

I Need To Believe - Andrew LeCleur

INTRO:

In a service like this I'm always aware that there are different types of people represented. This is probably simplifying things somewhat but here are the groups I have in my mind this morning as I speak to you: A) Those who don't believe, B) those who believe and are struggling, and C) those who believe and are walking strong.

Mode A: Those who don't believe. You might be someone who doesn't even usually attend church, or you might be someone who has been in church a long time. You may be very clear about your unbelief or you may be someone who actually thinks that you do believe and those around you think that too, but you have never truly met Jesus.

Mode B: Those who believe but are struggling and/or stuck. Those of us who believe move between groups B & C. We're never always in one group or the other. Mode B is the person who has a real faith walk with Jesus but who feels like they are stuck in neutral or even sliding backwards

Mode C: Those who believe and are walking strong. This is our goal. This is where we all want to be. We know Jesus, admire and trust him and our joy is growing as our admiration and trust is growing.

My aim in this message is (by God's power) to tempt, cajole, exhort, frighten and entice some of us who are in groups A and B to move into group C, or maybe just begin to believe that it is POSSIBLE to move into group C.

NOT ENOUGH:

Right off the bat I want to establish that the Christian faith is definitely about God forgiving our sins. Having our sins forgiven and the wrath of God removed from us is a wonderful and awesome thing. When God saves us he cancels our sin debt forever - **“there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

I think we do a good job of blowing that trumpet here at LEFC. We do a pretty good job of championing the precious miracle which is justification by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone. That's important.

....But forgiveness, as wonderful as it is, is not enough on its own. It is true that we are forgiven sinners, but that is not all that we are.

No condemnation is amazingly awesome...but in itself it is not all we need, is it? To be forgiven and have no condemnation from God but to be left unchanged, spiritually dead in our sins, would be hell on earth.

Forgiveness alone is not enough for **us** and it's not enough for **God**. Lack of anger is not all that God has for us. Yes, God forgives us, but he also changes us and wants us to live a new, strong, joyful, confident kind of life.

God's salvation is not just about what he DOESN'T give us (punishment); it is also very much about what he DOES give us!

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, **we too might walk in newness of life.*** (Romans 6:4 ESV)

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation.** The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV)

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved—**and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*** (Ephesians 2:4-6 ESV)

*And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made alive together with him**, having forgiven us all our trespasses,* (Colossians 2:13 ESV)

We know that this is true. We know in our bones that there is more to being a Christian than just being forgiven. We know that there is more joy to be had, more confidence to be gained, more freedom to experience, more pleasure, more victory, more hope...

We know this in our souls because God has planted it there and he feeds it in us when he tells us things like:

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. **They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.*** (Psalm 36:7-9 ESV)

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11 ESV)

*“Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,*

*come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;* (Isaiah 55:1-3 ESV)

Being a Christian is not intended to be a dull, lifeless drudgery of obedience whereby we give up the fun and enjoyable things of life so that God won't be angry with us.

One thing we can probably all agree with: We humans are beings that have an insatiable desire to be happy. God built that into us. And it is GREAT GOOD NEWS that **Being a Christian is not supposed to snuff out that desire. Being a Christian is supposed to fulfill that desire.**

C. S. Lewis put it this way: "If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

God doesn't want us to stop seeking happiness! That would be blasphemy! That would be sacrilege! That would deny what he made us to be and what he saved us to be

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4 ESV)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Philippians 4:4 ESV)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10 ESV)

Instead, he wants us to find TRUE HAPPINESS in the only place it can truly be found - IN HIM! This is what honors God more than anything else. This is what gives him the most glory - when we find our joy in HIM!

And some of us are there this morning and that's excellent. You're in group C. For this group this sermon will simply be fuel for the tank to keep motoring.

But many of us often find ourselves in Mode B. Many of us, if we're honest, are there this morning. Some of the quotes we just read point to this:

In the passage from Isaiah he asks us, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" The implication is - WE DO THIS.

In the C. S. Lewis quote he tells us that we settle for the fleeting, empty pleasures of sin instead of enjoying the lasting fullness of the pleasures of God. He says, "We are far too easily pleased." And he's right. And the reason is because we just aren't finding God very satisfying.

It might be that you're caught in a cycle of sin and it's really dragging you down. And, of course, sin burns our spiritual tongues making even harder to taste and see that the Lord is good. So you're stuck.

Or it might be that things just seem really dry. You read the Bible and rather than being honey to your tongue it feels like sawdust. You try to pray and it feels like you're just talking to yourself or the ceiling. You hear the Bible and sermons and songs talk about how wonderful and beautiful and awesome God is, but you don't feel that wonder and beauty and awe in your heart. You believe it. You want to feel it. But it's a struggle. Sometimes you get a fleeting glimpse but as soon as you do it's gone again. You may have been a Christian for a very long time but you've never really been overwhelmed with the goodness and greatness of God.

Whatever your situation, it is the nature of our struggle that we will all spend time in Mode B. *"The ways of the flesh wage war against the Spirit."* Or, as James puts it, *"For we all stumble in many ways."* (James 3:2)

In some seasons of our life, the visits are infrequent and brief. At other times the visits are more frequent and the sojourn lasts much longer. These times are very discouraging and difficult. But WE MUST NOT STAY THERE! It is crucial that we learn to find happiness in God!

Because the sober truth is this. One way or another we WILL be happy. And if we're not truly happy in God, we'll look for happiness elsewhere. That's why George Mueller said: "The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day, to have MY SOUL HAPPY IN THE LORD".

So...I want to spend the rest of my time offering a lifeline to those of you who find yourself, to one degree or another, in Mode B today. And if you are in Mode C today, take notes now to use against the day when you wake up in Mode B.

When I'm in Mode B, it can begin to feel like: this is it. This is all there is. This is how things are going to be. This is my life, I might as well get used to it. And eventually I begin to think (secretly) "Is this even worth it?"

I need to tell you: **this is not all there is!** I want to plant the seed of this hopeful truth in you: **God has more for you!** Satan and your own flesh would have you believe otherwise, but

God has given you his Spirit inside you and his written Word to testify to you that **THERE IS MORE FOR YOU!!!**

And there's even more good news: it is not up to you to get yourself out of Mode B and into Mode C. In fact, for many of us, it is that kind of thinking that often gets us into Mode B to begin with. We try to DO THE CHRISTIANITY thing and eventually the wheels fall off.

The amazing GOOD NEWS for us is that Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, has taken the task of securing our lasting joy in him upon himself. He has promised to do this! He has staked the honor of his very name upon the FACT that he will accomplish it.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.** (1 Thes. 5: 23-24)

And I am sure of this, that **he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion** at the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6)

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32 ESV)

IT'S NOT ON YOU to bring you to a place of walking in newness of life! IT'S ON GOD to do it! You can't do it. You mess it up every time you try! But God can do it, and he will!

That's why I love that scene in "A Beautiful Mind". In the movie John Nash and his wife are about ready to throw in the towel in their battle against his paranoid schizophrenia. They had tried everything and nothing had really worked except for the drugs that made him a zombie. And they are just on the verge of re-committing him to the Psychiatric hospital where he would be confined, medicated and subjected to electroshock therapy. But at this pivotal moment John's wife expresses a thought that I have had many times in my Christian experience. It's a thought that all Christians need to have when presented with the hopelessness of a joyless, victory-less, loveless life.

I... You... We...

NEED TO BELIEVE THAT SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY IS POSSIBLE. That God WANTS TO and WILL bring us out of darkness into light, out of deadness into life, that he will make our hard heart soft and our dull eyes see.

TRUST AND TEST

So the way out of Mode B into Mode C is first to TRUST that God is for you and wants to work on your behalf and second to TEST the truth of his promises by acting on them.

I'm asking you to TRUST and TEST God's promises because that is what God does. He tells you a promise and then he invites you to test whether the promise is true by acting on it. The fulfilling of God's promises to you happens ONLY when we TRUST them and TEST them by acting on them.

I know, I know. You're thinking, "Wait, wait, wait. You just said it wasn't up to us to move ourselves from B to C. What's up with this you have to act on it stuff?" When I say that it's not on us to do it, it doesn't mean that we are passive.

The thing is this: true TRUST always TESTS by action. Real faith always works. Like James says: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.* (James 2:17-18 ESV)

It's like the old chair illustration. You can talk all day long about how you trust that chair to hold you up. You can write books about it, sing songs about how strong the chair is. You can cite the physics principles that show that the chair will hold you up. But if you're not willing to sit in the chair, do you really trust it?

God proves and fulfills his promises to us as we TRUST them enough to TEST them in real life and to step out onto them without a net.

So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water..., the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away.... And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan. (Joshua 3:13-17 ESV)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (Jn. 7:37-38)

So, for those of us who want to move into Mode C - newness of life - I invite you to ask God to show you an area where you can exercise TRUST in his promises by TESTING them by acting on them.

It could be so many things. An act of obedience that he impresses upon you. Maybe he wants you to let go of something that has too much of a grip on you so that you will be freed up to seek him more fully. Maybe he wants you to seek the repairing of a relationship. It might be that he wants you to confess something to someone so that you can be healed in your soul. Perhaps he wants to breathe new life into a neglected discipline (prayer, Bible-reading). Or maybe he wants you to step out and share his good news with someone.

Be careful here! Don't let perfection be the enemy of the good! God's good plan for you is not perfection, but progress. So don't get all riled up and be like, "I'm going to read the Bible 6 hours every day and pray for 4 hours and share Jesus with 8 people every day, and stop swearing and get a rid of my PC and get a Mac..."

Satan loves to discourage us from taking small steps in the right direction by showing us how far we are from our ultimate destination.

Ask God to show you a way that he wants to lead you in newness of life and then test his promises by stepping out and acting upon them.

If we want God to move us from Mode B to Mode C, the way is by first trusting his promises - daring to believe that God is for you - and second by testing his promises - stepping out and acting in faith that he will do what he says he will do.

If you want this - if you need to believe that something extraordinary is possible - and if you would like prayer to ask God to help you believe ("I believe. Help my unbelief!"), we are going to have people standing by ready to pray briefly with you after our last song today up here in this corner. Maybe that would be a good first step for some here today.
Let's pray.