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A Measure of *Grace*

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How Far is Too Far?

by Roger Jones

When people, Christians in particular, are dating, the question eventually comes up... "How far is too far?" This is of course in reference to the physical boundaries in a dating relationship. It may be asked using different words: Is kissing okay? What kind of kissing is appropriate? When is it okay to kiss and for how long? Where exactly can I put my hands, and where exactly should I *not* put my hands? Or do the hands matter at all? Is there a difference between petting and "heavy" petting? Does oral sex count as sex? Or, more simply, How far is too far?

I'm sure this has been a dilemma for people since the beginning of time. Arranged marriages, in which the couple getting married may never have even met before their wedding day, probably helped to reduce the questioning. Technically, they were having sex on the first date, but this was because their first date was their wedding. Com-

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mitment came first and meant something more permanent than it often does now. In other times, men and women were never left alone without a chaperone. Today, we are often left to figure out the boundaries for ourselves. It is not uncommon to date for a year or longer prior to becoming engaged, and then there is sometimes a long engagement. It is no wonder that our understanding of the boundaries can get blurry over so much time.

I find myself wondering if “How far is too far?” is truly the question that is really being asked at all. Perhaps a more honest way of stating the question would go something like, “How much can I get away with and not sin?” Isn’t that what we are really asking when we want to know the precise location of the physical boundaries?

Paul states in I Corinthians 6:12, “everything is permissible to me, but not everything is beneficial.” I think sometimes we stop reading this verse after the “everything is permissible” part. Grace covers everything, right? Grace washes away sin, but unfortunately, we are often left with the consequences of our choices. When we say “you’re not worth waiting for” or “I’m not worth waiting for” with our actions, trust cannot develop fully

and wholly. When we go “too far” in a dating relationship, guilt and shame show up as unwelcome visitors. Questions about where the boundaries lie do nothing to address the internal issues of the heart.

In my own struggle with homosexuality, I found that the physical boundaries that I thought were firm quickly gave way. I now realize at least part of the reason how this happened. My decision to compromise my values had happened long before I ever be-

came physical with someone. It happened first in my mind and in my heart, when I chose to look to another person to meet my needs, rather than wait for whatever God’s provision for me might have been. Because I had already compromised so much, it was easy to give up on the rest of my values regarding sexuality as well.

I imagine that this is true in heterosexual relationships, too. The intensity of attraction and emotion that comes with a new relationship can be intoxicating. We let our hearts and minds rush forward in the excitement of it all. Our values and beliefs become secondary to the other person. We want to be close to our significant other, so we begin to let go of our convictions one by one. A significant boundary gets crossed

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Christmas and New Year Parties are behind us – on the last day of the first week of 2015, the year stretches out before us. Breathing a hefty sigh of relief, I turn my thoughts ahead. What will this year bring us in the way of ministry opportunities? What streams will be forged in the desert on behalf of people who attend WGA support groups? What new path will the Lord lead us along as we seek to refurbish existing and develop new programs? ⁱ

Amidst the excitement that always comes for me when I think about a new thing, there is also a sobering awareness of the climate of a culture which is increasingly disinterested in what the Lord is doing, if they even believe God exists. Where healthy (biblical) sexuality is concerned, critics of the Christian world view are often derisive and contemptuous. It is a society often professing “tolerance” for everything it seems **except** for Christians. It is toward this environment that my eye is cast as I pray and think about what the Lord has ahead for us.

What's Ahead?

By Mary Heathman

It is easy to “grow weary and lose heart” in the face of the opposition. I take encouragement from the book of Hebrews:

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, **let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.** And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. **For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** ³ **Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**” ⁱⁱ*

In the next couple of months, I would like to flesh out a bit what ministry looks like to me in the cultural context in which we find ourselves. In the meantime I am encouraged by the “great clouds

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#Chastityw/truth&grace

Components of Healthy Intimacy

By Scott Kingry

When a monastic person speaks of their vow to celibacy and chastity, they will say the point is to free them to love others completely--without the possible sexual/romantic undercurrent and without valuing more "attractive" people over others. I thought, yeah - ideally that should be what the marriage vow frees me up to do, too. If someone's interested in you and you say, "No, I'm a nun," or you say, "No, I'm married," that should free the relationship--in a perfect world. When I think about what my goals are as far as my sexuality, I like thinking in terms of that freedom to love others so much more completely than I can if I sexualize or romanticize them.

--Email excerpt from a dear friend, commenting on my last article.

I absolutely love this quotation from a close friend of mine, which came as we emailed back and forth discussing my last article on "Celibacy and Intimacy." "Yes!" I thought, "She's hit the nail right smack dab on the head." Most people (including myself) can feel like our vows to live life "chastely" are restrictive, big killjoys meant to ruin all our fun. We see them as preventing us from getting what we really want, rather than viewing them in the light of living in a true freedom to love others better and more completely. God has put holy boundaries around our bodies, sexuality and relationships, so that everyone is built up, encouraged and cared for, instead of diminished, exploited and in pain. For many vivid examples

of the latter, watch any Jerry Springer episode.

Her comments also started me on another train of thought in terms of this series on healthy intimacy. Whether or not we experience loving others as completely as we could, the sheer width and breadth of freedom we have can feel scary and daunting. I know personally that most of the time I just flail about in the midst of all my holy liberty. I often wonder and then ask, with such a strong desire to love God and others well, why do I feel so inadequate when it comes to actually putting love into practice? Here are a few questions to ponder as you think about your relationships:

- Are your relationships always "too close, too soon," or do you never quite seem to make meaningful connections?
- Are you always the one initiating, or is it you that is always running away?
- Is it "my way or the highway," or are your desires and needs always getting overridden?
- Do you over-communicate and overwhelm others, or are you self-protective, letting no one know you?

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- Does your “honesty” often hurt others’ feelings, or do you tend to hide your significant feelings?
- Do you usually take responsibility for the care of others, or do you withdraw at the first sign of someone’s need?

Whenever the topic of intimacy comes up, someone usually asks, “What in the world does intimacy look like?” I think it’s a fair question considering that many of us grew up without being taught or instructed about this important area of life. Intimacy appears to some as a nebulous, vague concept that’s “out there somewhere” and might accidentally happen if they’re lucky. But I was genuinely surprised to learn that there are tangible, measureable components to intimacy and relationship. With the above questions still in mind, let’s also consider whether many of our problems in relationships result from “too much” or “too little” of the components below:

Intentionality/Investment—Risking to initiate instead of being passive, taking responsibility to maintain the relationship and seeking quality time together.

Mutuality—Initiating, listening, communicating and vulnerability are not one-sided but shared and reciprocated.

Vulnerability/Honesty—Revealing yourself (thoughts, joys, dreams, fears) to the level that’s appropriate for the relationship. Being honest about your values, boundaries, feelings and flaws.

Nurture—Empathizing with others, being supportive, encouraging and caring in ways that do not diminish either party.

Follow Through—Basically “walking the talk,” showing dependability and building trust by completing things;

working towards closure, resolving conflicts, finalizing arrangements, returning calls, texts and emails.

Being Present—Not just “showing up” physically, but being emotionally available by listening and being attentive to others (rather than being checked out on your phone or social media).

Pacing—Relationships need time to build trust. There’s a certain pace to getting to know someone; it shouldn’t happen in a week, but shouldn’t take 10 years either.

If we err on the “too much” or “too little” sides of this list, we have to remember others are also navigating their own ways. Each person and relationship is unique and serves different purposes in our lives; that’s what makes relationship and intimacy so darned complicated. As elusive as intimacy feels sometimes, I hope these components are helpful to provide some structure as you think through your relationships.

Real intimacy respects boundaries without abandoning relationship. It is emotionally available, noticing what is happening in the lives of others. When people are practicing true intimacy, they care for one another by building trust and following through on their commitments. Real intimacy involves talking about joys, dreams and fears and dilemmas – at a level appropriate to the relationship. Real intimacy is honest about positive and negative feelings, and admits flaws and mistakes. In real intimacy, there is care for one another that touches the heart without diminishing either person. In my next article, we’ll explore and unpack the different types of intimacy that are available to us. Stay tuned!

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of witnesses” who have gone before. Their witness is a constant encouragement and inspiration. Once such person, a woman still very much alive, I believe, but way ahead of me in her vision for what’s ahead, has written a prophetic essay about what Chuck Colson once called the “false god of tolerance,” Joella Kruger wraps up her paper titled, *intolerance*, with her vision for hope during the end times she believes are at hand. I offer this excerpt in hopes that our WGA supporters and group members will be encouraged and will pray these words on behalf of the Body of Christ for 2015:

In the midst of brokenness and misery, the indestructible glory of God will shine out and the radiance of the City of God will appear for all to see. When violence and terror take over and chaos ensues, when we are surrounded by death and destruction, the hidden treasure in the fragile “jars of clay” of our personal lives and of our churches and fellowships will be evident as never before. It will no longer matter that the vessel is

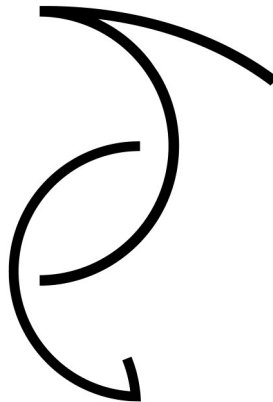
*unimpressive: only the treasure it contains will count. We ourselves will be insignificant and will have nothing more to boast about, and **all the glory will be given to our God in Jesus Christ, to whom alone it is due.***ⁱⁱⁱ

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever! Revelation 5:13

ⁱIsaiah 43:19; and 41:18

ⁱⁱHebrews 12:1-3

ⁱⁱⁱKruger, S. J., (2012) *inTolerance*, page 14.
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along the way (whatever that may be), and guilt and shame come. The temptation is to think, “If I’ve already gone too far, why not go further? I feel convicted about my choices, but when I’m with my partner, I can forget about how badly I feel, if only for a little while.”

My wife Jill and I were married in 2010. During our season of dating, I found that I was much more conservative about the physical boundaries within our relationship than I ever thought I would be. Because of my past experiences and what I had heard from others, I was committed not to bring a bunch of guilt and shame into this relationship. If we were to get married, I hoped it would be a celebration we could feel good about. If we did not get married, the physical part of our relationship would have been less difficult to sever, because we wouldn’t have given our sexual selves to each other prematurely. These boundaries were challenging to adhere to within our six-month engagement. We waited until after our wedding to consummate the sexual part of our relationship, but it was not without asking the “How far is too far?” question, A LOT.

I don’t share our story of waiting until marriage in order to brag. In fact, there were a few times where we took things further than either of us wanted to when we were thinking clearly and not caught up in the heat

of the moment. We had to set up some boundaries about when and where we spent time together alone, because we did not trust ourselves. And we talked with those we were accountable to in order to help us as well.

In his book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, Joshua Harris says, “Purity is a direction, not a line we suddenly cross by ‘going too far.’ The enemy of your soul would love to mar the beauty of your blossoming love by leading you down a path of lust and sexual compromise. Please don’t give him a foothold.” I like this quote, because it gives a framework for a different question than “How far is too far?”

Perhaps a better question is, “How can I love my partner and honor my values, beliefs, and convictions?” I leave you with a passage that seems fitting for the topic:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. I Corinthians 13:4-7, NIV

Editor’s Note: This is a revised and updated version of an article that appeared in *A Measure of Grace* in October of 2009.



December In Review

December 2nd & 4th: WGA presented at Front Range Christian School

December 6th: WGA Group Christmas party

December 17th: WGA Leaders Christmas Celebration

January And Beyond

January 25th: WGA Leadership Meeting

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

February 19th: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!

Thursday Night Group

December 4th: 25 people

December 11th: 24 people

December 18th: 29 people

December 25th: No Group

Orientation meeting: 2 new people

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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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