# **Belief - Part 1**

Knowing God

(Titus 1:15-16)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. This morning we’re starting a brand-new message series called “Belief” and we’re going to discover what it means to really believe and to know God. This is so important, because according to surveys, the majority of people believe in God and yet when you look at how most people live today, they are living lives contrary to the teachings of Jesus as if God doesn’t even exist. As a matter of fact, there’s a verse that I want to open up with that really sets the tone for this series; it’s found in the apostle Paul’s letter to Titus and he warns him in chapter 1,

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good” (Titus 1:15-16).

In other words, he says that there are those who call themselves Christians and yet live as if God doesn’t exist. They say they believe in God, but the way they’re living and what they’re doing is inconsistent with what they say, and so they prove themselves to be practical atheists.

Today’s message is very important, because we’re going to talk about what it really means to know God. You see, the reality is that God created us to have a relationship with him, but when that relationship was fractured by sin.  He redeemed us, he reconciled us to himself through his Son Jesus Christ, so that he could have that relationship with us again. And so, God has done everything he can do so that we can know him as he knows us. And this morning, we’re going to explore three levels of belief in God, and I’m praying that you’ll find yourself somewhere along this journey and no matter where you are, that you’ll move toward the third level of knowing God intimately. As we begin, the first one is people who believe in God, but don’t know him.

## 1. Some people believe in God, but don't know Him.

Unfortunately, there are many people that fit into this category. Now I know that may be surprising to some of you, but the Bible is very clear that you can believe in God without knowing him. James addressed this very topic in the second chapter of his letter to the church saying,

“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder” (James 2:19).

You see, even the demons believe in God, but the problem is that there’s not a loving personal relationship with God. It’s the same as the person who says they believe in God, but they live as if he doesn’t even exist. And so, you could say that there are basically two kinds of faith. A do-nothing faith and a do-something faith. A do-nothing faith is a faith disconnected from any type of behavior or corresponding action. It’s faith in the sense of it being an intellectual belief, but it only exists in one’s thoughts or feelings, and it’s never put into practice. This kind of faith, the faith of the demons that James is describing, is an intellectual faith, it’s a do-nothing faith, and it doesn’t lead to any kind of action.

A do-something faith on the other hand, is a deeper kind of faith, it’s a faith that requires a response, it is a faith that’s so strong that it inevitably leads to corresponding actions. This kind of faith leads us to do the things that God wants us to do. That’s what Paul tells us in Ephesians,

“We are…created in Christ Jesus to do good works…” (Ephesians 2:10).

And so, James says that do-nothing faith won’t help you. It can’t save you. And if you’re that kind of Christian, you kind of believe in God, the apostle John says very bluntly in first John chapter 2,

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4).

And so, what he’s saying is that, “Whoever says, I know God, but there’s no fruit in their life, there’s no acts of obedience, no sense of remorse when they sin” the truth is not in them, because there’s no transformation; there’s no evidence of a new life and the Bible says,

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

So, as we know and experience the goodness of God he does good through us, but if we claim to know God and our lives don’t represent anything of the character of God something’s amiss; because those who belong to Jesus Christ, live by the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit is obvious, being manifested in our lives as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The tragedy is that there are so many people who say, “I believe in God”, who do good things, who know a lot about God, and even know a lot of the Bible, but they still may miss heaven by about 16 inches, because you can have a head knowledge of God without having a heart relationship with God. In fact, Jesus warns about this in Matthew chapter 7, verse 21,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” (Matthew 7:21-22).

In other words, some people might say, “I went to church, I was baptized, I gave 10% of my income, I prayed every day and always tried to be good.” But Jesus said this in verse 23, “Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers’” (Matthew 7:23). Jesus said I never knew you, you may have believed, but it’s not about rules, it’s about a relationship. And that’s where some people are today, and I understand because that’s exactly where I was for so many years; I believed in God, I went to church, but I didn’t know him.

And so, the first level of belief is, “I believe in God, but don’t know him.” The second level would be those who believe, who’ve experienced him, and they might say, “I know him, but I don’t know him well.”

## 2. Some people believe in God, know Him, but don't know Him well.

For example, we all know that God is our Father, we say it, we sing it, but you know in spite of all my religious upbringing, it was difficult for me to approach God as my Father. Maybe I had a tainted perspective, but I never felt like God was too crazy about me, and so I never approached God in faith as a loving Father, but instead I approached him cautiously, distantly, even fearfully as a harsh taskmaster. The problem is, that God hasn’t given us permission to approach him in that way because that’s not who he is.

In fact, the Bible tells us that we can have a personal and intimate relationship with God, approaching him as an affectionate and loving father. And so, if your perception of God isn’t that of an affectionate father, a father who loves you so much that he would pay a great price so that he could adopt you as his very own, then this is for you, this is your verse. Galatians chapter 4, verse four says,

“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, so that we might receive the full rights of sons (and daughters). And because you are (his children), God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:4-6).

Now, Abba is a term of affection, like the word Poppa or Daddy; and so, if that’s not your concept of God, and you’ve approached God as anything other than a loving, tender, affectionate father you’ve been ringing the wrong doorbell.

You see, the reality is that many of us have actually had an experience with God, we’ve called on him, he might’ve answered some prayers, we may have even been born into his family, but the reality is that we haven’t grown to know him. In other words, we’ve been informed about Jesus, but we haven’t been transformed by Jesus. I’m not saying this person hasn’t been adopted by God, that their sins aren’t forgiven, but they don’t know him well.

In fact, some of the people that Paul was writing to here in Galatians may have very well fallen into this group. Let’s continue reading ahead in Galatians chapter 4,

“Formerly, (Paul said) when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God — or rather are known by God — how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?” (Galatians 4:8-9).

Now the context here was that the Galatians were struggling against legalistically following religious rules. And so, Paul was like, "What are you doing? You know God or you’re known by God, but you're going back to old behaviors that are hindering your relationship with God." In our context, this would be like becoming legalistic about the style of music, the kinds of songs we sing, or the type of clothes that you wear. When the freedom that God wants us to have is freedom from all the man-made rules of religion and instead focusing on our spiritual relationship with him.

This is so important and close to my heart, because when I first knew of the presence of Jesus, I was being pulled back into some of these things. I grew up in a very religious denomination and though I knew God, I didn’t know him well, and I was tempted to turn back.

For some of you, maybe that’s exactly where you are right now. Or for others of you, maybe you’ve completely turned away, you’ve turned back to a different lifestyle. You know him, but you don’t know him very well, because if you knew him well you’d be continuing in the process of being transformed. The biblical word I’m thinking about is sanctified, and you’d be in the process of being perfected by his presence, of being holy, and being transformed into the image of Christ.

You see, this is God’s desire, that the old would be gone and the new would come. And so, as we come to him in faith, as we believe, he transforms us and changes us by his Spirit. The Bible describes it this way in second Corinthians,

“We who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

There are those who believe in God, but they don’t know him. Then there are some of you, you’re being changed, you’re being transformed by the renewing of your mind. You believe in God and you know him, but you don’t know him well. And then, number three, the third group where I hope that you all would desire to be, is those who would say, “I believe in God and I know him intimately.”

## 3. Some people believe in God and know Him intimately.

Today, you may not be completely there, but you can relate, because you know what it means to be led by God. You’ve learned to walk by faith and not by sight. You know what it is to be gently convicted of your sin and to quickly turn from it. You see the hand of God working in your life throughout the day. You recognize him in conversations, you sense him directing you, you feel him prodding you, you know his comfort and his supernatural peace. It’s not that you’re perfect or better than anybody else, it’s just that you’re purposefully walking with God.

Listen to the language of David recorded in Psalm chapter 63, this is the intimacy of a man or a woman of God, verse one says,

“God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands” (Psalms 63:1-4).

This is the picture of a person who knows God intimately. Not that their perfect, not that they have it all together, but so much different from the person who says, "I believe in God, but don't know Him.” Or “I believe in God, but I don't know Him well.” This is the man or the woman who believes in God, who knows Him intimately, and by His grace and through His Spirit loves him wholeheartedly. And so, I want you to consider this question, “How well do you know God?”

You see, if you know him intimately, you’re going to love him wholeheartedly, your heart is going to break for the things that break the heart of God, you’re going to have a burden for the poor, the oppressed, and the overlooked. And when you mess up, you’re going to be convicted, you’re going to ask God for forgiveness, and you’re going to leave it behind. And not only that, but you’re going to know his power and sense his presence throughout the day as he’s loving you, encouraging you, and guiding you.

And here’s the very best news of all, God wants to reveal himself to you. The Bible tells us in Jeremiah chapter 29, “Call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.” And so, it’s not like playing hide and seek with God, but he says,

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you…” (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

And so, those of you, who believe in God, but don’t know him, I want you to know that you’re just one prayer away from getting to know him. Those of you who know him, but don’t know him well, you’re one prayer away from getting to know him even better, because when you seek him with all your heart he will be found by you. You see, he wants to reveal himself to you, he wants to show you his goodness, so that you love him and know him as he knows you. This is his greatest desire and it’s my prayer for you, it’s actually a prayer recorded in the Bible. So, I hope you pray this for me as I pray it for you. Ephesians chapter 1 records this prayer,

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe…” (Ephesians 1:17-19).

That’s my prayer, that you would have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you would know him better, because when his children know him, it pleases him and he will guide you into all truth.

As we close, there are some of you who would say, "You know what? I do believe in God, but I don't know Him." Others of you would say, "I believe in God, but I don't know Him well." And others of you, "I believe in Him and I want to know him intimately." Wherever you are, it's my prayer that you would turn away from sin, that you would step closer to Him, and that you would grow in intimacy. I pray that you would know God as he knows you, that you would know him intimately, and that you would serve him wholeheartedly.

As I’ve grown to know my wife Dana over the past 30 years, as I’ve grown to know Jesus in the past 20 years, there are those of you who want to grow in intimacy with your Heavenly Father. Those of you who believe, who want to grow closer to him, who want to serve him, and even if you’re already close you want to be even closer, you want to know his voice, and you want to be directed by his Spirit. If that’s you, would you respond to God?

Pastor John Talcott

Christ's Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

September 24, 2017

[www.cccemmitsburg.org](http://www.cccemmitsburg.org/)

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

Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.