

**Series: TIME FOR TRUTH—June 4, 2006**

**GOD IS  
Hebrews 11:1 - 3, 6**

**I. INTRO**

A. Today marks the start of what I believe will be a fun, but challenging journey to the core of truth. The title of the series is **TIME FOR TRUTH...In a World of Hype, Lies and Spin**. At the technical level, we will look at the core beliefs of The Olive Branch. But at a deeper level, we are going to look at how truth travels from our heads into our lives. Now, I realize that this offends something that goes very deep in our culture—**that all truth is relative**. Does anyone see a contradiction in that statement? “All truth” **includes** that statement! I believe that some truth is relative. But we believe at The Olive Branch that there is a core of truth in our world that **never** changes.

1. I think you’ll find our times together provocative, if nothing else. For example, have you ever wondered why followers of Christ say that Jesus is the **only** way to God? Well, we’re going to talk about that.

\*Have you ever wondered what God thinks of religion—and what the church-thing is all about—and why churches are so different from each other, and yet all claim to follow Christ? We’re going to talk about that next week.

\*And have you ever wondered about some of the things you hear about the Holy Spirit--about what baptism in the Spirit, the filling of the Spirit is? gifts like tongues, prophecy, healing? Well, we’re going to dig into that.

\*If the Bible is trustworthy, why do some Bible scholars say that it contains myths and mistakes? And how can I learn to read it and not be confused or frustrated?

\*And what about salvation. Can we lose our salvation--and what **does** it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit? And what about the people in this world who have never heard of Jesus Christ--what happens to them?

\*And what about the Second Coming of Christ. There are so many confusing theories out there. What’s up with the Anti-Christ, 666, Armageddon--what does all of that stuff mean? I can't promise you a concise answer on this--but we are going to take our best shot.

\*The deal is that we will be studying the core beliefs of The Olive Branch. This morning we’ll start with this one: **We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

2. I want to encourage you to be here for every session, **think** hard, and ask questions—and no question is off limits. This is a great time, not just for you to come--but for you to bring friends with questions.  
-I believe, for some of you, this time will help you know what you believe and why you believe it. But way more than that--why it makes a **difference** every day of your life.

- B. This morning, we're going to be talking about something that is absolutely foundational for everything else we deal with. It's what we believe about God. Let me read some verses from the book of Hebrews:

***What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see. God gave his approval to people in days of old because of their faith. By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen...So, you see, it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him (Heb.11:1-3,6 NLT).***

-The question I'd like to ask you is--what do **you** put your faith in; believe in? I mean, **really** believe--so much so that you stake your life on it? What is it that supports and drives all you do? What do you base your life on, make your decisions by? My prayer for you is that in a wish-washy Charlie Brown world, **you** will find solid ground.

## II. WHO IS GOD--REALLY?

- A. The Bible does not start with an explanation for the existence of God. It simply says, ***In the beginning, GOD...created the heavens and the earth.***

-I think there's a reason why the Bible assumes that. The idea of God is the ***single most commonly held idea in the world.*** But people's ideas about what God is like are vastly different. Some believe that God is everything. Literally. Some people believe there are many gods. Some people believe that there's a God, but He's not personal—he's just a force in the universe, pure, raw power and being with no personality. I believe—and have very good reason to believe that God is all powerful and eternal and present everywhere—but personal.

1. Some people say, "I don't believe in God." I'd like to ask, "What God don't you believe in—because I may not believe in Him either!" Sometimes what we believe about God has nothing, really, to do with how God has revealed Himself.
  - a. Some people see God as the "Cosmic Killjoy." The ultimate prude. This is a God who doesn't smile—and is angry a lot. He prefers dark colors, the "good old days," and his main thing is to keep from doing things that are a lot of fun. This God spends a lot of time spying on people. We were taught a song as little kids that said, "Oh be careful little feet where you go...Oh be careful little ears what you hear...Oh be careful little eyes what you see...there's a Father up above, looking down at you in love..." We kind of missed the love part because of all the spying. If you grew up in a legalistic home, or if the Christ-followers you knew were proud of all the things they ***didn't*** do—this may be how you see God.
  - b. Some people see God as this old confused man who looks a little like George Burns. He's quite slow, somewhat witty—but is basically confused by Blackberry's and quantum physics. He's hopelessly patriarchal in his views and doesn't really understand post-modern people and current ethics.
  - c. Some people see God as huge, massive, powerful—but extremely uninterested in people. That's why horrible things happen in this world, why

bullies seem to get away with atrocities—God’s attitude is, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t....”

The earth is kinda this self-propelled lawnmower that God started one day and left to run on its own.

d. If people have been through a lot of pain, sometimes they see God as this all-powerful being who tortures people just to watch them squirm—because He thinks they probably deserve it. If you don’t do things His way, you might end up with a lightning bolt through your chest.

2. That may be what some people believe about God—but it’s not the God of the Bible. **Who** you believe God to be is **very** important. So, how exactly do you find out what God is **really** like?

B. There are two sources, as I see it, for truth about God. First, we need to make the connection between what we see all around us—the things that are as plain as the nose on your face—to the existence, power and holiness of God. We talked about that evidence a few weeks ago. What bridges that gap is something called **faith**. -That’s exactly what the passage I read from Hebrews 11 is saying. You see a magnificent universe—designed, beautiful, and good. You see the intricacy of DNA—found in every single cell. You see the wonder of life. Faith is the confident assurance that Someone is behind all this, and that what we see gives clues about what He’s like. And that step of faith basically says, “I want to know You better! And I believe that the journey toward You will be rewarding!” Now, what specifically is it that you can see as you move toward God?

1. Well you can see **that He exists** part comes from creation. And there are certain things you begin to understand about God from just what you see.

For example, if what we see is billions of years old and God pre-dates it all, it makes sense to believe that God is eternal.

-You can also see that God is massive in both size and power--**way** beyond our ability to comprehend. We are just figuring out some of the laws and forces that govern the universe. Beyond that we have absolutely **no** comprehension of what it would take to create a ball of burning gas 610 million miles across. And then to think of the kind of power that would fling these stars 13.2 billion light years into space? It weirds me out to even **imagine** a God who can do that.

-By looking at creation, we can see that God is also infinitely intelligent--and attentive to details we can’t even see through our most powerful microscopes. Anyone who can create DNA—a miniaturized manufacturer’s hand book for a human being small enough to hide in every one of the trillions of cells in our bodies must be brilliant beyond comprehension.

-Now. I could go on—but all these things are what would be called **general revelation**. They are obvious to the naked eye; anyone—even a child—can understand them.

2. But there's another part about God that you could call **counter-intuitive**. It's the facts about God that you wouldn't be able to figure out on your own—and sometimes contradict what you would normally think would be true. And that's why we need what could be called **special revelation**. In other words, God had to do something special to make some things clear about Himself.

-Let me give you an example. You can look at me—and there are certain things you can know: my race, my age, my eye color—you could come up with a fairly certain calculation of my age, my general condition and my height and weight. But I would have to **tell** you the things I really like, and the things I really **don't** like. I'd have to tell you about what I think about my wife, what my family is like, what it was like for me to be in high school. That's **special** revelation.

-There are all kinds of claims out there surrounding special revelation. Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Joseph Smith, David Koresh, Sun Myung Moon, and Moses David all say that God gave them special instructions to pass on to others. Who's right?

a. Well, that's where what the **Bible** says in both Old and New Testaments, is so critical. I believe the **Bible** is the official standard that all spiritual and moral truth gets measured by.

-Let me tell you one of the most astounding revelations of the Bible: it's the fact that God didn't just make us—He **loves** us and is anxious for us to know Him. The Bible is a several thousand year record of God speaking to people and working with people. It tells us who He is, how He works with us, what He is trying to accomplish on this planet, and what He expects of you and me. It reveals that God didn't just wind up this planet and leave it to run on it's own while He went off to do something else. He's involved; engaged!

b. I believe the Bible is telling the truth. I'm going to ask you, if you **don't** believe that, to just assume that for the rest of our time together this morning. Is that okay?

2. What does the Bible say about God? The answer to that is—**a lot!** I got out a concordance, and I found 3897 references to God. What you see as you read through these--and I did scan through them all--is this amazing picture of God.

a. What you find out is that God often reveals what he is like—and what He wants people to remember--by the names He attributes to himself. When Moses asked his name, he called himself, **Yahweh**, or **I AM THAT I AM**. I am infinite, unchanging, have always existed and **will** always exist.

\*He reveals Himself as the generous **Provider**—promising to provide the food, shelter, water--and even the extras—that things that bring us joy.

\*He reveals Himself as our **Healer** of human bodies.

\*God also reveals himself as our **Shepherd**. He lovingly cares for us, finds us when we've wandered off, restores us, leads us, protects us, and brings us safely home.

\*And I could go on: The God who is always present, our Peace, the God who Sees everything; Savior, Shield, Fortress--and maybe best of all: **King of All Kings, Lord of all Lords**. He is the One who controls all of history. We have a free will to believe and do what we want, but the future is not up

- for grabs. Everything will ultimately fulfill God's plan—not the plans of anyone else.
- b. As you read about God, it becomes extremely clear that He is an active God--there are a lot of verbs that describe him: guiding, revealing, giving dreams, saving, helping, confronting, punishing, giving, creating, disciplining, redeeming and strengthening.
3. I think what surprises people as they get to know God is that He is so personally involved in our lives. In our world, big important people don't usually do that. -But God is so massive and so powerful that He not only keeps the major objectives of his plan for this universe clearly in front of him--he is involved in the intimate details of everyone's life--and He doesn't even break a sweat. He knows you, your motives, your desires, your characteristics *infinitely* better than you do.
 

-He not only knows you deeply, He cares for you--*really* cares for you. He wants you to feel loved and protected; He wants to fill your heart with joy; He knows the kind of damage sin does to a human life and human soul—and He wants to preserve us from that; He wants to forgive us and defeat the power of sin in us. The best way I can describe God is **HE IS SO FOR YOU!** Mom, Dad's, spouses—they're a little ambivalent on that—but not God. Believe it or not, He is more *for you* than you are!
  4. Let me give you what I believe are the three dominant attributes of God--especially in his personal relationship with us.
    - a. The first has to be **love**. Everything God does in this world, everything He allows in your life and wants for your life is motivated by **love**. Sometimes the definition of love from 1 Corinthians 13 is read at weddings. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy or boast—and it's not rude, self-seeking or easily angered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs and always rejoices with the truth. It always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. Love never fails. That, friends, is not just a description of love; it is a description of what God is like.
    - b. There is another aspect to God that defines His actions toward us. **Faithfulness**. He is *always* there; and *always* stays the same. We humans are little wish-washy on our promises—especially when they start to cost us. Not God. H keeps his promises—absolutely!
    - c. But there is another characteristic of God that is extremely important to understand. He is **holy; righteous**. The word literally means, "as it should be." Everything about God is perfect--everything He does is perfect and untainted--**as it should be**. Who knows what you would look like if you were **as you should be?** Well, I would assume—the One who created you. He wants **us** to be holy. I used to misunderstand that. To me, the word holy meant, "strict, tight, squeaky clean, unhappy, ..." Now I know that God's intent is my restoration; for things to be **as they should be!**

-Have you ever seen someone take an old car that **used** to be great, but now it has broken, bent, rusted parts, mice living in the interior—something that was sitting in some field somewhere decaying—and restore it to its original condition? Or take old stained clothing—and make it beautiful again? That is **precisely** what God wants to do with us.

- C. Now, I want to briefly get into something a little deeper here this morning--something that may be a little difficult for some of you to get your head around. Our Statement of Faith says, **There is one God...eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.** We call this the Trinity--and it gets at who God is at the core of His Being.

-Let me first talk about **why** we teach this and then give you the **best** analogy I can.

1. When it comes to what we believe about God, there are several options--all of which are currently being practiced.
  - \***Monotheism:** This is the belief that there is **One** God--this is what we believe.
  - \***Atheism:** This is the belief that there **is** NO God.
  - \***Agnosticism:** This is the belief that no one can really know whether or not there's a God
  - \***Polytheism:** This is the belief that there are many gods, little 'g.' Hinduism has over 365,000 gods. Many New Age philosophies fall into this category.
  - \***Pantheism:** This is the belief that everything is god, and god is everything; that god is primarily a force that inhabits both living and non-living things.
  
2. The Bible teaches that there is **ONE GOD**. That is at the core of the truth of the Bible. But when Christ came and revealed God in high definition, the astounding truth was that He, the **Son**, was God; that the **Holy Spirit** was also God; and that the **Father** was God. One God--Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Suddenly, some things made sense. Like the statement found in the second chapter of Genesis. When God created humans, He said, "Let **us** make man in **our** image." In the original language, Hebrew, this was stated exactly as it's been translated--in the plural.
  
3. Now, can I fully explain all this in a way you can easily understand? No. But then we're talking about God, right? And there's a lot of mystery that surrounds God. The word **trinity** that we use to refer to God is not in the Bible. It's just descriptive—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—three distinct Persons—**tri**; one God—**unity. Tri-unity.**

\*The best analogy I've seen for the trinity is H<sub>2</sub>O. If you put a test-tube with ice in it over a bunsen burner, there is a point where in the same container there is H<sub>2</sub>O in the form of ice, water and steam.

-I don't understand all this—but, then, I also don't know how God created something out of nothing, or how he put DNA in cells or how he created massive stars—and put them a billion light years out into space. By definition, God is **way** beyond our comprehension. And I'm just going to have to wait to understand how it fits together. That's okay--because I don't think I would worship a God I fully understood.

### III. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME...REALLY?

- A. The question the Bible continually asks is not **IS** there a God; rather, is God **truly** God in your life. James makes a very profound statement: **Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by WHAT I DO. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the DEMONS believe that--and shudder (James 2:18-19 NIV).**
1. This passage is saying that you and I can believe truth—ultimate **life-changing** truth in **theory** that never actually changes our lives. Practically speaking, a lot of people who believe in God--live as if there is no God--or as if He were irrelevant. Unimportant.
  2. The passage I read from Hebrews 11 says that without **faith**, it is impossible to please God. Faith is not a **creed**--a **statement of faith** you paste in the cover of your Bible—quote in church. It is the plan you **live** and **organize your life by**. Hebrews 11 records a whole list of people who staked their lives on the character of God--who saw eternal reality—and made a difference with their lives.
  3. Hebrews continues: **Anyone who comes to him must believe THAT HE EXISTS and THAT HE REWARDS THOSE WHO EARNESTLY SEEK HIM (Heb. 11:6 NIV)...**  
 -See it? **Earnestly! Sincerely—with all your heart. Nothing hidden.** Coming to God doesn't mean that you just believe in his existence--it means that you **earnestly seek Him**. That you believe that honoring Him and listening to Him is the single most worthwhile thing you will do in this life. That there will not be a single sacrifice, a single difficult decision you make to please Him that He will not in some way reward.  
 -So, I've got to ask you this morning to examine your heart--and truthfully answer the question: "Do I really believe in the character and integrity of God? Do I believe that God actually knows more than I do—and that He can be trusted?"  
 -Is it clear by the rewards you're reaching for that this is precisely what you're hoping in. Really? Or would it be more true to say that you're going for the money, status, success, power and fun of those world system—trying to keep God in your back pocket as a kind of insurance policy in case your plans don't work? Are you trying to **use** God? What would the people who know you best say about that?
- B. Let me break that down for you a little, because, you see, this gets to the very heart of what you and I believe about God—and living by **faith** in Him. I'd say there are two basic choices, that you could put like this:
- \***God** and man; or god and **Man** (Me). It really gets down to where the emphasis is--on who really runs the show. Does He come first; does what He says and think matter more than anything? Is He really everything the Bible says He is? Is He **in fact** perfect? Does He **in fact** have better plans and superior thoughts?  
 -Or are you posing as god. Little 'g'. You need to know that the ultimate sin against God is not some sexual no-no; it's the attitude mumbled under our breath, behind our pious faces, folded hands, and Bible quotes: **I can do this BETTER than God.**
1. The word the Bible uses for this is **idol**. An idol is not necessarily a plump Buddha statue, or some bizarre wooden carving you burn incense to.

It's anything in your life that comes before God. You usually worship it with time and money and devotion. Making money can be an idol. A career can be an idol. Did you know that your **children** can be an idol? God had to deal with Abraham on that one. Cars, houses, lawns, sports—almost anything can be an idol. Idols are the things that cause us to either ignore and minimize God—or disobey Him.

I've watched **many** people for whom a relationship is an idol. They give God lip service until someone comes along who promises companionship, a warm body, or an ego boost--and suddenly it's clear where God **really** is in their lives. "See ya later, Dude!"

-Did you see the sailboat on the bulletin called, **The Little 'g'?** If God is not **God**—big 'G', then you're left with a little 'g' god to help you. The question is, can your god, can your little 'g' god bring you peace and contentment? Give you hope when life looks really dark? Help you make wise decisions? Forgive your sins? Bring your dead body back to life some day. **My** God can!

-Let me give you a good way to tell if there's an idol in your life. If you don't have much time, energy or money to serve and worship God—or the **interest** to make space for Him. If you make your decisions and live your life on auto-pilot with ever giving much thought to what He even things—then you're probably serving some little 'g' god--and you'd better figure out what it is.

2. Let me mention another issue. It has to do with how big and powerful your God is. It is possible to sincerely believe that everything that the Bible says is true about God--that He is Holy, Just, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, Eternal, Loving, Infinitely Wise and All-Seeing--and **practically** live like an atheist--as if He doesn't exist and will never show up. You can believe in and worship a God who creates Universes in His spare time—and has come to live **in you**—and live a small, powerless, unchanged life.
  - a. So, let me ask you. Do you have dreams for your life and the difference you can make that are **God-sized**--or is your life pretty much laid out as if it's all up to you? Is your God big enough to supply the time, energy and resources you need to make a real difference in this world? How about it, is your God big enough to help you overcome the sin you've struggled with for years--the dark critical attitudes, the mouth that keeps digging graves for relationships, the jealousy that makes you small and mean, the sexual addiction that shames you and breaks your heart?
  - b. Do you serve a God who's big enough and smart enough and compassionate enough to guide you through the trials your in--and actually work for **good** in your life through it all? See, a God like that gives you hope--**even in the dark times**.
  - c. God will not be tamed to do tricks for you—He's wild; sometimes scary, but never mean. Are you comfortable with a God who, like Houdini, escapes from any box you try to put Him in? A God whose ways and ideas are **not** a lot like yours?

A God who loves and forgives people you don't even like—and never will? Will you let this God of the universe blow the sides off your box--expand your heart and mind--and life--to think in eternal terms?

3. This morning, what we've talked about is going to go right to the grass roots of life. A number of parents are going to dedicate their children to God.

-When God first revealed Himself to the Israelite people, He made it clear His Word was to be stored in their hearts and passed on to their children. That, if their children grew up in a world that didn't include guardrails, lovingly given by Someone who cared, Someone way bigger and brighter than us—they would be just generations away from a very destructive world. He was very specific:

***Attention, Israel! GOD, our God! GOD the one and only! Love GOD, your God, with your whole heart: love him with all that's in you, love him with all you've got! Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night (Genesis 6:4-7 Msg).***

-One of the biggest wake-up calls for parents as to what they really believe—and what they **know** about what they believe—is when they have children. Children who ask **lots** of questions.

I believe raising children is the single greatest challenge in life. Suddenly it becomes apparent that how you shape this eternal soul is way bigger and more important than anything else in life.

-But I've never met a parent who wants their child to play on streets where other kids live by Darwin's rule: **the survival of the fittest**. Any parent here who doesn't care about that? I want my children to be surrounded by people who believe that loving God and loving others is the most important thing in life. I want my children to know a God who loves them—and can guide them long after I'm dead and gone.

-Parents, let me just tell you, as if you didn't know, we live in a very complicated world—and God is a companion of adults **and** children. He loves them. He will help them find their way. But He asks for—and **needs** your help and cooperation. He is worthy of your faith--**the confident assurance that what [you] hope for is going to happen...the evidence of things [you] cannot yet see.**

#### IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

God has now spent **thousands** of years revealing Himself to frail, fragile human beings--1500 years of writing. "I alone am God. I am Sovereign over the nations. I'm loving, faithful, consistent, holy, and compassionate. I promise, I will **always** tell you the truth, give you wisdom for any problem, give you strength when you feel the weakest. I will **always** be true to you, pick you up when you fall, forgive you when you sin, give you strength to stand when your knees are weak. And when life is over, I will take you to the home you've always dreamed of--and you will clearly see what has been so fuzzy all your life. So, will you trust me? **WILL YOU TRUST ME? WILL YOU?**