

life groups discussion guide

ON3 family



Navigating Mystery

"Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the Triune God." -- John Wesley

"It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key." -- Winston Churchill

Small groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for the life application of the CORE 4 elements of worship, grow, serve, and share

Yes, Churchill was talking about the unpredictability of Russia - but trying to get our heads around the Trinity can be the same sort of difficult puzzle to unlock. I have heard several analogies, and while most are helpful, you innately know that they are falling a bit short. But, also as noted by Sir Winston, perhaps there is a key. I found this analogy really interesting:

I think an even better illustration of the Trinity is the universe itself (though no illustration is perfect). Isn't it interesting that the entire physical universe (uni = one) consists of three and only three aspects—space, time, and matter? If you were to take away any of these three, you would no longer have a universe.

SPACE consists of length, width, and height—three in one. If you were to take away any of these dimensions, you would no longer have space.

TIME consists of past, present, and future—three in one. If you were to take away any of these aspects, you would no longer have time.

MATTER consists of energy in motion producing phenomena—three in one. If there were no energy there could be no motion or phenomena. If there were no motion, there would be no energy or phenomena. If there were no phenomena, it would be because there was no energy or motion.

I believe that God left His fingerprints on the work of His creation, and we see in it a reflection of the Trinity. We see this tri-unity composing the very fabric of the universe. Why would the universe reflect a trinitarian nature? Could it be that God made His universe to reflect His own trinitarian nature? I believe that God left His fingerprints on the work of His creation, and we see in it a reflection of the Trinity

Q :: Some might say that it is not important to believe the doctrine of the Trinity – why is this doctrine so important to the Christian faith? What would be some ramifications if it were not true?

Q :: The Bible supports the elements of Trinitarian doctrine without ever explicitly stating such a doctrine. Why do you think Jesus never explicitly talked about the Trinity?

Q :: The Bible contains instances of two seemingly opposing views held in mysterious opposition. Examples of this include Faith and Works as well as Predestination and Free Will. Context, then, allows selection of one view rather than its pair as relevant. Do the opposing poles of unity vs. trinity (or single substance vs. three persons) constitute such a pair? If so, when it is relevant to focus on God's one-ness and when is it useful to dwell on the individual members of the Trinity and their uniqueness?

Get with the Program

The Trinity is the vehicle through which God executes His program of redemption. Each entity is equal - yet, each has distinct roles that they fulfill. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not impersonal entities. They each possess personhood and from eternity past have lived in personal relationship with each other.

The Son has eternally related to the Father as a Son, and is eternally submissive to the Father. That is why Jesus said, "...for the Father is greater than I." (John 14:28). This statement by Jesus only refers to the authority structure within the Godhead; it does not refer to any difference between the nature of the Father and the nature of the Son, as both share the exact same divine nature.

The word used to show the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the other members of the Trinity is proceeding. In John 15:26, Jesus said that He would send to us the Holy Spirit, "which proceeds from the Father." Though the Spirit proceeds from the Father, He is equal to the Father and the Son and is to be equally honored. Keep in mind that this proceeding and sending is happening between three Persons living in loving relationship with each other.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are, by their very nature relational beings and have always existed in a structure of relationships. The Father is the Head, then the Son, then the Spirit. These three timeless and equal Persons have positions of authority based on their relationships with each other – and their ordained role within the program of redemption.

All that said, it is in these ways, and within this type of structure, that we see the Trinity reflected in the family. The family is the vehicle through which God executes His program of reaching the world. In the family, each entity is equal - yet, each has distinct roles that they fulfill.

As people, we were made for relationships, and are incomplete by ourselves. After God created Adam, He said, "It is not good that man should be alone." Then He made Eve. Adam was incomplete without Eve. We too are not functioning – within God's divine program – as whole persons unless we are in relationship with others, as God is. While I am an individual person created in God's image, my true identity is found in relationships. I find my identity as the husband of my wife, the father of my son and two daughters – and of course, as a child of God. And all of this without losing my individuality.

Q :: How are the roles and relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, distinct from one another? And how do these distinctions help us in understanding better the ways in which the Trinity can provide a framework for our families and the distinct roles for husbands, wives and children?

Q :: At the Fall Adam, Eve and serpent formed a group of three, but they're a group in conflict, passing the blame one to the another. The family structure is broken. What can we learn from this as it relates to our own families?

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote:

"The union between the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person. What grows out of the joint life of the Father is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God."

Coupled with the concept that the Holy Spirit "proceeds" from the Father, Lewis' notion creates a beautiful picture, within the structure of the Trinity, of children coming into a family, proceeding from the relationship – growing out of the joint life – of the other two members.

I also ran across this wonderful description of the Spirit's role in the Trinity:

"In a certain sense, the Holy Spirit personifies the Love between the Father and Son."

Read Ephesians 6: 1-4

Careful – and very clear – instruction is given as to the role children are to play in the family. The primary function of children within the family program is twofold: obedience and honor.

Q :: Are these two functions related to the Holy Spirit's role within the Trinity? How?

Q :: Can you think of any other correlations between the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity and children in the family?

Instruction is given as well about our interaction with our children.

Q: Why do you think fathers are singled out in verse 4?

Q: In the Trinity each Person has a distinct function and yet all are at the same time equal in their role as One God. If we would agree (and I think we all would) that this is certainly true of husbands and wives (each have a different role, but not at the expense of their equal importance and value within the family structure), is it then appropriate to impart that same notion to our children – and how do we do that?

Conclusion

That last question feels like a good one to take with us and chew on. To be honest, I hadn't really planned that question. But as I typed it, its implications started penetrating into my heart. I'd guess that if we asked our children if they felt their role within the family was equally as important as the Father's or Mother's, that most of them would say 'no'.

And wouldn't that be another interesting, albeit unintended, parallel between the family and the Trinity?

I'm reading Francis Chan's book *Forgotten God* right now. The subtitle of that book is "Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit". And I think that hits the nail on the head. If not neglected, I think many Christians view the Holy Spirit as the lesser of the three Persons making up the Trinity – and there needs to be intentionality applied to reverse that.

Might not the same be true of our children? How empowering might it be to raise them in a way that places a value on them to such an extent that they know beyond any doubt that they are not the lesser component in our family – but they instead have equal value within the family as the Mother and Father?

Is it any coincidence that Jesus prayed for His followers to be "one" as He was one with the Father? Should we not model that very oneness within the family – especially given the biblical model we have set before us in the Holy Trinity?

As in the Trinity, I'm not advocating something that negates the children's role, function and obligation within the family. But what an incredible opportunity to empower them to see themselves as fundamentally – and equally – important to God's divine program on the earth, lived out and accomplished through the family.

Isn't that what we would call great leadership in any other setting?

I plan on giving this prayer, thought and discussion with my wife – and children.

Who's with me?