



# A Measure of Grace

November 2015  
Volume 19, Issue 11

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

## Understanding the Gender Dysphoric/ Transgender Experience *by Roger Jones*

Where Grace Abounds recently hosted a seminar called “Understanding the Gender Dysphoric/Transgender Experience.” One of our leaders, Shannon Rants, MA, prepared a presentation on the topic for those who attended. It was both compelling and eye opening for me. Even though I have been involved in ministry with those struggling with their sexuality and relationships for almost 20 years, this particular area is one in which I do not feel knowledgeable. Out of my ignorance, I have been quick to judge and criticize (if only in my own thoughts) those facing such a challenging issue.

Transgender people are quite marginalized and misunderstood, often even within the LGBTQ community that seeks to represent them. Partly this is due to the fact that the issues represented by the LGBTQ community are so

diverse. Lesbian, gay and bisexual are labels related to sexual orientation, but transgender and queer are more related to one’s understanding of personal gender. Gender and sexual orientation are often discussed as if they are the same thing; they are

*(Continued on page 2)*

Where Grace Abounds  
P.O. Box 18871  
Denver, Colorado 80218

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

[info@wheregraceabounds.org](mailto:info@wheregraceabounds.org)  
[www.wheregraceabounds.org](http://www.wheregraceabounds.org)



(Gender continued from page 1)

not. True, they interact with one another, but there are differences. And within the subset of transgender, there are many other variances. One of the lists I saw recently considered transgender 17 different ways.

Gender Dysphoria is the new term used by clinicians to describe what was once called Gender Identity Disorder. In essence, gender dysphoria is the experience of distress related to having a psychological and emotional gender identity that doesn't match one's biological/birth sex. In most cases, people who experience gender dysphoria are able to work through this and move beyond it. Those who are unable to do so may find themselves facing transgender issues. The symptoms are insistent, consistent, and persistent. In other words, the symptoms don't go away easily.

The behaviors associated with transgender people are a reflection of their attempts at reducing anxiety. Anxiety is a word we throw around easily, often equating it with a mild form of nervousness. This is not the definition here. This anxiety is severe, so much so that a person cannot feel comfortable in their own skin because of their insistent, consistent, and persistent feelings. Dressing as a different gender or adopting behav-

iors of another gender can reduce these feelings of anxiety. Some may resort to medical interventions, such as taking hormone supplements or having surgery, all in efforts to bring a congruency between their biological sex and the gender they believe themselves to be.

A question that many people seem to have about transgender is, "What part of this is sin?" I appreciated Shannon's response of "I don't know." While I do think that sin matters, I

***While I do  
think that sin  
matters, I often  
think we get so  
wrapped up in  
trying to define it  
that we overlook  
the hurting  
person right in  
front of us.***

often think we get so wrapped up in trying to define it that we overlook the hurting person right in front of us. This was the main point of Shannon's presentation, as well as our goal for bringing her here to give it. How can we bring greater understanding about gender identity, both to those struggling with their own and for those who love them?

Together we read the following passage of scripture from Acts 8:26-40:

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethi-

(Continued on page 6)

## Points to Ponder

*By Mary Heathman*

---

Over the past three years, I have participated in a task force with my denomination's regional organization, Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quaker). The representatives had just affirmed our longstanding statement on human sexuality (which can be found on page 12 of our Faith and Practice at: [https://kaceycom.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/faith\\_and\\_practice.pdf](https://kaceycom.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/faith_and_practice.pdf)). But there were many of us who were not satisfied with simply having a statement that represents our position. Thus, a task force was formed to address this question and to report back findings to Yearly Meeting representatives.

Our team quickly dubbed itself the **Being Jesus Project**, because our initial questions as we worked together took on the flavor of "What would it look like to simply be Jesus to people?" The work together was challenging, but rewarding.

A report was prepared for the annual gathering. Following are excerpts from that document and a few of the questions with which we challenged ourselves and fellow Quakers. I hope that readers of the WGA newsletter will be encouraged to think and pray, seeking God's specific direction as we are "salt and light" in this world till the day of Christ Jesus (which I hope is coming soon!) A copy of the full report is available upon request, simply email: [info@wheregraceabounds.org](mailto:info@wheregraceabounds.org).

Excerpts from: Being Jesus Project Report, July 29, 2015, by task force mem-

bers.

"The Being Jesus Project mandate was to . . . consider what incarnational ministry is in a society that will continue to depart from what we understand to be Christian values and Christian living."

"Task Force members have been reminded of a . . . theme that came up consistently during YM sessions during which we discussed ministry to the LGBT communities: 'Why are we singling out this population for ministry?' The topic is by nature 'potentially divisive and can detract our attention from what may be more important at the moment'."

"On the other hand, it seems odd to us as we have worked with this project, that we cannot yet address in a redemptive manner the topic that is being discussed in every form of media and around kitchen tables and water coolers everywhere. We wonder, 'How can we justify that?' The task force is concerned that we are less than eager to address the issue of what it looks like to be Jesus in our existing cultural milieu. Perhaps we need a vision of hope and greater measure of joy for the ministry God has set before us. We encourage Friends to pray for this vision and joy in the journey before us as we minister together in RMYM."

### **Biblical Direction offered for further study:**

"Jesus assured us that not even Hell itself will deter the advance of Christ's church. This point of faith has been established innumerable times over the last two millennia, including in our lifetimes. History records how Christ's

*(Continued on page 7)*

## #Chastityw/truth&grace

### Longings and Desires—Honoring Them

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

I've been talking about desires and longings over my last few articles in the larger context of an ongoing discussion of intimacy, to which we will return (finally) in my next article. In the last installment we followed the Israelite wanderings in the desert to see how they reacted to God orchestrating hunger and thirst in their lives. The reaction was usually pretty dismal (I imagine the WGA Newsletter readers also feel we've been wandering on this topic for 40 years!).

Lately, I've been noticing how those around me and I deal with our desires. I'll zero in on something or someone and begin gravitating towards it with the conscious or unconscious belief this friendship, relationship, project, vocation or event is going to *somehow* "do it" for me. Suddenly, most if not all my eggs seem to travel into that basket. Now honestly, there is nothing wrong with any of these things individually—most of them are desires, rooted in authentic needs, God has graciously given us to

fulfill. Who doesn't want to love and be loved by someone special, to have a vocation that is life-giving and satisfying, and to just delight in life? Everyone does. And yet, when I make any of these things "center stage" and an end in and of themselves, they seem to become thin and papery. They begin to pale in comparison to the larger things my heart was created for. How do I honor and become aware of those bigger desires? I'm still asking God to give me a clue, but I'll offer a few thoughts:

**Desire Much!** Those times I feel that God is asking me what it is my heart deeply longs for, I realize the answer is usually a big fat, "I have no idea." My desires can range from anything as simple as another cookie to a feeling of financial security or long and everlasting love. I am again returning to the words of C. S. Lewis with which I began this series. What has recently stood out to me is the word "*half-hearted*"; when it comes to leaning into my desires, this feels profoundly true. When faced with my deeper yearnings, my fears and vulnerability are exposed (what if they are laughed at or don't come to pass?). Isn't it just easier **not** to want too much? The quotation reminds us how diminished a life we can settle for and live. So the flip side question becomes: "What does it mean to live and desire God's best for us '*wholeheartedly*' with every fiber of our being?" We could spend a long and valid amount of time unpacking exactly what this means, but a good place to start

(Continued on page 5)

(Longings and Desires *continued from page 4*)

is in God's presence. Talk (and journal) with Him about what you truly desire for your life. Every time you think you've gone big, dream bigger! Our Father wants to give us good things if we only unabashedly ask.

**Follow the Thread!** I LOVE this helpful and hopeful bit of Thomas Aquinas' wisdom. Whenever a desire rises up in me that is "disordered" and less than holy, rather than just stepping on the conveyor belt to its usual shame-inducing outcome, I can interrupt this cycle, pause and choose a healthier alternative. Coming from a background littered with sexual addiction and emotional dependency, I can often follow the thread down to what it is I'm truly wanting and needing in the moment rather than acting on those impulses. Do I need some affirmation, attention, a sense of belonging, security? How can I honor the legitimate need that I'd miss if I chose the destructive path?

**Wait on God!** A lot of the trouble I have with my longings and desires is a product of my acting impulsively or compulsively to meet them, without even stopping and asking the question, "Is this really what I want?" I can get on the aforementioned conveyor belt, push "go," and hope with fingers crossed that this will be the thing that fulfills my wish. A question I often ask these days is, "Would I be willing to not immediately act upon this longing?" Could I hold this desire up *to* God and *with* Him and **wait** for Him to shape and fashion it into something that is closer to His heart and mine? We as Americans hate not having everything instantly gratified if we are honest, but you'd be surprised at what a more robust, holy and abundant desire comes *in the waiting*.

**Look for the unprecedented!** There have been many times I have been miffed (perhaps even angry?) with God about an unanswered hope, because it didn't come in the exact form or timing which I was wanting. But remember God's manna in the desert? This was a first-time instance of God meeting a need that had never been seen before—it was a completely new provision. My current prayers are, "Father, open my eyes to ways you are meeting needs outside of my usual small boxes; surprise me with your 'manna' for this hope and longing."

Regardless of my attempts to manage and honor my desires in the most holy of ways, there are still times when God gives me the not-so-popular answers of "not now" or even a big ol' "no." Then it's my choice how I respond. Will I, can I still believe that God is good and His love has my best interest at heart, or does it begin the battle of the wills? Probably there'll be a mixture of both. These difficult places of wrestling are a good spring board into looking at cultivating our intimacy with God. Stay tuned.

Once again, I'd like to thank Janelle Hallman and Michael Cusick for their teachings which inspired this series of articles and approach to honoring our God-given longings.



*(Gender continued from page 2)*

opians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea (NIV).

This passage was particularly hopeful. We do not know the circumstances that caused the Ethiopian to become a eunuch, or even what kind of eunuch he was (by choice, by birth, or made that way by another, Matthew 19:12). What we do see is that salvation was not withheld from him because of his circumstances. In fact, the Lord clearly sent Philip to the eunuch. This is a challenge to us to extend the love of Christ to everyone, including those we may not understand and who are often the outcast in society.

In short, we do not have all the answers as to why, how and what we are supposed to do about the issues of transgender and gender dysphoria. We are, however, called to love those who are struggling (or not struggling for that matter). This side of Heaven, we may never fully understand, but God does and these precious people are not beyond His reach.

(Underneath... continued from page 3)

church flourishes perhaps especially when its demise is intended. Although we are disappointed with the direction of our society, our environment for proclaiming the gospel is laughably free compared to the first century church to which we look for inspiration in our New Testaments. **Do we appreciate that secular culture was never identified as “the problem” by the NT writers even as the church was immersed in a contrary culture, and at times, persecuted?”**

**For example,**

The city to which Paul came preaching was... a very cosmopolitan place. It was an important city. It was intellectually alert. It was materially prosperous. It was morally corrupt. There was a pronounced tendency for its inhabitants to indulge their desires of whatever sort. ‘The ideal of the Corinthian was the man who recognized no superior and no law but his own desires.’<sup>i</sup>

“We can imagine that. And to the miniscule church dropped like a few grains of salt in an utterly unsympathetic kettle of tasteless Corinthian stew, Paul is irrepressibly hopeful at the opportunity, even privilege, at hand”,

14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? 2 Cor. 2:14-16 NIV

‘Perhaps Paul’s concluding query (v.16) will inspire further inquiry on our part.’

The report concluded with these points to ponder:

#### Queries

1. Is it possible that God has exactly us in exactly this culture at exactly this point in time?
2. Are we intentional about engaging the watershed social issue of our day, and doing so in a manner that looks like Jesus?
3. How does the spiritual risk of immorality motivate us in our life and ministry both inside and outside the church?
4. Do we need to repent of tolerance for heterosexual immorality? What would change if we attempted to exercise uniform concern for violation of God’s will? Are we careful in the pursuit of grace, repentance, humility, proclamation, and redemption?
5. George Fox said, “Let your lives preach.” What is the message our lives are preaching?
6. Are we called to “reach the refugees of the sexual revolution?”<sup>ii</sup>
7. How do we understand God’s Spirit to be leading us to respond to Paul’s jubilant declaration, **“Thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.”**

---

<sup>i</sup>R.V.G. Tasker, ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 8, 1 Corinthians, by Leon Morris (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1983), 16-17.

<sup>ii</sup>Christian Legal Society Church Guidance Webinar – 2015, July 8, 2015, <http://clsnet.org/church-guidance-webinar>



## October In Review

**October 2nd:** Scott participated on panel at Greenwood Church

**October 3rd:** Jill and Steve will be spoke at Tree of Life

**October 16th—18th:** Annual WGA Leadership Retreat

**October 23-24th:** Beyond Containment training for Circle Volunteers

## November And Beyond

**November 5th:** Understanding the Gender Dysphoric/Transgender Experience Seminar

**November 11th:** Scott and Roger will be speaking at a youth ministry class at CCU

**November 14th:** Family and Friends Gathering

**November 22nd:** Scott will be speaking at Foothills Fellowship

**December 5th:** Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry.

**January 25th—28th:** Scott will be attending the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians conference in Newport Beach, CA

### Thursday Night Group

**October 1st:** 18 people

**October 8th:** 18 people

**October 15th:** 30 people

**October 22nd:** 20 people

**October 29th:** 26 people

**Orientation meeting:** 3 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.*

Printed in the USA  
Copyright 2015