

What do you believe?

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I'm intrigued by the public radio program This I Believe. How often are we asked direct questions about what we believe? And what would you or I say when asked by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?"

I am going into the fifth year of a continuing education program in which the capstone assignment each year is to prepare a statement of belief. We are asked to describe our personal beliefs and principles, how we developed these beliefs, what has changed throughout our lives, and what situations have required us to act on these principles.

Out of this experience, I began to see the power of being able to claim what we believe and to think about how it intersects with the various commitments of our lives. I have added a "belief paper" to a course I teach for seniors preparing for their first ministry context. It's important for them to clarify who they are, what they believe, what they stand for and what they will or will not do. I make it clear that all of this thinking is outside the bounds of candidacy tracks or ordination exams; it is for our eyes only. My hope is that this might expand their flexibility and their integration.

Peter Miller, a senior editor of *National Geographic*, writes in *The Smart Swarm* about his study of bees, termites, birds and people. He brings some thoughts together about what we hold in common with the natural world, and what reflects our God-created ability to define our beliefs:

We add something of value to a team or organization mainly by bringing something authentic and original to the table...not by blindly copying others, taking advantage of others, or ignoring our better instincts. At times this means paying our fair share, sacrificing for the good of the group, or accepting the way that things are done. At other times it means standing up for what we believe, lobbying for a cause, or refusing to go along with the crowd. In either case, the best way to serve the group, it turns out, is to be true to ourselves.

What are your thoughts?