

“Why Should I Believe in You?”

Americans can disagree about a lot of things. After the last two weeks of political conventions we’ve seen those disagreements vividly portrayed in speeches and spin. But even with a nation clearly divided between red and blue; there is one thing Americans have consistently agreed to believe in during the last 60+ years- God!

Gallup polls have consistently demonstrated over the last 60 years that more than 9 out of 10 Americans believe in God. While the numbers remain strong; Gallup reminds us that everyone has their own definition of that three-letter word. So while we may agree that we believe in God; who or what we believe God to be still has many different answers.

As we move into this series, *Questions for God*, I think we will be challenged to rethink our definition of God. I say that because I think that we shape our image of God by how we answer the why. And if our answers are not drawn from scripture; then we have a faulty view of God. So I hope that we can see God’s true character as we ask questions of God and learn from scripture how God answers.

Over the next few weeks as we ask God to answer our ‘Why’ questions we will look at the stories of biblical figures who struggled with many of the same questions we ask and came to know God in new ways.

- Why did I have to go through...
- Why do you love me...
- Why should I pray...
- Why should I change...
- Why are you so unfair...

Before we go any further this morning I want to take a moment to assure you that it is ok to ask God questions. Not just, ‘Why does the sun come up in the east;’ but the really hard questions like, ‘Why does cancer strike the person I love?’

Asking questions is a blessing that God granted us and it is not a sin to ask questions of God; the Bible is full of people who ask questions. Without questions some of the greatest discoveries of all time would never have happened. Questions are the basis of the whole scientific process.

Speaking of science; do you remember the big scientific discovery of this past summer? It seems that scientists had long held to the opinion that there was a particle that helped to shape the universe. No one had ever seen the particle; but they believed in it because they saw the clues, the evidence, that pointed to it.

So with the help of the \$10 billion dollar Large Hadron Collider buried under the border of France and Switzerland scientists announced on July 4, 2012 that they had discovered- as far as scientific experiments can be assumed to be correct- the Higgs Boson particle- that subatomic particle that many refer to as the ‘God-particle.’

For over 50 years it had been theorized; but it had never been seen, never measured, never proven- but scientists believed in it none the less.

Now, isn't that interesting. These scientists have believed in something they cannot see and previously had been unable to prove! They have believed in this unproven particle because what they could see had convinced them that it had to be there.

Sounds much like a Christian believing in an unseen God; and while we cannot see God, while we cannot scientifically prove God's existence, we know that God exists because the clues are all around us revealing God's power and divine nature.

The Psalmist said in Psalm 19: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* And as Paul wrote in Romans 1:20: *Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities- his eternal power and divine nature- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.*

We could spend the rest of our lives unraveling the clues about God's existence- and I'd be glad to talk more about those clues at a later point- but this morning I'm not interested in debating whether we believe in God (after all 94% of us believe in God); but the more important question- does your belief in God move beyond knowledge *about* God to truly *knowing* God.

I began this morning by quoting the Gallup survey which indicated that over 90% of Americans believe in God. As encouraging as that statistic may sound the reality is that believing and knowing are two different things.

What we are really talking about here is the level of intimacy that we have with God.

Of the 90% who believe in God I would say that the majority of them *know God by reputation*. They may have been to church, they may have heard people talk about God; but their knowledge is secondhand.

Another large percentage of those people who believe in God probably know God in their memory. Thirty years ago I sat in class with people who occasionally friend me on Facebook. I have a recollection of many of these individuals, but I have to be honest and admit that until I attended my class reunion a few years ago I probably had not seen or talked with any of them. We lost touch after we graduated. So I know them; but it is in my memory.

There are many people who have a *memory of God*. They had an experience with God in their past; but then they grew up and moved away from God and haven't talked since. They know God, but not in an intimate way.

If you fit into either one of those categories with your knowledge of God; let me first say that I'm glad you are here, but most importantly I pray that today you will understand God is interested in more than being someone you've heard of or just a memory from days gone by.

God wants you to know him personally, intimately. God wants a relationship that is marked by a thirst for more of him. God wants a relationship where you seek him with your whole heart. God wants a growing relationship where you know his voice and can recognize it instantly.

What excites me about this series is that we often allow our questions for God to hold back our relationship with God. I believe that if you and I can walk through this series together; not only will we allow God to reveal who he really is, but I believe we can begin growing in our knowledge of God and most importantly in our intimacy with God.

Guys, I realize that some of you are hearing that word intimacy and thinking this is some chic sermon. Men are not intimate with God. You just made my point. The reason men so often only know about God is because we are afraid of intimacy! And I bet if you are afraid of intimacy with God you are probably also afraid of intimacy in your relationship with your wife. And intimacy has nothing to do with sex; just ask your wife!

You may be thinking to yourself, 'I believe in God. Isn't that enough?' It may be enough for you but it is not what God wants. It would be like saying, "I believe I am married to my spouse. Isn't that enough?" No, just like your spouse wants more than for you to acknowledge his/her existence God wants you to know him intimately!

Look at James 2:19 <http://bible.us/jas2.19.niv> for a moment. James says that even the demons believe in God. So apparently there is more to this whole believing thing.

We have a lot of people in the USA who are what we could call 'cultural Christians.' They are the people who know about God, they go to church on Christmas and Easter; and they were born in the USA so of course they must be Christians.

You see there are many people in church and in our neighborhoods who believe in God; but they don't know God. Or to put it another way; they know *about* God, but they don't *know* God.

Let me wrap this up in what I believe is a way that will challenge all of us.

How many of you want your children to have a faith- a personal and life-changing faith in God- that lasts beyond high school?

Well, it is all up to you! That's the conclusion of a book I've been plodding through entitled, *Almost Christian*. Listen to the subtitle: What the faith of our teenagers is telling the American church.

According to the author of the book, what our kid's faith is telling us is that we've missed the boat! You and I have failed to launch our kids with a lasting faith because they have not seen an intimate faith portrayed in our lives.

Listen to this passage from the opening chapter of the book.

"Since the religious and spiritual choices of American teenagers echo, with astonishing clarity, the religious and spiritual choices of the adults who love them, lackadaisical faith is not young people's issue, but ours."

The solution, the author says, is 'modeling the kind of mature, passionate faith we say we want young people to have.'

Our kids need to see in us the kind of passionate faith that David expresses in Psalm 63:1-4
<http://bible.us/ps63.1-4.niv>

Our kids need each one of us today to do more than just say we believe in God; they need us to model an intimate relationship with God that is expressed in our loving God whole-heartedly, passionately, and loving others with the same devotion.

What that means for you today is to accept the challenge to say I want to go beyond just believing in God- I want to know God intimately and I want to serve the children in my home, my church and my community.