



# A Measure of Grace

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## Fifty Shades of Trouble

by Roger Jones

If you have seen even an hour of television during the past few weeks, there is a pretty good chance that you have seen a preview for the film *Fifty Shades of Grey*. My Facebook newsfeed was full of posts about why people should not see this movie AND people celebrating that they were about to see it. Facebook is one of the few places where separate parts of life intersect. To name a few, my “friends” consist of people I went to high school and college with as well as people from church or WGA. So I usually get to see a full spectrum of people’s reactions to any given event or news item.

For those of you who may be unfamiliar with

*Fifty Shades of Grey*, here is a brief summary, as I understand it. Originally it was a novel writ-

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ten by E.L. James, the first in a trilogy. While there is supposed to be a plot of sorts, the taboo of the story is that it explores BDSM (Bondage, Dominance, Sadism, and Masochism). Some argue that it is a love story and its BDSM aspects are minimal, but all the advertising promotes the shocking images of whips and various other accoutrements of violent sex. While I have neither read the books nor seen the film, I did read a summary of the story line. The explanation of how one of the main characters became interested in BDSM seems to be that he was sexually abused as a teenager by a much older woman.

I should admit that the advertising I have seen is attention grabbing. It is difficult to look away or change the channel when there are such displays of eroticized conversation and situations, along with so much skin. It is both intriguing and repulsive to me at the same time, much like pornography and fantasy have often been. It raises questions like, "Am I missing out on something?" or "What would it be like

to try *that*?" But let's remember that fantasy, by definition, isn't reality.

BDSM is all about control. For some, it is the desire to be completely in control of another person's pleasure or pain. For others, it is about being completely out of control, allowing someone else to use and abuse them. Regardless of how far the role playing goes, it is

an exercise which attaches true, unmet needs to behaviors which are harmful. If intimacy with another person is pursued through BDSM, a cycle is begun in which more and more risky behaviors are necessary in order to feel connected.

This is the very nature of addiction. In the words of Gerald May from *Addiction and Grace*, "Addiction attaches desire, bonds and enslaves the energy of desire to certain specific behaviors, things, or people. These objects of attachment then become preoccupations and obsessions; they come to rule our lives."<sup>1</sup> When our true, God-given

***When our true,  
God-given need  
for intimacy  
becomes attached  
to things that are  
not healthy for  
us, then we  
are never truly  
satisfied.***

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## What to Say at a Naked Party

### *Three common strategies to check sexual 'liberation'* *no longer work* *by Frederica Mathewes-Green*

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*Note from Mary Heathman: I am in a series on ministry within our culture. For the second in the series, I would like to revisit an article from 2005, reprinted from the WGA newsletter: What to Say at a Naked Party. The three approaches that Frederica describes as failing, are still failing. The only approach that works as she describes it, is still the only one that "works". Next month, I will get specific about ministry in the here and now, after we get these basics under our belt.*

Anyone who's been on a college campus lately will confirm the depressing report delivered by Vigen Guroian in his essay, **Dorm Brothel**: *The new debauchery, and the colleges that let it happen*, in *Christianity Today*, February 2005. As someone who does a lot of campus speaking, I've seen my fair share of posters announcing sex-toy workshops, transgender celebrations, and, on one Ivy League campus, an open invitation to a "naked party." What's a naked party? Anybody who wants

can attend, but you have to take off all your clothes to stay.

It makes you want to weep for the children, for girls in particular, who deserve to be protected from this carnival of leering and molestation. Guroian hits the target in his demand that colleges do more to provide such protection. But what about the students themselves? How can we help them resist this expectation?

There are three typical strategies, and I don't think any of them works. The first is practical: We tell students to abstain because immorality leads to misery. But the libertines in the audience don't see evidence that this is so; they're having fun, for the most part, and it doesn't look like anyone is harmed. The second is romantic: We tell students that marriage is glorious. Once again, they don't see a lot of evidence of that, not in the lives of married people they know, perhaps especially in the lives of their parents. What they saw at the breakfast table for the last 18 years doesn't look that

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## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

*By Nancy Hicks*



### Puzzled

I love jigsaw puzzles. I have my favorite 1000 piece puzzle on my dining room table right now. I've been in a rough patch and find that one or two hours of puzzling pleasure goes a long way to calm and steady me. A trip to the aquarium, zoo or botanical gardens can do the same thing for me, but the puzzle is right here and free when I can't sleep at two in the morning.

Part of it is the color: patchworking brilliant colors together is more satisfying than chocolate dipped strawberries for me. Somehow it touches the same sensuous spot. It's weird, I know.

The other part is the sureness and predictability: every piece will eventually have its place. Lately, the wounds in my life feel like shrapnel that I believe (for some reason) I am required to dig out piece by piece and reassemble into the original hand grenade in order to heal. Puzzles reshape that nightmarish framework in my poor brain and point to a poten-

tially peaceful path to the end of my task; every piece is readily available and destined for a specific, pre-ordained place in the larger picture.

In puzzling (and not so much in life), I love the pieces that make no sense by themselves: "This piece has a beak, gray fur, green stripes and maybe water? Where do those all come together in one place here?" I usually have a small collection of such Weird Harold pieces off to one side of the table. I check back on them periodically to keep their shapes, colors, and clues fresh in my mind. When I find a home for one of them, I usually snort spontaneously in delight and start talking to myself, "Of course! That's where it goes. Why didn't I see that straight away?" Pleasure washes over me at the rightness of the mystery solved: end of quandary; finished.

Doing jigsaw puzzles reassures a small, very frightened part of me that order is possible, that pieces can eventually make sense together, that there probably is a big pic-

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ture in the end. The steady rhythm of working one piece at a time helps me to remember to breathe one day at a time, one hour at a time, one minute at a time. When I work at a piece in my life that just doesn't make sense, I can set it in the small pile to the side and wait for more illumination. I also don't have to work puzzling out my life all the time. I can stop when I get tired and do the other

things in life; I don't have to puzzle continually.

I have quite a bit of faith in the companies that make puzzles. I believe that the completed puzzle will match the picture on the box, that all of the necessary pieces have been included. I want to have that much faith in God. Jigsaw puzzles help my faith.

*(Naked Party continued from page 3)*

great, and what they did last night didn't feel that bad.

The third is our foundational premise that it's a matter of "objective morality." We regularly complain that young people have no absolute values; that, in Guroian's words, "There is no right and wrong." But this message is likely to strike hearers as irrelevant, speculative, and quaint. Not only that, but flat-out wrong. These students have an objective morality. It's just different from ours. They believe that it's objectively wrong to dump someone in a callous way. It's wrong to have sex with someone who isn't willing. It's wrong to transgress any one of a hundred subtle etiquette cues about who may sleep with whom under what circumstances. There

is plenty of objective morality on their side, and they think it's better than ours. As far as they can see, theirs is working and ours looks pointlessly difficult. Why should they switch? This argument sounds like nothing more than "because I said so."

What we really mean, of course, is "because God said so." And indeed persevering in chastity is so difficult that no other motive except self-abandoning love of God is sufficient. All the warnings about the dangers of promiscuity, all the vaunted bliss of marriage, can be irrefutably countered by somebody's experience. Doing the right thing is not guaranteed to make you happy, and the wicked sometimes thrive. But because the love of God constrains us, because

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need for intimacy becomes attached to things that are not healthy for us, then we are never truly satisfied. As long as we are looking for this intimacy from any source other than God, we are in danger.

As with any addiction, a person dealing with BDSM needs to look at the deeper issues. Questions such as, “Why do I need to have so much control?” or “Why do I desire to be in situations where I am abused and out of control?” need to be asked. Healthy sexuality and love are about submitting to God and to one another, not about control and manipulation. Often, when life seems out of control, people attempt to completely control the areas of life they believe they can. Or, when life is completely controlled, people may feel compelled to let go, giving themselves over to risky behaviors dictated by others. Balance needs to be found in order for healing to begin.

Another factor to consider is the effect BDSM has on other people. Another person, at least, is involved in the role play. What has brought them to the place in their lives where this is the way they choose to express their sexuality? As I mentioned earlier, childhood

abuse plays a factor for one of the characters in *Fifty Shades of Grey*. While this may not be true of everyone who is involved in BDSM, one has to wonder what is motivating those enticed by it.

As our culture slips further and further into different forms of depravity, depraved things become more and more normalized. We may look back at this season and wish we could return to it as the simpler time when BDSM was the only extreme sexual behavior everyone was talking about. I can only imagine what lies before us if that is the case. History indicates that things will continue to get darker. This makes me all the more grateful for Christ and His presence in our lives. We are not left to our own devices and without recourse; we can pray for our culture, both inside and outside the church. We can do our best to be a light in the darkness and, as God calls us, to walk with people who may be struggling with issues that are foreign or even unknown to us.

*Lord, please light our path and lead us away from temptation. Help us be a light in the darkness.*

<sup>1</sup> Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace*, San Francisco: Harper, 1988, 3.

(Naked Party continued from page 5)

our bodies are not our own but bought with a price, we persevere in a difficult path, pressing on toward the light ahead.

Now, this is a difficult sell to people who don't believe in God. For them, this is like a shiny new car with no engine. If you don't have the motive of love for God, passion for purity looks like an empty shell.

I believe that the only conversation that will currently make sense begins with faith in God. The best we can do is speak passionately about our own experience—our own transformative contact with God, and how it has reordered actions and relationships, and empowered ever-greater deeds and greater love. It's not a bad story, actually, and authentic passion connects with an audience in a way that theoretical propositions cannot.

I say "currently" because I think there is long-term hope. Look at *It Happened One Night*. While that excellent film exhibits good sexual morality, it also displays behavior we consider unacceptable today: drunkenness, smoking, threats to "sock" the female star. Hollywood wouldn't include such elements today, because the culture changed. It got better. Bad behavior hurts, and eventually this becomes undeniable. Chastity has

been such a fixture of human history that the current situation is wildly anomalous, and I expect it will eventually right itself, probably due to women realizing that promiscuity doesn't make them feel empowered, but endangered. It may even turn out, in a supreme irony, that the current phenomenon of transitory student lesbianism was just a strategy of desperation, the only way society currently allows young women to tell boys, "Go away, I'm not ready."

"God hates sin," some emphasize. But God hates sin like the parent of a leukemia victim hates cancer. God really does love the sinner. In order to reach the sinner we will have to love them, too, and offer ourselves humbly and authentically as examples of what God's power can do.

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*Frederica Mathewes-Green is author of Gender: Men, Women, Sex, and Feminism (Conciliar, 2002).*

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## January In Review

**January 10th: Survivors of Abuse Group started.** It met for several weeks but ended early due to some schedule conflicts among the group participants.

**January 20th: WGA Board Meeting**

**January 25th: WGA Leadership Meeting**

## February And Beyond

**February 15th: WGA Leadership Meeting – please pray for WGA's staff and leaders as we plan and train for working with the people in our care.**

**March 1st: Mary will be speaking at a local corrections facility.**

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

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

**April 11th: Family and Friends Gathering. Stay tuned for more information!**

**May 23rd: Memorial Weekend Picnic**

### Thursday Night Group

**January 8th: 24 people**

**January 15th: 29 people**

**January 22nd 32 people**

**January 29th: 32 people**

**Orientation meeting - 4 new people**

### WGA Staff

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*A Measure of Grace*  
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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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