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A Measure of *Grace*

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#Chastityw/truth&grace: Does God Care about My Longings and Desires? *By Scott Kingry*

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” *The Weight of Glory*, CS Lewis

“Every sinful behavior is rooted in a legitimate God-given appetite.”
Thomas Aquinas

In my last article on romantic and sexual intimacy I posed the question, “Does God care

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about my longings,
my physical and emo-
tional needs, my
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Where Grace Abounds
P.O. Box 18871
Denver, Colorado 80218

Office: 303/863-7757
Fax: 303/863-7769

info@wheregraceabounds.org
www.wheregraceabounds.org



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deeper desires?” My intention was to raise a companion issue: If I trusted and believed He cares deeply for me, my needs, longings and desires, I would find it (hopefully) easier to surrender and submit my sexuality to the sacred boundaries God has placed around this facet of my life. And in doing so, I would thrive and flourish. I think this is an important question and worthy of pausing and unpacking more.

For most of my Christian life it seems, I’ve been in a daily battle with my desires. I try my best to manage them, letting the good desires endure, while attempting to stomp out the not-so-holy ones. You’ve got to stay on top of those evil desires, because if you give them an inch, the next thing you know, you’ll be in Vegas doing all sorts of carnal, hedonistic pleasure seeking (and we know that what happens there, doesn’t necessarily stay there). I feel as though my evil desires will overtake and carry me away. *But wait!* According to the CS Lewis quotation above, my desires are not strong and powerful enough to undo me. They are too WEAK; I’m not wanting enough and settling for much less than God

desires for me.

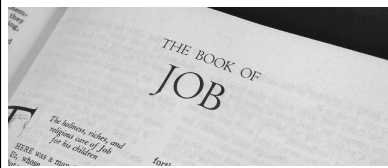
And wait again! Thomas Aquinas says that at the root of all the sinful desires are legitimate God-designed needs. When I am missing the mark or settling for less, somewhere behind all of the mess are still authentic longings He created. But what exactly are they? It’s taken a long time to even begin to put words around all the deep yearnings I wish to have realized in my life. I

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desperately want love, for it to stick and stay and not run so quickly through the sieve that is my heart. I long to feel valuable, to be wanted, to be embraced and to know that I’m accepted and have a place to belong. I want to know I’m significant and my life has purpose. I yearn to be enjoyed and delighted in—to be seen and truly known. Of

course, I don’t want to be the narcissistic, black hole of neediness everyone is forced to dance around, but rather to have the capacity to offer all of these same things to any dear one that Jesus puts in my path. Still, even as I re-read my list of desires, the words fail to convey the depth of longing behind them, but you get the gist. So the question becomes, “As I am more in touch

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(Note: In February of 1999, sixteen years and five months ago, I was in a similar place emotionally and spiritually to where I am now. Sick at heart, discouraged with what was happening in our culture regarding sexuality and relationships, I wrote an article about how I was afraid for how our young people would be affected. I grieved at the lack of resources for them. This very month, as I think about the young people in our lives, as I hear the stories of what is happening in their schools, as I pray for the Lord's provision for them, I am again heartsick and discouraged and in need of the Lord's healing touch, for His hope and joy for my continued journey in Him. It is also true that I am already encouraged and comforted by thinking through the years since I wrote this article—God has been faithful; many people testify to the Grace and Truth they have received in their time with us. Yes, we are still here doing what He has called us to do; truth is still truth we can stand on; grace is still grace we can rest in!)

My monitor screen was blank except for the title, "Heartsick," for a long time while I gathered my thoughts. Deep inside me, a familiar ache began to throb insistently. Words wouldn't form as I gave way to my

Heartsick?

By Mary Heathman
Reprinted from 2/1999

emotions for a while. There are no words, I decided, to describe a heart sick with frustration.

So, I cried till the throbbing slowed to a more tolerable pace.

As I look back over the past five sentences, I consider hitting the highlight and delete buttons. The words seem more dramatic than I like to be, and, having expended the emotion, I want to make a more rational introduction to my article.

But, if I do that, you won't get the whole message. My heart is sick sometimes; there are seasons when I can't find God in the circumstances around me. And in times like these, I throw my frustrated heart at what my faith tells me are God's feet, and I weep.

It doesn't seem necessary to go on at length about my periodic wrestling with frustration. Many of you are all too familiar with it yourselves. What I want to write about in this article are a couple of triggering points of frustration that force me to my knees, and the path I walk when I am sick at heart.

The first scenario that induces heart-

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with this God-given appetite, why are there times when I get glimpses of how God is fulfilling it and others when I feel like He's abandoned me to starve in a desert?" This is exactly where God and Scripture inform the dilemma.

Have you noticed when we communicate about needs, longings and desires, we find ourselves using words like hungering, craving, yearning, thirsting. Even Thomas Aquinas spoke of our "God-given appetite." Scripture is filled with many such parallels. As God works, shapes and forms His people, there are seasons of feasting and fasting, rhythms of deprivation and God's gracious provision. Hunger and thirst are apt metaphors for God's work in us to uncover deep places of hankering in our souls. Look at what some familiar Scriptures have to say:

Isaiah 55:1-2 (NIV), "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?"

And after Jesus has fed the 5000, he says in **John 6:27** (The Message), "You've come looking for Me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you, filled your stomachs—and for free. Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides."

Jesus Himself says He is the Bread of Life and Living Water. Remember what He says to the Samaritan woman at the well in **John 4:10** (The Message), "If you knew the generous gift of God and who I am, you would be asking *me* for drink, and I would give *you* fresh, living water."

The approach that Jesus uses, again and again, is to zero in and appeal to a deep place of longing. He continually asks us, like the Samaritan women, "What is it that you really want (desire, hunger and thirst for)?" The next sentence follows fast on its heels, "Why are you always desperately chasing after things that eventually leave you starving, when I am the One who created you and the longings within you, when I am the only One who

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sickness in me is the plight of our youth today. Confused about their emerging sexual feelings, as youth have always been, they are turning in droves to the privacy of the internet to discover what it's all about. They are encountering much more than they ever thought they would, and much of it feeds the dark side of their feelings.

I was discouraged today as I did some on-line research about resources for homosexual youth. The first web page I visited carried a story of a 14 year old boy who committed suicide because he had no hope for ever being accepted outside the safety of his own home. In his community, he had already been beaten up by "gay-bashers." At his "coming-out" group for homosexuals, he was sexually abused by a twenty year old fellow group member.

When I clicked to the home site of the organization sponsoring this story, I was stunned. Options available just one click away were one labeled "Meat" that advertised the availability of attractive young boys, and another that gave instructions on how to have gay sex. And the site offers a myriad of links to other "resources" like theirs.

I am heartsick over the plight of our youth.

Another scenario that makes me sick at heart is the discouragement of men and women who are working as hard as they know how. Praying desperately, wrestling against out-of-control sexual desires and the soul-tearing effects of childhood trauma and neglect, they still do not have a firm hold on the healing for which they yearn.

Not so long ago, I talked with a young man who married in good faith, had a child he adores, but whose wife left him for another man. In the midst of the stress of all this, his past sexual addiction came roaring back with a vengeance. His questions of me were, "So, remind me again why I'm still doing this recovery thing? What's the point?"

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Yesterday, a wife shared her hopelessness as her husband faces a jail sentence for his own sin, yet she can't stop blaming herself. She wants to know where God is for her in the chaos of her life.

I am heartsick over the spirit of discouragement that slam dunks some of our group members over and over again, just when it seems they are beginning to get a handle on life.

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As I think of these sad situations, my mind cringes - on your behalf as well as mine. I want to remind us all, God is good and works all things together for good I believe and have experienced this truth many times, and I praise God often for His sovereignty.

But sometimes the counting of many blessings and the remembering of God's promises just isn't what's needed for the moment. In moments like these, I draw strength from the words of Job, when he says, "*My good days are in the past. My hopes have disappeared. My heart's desires are broken*" (Job 17:11, Living). Job seems to understand what heartsickness feels like, and I no longer feel quite as alone in it.

Job goes on to say, "*The fact of the matter is that God has overthrown me and caught me in his net. I scream for help and no one hears me. I shriek, but get no justice. God has blocked my path and turned my light to darkness. He has stripped me of my glory and removed the crown from my head. He has broken me down on every side, and I am done for. He has destroyed all hope*" (Job 19:6-10, Living). It appears that Job knows the buck stops with God, and reading his complaint gives me permission to pour out my own frustration. In the doing of this, I find the darkness seems less thick.

In the midst of his complaint, Job

says something remarkable, "*But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth at last. And I know that after this body has decayed, this body shall see God! Then he will be on my side! Yes, I shall see him, not as a stranger, but as a friend! What a glorious hope!*" (Job 19:25-27, Living). Well, I find myself with a choice here - write Job off as nuts, or follow his example. On my good days, I follow his lead. Job, having lost over a dozen children and his wealth and health all in one day, lifted the eyes of his heart and remembered that in the end God wins and we do too. If Job could do that, then I can shake myself free of my own discouragement, at least for a moment, and strain toward God, naming Him as my Salvation, and looking forward to the day when my faith shall be sight and I will see him as a friend.

Later, maybe several days, Job says, "*[God's] mind concerning me remains unchanged, and who can turn him from his purposes? Whatever he wants to do, he does. So he will do to me all he has planned, and there is more ahead*" (Job 23:13-14, Living). Here we see acceptance, maybe a bit of resignation, but certainly a submission to God and His purposes, not just for today's circumstances, but for what is up ahead as well. Whether sooner or later, I want to get to that place too. I've been there before and I know it's the place of peace and hope. I pray for our group members that they, too, will persevere and

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come into that place as well. Will you pray with me?

A FINAL NOTE: Anybody who sets their course to live a godly life will face diverse troubles. We can count on it. There will be times when we lose our peace, maybe even lose our hope. Our hearts will get sick with the realities of this fallen world, especially our own sin nature. There will also be times when our hearts' desires, even those which we believe God promised us, are so far out of reach we despair that they will ever be fulfilled. But even so, we can

shake off all of that and look up toward Him who is our Salvation and remember that our goal, the real One, the only eternal One is reachable and assured. The feelings come and go, but the truth is the same nonetheless.

*“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1Peter 1:8). **The only thing that matters forever cannot be taken from us.***

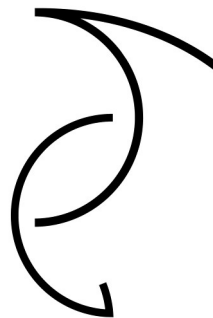
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can truly fulfill them in the best way?”

As I read Scripture through the metaphorical lens of desire equaling hunger and thirst, I see it throughout, from beginning to end, and would agree with Reverend Michael Cusick, “Desire and thirst are central to Christianity. When Jesus invites people to follow Him, He first awakens desire” (*Surfing for God*). Isn't it wonderful that He really does care? But unfortunately, we often get in the way of God's plans for our own fulfillment. We'll unpack that in my next article—stay tuned!

****PS—I'd like to thank Janelle Hallman and Michael Cusick for**

their teachings on this topic. They have influenced this article and created tangible experiences of managing and meeting God in the depth of desire in my own life. I have learned to pray that God would meet people at the deepest point of yearning in their lives.





June In Review

June 1st: Mary spoke at Time to Change

June 14th: WGA Ministry table at Harvest Church

June 27th: Scott spoke at a local women's Bible study

July And Beyond

July 25 - August 4: Mary will be presenting at the Wilmington Yearly Meeting

August 1st: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry.

August 20th 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

June 4th: WGA in the Park

June 11th: 23 people

June 18th: 16 people

June 25th: 23 people

Orientation meeting - 4 new people

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

Steve Huston
Chaplain/Church Liaison

Jill Huston
Family & Friends Coordinator

Dianne O'Brian
Asst. Program Director
Beyond Containment

A Measure of Grace
is edited by
Elodie Ballantine Emig

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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