



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

EXPERIENCING GOD [Part 5]. . .

CRISIS OF BELIEF

~ Scripture: I Samuel 17:45-47 ~

Rev. Stephen G. Bringardner

July 23, 2006

We come to a turning point in our quest for experiencing God.

- Last month, we started with the reality that God is always at work around & within us.
- He is always pursuing a love relationship with us that is real & personal.
- God invites us to become involved in His work, and it is up to us to RSVP.
- God speaks to us by so many means. We just need to get out of the “dead zones”.

Having done all that, we now come to a fork in the road. . . a crisis of belief, if you please.

You see, when God is at work in our lives, it’s inevitable that we are going to face some God-sized challenges—some things you cannot get through on your own. If God does not help you, you will fail.

That brings us to a crossroads, a decision point, a crisis. That word *crisis* means “decision”.

By crisis, I am not talking about a traumatic experience (e.g.: tragedy or stressful event).

I am talking about a turning point, a fork in the road—one that demands you make a decision.

Let me give you several scenarios. Place yourself in the one(s) that fit. . .

- You’re Moses, and the waters have parted. Are you going to go down into that water bed? And take a million people with you?
- You’re tempted. A way of escape has been provided (as promised). Are you going to take it?
- You live with an alcoholic. . . or, you are addicted. You have put down whatever the addiction. . . or the one you love has. Life will be different. Can you handle the changes?
- You live in a strife-torn country (hostile to Christ-followers). Your profession of faith in Christ could cost you your life. Are you willing to take that risk?
- OR, in our setting:
The stand for Christ you take at school could cost in terms of popularity.
The Christian values you hold to in the workplace could cost a promotion.
- You’re a kid attending a party where there’s a lot of peer pressure to drink, do drugs, smoke, engage in “casual sex”. What will you do?
- You’re an older adult facing the crisis of aging.....
You’ve been given a staggering diagnosis and a poor prognosis.....
You’ve just given birth to a mentally or physically handicapped child.....
You’re serving in the military and have just been assigned to IRAQ.

These are all God-sized challenges! *Crises of faith!*

How you handle them says a lot about what you believe about God.

There are many in the Bible who faced similar challenges. . . many who heard the call of God to something bigger than themselves—something God-sized—and they too came to the fork in the road we're talking about this morning:

- **ABRAHAM:** It was ridiculous to think that ABRAHAM could father a nation when he had no son and Sarah was way past childbearing age.
- **MOSES** could never have delivered the Children of Israel from Pharaoh's army, crossed the Red Sea on dry land, provided water from a rock, or furnished to his people bread & meat on a daily basis in his own strength.
- **JOSHUA** could not have taken the Israelites across the Jordan River on dry land, brought down walled cities, defeated enemies, much less make the sun stand still.
- **GIDEON** could never have defeated a Midianite army of 120,000 with 300 men. Only God could have done those things.
- Same was true of the **DISCIPLES** in the New Testament. They could not feed the multitudes, heal the sick, still a storm, or raise the dead. Only God could do these things. But He chooses to call servants—like you & me—through whom He does amazing things.

Moses / Joshua / David / Peter / Paul were able to do such things because they passed through the crisis of belief that could have otherwise stymied them.

Next week, we are issuing a challenge for many of you to become involved as small group leaders in our upcoming **40 Days of Community** campaign. Your first reaction will no doubt be, *"I'd love to do it. In fact God has been speaking to me about getting involved and serving Him. But it's such a God-sized challenge, because frankly I don't have the time and I don't think I have the skill (i.e.: I think others could do it better than me)"*.

That puts the focus on ME (i.e.: what I can do or think I can do; or rather, what I'm afraid I can't do given my limited resources). The focus needs to be on GOD (i.e.: what He can do, what His plans & purposes are).

"For with men it is impossible, but not with God; with God all things are possible." [Mark 10:27]

That's what **MARY** said when the angel visited her. She passed through the crisis of belief and said: *"May it be to me as you have said."* [Luke 1:37-38]

Take **DAVID**. God chose David and had Samuel the prophet anoint him to become the next king over Israel. In **I Samuel 17**, God brought David right into the middle of his activity. Saul was still king, and the Israelites were at war with the Philistines. David was still a kid. He was sent to check on his brothers in the army. When he got there, a giant of a man—Goliath (9 feet tall)—was taunting the Israelites. He was challenging the Israelites to send one man to fight him. The stakes were high. The losing nation would become the slaves of the winner. Israel's army was terrified.

David stood there in amazement. *"Who is this Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"* he asked. At that moment, David realized God had brought him to that battlefield for more than "checking up on his older brothers". He knew God wanted him to go into the ring against this giant. He knew God had prepared him for this assignment (i.e.: the Lord had delivered him once when he was stalked by a lion and another time when he was attacked by a bear). But what about now? Would He deliver him this time? David faced a *crisis of belief*. And he met it head on. He said: *"The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine"* [v. 37].

So he prepared to go up against the giant. And he shed the normal weapons of war (they were too cumbersome). He took a sling and 5 smooth stones, and confronted Goliath. And this is what he said:

*“You come against me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin. But **I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands. . .that the whole world may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves. For the battle is the LORD's. He will give you into our hands.**” [vv. 45-47]*

David’s statements and his actions spoke loudly what he believed about God:

- He is the living God!
- He is a delivering God!
- He is almighty and will defend His people!

His people thought he was foolish; Goliath was doubled over in laughter. But God gave him a mighty victory so that the whole world would know who this God in Israel really is!

Faith is what you believe about God. But it is not just what you say you believe; it is what you show you believe. That’s the way God set it up. Very seldom do we preach to the world; we show the world who Christ is. When people turn on to God, they come into an assembly like this and are taught by the preaching of His Word.

I wonder what it would be like if we were to confront whatever our biggest challenge is today with the same words: ***“I come against this (whatever it is) in the name of the Lord Almighty.”***

When you face a crisis of belief, what you do demonstrates what you believe. I wish I could tell you it always comes out great in the end. And really, I can tell you that! But it may not seem so to us. I’m thinking about some of the saints listed in **Hebrews 11** who experienced torture, mockery, and death. Were they *less faithful* than others? NO! Verse 40 of that chapter explains that God had something far better planned for them—and for all people of faith—than the world could ever offer. JESUS Himself suffered the humiliation of the Cross, but now is seated at the right hand of God the Father. Remember that when it all doesn’t turn out the way you had thought, hoped, or expected.

CONCLUSION

God invites you to become involved with Him.

- There may be a lot in your life that’s too heavy to bear.
- There may be things God will ask you to do that cannot be accomplished without Him.
- He will probably give you a God-sized mission (if He hasn’t already).

This will cause you to face a *crisis of belief*. How you handle that crisis (e.g.: the decisions you make, the actions you take) reveals what you believe about God—His nature, His strength, His provision—to a watching world. Let’s let the world see the difference living for Christ makes!