

Biography



Artist: **Graham Kendrick**

It seems like everyone has a story about a Graham Kendrick song. Whether marching with millions to 'Shine Jesus Shine' or being inspired by one of countless other songs from a 300 plus collection, Graham's music has put into words the cries of hearts from around the world. What of his own story? What about the history that lies behind so prolific a songwriter? Written in bold, the story of Graham Kendrick is one of faith, simple obedience and a determination to help people encounter God for themselves. It is also the story of how the Church has found ways of presenting an unchanging gospel to a fast changing world.

'It was the sixties and some Christians had recognised the Church's lack of cultural connection. Many people started using rock and folk bands together with youth-friendly preachers in coffee bars as a means of evangelising, legitimising the use of contemporary music in a church context. I followed the trend, formed a band and started to write songs for it.' Since that time his songs have become the soundtrack for the spiritual journeys of countless people and his praise and worship compositions are regularly on the lips of millions around the world.

This air of experimentation led to a huge variety of creative expression. Many budding communicators and musicians found their feet in these days, with plenty of people discovering that at last some in the Church had begun to promote its message in a relevant way.

'While we were influenced by the sounds of the charts, our distinctive was the message which in my case gave rise to a narrative song writing style featuring characters and situations from the Gospels or observations of everyday life.'

Moving from native Northampton to Essex and then on to London, Graham enrolled on a teacher training course at the tail end of his teenage years. Despite nominally heading towards a career as an English / Ceramics teacher, it was only when the course drew to a close that he faced the fact that his heart was elsewhere.

'Throughout my time at the college I had been writing and performing solo. Having previously played electric guitar with occasional backing vocals, it had taken me a long time to find any kind of voice, but once I had, then communicating my faith through the songs I was writing became not only a passion but a possibility.'

After qualifying as a teacher, and with enough gig invites to justify the decision, Graham and decided to take a gap year, performing his trademark story-songs in concerts, coffee bars and at events around the country.

At this point Graham's story fuses with the wider narrative that affects the whole church. Graham was not alone in his desire to preach the gospel in new ways, and the list of those he toured and worked with at the time reads like a Who's Who of Christian movers and shakers. The lively London music and arts scene was giving birth to tours, productions, a record company and a magazine. At London's Westminster Central Hall on the final night of a tour in which Graham was part of a backing band, a last minute gap in the programme left a space and Graham with an opportunity to

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move on to the next phase. At a capacity outreach event at London's Westminster Central Hall a last minute gap in the programme left a space which presented Graham with an opportunity to move on to the next phase.

'It must have pressed a few buttons' suggests Graham, typically understating. On the back of the performance came further invites as well as the opportunity to record his debut album, 'Footsteps on the Sea', backed by acoustic guitar virtuoso Gordon Giltrap and upright bass player Chris Laurence.

Another key connection was formed in these early days as Graham began work with Clive Calver. The man who would later become the driving force behind Spring Harvest, Youth For Christ and the Evangelical Alliance and now heads up a major American refugee relief agency called 'World Relief'.

The two worked together as part of a larger team, and instead of showing up for one off events adopted a 'no more hit and run' approach. The team of ten and more would work together with local churches on three-week-long missions. Consequently Graham's solo profile took a dip, but through living as part of a team and working through all the attending pressures and tensions a new role of worship leader and writer of congregational worship songs grew up alongside that of concert performer.

The rest of the story becomes ever more public, with each decade being marked by development, progression and more albums. The teamwork of the mid-seventies which largely buried the early public profile in the backwaters of local mission, gave way to a spate of high profile tours. In turn, these gave way in the eighties to a period of intense corporate growth as Graham's name became associated with many of the Church's success stories: March For Jesus, the boom of Spring Harvest and songs like 'The Servant King' and 'Shine Jesus Shine'. Graham moved to South London joined the Ichthus network of churches where the emphasis on mission, evangelism and social action provided the raw material for more songs that churches across the world would eventually sing. It was during this period that he met keyboard player and arranger Steve Thompson, who became his keyboard player and music director, and went on to produce several of his albums.

If Graham's experience of the eighties was of riding a wave, then the nineties was a period of consolidation and adjustment. Like many in the church he began to question where the next generation of worship leaders were, despite his involvement with the leading lights of the day in a succession of training events and conferences. As they eventually came through it was as part of their whole generation finding its own voice and identity. This brought with it a new role for Graham, that of spiritual 'father' and mentor:

The nineties was a season in which international events began to feature, and alongside the worship leading, his teaching and training skills were in demand. As a songwriter, he felt the need to return to his roots, and a unique project 'The Greatest Story Ever Sung (Millennium Chorus)' provided an opportunity to write for the likes of Michael W Smith, Maire Brennan, Jennifer Holliday, Bob Carlisle, Michael Crawford and others.

'I more or less shut myself away for two years and except for a set of street songs for March For Jesus and a 'best-of' compilation, didn't release an album of new praise and worship material for six years.'

That break came to a happy ending in 2001 with the release of the acclaimed album 'What Grace?' Featuring duets with Matt Redman and Martin Smith, it signposted a fresh direction as Graham consolidated the new role as a much appreciated father figure to the emerging generation. Since the album's release Graham's ministry has continued to grow, with connections between the generations taking on a global flavour. Graham has worked with Darlene Zschech, playing and speaking at the Hillsong conference and has continued to travel extensively throughout Europe, North America and Africa.

Just one look at a collection of Graham's songs and it is clear that he is passionately committed to the Church, and as such he is equally at home working in the background as he is leading from the front. Since the nineties he has put a premium on helping to lay worship foundations in embryonic churches in countries such as Albania, Turkey and France. With nothing to prove but years of experience to give, Graham has been able to teach and encourage the worshipping church around the globe, assisting them as they explore their own indigenous experiences within the framework of a biblical theology of worship that applies everywhere.

Which brings us to Graham's latest album. From the cover reminiscent of a craftsman at work to the title track (chosen as the 2003 Spring Harvest 25th Anniversary soundtrack), 'Do Something Beautiful' is a living, breathing testament to all that Graham Kendrick holds dear: encouraging others to know and love Jesus Christ and work it out in practical ways. Whether championing the cause of persecuted Christians through 'How Long?' (adopted as a theme-song by release International and Christian Solidarity Worldwide) or dueting with Darlene Zschech on 'There Is A Hope So Sure' or with Tim Hughes on 'Your Love, your Mercy', Graham's latest nurtures not only the talent of those he works with, but it offers an inspirational support to all who hear it. For Tim Hughes the experience of working with Graham confirms this: "Graham's humility and heart for God was a real inspiration – something of which I'm sure will be captured on this album." The encouragement is there for all of us to do something beautiful, to find the meeting place of faith and action, of devotion and intimacy. There can be no better way to end this look into the past, present and future of Graham Kendrick than to plug into what Darlene Zschech sees as the effect that 'Do Something Beautiful' has on those it touches:

"It has been an absolute honour to take part in this project – my respect for Graham and his unparalleled commitment and contribution to worship and worshippers continues to teach and inspire me to know and love Jesus more."

Graham Kendrick: essential facts

- Born in Blisworth, Northamptonshire in 1950 to the pastor of the village Baptisi chapel, Revd Maurice Kendrick and his wife Olive.
- There are currently 67 Kendrick songs in the UK Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) top 500
- Shine Jesus Shine appears in the CCLI top 25 in Australia, Canada, South Africa, UK (no. 5) and USA (no.7)
- His lyrics have been translated into numerous languages. His songs are sung daily by millions of worshippers around the globe.
- He was the co-founder of March For Jesus (MfJ). MfJ grew into an international prayer, praise and proclamation event, involving a total of around 55 million people over its years as a globally organised event.
- Graham Kendrick received a Dove Award in 1995 for his international contribution to worship.
- He is listed in the global Who's Who? Directory
- In 2000 Graham Kendrick received an Honorary Doctorate in Divinity from Brunel University in recognition of his contribution to the worship life of the Church.
- Graham is married to Jill, they live in Croydon, Surrey have four daughters.

For more information and any promotional material, please contact.
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