



A Measure of Grace

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In the News *by Roger Jones*

Over the past several weeks, the news has been lit up with headlines about Bruce Jenner and the Duggar Family scandal (of the TV show “19 Kids and Counting”). For those of you who may be unaware of these situations, I will offer a brief summary of my understanding of the events.

Bruce Jenner (former Olympian and part of the Kardashian extended family) announced several weeks ago that he has always felt like he was in the wrong body and is actually a female (on the inside if not the outside). He is transitioning to become Caitlyn Jenner. *Vanity Fair* magazine published its most recent issue with Caitlyn on the cover, in women’s clothing and makeup. Caitlyn is being both praised as a hero and condemned as delusional fool.

Josh Duggar (the oldest of the Duggar children) has been accused of and

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confessed to molesting some young girls (some of whom were his sisters) when he was fourteen years old. It is unclear to me exactly what happened following these events (Josh is now 27 years old, married and has children of his own). Some sources seem to indicate a cover-up, while others are saying the police were involved. Josh and the entire Duggar family, all devout Christians, are being condemned as hypocrites and pedophiles by some, but others are calling for forgiveness and letting the past stay in the past.

As with all the sensational media we are bombarded with daily, the truth of these situations is difficult if not impossible to discern. We can never understand what it has been like for Bruce Jenner living all these years feeling the way that he claims to have felt. We don't know the circumstances or the follow-up that occurred within the Duggar family.

My purpose in writing about these stories is not to encourage people to choose a side, particularly the sides we are presented with. If we follow what seems to be the norm in our culture, we must either love or hate Caitlyn Jenner, and we must offer blanket forgiveness to Josh Duggar or treat him like pariah. We tend to

forget that the "issues" we are discussing are the reality of people's lives. As I have read articles and seen the various reactions that people have to these stories, I am reminded that we need to look for the "third way."

Both Jenner and the Duggars have chosen to live their lives in a very public way, as stars of their own reality TV shows. They have opened themselves to a type of visibility and criticism that most people will never experience. Some would argue that their willingness to live so publically

is a problem by itself. Why would a reasonable, emotionally stable person ever choose to do such a thing? Regardless of the rationale behind their decisions, people are watching them. While most of us will never experience the public eye in the ways these have, many of us are facing similar issues.

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Many sound off with opinions as if they are experts on every topic, as if opinion is fact. Thanks to social media such as Facebook and Twitter, there is an audience for the sorts of random thoughts and jokes that come to mind about any given situation. We should all consider our words more carefully, but as Christians we, in particular, are called to be more

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Public Image ~ Does It Matter? (Part 4)

Excerpts/Reprint from a Measure of Grace, 2008

by Mary Heathman

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 fourth in a series of articles written in 2008. This was the concluding article in that series. The thoughts expressed here read a bit simplistically from my vantage point seven years later. 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

Quoting an earlier article, "I would like to report a few points from *UnChristian*, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, 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."

In this last article of this series, I would like to take each of *UnChristian*'s six most common points of skepticism/objections raised by outsiders and quote Kinnaman's and Lyons's solutions, their ways to turn the perceptions around, i.e., antidotes for the public image problems Chris-

tians face today. I will illustrate each with some experiences/thoughts of my own.

Outsider's Perception (OP): Hypocritical. "Christians say one thing but live something entirely different."

New Perception (NP), Kinnaman and Lyons): "**Christians are transparent about their flaws and act first, talk second.**"

What that means to Me (MH): Once when I was the token conservative speaker at a panel discussion on the biblical perspective on homosexuality, a man in the audience spoke to me through clenched teeth with no attempt to hide his contempt for my perspective. When I asked him why he was so angry, his face crumpled and he told of his experience of great pain through the hands of Christians he had asked for help. I said in my response to him, "I am so sorry that happened to you; that is not God's heart. And I want you to understand that I do not see myself as any different from you—whatever is yet in my life that is not as God intends it to be, is just as much sin and brokenness as anything that has been directed toward you." After that experience, I make it a point not to allow myself to be in a position where I am speaking about sexual sin until I

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have clearly made the point that I myself am a sinner no different than anyone who may be listening to me.

(OP): *"Too focused on getting converts. Christians are insincere and concerned only with converting others."*

(NP): ***"Christians cultivate relationships and environments where others can be deeply transformed by God."***

(MH): As I mentioned in a previous article, I made a decision long ago that I would ask God to help me build real relationships, love people in His name, and allow Him to draw them to Him. Insofar as it is within my power, I want to create an environment of grace and truth and invite people into my life in the Lord. WGA's support groups and discipleship counseling and other activities are intended to be such a place, where people can come as they are and encounter authentic relationship with believers and the God we serve.

(OP): *"Anti-homosexual. Christians show contempt for gays and lesbians."*

(NP): ***"Christians show compassion and love to all people, regardless of their lifestyle."***

(MH): One of my favorite illustrations of this happened when Promise Keepers held their first conference in Boulder. There was to be a demonstration by local gay and lesbian activists. When the activists arrived, they were met by a number of big

strapping football players whose job it was to keep the activists from entering the stadium. There was tension escalating right along with the temperature on that hot summer day, until a few of the athletes came out with a tray of cold drinks and snacks and served the activists. As the players held the line (activists could not enter the stadium), but also served refreshments, the mood lightened. Gays and lesbians were treated with compassion and respect!

(OP): *"Sheltered. Christians are thought of as old-fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality."*

(NP): ***"Christians are engaged, informed, and offer sophisticated responses to the issues people face."***

(MH): It is fun for WGA staff to speak at youth groups. Often the young people are initially barely attentive, but quickly sit up and take notice when we quote newspaper headlines about what is happening in the world, especially the world with which they are most familiar. When a line from one of their favorite songs is used as an illustration to make one of our points, or when we show a clip from a headliner movie, they look at us with renewed respect. Clearly, we have done our homework and aren't as out of touch with their world as they might have thought we were!

(OP): *"Too political. Christians are primarily motivated by a political agenda and promote right-wing politics."*

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Somebody Has to Pay

Greed: a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (such as money) than is needed.

These were difficult feet for her – small elegant feet with graceful toes, even the slight twist of the smallest ones were just like her mother’s. As she held them gently, bathing them, clipping the nails, scrubbing off the callouses, a tear crept out of her lovely, almond eyes and fell into the warm, scented water. For a moment she was home and young, and the world was simple again.

“OUCH! God! Watch what you’re doing down there for Christ’s sake!” The voice ripped through her gossamer thin moment and stung her back to the reality of her life.

“Even though you save money, you get what you pay for with these \$10 pedicures,” the voice whined angrily into the cellphone. “At least there won’t be a tip on top of it today,” the angry words continued, shooting past the phone and hitting the top of the bowed ebony head – their intended target.

The second tear was for the long walk home that night to a small, stifling closet of a room with six other girls who also cried softly in their sleep. Tips were the only way she could pay

for bus fare, and the 12-hour steady queue of feet had not been generous.

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“\$10 for this lamp? Are you kidding? I’ll give you \$2. This is a garage sale after all, not a department store, for Christ’s sake!” It had seemed like such a good idea at the time, a garage sale. She had felt excited when she told Juan, the kitchen guy, about it between shifts as he stood with his arms in the soapy water,

“It will be a good excuse to get rid of things we don’t need anymore, I can make the extra money I need for Shane’s class pictures and his haircut, and I can buy those vitamins that were helping. Heck, I might even be able to buy Shane that toy he gushes over every time we’re in Target for his birthday!” Giving up one of her late night shifts the night before to get everything organized had seemed like a reasonable sacrifice at the time, “an investment” she had called it in her mind. But the excitement had been bickered and negotiated away by the end of the day. She took the two crumpled dollar bills thrust into her hand and added them to the very small stack of their companions in her cash box. And as she watched the faded pink childhood lamp with limp lace thrust unceremoniously into a backseat bulging with garage sale booty, she found herself trying to choose between class

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pictures of gapped toothed raggedy-haired boy, or the joy on that same mop-headed heartthrob as he opened his birthday present. It was going to have to be one or the other.

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“Is that the best you can do? I had a contractor with a team of workers here last week that said they could get the job done in half the time, and they weren’t going to charge that much more. I’ll pay you \$100 less than your bid. Take it or leave it.” Phillip had been so happy to get this call. Three years ago, he could hardly keep up with the calls and the work; his wife had been so proud of him.

“You were right, Phil! Owning your own business will be such a relief. I’d like to see Bob’s face now! He’d

be eating all those nasty things he said to you when you quit. No more fighting for a raise or arguing for overtime. I’m so proud of you.” Proud wasn’t a word she used much now, especially when she got home from her evening shifts. When the directions had taken him right into the gated community this morning, he had sighed and smiled with relief. They needed this job. He needed this job. So did she. The low bid had been a tactical error; he knew it gave him no room to negotiate, but they needed this job to be a yes and they needed it today. But \$100 would cut his profit in half. \$100 wouldn’t satisfy the water bill shutoff notice on the front door and the groceries this week. But \$100 would take care of one of them.

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loving. An off the cuff remark about how “sick” Jenner must be makes one just another unsafe person to someone who may be silently struggling with gender or sexuality. An online argument about how Josh Duggar has been forgiven by God, so we should just forget about the abuse and move on, could very well invalidate one who has been abused and has never been able to admit it. It dishonors the victims’ stories and does a disservice to Josh himself. It is arrogant to pronounce someone’s forgiveness, when we are not the wronged party. Of course God offers forgiveness, but He also allows the consequences of actions to run their course.

I am not saying that it isn’t okay to have an opinion or to share it. I am suggesting that we do our best to place ourselves in the shoes of those people we encounter, both in real life and in the media, before we speak or comment. It is God’s love that will draw people to Christ, not our judgments. I ask that you consider, as I will, when and how to speak into situations such as these. I know that God loves Jenner and Duggar. He also loves us in the midst of our own messy stories.

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(NP): ***“Christians are characterized by respecting people, thinking biblically, and finding solutions to complex issues.”***

(MH): A friend of mine from church ran for the school board so that she could participate in the committee on reviewing curricula and textbooks. A WGA leader volunteers for a political candidate that he believes in. Neither of these folks are beating a drum for their own way; but entering a process with others in their community, working on causes, letting their world view be a part of the discussion, not trying to drown out all other voices. I am proud to know such people who are powerful antidotes to the popular misperception of Christians.

(OP): *“Judgmental. Christians are prideful and quick to find faults in others.”*

(NP): ***“Christians show grace by finding the good in others and seeing their potential to be Christ followers.”***

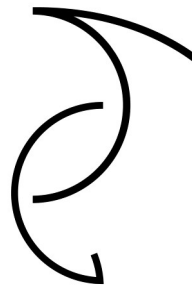
(MH): There is so much to say about grace that I find myself unable to give a single illustration. I think back to a series of articles I wrote on “What Is Grace.” If the reader would like to know a bit about what I think grace in action looks like, I suggest you look on our website, wheregraceabounds.org, do a search for the word grace and read the articles that are found there. I would also suggest that if you want to read something very helpful about grace, try a few of my favorites, *Guilt and Grace* (Tournier),

Addiction and Grace (May), *What’s So Amazing About Grace*, (Yancey), and most importantly, dive into a study of Romans Chapter Five.

Again, I am tempted to apologize for printing all these harsh criticisms of believers. It is my hope that you adopt the new perceptions that Kinnaman and Lyons are suggesting. For as they say, “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.” May the Lord, who loves Outsiders and Insiders as well, be so real and close to us that we simply find ourselves behaving toward one another as he intended—in truth and grace—in truth and love.

Oh, Lord, may it be so among believers first!

Excerpts are taken from *UnChristian* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, Baker Books, 2007.





May In Review

May 4th: Mary spoke at a local corrections facility.

May 23rd: WGA Picnic in the Park

June And Beyond

June 1st: Mary will speaking at Time to Change

June 14th: WGA Ministry table at Harvest Church

June 27th: Scott will be speaking at a local women's Bible study

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

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

Prayer Request

Please pray for the Where Grace Abounds Staff, Leadership and Board as we continue to administer God's truth and grace in the areas of relationships and sexuality. Please pray for our group members—those navigating issues around sexual addiction, sexual abuse, same sex attraction, transgender, and for those charged with a sex offense and their families. Please pray that we would have opportunities to speak in various Christian settings in the upcoming months.

Thursday Night Group

May 7th: 31 People

May 14th: 30 People

May 21st: 36 People

May 28th: 27 People

Orientation meeting: 4 new people

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Mary Heathman
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Steve Huston
Chaplain/Church Liaison

Jill Huston
Family & Friends Coordinator

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Beyond Containment

A Measure of Grace
is edited by
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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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