



A Measure of Grace

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WGA's 30th Year of Ministry

by Roger Jones

WGA is thirty years old. It was in 1986 that the seeds of vision for what was to become Where Grace Abounds sprouted in Mary Heathman's heart. She, with a team of others, laid the foundation for the ministry that has affected so many men and women since then.

This year, the staff, board, and leadership of WGA will be doing some evaluation and planning for the future. As the culture around us has continued to change in a variety of ways, it has become clear that WGA needs to make some changes as well. We are just in the beginning phases of identifying the areas of concern, but would you be willing to pray with us for guidance? We need God's clear direction as we continue to reach out to those struggling with sexual and relational concerns.

- There is a gap between what we know people really need in order to heal and what they perceive that they need. Our years of ministry have proven that people need true, authentic, healthy relationships. Our current

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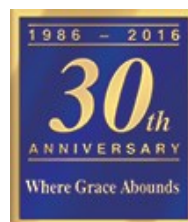
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culture relies heavily on social media and other forms of pseudo-connection that simply do not provide for the depth most people need to fully experience healing. Please pray with us about how to bridge this gap so that more people can walk in the freedom of Christ, regardless of their struggles.

- The number of people attending WGA's weekly group meetings on Thursday nights has dropped over the past year. The overall number of participants has not varied significantly, but many are only attending once or twice each month, rather than weekly. This raises questions about whether we should modify our schedule to accommodate those who attend less frequently. If we do make changes to our weekly schedule, what other forms of support can we offer in the longer stretches between meetings?
- With the legalization of gay marriage, along with the general attitudes about sexual expression and pornography, fewer men and women seem even to be aware that such cultural shifts may contribute to some of their problems. WGA needs opportunities to cast vision and speak truth into our world.
- Over the thirty years that WGA has been in existence, we have done very little to market and publicize the ministry. Most of the people who come to us have

heard us speak in a church or learned about WGA from someone else who has participated in one of our groups. An area of prayer concern relates to how we should get the word out to people about who we are and what we do. Will you consider telling people about WGA, especially if it has had a personal impact in your life?

We have a number of events scheduled this year to celebrate WGA's 30th anniversary. The first one is right around the corner! On February 6th at 9:00 am, we will be having a special time of prayer for WGA, celebrating all that God has done and seeking God's direction for the future. This prayer time will be held at the WGA offices and will be followed by a brunch at 10:30. Please let us know if you can attend, by sending us an email at rsvp@wheregraceabounds.org or by calling us at 303-863-7757. If you can't attend, please consider setting aside some time to pray for WGA that day. We certainly appreciate it! Watch your mail for information on other events this year. We hope to see you at one (or more) of them!





Building Community

By Mary Heathman

(Reprinted from January 20002)

Anyone who reads my newsletter articles or hears me speak regularly knows that I frequently return to four basic concepts as the basis for the ministry at Where Grace Abounds. First, God created us for relationship--with Him and with one another. Second, in order to be able to understand the love of God, one must be rooted and grounded in love (See Ephesians 3). Third, this necessary rooting and grounding in love happens within community--within close relationship with one another and with God. Finally, when we are thus rooted and grounded in love, immersed in loving relationship with God and plugged into a loving community--we begin to see what God sees, hear what He hears and do what He does--we love and serve the world.

Jesus prayed for us: *"that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me"* (John 17:21-23).

In all the years I have followed Christ, in the many sermons I have heard, in the books I have read, in tapes I have listened to, I have yet to hear a dissenting voice concerning the concepts listed

above. We seem to be of one mind as to their truth.

Yet, it has troubled me from the outset of my faith-walk that there is so much discrepancy between what we believe and how we actually live. I remember asking in Sunday School in my early years, "It seems that we all know the right answers already. Doesn't it bother anybody that we aren't doing this stuff?"

Well, as it regards community building, many in my church were "doing stuff." The men and women who discipled me modeled life in community. They let me soak in the presence of their love for one another. They taught me well about Jesus and His love. And I grew up in this environment--growing emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

It's not a mystery, then, that when I received a call to ministry and began to make my first efforts, I almost automatically duplicated what had been done for me. I began to gather people together, to study together about relationship--with God and each other. In 1986, just a year after I began to work full-time in ministry, WGA had its first core group retreat. A year later a few gathered to form what is now the WGA leadership team, a small community of men and women who have a shared vision and purpose.

When I think back and remember those early days, I have cause to wonder, "How did we get here from there?" The

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New Year, New Resources

By *Scott Kingry*

"When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the shepherds are back with their flocks, the work of Christmas begins:

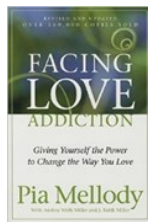
To find the lost, to heal the broken,

To feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations, to bring peace among all, to make music in the heart."

Howard Thurman

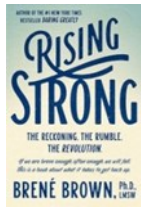
I was suddenly struck by this quote that appeared at the very end of a devotional I was using during the Advent and Christmas season. Something resonated on a deep level with an affirming "yes" to the spirit of the words. Working within the realm of sexuality and gender, it's easy to get constantly swept up by the craziness and swift changes that happen on this front daily. It is a timely reminder that Christ's Incarnation bottom line, is still about ever and ongoing healing, mercy and reconciliation. Our hearts, here at WGA, long to be part of Christ's mission. We hope the environments we provide, the teaching and resources we have to offer will help those who are lost, need healing from deep emotional wounds, who are in bondage to painful ways of relating and addictions and those who are starved for true and rich intimacy. Here are some of the current resources (books and accompanying websites) we've highlighted in our Thursday Night support group over the last several months.



FACING LOVE ADDICTION

By Pia Mellody, 2003

In this revised and updated version of Facing Love Addiction, bestselling author of Facing Codependence and internationally recognized dependence and addiction authority Pia Mellody unravels the intricate dynamics of unhealthy love relationships and shows us how to let go of toxic love. piamellody.com



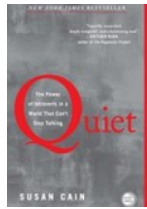
RIISING STRONG

By Brené Brown, 2015

Social scientist Brené Brown has ignited a global conversation on courage, vulnerability, shame, and worthiness. Vulnerability—the willingness to show up and be seen with no guarantee of outcome—is the only path to more love, belonging, creativity, and joy. But living a brave life is not always easy: It is the rise from falling that Brown takes as her subject in Rising Strong. brenebrown.com/my-blog

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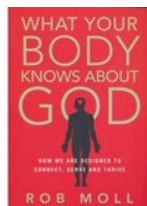
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QUIET: THE POWER OF INTROVERTS

By Susan Cain, 2013

In our culture, which emphasizes group work from elementary school through the business world, everything seems geared toward extroverts. Luckily, introverts everywhere have a new spokesperson: Susan Cain, a self-proclaimed introvert who's taken it upon herself to better understand the place of introverts in culture and society. Cain explores introversion through psychological research old and new, personal experiences, and even brain chemistry. quietrev.com



WHAT YOUR BODY KNOWS ABOUT GOD

By Rob Moll, 2014

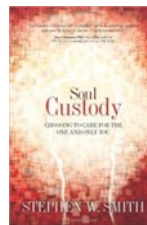
If God is real, and we are created in God's image, then it makes sense that our minds and bodies would be designed with the perceptive ability to sense and experience God. Scientists are now discovering ways that our bodies are designed to connect with God. Brain research shows that our brain systems are wired to enable us to have spiritual experiences. The spiritual circuits that are used in prayer or worship are also involved in developing compassion for others. Our bodies have actually been created to love God and serve our neighbors. robmoll.com



ALWAYS TURNED ON: SEX ADDICTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

By Robert Weiss, Jennifer Schneider, 2015

Technology has significantly changed our world. Sexual imagery and encounters can now be accessed anywhere, anytime, using portable electronic devices. Users can generate a stream of graphic pornography, a wide variety of virtual sexual activities, and casual, anonymous, or paid-for sexual encounters with a click or a tap. Simply put, we have greater access to highly stimulating sexual content, and potential sexual partners, with much less built-in accountability. robertweissmsw.com



SOUL CUSTODY: CARING FOR THE ONE AND ONLY YOU

By Stephen Smith, 2010

Every day, inner and outer violence ravages the soul, leaving us weak, fearful, and malnourished. In Soul Custody, Stephen W. Smith presents eight choices to help readers reclaim custody of their one and only life—choices about silence, community, vocation, honoring the body, finding one's true self, and more. As Smith reminds readers, allowing God to shape the soul leads to the deep, full, and satisfying life that God had in mind all along. steveandgwen-smith.com

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answer to that question could fill a year's worth of newsletters, but a few thoughts come to mind that I would like to share with the reader to explain how the WGA community was built. It is my prayer that our experience may be of use to others.

Let me share a few discrepancies of our own and insights gained through them:

Dissonance #1: We all knew that we were to “agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among” us and that we may be “perfectly united in mind and thought.” (1 Corin 1:10). But it seemed we were constantly at odds with one another. The group was hopelessly diverse, with no common background or interests except the desperate desire to overcome sexual sin which they hated in themselves **and** in each other!

At the first retreat, I arrived early to set things up and prepare my opening games and exercises. I was prepared and excited at the prospect of this opportunity to be together.

It didn't take any longer than the second carload to arrive before a dispute broke out. It seemed that the first arrivals had taken the “best” sleeping arrangements for themselves and left the open loft to the others. The first group held to the proverbial rights of the early bird while a couple of latecomers accused the “early birds” of being selfish and insensitive to the needs of others. The dispute escalated from trading veiled judgments of one another to not so subtle verbal abuse. Instead of getting acquainted exercises and games, our first evening was spent on conflict resolution.

After we worked things out among us, we were “perfectly united in mind and thought” and “there was no division among us.” We spent a wonderful evening singing and sharing together.

Community Building Insight #1: It is rare to start out unified. It takes honest communication and careful listening to one another, it takes compromise and negotiation sometimes. It also takes standing firm against peer pressure at other times. And it is hard work!

Dissonance #2: We all knew that we have an enemy who is “prowling about seeking whom he may devour,” and that we should be alert to his activity among us. But in this new group of people, all of whom had trouble trusting, we forgot we had a common enemy and our unity was short-lived. It seemed that when it came time to make any decision as to what activity to do, or who would cook, or when we would have lights out, there was dissension and suspicion of one another's motives and tension would creep back into our relationships.

It was at a particularly awkward and tense moment that I remembered the scripture that tells us our enemy is not flesh and blood, but principalities and powers of this dark world (Ephesians 6:12). Together we sought the Lord's presence, resisted the enemy and he left us.

Community Building Insight #2: The enemy of our souls knows how strong we are together and will work tirelessly to pull us apart. Prayer, authoritative prayer, must undergird any attempt to build relationships--with God and with one another.

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Dissonance #3: We knew that we were stronger when we spent time together, supported one another in prayer, kept each other accountable. But it was often true that when we were apart, some forgot the importance of community. Some began to get complacent and didn't think they needed it, and some began to forsake "the assembling together" that we knew quite well we needed.

Invariably, when a critical mass of us sloughed off on gathering--not just for group, but sharing meals together, having fun, talking about our hopes and dreams--the unity in the community dissipated, weakened, cracked. Accountability was reduced to policing one another, and we slid back into legalism and joyless service. Like a law of physics that says "left to themselves, everything in the universe is moving toward chaos," our hard-won fellowship, without the nurture it needed, became weak and vulnerable.

Community Building Insight #3: Healthy relationships take time and attention. There is no substitute for time together on all fronts -- we must be together, work, pray, play, and serve and rest together regularly. As Charles Spurgeon said, "Christians who isolate themselves and walk alone, are very liable to grow drowsy. Hold Christian company, and you will be kept wakeful by it, and refreshed and encouraged to make quicker progress in the road to heaven."

Dissonance #4: We all knew that Jesus Christ was all we needed for life and life abundant. Yet, when we faced a new trial or suffered a loss, or were disappointed or disillusioned, then Jesus and Jesus alone wasn't enough for us. We

would cast about for another self-help book or "new" technique or model for healing. (Praise God for these tools, but not in the place that belongs only to Jesus!)

Community Building Insight #4: Make it our motto in everything, great or small, to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" and then we can expect all that we need to be provided, and we can be assured of His presence in our midst.

There is much, much more I could say about community building, but I will leave it at four points for now. They are the basics.

The WGA leadership team has learned so much about community and regularly experiences rich fellowship. But we don't pretend to have perfected it! As Spurgeon said, "Yes, there are graces to which we have not attained; places of fellowship nearer to Christ which we have not reached; and heights of communion which our feet have not climbed. At every banquet of love there are many baskets of fragments left. Let us magnify the liberality of our glorious [Lord.]"

May we all aspire to more of Him, in direct communion with Him and through the fellowship of the community of saints!





December In Review

December 5th: Intercessory Prayer meeting

December 16th: WGA Staff, Board and Leadership Christmas party

January And Beyond

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

January 22-28th: Beyond Containment volunteer training

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

February 6th: Prayer and Brunch at WGA—see insert for details.

Watch your mail for events and activities to celebrate WGA's 30th year of ministry!

Thursday Night Group

December 3rd: 17 People

December 10th: 21 People

December 17th: 21 people

December 24th: No Group

WGA Staff

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Mary Heathman
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Steve Huston
Chaplain/Church Liaison

Jill Huston
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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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