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A Measure of Grace

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

WGA Update

By Roger Jones

Periodically, I take the opportunity to remind the readers of *A Measure of Grace* about the various groups and other things happening around WGA. We need your prayers as we pull together events and gatherings for men and women dealing with sexual and relational issues in their lives. Please let us know if you have any questions about these!

We have just wrapped up our modified summer schedule for our **Thursday Night Group** and moved into the “school year,” as we affectionately refer to the season from September through May. As is typical, numbers were down a bit over the summer. In the coming weeks, we will offer a number of really good presentations from guest speakers and regular speakers as well. Topics will include: “Cultural Influences on Gender and Sexuality,” “The Theology of Sexuality,” and “Cultural Sexual Norms & Healthy Sexuality.” Of course, we have our regular 12-week cycle of Foundations classes ongoing too. If you haven’t been to our group in awhile (or

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ever), now is a great time to come by for a visit. Let us know and we’ll make arrange-

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Where Grace Abounds
P.O. Box 18871
Denver, Colorado 80218

Office: 303/863-7757
Fax: 303/863-7769

info@wheregraceabounds.org
www.wheregraceabounds.org



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ments for you to do so.

This month, our **Going Deeper with God** group begins and will address pursuing intimacy with Him. The aim is to help participants be real, to develop vision for God's Reality, and to encourage them in the transition between where they are now and where they want to be with God, each other and themselves. This group will continue through November.

On November 8th, there will be a gathering for **Family and Friends**. Steve and Jill, the faithful leaders, will host the event in their home. This will be such a great opportunity to connect with other people who are wondering how best to walk alongside a loved one who struggles with relational issues. If you are seeking help in this area, please contact us. We will make sure you get the appropriate information about the gathering.

October 17-19th will be WGA's annual **Leadership Retreat**. Our team of volunteer leaders, along with the staff, will meet in Breckenridge to do team building exercises, train, and just hang out together. Please pray for this group of men and women who give so faithfully of their time and resources to all those who come to WGA for help.

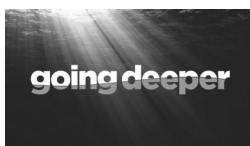
January seems a long way off, but it will be here quickly! This is the month when we kick off a couple of

short-term groups that we offer each year. We will have a **Men's Commitment Group** and a **Survivors of Abuse Group**. One of the prerequisites for participation in these two groups is to go through Discipleship Counseling with us. People are already signing up, so please pray for those considering these groups. If you have an interest in joining either group, please contact the WGA office ASAP.

Thank you all for your prayers and financial support of WGA. Time and again, I have been amazed by how God provides for WGA. Through July, expenses exceeded income for the year by a significant margin. In August, some of the difference was made up, but we still need more donations. Would you please pray with us about this as well?

In closing, I want to thank you for your interest in WGA and our mission. I've mentioned just a few of the things that are happening around here. It is such a privilege to do the work that God has laid before us; that is, reaching out to those struggling with painful sexual and relational issues. Please let us know if we can help you!





This month, one of WGA's special interest groups is starting. **Going Deeper with God (GDWG)** is a study based on the story and writings of former staff member, Karen Wood. The group is facilitated this year by WGA staff member, Steve Huston and me. GDWG is an honest, focused look at our relationship with God and how we might draw closer or deeper into our lives in Him. In this article today, I would just like to share a bit about this group and ask you to pray for us as we spend 4 months together thinking, praying, and discussing our relationship with God.

Most Bible readers, if we have been paying attention, have been stunned by the story in the book of Hosea, as it is commonly understood to represent how God feels about His people. In his devotional, *Near and True*, David Guzik shares his thoughts about the prophet Hosea and his wife, Gomer, a prostitute he bought and married in obedience to God's direction. Gomer had left Hosea and gone back into her old ways, and then Hosea again heard from God, "*Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of*

Going Deeper with God

By Mary Heathman

Israel, who look to other gods"

David Guzik wrote:

"[This} shows us an important principle about love: Hosea was *directed to love, even when it must have been hard to love*. . . . in principle, the Scriptures show us that love is largely a matter of the *will*, and when we direct ourselves to love someone God tells us we must love, it can and will happen." This is why "We're not in love anymore" isn't valid grounds for a bad relationship or divorce. It assumes that love is something beyond or outside of our will. Your present feelings also don't justify a lack of love towards God. When the Bible says, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*" (Deuteronomy 6:5) it directs the command towards our *will*. No matter what your feelings are, you can *choose* to love God today. You can do it because the love God has for you is rooted in choice. (Guzik, 2005)

[Author's Note: If you are intrigued by this quote, you might enjoy going to the website and

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#chasistyw/truth&grace

An Inward Intimacy

By Scott Kingry

*It is only after a reasonable sense of identity has been established that real intimacy with others can be possible. The youth who is not sure of his or her identity shies away from interpersonal intimacy, and can become, as an adult, isolated or lacking in spontaneity, warmth or the real exchange of fellowship in relationship to others; but the surer the person becomes of their self, the more intimacy is sought in the form of friendship, leadership, love and inspiration (Erik Erikson, **Identity and the Life Cycle**, 1959).*

When I landed on the doorstep of Where Grace Abounds oh, so long ago, I came with what appeared to be a lot of baggage. I was in my mid-twenties and already had a good decade of dysfunction under my belt, several addictions, a lot of anger and disappointment with life and a wake of relational dysfunction behind me. Besides the cold distance in my family relationships in the aftermath of telling them I was gay, I had many friendships I also abandoned along the way. My romantic relationships weren't fairing any bet-

ter. The men I dated back then were usually emotionally unavailable, and I swung from detachment to emotional dependence in what became tedious patterns. After several months at WGA, as I read books, participated in group and did some counseling, the baggage on the doorstep kept piling up. New things continued to be revealed about me.

The fact that I was lousy at relationships was pretty self-evident. Yet, what surprised me most in the midst of all my relational ruin was that even my relationship with myself was broken. I was, for the most part, lost and a shell of person lacking a solid identity. I didn't have any vision for my life, or what I wanted to do. I didn't know what I liked or enjoyed; I felt like only a people pleasing conglomeration of expectations I had grown up with. I was insecure with my masculinity and had zero confidence in who I was. I resonate with what Dr Erickson said above about human development. I couldn't really relate to others in a healthy way (I was ambivalently moving from being self

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-protective, self-contained and detached to needy, boundary-less and dependent) until I had a healthy, foundational place of personhood to relate from. As Jesus exhorts us in Matthew 22:37-40, it was time to seek and pursue relationship with Him, pray for healing and care for myself as well as my neighbor. Getting to know over the last several decades the “stranger” God continues to recreate has been challenging, fulfilling and always surprising.

It seems *inward intimacy* should begin with some good hard reflecting on the same kind of questions I’d be asking in any other relationship I’d pursue:

- Can I trust myself that I will act in my own best interest?
- Am I committed to myself, my growth and what’s best for me?
- Do I feel worthy and capable of giving and receiving love?

I’m saddened how many times throughout my life the answer has been “no” to these questions. How have you answered such questions throughout your life?

In my ongoing search for personhood, I have been trying to get in touch with the simple legitimate needs God created within me. I often use this list from Michael

Cusick’s book *Surfing for God*:

- **Attention** - I long for people to like me.
- **Affection** - I long to be enjoyed. I long for you to take pleasure in who I am.
- **Affirmation** - long to know I have what it takes, I long for your blessing.
- **Acceptance** - I long to belong, I long to know I fit in.
- **Satisfaction** - I long for well-being.
- **Significance** - I long to know that I matter, I long to know I’m worth knowing.
- **Security** - I long to know I will be okay.

For a good portion of my life, I was unaware these deep heartfelt longings even existed, though I was starving for them to be met. For a long time, I considered as weak, even embarrassing, having any kind of need or vulnerability. I worked hard at being self-reliant; so any time one of these desires popped up their little heads, my job became discounting it, shaming it, ignoring it or unconsciously trying to meet it through a sexual experience. It hasn’t just been becoming aware of these valid God-given yearnings over the last many years, but also acknowledging and honoring myself and them as important

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enough to fulfill in healthy ways. Do any of these stand out or touch you at a deep level as you read this list?

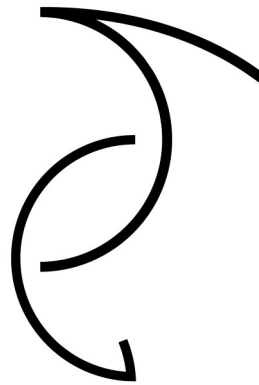
The journey of inward intimacy and growth into personhood is a unique road that we all have to follow as God guides us. There are a lot of mistakes, re-evaluations and recalculations along the way, and no two persons' passage is the same. I can't give a 1-2-3 easy formula for self-actualization, but I can point you to some of the areas of growth I've experienced participating in the WGA community all these years: (I'm still working hard on all of them!)

- A healthier self-care—less reliance on coping in unhealthy ways.
- A growing awareness of managing and honoring my emotions in healthier ways.
- Healing my belief system—living more closely in line with reality.
- Disentangling love, sex and intimacy.
- Being comfortable in my own skin and gender.
- Creating and maintaining healthy boundaries with myself and others.
- Restored relationships (God, family, friends, self)—

forgiveness!

- Developing a support network of relationships.

I'm grateful for the healing God has done and continues to do, even when it's bumpy and messy. I breathe a sigh of relief upon understanding the lie of our culture that I'm only half a person looking for someone to complete me. My goal is to become a more and more healed and whole person (this side of heaven anyway). Whether single or married, this is always the hope we have in Christ. God bless your journey of intimacy as you look inward.



(Going Deeper continued from page 3)

listening to Guzik's thoughts on Hosea – I haven't yet, but hope to soon: His devotional on MP3 – part one of a full Guzik's teaching on Hosea is at: http://www.enduringword.com/audio/Hos01_03.mp3. Let me know about your experience.]

In WGA's group, Going Deeper With God, the theme of the material written by Karen Wood is focused on several ways of getting honest with God: emotionally, mentally, spiritually and volitionally. Each of these could be the topic of an article of its own, but I will simply say a few words about volitional honesty because that is what's been on my mind so much lately.

As Guzik says, love is a choice. The Jews understood that well – when love is mentioned in the Scriptures, it is always connected to actions, not feelings—be kind, gentle, and forgive, etc.—referring to active ways to behave. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that we should feel kind before we act kindly toward someone, or that the act of forgiving someone who has wronged us should wait until the feelings match the action.

Volitional honesty is when we start to face the actual motives behind our behaviors or lack thereof. When we are volitionally honest, we take responsibility for our

choices and motivations. Starting with this basic honesty leaves us vulnerable before God and allows for deeper confession, which opens us up to fuller repentance (brought on by God's kindness to us, of course.) And in this deeper repentance, the emptying of ourselves before God, there is room for more of Him. He can become greater and greater in our conscious minds and hearts.

A choice to love God and others takes us deeper into God and deeper into an understanding of ourselves and others. Please pray for us as our little band of six explores our relationships with God together for the next four months. And, as always, I am so grateful for your prayers and financial support for our efforts as we serve the people the Lord brings to us!

Guzik, D. (2005). *Near and True*, Enduring Word Media (December 10, 2005). His devotional on MP3 – part one of a full teaching on Hosea: http://www.enduringword.com/audio/Hos01_03.mp3



August In Review

August 2nd: Intercessory Prayer and Breakfast

August 23rd: WGA Event - Cookout



September And Beyond

September 18th: Monthly Orientation Meeting
required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night
Group—invite a friend!

**September 13: WGA is presenting at Tree of Life
Church**

October 4th: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am
at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the
needs of the ministry.

October 17-19: WGA Leadership Retreat

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

**November 8th: Family and Friends Gathering. Stay
tuned for more info**

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

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.*

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