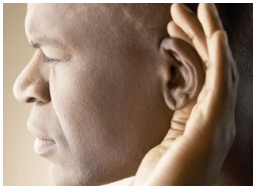




A Measure of Grace

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When God is Silent *by Roger Jones*

At my church this past week, the message (given by my wife, Jill) was from the first half of Psalm 22, talking about the seasons in life when God seems to be silent. David, the author, understands the feelings of abandonment and frustration that come from such periods of time when God is difficult to find and/or connect with.

Psalm 22:1-8, NIV

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,

by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel
praises.

⁴ In you our ancestors
put their trust;
they trusted and you
delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried
out and were saved;

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in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

⁸ “He trusts in the LORD,” they say,
“let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.”

With David, we are in good company when we experience similar feelings. A more modern example is that of Mother Teresa. A few years ago, a collection of her correspondence with some of her spiritual advisors/mentors was released. Through her letters, she revealed that for almost fifty years of her life and ministry, God seemed distant from her. She felt abandoned and alone. And yet she remained faithful to her calling to work with the poor.

I have experienced seasons when I have wondered if God was really present at all, or if I had simply made Him up somehow. During those times, it is easy either to forget or to explain away any experiences of God’s closeness. During a potentially serious health scare with my daughter a year ago, I could well relate to the words of David and later of Jesus, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In the days between the doctor’s initial concern that she might have hydrocephalus (water on

the brain) and the ultimate clean bill of health, I wrestled deeply with God. I forgot about His goodness.

Following our discovery that she was healthy, I continued to wrestle. While I wanted to believe that God would not allow anything bad to happen to my baby, I also had to face the reality of all of those who devoutly love and serve God and yet also experience terrible trauma, even the death of a child. Why should my family be treated any differently? Did we pray more effectively, or does God somehow love my daughter more (than ...)? This line of questioning is pointless and circular, but so often typifies the trap we find ourselves in when God seems silent.

Mother Teresa was comforted through a letter she received from one of her mentors, the Reverend Joseph Neuner, regarding what she described as her “darkness.” “He seems to have told her the three things she needed to hear: that there was no human remedy for it (that is, she should not feel responsible for affecting it); that feeling Jesus is not the only proof of his being there, and



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Public Image ~ Does it Matter? *by Mary Heathman*

Mary's note: I am in a season of reflection on how to be in the world, but not of it," and how we might be salt and light in the contexts in which we find ourselves every day. As part of my process, I did a review of what I have written in the past about this issue and found a series of articles written in 2008 that are still right on target. Though written six years ago, the issues I named then, and the personal experiences shared, are as relevant today as they were then. As you read, I hope you will be thinking and praying for WGA leaders as we continue to hold up the banner of truth and grace in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

In a recent poll, AOL users were asked, "Who do you find most annoying?" They were offered three choices to nominate, Rosie O'Donnell, Ann Coulter, and Paris Hilton. Respondents chose Rosie O'Donnell as the most annoying (57%), Ann Coulter and Paris Hilton were a close second and third at 18% and 17% respectively. I voted for Rosie, not because she annoys me all that much, but because, of the three choices, I think she would be pleased with the label. (More importantly, I wanted to see the poll

results and you can't view it if you don't vote.)

In the brief analysis that followed the stats, it was speculated that Rosie O'Donnell was nominated because of her feuds with public figures like Donald Trump and Bill O'Reilly, and her frequent political rants. Paris Hilton's reputation of annoyance was thought to come from her "Oompa-Loompa" exploiting, driving drunk, highly publicized jail sentence, and simply for being rich. Ann Coulter's ranking was said to come for one reason, her "Relentless bashing of Democrats/liberals."

It is Ann Coulter's ranking that interests me the most. Her main claim to fame that landed her a 1% lead over Paris Hilton's shenanigans come primarily from her political positions and the way she expresses them. Now, I have a problem with her name making the list – I wonder who decided to place her as one of the three choices, but that issue is for another time.

My purposes for this article are simply to point out that the public is irritated enough with the public witness of some conservative Chris-

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#Chastityw/truth&grace

The Different Types of Intimacy

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).

We’ve been meandering our way through this Scripture over the last several months, exploring the various facets of intimacy. Though Jesus didn’t necessarily intend them for this specific use, his words give a rich, helpful structure for looking at the different recipients of love—ourselves, others and God. So far, we’ve covered our culture’s dysfunctional views of intimacy, the reality of loneliness, intimacy with ourselves and the components of healthy intimacy. Finally, we’ve built up to a discussion of the different types of intimacy available to us in our relationships, i.e., loving others.

Often when I bring up the word intimacy in a discussion, people automatically think of romantic or sexual intimacy. I remember walking through the doors of WGA many years ago with the same limited definition. I had no vision for what this intangible thing called intimacy looked like beyond sex and romance (and, sadly, those were the only things I valued and desperately pursued at that time). If our sexuality is viewed as the mechanics of a car, I want to know what the fuel is that actually runs the vehicle, that drives it. What is it our hearts deeply long for and what were we designed to

move towards? One of the answers is **intimacy**. I think going back to what is intrinsic to our divinely created sexuality can give us clues to the types of intimacy we desire.

My concept of sexuality is multi-faceted. Sexuality is about our bodies, our biologically designated sex/gender and the daily need we have for healthy touch. It also influences our emotional lives, our thought lives and our wills. It has a relational component; the very energy of our sexuality pulls us out of ourselves and towards one another. Our sexuality includes the non-physical side of gender: how we think, feel and fit in with the same and opposite sex. God cares very much what we do with our (and others’) bodies, because there is a spiritual dimension to our sexuality. Chastity is a daily discipline. So it only makes sense that intimacy isn’t something that’s just “out there”; it has to do with nourishing the different parts of who we are. We need emotional intimacy, intellectual intimacy, spiritual intimacy, healthy touch, and friends from both genders with whom to experience life. Let’s unpack these a bit.

Experiential Intimacy (Sharing Life): This is day-to-day intimacy. Sometimes I’m tracking and sharing routine things (How was your day? How was work?); other times, big, joyful or agonizing things (grief, loss, celebrations, holidays). This involves sharing trips or different types of experiences together.

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(Intimacy continued from page 4)

Don't miss this often neglected intimacy or the ways you can intentionally deepen simple points of connection.

Emotional Intimacy: I've worked hard over the years becoming aware my emotions, acknowledging them and giving them room for expression, but do other folks know I have them? Would I be willing to express joy, sorrow, grief or anger with close friends or loved ones? Could I work through a conflict with another? Vulnerability often provides the opportunity to experience intimacy on a deeper level.

Intellectual Intimacy: I'm not much of an intellectual, but I love discussions, sharing thoughts, opinions and perspectives about a variety of issues. Sometimes I make myself vulnerable by sharing my thought world with others, despite fear of being discounted or rejected. I am enriched when I discover what, why and how someone thinks about things.

Physical Intimacy (Healthy Touch): This is a tricky thing for most people, especially for those who have been wounded or exploited by inappropriately sexualized touch. Yet we need it all the same, so we must figure out what's appropriate for each relationship (and at this point in the series, I'm talking about friendship). Is it handshakes, arms around the shoulder, or hugs (A-frame, side or bear)? Do you reach out or receive this type of intimacy in a healthy way?

Spiritual Intimacy: I am shocked by how intimate it is to sit with someone in God's presence, praying for one another with hearts open to God. This vulnerability goes beyond words sometimes, and leaves a lingering sweetness. No wonder

people shy away from prayer, at least out-loud prayer with others. Our longings and yearnings for what we want most suddenly appear during these times, or contrition, or conviction—wow! There are many ways of being intimate spiritually: worshiping together, having a lively (respectful) debate about Scripture, serving together. Have you ever thought of these as pathways towards deepening intimacy?

As you browse through this list, think about your current relationships. What types of intimacy are present? What ways could you intentionally deepen some of them? Once again, people can err on the “too much,” or “too little” when pursuing intimacy. We can share (or expect from the other person) much more than what's appropriate for a relationship, or we can remain hidden and self-protective to the point that intimacy never has a chance to get off the ground. It's good to refer back to my last article on the “Components of Healthy Intimacy.” Let's not forget mutuality, pacing, follow through, etc.

“But hey, ” you might ask, “...what *about* sexual and romantic intimacy?” Exactly, I think that deserves a whole article by itself. Stay tuned.

(When God is Silent continued from page 2)

her very craving for God was a ‘sure sign’ of his ‘hidden presence’ in her life; and that the absence was in fact part of the ‘spiritual side’ of her work for Jesus.”¹ Her response was, surprisingly, “I can’t express in words — the gratitude I owe you for your kindness to me — for the first time in ... years — I have come to love the darkness.”²

Neuner’s statement that “there was no human remedy for it,” allowed Mother Teresa to stop striving for a connection with God and feeling that was doing something wrong. While this lets us off the hook of a performance based faith, it remains difficult in another way. This is because we must then wait upon God, rather than trying one thing after another, busying ourselves with our own efforts. In the pursuit of busy-ness, we at least feel that there is something we can do, and we can blame ourselves rather than God, if our efforts are fruitless. His next bit of counsel, “Feeling Jesus is not the only proof of his being there,” is a good admonition to us as well. When we are seeking the “feeling” of Jesus’ presence with us, we may miss out on the ways that He is actually being present to us through other people. Despite feeling alone during the health scare with our daughter, we were not

in reality. In fact, many were praying for us and joined with us in our fears and anxiety.

I don’t believe that Mother Teresa’s statement, “I have come to love the darkness” implies that she embraced some sort of evil within herself. The “darkness” she described was her inability to sense the presence of God, as if the lights had suddenly gone out. Neuner’s counsel to her brought great comfort, because she could see that the “darkness” was similar to what

Christ experienced in His suffering and death. “My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?” In effect, it was through God’s silence that she was able to connect more deeply with Christ. Hers was a lonely path, yet not purposeless. She had not been abandoned.

I pray that as you journey with Christ, you can

celebrate the times when you sense His closeness and cherish that closeness, especially when it feels like He is distant. Do not lose faith when He seems silent, but look for Him in the unexpected places. Know that through your loneliness and suffering, celebrating and joy, God is present.

^{1,2} David Van Bienna, “Mother Teresa’s Crisis of Faith,” *TIME*, August 23, 2007

When we are seeking the “feeling” of Jesus’ presence with us, we may miss out on the ways that He is actually being present to us through other people.

(Public Image continued from page 3)

tians that 18% of poll respondents picked Ann Coulter over two people notorious for their attention-grabbing behavior and sound-bytes intended to further their celebrity. In contrast, I think Ann Coulter, though I am often wishing she said it differently, is simply expressing her beliefs and debating the issues of the day.

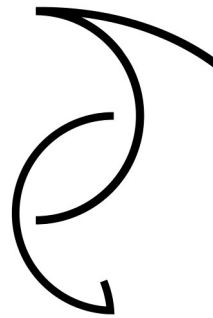
Coulter is the legal correspondent for Human Events and writes a popular syndicated column for Universal Press Syndicate. She is a frequent guest on many TV shows, including Hannity and Colmes, Wolf Blitzer Reports, At Large With Geraldo Rivera, Scarborough Country, HBO's Real Time with Bill Maher, The O'Reilly Factor, Good Morning America and has been profiled in numerous publications, including TV Guide, the Guardian (UK), the New York Observer, National Journal, Harper's Bazaar, and Elle magazine, among others. She was named one of the top 100 Public Intellectuals by federal judge Richard Posner in 2001.

Impressive credentials in anybody's book. Yet, in our country, where debating issues of the day and freedom of expression are constitutionally protected and supposedly valued, many people named her the most annoying person of the three women named!

What difference does this make to me, to you the reader, to WGA group members, I wonder.

I have kept a file for years (since I became a Christian under massive resistance, myself) called, "The Way They See Us." It is a file of articles and notes compiled to illustrate the public image of Christians in our country, the world—the media's representation of us and how we came to earn that reputation in some ways and how we are mislabeled in others.

In the next few months, I will explore this a bit. If you have illustrations or questions along these lines, feel free to contact me at mary@wheregraceabounds.org. In the meantime, please pray for our public witness during this highly politicized season. May the voice of truth and grace have its way in a sea of compromise (otherwise known to my heart as politics!)





February In Review

February 15th: WGA Leadership Meeting

February 21st: WGA Activity - Game Night

Thursday Night Group

February 5th: 29 people

February 12th: 30 people

February 19th: 32 people

February 26th: 11 people

Orientation meeting - 1 new person

March And Beyond

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

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

April 11th: Family and Friends Gathering.

April 16th: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!

April 16th: Mary will be speaking at Time to Change

April 19th: WGA Leadership Meeting

May 23rd: Memorial Weekend Picnic

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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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