

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Let Me Introduce Myself

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Scripture:

Psalms 19:1-4, 7-8, 10-11

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

⁴ Yet their voice[b] goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,

than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.
¹¹ By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Luke 15:3-7

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Transcript:

Well, the first time I met my wife, very first time I met her, after about two minutes of conversation, I thought, "I wonder if we're going to get married." I had never had that thought about anyone that I had met before, but I had it about her. And it occurred to me, she was in the last service, sitting in the front row when I said that. And it occurred to me in that moment, "I have never told her that," but now she knows.

And then I immediately felt this urge to tell her about myself. So, I did. I told her all kinds... I told her I was a Christian, told her all kinds of things about myself, because I wanted her to know me because we were going to get married.

It is a human thing to want to be known, or at least the parts of ourselves that we want others to know about. So we reveal ourselves to them, and that's what keeps social media in business. We want people to know us, so we post stuff. "Look, here's my cat." "Look, here's my dinner." "Look, here's my political opinion." Social media is built on our desire to be known. And the reason is, we are made in God's image, and the God who comes to us in Jesus is the God who wants to be known.

We're doing a sermon series called, "Is it good, or is it God?" about some of the basic beliefs of Christianity. Because there's a lot of conventional wisdom in our culture and it sounds good, but it isn't actually what we as Christians believe. And even people who know some of the basic beliefs don't know how it affects our lives, how it changes how we handle money, power, sex, school, jobs, decisions, all kinds of stuff.

So, we're going to talk about some of those basic beliefs and how they change how we live. And today, I want to talk about the foundational doctrine of every other basic belief, and that is the doctrine of revelation. Revelation, which says that we did not make God up. We didn't figure out who he was. He reveals himself to us. He has told us who he is and what he's like and what he's about.

A little like how I started to tell Christina about myself. I revealed herself to me when we first met. And this little doctrine of revelation makes a big difference. It gives us confidence, direction when we're lost, hope, and courage. And I'll say why in a little bit.

And the doctrine of revelation is different than some of the conventional wisdom in our culture. There used to be a store, I don't know if it exists anymore, but there used to be a store called, Build-A-Bear, where you could... Some of you are shaking your head, right? So you could go in, and you could basically make your own stuffed animal. The face you wanted, the animal you wanted, the cloth you wanted, the color you wanted. You could design your personalized stuffed toy.

Well, in our culture and even in the church, we have a Build-A-God theology. I want a God who does this. And I'll take a God that does that. And not so much of this. And I really don't want that. It's our custom designed personal Godlet, a God who likes all the same things we like, is mad at all the same people that we're mad at, helps me do the things I want to do, and approves of every single I make. God made us in his image, and we like to return the favor and make God in ours.

And I'll sometimes hear people say things like, "Well, I just don't believe in a God like this, or I don't believe in a God that would do that." Well, with all due respect, it doesn't really matter what you just wouldn't believe in. That's not the question. Is it? The question is who is God, really? And he has revealed that. He has shown us who he is. He has told us that. And God reveals himself in a couple of ways. First, through creation. The text we read today says, "The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands." So creation, sky, moon, sun, oceans, it all points to a creator. In the same way as if you saw a car and you said, "Wow, what a great car. It must have spontaneously emerged from some goo." That doesn't make sense. The car points to a car maker. Creation points to a creator.

And many of you have heard, there's lots of evidence for this, and there's all kinds of bits of data around this. Things like if the force that held protons, neutrons together into an atom, if that force were just a little bit different, 5%, by as much as 5% difference, life couldn't exist. The moon is the perfect size, not too big, not too small, just the perfect size to keep the Earth's axis tilted at 23 degrees, which prevents us from having 500 degree temperatures or minus 500 degree, which would wipe out life. On and on and on. There's a lot of those things. It doesn't make sense that all of that just happened to happen. Creation points to a creator.

That's what's known as general revelation. Everybody can see it. But creation doesn't reveal everything about God. The heavens declare the glory of God, the power of God, but they don't declare the mercy of God. They don't declare the love of God. So God's self revelation gets a little more specific because he also reveals himself through his law, his commands. The passage we read today, you may have noticed it moves from talking about the heavens declaring the glory of God, and very quickly moves to talking about God's law. And God's law reveals his character, what he is like, what he wants., Listen to how the law is described in the psalm that I read. In every case, it is also a description of God. The law of the Lord is perfect. Is God perfect? Yes. Refreshing the soul. Does God refresh us? Yes. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy. God is trustworthy. Making wise the simple. God does that too. The precepts of the Lord are right. God is right. Giving joy to the heart. God gives joy.

The law is telling us who God is, reveals his heart, reveals what he values, how he wants things to be. The laws are a description, not just of God's character. They're also a description of the world God wants us to live in, without lying and adultery and jealousy and poverty and division and all of that stuff.

Third and most important, God reveals himself in Jesus. The Bible says, "In the past, God spoke to our ancestors," that is, revealed himself, "through the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." Jesus is God himself in human form, so that we can understand him.

What is God like? Look to Jesus. What does God care about? Look at Jesus. What does God do? Look at Jesus. Jesus is everything the Father wants to say. Jesus is everything the Father wants to say.

Fourth way that God reveals himself, through the Holy Spirit in us. The way God communicates to us personally is he puts his Holy Spirit inside of us, and he reveals himself. And he does that in lots of ways, through something that someone else might say, have you ever had an experience where someone's talking, and suddenly they help you understand God better? Well, that's the Holy Spirit in you saying, "Hey, pay attention. That thing that that person just said? That's my word to you." God reveals himself through the Holy Spirit in

those thoughts that pop into our heads, that maybe aren't our thoughts, they're from God, or dreams or images or all kinds of ways.

And then finally, and very importantly, God reveals himself to us through the Bible. And the Holy Spirit is part of that too. When you read the Bible and you have some aha moment, you learn something about God, or it comforts you, or it directs your steps. Again, that's the Holy Spirit using scripture to reveal to you who God is. Never read the Bible without first asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you through it.

And this is why daily Bible reading is so important because we want to know God, we want to know who he is, and the Bible describes who God is. Whatever passage you're reading, you can always ask the question, what does this passage tell me about God? His love for us or his hatred of sin, because he loves us, and sin hurts us, and his grace and his mercy. God reveals himself through creation, his law, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible. That's the how of revelation. That's the how of revelation. What's the why? Why does God reveal himself?

Well, for one important reason, he reveals himself because he wants relationship with you and me. In the original Hebrew of the psalm that I read, the first six verses refer to God using the Hebrew word [El 00:09:05] which is the generic word for God. But then, in verse seven, it switches the name of God to Yahweh, which is God's personal name. So the psalm shifts from general knowledge about God to a personal knowledge of God. And that shift happens in verse seven, where it starts to talk about the law, God's commands. God's self revelation is not an abstract truth. God doesn't reveal himself so we can do theology on him. He reveals himself for relationship with us.

So back to meeting my wife, I wanted to tell her about myself because we were going to get married. But if I had said, "I'm 5' 10", I have green eyes, and my brother's name is Bruce. Will you marry me?" Probably would've been a little too soon. Probably wouldn't be enough information and not the right kind of information. Because I would've given her facts about myself, but it wouldn't have created a relationship.

God reveals facts about himself because that's important. But he also reveals his character, his heart, who he is, what he feels because he wants relationship. That's why he reveals himself. And he wants us to talk back because that's part of a relationship is back and forth.

Last week, I had a line in the sermon where I said, ["Bell Press 00:10:24], I love you." And one of the services, the people said, "We love you too, Scott." Oh, wasn't that nice? They answered back. None of the rest of you did, but they did. And that's something. One out of five, that's not bad. If you say to someone, "I love you," and they said, "Mm-hmm (affirmative)," that doesn't feel good, right? Something's missing. Feels like a loop needs to be closed somewhere.

God is not issuing a truth claim. I exist, true or false. Not asking us a true or false question. He's saying, "Will you be in relationship with me?" True or false are not the right answers. Yes, no, maybe? He wants relationship. That's why he's revealing himself to us. All right. That's the theology. So what? So what? Why does it matter? What difference does it make? How does it affect how we live? Well, a couple of ways that give us greater confidence, direction when we're lost, courage, and hope. First, the doctrine of revelation changes how we live because it leads to a life of listening. God is talking all the time. Are you listening?

Every once in a while at home, I'll be looking at something on my phone, usually a very weighty, scholarly article filled with important insights that I am then going to share with you and change all of your lives, and I'm really focused on it. But gradually in the background, I hear this sound, this [inaudible 00:11:58] and it gets a little bit louder and louder. And then pretty soon I hear my name. "Scott, are you listening to me?" It's my wife. "Yes." "Then what did I say?" "Stuff. About things." My wife is trying to get my attention, but I'm so focused on the important, weighty article, or maybe it was a TikTok video. I don't know. Doesn't matter. The point is that like my wife, God is constantly revealing himself, but we're so focused on our jobs or our school, our friends or whatever it is... Or whatever it is, politics, whatever it is, so focused on these things that we just aren't hearing God. Create a life of listening by reading the Bible daily, praying and leaving space for those thoughts that maybe aren't your thoughts, but are God's. Worship as we're doing here, community where other people can point you to God.

And when you learn to listen, God guides you. He reveals himself, and he guides your steps. He helps you make decisions. He encourages you and gives you courage when you feel weak and when you need it.

Second way the revelation changes how we live as it leads to a life of obedience. And that gives us a richer, deeper, fuller life. And when you understand that God is trying to lead you to a better place in life, then you want to obey his commands. Not have to. You want to because you recognize he's trying to lead you to a better place. And this is where the doctrine of revelation is so important, because we all have... All of us, to one degree or another, have a Build-A-God theology, where we custom design our own little God who agrees with everything we agree with and approves of everything that we do. And that God never asks us to change a thing, except the things we already decide that we want to change. And then it's okay for that God to ask us to change.

But God has revealed to us who he really is. And that is sometimes different than our Build-A-God that we have. God's self revelation is the hard fact that smashes our little Build-A-Gods into pieces for our own good. Because when we obey the real God, not our Build-A-God, that's when we have more joy, hope, confidence, courage, adventure.

One of the most inspiring trips I've been on was a couple years ago where a group of us, Rich was on that trip as well, we went to Greece and worked with Muslim refugees who have become Christian. And it's so inspiring. These people are seeing miracles. They have so much courage. They tell their families and people back home about Jesus even though that meant, in some cases, the families would try to have them killed. They were filled with joy in spite of having nothing. And so I asked one of these super inspiring people, "What do you want me to tell the people in my church when I get back home?" And he said, "Don't arrange Jesus and the Bible the way you want it to suit you. If Jesus says to do something in the Bible, do it."

And whenever I'm with people who have this supernatural courage and joy and hope, that's always the common denominator. They are not following a Build-A-God. They're following the God revealed in scripture. And when God says to do something, they do it. And they obey.

See, many of us want a life-changing experience without actually changing the way we live. Right? Many of us want a life-changing experience without actually changing the way that we live. The Bible says all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, we like that, rebuking, we don't like that, correcting, not keen on that one either, and training in righteousness for our own good. The psalm we read today says that God's commands are

sweeter than honey. They are not bitter. They are sweet. God designed us. He knows best how we will thrive, and his commands are him guiding us to get to that thriving life. It's a little bit like highway signs. If you had decided that you wanted to go to Mount Rainier, because it's beautiful and awesome, as you drove, you would see signs that would say Mount Rainier, next right, Mount Rainier, next left. And you would take those signs. Otherwise, you might end up in Toppenish, and you do not want that.

God's commands direct us to the abundant life. The psalm says, "By them, your servant is warned." Hey, don't go that way. No, that's the wrong way. That way goes to Toppenish. No. In keeping them there is great reward, not little reward, great reward in obedience. And then it says, "Who can discern their own errors?" Oh, that is so true. Isn't it? Ever notice someone who has a really bad habit or a really pronounced sin, and you find yourself thinking about that person. Let's say maybe they gossip a lot, and you think, "Man, why can't they see what a gossip they are?" Or maybe they're kind of bully, they're a bully, and you think, "Man, why can't they see what a bully they are?" Well, guess what they're thinking about you? Why can't they see... So easy to see in others, so hard to see in ourselves.

And that's why we need a real God, not a Build-A-God, a real God who can correct us, tell us what we need to hear rather than what our itching ears want to hear. And the only way you know you're following the real God that has revealed himself to us and not a Build-A-God is if sometimes scripture offends you or rebukes you. Yes, encourages you. Yes, comforts you, but also corrects you. That's how you know you're following the God who's revealed in Jesus and in the Bible.

Revelation lead leads to a life of listening, a life of obedience, and finally, a life of being wanted. God reveals himself for only one purpose. He wants to be in relationship with you and me. He doesn't need to be, he's not needy, but he wants to be in relationship with you and with me.

And we see this in the other scripture that I read out of Luke, where Jesus tells the parable about the shepherd who leaves 99 sheep behind to go find the one sheep that has wandered off. And this is Jesus, God himself in human form, revealing to us who he really is and what he's really like. He is the God who stops at nothing, relentlessly seeks after you and me. So much so that he came himself in the person of Jesus to pursue us and find us. He

reveals himself over and over and over, and he will not give up because he wants relationship with us. And even if you do not feel pursued by God right now, you are pursued by God. Maybe even through this sermon. And it feels good to be wanted, right? We all want that.

I remember once I got a phone call from a guy at another church, and he said, "We're looking for a new senior pastor, and we've heard about all the great things that people in your church are doing, and we've watched your sermons." And I get calls like this from time to time, seeing if I want to apply for that job. And I didn't have any interest in that, so I said, "Oh, thank you so much. But I'm really not interested." And he said, "No, not you. We want a young you." I used to be the young me. I did not feel wanted. That did not feel good to not be wanted. I didn't want the job, but it would've been nice to have been wanted for it. We want to be wanted. When someone wants to be your friend or wants to date you or wants to hire you or wants to marry you, doesn't that feel good? We want to be wanted. And we spend so much of our time living our lives, trying to be wanted. Look at my looks. Don't you want me? Look at my job title. Don't you want me? Look at how much money I have. Don't you want me? Look, I'm friends with this powerful person or this wealthy person or this popular person. Doesn't that reflect well on me, and doesn't that make you want me just a little bit more?

The desire to be wanted drive so much of what we do. Here's the thing. You are wanted. God is constantly revealing himself to you to be in relationship with you. He is the shepherd that will leave the 99 behind to find you.

I once had a conversation with a young adult who just grew up. He hated Christians, but he had some Christian friends and they just kept trying to show him love. And at one point, they offered to pay his way to Europe for a whole summer if he would spend six weeks at a Bible college in Austria. And he wasn't interested in the Bible college, but he did want to go to Europe, so he took them up on it. And he traveled all throughout Europe, went to all the night clubs, enjoyed the party scene, hooked up with all kinds of different women, and then finally arrived at the Bible college, determined to prove to them that Jesus was not real. But the very first night there, the speaker was from Australia. And this guy didn't want to listen, but the speaker had a cool accent, and it drew him in. And the speaker was talking about the book of Ephesians in the Bible and talking about avoiding unhealthy behaviors, like being drunk or gossip or sexual promiscuity, basically the things he'd been doing all

summer long. So it suddenly seemed very relevant to him. And so, that night he started reading a Bible, and he recognized in places, it was describing the life that he had been living. And as he read that, he also started to recognize that he actually really wasn't having all that much fun, and he felt a little empty inside. But the Bible also talked about this guy named Jesus who loves us and forgives us and makes us new.

Well, and for six weeks at this Bible college, he got to see the real Jesus through the Bible, through the people that were at this Bible college. When they found out about how he hated Christians and his drinking and his promiscuity and all of that, all they said to him is, "You know what? The hospital is not for saints... The church is not for saints. It's a hospital for sinners." And he'd never heard that before. He always thought church was for perfect people who had it all together and loved to let everyone know how perfect they are. Well, at the end of the six weeks, he went on a two day hike up into the mountains, so in nature, in creation, and he prayed a little bit. And he really felt God's presence in his prayers, but also just in creation, in nature. And he felt like maybe God wanted him to stay another six weeks at the Bible college, but he didn't have the money. So he said, "God, if you are real, and if you want me to stay at the Bible college, provide the money and I will." Well, when he got back from his camping trip, the head of the school told him that he had just received an anonymous check that would pay for him to stay at the Bible college for another six weeks.

And this guy knew that that was God answering his prayer, and it scared him to death, so he caught the Nick's plane back to the US, and he never went back to that Bible college. Not where you thought the story was going. But it got him thinking about Jesus, who did not condemn him, but simply said, "Your sins, and I know there are many, are forgiven. And I can make you new again." This Jesus who was relentlessly pursuing him, constantly revealing himself to him over and over, through his friends that paid his way to the Bible college, through the Bible, through two days in creation, through the thoughts inside his head as he prayed, Jesus was pursuing him, revealing himself over and over.

And eventually, he could not hold out against that kind of love forever and gave his life to Christ. And a lot of things started to change. Broken relationships started to heal, he started doing mission trips in the developing world where he would teach kids and he loved it. It was an adventure. A lot of his life changed.

Jesus kept revealing himself over and over and over in order to have a relationship with him, which led him to a life of listening, a life of joyful obedience, and a feeling of being wanted. And he had more adventure, hope, courage because of it all. The heavens declared the glory of God to you. God is revealing himself to you over and over. So this week, look for it. Pay attention to the ways that God is trying to get your attention because you are wanted by the God of the universe. And he will not stop seeking, not stop speaking, not stop calling your name, not stop looking for you, not stop revealing himself to you. He will never give up. He will never give up, coming after you because he wants to be with you. You are wanted.

So Lord, thank you that that's the God you are. And thank you that you reveal yourself over and over. Lord, help us to see it this week. In the midst of all of our business, in the midst of all that we're doing, Lord, help us to see and hear the ways you're revealing yourself to us in ways that change us, transform us, and get us closer to you. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Psalm 19:1-4, 7-8, 10-11 & Luke 15: 3-7

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Suggested Icebreaker Question:

- What is your favorite season?

Opening Question:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions - *Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:*

- In his sermon, Scott uses a "build a bear" / "build a God" analogy to describe how we sometimes create a God that suits us and our desires, rather than look and listen for him to reveal who he really is to us. Reflecting on your own life, is there an example of a time when God revealed himself to you, shattering your own "build a God" creation?
- God pursues us and wants to know us. How might we be on the lookout for God's revealing of himself to us this week?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer:

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.