The Trinity

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Article I of Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion

What is undeniably, inescapably true of Christians is that we are *trinitarian*. We confess belief in one God in three persons. We hold many other important beliefs, but without Trinitarian theology, we are guilty of worshipping a false God. Which means we want to be very clear about who it is we worship! Jen Wilkin writes "The heart cannot love what the mind does not know."¹ As we grow in our knowledge of the God we worship, our prayer is that you will grow in your love for him and delight in him.

Two brief acknowledgements to make as we enter this series. First, we will *never* be able to comprehend the fullness of the God we worship. There is an important space for mystery - God is beyond us, and that makes him worthy of praise! Second, we can have an accurate knowledge of the God we worship through his word, and the goal of our theology is to speak, think, worship and love him according to who he is.

¹ Jen Wilkin, *Women of the Word,* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014: 31.

Study 1 - God is One and God is Three

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is teaching about the one God, the author and end of all things; about the relations between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that constitute the one God's inner life; and about the manner in which the one God extends those relations to his people through his works of creation, redemption, and consummation, to the praise of his glory.

Scott R. Swain, The Trinity: An Introduction

As a group, get each person to share a *boring* fact about themselves. Something mundane but true about you. (E.g. *I spread margarine on my toast before spreading Vegemite on it.*)

If you were going to introduce God to someone who had never heard of God (or Christianity in general), how would you do it? What would you say?

Going wide

To help us see how God is one God, and yet three persons, we're going to read a few passages. *Don't spend too long on any of these - they're here to help give a big picture view*.

Passage	What this Passage says about God
Genesis 1:1-2	
Exodus 3:14-15	
1 Kings 8:59-60	
Isaiah 43:10-11	
John 1:1-18	
John 14:26	
John 17:1-5, 20-23	
Ephesians 4:4-6	
1 Corinthians 8:4-6	
2 Corinthians 3:17-18	

Passage	What this Passage says about God
Hebrews 1:1-4	

Was there anything in any of these passages that jumped out or was surprising to you?

Pulling all of that together, what does the Bible say about God (especially since the word "trinity" doesn't actually appear in any of these passages)?

Going deep

Now that we've got the big picture from the Bible, let's narrow our focus onto two passages to help tie some of this together.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Matthew 28:18-20

In Matthew 28, Jesus refers to *the name*: a singular name, for a singular God (cf Deuteronomy 6). According to Jesus, who is included in this one God?

Given their "God-ness" isn't a distinguishing feature between these persons, what does distinguish them one from the other?

Salvation is a combined work of the one God; the baptismal formula in the name of the three persons reaffirms this. How do the three persons of the Godhead each work in our salvation?

There are some important boundary markers that distinguish the members of the Trinity based on what we've seen in the breadth of texts:

- 1) Each of the three persons is identified with the one God; "togetherness and one-ness"
- 2) Each of the three persons is defined in relational terms; "from-ness"

 Each of the three persons is described in distinct terms; "difference and likeness"

These boundary markers help us hold a Biblical Trinitarianism, and can be found articulated in the Nicene Creed (Appendix 1) and the Athanasian Creed (Appendix 2). To overemphasise any one of them, or to neglect any of them, pushes us into dangerous territories. It's difficult to maintain them all! But the Trinity is one of those parts of scripture that is a tension to hold, not a problem to solve.

Using those boundary markers to help, what might be the problem with these different analogies used throughout history to describe the Trinity?

a) The Trinity is like how H₂O can exist as liquid, solid or gas (i.e. water, ice or vapour)

b) The Trinity is like an egg, because you have three things (shell, white, yolk) in one.

c) The Trinity is like how one family can have a father, a mother and a child.

A visitor to church one day, Yuna Tee, tells you that there is only one God. She says, "*If there is only one God, and that God is the Father, and if Jesus is God, then it only makes sense that Jesus is the Father*." How would you respond to Yuna?

What have you learned about our God? How might this prompt your worship and adoration of him even more?

Pray

In Romans 11:33-36, Paul breaks out into praise of the one God who is so far beyond his understanding. And this mystery leads him into worship.

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!
³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"
³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?"
³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

As a group, praise our mysterious, transcendent and glorious God. You may like to say the Athanasian Creed together (Appendix 2) to help articulate the faith (which we will say in church together).

Further Reading

There are plenty more passages we could turn to and study! Read and reflect on some of the following passages over the week ahead.

2 Kings 19:15-19 John 5:37-39 John 6:38-40 John 10:34-38 John 12:44-45 Colossians 1:15-20

Study 2 - God the Father

We speak to God, and God listens to us, as if we were Jesus. Jesus is God's child by nature, and we become God's children by grace. Jesus is born of God; we are adopted. So when we confess that God is "Father," it is not a theological idea but a confession of the defining relationship of our lives. We call God "Father" because that is what Jesus calls God, and because Jesus has invited us to relate to God in the same way. In other words, we call God "Father" because of revelation.

Ben Myers, The Apostles' Creed

What examples of fathers - good or bad - come to mind when you think of media, TV, movies, etc.?

What do you think makes someone a good father?

Going wide

To help us see the person of God the Father, we're going to read a few passages. *Don't spend too long on any of these - they're here to help give a big picture view*.

Passage	What this Passage says about God the Father
Exodus 4:22-23	
Isaiah 63:16	
Isaiah 64:8	
Matthew 5:43-48	
Matthew 6:25-33	
Romans 1:7	
1 Corinthians 1:3	
Galatians 4:4-7	
James 1:17-18	
1 John 2:15-17	

Was there anything in any of these passages that jumped out or was surprising to you?

Pulling all of that together, what does the Bible say about God the Father in his relationships to:

Israel:	 	
Jesus:		
Us:		

Going deep

Now that we've got the big picture from the Bible, let's narrow our focus onto two passages to help tie some of this together.

Read Ephesians 1:3-10 and Hebrews 12:5-11

Would God be Father without creation or redemption? Why, or why not?

According to these passages, what character traits does God the Father express?

How does God the Father express his fatherhood over Christians?

Al Lohne, a member of your small group, shares one week after prayer that he has trouble praying to God as Father because of his experiences growing up. *"I never met my dad. My mum fled from him when I was really young. She didn't want to talk much about him, but I knew he was just plain evil. So when we pray* *to God as "Our Father in heaven," I really struggle."* How might you respond to Al?²

Tim Chester, in his book "Enjoying God," reflects on this idea of us living in a fathered world.

...*everything* is an act of God. Sometimes God acts directly (in what we call miracles) and sometimes God acts indirectly through intermediate causes (which we call natural causes). But everywhere our heavenly Father is at work. The postman who delivers a comforting letter is an agent of God, even if they are unwitting partners with God. The farmer, the miller, the baker, the shopkeeper - or their industrial equivalents - are agents of God's kindness, used by God to gift us food.³

Think about your own life right now, and share back with the group: what are *three* ways in which God's Fatherly provision and oversight was expressed in your life today? And then as a group, turn this into praise!

² Please do seek out help if you're in a dangerous situation. 1800-RESPECT, Lifeline (131114), MensLine (1300 789 978).

³ Chester, Tim. *Enjoying God*, 42.

Pray

Here's a prayer written by Robert Hawker (1753-1827),⁴ in which he prays to God our Father and reflects on the theme of God's fathering this world. As a group or on your own, read through this prayer, making it your own prayer to God the Father.

Almighty Father, it is your special mercy to give your Son, and with him all things, to the highly favoured objects of your everlasting love.

From all eternity, you planned, ordered, willed, appointed, and prepared the great salvation of the gospel. You chose Christ as the head, and the church as the body of this amazing work of redemption.

You have carried out all the great designs. You strengthen and complete everything in our final salvation—in grace here, and glory hereafter.

Blessed, holy, and compassionate Lord God! For the sake of Jesus fulfill this promise daily in my soul. Bear me up, carry me through, and strengthen me in Christ, that I may walk in his name, until you bring me in to see his face in your eternal home, and I dwell under the light of his countenance forever, amen.

⁴ Robert Hawker, "The Father Planned it all," in Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans, ed. Robert Elmer (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 98.

Study 3 - God the Son

For the Saviour, through His Incarnation, in His loving-kindness effected both these things: He made death to vanish from us, and renewed us; and, being invisible and unseen, He appeared through His works and made Himself known to be the Word of the Father, the Ruler and King of the whole creation.

Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation of the Word of God

As a group, line up youngest to oldest in order of your date of birth (including time of day in the case of a tie!).

If someone were to ask you what God looks like, how would you answer?

Going wide

To help us see the person of God the Son, we're going to read a few passages. *Don't spend too long on any of these - they're here to help give a big picture view.*

Passage	What this Passage says about God the Son
2 Samuel 7:11-16	
Isaiah 7:14	
Isaiah 9:6-7	
Psalm 2:7-12	
Mark 1:9-11	
Luke 1:30-35	
John 20:28-31	
Philippians 2:5-11	
Colossians 1:15-20	
Hebrews 1:2-3	

Passage	What this Passage says about God the Son
1 John 5:1	
Revelation 2:18, 25-28	

Was there anything in any of these passages that jumped out or was surprising to you?

Pulling all of that together, what does the Bible say about God the Son in his relationships to:

God the Father:_____

David's Family Line:_____

What do these passages have to say about the incarnation (the event in which God the Son took on humanity and was born as the man, Jesus)?

Going deep

Now that we've got the big picture from the Bible, let's narrow our focus onto two passages to help tie some of this together.

Read John 1:1-18 and John 5:16-30

What things are true of both Jesus (ie the Son) and God (ie the Father)?

Is it possible to know, love and honour God the Father but reject God the Son? Why, or why not?

What is on offer for those who receive the Son and believe in him? How does this leave you feeling?

Ari Yanhisum, a Jehovah's Witness who knocks on your door one day, shares "*The Son of God is a mighty one and one of God's best creations! But he's not eternal; there was a time when he was not, for the Son is a creature and a work.*" How might you respond to Ari?

If we want to know what God looks like, how he loves us, what his heart is, we simply need to look at Jesus. He is God the Son incarnate. He speaks, interacts, loves and judges *exactly* the same way that God the Father does. He is full of grace and truth, gives life to all he wills, and executes judgement as

his Father wills. We have a tender, loving and compassionate saviour. Which means we don't need to work for God's love, forgiveness or approval. It is ours in Christ.

Write down the ways in which you strive to earn approval and acceptance whether at home, or in relationships, or in the workplace. Share one of these areas with others where you are seeking approval, and over this week commit to praying for each other.

Now apply the gospel to yourself: in Christ, you are loved, accepted and cherished as God's child. Isn't that amazing? You can call him Father and have the same love and acceptance that the Son has. Praise God together as a group.

Pray

One of the earliest Christian prayers appears twice in the New Testament: *Marana tha!* (1 Corinthians 16:22, Revelation 22:20) This is Aramaic for "Come, Lord" and is a prayer to Jesus, asking him to return again soon. Why not make this your prayer as a group? Ask our Lord to return! Pray for those who don't know him yet to come to faith (2 Peter 3:9). Pray for us to live holy and godly lives in the meantime (2 Peter 3:11-12).

Deep Dive

On Thursday 13th June we have Tim Patrick (the Principal of Bible College SA) speaking on the dual natures of Christ; the Son of God who is fully divine and fully man.

Study 4 - God the Holy Spirit

For it is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and in earth. Because he is circumscribed by no limits, he is excepted from the category of creatures; but in transfusing into all things his energy, and breathing into them essence, life, and movement, he is indeed plainly divine.

John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, I.13.14

It's the early 30's AD, Jesus has just risen from the dead and he's asked you to be in charge of his marketing department. What's your plan for getting people to follow him?

Is the Holy Spirit like "the Force" in Star Wars? Why, or why not?

Going wide

To help us see the person of God the Holy Spirit, we're going to read a few passages. *Don't spend too long on any of these - they're here to help give a big picture view*.

Passage	What this Passage says about God the Holy Spirit
Genesis 1:2	
Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29	
Psalm 104:27-30	
Isaiah 11:1-4	
Luke 3:21-22	
Luke 4:1-2, 14-15	
John 14:25-26	
John 15:26-27	
John 16:7-15	
Acts 5:1-9	

Passage	What this Passage says about God the Holy Spirit
2 Corinthians 3:17-18	
Hebrews 10:15-18	
Revelation 14:13	

Was there anything in any of these passages that jumped out or was surprising to you?

Pulling all of that together, what does the Bible say about God the Holy Spirit in his relationships to:

God the Father:_____

God the Son:
Us.
Us:
What's the difference between how the Holy Spirit was at work in the Old
Testament compared with the New Testament?

Going deep

Now that we've got the big picture from the Bible, let's narrow our focus onto three passages to help tie some of this together.

Read Acts 2:1-22, 1 Corinthians 12:1-14, 27-31 and Galatians 5:16-25 Why does God pour out the Holy Spirit onto all believers? What is his purpose? Make a list of the different works that the Holy Spirit does through God's people. What does the Spirit do through these gifts?

In 1 Corinthians 14:12, Paul says "*Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.*" According to the Bible, the big work of the Holy Spirit is building up the church by empowering God's people to more clearly point to Christ. Rubber hits the road time: how are you building God's church? What gifts has God given you to build his church?

A family friend, Carrie Semattik, shares with you one day "The most important thing about the Holy Spirit is that every Christian who gets him can speak in tongues. If you can't speak in tongues, you probably don't have the Spirit and need to be born again - even Jesus said it was gonna be what his disciples did check out Mark 16:17!" How would you respond to Carrie?

The Holy Spirit is just that - the Spirit of Holiness - the one who works to make the church and each individual member of it holy. One of the chief works of the Holy Spirit in our lives is putting sin to death. It's making us look more and more like Jesus. So take stock for a moment: compared to a year ago, or two, or five:

- Are there sins which are no longer as present in your life?
- Have you been more eager to help grow God's church to serve others?
- Have you grown in the fruit of the Spirit love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?

How might you better support one another as a group in putting sin to death, keeping in step with the Spirit, and working together to build God's Church? One important way is to share openly and honestly with each other as a small group about these areas of struggle and growth. To be accountable to one another. Commit this to prayer.

Pray

Here's a prayer, called a litany, which is found in the Australian Prayer Book. Get half your group to say the normal words, and the other half to say the bold words.

Come, Holy Spirit, creator, and renew the face of the earth.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, counsellor and advocate. Touch our lips that we may pray aright and proclaim your word.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, power from on high, make us agents of peace and ministers of wholeness.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, giver of life, breathe on your Church and make us a living people, holy and free.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

(Together) **Come, Holy Spirit, bond of love, pour your love into our hearts that we may serve you with joy.**

Further Reading

There are plenty more passages we could turn to and study! Read and reflect on some of the following passages over the week ahead.

1 Samuel 10:1, 6, 9-10 Isaiah 42:1-7 Isaiah 61:1-3 Isaiah 63:7-14 Zechariah 7:7-12 Acts 10:1-11:18 Romans 8:14-17 1 Corinthians 13-14

Study 5 - The Triune God who is Good

Goodness flows out of God as naturally as breath flows out of us. When he speaks, a creation that is "good" is what results (see Genesis 1). The morning sun rises, bursting the night's darkness with colour and light and the goodness of God. The aroma of freshly-brewed coffee, the gift of taste buds, the emotional outlet of singing, the existence of laughter - they all point back to a God whose creative goodness included these in the human experience. He did not have to. But his goodness spills over with unrestrained abundance, filling every corner of creation. Because goodness is what God is, goodness is what God naturally does.

Adam Ramsay, Truth on Fire

There's a classic South Australian bit of lingo: "heaps good." How would you explain what "heaps good" means to someone from a different part of the world?

Do you think God is good? Why, or why not?

Going wide

To help us see the goodness of our Triune God, we're going to read a few passages. *Don't spend too long on any of these - they're here to help give a big picture view*.

Passage	What this passage says about God's goodness
Genesis 1-2 (skim read)	
Exodus 33:18-23	
Psalm 34:8-14	
Psalm 118:1, 29	
Nahum 1:7-8	
Zechariah 8:14-17	
Matthew 5:43-48	
Mark 10:17-18	

Passage	What this passage says about God's goodness
Romans 12:1-2	
James 1:16-18	
2 Peter 1:3-4	
3 John 11	

Was there anything that jumped out or was surprising to you?

Pulling all of that together, what does the Bible say about God's goodness?

What does the Bible have to say about our goodness?

Going deep

Now that we've got the big picture from the Bible, let's narrow our focus onto two passages to help tie some of this together.

Read Psalm 136 and Romans 8:28-39

Who does God show his goodness to?

One big challenge to God's goodness in our world is suffering. How do the Psalmist and Paul address God's goodness in the context of suffering?

One powerful way to remember God's goodness to us - his commitment to our flourishing - is to remember God's track record; to remember how he has already acted in goodness. These passages serve as an excellent example! What sorts of things would we include today if we were to rewrite Psalm 136?

Anne Gwish, a member of your church gathering, shares with you one day "*My cancer is back. I feel really hard done by; I've been coming to church and praying and devoted to God. I've done all the right things. I know he is good, but I really can't see how right now or why he's letting this happen.*" How could you respond to Anne?

Biblical scholar John Feinberg summarises:

When we look at the biblical concept of divine goodness, one major idea stands out. It is that God is concerned about the well-being of his creatures and does things to promote it.⁵

⁵ John S. Feinberg, No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 368.

Our God is good towards all his creation, and this is one way in which we are called to be like him (cf Titus 2:11-14; 3:1, 8, 14). So, how can we do what is good? In the week ahead, what's one good thing you could do for:

- Those who are poor/homeless in our city?

- Someone else in your home congregation at church?

- Christians around the world who are suffering?

As we come to the end of our series looking at our magnificent God, where better to land than in praise of his goodness? As a group, pick a song (or several!) to sing together (or just listen to) in praise of him. A few ideas:

- Holy, Holy, Holy
- How Great is our God
- King of Kings
- This I Believe (The Creed)

Pray

Here's another prayer from the Australian Prayer Book - a prayer of thanksgiving **A general thanksgiving**. Why not use it as a starting place for prayer and praise of the goodness of our God?

Gracious God, we humbly thank you

for all your gifts so freely bestowed on us,

for life and health and safety

for freedom to work and leisure to rest,

and for all that is beautiful in creation and in human life.

But, above all, we thank you for our Saviour, Jesus Christ,

for his death and resurrection,

for the gift of your Spirit,

and for the hope of glory.

Fill our hearts with all joy and peace in believing;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Appendix 1 - The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory

to judge the living and the dead.

His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,

the Lord, the giver of life.

He proceeds from the Father and the Son,

and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.

He spoke through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,

and to life in the world to come. Amen.

Appendix 2 - The Athanasian Creed

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith; Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood. Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; He ascended into heaven, He sits on the right hand of the Father, God, Almighty; From there He shall come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; and shall give account of their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.

The Trinity - Recommended Resources

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