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# A Measure of Grace

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

## June 12th, 2016, Orlando *by Roger Jones*

Since hearing the news of the horrible massacre at a gay bar in Orlando on the morning of June 12<sup>th</sup>, I have been in shock. There really is little to say that will bring comfort to those affected by the shooting. Most of the things we tend to say as Christians seem like platitudes. Yet, while it may seem trite to some, the most important thing we can do is pray. I wonder, in addition to our prayers for peace and healing, should we not be asking God what actions we can take to bring about healing and peace?

I am writing three days after the tragedy. On social media, I have already watched the wave of responses morph from initial shock, horror and devastation to criticisms of all those initial reactions. "No one seems to be doing enough," I read. "Christians have been silent and that is deplorable." "Religious intolerance is the root of all this hatred and Christianity is, at least in part, to blame." Many are zipping past hurt and grief and using the situation to further their own agendas, be they political or religious or whatever else.

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The shooter in this case was a Muslim and had claimed allegiance to

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Isis (at least that what we are hearing today). Unfortunately, I know very little about the Islamic faith. I imagine that Isis is made up of extremists; much like those associated with Christianity over the centuries. I do hear some messages of hate from Christians, although no recent examples that I am aware of have resulted in this kind of slaughter. Sadly, those who have questions about their own faith and are open to exploring religion may be pushed further away from that pursuit by the idea that religion is about hate. For those who have yet to adopt a faith, Christianity and extremist Islam probably don't seem all that different from one another. The message of the day is that religion breeds hatred. Whether or not you agree, it seemed very true on June 12<sup>th</sup>, especially to the LGBTQ+ community. And while, yes, you can argue that this was an attack on America, not just the gay community, it was aimed at a people group that has been the target for a long time.

As Christians, how can we take this opportunity to show more love than we ever have before? In Orlando, I know that people showed up in droves to donate blood to the victims. I have heard that many churches have offered funeral services free of charge to the victims' families. Most of us do not live in Orlando, so a direct response is not possible. There are places to give

donations that are easy enough to identify. The funds will go to support the victims' families. Whether or not you agree with the "lifestyle" of those involved, an outpouring of love and generosity is needed.

Closer to home, we can consider how to make our communities safer. The more such shootings occur, the less safe everyone feels. We can counter fear by continuing to live our lives visibly in the community. It may be tempting to hide away and create an

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illusion of safety for ourselves, but that is not practical or helpful to society at large. I remember after the Aurora theater shooting in 2012 how "on edge" I felt the next time I was in a theater. I was afraid, but it was important for me to go back to a theater. It may seem easy to dismiss the June 12<sup>th</sup> shooting because it was in a gay bar, a place you might never go. But really, it could have been anywhere. It has happened in our churches and schools and malls.

Now is a great time to reach out to your GLBTQ+ loved ones. Let them know you care. Ask them how they are being affected by these events. Tell them that you love them. Make sure there is a "period" at the end of the "I love you." No ifs or buts following the statement. Just "I love you."



## WGA Roots ~ Our Name

*By Mary Heathman*

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In the summer of 1986, five ministry leaders gathered around the table in the meeting room of the offices of His New Creations. As I recall, there were five of us, three men, Mark, Will and Adam, and two women, MaryAnn and I. We were there to plan for what might come next after the recent closing of His New Creations, the ministry where all of us had served together for some time. The shared vision that brought us together this day was a hope that a new ministry could be formed so that Thursday night meetings could continue to provide support for people who were in conflict with their sexual feelings and/or behavior; and offer support to family and friends.

It didn't take long to decide that we would form a ministry, and that each of us were committed to volunteer our time to facilitate group meetings. What did take us a good bit of time, and some angst and tension, was the naming of this new ministry. In this article I want to share my memory of this decision-making process.

As I set myself to describe our discussion, my mind is flooded with the memory of passionate men and

women that started Where Grace Abounds and the solid foundation we built in those few early months that stands yet today. I wish I was in current contact with the others so I could include their perspectives—it would make for a richer and more colorful story—maybe they will somehow see this article and contact me to set the record straight; I hope so.

The interesting part of the story begins as our little band of pioneers turned our attention to brainstorming names for the new ministry. There had been several tongue-in-cheek suggestions that arose out of a campy humor that made us all chuckle (and move on quickly). It is probably God's mercy that I have forgotten most of the offerings, but I do remember the camaraderie as we laughed. It was good to be together and exciting to be planning a new ministry.

As for the name we were looking for, several serious contenders made it into the notes but nothing was catching any of our hearts. I remember someone suggesting, "What about Pathfinders?" Another said, "No, that sounds like a scout troop or a 4-wheel drive."

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## #sexual-identity-alphabet-soup Navigating Same Sex Attractoins and Sexual Identity (A New Series!)

By Scott Kingry



*“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:1-3*

When it comes to labels that people use for their sexual identities, I sure do miss the 1980s. Back then I was living in the Gay community here in Denver, that’s the only letter there was at the time—just “G”—life was simple. A few years later, it became the Gay & Lesbian Community (GL) to be clearer about the inclusion of women. Not too long after that, they added Bisexual and Transgender making the acronym GLBT. Then one day I looked up and it had come to be known as the LGBT community. Did the Lesbians stage a coup, I wondered? Sometime in the 1990s the letter Q was added for Queer and those in the gay community who experience their gender outside the male/female binary classification. These days I’ve seen it with another “Q” and “I,” but it can go all the way up to LGBTQQIP2SAA (considering I

only have a page and half for this article, I suggest a quick Google search to show you what this latest acronym means). But frankly, I’m exhausted.

I’ve noticed within the last several years that there seems to be a lot of pressure to come up with a sexual identity label and “self-identify” as something, especially when it comes to youth. You’ll hear all sorts of terms being thrown around: pansexual, genderqueer, polyamorous, cisgender, aromantic, etc. I heard one woman recently identify as a “gendervoid foxkin demi-queer.” I’m not exactly sure what that means; perhaps gender neutral and only slightly non-binary? She also has a trans-species label indicating kinship to foxes—wow. I’ve been researching such things more and more often because our culture changes so rapidly these days. When it comes to the language of sexual and gender identity, several people may use a similar term but not necessarily give it the same meaning. The goal seems to be that definitions resonate with about 51 out of 100 people. In an online

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glossary of current language, I've found approximately 70 terms to label gender and sexual identity.

But what is the definition of "Sexual Identity Labels" and what is their benefit to those who use them? Psychologist and author, Mark Yarhouse (who is awesome by the way!) uses this explanation:

**Sexual Identity**—this is a socio-cultural label that helps people communicate to others something about their sexual preferences (e.g., "gay," "straight," "bi"). It may be based upon a person's sense of his or her biological sex (as male or female), gender identity (as masculine or feminine), direction and persistence of sexual attractions (sexual orientation), intentions and behaviors (what one intends and chooses to do with the attractions one experiences), and beliefs and values about sexual behavior. *Mark Yarhouse, Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling, Vol.59 (no. 3), 201-212*

So a sexual identity label is to communicate something to others about our preferences and "who we are."

In this new series, we're going to unpack the complexities of this definition. In a culture that has tons of sexual and gender identity labels,

we're hopefully finding fresh ways to share our own stories and the experiences of those we know in the WGA community. But I need to mention a couple of personal presuppositions of mine before we launch into a dialog on identity:

1. Any discussion on sexuality should always be considered in light of the bigger picture of the biblical narrative. God's creation at the beginning of time was filled with goodness and beauty, but that creation has fallen and is in need of redemption through Jesus Christ. One day creation will be glorified and fully restored through Him. Our sexuality is part of this bigger story. It's a good and beautiful thing that has become broken in many ways. Through Christ, it is being restored and healed, and will fully be so one day.
2. Identity is complex and the search for "who we are" may lead us down numerous paths. There are multitudes of places where we can find identity (i.e., man/woman, short/tall, republican/democrat, fireman/ballerina, dad/mom). But for me, I want the weight of my identity, first and foremost, to be "in Christ" (see above, Colossians 3:1-3). This is a daily challenge. As a young Christian, I began to realize that God

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cared very much what I did with my body. I realized that living IN Christ meant that God wanted all the areas of my life, including my sexuality: how and when I would express my sexuality physically; how I treated others and respected their feelings, thoughts and bodies; in other words, how I handled my relationships. God wants me to surrender and submit all these areas of my life to him. He desires that I bend myself around Him and His word, not bend Him around my desires.

Mine can be tough (even offensive) beliefs in a culture that prizes autonomy and self-actualization, but hopefully these discussions can be undergirded with the strength of grace as we all muddle around trying to figure these things out. The next logical questions could be, “What is our sexuality/sexual identity and what are its various, God-ordained components? We’ll explore the questions in the next article. Stay tuned.

*(WGA Roots continued from page 3)*

We stopped to pray as the brainstorming lost momentum and we still hadn’t landed on the right ministry name. After we prayed and sat together a bit in silence, MaryAnn said, “God just told me the name!” She grabbed her Bible and turned to Romans 5 and read verse 20, “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

The rest of us responded with less enthusiasm than hers. We appreciated the message of the verse, but didn’t see the ministry name obvious anywhere in it! Back to brain-

storming, someone suggested another name and MaryAnn became upset and left the room saying, “God gave me that verse for the ministry name, I know he did!” I followed her into the other room and we talked a bit and she agreed to come back to the discussion.

We sat together for several minutes, eyes down, in a glum silence; it was clear we lacked hope of ever finding a name. One of the guys said, “Well, maybe if we worked with the words of the verse a little. . . “ We looked up hopefully, and re-engaged, “Grace

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(WGA Roots *continued from page 6*)

Abounding”, or “Abundant Grace”, or “More Grace”, or . . . . We were stumped again, for none of these were resonating. Then someone (I don’t remember and it doesn’t matter who) said, “Well the ministry is a place, what if the name sounds more like one for a place where grace abounds?”

Our energy spiked! Relief and smiles all around the table! “That’s it; that’s the name, Where Grace Abounds!” “Perfect!”

All of us were humbled by the process. We had come together to offer what we had; we were honest with each other as we searched for the right name. And we had to work through some tension and stress and disagreement. We offered what we had to God and prayed for discernment; we sat in silence together admitting our lack of vision and inability to come to agreement. Out of the silence came the answer, “Where Grace Abounds.” And it didn’t matter who had voiced the name first; because we all recognized that we had just been named by God and we were simply rejoicing together in that simple miracle.

The process we went through that day in 1986 became the standard for decision-making for WGA:

- offer what we have, putting it

all out on the table,

- honestly assess our sense of things along the way,
- submit to God the sum total of our efforts which inevitably falls short,
- wait on His provision,
- work through stress and tension; don’t abandon each other in the process,
- continue to work as we wait,
- rejoice when the Spirit brings it all together.

May we never lose these foundational principles of working together in flow of the Lord’s guidance and direction.

### **Intercessory Prayer**

**Join us for prayer on July 2<sup>nd</sup> at 8:00 am at the WGA offices! We will be focusing our time of prayer on praying for the victims of the June 12<sup>th</sup> shooting in Orlando at a nightclub for the LGBTQ+ community. Prayer is from 8:00-9:00, with breakfast following. Please RSVP if you plan on joining us for breakfast. We want to make sure there is enough food for everyone. See you then!**



## May In Review

**May 20-21st: Circles of Support and Accountability volunteer training**

**May 21st :Steve and Jill shared their story at marriage seminar at Colorado Community Church**

**May 28th: Memorial Weekend Picnic**

## June And Beyond

**June 21-23: Scott and Steve attending and teaching at the EPC General Assembly in Northville , MI**

**July 2nd: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. See details on page 7.**

**July 3rd: Mary speaking at Buffalo Creek Church**

**July 13th: Scott and Roger teaching at Rocky Mountain Youth Camp**

**July 21st: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!**

### Thursday Night Group

**May 5th: 31 people**

**May 12th: 29 people**

**May 19th: 28 people**

**May 26th: 28 people**

**Orientation meeting - 4 new people**

### WGA Staff

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**Scott Kingry**  
Program Director

**Mary Heathman**  
Founding Director

**Steve Huston**  
Chaplain/Church Liaison

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*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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