

## **Stand Out**

**By Gemma Neill**

I remember when I was about 9 years old in school, I really didn't mind standing out and standing up for what I believed in. I went to a small village school and we just had one small field out the back where all the children went to play at lunch time so 4 year olds right through to 11 year olds. And it was really annoying because there was a group of the older boys who would play football and take up the whole field. Girls couldn't play. The younger kids weren't allowed to play. Just this group of older boys. All the other kids would be around the periphery of the field because there was no room left to play because of the football match and even there you would frequently get hit in the head by their stupid football. And so, I decided to make a stand. So I wrote a letter of complaint to the headmaster asking him to do something about this issue. He told me how much he appreciate my letter blah blah blah but nothing changed. So I had to move to stage 2. I co-ordinated a 'sit down'. I spent a few days before recruiting people to my cause of getting football banned. And then, on the chosen day, I told all the recruits that when the whistle went to call us all to go in for lessons, just to sit down on the field and refuse to move. And so we did. And football was banned for the rest of that academic year. I didn't mind standing out and standing up for what I believed in.

It's funny but I think something has happened as I got older, standing out, although it sounds cool and worthwhile and like the right thing to do, the reality of what standing out means isn't always something we want.

We can be so scared to stand out. So aware of ourselves, worried about what people will think of us - for those of us in the room that are Christians we can worry that we will come across as weird or that we are offensive or that we are opinionated, arrogant, judgemental, brain washed.

I believe that in our current cultural context we have never been more afraid of standing out. So much so that even in penning this message I struggled and battled to figure out how to say what I feel led to say in a way that won't offend anyone, or come across wrong, or put anyone's back up! But I'm just going to say it anyway (that 9 year old coming back!). I believe that in this era of tolerance, of not wanting to rock the boat, speak out of turn, we live afraid to stand out. We are living in times when there's an expectation that we have to accept everything, that anything goes, 'if it's good for you and works for you, then it's fine by me'. But perhaps it goes even further, and that in societies bid to be tolerant and accepting of all, it's actually going full circle back to being intolerant? Intolerant of other people's views and opinions and beliefs because, well, I don't agree with your belief on that matter so therefore you are no longer allowed to express it. AHHHH! It's so complicated and confusing. No wonder we don't want to stand out!!

Yet Jesus has told us that we are supposed to be 'salt and light' in the world, standing out for Him, having an influence. Where do we go from here? How do we stand out for Jesus in this era and context of intolerant tolerance?!

### **John 1 NIV**

**1 In the beginning was the Word (this is talking about Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome[a] it.**

**14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

**16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**

Beautiful passage. Let's come back to our tension...how are we supposed to live stand out lives in the era we find ourselves in, in this age of tolerant intolerance? We find the answer in the Word, we find the answer in Jesus, everything always comes back to Jesus, we always need to keep the focus of our lives as Jesus plus nothing. Everything always only Jesus. John teaches us here that Jesus is full of grace and truth, and that right there is what we need to hear. **How do we live for Jesus and have influence in this current cultural context? We need to live with grace and truth.** Jesus was full of grace and truth and we, as His followers, need to live with grace and truth. This passage helps us get a better understanding of the tension we find ourselves in.

Sadly, parts of the church (global) and some Christians have come down to heavy on the truth side of things. The church has been so hardline on this is how you should live your life, this is how you should behave, do this, don't do that, if you lie you fry, hell, fire and damnation, sort your life out before you come to our church, it's been the voice pointing out everything wrong in society. And sadly, this has resulted in so many people seeing church and Christians as judgemental and exclusive. And I think this is what we worry about when it comes to standing out for Jesus. We worry that perhaps people will see us as this kind of person and we don't want to be this kind of person right?

Because if as a church we are sooo truth focused then what we will end up with is rules upon rules upon rules and those rules just crush people, they reject people, the exclude people, the make people resentful and ultimately they cause people to rebel.

The other side is sometimes, if we don't want to be truth over there, we head on over here to grace. Grace that says we can do whatever we want because Jesus will forgive us, Jesus loves me just as I am.

But the problem when we live over here without any truth is that we miss out on experiencing for ourselves the amazing life God has planned for us. We have a little bit of Jesus in our life that makes us feel good and loved (and oh how much He does love you) and we have our favourite feel good bible verse like 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me Phil 4:13', but we live in this place of just grace where I can do whatever I want. Whereas actually God wants to bring a bit of truth into your life so you can experience His life transforming power at work in you, shaping you and refining you to become His best version of you.

Jesus isn't the BALANCE of grace and truth. He is FULL of grace and FULL of truth. Jesus is full of truth that will confront, truth that can be controversial, truth that makes you feel uncomfortable. Yet at the same time Jesus is full of grace. Grace that forgives and empowers and guides and restores.

Where do you get your understanding of truth from? The Barna institute in America did some major research into this and they found out the most common places people get their understanding of truth is based on:

1. How it *feels* to me

So much of what people believe to be true is based on their feelings. "Well it feels right to me", "I don't feel so sure about that". But the problem with this is that our feelings are not a reliable measure of life. Our feelings can be up and down, feelings come and feelings...go, if some of us in the room are honest our feelings are even affected by the food we have or haven't eaten that day! #hangry

2. What *others* are saying and what I know they would be happy to hear

We can also base our understanding of truth based on what other people are saying - especially those close to us..."my Mum always said XYZ, well my friend shared an article about this on facebook..." What's even sadder is that the research showed that so many people base their truth on what they know other people around them would be happy to hear...

3. What I would *like/wish* to be true

My instagram post that if you eat chocolate while reading the Bible the calories don't count. Now I wish this were true. But if I take my wish and make it into a truth...i'm going to be putting on some weight!

We need to seek to be people who live under and by the truth of Jesus. Not what other people say or expect but on what Jesus has said, not what my feelings dictate but what the word of God says, not on what I wish was true but by having faith in who God is and what He has said. My truth comes from Jesus, my truth is Jesus.

Jesus is FULL of truth. And sometimes we can struggle with this. The truth can be hard to hear. But we don't need to be afraid of truth because truth is actually there for our benefit.

Illustration: It's like the world is blind drunk but it's angry at Jesus for stopping us getting behind the steering wheel of a car.

Truth isn't something that we need to be afraid of. Sometimes, yes it may be hard to hear, but the reality is Jesus's truth is there to transform us. Truth isn't something Jesus wants to use to control you and stifle you and take the life out of you. On the contrary, John 8:32 records that **'the truth will set you free!'**

So when it comes to making a decision in life, when it comes to some of your behaviours, when asking yourself the questions 'what do I believe about this', what's my opinion on this ask yourself a simple question... 'what does Jesus say about this?' and let that be your truth because my truth comes from Jesus.

The final thing I want to highlight today from this passage we have been looking at is the order which I believe is intentional. John doesn't write that Jesus was full of truth and grace. He says Jesus was full of grace and truth. The order matters.

As God deals with us He does so with grace and love and acceptance before He guides and instructs us into a better life with His truth. Just look at the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8. Jesus looks at this woman and says “Neither do I condemn you \*GRACE\*, go and sin no more \*TRUTH\*”.

When Jesus tells us the truth He doesn't leave us on our own to then deal with it. He doesn't say “You're a sinner sort your own issues out”. He offers us a way out. In fact Jesus IS the way out. **“Jesus said I am the way, the truth and the life” John 14:6.**

As we look to interact with the world around us we need to do as Jesus did and be people full of grace, led by grace, grace first, but not afraid to speak transformational truth.

We can only stand out if we know what we are standing on. We can only stand out if we know WHO we are standing on. Jesus is my truth.