

FOCUS Newsletter

a newsletter for women in difficult relationships, feeling emotionally and spiritually alone

To Err is Human....

To Forgive is Divine

November/December 2008

Some years back I came across this "tongue-in-cheek" quote in one of Chuck Swindoll's books. Anyone who has served in the United States military knows exactly what it means: There is no allowance for mistakes when you're in the service. One small goof in basic training can translate into a five-mile hike with 40 pounds on your back, or an evening cleaning the latrines with a toothbrush (ever try to shine a mirror with a toothbrush?).

I've been there and done that, and I can assure you there is no grace and no mercy in the military just lots and lots of "ungrace." And while that makes for great discipline among the troops, it has no place in the Christian community.

Ever go to a church where the only language spoken is "Legal-eez"? Leaders in churches like that try to manipulate their members to jump through hoops in order to please God. (I've always wondered, how do they know exactly what should be on the "God Pleasing List," and how

often does each thing need to be done in order to please Him?)

I've seen church leaders set the standards for the divorced woman who is trying to get back into the good graces of the church. (Who decided she should ever be pushed out of it?)

And what about the adulterer or the alcoholic? What "penance" will the church assign to them so they can win back God's love? (And who decided they lost it in the first place?)

What becomes of the abused, the hungry, and the hopeless sitting in pews, waiting for answers and hungering for unconditional love that never seems to reach them? What about that prostitute who works the streets at night? Is she too sinful, too dirty, to be brought into a loving church family? (Perhaps it was the lack of love that put her out on the street to begin with.)

When church leaders spend a lot of time trying to determine how much sin is "too much" and where to "draw the line," they are waving the stone-cold tablets of The Law, instead of

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1-2

the bloodstained banner of God's Grace. They have forgotten that Grace has never depended on what we do for God, but rather, on what God has done for us. Grace is a gift from a loving God and no one has ever earned it nor been worthy of it.

Lewis Smedes, a professor in psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary wrote an entire book on shame and grace. Philip Yancey quotes Smedes in *What's So Amazing About Grace?*: "What I needed more than pardon was a sense that God accepted me, owned me, held me, affirmed me, and

would never let go of me even if he was not too much impressed with what he had on his hands."

Smedes goes on to say that he has identified three common sources of crippling shame: secular culture, graceless religion, and unaccepting parents. "Secular culture tells us a person must look good, feel good, and make good. Graceless religion tells us we must follow the letter of the rules, and failure will bring eternal rejection. Unaccepting parents – 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself!' – convince us we will never meet their approval. Every institution, it seems, runs on ungrace and its insistence that we *earn* our way." (emphasis mine)¹

Yancey continues:

"(In life) we are accustomed to finding a catch in every promise we hear, but Jesus' stories of extravagant Grace include no catch, no loophole, nothing disqualifying us from God's love. Each has at its core an ending too good to be true – or so good that it must be true.

"How different are these stories from my own childhood notions about God: a God who forgives, yes, but reluctantly, (and only) after making the penitent squirm. I imagined God as a distant thundering figure who prefers fear and respect to love. But Jesus tells instead of a father publicly humiliating himself by rushing out to embrace a son who has squandered half the family fortune. There is no solemn lecture from the Father, no 'I hope you've

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learned your lesson!' Instead Jesus tells of the father's exhilaration – 'This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found' – and then adds the buoyant phrase, 'they began to make merry.'

"What Jesus is saying in effect was: 'Do you want to know what it feels like to be God when one of those two-legged humans pays attention to me? It feels like I just reclaimed my most valuable possession, which I had given up for lost.' To God himself, it feels like the discovery of a lifetime."² What an amazing God! What amazing Grace!

Philip Yancey makes Grace even easier to understand:

"Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more – no amount of spiritual calisthenics and renunciations, no amount of knowledge gained from seminaries and divinity schools, no amount of crusading on behalf of righteous causes. **And Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less** – no

amount of racism or pride or pornography or adultery or even murder. Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love."³

Romans 8:1-2 sums it up beautifully:

"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because *through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*" (emphasis mine)⁴

The law itself has been met and nailed to the cross with Jesus. It no longer has any power over us. There is nothing left for us to do. We are free to be in relationship with God and He takes great joy in us. Isn't that amazing?

You'll find the beautiful story of Amazing Grace threaded throughout the Bible. Treasure that story, then wrap your mind around this: God loves you so much and there's not a thing you can do about it!

Hallelujah, let's party!

¹ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1997, pg. 36

² *ibid*, pg. 52

³ *ibid*, pg. 70

⁴ New International Life Application Bible, NIV, Tyndale House Publishers, 1991

By Sherry Brown@2008 FOCUS Ministries, Inc.

Letters/E-Mail

Dear FOCUS,

Your latest e-mail, made me cry, but not tears of fear, or sadness etc. It was more like a letting go, a release, a refreshing kind. I have kept your e-mail and have read and re-read it the past two weeks.

I haven't been physically hurt the past 2-3 weeks, so that's a good thing I guess. He still hurts me with his words and ways of being and expressing himself. But I guess I'll survive.

Paula, thank you for helping me during my crises panic mode, I've never been the type to ask for help, so even writing the first e-mail was hard. I'm doing a little better and I guess my mind is a little clearer. I always thought of God being so far away, looking down on me, checking for every time I did something wrong, disapproving of everything I did.

I never thought of God as someone who loved me... It's actually feels good. I keep telling myself it's true...hard to believe, after years of thinking differently.

—Email



Words That Heal

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

John 14:9, 12-14 NIV

FOCUS Support Groups

- **Brandon, FL**
The second and fourth Saturday of each month
- **Eustis, FL**
Saturdays 10 a.m. to Noon.
- **Savannah, GA**
Saturdays.
- **Glen Ellyn, IL**
Third Monday of every month
- **Wheaton, IL**
The first and third Saturday at 9:30 a.m.
- **Wood Dale, IL**
Second Thursday at 7:00 - 9:30 p.m.
- **Lexington, KY**
Saturdays at 9 a.m.
- **Akron, OH**
The second and fourth Thursday of every month at 6:30 p.m.
- **Findlay, OH** The second Thursday of every month 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
- **Olmsted Falls, OH**
Wednesdays at 7 p.m.
- **Felton, PA** The second Thursday of each month 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
- **Knoxville, TN**
Tuesday at 7 p.m.
- **Lynnwood, WA**
Wednesdays 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

If you are interested in information about a particular support group or would like to start a support group in your area, contact Paula Silva at 630-595-7023 or paula@focusministries1.org..

What Wrapping is on Your Package of God?

Women in destructive relationships struggle with many issues. Trust is one of them. Deception, lies, and control have eroded away the intimacy of the partnership. This lack of trust can also affect their faith in God. ***“If I cannot trust my partner who I can see, how can I trust God who I cannot see?”*** is a question on their minds.

Since they cannot fix their relationship, they often possess a fear that God will look at them as a failure, withdraw His love, and abandon them.

This causes women to lose hope. Depression and despair encompass them. During these times of crisis, they will either run to God anyway falling into His arms experiencing His grace and love or they will create a wall of distance asking, ***“How could a loving God let this happen?”*** Their decision is often based on their concept of God that has been formed by their experiences over time.

Generally four basic concepts of God are below the surface of women’s stories. Imprinted on their heart may be a combination of more than one viewpoint depending on the circumstances at the time.



Hell, Fire, and Brimstone God

- A God who condemns
- A raging God who waits for me to slip up and zap me
- A God who treats me as a puppet pulling my strings and taking away my freedom of choice
- A God who chooses whether to give me a good or bad day.



The Genie God

- A God who grants three wishes when I rub the lamp
- A God who comes at my command when I want Him to and does what I want
- A God who grants all my desires when I petition Him in prayer
- A God who makes **my** life work according to **my** plans



The Slot Machine God

- I put my great works in the slot and pull the handle, and blessings pour out.
- God is supposed to bless me for all the great things I have done for Him.



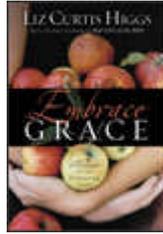
Jack-in-the-Box God

- I only let God out when I need His help
- I stuff Him back in the box and take over control of my life until the next time something goes wrong.

In three out of the four concepts of God we maintain control and lose sight of the sovereignty of God. God desires for us to truly know Him. It is in knowing Jesus, His son, that the glory of the Lord is revealed.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14 NIV

Book Review



Embrace Grace by Liz Curtis Higgs

If you've ever struggled with shame, guilt, depression, or feeling unloved by God, this book is for you! For those who feel like they don't belong, who lack faith, who have a past they are ashamed of . . . or for those who just need to feel loved and accepted, this book will feel like a big hug from God as He embraces you in arms of grace and forgiveness.

Our ministry is about hope . . . and that is what you will find in this book.

Author, Editor and Publisher: Paula Silva
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The mission of FOCUS Newsletter
is to encourage women
who are struggling in difficult circumstances
to find strength and hope in Jesus Christ.

Funding: FOCUS Ministries is a not-for-profit organization. This ministry is funded by contributions and grants. **If you would like to help us minister to hurting women through the distribution of printed materials, support groups, workshops, and financial assistance to victims of domestic violence, please send your gift to FOCUS Ministries, Inc., P. O. Box 2014, Elmhurst, IL 60126.** A tax-deductible receipt will be provided for all contributions.

FOCUS Ministries (and all individuals affiliated therewith) disclaims any personal liability for information presented within this newsletter or in seminars, workshops, and support group meetings. You should always consult a professional for medical, psychological, legal, financial, or biblical advice.

YOU – are GOD!!

By Gail DeBackere

O Father—You never sleep!
You are with me when I go to bed—
You are with me when I awake.

The LION of Judah!
THE ONE TRUE GOD –
The Great “I AM”!!

You are God of the night –
You are God of the day...

God of all hearts –
Whether hard or soft

God of all that is –
God of all that will be –
God of all that was –
GOD - for All to see!

God – whether people believe
God – though many are deceived.
God – though the earth be cast into the
Sea!

Judger of Sin
But God of REPRIEVE!

God of ALL COMFORT
AVENGER of the OPRESSED.

God – come as a BABY
The SACRIFICIAL LAMB—

The LION of Judah!
THE ONE TRUE GOD –
The Great “I AM”!!

Hidden Abuse

Anyone who mentions the words domestic violence automatically thinks of the various forms of physical abuse which are visible to the naked eye. Below the surface of those wounds though is a crushed heart and a remnant of an image bearer of God.

Often in the Christian community the devastation of verbal and emotional abuse is minimized or denied as part of domestic violence. Yet it is those invisible, deeper wounds that are the most destructive to our spirit. No antiseptic or bandaids can repair. They leave messages about ourselves which are lies from the Evil One to keep us trapped in our perception of ourselves which can prevent us from becoming all God intended us to be.

This was true in Cindy's life. Cindy anxiously looked through her purse to locate her cell phone as it rang incessantly. Looking at the caller ID, she shuddered as she answered. The voice on the other end was her husband demanding to know who she was with, where she was, and what she was doing. "Why did he call her every couple hours?", she asked herself. She knew if she did not answer she would encounter flaming arrows of her husband's rage that would pierce her heart.

The cell phone has become an electronic tracking device for the abuser. The addition of GPS

systems on these phones has placed an additional way to maintain control and keep her from reaching out for help.

When Cindy returned home, she incurred her husband's wrath because she did not answer her cell phone quick enough. The rage increased as she handed him the grocery receipt. The verbal barrage continued into the evening. When bedtime came she chose to sleep on the couch hoping that her abuser would calm down. As she drifted off into sleep, she was startled an hour later by her husband raised voice ringing in her ears as the demeaning words fell from his lips. She covered her ears and hoped he would return to their bedroom.

When all was quiet sleep returned. In her dream she was falling, but this was really not a dream. Her husband had returned a couple of hours later and pushed her off the couch. This pattern continued all night long. As she arose in the morning, fatigue engulfed her.

Her husband was already up demanding his breakfast. He continued by humiliating her appearance as the children entered the kitchen. He called her "airhead" and "the worse excuse for a mother" all in earshot of the children. As she prepared breakfast, she questioned herself. "Am I all he said I am? Maybe what happened last night was all a dream. After all, he is a respected elder of our church."

Everyday women like Cindy



experience the destructiveness of verbal and emotional abuse. **Name calling, demeaning words, accounting of her time and money spent, sleep deprivation, and humiliation intertwined with crazymaking** are only a few examples that fit into this category of abuse.

Consider this definition of emotional abuse stated by Leslie Vernick in her book, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship: Seeing It! Stopping It! Surviving It!* ***If you're in a relationship that lacks mutual caring, safety, honesty, or respect, and you regularly feel anxiety, fear, shame, anger, or despair, then your emotions are warning you that you are in a destructive relationship.***

In the book, *Boundaries in Marriage* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, it states, ***When two people are free to disagree, they are free to love. When they are not free, they live in fear and love dies.***

Verbal and emotional abuse is sin for it destroys God's image bearer.

Prayer Requests & Urgent Needs

Urgent Needs:

- Professional **grant writer and fundraiser**
- Selling of KY house
- Donations have dropped severely because of the economy, but contacts have increased. Presently we cannot meet all the needs because of lack of funds.

Praises:

- Women are growing in their relationship with the Lord through the help they have received from our ministry.
- Two more FOCUS support groups have started

since our Train the Trainer in October, 2008.

- God has opened more doors of opportunity to address domestic violence in the Christian community.
- We have partnered with Marie Barlow Martin, Christian songwriter/singer, to address the issue of domestic violence.

Prayer Requests:

- Pray for the development of our teen/tween program and curriculum

- Pray for woman and families who contact our FOCUS Women's Center
- Pray for individuals, churches, and businesses to commit to **monthly giving**.
- Pray for all the **FOCUS support group leaders** in the U.S
- Pray for **property** near Elmhurst, IL to be donated for our FOCUS Women's Center. We have out grown our facility.
- Pray for **property** to be donated for Women's Retreat Center.
- Pray for **houses** in IL, to be donated for use as transitional homes.
- Pray for funding to provide **scholarships** for women who want to become support group leaders to attend our Train the Trainer seminar.
- Pray for more **invitations** from churches to train pastors, staff, and congregations about domestic violence.



Upcoming Events

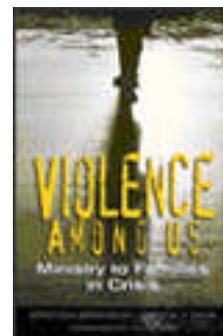
- **Nov. 1, 2008**—Love Doesn't Hurt Seminar, College of DuPage, Student Resource Center, Glen Ellyn, IL
- **Nov. 14, 2008**—Behind Closed Doors, Emmanuel bible Church, Berwyn, IL
- **March, 2009**—Train the Trainer, Oakbrook Terrace, IL
- **Sept. 16-19, 2009**—Exhibitor at the American Association of Christian Counselors World Conference, Nashville, TN
- **★Oct. 17, 2009**—Restoring the Hope Fundraising Luncheon, Diplomat West, Elmhurst, IL, Guest speaker, **Leslie Vernick**, Singer, **Marie Barlow Martin**, **Anita Lustrea**, host of Midday Connection, and **Rachel Mohn**, www.panicdots.net

If you would like the FOCUS team to come to your church for a women's retreat ("A Woman's Journey To God"), seminar on domestic violence, or other speaking engagement, please contact us as soon as possible as our calendar for 2009 is quickly filling up!

Contact Paula at 630-595-7023 or contactus@focusministries1.org.



www.MarieBarlow.com



Paula Silva, Coauthor

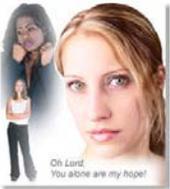


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Endorsement:

These women are called, prepared, and surrendered to their crucial ministry. The stamp of God is on their lives and work. It's my prayer that God will use their gifts across the world to draw thousands of women to the hope that Christ provides. This is one ministry I'm sold on.

Dr. Larry Crabb, New Way Ministries

"I commend FOCUS Ministries for helping the church in its battle against domestic abuse. After seeing the response to a message I preached on this topic, I've come to realize that domestic abuse is much more common in our churches than we would like to admit. The materials and interaction I've had with FOCUS Ministries was helpful and very much needed. I pray that God will use FOCUS to awaken all of us to the reality of abuse as well as bring hope and healing to the victims.

Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer

Senior Pastor, The Moody Church, Chicago, IL

O Lord, You Alone Are My Hope! Psalm 71:5 NLT