

# When You Believe in God but Don't Really Know Him

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's my pleasure to start off this new series this morning, which, as Sonia already said, is based on the book *The Christian Atheist*. I've got it here, so if anyone ever fancies reading it, that's what it looks like. It's written by a guy called Craig Groeschel, who is basically writing from his personal experience of going on a journey to discovering God a bit deeper than he really thought initially. It's basically talking about when you believe in God, but dot, dot, dot, it continues with lots of other examples. So this is assuming that you have some sort of thought or understanding or faith perhaps in God. That's kind of our basis. So just as a side note, if you feel like, no, that's not me, I'd love to talk to you afterwards. Hold on to your horses, keep listening, and let's chat over a coffee or grab someone else and let's continue your thoughts and your conversations. So when you believe in God but stuff gets in the way, or when you believe in God but there are stumbling blocks that hinder your belief, or when you believe in God but you live as if he doesn't really exist, he's just distant. So what are we really exploring? Well, we're looking at what is our real understanding of who God is and what difference does that make in our lives? Every day, our everyday living. So as Sonia said, today we're really exploring it.

When you believe in God but you don't really know him, what's the difference there of those two things? Well, some of you might know that I've been coming to this church since about June, end of June.

You might know a bit about me. You may not know much about me at all. You probably don't know that I really like rugby. It might come as a surprise to you, but I love it. I really love it. In fact, I enjoy watching it and I also enjoy playing it. I'm in a little rugby team at college. You might also not know that when the Rugby World Cup is on. I get all excited and I particularly like to remind people that there's an England women's rugby team as well and they're really good. They do really well. What I particularly like to remind people, and John will know, probably gets a bit annoying, but I know two of their players, which is pretty cool. I don't just know them. I actually went to school with them. Two of the England rugby team players in the women's team and I even played rugby with them. That's my little claim to fame. People probably get quite bored of it when the rugby is on. So I know two of the rugby players. That might mean that, yes, I'll watch their matches. I'll support them. I'll cheer them on.

But when I say I know them, do I really know them? I might know what position they play or how many tries they've scored that season, but I probably couldn't tell you what makes them laugh or even perhaps what struggles they've had that year. And I probably also, they probably couldn't tell you much about me either. They might not know what's gone on for me this year. They probably don't know I come to this church. So it turns out that although I might claim to say I know them, I don't really know the two women on the rugby team that much. There's not much of an investment in that acquaintance that I have. I probably won't even send them a Christmas card. I'm sure perhaps you might have a similar story of someone you know, someone maybe you've bumped into, an encounter, someone you might say, oh yes, I know of them. But you might not know them that well. Perhaps even a politician or a political party that you believe in, you'll vote for, but you probably don't know what they're having for dinner that night. So why is this so important? Well, it's one thing to say that we believe in someone or that we've had an encounter with someone. But to actually know someone is a much deeper encounter, a much deeper relationship than just an acquaintance. So what about God then? Do we believe in God? What comes to mind when you think of God, when I say the word God? Is he a big old bearded man? Some guy floating up in the sky? Some distant power in space that makes things happen occasionally?

Or perhaps you might refer to him as the guy upstairs or the boss man? Maybe. If that's the case, I'd love to suggest that actually there's a whole lot more to him than you might know already. The book of James says actually even the demons believe in God. But what about for us?

[ 6 : 01 ] what difference does that make for us? In the passage in Matthew that we've just read, it actually encourages those who believe in God to go deeper, to know him intimately. Jesus says, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. This is a pretty big invitation to come and know a bit deeper the God of heaven and earth, the creator of the world, and to know the goodness that he has for us who believe. So as we ask, when we seek, when we knock, there might actually be different names that we come to understand of God. You might already call God different names like, for example, God as comforter, if you found him to comfort you in times of trouble. Or perhaps for you,

God is saviour when you know that Jesus paid the price for your sins. Or maybe you might know God as healer when he's come in your time of brokenness and restored you.

Or maybe you know God as friend when you felt alone and had him by your side. Whatever name you might call God, whatever you choose to associate him with, we can be remembered, reminded that our God is a good God. He doesn't hide. He doesn't hide up in the heavens. He's not distant. He's here with us. He cares and he's present. His spirit is with us.

And moving among us. So this invitation we hear in Matthew to come, ask, seek, knock, it's saying come closer and see the goodness of God. See the good gifts that he has for you to discover. It's an open invitation at any time. You won't miss it on one chance and that'll be it.

You can keep on going, keep on discovering. He's saying, hey, come on, come and get to know me. I'm here. I want to get to know you.

[ 8 : 55 ] So what's stopping us? What's stopping us moving from believing to really knowing God? In this book, he suggests that people can often feel like they don't deserve God, even though this invitation is here. People might say, oh, he's too busy for me. He's too busy worrying with more important things in the world. Or I wouldn't want to seem selfish. Maybe that's quite a British approach.

I don't want to intrude on what God's got to do with the world. I mean, maybe these are quite fair enough thoughts. But if we know God, then maybe we will know that he's quite capable of all of those things. He's quite capable of knowing each one of us completely inside and out.

But maybe we do find ourselves doubting these things. And if so, I would love to encourage you to go to Psalm 139, 139. It's such a great psalm where it speaks into our identity in God. It speaks into how much God knows us. He knows us inside and out. He knew us before we were even born, before we were even a thought in our parents' minds. He even knows how many hairs are on your head. He knows you're coming and you're going. The psalmist who wrote Psalm 139 finishes off by saying, search me, O God, and know my heart. They've come to this conclusion of, you know me. Come and know me more. Let me know you. Let me discover you. It's a close relationship and it's a partnership that is coming and going. It's like a conversation. You might have also noticed when Tina read the passage, there's this analogy that Jesus uses of a father and a son, this parental relationship that seems pretty intimate and quite trusting as well. There's something beautiful about the childlike faith. There are no inhibitions of asking. Perhaps you who have had children will know that when kids want something, they'll ask, they'll say, can I have it? I want it. I see that. I want it. And people, I mean, I can't speak from experience, but I certainly know that adults who have that care for children, they want to give the good things, the things that are best for them.

Okay, that might not be the sweet that they're asking for, but you might want to pour out your love and your care for that child. And so Jesus is saying, God, our perfect heavenly father, however your earthly father understanding might be, God is the perfect one full of goodness. How much more is he going to give good gifts to you? You who are adopted into his family? You who are known by him?

[ 12 : 31 ] So should we not more be childlike in our understanding, our faith, our approach to knowing God? Jesus is saying, come on, just do it, just ask. Have those inhibitions just wiped away. Don't even worry about them. Come and ask and discover more about me. After all, our perfect father is giving good gifts to his children. He's giving comfort and support. He's giving healing. He's giving wholeness.

He's giving love. So as I begin to conclude, let's not just claim to believe in God or to live our lives like Jesus, but let's actually do what Jesus did and be with the father. A bit like earlier, we had that

moment of stillness just to kind of realign ourselves again with where we're at, finding God again, perhaps. Let's spend that time getting to know our heavenly father. Jesus spent his time pouring out his heart in times of trouble, in times of need, and even in times of thanksgiving, he would retreat away from the people and spend time with his father. So let's let go of our inhibitions, our worries and our doubts, perhaps even our selfish pride of needing to ask for help. And let's come close to the father. Come close and really know him. Let him into your life. Whilst we remember that our God is a good God. And he invites you to come and know him to come and know his goodness more.

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