



A Measure of Grace

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About Forgiveness *by Roger Jones*



Christmas is a season for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. For many, it can also be a reminder of painful family dynamics and memories. I'm reminded of difficult stories I've heard from those who have come to WGA over the years. With those in mind, I want to discuss the topic of forgiveness with sensitivity.

Scripture admonishes us to forgive. In fact, our own forgiveness is often tied to our act of obedience in this area.

"For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14); "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25).

There are times when forgiveness is a one-time, package deal, and we are able to move on without a second glance. A minor car accident is a good example of this. If someone rear-ends me

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while I am sitting at a stop sign, I have clearly been wronged. Barring no long-term physical injuries, however, I will probably not think much about the accident after my car is repaired. Of course, the act of forgiveness may still be challenging in such instances, especially if we are put in touch with previous experiences of injustice.

There are other times when forgiveness requires more from us. It is difficult to forgive some things, especially when restitution is not or cannot be had. Five dollars taken from your purse or wallet is easily forgotten, if noticed at all. Other victimizations, such as abuse or rape, bring ongoing consequences. Forgiving may be a process for a person who has been severely wronged, as new costs are revealed over time.

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Recently, I was in a discipleship counseling appointment with Mary Heathman and one of WGA's ministry participants (we meet with people in pairs). The topic of forgiveness came up and Mary used the following example. "If I were to leave the room for a few minutes," she said, "and when I came back, I realized that Roger had stolen \$5 from my purse while I was out, that would be easy to forgive. I might not leave my

purse alone with him again, though." She went on, "If later that day, I realized that Roger had actually taken \$50 from my purse, I would feel the sting a bit more. Now I won't be able to eat out like I was planning to this week. I have to forgive Roger for more than I originally thought." She finished with, "If at some point, I realize that Roger also found the \$500 in my purse that I had set aside for my mortgage payment, I am really going to have to scramble to pay my bills on time. I may have to borrow some money from a friend. Forgiving Roger for that will be even more difficult."

First, let me reiterate that it was only an example. For all you "opportunists" out there, keep your eyes and hands off of Mary's purse! She doesn't actually carry that much cash with her. Secondly, your purses are safe with me!

The reason I like Mary's illustration is that it paints a clear picture of the cost to forgive. You can't get much more specific than dollars and cents. It also shows how she would have to forgive again as new information became available. When she forgave for the \$5 theft, she had no idea what she would later find out. At the point where the story ended, she would

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ries on grace, but I know I can't even begin until I say a few words about what grace is NOT.

My thoughts race whenever I think of what I might write to describe grace. The backs of church bulletins and used envelopes, scraps of scratch paper, even a few layers of sticky notes, all hold bits and pieces of my thoughts on what grace is. Yet I couldn't seem to write the next article; it seemed something was missing.

1. Grace is not . . . magic!

Although He is all powerful, God doesn't wave a magic wand in response to our calling upon Him in emergencies. He hears us all right, but grace is not the magic ingredient that wipes away all consequences of sin (our own or others) from our lives.

2. Grace is not . . . about me, or you!

There is nothing about God's grace that describes our personal value, or worth; nothing about it measures our performance or lack thereof. God's grace is all about His character. Grace says nothing about me; it speaks loudly of God.

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#the~clashes~in~our~sexual~identity

Why We're All in the Same Boat

By Scott Kingry



Sexual Identity:

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).

Over the last several months, we’ve been defining and discussing what sexual identity is and what the various components are that make it up. Mark Yarhouse’s definition gives us a breakdown of some of the facets that I unpacked in my last article: Biological Identity (designated sex, male and female), Gender Identity (masculinity and femininity), Sexual Attractions (sexual, romantic, physical attractions), Sexual Expression (behavior) and our faith, values and relationship with God. I’ve also added an extra category, “Other things that can influence our Sexual Identity.” This includes a wide array of things like abuse, trauma, sexual addiction, the culture we grow up in, our family’s views, and the attitudes about

sex and sexuality in our church. All of these can skew our vision of ourselves, our bodies and our sexuality.

In a perfect world we would experience our sexuality with a solid sense of congruence and wholeness. But sadly, the world we are living in is far from perfect. In a broken world we experience many conflicts and inconsistencies within our sexual identity. Let’s unpack some of the battles we face:

Our Behavior Can Be in Conflict with Our Faith and Values

This is usually easy to spot, and the very thing that brings men and women to Where Grace Abounds. Some type of behavior is troubling us, because we feel we’ve crossed the boundaries that God has ordained around the expression of our sexuality in particular, or personhood in general. Conflict-inducing behaviors often begin with sexual addiction: binge viewing of pornography, compulsive hooking up, or sexual infidelity within or outside of marriage. Non-sexual addictions, such as binge drinking, drug use, eating disorders, gambling etc., also produce internal conflict. And then there are relational problems like emotional dependency and the way we treat one another. Remember, Jesus upped the ante when it comes to our behavior: calling someone stupid is the same as murder and lusting after someone is the same as adultery. These sins begin in the deep

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places of our hearts. In this broken world, we live on a battle ground most minutes of our day. Thank God for His Grace!

Our Attractions Can Be in Conflict with Our Faith and Values

Obviously, many people don't experience any conflict caused by their attractions. But some who do seek out Where Grace Abounds to find an environment in which to sort through confusing attractions and their possible meanings. I came to WGA many years ago because I was living in the Gay community in Denver, but had a conversion experience to Christianity. Suddenly my questions about sexuality, attractions and sexual behavior with men were once again on the table. It was important to have a place to talk about this area of my life. There isn't anything inherently culpable about same-sex attractions in and of themselves. Attractions and sexual orientation arise out of a mostly incomprehensible interplay developmental and environmental issues. It's what we do with our attractions that can cause conflict—are we lusting after someone, making someone uncomfortable or crossing boundaries? Everyone has some pain and confusion in this area: we may experience attractions to the wrong kind of people that set up destructive patterns and inflict wounds. We may be attracted to those who aren't our spouses and create painful and messy situations, if we act on such attractions.

Our Biology and Gender Identity Can Be at Odds with One Another

Regarding those who experience a disconnect between their Biological Identity

(being physically male or female) and Gender Identity (how masculine or feminine one feels and fits within a culture's gender roles and stereotypes), we often think of Gender Dysphoria or Transgender. Dr. Yarhouse's definition of Gender Dysphoria is "*the experience of distress related to having a psychological and emotional gender identity that doesn't match ones biological/birth sex.*" Not all who experience Gender Dysphoria become Transgender and not all who consider themselves Transgender feel the distress and conflict associated with dysphoria (obviously this is very multifaceted). But for those who do, disconnect compounded by distress is agonizing. As I mentioned earlier, so many things can destructively inform how we feel about our bodies and as men and women: abuse, trauma, negative views of our bodies and sexuality from our church and family. Hopefully an environment like WGA can offer a place to seek healing from these wounds.

So, when we look at the various components of our sexuality, understand them and then consider all the possible conflicts that can arise within our sexual identity (we've only explored a few of the potential struggles), we find the playing field is more level. As a dear friend of mine once said, "When it comes to diverse types of brokenness—we're not on many different boats on different rivers. We find ourselves all on the same boat with the same need for grace, truth and healing." Now that's comforting and humbling.

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likely have found herself a little anxious about what else might come to the surface. Would she find out later that I had stolen even more from her?

This is the dilemma that many of us face, particularly when something precious, such as our innocence, has been robbed from us. We can forgive a person for what we know about so far. We can commit to forgiving what we have not yet realized, but we will still feel loss as the ripple effects of sin continue to impact our lives.

If a man or a woman was sexually abused as a child, he or she may struggle to forgive the person who abused them. Carrying the weight of shame that comes from abuse is a big burden, however, one which can cause bitterness and resentment to build. Such feelings may seem justifiable, but they are also poisons to a person's well-being. One of the definitions of the word forgive is "to cease to feel resentment against." Forgiveness is the act of letting go of the burden of resentment.

When a person decides to forgive, can they forgive what they are not aware of yet? Over time, more consequences may arise. A woman who was abused as a young girl may decide to

forgive in her early twenties and fully mean it. In her early thirties, she may discover that she is ending yet another relationship, because she is unable to trust. She is afraid of letting a man close enough to hurt her. At this point of realization, she is faced with letting the old resentments and bitterness sweep her away, or she can again choose to forgive, with a clearer picture of what her abuser has cost her.

As I mentioned before, I believe we need to commit to forgive, even knowing that the length of the process may surprise us. Making this commitment early on will help us to approach the new revelations with a healthy perspective: *God is on my side, and I don't need to carry the burden of resentment.*

Our wounds matter to God. He is our Savior and wants us to forgive so that we can live beyond our woundedness. But He is also our heal-

er and knows what it takes to really heal. God is not like the leaders that the prophet Jeremiah referred to when he said, "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14; 8:11). God knows that sometimes a serious wound must be carefully probed and cleansed; He knows that some injuries

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must not be covered over quickly, but need to heal from the inside out. Is it possible, then, that complete forgiveness may also evolve in layers as well?

Perhaps this is part of what Christ meant when He said: *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it* (Luke 9:23-24).

It seems the Lord is telling us that as we follow Him, taking up daily the “cross” of our burdens and pains, He will show us their cost as we are able to bear them. He will take our willingness to forgive and help us through the process, forgiving and forgiving and forgiving again, until all is finally finished!

Note: This article originally appeared in the December 2009 issue of A Measure of Grace.

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3. Grace is not . . . cheap!

Yes, grace is free to us--we can't earn it--but it didn't come without great cost. God took upon Himself the form of a man, Jesus. This God-man sweat great drops of blood under the stress of his purpose in life. He gave his life willingly, taking upon himself the consequences of the sin of people who turned away from Him. So many times we rejoice in the power of the resurrection without realizing that it came at great cost--the priceless gift of the Savior to men and women who are lost and can't find the path back to their creator.

To wrap up this brief discussion about what grace is NOT, let's review:

God's grace isn't magic. We still have to take responsibility for our actions and face the consequences of

our sin. Nor is grace about me or you; it's all about God's character. Finally, grace is the costliest of all gifts. It is free to us, but cost God the excruciating pain of watching His Son suffer and die through no fault of His own.

As we look ahead over the next few months of discussing what grace is, it is my hope that we will all keep in mind what it is not. Let's ask God to change our hearts and minds, teach us what is true about Him and ourselves, and help experience the costly grace He offers to us without charge.



November In Review

November 12th: Family and Friends Gathering

November 13th: Mary spoke at Colorado Springs Friends Church

November 13th: Steve spoke to the youth males At Colorado Community Church

November 21st: Scott presented to a class at Denver Seminary

December And Beyond

January 7th: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry

January 26th: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!

January 15th: WGA Leadership Meeting

January 24—26: Scott will be at the ECO conference representing WGA and One by One

Thursday Night Group

November 3rd: 24 people

November 10th: 19 people

November 17th: 19 people

November 24th: Thanksgiving

Orientation meeting - 2 new people

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Mary Heathman
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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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