



A Measure of Grace

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Transgender Issues Part 3

By Roger Jones

In the past months (May & July), I have been exploring the transgender issue here in the WGA newsletter. Specifically, I have been asking our readers to consider the different viewpoints from which people approach this conversation. It is clear that we all do not agree upon the right course of action for those struggling with their gender identities. Understanding the “other” perspectives can be helpful if our goal is positive conversations, rather than fighting and creating more schisms. In his book *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, Mark Yarhouse describes three different “lenses” or “frameworks” through which most see transgender people. We discussed the “integrity framework” last month.

Briefly, the integrity framework views gender and sexuality in terms of “the sacred integrity of maleness and femaleness

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stamped on one's body."¹ Messing with or attempting to alter one's gender, including cross-dressing or gender reassignment, are seen as problems, because it is through our God-given gender that we uniquely reflect His image. In this article, we will discuss the two remaining frameworks introduced by Yarhouse: 1) the disability framework and 2) the diversity framework. I will wrap up with a bit of discussion about how we can use the strengths of each framework to inform how we approach transgenderism.

The disability framework views gender dysphoria "with reference to the mental health dimensions of the phenomenon For Christians who are drawn more to this framework, gender dysphoria is viewed as a result of living in a fallen world in which the condition--like so many mental health concerns--is a nonmoral reality."² We don't typically assign a moral judgment to people dealing with mental health issues, such as depression or schizophrenia. Those using the disability framework assess transgenderism similarly. Viewed as having a disability, transgenders may pursue some potentially helpful treat-

ments, including counseling or some forms of cross-gender identification that reduce anxiety. The main point to consider here is that those within this framework do not view being transgender as a moral issue.

The diversity framework views transgenderism as "something to be celebrated, honored or revered;"³ being transgender is just another variation of God's wonderful creation. Yarhouse identifies two variations in this framework: those with a strong view of diversity and those with a weak view (strong and weak are used here as terms to indicate the strength of the commitment to diversity, not a statement that one is better than the other.). Those with a strong view tend to see the binary system of male/

female, including sex and social norms, as problematic. The binary approach needs to be abandoned in order to bring about greater acceptance of multiple variations of gender and sexuality. Those with the weak view of diversity, currently in the majority, are not seeking to deconstruct the binary system, but rather to promote more acceptance of the transgender identity

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I have been asking our readers to consider the different viewpoints from which people approach this conversation.



God's Provision: Adequate or ...?

By Mary Heathman

(Reprint form September 2011)

In my reading this past week, several times the authors seemed to follow a pattern something like this: 1) Identify and discuss a need or desire that currently isn't being met, 2) explore what God's provision might be for that need or desire, and 3) decide whether God's provision is adequate. From that point, the conversations take different directions depending on whether the author has decided God's provision is adequate or not.

If God's provision is considered adequate, the conversation almost always moves to an exploration of how to manage oneself in light of having not yet experienced God's provision. Questions are considered like: how one might live with unmet needs and desires while waiting on God's provision; how to discover if one is blind to God's provision because it doesn't match one's expectations; or a myriad of other questions that arise out of an honest examination of the incongruity between one's belief that "God's grace is sufficient to meet all our needs," and the stark reality of

one's experience of yet unrealized provision. It has been my experience that this direction, though painful, has the result of aligning one more intimately with God and His purposes.

If, on the other hand, God's provision is concluded to be inadequate, the conversation moves quickly to an exploration of how one might "help" God to meet one's needs, or even to turn from God's provision as irrelevant in "this particular need or desire," and pursue other resources that might have something to offer. The outcome of this direction seems to be less painful, at least in the short-term; in fact, it promises fulfillment in a variety of ways, but has been my experience that one's relationship with God suffers. When I turn from God and look elsewhere for provision that is independent of Him, then distance is created and intimacy with God diminishes.

(Author's note: in my writing or speaking, in order to protect confidentiality, I never use illustrations or quotes from my private interactions with people; the thoughts and ideas I refer to are always either

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Refresh!

New Decade of Ministry: New Ways of Loving Hurting People

By Scott Kingry

“...just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Romans 6:4b

We’ve enjoyed celebrating our 30th anniversary throughout 2016—three decades sure have flown by quickly! We’ve still got a little bit of reveling left before the year ends. But already the seeds of change are in the air, as we transition to our fourth decade of ministry with refreshing new formats and educational resources. Ways that we can continue to love hurting people and offer environments of healing in Christ’s name.

Our Thursday Night Support Group has always offered 3 key elements: One of them is an **Introduction to WGA** through our Orientation Meeting. Folks who are referred to WGA or find us on the web, have an opportunity to come to our informal meeting, hear some of our stories and get a run down on the groups, services and resources we have to provide. Another main element is **Ongoing Community Support**. This is what we’ve provided on Thursdays for the last 30 years. No matter how long it’s been, someone can always “drop-in” on a Thursday, hear a relevant talk on a multitude of topics and be able to share about there week in a small group.

Sandwiched in between these two essentials, is the meat of our new program we’re beginning in September called “**ReSOULutions**” our tag line is “Restoring the Wounds in Our Souls through Real Solutions”. There are many meaningful words which go into this pithy title—resolve (steadfast, determination, healing), restoration and resolution—all of which we hope God will bring to those who attend. ReSOULutions are (4) four week series on specific topics pertinent to WGA (Love & Sex Addiction, Sexual Identity, Resolving Sexual Abuse and Ways of Healthy Relating). They seem like very separate topics but sometimes can be tangled all together in a person’s life. Each four week module will provide resources, teachings and a place to process how it applies personally. We’ll be adding a new small group environment called “ReSoulutions Groups” which will provide a tool to work through together.

Besides our new program, Where Grace Abounds has many other educational resources in the form of seminars, trainings and gatherings—we’re heading into our fourth decade with a bang. Here is our ReSOULutions schedule for the fall—please call the office if you have questions or would like to attend.

ReSOULutions

Restoring Our Souls through Real Solutions

(Four) 4 Week Focus Groups

September 2016-

Seeking True Connection: Resolving Love & Sex Addiction

This 4 week series will concentrate on teaching, tools and support around the issues of love & sex addiction. Definitions and contributing factors (such as shame, trauma, family dynamics, etc) will be discussed. The addiction cycle will be explored, along with options and resources to choose healthier options and alternatives when in the thick of temptation.

(9/1) Love & Sex Addiction 101 / A Core Issue: Shame

(9/8) Understanding Addiction: Mapping out the addiction cycle

(9/15) The Cycle of Healing: Mapping out healthy alternatives

(9/22) Practical Tools and Self Care

(9/29) WGA Seminar: Engaging the Culture

October 2016-

Navigating Sexual Identity and Same Sex Attraction

This 4 week series will explore the components that form our sexual identity, especially those who experience same-sex attraction. Experiences from a male and female perspective will be shared, along with how these dynamics can affect families and other relationships. Other questions will be explored, such as theology and identity, along with tools to create a framework for navigating these complex parts of who we are.

(10/6) What is our Sexual Identity? / Male Experience (Story)

(10/13) Female Experience (Story) / Navigating Family Dynamics

(10/20) What Carries Weight in Our Sexual Identity?

10/27) The Theology of Sexuality

Coming In November 2016-

Resolving the Effects of Abuse—January 3rd-December 1st

Coming in 2017

Ways of Healthy Relating—January 5th-January 26th



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and community, even within the LGBTQ population.

The reason I have devoted three articles to this topic is that I think it is important to try and understand where another person may be coming from in this conversation. This does not mean that we all have to agree with one another; but rather than assuming that someone is being stubborn or willfully rebellious, perhaps we can accept that people approach gender and sexuality (and many other things) from different world views. Regardless of how we feel about such volatile issues, it is good to take a step back and consider the reality of points of view other than our own.

Later in his book, Yarhouse describes a fourth framework that we should perhaps be working towards, called the “integrated framework.”

My concern is that any one of these three frameworks – to the exclusion of the best the others have to offer – will likely be an inadequate response for the Christian community. My own leaning is to identify the strengths in each framework, to essentially see these as lenses through which we see the topic under discussion. Rather than select one lens to look at gender dysphoria, we

can look through all three, identify the strengths of each framework and apply it to how we approach the topic and the person who is navigating this terrain. What we have then is what I refer to as an *integrated framework* that draws on the best of each existing framework.⁴

So how do we approach these conversations with such an “integrated framework?” First and foremost, we do so prayerfully. Without God, we are sure to fail miserably in our goal to build bridges and increase understanding. As with most of the complicated issues that involve humans, there are no easy, one-size-fits-all answers. Every conversation will be different and every transgender person has a unique story and perspective. Don’t assume you know where the other person is coming from. Take the time to ask questions and hear another’s story.

Personally speaking, I find myself already using the integrity and the disability lenses. I believe that God has a purpose for gender and sexuality, which I may not fully understand, but matters deeply. And yet I realize that we live in a fallen world and none of us is able to live and experience the world as if the fall had not occurred. I think there are

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some tools (counseling, medication, etc.) that might enable transgender people to live their lives more peacefully. I have yet to see evidence that gender reassignment surgery is as successful as people want it to be. Yet if a person opts to pursue gender reassignment, I don't believe this removes them from God's grace or His love. The lens I need to examine more is the diversity lens. While I might not be able to go so far as to believe that "transgender" is just another gender manifestation like male and female, I can work to see the "person," rather than the "problem." I want to be able to validate a transgender

person's experience and not assume I know the answers for them. I want to show them the love of Christ, which does not depend on how they choose to express their gender or sexuality.

¹ Yarhouse, Mark A., *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2015, pg. 46.

² Yarhouse, pg. 48.

³ Yarhouse, pg. 50.

⁴ Yarhouse, pg. 53.

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from reading blogs online, quoting a teacher/speaker/author, or other such public venues.)

It is likely apparent to the reader that I have already revealed my bias—if you didn't catch it yet, I will spell it out clearly. It is my conviction that "God's provision is adequate; I just may not recognize, or may not be ready for it yet. He will meet my true needs and holy desires that He has placed within me; but I often don't even know what they really are and I need for Him to teach me."

I am not always at this point of

faith and commitment to wait for God's provision, so I am especially grateful for biblical stories that both (1) help me understand that I am not alone in my confusion and impatience with God, and (2) teach me principles to live by as I follow Christ. In the next few months, I will draw from biblical examples of waiting (or not) on the Lord, and how that played out in the lives of biblical characters like Abraham and Sara, Joseph, Saul/Paul, and others. I look forward to revisiting these stories, as I am currently chafing a bit under the discipline of waiting in some areas of my own life. We're all in the same boat, you know!



July In Review

July 3rd: Mary Spoke at Buffalo Creek Church

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



August And Beyond

August 11-13th – Mary will be at the Rocky Mountain yearly Meeting of Friends

September 3rd: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry

September 29th: WGA Thursday Night Seminar—Family and Friends Theme

October 16th – WGA participating in the Cherry Creek Presbyterian missions event

October 16th – WGA participating in the Denver Friends Church missions event

October 21-23rd – WGA Leadership retreat

November 4-5th: WGA Seminar at Denver Friends Church

November 12th: Family and Friends Gatherine

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Where Grace Abounds exists