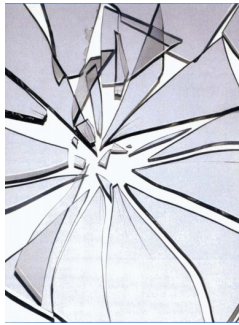




March 2016
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A Measure of Grace

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds



The Broken Promises of Porn

by Roger Jones

At the end of this month, WGA is hosting the seminar, “Longing for Connection: Love and Sex Addiction in the Digital Age.” In light of this, I thought it might be a good time to address online pornography and fantasy, which are struggles for many people. Fantasy goes hand in hand with pornography and often ranges beyond its explicit visual or verbal forms. It may “fill in the blanks” *left by* the written word, or *made in* real-life, interpersonal relationships.

In his book *Surfing for God*, Michael Cusick talks about “the broken promises of porn.” His premise is that while pornography purports to meet some legitimate needs, it cannot be something that it is not. Their facades may look appealing from the outside, but pornography and fantasy cannot provide what true intimacy with another human being can. Our God-created need for intimacy is not necessari-

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ly sexual in nature. More often than not, I would argue, this need for intimacy is not met sexually, and cannot be met through pornography. Below are pornography's broken promises that Cusick discusses, along with some of my own thoughts. Cusick's book is written for men, so I have edited these slightly to allow for the women who also struggle with pornography and fantasy. My changes appear in brackets.

Porn Promises Validation of Our Manhood [or Womanhood] without Requiring Strength [or Vulnerability]

Cusick writes that pornography never rejects. It never reminds us of our own failures or weaknesses. Porn and fantasy allow us to experience our maleness or our femaleness without feeling weak or vulnerable in the presence of someone else. Now more than ever, gender roles are less defined, leaving us few avenues where we can fully experience gender. Sexual expression is one of the few things left to us that is predominately male or female, so we should protect the reciprocity it properly demands.

Porn Promises Sexual Fulfilment without Relationship

Porn and fantasy can and do provide avenues for sexual release. They cannot, however, provide true intimacy or connection with another person. In fact, the more we turn to false forms of connection, the less we turn to real people for any of our true, legitimate

needs. We learn to rely more and more on our own devices and less and less on other people. This may sound like a great idea, but it does not challenge us to grow and change.

Porn Promises Intimacy without Requiring Risk and Suffering

Cusick tells the story of a man who had made it a goal in life to avoid conflict. He grew up in a family where compliance was highly valued, so he learned not to disappoint others. The cost was that he was never able to share his heart with anyone, because he was afraid of disappointing them or causing conflict. He never felt known by anyone, even his wife. Because of the way God made each of us, this man had to give his heart to something. He gave it over to porn and fantasy, which could not love him back.

Porn Promises Passion and Life without Connection to [the] Soul

In the absence of passion, something will seek to fill the void. Christ promises "life and life abundantly." When we have given ourselves over to fantasy and pornography, we have little drive left to seek out other areas in life that inspire passion and excitement. We settle for less and less. The nature of addiction is that we progressively require more of the "drug" in order to receive the same high as before. Not to be crude, but everyday, real life moments will rarely compare to the intensity of an or-

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WGA Resources 101

By Scott Kingry

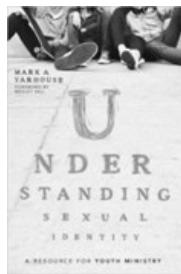
Frequently when we're out speaking or hosting a resource table at a conference, we're often asked the question "what would be a good resource on (fill in the blank) to help me get started?" Excellent question, and with that in mind I'd like to offer few basic resources on some of the topics that typically come up at Where Grace Abounds. Of course there is the ever present qualifier that we use--**Where Grace Abounds does not necessarily endorse or recommend these resources to or for everyone. For questions, please consult the staff.



Sexual Addiction:

Surfing for God by Michael Cusick

What if lust for porn is really a search for true passion? In a world where there are 68 million searches for pornography every day and where over 70 percent of Christian men report viewing porn in the last year, it's no surprise that more and more men struggle with an addiction to this false fantasy. Cusick uses examples from his own life and from his twenty years of counseling experience to show us how the pursuit of empty pleasure is really a search for our heart's deepest desire—and the real key to resistance is discovering and embracing the joy we truly want.



Sexual Identity/Same Sex Attraction:

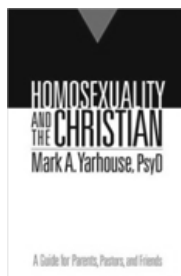
Understanding Sexual Identity by Mark Yarhouse

Reframing the focus away from the culture wars, Yarhouse introduces readers to the developmental considerations in the formation of sexual identity—all of which occurs in the teen years. He offers practical and helpful ways to think about homosexuality along with suggestions for talking with people who experience same-sex attraction. He also helps parents and youth volunteers learn to graciously respond to children and teens who struggle with questions of sexual iden-

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tity, and discusses how youth ministry can become more relevant in the lives of youth who are navigating these issues. Written with youth in mind but relevant for anyone seeking understanding of same sex attraction.



**Family & Friends, Church and Culture:
Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors and Friends By Mark Yarhouse**

The Christian conversation on homosexuality is often marked by a lack of humility, compassion, and understanding. When talking about homosexuality, Yarhouse uses a three-tier distinction: attraction, orientation, and identity. One may experience an isolated or occasional attraction to the same sex without having a same-sex orientation. One may have a same-sex orientation, yet choose not to accept a gay identity. Yarhouse argues that neither of these first two tiers is the result of choice. The last tier is where choice comes in. How does one respond to sexual desire? And what, or who, should a Christian place at the center of their identity? In part one of his book, Yarhouse addresses the obvious questions: what does God think about homosexuality, and what causes homosexuality?

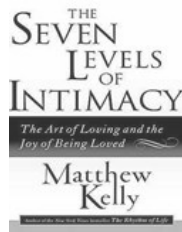


**Gender Dysphoria/Transgender:
Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture By Mark Yarhouse**

Few topics are more contested today than gender identity. In the fog of the culture war, complex issues like gender dysphoria are reduced to slogans and sound bites. And while the war rages over language, institutions and political allegiances, transgender individuals are the ones who end up being the casualties. Mark Yarhouse, an expert in sexual identity and therapy, challenges the church to rise above the political hostilities and listen to people's stories. In Understanding Gender Dysphoria, Yarhouse offers a Christian perspective on transgender issues that eschews simplistic answers and appreciates the psychological and theological complexity.

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Sexuality and Relationships:

The Seven Levels of Intimacy by Matthew Kelly

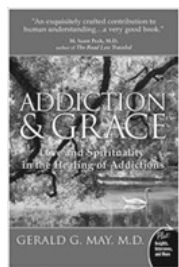
We all yearn for intimacy, but we avoid it. We want it badly, but we often run from it. At some deep level we sense that we have a profound need for intimacy, but we are afraid to go there. Why? We avoid intimacy because having intimacy means exposing our secrets. Being intimate means sharing the secrets of our hearts, minds, and souls with another fragile and imperfect human being. Intimacy requires that we allow another person to discover what moves us, what inspires us, what drives us, what eats at us, what we are running toward, what we are running from, what self-destructive enemies lie within us, and what wild and wonderful dreams we hold in our hearts.



Sexual Abuse:

Beyond Desolate by Tammy Schultz and Hannah Estabrook

Sexual abuse blindsides victims in its wake. Against the backdrop of torment, Jesus, a fellow sufferer, speaks into our anguish and paves the road toward a life beyond desolate. BEYOND DESOLATE proclaims hope into a world not absent of ache, but a world where He bleeds with us and brings us a new song.



Addiction and Recovery:

Addiction and Grace by Gerald May

Addiction and Grace offers an inspiring and hope-filled vision for those who desire to explore the mystery of who and what they really are. May details the various addictions from which we can suffer, not only to substances like alcohol and drugs, but to work, sex, performance, responsibility, and intimacy. Drawing on his experience as a psychiatrist working with the chemically dependent, May emphasizes that addiction represents an attempt to assert complete control over our lives. Addiction and Grace is a compassionate and wise treatment of a topic of major concern in these most addictive of times, one that can provide a critical yet hopeful guide to a place of freedom based on contemplative spirituality.

(Broken Promises *continued from page 2*)

gasm. When the only way we teach ourselves to experience passion is through sexual release, everything else is disappointing.

Porn Promises Power over [Others] without Responsibility and Humility

In our fantasies, our sexual partners always play their part exactly the way we want them to. They are exactly the right amount of playful or risky or gentle because we are the “gods” of our fantasy worlds. If the porn we are watching doesn’t match the fantasy, we just click on something else. There is an endless amount of porn to click on. Because everyone is doing exactly what we want, we face no need to be responsible with our sexuality or recognize that we affect other people. We do not have to submit ourselves to the realities of our spouses’ lives and challenges that may affect their ability or interest in sex. Porn and fantasy can be used at any time, especially NOW. Porn and fantasy have nothing to teach about love and patience.

Porn Promises Comfort and Care without Depending on Others

Loneliness can provide a big motivation to seek comfort and care. When we do not feel connected to another human being, porn and fantasy become more and more attractive. We are ever increasingly busier, with little time for self-care, and building relationships takes time. Asking for help or needing another person is not highly valued in American culture; we are

so afraid of being “needy” that we won’t express any needs at all. Porn and fantasy can feel like comfort and care, but in the end leave us right where we started: alone.

From a certain perspective, most of the above “promises” of porn offer what we think we want. If we have no vision for the pursuit of relationship with other people, why not choose porn and fantasy? We know exactly what we are getting, so they do not disappoint. But that is a big part of the problem. There are no surprises or challenges -- no need to grow or be more than we currently are. Sadly, it often isn’t until people are completely isolated and separated from real human connection that they realize the consequences of their actions. The monster of porn and fantasy continues to need to be fed, leaving its captive with little or nothing to offer other people. It becomes a wall that keeps everyone out while we are trapped inside.

Longing for Connection:

Addicted to Love and Sex in the Digital Age



Thursday, March 31st 2016 from 7-9 PM

Hosted by Where Grace Abounds

Guest Speakers: C. Paige Smith and Tracy Roberts

Held at Corona Presbyterian Church

1205 East 8th Ave; Denver, CO 80218

This workshop is free of charge. Please join us!

How is digital technology affecting youth and the development of their ability to build healthy relationships?

What are the long-term effects of pornography, sexting, and other impersonal forms of sexual expression?

How do I help a loved one who is misusing technology to further their addictions?

How do I find and build healthy relationships in the “real” world?

Who Should Attend?

- Parents who want to help their children navigate their developing sexuality relationship skills in the digital age.
- Pastors and youth workers who want to help youth and young adults make positive, healthy choices with regards to their sexuality and relationships.
- Pastors who want to help strengthen the marriages in their church.
- Anyone who wants to learn how the digital age is affecting our ability to establish healthy, lasting relationships in the “real” world.



February In Review

February 6th: Prayer and Brunch at WGA
30 people joined us to pray for WGA and celebrate 30 years of ministry.

Thursday Night Group

February 4th: 20 people
February 11th: 25 people
February 18th: 28 people
February 25th: 23 people

March And Beyond

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

March 31st: Longing for Connection workshop (see page 7 of this newsletter for details)

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

April 21st: 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.

Financial Update

Please continue to pray for WGA's financial situation. We experienced a loss of approximately \$25,000 in 2015 and continued to see expenses higher than income in 2016. God has provided generously for 30 years and we trust that He will continue to do so. We need his clear direction if we need to make substantial changes to our budget. Thank you!

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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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