

Series: **GOD...BIGGER THAN MY BOX!—September 2, 2007**

## FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH

John 8:1-10

### I. INTRO

- A. In October of 1991, surgeons performed a 6 hour surgery on a woman at Stamford University Medical Center to remove a tumor from her abdomen. What made this surgery so different is that the tumor weighed 303 pounds and was 3 feet in diameter. -Besides raising the weirdness quotient of the world a little, you've gotta ask, why would someone wait long enough to grow a 300 pound tumor before even being examined? Apparently it was fear. Fear of the truth.

-But in her case, even though the truth was bad--that she had the biggest tumor in the world, the **truth** was her best friend. In fact, it was ONLY the **truth** that could give her back her life!

1. Anyone here, beside her—beside me--who's ever been afraid to hear the truth? A somber looking doctor walks into the examining room with a clipboard; the principal of your child's school calls and says, "Can you come right away?"; a spouse or close friend says, "There's something we need to talk about"; your boss says, "I'd like to meet you in my office in five minutes."  
-Feelings of dread come over us. Our minds begin to catastrophize about what the news is.

2. Our **biggest** problem many times is not truth; it's truth without grace. No compassion. No hope. Hearts are torn out, people are voted off the island. Kids futures are totally altered, businesses drop employees, men and women ditch their spouses, patients are told they're going to die—with no grace. Real people with souls, feelings, hopes and dreams are left bleeding on the floor with, "Sorry. That's just the way it is. Good luck." That's life in a graceless world.

- B. The Bible makes it clear that God **IS Truth**. Always. He is totally incapable of lying or distorting truth. What He has said in the Bible is **absolutely right and absolutely true**. Like it or not, what God says is our reality check on the truth of living this life—and living in eternity. But sometimes, because of our graceless world, the fact that God is **truth** doesn't bring people a lot of comfort.

-So, there is a companion fact to God's truth. He's full of **grace** and **truth**. He never uses truth to crush or devastate people--leave them smashed on the floor.

1. Being full of truth **and** full of grace changes everything. It does. Let me illustrate it like this.

\*Full of truth says, "You've got a 303 pound tumor that is sucking the life out of you, incapacitating you, creating incredible pain. Full of grace says, "We can do surgery--and you can have your life back!"

\*Full of truth says, "Your jealousy is killing you--and it's destroying your relationships one by one. Full of grace says, "If you will come to me, I can forgive you, heal the part of you that feels small and inadequate, and restore what you're losing if you will cooperate with My Spirit."

2. Truth by itself can leave you bloody and destroyed. Truth can wreck any hope you have for the future. Truth can be cold, sterile, mechanical--it can whack pieces off your life and leave you as an emotional amputee with no wheelchair. But **grace** brings warmth, love, healing--and **hope**. And God is full of truth--**and** full of **grace**. AMAZING grace. This is the One we serve.

## II. TRUTH AND GRACE; PAIN AND HEALING

- A. It is extremely important for us to understand that God is **full** of truth. When truth becomes partial--it's dangerous. It really ceases to be truth at that point.
  1. So, I want to ask you: Do you truly **believe** that there **is** absolute truth—and that it finds its source in God? That what He says about life, about relationships, about sexual behavior, about living beyond ourselves, about justice, families, about you, about spiritual reality is **not** just “a perspective,” but totally and unfailingly true? -All through the Bible, God is revealed as being the ultimate truth-teller. God has no need to tell anything **but** the truth. He tells us the truth out of love and compassion.
    - a. For example, God gave the 10 commandments, not as rules to cramp our style and ruin our day, but as **guardrails** for life. Anyone know why they put guardrails on a highway? It's to **save lives!**

-I've told you about my encounter with a guardrail. I was mad at the damage the guardrail did to my car.  
That is, until I got out and realized that 10 feet beyond the guardrail was a 50 foot embankment--straight down.

-The 10 commandments are guardrails that are **built into life on this planet**. They are intended to keep us protect us—and because they come from God, not humans, they will never change. Some people ram into these guardrails—look at the damage and say, “Man, that **hurt!** I don't want to do that again!” That's the **smart** response!
    - b. But directionally challenged people look at these guardrails and say, "These are true for other people--but **not me!** I think if I hit them hard enough, I can break through to freedom!" So, they back up, aim their life at the guardrails and hit the gas pedal.  
-And all they really do is wreck their lives--sometimes to the point where life doesn't even work any more.
  2. Why do you think God has gone to so much trouble to tell us the truth—when most people aren't even interested in hearing it? Think He's a control freak—or some kind of Cosmic Prude trying to keep fun-loving people from having a good time? God tells us the truth because he **IS** truth—and because He loves us.

-But sometimes the truth that hurts; sometimes it comforts; sometimes it heals--but it's **always** accurate and unfailing. And with the truth comes **grace**. Grace is always waiting for truth to finish it's work!

- B. John, one of those who knew Jesus best, says this about Jesus Christ:  
**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 TNIV).**
1. If you watch Jesus' life, that's what you see. Grace...and truth. Probably the most dramatic picture of that is found in a story the same author tells about stone-throwers and grace-givers. Let me read the story.
- Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.**
- When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more (John 8:1-11 NLT)."**
- a. The whole scene is like a rerun from the Jerry Springer Show. To understand this story, you have to know that this was a trap set by the religious professionals.
- The woman they dragged in was the bait. Jesus was cornered! If he condemned her to die according to the law, he'd be in huge trouble with the Romans—and all the people who saw Him as compassionate. If He didn't, they'd condemn him as being soft on the authority of the Torah.
- But as the leaders badger Jesus for an answer, he just bends down, stoops over, and starts writing in the dust that covered the white marble of the temple court.
- b. By the way, want to know what He was writing? Nobody knows! Early traditions tell us that he was writing the names of the people holding rocks in their hands--and then writing their sins under their names. That makes total sense, given what happens next.
- Jesus straightens up and says, "Yep, she oughta be stoned! Let's do it this way. Let's have the person without sin throw the first stone!" Then he bent

down and continued writing. And the rock-throwers just melted away--the older ones first.

- c. When the last rock-thrower mumbled and dropped his weapon, Jesus turns to the woman, still trembling, still humiliated, still there. He asks, almost in mock surprise, "Hey! Where'd everyone go? **Has no one condemned you?** She said, **No one, sir.**

-Then Jesus, Son of God—the only One qualified to throw a rock, says these amazing words. **Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and LEAVE YOUR LIFE OF SIN.**

2. Do you see it? **Full of TRUTH and full of GRACE.** The truth about her life was obvious. Jesus told her that she needed to **leave** her life of sin--not excuse it because she was trapped. And then there was grace. Forgiveness.
- a. This story is fascinating in how it portrays the root meaning of the word **grace**: Love that **bends**. Love that **stoops**. That's exactly what Jesus did. This passage clearly says, "**Jesus BENT DOWN**" and "**..again he STOOPED DOWN.**" He is the **God of the second chance.**"
- b. This happens all through Jesus' teaching—all through his life. The Prodigal Son got sick of life on the farm and told his Dad to give him his share of the whole thing. Then he **wasted** the whole bankroll on parties and prostitutes and booze? Tough times hit, and he winds up feeding pigs? That this should happen to a good Jewish boy!"  
-But there's a moment of truth. He's humiliated his Dad, burned down through all his money, he's starving—knee-deep in used pig feed—and the thought occurs to him, "This is not the life I'd dreamed I'd have. Maybe if I went back home I could find mercy. Maybe I could find a way back to my Dad."
- And, of course, His Dad doesn't just receive his scruffy looking kid back as a servant—he runs to meet him, reinstates him as His Son, and throws a party because his son had come home. **Amazing** grace. **Reckless** grace!
- c. This incredible combination comes up again and again in Jesus life—full of truth, and full of grace. In fact, Jesus' life ends on a cross—offering grace to the criminal dying next to Him—and offering forgiveness to the ones who nailed him here.
- d. It's pretty easy, among religions especially, to find truth without grace. What's clear about Jesus and the story of the woman caught in adultery is that truth **alone** turns religious people into rock-throwers. It leaves people the people it's inflicted on broken and bloody; and it leaves the people who throw the rocks feeling quite spiritual. To people who are excellent at confessing the sins of others, Jesus says, "Why don't you put down your rock?"
- C. I'd like to summarize the role God's truth and grace play in our lives--because that's so critical to understand.

1. This **building block** represents the first aspect of God's truth. It is a foundation for life. Jesus said, "If you don't build your life on a foundation of truth—it will crash when the storms of life come!" Beach houses are pretty cool—but have you ever seen one after a hurricane. If there's nothing solid and unmovable under it that it's bolted to--the storm will tear it apart. Piece by piece. And the storm **will** come. That's **truth**.

-I have a very important question for you. Putting your faith in Jesus means believing that, not only is He God, not only is He brilliant—He's **right**. About everything. What he said about money, about lust, about worry, about judging, about—everything. **Do you believe that?** And is it reflected in your life?

-We live in a world that sees truth as **Movenpick**--kind of a smorgasbord thing where you go around and pick the truths you **like** from The Secret, from New Age, from Buddhism. Jesus said that His teaching was the foundation for life—and you either believe that or you don't.

-Is His truth tough? Sometimes. But it is always accompanied by grace. Power to change. Forgiveness.. Compassion. Hope. Something you won't find anywhere else in any other system or book.

2. God's truth can also be represented with this **alarm clock**. Have you ever been having a really cool dream--you've just sunk a 40 foot putt, all your friends are text messaging you telling you how great you are, your three kids have cleaned their rooms and been respectful for a **whole day**. Then the alarm goes off. **Reality check**.

- a. One day, Jesus' disciples were in the middle of this incredible narcissistic fantasy.

About how, in Jesus' kingdom, they would get comfy, jewel-encrusted thrones with exotic foods to each and lots of people to boss around. **Then** the alarm clock went off—**Ehhhhht! Poof!** Jesus said, "By the way, the Son of Man is going to be completely humiliated, suffer, and die on a cross." And they were pretty ticked off.

- b. Sometimes we get this distorted view of what following Jesus Christ is supposed to be like. That life centers around our comfort and convenience. That when trouble hits, prayer is like dialing 911. The receptionist in Heaven buzzes God--and Heaven's EMT team comes screaming in to help our kids be successful, our life be more pain-free—and our room-mates be less selfish.

-The **truth** alarm says that God is **always** at work—but it may be in invisible ways, or in ways we don't want. He might want to change **us**—and not **everybody else!** **"Gasp! No! Say it isn't so!"** Sometimes sickness ends in death. Sometimes really unfair things happen--and God just says, **trust ME!**

-But with **truth** comes grace. Patience to wait when we don't **want** to wait! Power to persevere—and change. He's **full** of truth and **full** of grace.

3. Sometimes truth is like this **scalpel**. Listen to what the Bible says about its role in our lives:

**For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword [any scalpel], it PENETRATES even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12 TNIV).**

- a. **OW!** Sounds bloody. Painful. **Sharper, penetrate, dividing bones and marrow, judges!** What goes through your mind when you see someone in a mask coming at you with one of these? I want to run!  
-But remember, it's not a .44 magnum, a butcher knife or a guillotine. Scalpels—cut for a **purpose—to heal**. Even when they amputate--it's to preserve life. Scalpels repair heart damage, take out infected appendices, remove blood clots. And God is an amazing surgeon. The best!
- b. God has used the scalpel so many times on my soul, it looks like a roadmap!

-The first memory of the **many** cuts I've had was the night my Dad sat me down and warned me about my stubbornness and rebellion. He said, "Ken, you'd better listen!" I wasn't **about** to listen—until I had this profound sense that God was in that room. I'll tell you—the hair on the back of my neck stood at attention. I broke. I have no idea where I would've turned up if God hadn't brought the scalpel in.

-When I was starting out in ministry, the Senior Pastor confronted me about the unteachable, defensive spirit he saw in me. I hated it—**resented** it--but it was the scalpel. And there was the day Lori confronted me about my workaholicism--and how it was affecting her and the children. Where would I be if I hadn't had surgery? Truth does the surgery; and **then...and ONLY then**--grace that heals. Truth...and grace. And if we refuse to hear the truth, we can never find the grace. It's a package deal.

### III. GIVERS AND RECEIVERS OF TRUTH...AND GRACE

- A. What would it look like for you and me to be **full** of truth and **full** of grace? Most people don't carry truth and grace in equal proportions. People who are weighted too much on the truth side tend to just dump the truth on people--and sometimes, when they're done, there's a lot of blood on the floor and no ambulance.  
-Others are weighted too much on the grace side—where some of the truth—the last 10%--gets left out. Sometimes to avoid conflict, or out of fear of hurting someone people—**we**--gloss over the truth. Instead of telling the truth, we smile, nod and chirp, "I'm okey-dokey—you're okey-dokey!"
1. Let's just kinda do a poll here and see where you are. How many of you think you might tend to err on the **full of truth** side--but the grace side is a little thin? You just tend to let it hang out--figuring you can mop up later? How many of you know someone quite well who's like that, and you'd like to tell the truth for them, too?

-How many of you would tend to err on the **full of grace** side--sometimes to the point where truth gets obscured?

How many of you **know** someone like that, but you'd never be rude enough to tell them cause you'd hurt their feelings?

2. God has called you and me to tell the truth. To be full of truth. All the time. You're thinking, "**Yes! I've been waiting for permission to nail them!**" Slow down there cowboy! Guess who we tell the truth about **first?** It's not someone else. It's ourselves. The Bible says:  
***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9 TNIV).***

-The word **confess** means to **say the same thing as someone**. In this case, to confess our sins means to agree with God's diagnosis of our problem. And **then** we find grace. He is faithful, just—and He'll forgive—cleanse.

The Bible—the truth God tells—is described as a **mirror** not a microscope or telescope. A mirror is a tool to...what...look at truth about **me!**

- a. Let me tell you something that people who are weighted toward truth-telling or weighted toward grace-giving both tend to do. It's to **not see the truth about themselves**. God speaks. God shines the light. We say, "Who, **me?** NOT ME! Other people are like that, but **not me!**" It's like our immense egos can't handle the truth and admit, "God, You are right and I am wrong. In fact, I'm headed straight for the guardrail!"

-It's pretty easy to have a vision for everyone else's life. How **they** should be doing the things **we're** passionate about.

But when God calls us on our judging, our gossiping, our blame shifting, our greed, our unforgiveness—and says, "You need to change! This condition is life-threatening—sinful!" our temptation is to close our eyes and hold our ears like little kids. "I'm fine. But the rest of the **church** sure is screwed up!"

-And eventually, our soul shrivel and our conscience hardens. We can't look God in the eye--because God is **full of truth**. And we aren't.

- b. Part of telling God the truth is telling ourselves the truth. Any of you know someone who hasn't really told themselves the truth in years? We call it **living in denial.**

-I worked for a year in a nuclear power plant in the security division. This took place in another life, actually. Security people usually have **way** too much time on their hands. So, one night a bunch of us in the main security building were philosophizing on some of the recent research about how damaging smoking is to your health.

-This one friend of mine, Bill, squinted, took a long drag on his cigarette, blew the smoke out the side of his mouth, and said, "I think all these warnings about smoking are a bunch of used bull-feed (not his exact words). I don't think these things hurt you--I think that's just government propaganda."

-Well, to admit **truth** would be extremely inconvenient for Bill--because it's really hard to quit smoking. It's **easier** to live in denial. How many of you think it's healthier to live in denial? So. **SO!** Lets not be stupid about this. Let's at least have the courage to **tell ourselves the truth!**

3. And we need to tell the truth to others. Being full of truth means being a **truth-hearer** and a **truth-teller**. This is hard work. If you're weighted on the side of grace-giving--sometimes at the expense of truth-telling, this is heart-wrenching stuff.

- a. Some people think, "I want people to like me--and they won't like me if I tell them what I really think and how I really feel." Or, "If I tell the truth, it may jeopardize my relationship."

-And I can fully identify with that. I want people to like me. I don't **like** to upset apple carts! But I have learned the hard way--and I'm **still learning**--that you never do someone a favor by withholding truth. Truth is their best friend.

-Some time ago I was reading in the sticky pages of Leviticus—and among all the passages on mildew and skin disease—found this verse:

**Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt (Leviticus 19:17b TNIV).**

We need to tell the truth. We need to do it in a timely way. The Bible says to **tell the truth IN LOVE**. That is—carefully!

Where we ask questions and don't just back up the truck and dump our load.

- b. Now, some of you meat-eating truth-tellers are saying, "Yes! I **knew** I was right on this. Just cut out the cancer! Take a swig of whiskey, bite a piece of wood, and whack off the diseased leg!"

-If I'm describing you, you need to remember that Jesus was full of truth **and FULL of GRACE**. The Pharisees were full of truth. They just didn't have any grace. Truth points, judges and condemns. Ever heard someone talk about "cheap grace?" There is no such thing. Grace was Heaven's most expensive gift--it cost God His Son. It's **grace** that's called amazing. And when there's no grace, truth just butchers, cripples and kills.

-I want you to think about something. If God were to sit you down in front of a 90 minute DVD that pointed out precisely how **far** you are from His plan—and the effects of the hurt you've caused by actions you can't even **remember**—think you could take it? I couldn't. God does something **much** better. In **grace** He gives us as much truth as we can handle without being overwhelmed—suffocating under it all.

-God's message to us as a community of faith is that, like Him, we are called to be **full** of truth, and **full** of grace. As a community--we need to think carefully about what we say.

For us as individuals, that will mean asking ourselves—**before** we dump stuff out.

-Let me suggest some: "Am I telling the truth in love? Genuine, grace-filled love? Am I preserving the community or destroying it? Is this truth—or is it my opinion about the truth? Am I getting a little charge out of knowing that what I say is going to make this person bleed and hurt—cause they've ticked me off, or I don't like something about them? How would **Jesus** show grace to this person I want to clobber with a rock?

-Telling someone the truth is **never** enough. We need to show grace. Full of **grace** and full of **truth**.

B. Friends, when we will tell the truth--when we will admit the truth, even if it isn't very attractive--then we can find grace.

1. Grace is an amazing thing. I think one of the reasons why we get so weird about hearing the truth and admitting the truth is because we really don't understand grace.

-That even when we've been dragged naked out of a humiliating mess—caught red-handed—Jesus does what we would never expect; He stoops, bends—and offers something found no where else in our world. Grace. When we're suffering the consequences of our sin—pinned, immobilized—to a bloody piece of wood—Jesus is on the cross next to us. He offers grace—and life.

a. I want to ask a tough question this morning. Have you been fighting off truth?

Shoving the mirror away, or ignoring the truth in some area of your life? God's there—but He has your handprint on His face—cause you've been shoving Him away. He's been speaking about the kind of stuff you've been looking at, or the way you've been judging others, or some jealousy trip you're on, or some blatant form of selfishness or greed. And you don't **want** to listen. But the Holy Spirit has been speaking. Knocking. Pleading with you to change before it's too late.

b. And this morning--it's time. It's time to listen. It's time to own truth. And **if** you will, **grace** is waiting. Forgiving grace. Grace to wash you clean. Grace to make things right. Power grace to help you change. Grace to rebuild your life on a foundation of truth. But until you admit the full truth--you can't find full grace. And I just want to tell you--**grace is BEAUTIFUL**--infinitely more beautiful than denial, blaming, stubbornness—or any other alternatives.

2. I seem to regularly find myself among those who don't want to hear truth. But I also find myself among the stone-throwers. Christians actually get quite good at this—and it's not just the **religious right**. It's the religious left, center, right—and the irreligious. It's human nature. You know--form a tight circle around someone they disapprove of--and when they're done, there's crumpled life and a pool of blood on the ground.

-You may be in this group too—**exceptionally** discerning of God's will—and judgment—on others.

Doing it makes you feel closer to God—who agrees with you on so very many issues. Truth is, it makes you feel better about your own flaws and inadequacies to stone someone else for theirs.

-You can do that—and one day the judgment thing will turn on **you**—as Jesus said—and you'll receive judgment in the same dumptruck you used to pour it on others. Jesus has something better—for you, and for us as a community. It's called **grace**. It's found nowhere else on this planet, except in among genuine followers of Jesus. Jesus has called us--not to be rock-throwers, but grace-givers. If you've got a rock in your hand—you need to put it down. You just do.

#### IV. CLOSING

I have a dream for this community—and myself as a part of it. To be full of truth--and full of grace. If we could do that consistently—if I could do that consistently—I think the difference we could make would be astounding. That's what I'm going to ask God for today. If we're going to be a community—full of truth and grace—there are some things we need to do personally.

1. Where is truth pressing in on your life? Will you see it—and will you own it, because **grace is waiting!**
2. Are there any rocks in your hand? If so, would you, like that crowd around Jesus, just drop them? Just let them go—and ask God to soften your heart and fill it with grace. This table of communion, friends, is a **table of GRACE—and truth!**