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A Measure of Grace

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How Should We Measure Success?

by Roger Jones

As we enter into 2016 and look back over WGA's thirty year history, we find an apt time to reflect on what God has done through WGA and what He continues to do. As I have thought back over my own history with WGA (21 years and counting), I have discovered a mixture of wonderful and painful memories. Many people have come and gone over this time, some who are thankful for how God used WGA in their lives and some who would say otherwise. It causes me to think that we need a measure of accomplishment that does not solely rely upon the number of "success" stories associated with the ministry. These stories are important and should not be minimized. However, when "numbers" and the like are treated with more importance than they deserve, it is easy to lose sight of what God has called us to do.



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

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

Email:
info@wheregraceabounds.org
Website:
www.wheregraceabounds.org



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So, how should we measure success, if not by numbers alone? I recently heard a sermon from Pastor John Geiter of Corona Presbyterian Church. (This is the church that has hosted WGA's Thursday Night Group for over twenty years.) He was preaching from the book of Jeremiah on this very topic. Beginning in Jeremiah 1, we read about Jeremiah's call to go and speak the word of the Lord to the nation of Israel. As we continue reading, we see that God is removing His protection from Israel and allowing them to be held in captivity for 70 years (because they were not being faithful to Him). In essence, God tells Jeremiah to be obedient and speak the word of the Lord, and He tells Jeremiah that no one will listen to him (Jer. 7:27). What a frustration that must have been!

One of Pastor John's major points is that "faithfulness to God becomes the ultimate expression of success." He relates this to his own church, which has not seen the growth and "numbers" that many other churches seem to have had. He is certainly not impugning these other churches, but rather reflecting on whether or not he and his church

are being faithful to the call God has placed upon them.

Similarly, I ask the question for myself and for WGA. Have we been faithful to what God has called us to do? Humbly, I assert that we have been faithful. Of course, ours has not been a perfect path without error, but we have done our best to follow God and to return to His path when we have strayed.

Our primary mission is to love people and to point them towards Christ.

As a reminder to myself and our readers, I will state here what we are called to do. Our primary mission is to love people and to point them towards Christ. The area of focus God has given us is to work with those who are dealing with sexual and relational issues. In particular, these struggles often leave people feel-

ing that they are somehow separated from and unworthy of God's love. This could not be further from the truth! God has strategically placed WGA to be a bridge for many who have felt unloved and unfit.

WGA is to be a safe haven for people to talk openly about the real and difficult things they are facing, even when the consequences are dire.

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The Company of the Committed

By Mary Heathman

It has been my privilege for thirty years to partner with men and women passionate for Christ and His purposes in the world. These leaders have demonstrated over and over again their compassion for the people the Lord brings to Where Grace Abounds. In this thirtieth anniversary year, it is a joy and a privilege to think about the staff and leadership of WGA over the years. I would like to take the space that I have in this article to highlight the purpose and philosophy of the WGA staff and leadership and its commitment to WGA and its mission.

Excerpts from WGA's Purpose and Philosophy of Leadership state:

Operating under the direction of the WGA staff, the WGA leadership team exists:

Through service to others, to further the purposes and philosophy of Where Grace Abounds as defined in its vision statements and other poli-

cies and procedures approved by the WGA staff and board of directors.

To provide encouragement and accountability for support group leaders, peer counselors, public speakers, teachers, role models, writers, and other volunteers.

To motivate team members to seek and personally appropriate God's plan for their lives.

In keeping with WGA's commitment to 100% Grace and 100% Truth, the leadership team exists within an environment of love and acceptance of a person, as he or she is, without compromising the biblical standard of holiness. Grace is "God's unmerited favor towards those who believe"; Truth (God's law), is God's gift to us to reveal the sin which keeps us from a life of holiness. The leadership team is allowed to rest in God's grace and is expected to accept the challenge presented by His standard. Within this

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#Chastityw/truth&grace Intimacy with God (finally!)

By Scott Kingry



"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matthew 22:37-40

*"I am the Good Shepherd; I **know** my sheep and my sheep **know** me—just as the Father **knows** Me and I **know** the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep." John 10:14-15*

In our ongoing discussion about intimacy, we have traversed a lot of ground on the topic over the last several months (and months and months). Exploring various facets of intimacy, we've also been meandering our way through these familiar words of Jesus. Though He didn't necessarily intend them for this specific use, His words give a rich, helpful structure for looking at the different recipients of love—ourselves, others and God. So far, we've really unpacked the first two categories (ourselves and others)—we truly have. We've discussed loneliness, celibacy and intimacy, romantic intimacy, the components and different types of intimacy and just completed

a 3 part series on desires and longings. Whew! Now after all that we finally come to discuss what it means to draw close to the loving Creator who designed us for intimacy. I'm sure I can do this in a short newsletter article—ha!

At first glance, it seems logical that to know God and deepen intimacy with Him require what any other relationship needs. In an earlier article, "Components of Healthy Intimacy," we saw topics like intentionality, vulnerability, honesty, follow-through and being present with those with whom we're spending time. I imagine we need to offer God these same things from ourselves. But what exactly does it mean to "know God and be known by Him"? A recent WGA speaker, Pastor Chuck Orwiler, challenged us with a different form of the question—*"What does it mean to accept, and then be awash with God's affection for us and return that affection to Him?"*

When we think of knowledge, we often think of items collected in our heads: personal opinions, facts, and speculations. Ours can be a detached kind of knowing. We can know something without being involved in it. But Pastor Chuck explained that

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(Intimacy with God *continued from page 4*)

in the Old and New Testaments *knowledge* is something that arises out of a **personal encounter** with the Living God. It's very much demonstrated in the scripture above from the book of John, and which Chuck mentioned. The word "know" here doesn't refer to some distant, uninvolved information, as if God only consents to the fact that we exist, but it points to the very definition of intimacy—belonging, closeness, inseparability, commitment, devotion and constancy. I love that Jesus compares our knowing Him on levels that can approach the way the Father and He know one another. It would be good to reflect on this scripture with that in mind. What does it mean to you?

Still, Jesus ups the ante even more. Later in the book of John, He takes our closeness to an even deeper level with Him. Jesus prays (for us!)—*"I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them maybe one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us... that they may be one as We are one... I in them and You in me—so they may be brought to complete unity."* **John 17:20-23** What intimate language Jesus uses to describe His love and yearning for us! He employs the type of "union" language found in Song of Solomon. The image that describes the human element of the oneness as "the Bride of Christ" seems appropriate.

Pastor Chuck's question continues to resonate. *"What does it mean to accept, and then be awash with God's affection for us and return that affection to Him?"* But a bigger question might be *"Why in the course of our lives do we distance ourselves and sometimes block the pure affection God has for us, thereby disabling ourselves from engaging that affection?"* Jesus longs to be "one" with us, and you may have similar experiences to mine: when God bridges the gap and surprises me with His presence. His great love for me is suddenly real; I can tangibly feel it, and I well up with gratitude. We love because He loved us first. So why do we fail to experience that kind of intimate love with Him in a larger, fuller, more constant way? My list of excuses can be long. Remember that knowing God is having continuous personal encounters with Him, yet I'm too tired or distracted to pray sometimes. I'm too filled with anxiety or busy-ness to sit quietly in His presence, or too fearful to surrender parts of my life in trust to Him. I run away from the very closeness my heart longs for, and this spills over into my personal relationships—why? In my last and final installment we'll explore the barriers we maintain or create to intimacy. Stay tuned.

(The Company of the Committed *continued from page 3*)

environment, there is safety to admit the “sin that so easily entangles” and motivation to “press on to the goal which is Christ Jesus.”

WGA is a cause, community and a corporation.

*As a **cause**, WGA is at the forefront of ministry to people with sexual difficulties. As they work together on behalf of sexually and relationally broken people, the leadership team is a vital link in the chain of varied activities.*

*As a Christ-centered **community**, the leadership team experiences growing intimacy with one another and enjoys the fruits of that intimacy: accountability, mutual support, and encouragement. A deep satisfaction is also experienced by those who invest themselves consistently in service on the WGA leadership team. Within this community, team members learn to love and serve one another, while gaining strength and vision to love and serve others.*

*As a **corporation**, WGA seeks to carry on its work within a*

well ordered environment. The leadership team is to function as an important cog of the overall organization. During regular leadership meetings, the sharing of individuals' experiences and ideas are recorded and incorporated into long range ministry planning.

Charles Garfield, writing in Peak Performance about the NASA Astronauts, said, “The biggest predictor of success is heart for the work, far more important than aptitude.” In the USA Weekend, Jan 1-3, 1999, an article described the difference between chess **masters** from chess **grand masters**. Testing found no difference – **Grand masters simply loved chess more!**

WGA staff and leadership over the years have shown an overwhelming heart for God, a commitment to His purposes through WGA and a sacrificial investment in each other in the “Company of the Committed.”

I am awed by the Lord’s provision of these faithful men and women to come alongside one another in ministry; I am so grateful for them. Please join me in praising the Lord and praying for WGA staff and leadership.

(Success continued from page 2)

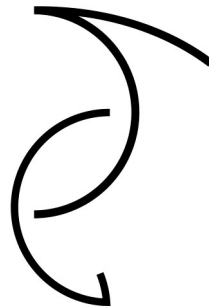
We are to love and accept without judgment. Acceptance causes shame to dissipate and allows people to receive love as they feel fully known and understood.

WGA is called to offer practical tools to help individuals overcome addictive behaviors and limiting beliefs they have about themselves. As we point people to Christ, we acknowledge that it is His job to convict people of sin and show them the path towards righteousness. As “wounded healers,” who have had significant struggles ourselves, the staff and leadership of WGA have insights to offer. While in the midst of our own growth and continued pursuits of healing, the staff and leadership do our best to model transparency and honesty about the challenges we continue to face.

WGA is to cast vision for what healthy sexuality and relationships can look like. I like how the Message translates Proverbs 29:18: “If people can’t see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.” It is our prayer that God will use WGA as a place for people to see how God is moving in our culture, but also to see what He is doing personally, in their own lives.

Back to John Geiter’s message, which ended with an encouragement from scripture. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (II Corinthians 4:16-18, NIV).

It is a real challenge and can be discouraging when we focus on those who do not want to hear what we have to say. It seems that there are fewer and fewer people who want to submit their sexuality and relationships to God. Our troubles do not always feel “light and momentary”. Now is a good time to remember that God is eternal and that our job is simply to remain faithful. His job is to do everything else!





January In Review

**January 22-23th: Beyond Containment
volunteer training**

**January 25th–28th: Scott attended the
Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians
conference in Newport Beach, CA**

Thursday Night Group

**January 7th: 16 people
January 14th: 21 people
January 21st: 24 people
January 28th: 23 people**

**Orientation meeting: 3 new
people**

February And Beyond

February 6th: Prayer and Brunch at WGA

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

**March 12th: Family and Friends Gathering. Please
contact the WGA office for more details.**

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

**May 28th: Memorial Weekend Picnic—stay tuned
for more information.**

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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