

## God Reveals (Psalm 19:1-8; John 1:1-2,14-18) Becky Douglass

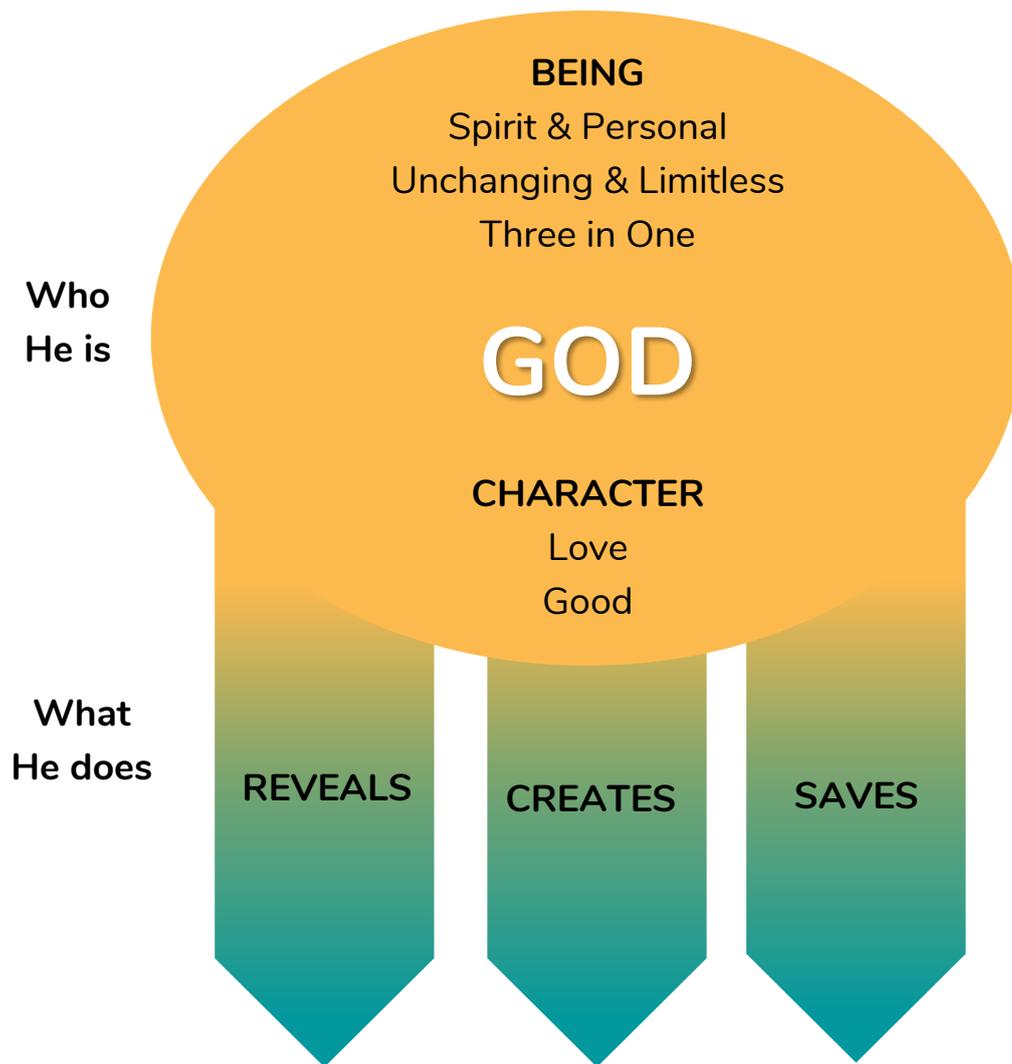
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### Who is our God?

For the past 10 weeks we have been seeking to answer this question. I hope you have learned something during that time! Maybe your ideas have been made clearer. Maybe you have looked at some aspect of God from a different perspective. Maybe you have asked some new questions about God. All of these are good!

Now, I would like to put that thinking to work! I want you to think about an average Aussie that you might come into contact with every day. Most have some ideas about God, but probably haven't read the Bible in a long time – if ever! Many would have never entered a church. An increasing number come from a culture that has a different religious heritage and so their ideas about God have been influenced by that. Can you think of someone like that? OK – now I want you think about how you would tell that person about the God of the Bible. What is important for them to know about Him? What words would you use to describe Him? Have you got some ideas? OK – turn to a those around you and try to come up with a couple of sentences that you could use to describe God to this ordinary. (*discussion and sharing*)

It isn't easy to do this is it? We've been using the diagram on the next page to organise our thoughts about who God is. We've looked at both what He is and who he is – his being and his character. But there is more. God is, but God also does. Who God is shows itself in what He does. It is to this that we now turn as we seek to get to know our God better. There are three main ways in which God relates to us - He reveals, He creates, and He saves. This morning we will start with the fact that God reveals Himself to us. In fact, if it weren't for His revelation, we could not know Him at all. God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself to us, because He wants to have a relationship with us. He wants us to know Him.



### God's Work in His World

One way we can know God is through His work in this world. God is not a distant God. Since the very beginning, God has been actively involved in His world in many ways which reveal who He is. Our readings this morning give us three examples of how He has done this.

#### 1. God Acts

God's actions began with the creation of this world - a creation that reveals Him. The Psalm we read this morning says: *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."* (Psalm 19:1) God's creation tells us about Him. A couple of weeks ago, we went to see a special exhibition of the artwork of Vincent Van Gogh. His artwork, his creations, were projected on big screens which surrounded you and immersed you in his world and the way he saw things. We got to know him a little better through looking at what he made. In a similar manner, when we immerse ourselves in God's creation, we learn about the Creator. One of the negatives of today's world is that so many people are effectively cut off from the natural world and so have lost this avenue of connection with God.

Of course, the other reality is that even those who are exposed to God's creation are so blinded by sin and rebellion that they choose to not see what God is revealing through it. Paul describes them this way:

*“Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like ... instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. (Romans 1:20-23)*

When we turn away from the real God, we make up our own gods. But no other god can measure up to the greatness of our God. And our own gods always lead us into sin and death as we will see in a couple of weeks.

And God didn't stop acting with creation. All He has done in history points us to Him. God's action in saving His people from slavery in Egypt was a powerful witness to who He was. Rahab saw how God acted on behalf of His people and she turned from the idols she had formerly worshiped and followed God instead. Throughout the Bible we have similar accounts of people who see God at work in the lives of His people and choose to believe in Him and follow Him as a result.

## 2. God Speaks

In the Van Gogh exhibition we visited, the artwork was supplemented with quotes from his diaries. This was immensely helpful. With just his art, you can make some good guesses about what He was thinking, but with his words, you know how he is thinking and what is influencing him. In the same way, God's actions reveal many things about Him, but His words reveal even more. They explain why He acts the way He does, how He feels, what He desires.

The second section of the Psalm we read today talks about God's words, specifically God's law, saying, *“More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”* (Psalm 19:10). God's law taught God's people about what He values, what He wants for them, how He loves them. If they were followed, they brought knowledge of God and true life.

When the people wandered away from Him, the prophets shared God's warnings of judgement and promises of restoration. The Grace Groups will look at the commissioning of Jeremiah this week. When Jeremiah hesitated to speak for God, saying he didn't know what to say, God assures him by saying, *“Behold, I have put my words in your mouth”.* (Jeremiah 1:9) The prophets were to speak only what God gave them to say.

The same was true of the apostles in the early church. Paul says: *“For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”* (Galatians 1:11,12) Through the law, the prophets and the apostles we can hear the very words of God to us.

## 3. God Becomes

After attending the Van Gogh exhibit, I felt that I understood him quite a bit more than I had before. Of course, the only way to really know him deeply would be to travel back in time and become his friend, talking things over with him and seeing how he acted in different situations. Deep knowledge of someone requires living with them. The amazing thing about God's revelation of Himself is that He so desired us to know Him that he did indeed come to live with us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was the definitive explanation of God; the climax of God's revelation to us. As John says, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*" (John 1:14,18) the Greek word for 'made known' means to 'carefully explain in detail'. When we look at Jesus – His birth, life, death and resurrection - we can come to know God with a depth that no other revelation of God can equal. Jesus is the definitive revelation of God.

### **God's Scripture in Our Hands and Heart**

All of this is wonderful to know. But I wasn't there when God gave the law. I have never heard a prophet proclaim God's words nor have I heard Peter or Paul preach. My greatest disappointment as a child was that I was born too late to see Jesus in the flesh and follow Him about while He was on earth. If God's revelation had ended with God's work in His World, I would only know about Him through imperfect second-hand accounts. But God had a plan to make His revelation available to anyone in any time. God has given us His Scripture. 'Scripture' is a word which means a 'sacred writing', a 'holy, God-made account' of the truth about Himself.

#### **1. God's written account**

The scripture we hold in our hands today is not just some human ideas about God. Yes, it was written by many human beings over many years in many different styles and languages. But every word is what God wanted to be written. Peter says:

*... no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20,21)*

Paul calls Scripture "*God-breathed*" (2 Timothy 3:16). This does not mean that God dictated the words that the different authors wrote. Each author retains their own style and purpose. For instance, the books of Kings and Chronicles both record the history of Israel, but they were written by different people for different purposes and so they approach things differently and include different events. The same is true of the Gospels. But in some way, God, through the Holy Spirit, controlled what was written and how it was brought together in the form that we have it today. The Bible is a true and complete representation of God's revelation to us. This is important for us to affirm, because many today would not believe this. Many would say that the God can use the Bible to speak to us, but that it is a fallible, human book which doesn't always accurately represent God's revelation to us. But that is not what we as a church believe. We believe that the Bible is God's Word – we can trust it and we must come under its authority.

#### **2. Explained and applied by God**

But that doesn't mean that it is always easy to understand or that we will always interpret it correctly! I know that my understanding of some things has grown over the years as I have

continued to study Scripture and broaden my understanding of its historical and cultural background. But even more, my understanding has grown as I have grown closer to God and come to understand more about Him and His purposes. As God has changed me and worked in my life, the Holy Spirit has given me understanding beyond anything mere study could bring. Jesus said:

*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will reveal to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and reveal it to you. (John 16:13,14)*

Just like the Holy Spirit worked with the human authors of Scripture to guide what was written and ensure that it was truly the Word of God, the Holy Spirit also works in us to explain the Scriptures to us so that we understand things correctly. And as we begin to understand God's revelation, it becomes more than just facts about God, but becomes a personal communication from God, an encounter with Him, a channel for His relationship with us. Dinesh called it a "love letter from God" last week, and I think that is a good description.

The Holy Spirit also uses the Scripture to change us. But we must be willing to be changed. James warns:

*Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. (James 1:22-24 NLT)*

The Word of God comes alive when we read it in the presence of God, with the help of the Holy Spirit and with a heart open to be changed by what we read.

### **Therefore ...**

I cannot have a personal relationship with someone I don't know. The more I get to know someone, the closer and stronger the relationship becomes. When I got married, I thought I knew Scott. We had spent many, many hours together and had shared deeply about our hopes and fears, successes and failures. Then we got married and moved in together! I quickly discovered that I knew nothing about him at all. We have spent the past 31 years getting to know each other and there are still moments when I realise that I have so much more to learn. People are infinitely complex.

If that is true about another finite human being, how can we ever hope to get to know an infinite God? The answer is that we couldn't if He hadn't chosen to reveal Himself to us. But he wants us to know Him and so He has chosen to reveal Himself to us in ways we can understand. We can know Him through what He has done and said in history. We can know Him supremely through Jesus Christ - God in the flesh. Today, this knowledge comes to us today primarily through His Scripture – the holy, divinely guided, written account of God's acts and words – which is explained and applied to our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit in our life.

Our response to this revelation must be to choose to expose ourselves to His revelation. The founder of the Bible College where Scott and I met, loved the Bible and had much of it

memorised. His regular lament was, “Don’t you folks ever read your Bibles?” We can’t expect God to reveal Himself to us if we don’t read His Scripture, spend time studying it and thinking about it, asking the Holy Spirit to explain it to us and show us how it should change our lives. The Bible is not just facts about God or a record of history. The Bible is a personal encounter with a personal God. Are you open to what He has to say to you today?