I Believe – Part 1

# God is Enough

# (Colossians 1:15-16)

We’re beginning a brand-new message series called “I Believe” and so the first thing that I want to do is lay the foundation for this series. Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33), but when life becomes challenging it can be difficult to believe in a God we can’t see, and we suddenly find ourselves doubting and wondering why God didn’t answer our prayers, why he allows suffering, or why we can’t feel his presence? And today many people are fabricating their own god, their own version of what they want to believe about the nature of God, but the problem is that when we start creating our own ideas about God and what he’s supposed to do for us he just may not meet all our expectations. And so, when you say, “I Believe” in our culture today, one must ask, “Is that based on your assumptions, your conclusions about who God is, or what he’s revealed about himself in his Word?”

You see, when you have an incorrect view of God, maybe your own version of God, it’s a lifeless idol and it’s only natural to become discouraged, to lose hope, and to walk away from the Christian faith. When your god doesn’t fix all your problems, doing what you want, when you want, and how you want, will you still believe? This is a problem that I’ve been watching curiously or maybe I should say cautiously for many years. Our culture is changing, and many people are building their lives on the shifting sands of cultural relativism. It’s not like it was in the days of Billy Graham anymore. You know, 50 years ago, thousands of people would come to hear him speak, he’d preach about sin, death, and the promise of Jesus forgiveness, and masses of people would respond. But today its completely different, in fact in many churches, attendance is declining because many people find Christianity irrelevant and particularly here in our Western culture because we’ve lost a biblical worldview.

This is something that I’ve seen in my lifetime and it began with a gentle erosion of our Judeo-Christian values as they removed the Bible and prayer from schools. No longer can we take it for granted that people understand who God is, that they know what sin is, and that they recognize a need to be saved from the coming judgment. Today in our Western culture we’ve replaced our biblical foundation with science and philosophy; but it’s not just in our schools, the media and movies we watch have saturated us with evolutionary theory and the concept of millions of years. It’s for that reason that we’ve lost our biblical foundation about our creator God, his Word, the fall of mankind, sin, judgment, and our need of salvation.

It was Barack Obama who while he was still a senator, talked about “A New America” and he said, “Whatever we once were, we are no longer a Christian nation. At least not just. We are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation and a nation of nonbelievers.” And what he was really saying was that his intention was to fundamentally transform the predominant biblical worldview of our nation to a secular one; that we would no longer be a nation that believes in one God and bases our thinking on the Bible.

He was successful for the most part. He brought change, but it wasn’t a change that was helpful, wholesome, and beneficial for our nation. You know, it used to be that when you talk to people, the majority of people would profess to believe in God; but nowadays a lot of people aren’t really sure if they do. As a matter of fact, I encounter more and more people who are wanting to believe, who’d like to believe, but somewhere along life’s journey they’ve had a crisis of faith, something happened, somebody hurt them, and they became disappointed and disillusioned.

I mean, how many times do you encounter people who get bogged down with the question, “Why?” You know, why did all this flooding happen? Why did I lose my job? Why did my friend have to die? And there are just so many times when somebody will ask, "Why?”

And then there’s those people, you talk to them about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and they give you a blank stare and ask you, “Which god you talking about?” You know, “Are you talking about Zeus, Thor, Allah, what god are you talking about?” And it’s just like in Acts chapter 17 when Paul was preaching in the marketplace in Athens, verse 18 says,

“A group of… philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods” (Acts 17:18).

It's this attitude, this kind of thinking that’s spreading through our Western culture like an infectious disease and it’s not getting any better. You see, the removal of prayer and the Bible from schools was just the beginning. Now the freedom to exercise your Christian faith is condemned in the public square. We’ve seen crosses, the 10 Commandments, statues and even nativity scenes being progressively removed from public places. Is it any wonder that people want to believe but they can’t? You know, they want to believe but there’s all these different reasons not to.

Well today, we’re going to look at one of those reasons. In fact, I wonder if any of you binge watched any TV shows this week? We’ve made it really easy today, haven’t we? You know, you can watch a movie or your favorite TV show whenever you want. It doesn’t matter whether its DirecTV, Verizon, XFINITY or Dish, everybody’s offering On Demand. We’re living in an On Demand generation, but the problem is that many people want an On Demand type of God.

Some of you might’ve prayed for somebody, believing that God would heal them, and yet they weren’t healed. Maybe you were praying and begging God to save a relationship and you believed he would but nothing’s changed. Maybe you’re that person that’s always helping others, you’re like super generous, but personally you’re still struggling financially. And so, it’s like, “What’s up with that?” You know, "God, where are you?" You see, On Demand is great, it’s convenient, but if you’ve got an On Demand God who doesn’t do what you want him to do, when you want him to do it, you’ve got a real problem.

And so, when God doesn’t do what we think that he should do, and at just the right time, we get frustrated. Maybe we determine that God isn’t real, or he’s not that powerful, or he just isn’t that good, but the real issue is that this type of On Demand God doesn’t exist. You see, God's not this genie in the sky that you rub and get three wishes. He’s not some sort of cosmic coke machine where if you pray your prayer, give your tithe, and push the button out comes your answered prayer. That kind of God doesn’t exist, but the Bible does tell us about God. For example, Colossians chapter 1 says,

“Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:15-16, NLT).

And so here, the apostle Paul tells these people who didn’t have a strong biblical foundation where they fit in the story of God, creation, and eternity. And he says, “Everything was created through him and for him.” And so, God’s the creator and we were created for him. He doesn’t exist to do whatever we want, whenever we want, but instead, he’s the potter and we’re the clay. Now, don’t get me wrong, God does answer prayers, but he’s not a magic genie in a bottle doing what we think he should do; when, where, and how he should do it.

Therefore, we need to recognize that it’s not all about us, we’re not the main character in the story, we exist to serve God. He’s the Lord and we’re his servants. And so, we need to get to know him better and know his purpose for us, not by a distorted worldview, but by a biblical worldview. And so, we want to explore the deeper things of God, piercing the surface level of life as we’ve known it, so that we’re able to live a deeper fuller life of faith. And today we’re going to look at three things that will help encourage our faith giving us the confidence to say boldly “I believe”. And the first one is knowing his presence.

## 1. Knowing His Presence

Now, many of you know if I were to ask you, “Is God always with you?” that he promised, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13.5). But the reality is when you bring it to a more practical level we don’t always live that way. As a matter of fact, Craig Groeschel used the term, “Christian Atheist” to describe someone who believes in God but lives as though he doesn’t exist. And unfortunately, many people live this way, oblivious to God as if he’s way off in the distance, maybe he’s paying attention or maybe not. But the Bible teaches us something entirely different. Jesus said,

“Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, New Living Translation).

The Bible says again and again that God is with you, he’s right here, right now. And so, he’s with you at your house, he’s with you at work, and he’s with you when you’re in your car.

There may be some of you, maybe you’re new to this whole God thing, you’re a new follower of Jesus. Or maybe you’re a believer but you are kind of complacent, you know you’re a lukewarm Christian, you’re not committed; but I want to assure you, if you will truly pursue God, seeking him, getting to know his Word, his character, and his nature, you’ll have that deep assurance of his presence. You’ll be able to say, “I Believe” because you’ll know that he’s good, he’s your rock, and he’s with you always.

This was the confidence that David had. He was actually the most unlikely guy in the Bible who became king, but he said the most amazing things about trusting God when things don’t make sense. He just cried out to God, "Why are you allowing this? Why are my enemies pursuing me? Where are you? This doesn't seem fair." And he had greater hardships than most of us will ever experience and yet as he grew to know and trust the faithfulness of God he said:

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me…” (Psalms 23:4).

Even though my life is in jeopardy, even though I’m being hunted down, even though there's no food or shelter, even though I’m walking through the darkest point of my life, I don't have to be afraid, because you’re with me. You're here and your presence is enough.

There are some of you here who know that when you get to that place where you have nowhere else to look, I mean that you’re so low that you have nowhere to look but up, that it’s in those times that the presence of God becomes so real. It’s in that time that God heals you, your fears melt away, and the peace of God which transcends all understanding envelops you. I think it was Rick Warren that coined the phrase, “You never know God is all you need until God is all you have.” And so, it’s not until you begin to understand the faithfulness of God in the valleys that you begin to understand the power of his presence in every day. He’s with you all the time, he’s here to stay, he’s not going anywhere, and no amount of trouble can change that. He’s with you and you can know his presence; and then the second point is that we need to recognize his purpose.

## 2. Recognize His Purpose

You see, when you give your life to Jesus Christ, he becomes the architect of your future. He designs and directs the details of your life so that you can become the person he created you to be. Listen to what the apostle Paul said in Romans chapter 8, he said,

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

And so, no matter what you see, no matter what you feel, you can know that God has a purpose and that he’s at work at some way in your life. There’s a great example of this in the book of Genesis; it’s the story of Joseph, recorded in chapter 37. His brothers sold him into slavery and told their father that he’d been killed by wild animals. Meanwhile, Joseph was taken away to Egypt where he became a slave and then was put in prison for something he didn’t do; but God was at work in the details of Joseph’s life and he eventually became one of the most powerful men in Egypt. You see, it was because of God’s purpose that he was responsible for saving the country from the effects of a great drought. At the same time, he was able to save his family and be united with his aging father. When his true identity was revealed, his brothers came to him pleading, “Forgive us for the wrongs we’ve committed in treating you so badly.”

“Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:19-20).

And so, we need to understand that when God doesn’t do exactly what we want, even if we know he could and believe he should, it doesn’t mean that he doesn’t love us and that he’s not working everything for our good. We’ve got to recognize that he’s got a purpose, he’s always loving, he’s got plans to give you hope and a future, and he always has our best interest at heart. In fact, Romans chapter 8, verse 35 says,

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 37-39).

We need to recognize that God has a purpose and no financial trouble, no broken relationships, no unemployment, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. And so, we need to understand that God doesn’t prove his love when he answers our prayers. God proved his love when he sent his son Jesus Christ. He proved his love when we were still sinners. And there’s never a time he doesn’t love you, but he won’t always do what we think that he should, when he should or how.

As Rick Warren said, God has a plan for every problem. He has a purpose for your life and he knows what he’s doing. The good thing is that we don’t have to understand all the details of God’s purpose to be part of it. You just have to trust him. And so, we just need to recognize that he has a purpose, that he’s working all things together for good, and the third thing is that we need to see the big picture.

## 3. Seeing the Big Picture

Basketball coach Dean Smith once said, "If you're going to make every game a matter of life or death, you're going to have a lot of problems. For one thing, you'll be dead a lot."

Now, Dean Smith wasn’t just some youth league volunteer coach. He coached Michael Jordan among others. He coached North Carolina for 36 years and took them to the Final Four 11 times. And so, this guy knows basketball, he knows coaching, he knows winning, and he knows every game isn’t do or die. You have to look at the big picture of an entire season or maybe even a series of seasons in order to accomplish your goals as a coach.

It’s important that we see the big picture, because we get stressed when we live as if this moment is all there is. You know, when a child is born handicapped, a really good person dies because of the negligence of a drunk driver, there’s a national disaster or some kind of terrorist attack; we don’t understand it and we wonder why? Honestly, it’s way beyond you or my finite capacity to attempt to answer why, but what we can do is embrace Isaiah chapter 55 when God said,

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

As I know his presence, recognize his purpose, and see the big picture I can take comfort in the fact that God is wiser than I am, that he’s already in tomorrow, and that time doesn’t restrain him. You see, you and I can know that he’s a good God working in all things to bring about good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. Our God has the end in mind, he sees the big picture, and he’s using even the things we don’t want and things we would never ask for to conform us to the image of his son. I’m so thankful that his ways, his knowledge, and his power goes well beyond the limited understanding of my finite mind. He is infinite and glorious in all of his ways and I don’t have to understand everything to trust him knowing that his ways are higher than my ways, and his thoughts higher than my thoughts.

You see the Bible teaches us at that this moment isn’t all that there is, this moment is just one drop in the bucket of eternity, and that’s why we need to learn to see the big picture. If you’re experiencing a setback, if you’re dealing with great disappointment, and you’re frustrated it’s not the end of the world because we don’t live for today, we live for eternity. The Bible says,

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

In other words, God got great things in store for his people. He is in control of all things, and he’s way too powerful, way too good to be an On Demand, genie in the bottle type of God. And so, we need to realize that there’s so much more that we can’t see, this moment isn’t all that there is, most situations really aren’t do or die situations, and when we see the big picture, when we look at life from God’s perspective, we’re going to be able to better determine even when we don’t understand, that we need to simply trust God, knowing that we exist for him and not he for us, and that we exist to bring praise, honor, and glory to his name.

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September 30, 2018

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*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, Preaching Library, and PC Study Bible.*

*Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*