**INTRODUCTION**

Good morning. Thank you to **Kyle and the worship team** for leading us today.

This is Week 1 of our church-wide study called Believe. This year we are looking at 30 Big Ideas in the Bible and it all starts with God.

You’ll want to bring your Believe books with you to church. Take them to your Connection Group. Get out a pen and write in them.

If you don’t have your Believe resources yet, that’s ok. It has been a stressful time over the past couple weeks. We know that, and it will be really easy for you to jump right in this week.

Let me tell you about the resources that are available and how you can participate:

1. Get your own **Believe book and study guide**.

The book is an **abridged Bible** that’s organized around the **30 Ideas** that we’ll explore each week. You can purchase the book and the study guide as a bundle in the lobby for **only $8**.

You read one chapter a week following the **Five Ten reading plan**. So, read ahead before you hear Ronnie’s message on Sunday. For example, this week starting on Monday you should read Chapter 2 of the Believe book.

And you only need to read for **10 minutes a day, 5 days a week**.

Each chapter has **five reflection questions** you will see as you read. So, you read a small section of the book, 10-minutes, answer one question. And your done for the day. If you do that five days a week you’ll be all set.

1. This is also the perfect time to join a Connection Group for Believe. We don’t want you to be lost in the crowd here. A Connection Group is the best way to get to know people at church, and talk about Believe with friends.

To sign up for a Connection Group there are 3 Easy Steps. You can look at the catalog of all the groups online, or pick one up on the lobby, there is a quick signup form you fill out on the website, and then we will help match you up with a group.

1. Believe is a church-wide study for all ages, and there are some fantastic resources for families. So parents make sure you get these. This is not stuff we ordered from a kit, our Children’s Ministry and Student Ministry have custom made these for you and they are really cool.

First, every family can pick up Believe-In-A-Box. You can get a box in the Education Wing. It has CD with music, a memorization chart, coloring pages for younger kids.

And then each week there is a Take It Home discussion guide for your family. It’s got age-specific questions for little kids and on up to teens. And there is a family activity that you can do together each week.

So, this is a special opportunity. Whether you are participating in Believe as children**,** students **or** adults. It might be **on-campus**, or in the **neighborhood**. Maybe it’s **SMALL group** with you and one other person, or a **BIG group** of 30 people.

We are going to be covering our part of the Houston area, and having these fantastic conversations about what it means to Think, Act, and Be like Jesus.

Well, again **[pause]** **good morning** and hello everyone at our **Foster Creek** campus. My name is Ryan Bien and I am the **Connections Minister** at First Colony.

My oldest son, Jack, is 5. And over the toddler years we have had some interesting conversations about God. Kids are pretty literal… so it’s tricky because he can take what I say and come back with things that really stump me.

For a while the biggest number Jack could think of was 142. Not sure where that came from but in the universe of numbers 142 was the end of the line for him. So, we were talking about how BIG God is, and that God is powerful. And Jack says, “Is he 142 feet tall?”

Uhh… not exactly, I mean I don’t know. He doesn’t have a specific height.

“But you said he was Big.”

I know. He is. God’s Big. He’s the biggest. But nobody really knows how tall he is.

And my favorite one is during our bedtime routine I was going for this deep spiritual moment, and I was assuring Jack that God is always here with you, He’s inside us, and you can ask him for help anytime.

And I was thinking this is it. I mean, I’m a minister and I am sharing real truth with my son that will have a significant impact on his life. And he looked at me with curiosity and said, “So can I burp God out of me?”

What? No. No. You can’t. And that just ruined my teachable moment. We’ve really lost any momentum we had going here.

Sometimes it is hard to grasp God, isn’t it? The concept of God is a big idea that requires big brain thinking.

Did you know, an ostriches eye is bigger than its brain? Guys… some days, I feel like a goofy ostrich.

The editor of Believe, Randy Frazee quotes theologian and author A. W. Tozer. Tozer said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Why? Because your mindset about God will drive all that you are, and all that you do.

So, let’s start Believe with the **KEY QUESTION**. You have to start with the right question. And this one is a doozy:

**WHO IS GOD?**

I’m going to give you Ryan Bien’s personal testimony on this question right out of the gate…

For me, God is who I depend on as my rock-solid foundation when everything else that was supposed to be reliable in my life is not going to cut it.

Jobs, homes, hobbies, your health, even the people in your life, are here today and gone tomorrow.

I don’t have to explain this to you. We have all been living through this catastrophic storm seeing homes destroyed. We were scared; hoping our families would be safe.

Who is God?

God is who you turn to as a safe haven. When you realize what matters most in life.

On that Monday night when the rain from Hurricane Harvey was assaulting Fort Bend County, we evacuated our house in Sugar Land and crammed into my mother-in-law’s apartment.

Late at night, I lied awake worrying about our house and our safety. And I found myself saying this prayer…

God I’m thankful to be dry and have a roof over my head. God I’m thankful to have a bed to sleep in tonight. God I’m thankful my wife is beside me holding our two-week-old baby girl. And I’m thankful my boys are asleep peacefully on the floor next to us. In the midst of this storm… whatever happens tonight God… we need you.

This hurricane affected all of us. We all have a story. Some much worse than others.

So, suddenly the question, *Who is God?,* is not just an intellection exercise. It’s a question that feels raw and relevant in the midst of a crisis.

In a time like this we urgently cry out to God like David:

Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who vindicates me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me—God sends forth his love and his faithfulness. (Ps. 57:1-3)

These past several days have led us to ask questions about God, and to depend on His love and faithfulness.

It’s interesting that the question from Believe Chapter 1 is not, “Is there a God?” The truth is, around the world, most people believe there is a God.

Here in the United States, depending on the study you look at, an estimated 90-97% of the population believes there is a God.

So, if you believe there is a God, you are in good company.

The Apostle Paul speaks to this common belief in Divinity. On page 16 of your Believe book you will find Romans 1:20…

*For 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, so that people are without excuse.*

Paul is saying that people have always instinctively seen the evidence of God simply by looking at creation. God reveals Himself in the world around us.

Let’s look at how God is introduced as the main character in the Bible:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* (Genesis 1:1)

In the beginning… God.

In these first few words of the Bible no explanation about God is given. God doesn’t feel the need to defend his existence. It’s assumed.

Instead, God invites us into a relationship.

And the ultimate proof of God’s existence and his desire to know you and love you comes down to one single moment in history… the death of Jesus for your sins, and his victorious resurrection.

God reveals himself in the world.

I want you to hear this…

This *Believe* journey we are starting together it’s meant to help you examine the basic beliefs of the Christian faith.

It’s perfect for people who are already Christians, and it’s perfect for people who are curiously seeking.

We are going explore the Bible to examine the core beliefs, practices, and virtues of Christianity.

But the heart of this study isn’t about getting through a reading plan, or memorizing a bunch of Bible verses and belief statements. Those are tools to help you.

Our ultimate goal is to *truly know* God and be in relationship with Him.

And there is a great example of choosing a relationship with God in the first chapter of Believe. It comes from Joshua chapter 24 starting on page 18 of your Believe book:

Here’s a little history and context…

After 400 years in slavery, God delivered His people, Israel, out of captivity in Egypt through a series of amazing miracles.

But even though God demonstrated His love and power to them over and over again, the Israelite’s hearts were fickle.

At this point in the story they had wandered around the wilderness for 40 years. They have gotten a taste for the other gods the surrounding nations worship, and they can’t make up their minds.

So, before the people enter into the Promised Land that God has led them to, their leader, Joshua, gathers everyone and calls them to account with this Winston Churchill type speech. This is the climax of Joushua’s message:

*Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*  (Joshua 24:14–15)

Joshua’s razor-sharp message is there are options about what you believe and who you follow, but a decision must be made.

Notice the Bible never denies the availability of other gods. In fact, God makes it clear that there will be other gods competing for our affections.

And you have the freedom to choose which god you will serve. For us today, it probably won’t be the gods of the Amorites. But it could be the god of materialism. The god of politics. The god of pride. Just to name a few.

So, the question is not *Is there a God?* But, *who is God?*

Who is the one true God? And will you serve Him?

And here is the Christian response. It’s the key idea for this week.

**KEY IDEA: *I believe that the God of the Bible is the One True God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.***

From this Key Idea, I’m going to give you two characteristics of God to think about today:

1. The first is **True God**

The history we read in the Bible shows that people believed in gods – lots of them. People worshiped different gods for different reasons.

But the Bible declares, “There is one true God. He’s the One that was in the *beginnin*g – the one that created everything. And He’s the One that will be present in the *end*.”

So, the big question you need to answer is *which God is the true God*, and *what does it mean to believe in that God?*

At some point in your life, you have wondered… Is the true God *near* us or *far* away? Is the true God *gracious* or *vindictive*? Is God *wholly* *concerned* with me, or *completely disinterested*? Is God *good* and can He be *trusted*?

These are essential questions. And the way we answer for ourselves matters significantly.

So, our first Big Idea from the Bible is that Scripture claims there is one true God.

And Jesus made this claim himself. He said this prayer for his followers:

*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”* (John 17:3)

**Throughout the Bible the claim is that this God as revealed in JESUS is the ONE TRUE GOD.**

And that brings us to a second characteristic…

1. **Triune God**

The God of the Bible is one God, not many. In the Old Testament, Israel’s great memory verse was:

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”* (Deuteronomy 6:4, NIV)

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are monotheistic religions. Meaning One God.

In Old Testament times this belief in one God made Israel unique. Other nations, like Ancient Egypt, believed in a number of gods.

But if you look closely at the Bible, we discover something interesting about this one God. He is spoken of in three persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. There’s an example of this at Jesus’ baptism:

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

(Matthew 3:16–17)

So, all three converge in this scene. **One *God*. Three *persons*.**

Well, how do we understand this three-in-one?

There are a lot of bad analogies out there that break down. So, I’m not going to give you a Trinity analogy because I’ll probably end up committing some kind of ancient heresy!

This idea that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is hard to comprehend. We love to think in terms of hierarchy. We like to rank and order everything and everybody.

**God is NOT a *hierarchy*, but a *community of equals*.** This is HUGE for how we understand God.

It’s HUGE for how we understand ourselves and our relationship with God and others.

God is a **relational being** – As God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit, He is His own community.

In **Gen 1:26** God said, “Let *us* make mankind in *our* image.” Not me and my, but **us and ours**. The essence of God is relational. And his desire for us is to experience relationships.

God is a triune God. His image is community.

Early in the Creation narrative, God looks at Adam and says, “**It is not good for the man to be alone.”**

And with that matter of fact statement God reveals this broad universal truth that **something is off when no one really knows us**, and that we were *made* to have meaningful relationships.

God **designed us to live in community.** He made us male and female to be in relationship with each other, and in relationship with Him.

That’s what your family is, what this worship gathering is, it’s what our Connection Groups are for.

Being in community like God designed you to be… based on His own image.

As your read Believe, to help you understand the Trinity I recommend you try talking to the Trinity and see how that shapes and influences your understanding and your heart.

I often pray specifically to God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. Father. Son. Spirit.

Heavenly Father, protect me in this difficult situation and provide for me.

Jesus thank you for loving me and sacrificing your life for me. Thank you for your forgiveness. Forgive my sins from today.

Holy Spirit work through me today. Give me courage and boldness. Guide my thoughts, words, and actions.

**So, the God of the Bible is the True God. And we come to know him as a Triune God:**

* 1. A loving and caring **Father** who *provides, protects*, and *forgives*.
  2. A selfless **Son** who *sacrifices, serves*, and *saves*.
  3. A **Spirit** who *guides, energizes*, and *transforms* us.

**CONCLUSION**

Well, as we look to the weeks ahead I think most of us fall into one of two categories, or somewhere in between… and either way I’m going to leave you with a challenge.

Some of you here today are not sure what you believe. Maybe you are new to church or haven’t attended church in a long time.

Maybe you have gone to church your whole life, and you are here every single Sunday.

And you have questions and doubts. You’re not sure if you really buy-in to the Bible and Christianity. There’s something that doesn’t add up. Explanations that have never made sense. Ideas that don’t satisfy your questions.

Let’s all commit to saying that it is ok. If that’s you we are so glad you’re here. There are others like you here too.

And we want this church community to be a place where you can be honest, be open, and ask questions.

I hope you will have the courage to share any doubts that you have been afraid to say out loud.

There’s a story about a man in the Gospel of Mark that exclaimed to Jesus, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

What an honest response that we can all say for ourselves.

Reading the Believe book, and being a part of a Connection Group is a huge opportunity for you to explore the Bible and decide what you Believe.

I’m excited for you and I hope you’ll press into that opportunity.

Ask Jesus to help you with your unbelief and see what happens.

And Connection Group Leaders… if you are leading a Believe group, when you get together tonight or this week, pledge to help make your group a safe place, an open place for doubts and questions to be shared.

And to be honest when you don’t have a good answer. You can explore and search for truth together.

The other side is some of you have been Christians for a long time. You are a student of the Bible and you know church doctrine well.

You could look at the 30 Big Ideas in Believe and say, “I have seen lot of this before.”

If that’s you, there is a potential trap to avoid of simply going through the motions of another bible study.

Be careful you don’t buy the memory verse cards out in the lobby because you want to be the memory verse champion. Make sure you don’t turn the daily reading plan into an agenda item, instead of an opportunity to grow.

Ask God every week to show you something you haven’t seen before. To teach you something new. To use these ideas in the Bible to create a powerful conversation with a friend or family member.

Take some Believe postcards home and invite someone to do this with you.

Wherever you land within those two categories I hope Believe is a fresh season for you. A time of renewal. A chance to heal if you are hurting. The start of a bold new chapter in your faith journey.

Where you know the one true God, like never before… and the Grace he has in mind for you though Jesus.

Pray with me.