GOD IS RELATIONAL

One of the most mysterious aspects of the character of God is the Trinity. When people try to find an illustration from another part of life to explain it, they always fall short. Some have tried to say that God is like water, because water can be ice, liquid or steam. However, this suggests that God functions in different ways at different times when in reality, all three persons of the Trinity exist eternally. Some try to explain the Trinity by using the picture of an egg—it is shell, white and yolk, three things in one. But this picture makes it sound like each person of the Trinity has a different nature rather than sharing the same divine nature.

The fact is, any attempt to fully explain the Trinity could lead us into heresy. God’s nature is a powerful mystery and the more we try to understand and explain it with our logic, the more limits we place on who He is, making him too small.

As humans, we have a tendency to back away from things that we can’t explain or understand. So often, if we can’t understand something, we choose not to engage it. Many people haven’t experienced God because they have yet to be satisfied with an explanation of Him. Others live as Christians but are only good with God as long as He operates in the box they’ve created for Him. Both of these types of people have limited their engagement with God, and confined him to their own expectations.

We do the same thing to people as well. Somehow, even from childhood, we learn to spot the people who are different than us and are subtly socialized into connecting ourselves to people who are more like us. It’s in our nature not to engage things that are different and disconnected from who we are. But the beautiful reality of the Trinity has some significant implications of how that should be different.

When we talk about God as the Trinity, we mean that there is one God who eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These are three distinct persons who share one divine nature. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. Yet,

**The Three Unique Persons of the Trinity Have Existed Eternally in Community with One Another Sharing the Same Divine Essence. And We Have Been Created to Emulate That.**

**QUESTION:** Do you find yourself backing away from things beyond your understanding? What things specifically? How have you tried to contain God in a box?
the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. While a huge concept to fully grasp, the simple beauty of this doctrine is that God in His very nature is relational. These three unique persons of the Trinity have existed eternally in community with one another sharing the same divine essence. And we have been created to emulate that.

RATHER THAN BEING LIKE AN EXCLUSIVE COUNTRY CLUB, THE CHURCH SHOULD BE MORE LIKE THE X-MEN—A PLACE FOR WEIRD PEOPLE WITH UNIQUE GIFTS WHO ARE CALLED TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY AS ONE.

Read Genesis 1.26.

Earlier in chapter 1 we see that when God created the plants, He spoke to the land. When God created the fish, He spoke to the water. When God created the birds, He spoke to the sky. Yet when he created mankind, He spoke to Himself. He pulled our identity out of His identity and created us to be like Him.

Too often we get sidetracked trying to explain the deep mystery of the Trinity and wrap our minds around God that we forget that we are supposed to imitate His relational character. We are disciples with unique individual personalities and gifts, but we’re called to share that together as the body of Christ. We are supposed to be one community with many disciples. Then we are to go and bring other people into that community (see Matthew 28.19).

As disciples of Christ, there are three life-changing implications from the reality that we’re called to emulate God’s relational nature.

1. THE REALITY OF GOD SHOULD COMPEL US TO CELEBRATE ONE ANOTHER.

The three divine persons of the Godhead are forever united with each other in mutual love. They dwell in each other, and over and over again in scripture we see a mutual appreciation for the diversity represented in the Godhead.

QUESTION: Read Matthew 3.17, John 12.49 and John 16.13–15. How do you see each member of the Trinity expressing appreciation for another member in these passages?

The oneness of the Trinity does not necessarily mean sameness. When we look at God, the essence is the same but the persons are distinct. For us that means we can be uniquely ourselves and we don’t have to try to be somebody else. The Trinity shows us that we can be unique and still fit in. Rather than being like an exclusive country club, the church should be more like the X-Men—a place for weird people with unique gifts who are called to serve the community as one. It should be one house for many nations.

The other part of this is that we need to stop forcing other people to be like us. We shouldn’t make people think that they have to dress like us or speak like us. When we do that, we’re communicating that we want the church to look more like us and less like God. Instead, we need to let people be who God created them to be, thank Him for their uniquenesses and celebrate the differences!

QUESTION: Do you find it difficult or easy to celebrate differences you have with others? How so? What does it look like to welcome uniqueness into your community?
2. THE REALITY OF GOD SHOULD COMPEL US TO COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

Read John 11.41–42.

Throughout scripture we see the constant communication among the three persons of the Trinity. In this particular text, Jesus says with confidence that He knows that God always hears Him—the lines of communication between them are always open. What a beautiful thing to say! How many of us could say that was true of the people we’re closest to or the people we work with? Do they know we hear them?

We are called to be that kind of community. The people we share community with should know that they have constant access to open communication. Division exists where there is no intention for unity. In other words, division happens because we let it happen. We have to be intentional about being a unified community and communication is one of the greatest tools for intentionally fostering unity.

**QUESTION:** What are you doing to make sure you’re being intentional about keeping communication open with those you’re trying to live in community with? How have you seen lack of open communication hinder unity?

3. THE REALITY OF GOD SHOULD COMPEL US TO COLLABORATE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

Read Romans 5.1–5.

In this passage we see the Trinity working together to accomplish amazing things. Through Jesus, we can access the Father by faith, and the Holy Spirit pours God’s love out into our hearts because He teaches us about the Father. Because of this powerful God who chooses to eternally exist in three persons and the work they do together, we have been reconciled to the family of God. What would we be able to accomplish if we intentionally collaborated with one another no matter how different we seemed? The truth is that the work that God has called us to is so much more important than whatever might make us feel uncomfortable.

Even Paul had to repent for this. In Acts 15 he and Barnabas had an argument over whether or not to include John Mark in their ministry. The argument was so sharp that they parted ways. Then, in 2 Timothy 4.11 Paul sends for Mark and says he is useful in ministry. Basically, Paul was admitting he was wrong. Yet he and Barnabas never collaborated in ministry again.

When we end relationships or refuse to work with someone just because something is uncomfortable or someone is different from us, we remove the potential of what God could have done through that collaboration. As a community of believers, we have been called to live, grow and serve in the tension of diverse unity. And tension doesn’t always feel good! We are called to be the unique people God has made us to be and yet commit to live in community with those who are altogether different from us because we understand that His plan is so much bigger than our differences. In this way we imitate the essence of who God is.

**QUESTION:** What makes living in diverse unity such a tension? How could you see collaboration with someone different than you having the potential for God to do great things?

**SONGS SUNG DURING WORSHIP**

All Creatures Of Our God And King, Be Thou My Vision, Christ Is Risen, Our Father, Anchor.