intended to address my attitude (me, *an attitude?* *How could that be?*”), there was more.

I have done well physically (I’ll share my successes first). LeeAnn tells me that she and the other PTs have been “astounded” at how well my body was working when they first saw me right after the accident. They continued to be amazed at my progress in healing and regaining use of my muscles and such. I have been neither working too hard or slacking in my exercises and am ahead of schedule in all ways. They have used words like “amazing,” and “excellent” when talking about my progress. I did tell them that so many people were praying for me that I was sure the Lord was accelerating the process of healing.

Regarding what LeeAnn calls my “attitude,” however, I have apparently not been facing reality. In response to a barrage of questions at the last visit,

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have heard of WGA before, then I might have to deal with whatever misperceptions they may have. And of course, this whole scenario I just spelled out for you might never come to pass at all. My worries might well be in vain.

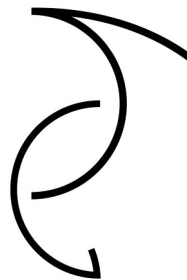
I cannot help but remember the numerous conversations I have had with people about very similar situations. I've been asked more than once, "How do I love my gay neighbor?" And every time, my response to the person is, "Well, you love them by treating them the same way you would anyone else." So, it is time for me to practice what I preach. Regardless of the response I get from them about my working at WGA, my role is still to love them and care for them. I will offer to help them move and make them a meal. I will offer them the use of our ladder, mower, and anything else that might prove helpful. Hopefully, we will get to know each other and establish a friendship.

To have any hope of building a good relationship with our new neighbors, I must set aside some of my own preconceptions. It will not be at all helpful if I continue to judge them by assuming I know how they will judge/perceive me. I do not know anything about them

or their past. I might be surprised as I get to know them. The easiest thing to do would be to stay in my house and wave across the street whenever I see them. The difficult thing is to move towards them and to risk the potential for conflict (and the potential for a great friendship).

I trust that God will use the relationship to change my heart and my attitude towards people who may disagree with me. That is my hope. Perhaps He will use it to change them as well, but that seems secondary. Assuming that they will benefit from relationship with me and my family seems to be dangerously close to pride. I hope that we can love each other well and that the relationship will be mutually beneficial.

Lord, may we be humble in our approach and show everyone we meet Your love.



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she said, "Listen! You seem to be in denial about what a serious trauma your body has been through! All these questions are about how long, why you aren't farther along, when will you be back to normal. You have to realize that your injuries were very serious, and it takes a long time to heal from the beating your body took! You need to relax and quit expecting too much."

It wasn't easy to hear this challenge from my physical therapist, especially when it put a spotlight on a spiritual weakness that has been a theme all my Christian life. I remember one of the first word studies I was assigned by my mentor when I was a new Christian. Dorothy told me that I needed to look up, read, and pray about all the Bible had to say about "How long?" Dorothy was responding to my questions about serious concerns on my heart. My questions had to do with when God would rescue my children and me from abuse; when He would change me so that I would be able to follow Him well; when He would intervene in some hard circumstances in my family. All these issues were ones that His word spoke about and promised His deliverance; I just wanted to know when I could expect the fulfillment of His promises.

I will leave you to look up the 54 verses we find in the New International Version of the Bible when you search for "How long" on biblegateway.com. But here are two principles that brought me up short and gave me a reality check 42 years ago and again last week:

1. I am not the only person who wants to know, "How long?" The Psalmist writes: "*My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord, how long?*" (Psalm 6:3) So it is a legitimate question, a heart-felt prayer, but appears to be a part of the human condition. It also appears He doesn't answer that question very often. I was devastated to know that I may not get to know "How long."
2. **God also asks, "How long?":** "*How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?*" (Psalm 4:2) So God questions us, too. I suspect His heart aches over the time it takes for me to remember Him, to turn away from all that is taking up my time and energy in directions He didn't send me, in directions that divert me from His purposes.

So, I am continuing in recovery, both physically and spiritually. The journey has some hard jolts to the body and soul. But the Lord is there in the midst—healing us and getting our attention whether through the words of our physical therapist, or pastor, or friend, or simply the whispers of the Holy Spirit in the quiet that has been thrust upon us in the aftermath of a serious trauma—either physical or spiritual. **God is with us! Emanuel! And I am so glad He is!**



July In Review

July 9th: WGA presented at Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting Youth Camp

July 12th: WGA Event: Drive-In Movie Night—Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade



August And Beyond

August 21st: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!

September 6th: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry.

September 13: WGA is presenting at Tree of Life Church

October 17-19: WGA Leadership Retreat

October 19th: WGA is participating in a missions event at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church

November 15th: WGA is presenting at Tree of Life Church

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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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