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A Measure of Grace

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Authentic Needs: The Force Behind Addiction

by Roger Jones

Over the past several weeks, I have seen an article pop up online from a few different sources: "The Likely Cause of Addiction Has Been Discovered, and It Is Not What You Think," by Johann Hari. If you'd like to read it in its entirety, you can access it online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/johann-hari/the-real-cause-of-addiction_b_6506936.html.

The author primarily discusses drug addiction and the common, yet erroneous, beliefs we have about it: "Imagine if you and I and the next twenty people to pass us on the street take a really potent drug for twenty days. There are strong chemical hooks in these drugs, so if we stopped on day twenty-one, our bodies would need the chemical. We would have a ferocious craving. We would be addicted. That's what addiction means."

Part of our understanding of addiction is based on
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experiments done on rats. When placed in cages with the choice of plain water or water laced with cocaine, rats chose the drug, even if it killed them. But psychologist Bruce Alexander discovered something interesting about those studies: individual rats were placed in cages *alone*. He wondered what would happen if they were not alone and did some follow-up experiments.

Alexander created a Rat Park that offered good food, fun things to do, and most importantly, other rats. When the same two water options were given to this community, the rats drank only about 25% of the drugged water. In fact, they seemed to prefer the regular water. When he recreated the original experiment with a rat alone in a cage, it predictably chose the drugged water. However, if an addicted rat was placed back into the Rat Park, it recovered quickly and rarely went back to the drugged water. Community and circumstance seemed to make all the difference.

So, how does this relate to WGA and issues of sexuality and relationship? Let's explore that a bit. If people can be sexually addicted, might community and authentic connection be keys to their recovery for them as well?

One of the things we have taught at WGA for a long time is that sexual issues are rooted in relational prob-

lems. If one persists in trying to get authentic needs met from a source that cannot meet them, addiction can form, especially if numbing of pain or some sort of payoff is involved. The rats in the experiment opted for drugs when they were alone, either because they were bored, lonely or wanted to feel something intense. I believe the same is true for lonely, bored people who choose pornography, fantasy, etc., to meet their need for true connection: they end up addicted, if they remain alone.

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Ineffective, addiction-recovery programs assume that once people have physically "withdrawn" from the influence of drugs, they can return to their lives with a fighting chance of maintaining sobriety. But without exploration and resolution of the issues that led to the addiction in the first place, there is barely a chance at all. People need tools to establish meaningful connections with others before they can sever the connection to their former drug of choice.

This reality, that authentic connection is vital to every human being (and rat too), is at the heart of what Where Grace Abounds offers. This is why WGA programs are part support group and part community. We firmly believe that connection with one another the key to healing for those struggling with

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Public Image ~ Does it Matter? Part 2

By Mary Heathman (reprint)

Author's note: I am continuing 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. Here is the second in a series of articles written in 2008 that are still right on target. 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. -- Mary Heathman

Thirty-six years ago, fresh from *Evangelism Explosion* training, I was sharing my new faith with a friend. He said, "You seem to think I haven't had any experience with this Christian thing. I was saved once. I was invited to a camp for kids, and the leaders were running around saving souls and hanging them on their belts like scalps, mine included. I went back home to my crummy life and I never saw or heard from any of them again. They didn't care about me."

I was stunned in the moment; but made an important decision that day. Never again would I "share Christ" as a project, but would pray that the Lord would make me truly interested in people. I decided to build relationships, enjoy and love people, and let Jesus bring them to Him on His timetable, not mine. My decision was reinforced by scripture in the second chapter of Acts where we read that after Pentecost, all the believers "*were together, and had all things in common; And*

sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:44-47)

Apparently, in the beginning days of the early Church, "They" were intrigued enough by what they saw in "Us" to allow themselves to be gathered into the ranks!

Looking at the way "They" see "Us" is not just my idea, not just a file of notes and clippings I have kept over the years. In a recent book, *UnChristian*, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, we read some troubling news about the public image of Christianity. They have written a book that contains what George Barna describes as "*rigorous research and the difficult process of communicating statistics in everyday language. . . it is a logical carefully reasoned narrative about the past, present and future state of society and the Christian faith.*"

In the reading of *UnChristian*, I find it underscored and reinforced what we have experienced for years—a growing negative perception of Christianity. So, for this second article in this series, I would like to report a few points from

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Reflections: Thoughts from a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

I've been reading *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz and creating a couple of Thursday night talks for *Where Grace Abounds* around its themes. Ruiz treats four basic tenets from the wisdom beliefs of the Toltec people, a group that lived thousands of years ago in Mexico. I am amazed, as I read the literature and wisdom of peoples from across the globe and across time, that there is nothing new under the sun. No matter whether you eat grubs and live in a thatched hut, or eat take-out and live in a high-rise, there are issues that are common to all humans.

The Toltec recognized that all of us are born with a desire to please, to be acceptable, to fit in. We watch faces for reactions as babies and discover that we have the power to elicit a smile or a frown. As we grow we listen for the cues that tell us what is acceptable. Often those cues are not encouraging to our unique personalities: "Children should be seen and not heard." "Why are you so stupid?" "You shouldn't ask so many questions." "You've got two left feet." "You aren't worth my time." We often agree with these statements and absorb them deeply within us to build an image that is acceptable in our world. As a result we end up constrained by false images of who we think we should be, instead of free to live as we have been created to be.

There are four agreements that the Toltec believe are foundational for freedom. Our journey then is to learn to practice

these good agreements and deal with our limiting/ false agreements as the light of freedom reveals them. As I studied these, I realized that Jesus' life presents an amazing model for living these out. See what you think:

1. Be impeccable with your word.

Our words are powerfully creative forces: not surprising, since we are fashioned after God who created the universe with his word (Genesis and John 1). This agreement challenges us to "do no harm" with our words, to be kind and truthful with what we say and think about ourselves and others. How often do you make self-deprecating remarks? One day of tracking that will reveal how unkind you have learned to be to yourself. Such remarks usually point to false agreements we have made in the past. How often do you speak or think unkindly about other people? Be prepared to be alarmed as you track how often you sum up the people in the world around you with unkind, half-true judgments. This agreement to be impeccable with your word is the place to start for renewed self-awareness.

2. Don't take anything personally.

Because everyone else is dealing with their own set of untrue agreements and working hard to present a modified/ false image for the world, how can their reactions be filtered through my own false images and come up with anything true about me? The guy flipping me off on the highway is filled up with his own struggles, so his over-reaction has nothing to do with who I am. Likewise when

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I am emotionally reactionary with someone, it isn't about who they are. It's my stuff. This is not to suggest that I should be impervious to any outside input! When I am the recipient of criticism, whether a tsunami blast or a gentle rebuke, I have the opportunity to say, "What do I think about this? Does this resonate with one of the false agreements I've made that I am working to discover and change or not?" And further, because I don't have to take everything personally, I am free to wonder about the wounding in others. I am enabled to see past their presenting emotions to pain that I can respond to, e.g., "Wow! You are really angry. Are you alright? Is something going on?"

3. Don't make assumptions.

- Most of us have been taught since we were only a few feet tall not to ask questions.
- Many of us truly believe that we can accurately interpret the looks, comments, actions and inactions of others without asking questions.
- And finally we have learned to believe that if someone really cares about us they will know what we want, what we like or what we are feeling without having to ask questions.

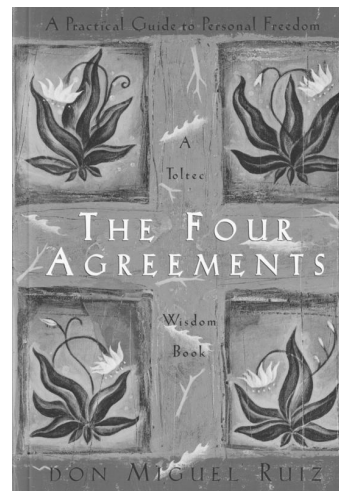
Don't make assumptions. It's ok to ask questions. It's important to ask questions. It's courageous and kind to ask questions.

4. Do your best.

My first reaction to this agreement was to groan. I have slaved as a people-pleasing perfectionist under the heavy load of the ever elusive mandate to "do my best." Not getting enough sleep, saying "yes" when I should say "no," over-

planning, overproducing, and still never feeling I've accomplished what I should. Ah, that nasty word, "Should." Doing our best is about doing the best WE can do, not doing the best that CAN be done (by superman, or Martha, or Jesus or someone). My "best" changes throughout the day, throughout the year, in different seasons of life and events. When I do more than my best, I end up feeling exhausted and resentful and then unable to even do my best. When I do less than my best, I feel guilty and shameful and then unable to do even my best. It takes self-control for me to do my best – nothing more and nothing less. It also makes me examine my motives for what I do.

These four ideas have been exploring my heart and mind like little Hubble spacecrafts – sending back pictures of the backsides of things that I've never looked at before, giving me new images of my internal universe. It's like . . . cosmic. I hope this little set of Toltec tools will help you to discover that "you are here" on the map of your life that you share with humanity. Pick up the book!



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UnChristian, and suggest that those who are serious about reaching out to our culture in the name of Jesus, should not just read, but study this book, discuss it among themselves, and make it a key part of their prayers and planning for outreach and evangelism.

“They” are “outsiders” as defined by David Kinnaman, in his book, UnChristian. According to his research of the perceptions of these folks, they wouldn’t be offended by this label, as they are “looking at the Christian faith from the outside. This group includes atheists, agnostics, and those affiliated with a faith other than Christianity . . . and other unchurched adults who are not born-again Christians.” When they say, “Us,” they mean insiders, those who would call ourselves followers of Christ, Christians, born-again believers, and who practice our faith regularly.

According to the research, there are six broad themes—the most common points of skepticism and objections raised by outsiders—that are important to understand about how “They” see “Us”. Those six themes are outlined in the following excerpt from UnChristian:

1. **“Hypocritical.** Outsiders consider us hypocritical—saying one thing and doing another—and they are skeptical of our morally superior attitudes. They say Christians pretend to be something unreal, conveying a polished image that is not accurate. Christians think the church is only a place for virtuous and morally pure people.

2. **“Too focused on getting converts.** Outsiders wonder if we genuinely care about them. They feel like targets rather than people. They question our motives

when we try to help them “get saved,” despite the fact that many of them have already “tried” Jesus and experienced church before.

3. **“Antihomosexual.** Outsiders say that Christians are bigoted and show disdain for gays and lesbians. They say Christians are fixated on curing homosexuals and on leveraging political solutions against them.

4. **“Sheltered.** Christians are thought of as old-fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality. Outsiders say we do not respond to reality in appropriately complex ways, preferring simplistic solutions and answers. We are not willing to deal with the grit and grime of people’s lives.

5. **“Too political.** Another common perception of Christians is that we are overly motivated by a political agenda, that we promote and represent politically conservative interests and issues. Conservative Christians are often thought of as “right-wingers”.

6. **“Judgmental.** Outsiders think of Christians as quick to judge others. They say we are not honest about our attitudes and perspectives about other people. They doubt that we really love people as we say we do.

“The next six chapters of this book explore these six critical perceptions, describing how outsiders arrive at these viewpoints and how these viewpoints affect their understanding of Jesus. Each chapter also articulates a desirable new perception—a biblical vision for how Christians should be known. This desirable perception is not an effort to be popular or merely to accommodate outsiders

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ers, but to engage them with the life-changing Jesus rather than an unchristian version of him.

“Let me reiterate that you may not agree with the views of outsiders, but you should not ignore them. We have to deal with [them] as they are—candid, irreverent, and brazen. If we do not, it makes their criticism even more forceful because it goes unanswered.” Excerpts taken from *UnChristian* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, Published by Baker Books, copyright by David Kinnaman and Fermi Project, 2007

I almost want to apologize for this list of hard to hear criticisms of “Us.” Almost, . . . but it is too important to ignore. “Outsiders” represent 37% of the population between eighteen and forty-one, 40% of those ages 16-29. Moreover, the perceptions aren’t just “out there” To

make one final quote from UnChristian, “. . . we must grasp the idea that young people in our churches are also feeling the heat of these negative perceptions. They are bringing up some of the same challenges, questions, and doubts facing those outside the church.”

Public Image—Does It Matter? I think it does—if we want to share the Good News, we need to face the truth about how “They” see “Us.” Next month, we will look at the antidote to some of this bad news.

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sexual and relational issues.

God created men and women with core needs: to be known, to be loved, and to have purpose and meaning. When these core needs are not met, people seek out substitutes, or things that at least dull the pain of unmet needs for a while. Simply removing access to porn or unhealthy relationships won’t solve the problem; it is only a first step to helping a person get in touch with the deep longings of his/her heart. Without community and true connection, those longings and desires lead back to darkness.

Hari ends his article especially poignantly, “When I returned from my long

journey [research for article and book], I looked at my ex-boyfriend, in withdrawal, trembling on my spare bed, and I thought about him differently. For a century now, we have been singing war songs about addicts. It occurred to me as I wiped his brow, we should have been singing love songs to them all along.”





March In Review

March 18th: WGA Board Meeting

March 21st: WGA Event—Game Night

Thursday Night Group

March 5th: 29 people

March 12th: 30 people

March 19th: 26 people

March 26th: 25 people

Orientation meeting: 2 new people

April And Beyond

April 11th: Family and Friends Gathering.

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

April 19th: WGA Leadership Meeting

May 2nd: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry.

May 4th: Mary will be speaking at a local corrections facility.

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

May 23rd: WGA Picnic in the Park - 11AM—3PM, Alamo Placita Park. Join us as we celebrate all that God has done through WGA since 1986!

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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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