

## ABSTRACT

### Jesus and the Relational God of Love: Helping Disciples Value a More Fully Trinitarian Journey Toward Maturity

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Rather than being perplexed and giving up on the subject of the Trinity, what if normal, everyday disciples could be helped to cultivate a deeper value for the Trinitarian faith? *Jesus and the Relational God of Love* seeks to answer that question by laying a biblical and theological foundation of the self-revelation of God in the sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit. At the center of the New Testament is Jesus Christ and his relationship with his Father in the shared love and communion of the Holy Spirit. Emphasizing the relational nature of God is an important step for helping normal, everyday disciples understand the importance of Trinitarian theology for discipleship and life together in the church. *Jesus and the Relational God of Love* contends that the long-term impact of a deepening value for Trinitarian worship, community, and mission will be tremendous. The project intervention described in this study helps discipleship school students in a foundational understanding of the Trinity and facilitates reproducing discipleship through an inductive Discovery Bible Study on “The Relational God of

Love.” The implications of the project are practical and touch many areas of life including our personal lives, our church life together, our mission to the city, and our mission to the nations. The project represents the potential for a healthy adjustment in our basic view of God and the practical importance of Trinitarian discipleship for the future of the church.

Jesus and the Relational God of Love: Helping Disciples Value  
a More Fully Trinitarian Journey Towards Maturity

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## DEDICATION

To Kim, thanks for saying “yes” over and over, and for believing with me that we are a picture of the love between Christ and the church—better and better, that’s what we say.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Knowing the Relational God of Love

#### *Introduction*

Learning to talk involves mind-boggling complexity. Whether it is a young child or an adult learning another language, there is a process of learning words, grammar, subjects, verbs, participles, and so on, for effective communication in life. When training a young child, it is natural to reach down to their level and help them. They may not understand the nuances of language, but over time they learn.

That is what God does with us. The Father reaches down to humanity in the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. He meets us in the middle of our brokenness and reveals what he is like. Jesus' life and words show us what the Triune God is like in ways that we can begin to understand. It is like learning language. Jesus is the Word and gives us the basics of God's language. Love God. Love your neighbor. Learn how to have right relationships. Both simple and profound . . . God loves and he wants us to receive his Love and share that Love with others. At the center of the New Testament is Jesus and his loving relationship with his Father in the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

The point of this project is not to dumb down the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather to offer a starting place for thinking, contemplation, and discipleship. There are so many nuances of Trinitarian thought along with emphases arising from different

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 30. The idea that the center and heart of the New Testament is the relational God of love is deeply profound and is in contrast other secondary themes like man or man's sin problem. I also want to credit to Baxter Kruger, who studied under Torrance at King's College, Aberdeen, and has often stated that this was an ongoing emphasis in the teaching of Torrance.

traditions in church history. While “relationships and love” are not the only way to enter meaningful thought about the Trinity, the burden of this project is to show the relevance of Trinitarian thinking for Christian discipleship.

In his recent book, *On the Triune God*, Fred Sanders offers a great example of the tension of explaining a complex subject to a broad audience in the story of Albert Einstein and his work in theoretical physics. Einstein wanted to explain his theory of relativity to a wider audience, but the tension of being clear carried the possibility of concealing the core issues, which would deceive people with the “illusion of comprehension.” Then, the other side of the tension was to give an “expert account” of the theory, but then the average person would be discouraged and lose interest. Einstein’s answer was to write an article entitled “ $E=mc^2$ : The Most Urgent Problem of Our Time.” He circumvented some of the complex math telling the history of relativity and then by telling a parable of a miser who was incredibly rich, but died and left everything to his two, incredibly rich, but miserly sons. Neither the father nor the sons ever spent money, nor were they generous, so no one knew how much they possessed. He went on to brilliantly compare the miserly men to the making of atomic bombs. The bombs are now being made with the knowledge of the atom, but no one knows how much power is there. Thus, “it is the most urgent problem of our time.”<sup>2</sup>

An analogous argument could be made about Trinitarian theology. We are discussing none other than the revelation of God in the sending of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This God is loving and beautiful and we earnestly desire to fully know him, but he is also mysterious and we can never say all that there is to say about him. The

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<sup>2</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 182-185.

tension is that we might say simple things about God, and give the illusion that God is fully comprehended. The other tension is that we begin at an expert level of complexity and description that confuses people and confirms the thought that “Trinity” is best left with the expert theologians. This project will be a sustained effort to give value to introducing the non-expert to the value of knowing God as Triune. We will emphasize loving and relational nature of God by using the “Relational God of Love” as an introductory phrase. Then, as a twist on Einstein’s article we might say, “Knowing the Relational God of Love: The Most Urgent Opportunity of All Time.”

Without sensationalizing the point, there is a great and untapped opportunity for helping disciples think more deeply about and value the Trinity. I contend that the relational and loving nature of God is a tremendous “on ramp” for the lifelong journey of discipleship into Trinitarian thinking, which will have deep and practical implications for worship, community, and mission<sup>3</sup> to the world around us.

### *Topic Statement*

Knowing Jesus and the relational God of love that he reveals to us is virtually mandatory for growth and maturity as disciples of Christ. The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry project is to introduce disciples to the love and relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Trinity) so that they will value a lifelong journey of receiving and expressing this love and relationship through worship, community, and mission to the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Although I am choosing to use “mission” throughout this project, I want to acknowledge the work of Michael Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), for a re-examination of “mission” and related terms that have made the subject unclear in recent years and/or carry the baggage of our humanity and history in world missions. Regardless of possible future changes, the heart and passion of bearing witness to Jesus and his Kingdom will always need to be forged in the context of life-giving, multiplying, and reproducing discipleship and church life.



### *Problem Statement*

Although our relationship to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is at the heart of our Christian faith, many disciples shy away from deep reflection on the Trinity, and as a result, miss out on the rich relational implications for worship, community, and mission. This project seeks to address that problem by intentionally introducing disciples to the relational God of love and helping them to value the lifelong process of being shaped by a more fully Trinitarian faith. The goal is not to answer all of the deep questions about the Trinity, but rather, the goal is to implement an entry-level study that will start an ongoing conversation and deepening value for the importance of Trinitarian thinking in the church.

### *Overview of the Project*

This project identifies the need for a more fully Trinitarian perspective about God and the way that perspective will impact the basic values of loving God, loving others, and joining God's mission to the world around us. Some churches are good at basic training towards a more fully Trinitarian perspective, but for many churches, these opportunities are missing or lacking. The question, then, is how do we implement a simple and reproducible training so that new and maturing disciples can understand the importance of seeing the relational God of love who is revealed in the sending of the Son and the Spirit?

After considering different directions and applications for Trinitarian theology, this project will focus on the need for a basic introduction because so many Christians affirm our historic Trinitarian faith, but are not sure what that might mean for their own lives. My wife helped to bring clarity to this point when she noted how people's eyes

often glazed over or looked away if I mentioned the Trinity or the important implications of Trinitarian theology for church life. This was a problem and I realized that I had discovered not only a much-needed area of study for this project, but also a focus area that could lead to great impact in the lives of disciples of Christ and the church.

The focus of the project will be the students of the Christ Fellowship Discipleship School, which is a nine-month discipleship training school that seeks to develop reproducing disciples in the context of church life. The project will seek to intentionally introduce and emphasize the importance of the relational God of love (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) over a seven-week period so that disciples of Christ will begin to more deeply value the importance of Trinitarian theology for their lives and the ongoing life of the church.

The action plan for this project will begin with a survey on “The Relational God of Love.”<sup>4</sup> The first half of the survey will gather basic demographic information and perspective on the shared core values of Christ Fellowship and the Antioch Movement (loving God, loving one another, and loving those who don’t know Christ). The second half of the survey will gather data about the student’s perspective on the Trinitarian and relational nature of God. The emphasis in this section of the survey focuses on a basic understanding of the Trinity and then moves toward future-oriented value statements that affirm the importance of a Trinitarian perspective for the ongoing development of a disciple’s life and maturity. The survey will be given to two groups: it will be given twice to group A, the Christ Fellowship discipleship school students, and it will be given both before and after the intervention. The survey will also be given to group B, the Antioch

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for the full survey.

College Station Discipleship School. They will also be given the survey twice, but will not receive the intervention.

The intervention approach will involve two key parts. The first part will be a night of training on “The Relational God of Love and Lifelong Discipleship.” This training is designed to give some basic thoughts about Trinitarian theology and show the potential impact on our core values of loving God (worship), loving one another (community), and loving those who do not know Christ (mission). The outline for the class training will mirror key outline points from the biblical and theological foundation chapter of this project.

The second part of the intervention will be a five-week Discovery Bible Study (DBS). Discovery Bible Studies are a simple method of discipleship in which a few people read a passage of Scripture twice, and then ask a series of questions: What is the main point? What does this passage say about God? What does this passage say about us? And how can I apply this passage to my life? They have been effectively used around the world in reproducing church planting and disciple making movements. A major benefit of the DBS method is the inductive and “hands-on” approach that helps people make learning connections versus a one-way lecture-training model. My project would offer a DBS on “The Relational God of Love,” and the students of this study would constitute group A.

The first outcome intended for this project is that disciples of Jesus would place a greater value on knowing the relational God of love (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). A successful project would look like disciples that see the importance of Trinitarian thinking and want their lives to be shaped by that reality. The important thing is not that

they become theologians that read thick books, but that they enter a conversation and a journey of asking what life should look like in the light of God's relational nature. A helpful metaphor for this project might be the difference between an "operating system" and an "app" on a Smartphone. The operating system is the complex programming language that supports the function of a Smartphone application or "app." Operating systems are written by experts in programming language so that non-experts can use the application by tapping on the icon or "app" on their phone. The "app" is designed for ease of use and helps to take complex things and make them much more accessible. In the end, if this project could help non-expert, normal, everyday disciples with a needed trajectory adjustment toward a more fully Trinitarian faith, then it would be a success because it would help disciples and the church be formed more into the relational image of God, *as he really is*. In addition, the project is being designed to be reproducible, especially among churches that utilize discipleship schools like those in the Antioch Movement and a growing number of other churches as well.

As a postscript to the introduction and overview of the project, we implemented the project as outlined above, and the results were encouraging. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were encouraging. While we cannot know all the contributing factors to the results achieved by the project and resulting surveys, the open-ended answers given by the students participating in the intervention suggest an increased value for Trinitarian discipleship. These answers will be discussed in Chapter Four. The numerous implications for ministry will then be discussed in Chapter Five. But before we get to the results of the project we will move on to Chapter Two and lay a biblical and theological foundation for the journey of Trinitarian discipleship.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Jesus and the Relational God of Love: Helping Disciples Value the Trinitarian Journey Towards Maturity

#### *Introduction*

Rather than being perplexed by and giving up on understanding the Trinity, what if disciples could be helped to cultivate a value for Trinitarian faith? What if disciples could be helped to see some of the Trinitarian implications for the way we worship, bear God's image together in community, and participate in his mission together? What if disciples could be helped to see that joy and beauty is waiting in the discovery of the relational God of love? This project intends to make some of those basic connections and turn some the "ifs" into the internal motivation needed for actual growth and change in discipleship.

As a foundational starting place, Jesus Christ is God in the flesh and he is the visible, self-revelation of God to the world.<sup>1</sup> The very name Jesus Christ, the Son of God, speaks to the relational and loving nature of God. Jesus is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, in the shared love and communion of the eternal Holy Spirit. As disciples grow and mature, they come to know Jesus as the one who reveals God to be relational and loving. The purpose of this chapter is to lay the biblical and theological foundation for a Trinitarian perspective about God and for the value of discipleship shaped by a growing Trinitarian faith, which is expressed in our worship, community, and mission.

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<sup>1</sup> The chapter will give more detail in the sections on the Sending of the Son and the Spirit, but we want to be clear that Jesus is God and he reveals the relational and loving nature of God to humanity in his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return.

A few prefatory remarks will help to set the stage for what follows. First, sometimes the terms “Trinity” and “Trinitarian” seem daunting, so I am also using “the relational God of love” as another way to describe the love and relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that is revealed in the sending of the Son and the Spirit. Also, it is worth noting that Evangelicals<sup>2</sup> are often at a disadvantage when approaching the topic of the Trinity. Without the tradition, liturgy, or confirmation of the ancient church, many Evangelicals need help to become aware of the importance of Trinitarian theology. Gilles Emery notes that an emphasis on the Trinity is built into the normal life of the Catholic Church through the liturgy that happens week in and week out.<sup>3</sup> Another obstacle for some is that the idea of “Trinity” is often treated with caution because the word is not in Scripture.<sup>4</sup> While the point is not to leave the Evangelical tradition for a more ancient one, there certainly is a need for more intentional points of connection to the importance of Trinitarian thinking about God.

As we begin the chapter it is also important to highlight that there is a profound mystery connected to knowing and describing God. We often use analogies for God, and our “certainties” must be described with humility because there is always more than we

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<sup>2</sup> I am using Evangelical here as a broad brush stroke to represents conservative Protestant Christian faith in contrast to the ancient Orthodox and Catholic churches and the value that they place on training in the Trinitarian faith. I am indebted to conversation with Dr. Yancy Smith for originally suggesting this idea.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> As an example, the churches of my youth had a motto to “speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent.” Although baptisms were done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we did not use “Trinity” because the word was not in the Bible. An important related issue was Christmas. The emphasis was that we did not know the actual date of Christ’s birth and the pagan connection to the Christmas tree meant a de-emphasis of Christmas in general. The loss, of course, is the important annual conversation about the Incarnation of Christ. Both examples hinder a robust conversation about the Triune nature of God.

see when we think and speak of God. Paul speaks of the mystery of God when he quotes Isaiah 64:4 and states, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, God has revealed himself. Charles Twombly notes there is a “limited comprehensibility to the incomprehensible” because of the revelation that each member of the Trinity is disclosing something “about the inner character of God.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, what we know about the Triune nature of God is because God has chosen to reveal himself in the sending of the Son and the Spirit. Fred Sanders connects the mystery of the Trinity to the general way that hidden mysteries are revealed when he states,

The Trinity is thus a mystery in the New Testament sense of the term: something always true, long concealed, and now revealed. God’s identity is made known on the basis of the twofold central action in the economy, the self-interpreting missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. So fundamental is this event for theology that it is the paradigm case of what revelation is, according to the Christian doctrine: divine acts and words bound together by an inner unity.<sup>7</sup>

Darrell Johnson encapsulates the same point when he states, “Mystery, yes. But not a total mystery.”<sup>8</sup> That is wonderful news because real and lasting life is found in knowing God *as he really is*, as Jesus states, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (Jn. 17:3).

There are so many places of tension when trying to discuss Trinitarian theology because we are talking about revelation and mystery *and* we are trying to have a dialogue and discussion in a way that will help normal, everyday disciples want to incorporate

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<sup>5</sup> All biblical citations come from the NIV (1984), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> Charles C. Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Sanders, *The Triune God*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Darrell W. Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 77.

these things into their lives. A friend recently said that the difference between milk and meat in Heb. 5:11-14 is “who processes the food.”<sup>9</sup> We want more and more disciples to be able to grow up and process the food that they are eating. We want them to be nourished by the richness of God’s Triune, loving, and relational nature. So, we will intentionally hold out what we know in the tension of the things that we do not know, and all the while, we realize that we need conversation and dialogue through the whole process. We all see in part, and the fullness can only be found together with other people and other voices in the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23).

In what follows, we will discuss knowing God as triune in the following logical steps. First, we will look at the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and in the sending of the Holy Spirit. We will then look at the importance of the loving and relational nature of God and briefly trace the development of Trinitarian thinking in the early church. After looking at what we know and what we think we know, we will then move on to the ways that Trinitarian thinking affects the core discipleship issues of worship, community, and mission. We will then finish the chapter by showing how Trinitarian theology unfolds into a basic discipleship plan and cast vision for the future that flows from the insights of the chapter.

### *The Starting Point is Jesus: The Sending of the Son*

An argument could be made that all biblical and theological discussions and assertions should start with Jesus. We start with Jesus because in Jesus Christ, God is revealing himself and saying this is what I am like. We start with Jesus because “he is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) and as the Son, he “is the radiance of God’s glory

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<sup>9</sup> Justin Dorroh at Christ Fellowship Discipleship School, Oct. 23, 2017.



and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:3). We start with Jesus because he is the Light of the World and we are absolutely in darkness apart from him. Baxter Kruger notes that our blindness is complete apart from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He notes that the first decision of Adam and Eve (after the fall) in the Garden was to hide in the bushes *from God*. He asserts that Adam and Eve hid, not from our loving God as he really is, but from the god of their fallen and darkened imagination.<sup>10</sup> There is no way to over-emphasize how foundational our need to see God, the Bible, theology, and all of life through the lens of Jesus Christ and the light that he brings to our darkened minds. Without him, we are without hope. But with him, as Julian of Norwich states, “all shall be well.”<sup>11</sup>

### *Seeing God Through the Lens of Jesus*

Many people struggle when they first hear that God the Father is like Jesus. Perhaps God seems harsh or distant, or the pictures of God in the Old Testament seem harsh, or perhaps there are hurts from authority figures, but most find it refreshing, sometimes surprising, and exceptionally good news that God looks like Jesus. The consistent witness of the New Testament is that Jesus reveals what God is really like. We start with Jesus because he is the mystery of God revealed (Col. 2:3-4). As stated earlier, we still have to hold the mystery of God in tension, but we can confidently say that God is like Jesus. Gregory Boyd notes, “If all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ, then we clearly have no business treating the Bible as an independent

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<sup>10</sup> C. Baxter Kruger, *Against All Worlds: Jesus Inside Our Darkness* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2007), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Clifton Wolters, trans. (London: Penguin, 1966), 185.

source of wisdom and knowledge to supplement what we find in Christ.”<sup>12</sup> We must get our ideas about the nature of God by looking to Jesus. In other words, as Michael Ramsey succinctly states, “God is Christ-like, and in him there is no un-Christ-likeness at all.”<sup>13</sup> It is important to say that in revealing God, Jesus is specifically revealing the God of Israel and his intent to “establish his sovereign rule over Israel and the world.”<sup>14</sup>

Some of the best encouragement in the New Testament for seeing God through the lens of Jesus comes from the Apostle John. John is fascinating because he wrote his Gospel and letters so much later than the other Gospel writers. Tradition says that the Bishops of Asia asked John to write a gospel to combat the heresy of the Ebionites and others “who asserted that Christ did not exist before Mary.”<sup>15</sup> So, John wrote his Gospel and started powerfully showing the Trinitarian relationship of Jesus with his Father. From the opening words of the prologue it is clear that John is looking through the lens of Jesus in order to see God. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1). By the end of the prologue, John states, “No one has

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<sup>12</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *Cross Vision: How the Crucifixion of Jesus Makes Sense of Old Testament Violence* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 24.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Ramsey, *God, Christ, and the World: A Study in Contemporary Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 9, quoted in Gregory A. Boyd, *Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament's Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross, The Cruciform Hermeneutic*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 36.

<sup>14</sup> N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*, (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 84.

<sup>15</sup> Jerome, quoted in Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 59. The Muratorian Canon is possibly the oldest listing of New Testament books. Bauckham speculates that the Canon quote about John may have come through Jerome, who may have been quoting Papias of Hierapolis. On the Ebionites, see also David E. Willite, *The Gospel According to the Heretics: Discovering Orthodoxy through Early Christological Conflicts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 42.

ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (Jn. 1:18, NIV).

John repeatedly captures the words of Jesus that communicate that he is the true lens for seeing God. It is the relationship of Jesus the Son to God the Father that John is keen to point out. John notes the personal and familial name of God as “Father” over 100 times in his Gospel as compared to a mere 15 references in the entire Old Testament.<sup>16</sup> Jesus steps into our humanity in the incarnation to show us God’s intent for humanity to live in constant connection and dependency upon God. He only did what he saw the Father doing (Jn. 5:19), and he only spoke what he heard the Father saying (Jn. 12:49-50). When describing this phenomenon, T. F. Torrance states, “In this absolute unity in Christ, God steps among men and women and gives himself to be known in act which is identical with his own person, in activity in which he is fully present, bodily present, in action which issues out of his innermost being and heart. That act of the ever-living God is identical with Jesus.”<sup>17</sup> John wants his readers to understand Jesus’ identity and that he is revealing God the Father to the world. There is a noteworthy interaction between Philip and Jesus in John’s Gospel:

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”  
 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work (Jn. 14:8-10).

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<sup>16</sup> C. Baxter Kruger, *The Shack Revisited: There Is More Going on Here than You Ever Dared to Dream* (New York: FaithWords, 2012), 70.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, Robert T. Walker, ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 107.

These statements are not isolated, but rather, represent the clear and unambiguous teaching of John's Gospel. Elsewhere Jesus flatly says, "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30). The Jewish leaders plainly understood his plain speaking and in the next verse picked up stones to stone him. Jesus is the lens for seeing what the Father is truly like. Emery summarizes this section in noting that the Father and Son share reciprocal knowledge, love, power, and action seen in the person of Jesus Christ. He goes on to add, "Thus, it is in Jesus that we discover what the name 'Father' means."<sup>18</sup> To understand the Father, we look first to the sending of the Son and the person of Jesus Christ. Just as we look to Jesus to see what God is like, we must also look to Jesus and the leading of his Spirit to properly understand the Bible.

### *Seeing the Bible Through the Lens of Jesus*

As we transition to seeing the Bible through the lens of Jesus, we are now even more concerned with words. Not only is Jesus THE Word as John describes in the first verse of his Gospel, but Jesus is also the final word, which is made clear by the writer of Hebrews (see Heb. 1:1). In Hebrews, the contrast is between the old and the new covenants, and that fact is highlighted in the comparison between Moses and Jesus. Buchanan gets to the heart of the matter when he notes, "In every way, Jesus...is superior to whoever or whatever has come before him. The past is a mere shadow of Christ's present reality and of his glory."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Emery, *The Trinity*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Buchanan, "Can We Trust the God of Genocide?" *CT* (July/August 2013): 23, quoted in Boyd, *Cross Vision*, 20. This is a common New Testament theme. Col. 2:16-17 is an example of the contrast between the shadow of the old covenant and the reality of the new covenant that is seen in Jesus Christ.

But the over-arching mandate for looking at the Bible through the lens of Jesus comes from Jesus himself. Jesus explains to the Pharisees that they are missing the whole point of the Scriptures, which is to come to him for eternal life (Jn. 5:39-40). On the Road to Emmaus in Lk. 24:27 Jesus unpacks what was said about himself in *all the Scriptures*. Rather than just a few isolated texts, Richard Hays notes, “The whole story of Israel builds to its narrative climax in Jesus. That is what Jesus tries to teach them on the road.”<sup>20</sup> Hays emphasizes that Jesus is the lens for reading the Scriptures in both *Reading Backwards* and the more expanded version *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*. In both of these books there is an invitation to a “conversion of the imagination” in which readers are invited to see the way the Gospel writers read Israel’s Scriptures and interpret them in a way to “depict the identity of Jesus.”<sup>21</sup>

A great deal of theology is an exercise in looking at the Bible through the lens of Jesus. N. T. Wright looks at the narrative of Scripture in this way. How would the Jews of Jesus’ day have understood what was happening in his life, death, resurrection and ascension? For example, Wright looks at the cross and with the story of Israel as a backdrop, and he is keen to make the point that Jesus’ followers saw his death as something more than an assassination. Wright notes,

They saw it (the crucifixion and resurrection) as the vital moment not just in human history, but in the entire story of God and the world. Indeed, they believed it had opened a new and shocking window onto the meaning

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2015), 14. One of the fascinating points of Hays’ book is to say emphatically that all of the Gospel writers, not just John, believed that Jesus was the embodiment of Israel’s God. Mark is often criticized for supposedly not being clear about the divinity of Christ, but Hays points out that by “reading backwards,” Mark is actually very clear about the identity of Jesus. When Jesus calms the storm in Mk. 4:35ff the disciples ask, “Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?” Hays points out that Ps. 107 is clear the Lord is the one who stills the sea and the waves. 22-23.

<sup>21</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 4.

of the word “God” itself. They believed that the one true God had suddenly and dramatically put into operation his plan for the rescue of the world.<sup>22</sup>

Wright and others show the logic of understanding who God is, even the God of Israel’s scriptures, through Jesus.

Other theologians have centered their life’s work by looking at the Bible and theology through the lens of Jesus. Karl Barth would certainly be prominent on that list, and the *Church Dogmatics* is an example of a sustained, thirty-year effort to look at theology through the lens of Jesus. Commenting on this aspect of Barth’s theology, Kimlyn Bender notes, “for Barth theology is Christology. To say this is to affirm that every Christian doctrine must be determined and shaped by God’s revelation in Jesus Christ . . . no doctrine can be formed independently of Jesus Christ.”<sup>23</sup> Stephen Wigley notes that Hans Urs von Balthasar was greatly influenced by Barth’s “fierce concentration upon God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ as the only place for theology to begin . . . and joy and wonder in encountering that revelation . . . and a real and redeeming awareness of the beauty of God.”<sup>24</sup> T. F. Torrance certainly moved in this same direction and stated that our task is “to yield the obedience of our minds to what is given, which is God’s self-revelation in its objective reality, Jesus Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’ Crucifixion* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Kimlyn J. Bender, *Christological Ecclesiology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen D. Wigley, *Balthasar’s Trilogy: A Reader’s Guide* (London: T & T Clark, Continuum, 2010), 18.

<sup>25</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 1.

At this point it is important to state clearly that Jesus, or perhaps more clearly, the Spirit of Jesus is a critical hermeneutical principle for studying the Bible.<sup>26</sup> Even in this study, there is a lens that looks at the “relational God of love” with an emphasis on Trinitarian theology, but the first and leading mental image is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Sanders offers a great way to summarize this section when he states that we should “watch Jesus and think Trinity” and, in the process, we will find a rich Trinitarian background in Scripture that we never noticed before.<sup>27</sup> What we see in Jesus has been given to him by the Father, and the Spirit is working to reveal those things to us (Jn. 16:12-15). Paul also notes the special work of the Spirit in revealing the deep things of God to us, and in being given the “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:10-16). We can only pause in awe and thank the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit for this incredible gift. And with that we turn from the sending of the Son to the sending of the Spirit.

### *The Sending of the Spirit*

Another aspect of God’s self-revelation is the sending of the Holy Spirit. Emery reminds us that the “manifestation of the Holy Spirit is at the heart of the Father and the Son. The study of the Holy Spirit does not constitute a chapter separate from what has gone before.”<sup>28</sup> The point here is that the Triune God is always working together in the economy of salvation to reveal his life, love, and purpose for humanity. Even though we

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<sup>26</sup> I want to give credit here to two incredible mentors, Dr. Leroy Garrett (Denton, TX, d. 2015) and Dr. Larry James (Dallas, TX). They separately gave me the exact same advice when I was brand new in ministry. “Jamey, whatever you do, don’t interpret Scripture in a way that is contrary to the Spirit of Christ.” That admonition was so much more profound than I could have comprehended at the time and it has helped me avoid many ditches on the journey and ultimately helped me discover a more fully Trinitarian faith.

<sup>27</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010), 135.

<sup>28</sup> Emery, *The Trinity*, 36.

start by looking at the Son who reveals the Father, we also understand that “the Holy Spirit is precisely the communion of the Father and the Son: he is at the center of the revelation of the Trinity as a mystery of communion.”<sup>29</sup>

Although the sending of the Holy Spirit is a special time that marks Pentecost and the birth of the church, the entire life and ministry of Jesus is also marked by the presence of the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is conceived and born through the direct action of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:18, 20). Jesus is baptized with a dramatic manifestation of the Triune God—the Holy Spirit descending and the Father speaking his blessing, pleasure, and approval (Mk. 1:9-11). Peter states that Jesus is anointed with the “Holy Spirit and power” so that he could “do good and heal all those under the power of the devil” (Acts 10:38).

Just before the crucifixion when Jesus is saying so many important things to his disciples, he lets them know that he was leaving, but that the Holy Spirit was coming to help them (Jn. 14:16). He lets them know that they will not be orphans, and that when the Spirit comes; he will be with them as well (Jn. 14:18). And importantly, on the day when the Spirit comes they will realize that he is in the Father, that they are in him and that he is in them as well (Jn. 14:20). Because the Spirit was coming to them, Jesus lets them know that the Father, Son, and Spirit would make their home with them (Jn. 14:23). In the next couple of chapters of John, Jesus goes on to say more of the Spirit’s purpose—to teach, to remind, to empower abiding in Jesus, to strengthen against persecution, to give power to their testimony, to bring conviction regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment, to guide into truth, to tell what is to come, and to bring glory to Jesus by revealing what belongs to Jesus, which is all that belongs to the Father as well (Jn. 14:25-16:15).

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<sup>29</sup> Emery, *The Trinity*, 36-37.



After the death and resurrection of Jesus through the power of the Spirit (Rom. 1:4), the book of Acts starts with a promise of empowerment by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Ten days after the ascension of Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit dramatically marks the celebration of Pentecost and the church is born (Acts 2). And the important point in telling this story is that from this point forward, the church lives to express the ongoing ministry and mission of Jesus, and his revealing of the Father's love and heart, in the power of the Holy Spirit. There is, as Emery states, "a continuity between Jesus and the Church under the sign of the Holy Spirit."<sup>30</sup>

The Holy Spirit comes to bring us into a real experience of the love and life of God. Paul writes about this again and again. In Romans, Paul tells how God pours his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), and we therefore have a completely new orientation to life in the Spirit (Rom. 8:2). And this new life is a life journey of living as sons and daughters. We live forward into this new life knowing that we are children because of the Spirit of God and by him we say, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15-17).

The baptism of Jesus is an important reference point for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Ed Piorek believes that the baptism of Jesus is the "Central Event" in the New Testament because there is a manifestation of the Father's love for the Son and the communion of the Holy Spirit and that believers are invited into that fellowship.<sup>31</sup> Sanders builds on the importance of Jesus' baptism as an interpretive key to the New Testament and urges, "we should always inquire after the hidden presence of the Spirit and the Father in the unhidden work of Jesus."<sup>32</sup> Clark Pinnock also mentions the

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<sup>30</sup> Emery, *The Trinity*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Ed Piorek, *The Central Event* (S.I.: Catch the Fire Books, 2017).

baptism theme and suggests that the sending of the Spirit is “meant to remind us of the flood” and the returning of the dove to the ark and the hope for “the renewal of creation.”<sup>33</sup> In telling the sweeping story, Wright notes, “the Spirit is given to begin the work of making God’s future real in the present.”<sup>34</sup> He later adds that life in the Spirit means that we “live at the intersection of heaven and earth.”

Although we may not always focus on the Holy Spirit, Smith believes that “the Holy Spirit is not upset about this” because the “constant aim of the Spirit is to point us to the Father and to the Son, and not himself.”<sup>35</sup> Even when we do not focus directly on the Holy Spirit, Sarah Coakley notes that we are indebted to the role of the Spirit in leading us into contemplative prayer and greater insight about the Trinity.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit makes the deep things of God known to us (1 Cor. 2:10-16) and the Holy Spirit helps us to pray at every step along the way (Rom. 8:26-27). On a practical level, Coakley’s insight about the Spirit helping us to know the Trinity inspired a key part of this project’s intervention strategy of waiting in stillness and acknowledging the Spirit’s role in leading us into truth about the Trinity (see the Discovery Bible Study on the Relational God of Love in Chapter Three).

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<sup>32</sup> Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, an Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2016), 87.

<sup>34</sup> N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 124, 133.

<sup>35</sup> James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling in Love with the God that Jesus Knows* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2009), 28.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 55-56. Contemplative prayer is a sustained part of Coakley’s thesis and she argues from a feminine perspective that we have neglected this key Patristic emphasis for a deeper understanding of the Trinity. Even though the emphasis in this chapter is that we should start with the visible revelation of God in Christ, she makes a great point about the Holy Spirit helping us in contemplative prayer.

As we think deeply about God revealing himself in the sending of the Son and Spirit, we are indeed able to see that God wants to redeem all our lives and bring us into a living relationship with him. With this insight, we can now turn to look more closely at the relational nature of God.

### *The Relational God of Love*

In the economy of salvation, we can see that God is a relational God of love (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Pinnock observes, “To see God as relational Trinity is not human speculation but an insight arising from the narrative of salvation, which is God’s self-revelation.”<sup>37</sup> At the beginning of Ephesians Paul writes that God wanted us to be a part of his family long before we were created (Eph. 1:4-5). It is one thing for us to see that God loved us so much that he wanted to save us from our sins, but it is another thing to see that God adopted us as children by way of the Spirit’s uniting us to the Son and therefore making us part of the family of God. Kruger notes that God’s decision to include humanity in the shared love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit “establishes the ultimate basis for the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Son of God.”<sup>38</sup>

In the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God we see that God is relational and familial. Jesus is the eternal Son of the eternal Father in the shared love and communion of the eternal Spirit. In his first letter, the Apostle John is burdened that his readers would see the love and fellowship of the three divine persons. He writes with passion and a hope for complete joy as more and more people come into the fellowship of

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<sup>37</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> C. Baxter Kruger, *Jesus and the Undoing of Adam* (Jackson, MS: Perichoresis Press, 2003), 21.

the Father and Son in the anointing of the Holy Spirit. John's famous declaration that "God is love" is profound and points to the eternal community of the Triune God (1 Jn. 4:8, 16).<sup>39</sup> Love is what is shared between a lover and a beloved. John also gives a very specific definition of God's love as other-centered and self-giving and explains that the cross is the way to understand God's love (1 Jn. 4:10-11).<sup>40</sup>

Reeves notes that something happens when we see the relational God of love, "it is only when you grasp what it means for God to be a Trinity that you really sense the beauty, the overflowing kindness, the heart-grabbing loveliness of God."<sup>41</sup> He adds that God as Trinity is "precisely what is so delightful about him." There really is something delightful about discovering that God is loving and relational, and that he wants to adopt us as his sons and daughters.

At this point it is important to note that we are underscoring how Christians come to know God as triune. Johnson dramatically shares the joy of Trinitarian discovery after reading this quote from Thomas Torrance, "God draws near to us in such a way as to draw us near to himself within the circle of his knowing of himself." Johnson goes on to say, "I almost dropped the book! I was stunned. Tears began to flow. I wanted to get up and dance and fall down on my knees. That one sentence pulled together 25 years of

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<sup>39</sup> This is an admittedly Augustinian reading of this verse, but one we think is faithful to the Johannine logic.

<sup>40</sup> Boyd, *Cross Vision*, 35-36. Boyd emphasizes that God's love is clearly and objectively defined in the cross. Boyd shows that there is not ambiguity when it comes to God's love: God laid down his life for us and we should lay down our lives for our brothers (1 Jn. 3:16). While he is working to re-interpret Old Testament violence in light of the cross of Christ, the point about other-centered love revealed in the cross is very important for understanding the relational God of love.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 9.

thinking and searching and praying!”<sup>42</sup> Testimonies like Johnson’s are important for helping the non-expert see the relevance of Trinitarian theology and then be motivated by the joy and satisfaction of knowing the relational God of love. However, before we can look at what this might mean for discipleship, we need to look at the development of Trinitarian thought in the early church. What were some of the “mile-markers” in the development of the Relational God of Love?

### *The Development of Trinitarian Thought in the Early Church*

#### *In the New Testament*

The early church had to go on the journey of discovering that Israel’s one God was revealing himself more fully as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup> Emery notes that the “revelation of the divinity of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit is not made by a sort of ‘addition’ that would break the divine unity (three gods, or two gods inferior to the first), but by an *inclusion of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit in the identity of the one God.*”<sup>44</sup> Early on, the New Testament writers began to look at the Old Testament and those statements about God through faith in Jesus Christ as God’s Son. Examples of this would include John noting the “I am” statements by Jesus in his gospel and Paul, in perhaps the earliest New Testament letter, noting “when the time had fully come, God sent his Son...and God sent his Spirit” so that we could be sons (Gal. 4:4-5). Paul also clearly notes the divinity of Jesus when he says “for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things

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<sup>42</sup> Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity*, 60.

<sup>43</sup> While scholars like James D. G. Dunn have emphasized the diversity and development of thought within the New Testament, our current section will take a more canonical approach when describing the New Testament texts in order to trace the development of Trinitarian thought in what has traditionally been called the post-Apostolic period.

<sup>44</sup> Emery, *The Trinity*, 50.

came and for whom we live, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Cor. 8:6).

One of the amazing things about the journey of the early church is that the earliest disciples were Jewish men and women who had seen something so amazing in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that they were willing to rethink the most core truth about God expressed in the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4). Although doubting at first, Thomas later declared, “My Lord and my God” (Jn. 20:28). And perhaps one of the clearest expressions of this new way of thinking came immediately after the disciples had *worshipped* Jesus in Mt. 28:17. Jesus then declares that he has *all authority* in heaven and on earth and gives the disciples the commission to go and make disciples and to baptize them “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19). In this one passage, Matthew testifies to the co-equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In addition, Morrison notes that there are several other places in the New Testament that use the “triadic formula” and point to the co-equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son (1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2).<sup>45</sup>

### *The Church Fathers and the Person of Jesus*

As the years moved on past the first century, various leaders and theologians picked up different themes of Trinitarian thought. Notable among them were Justin,

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Morrison, “The Deity of the Holy Spirit,” *Grace Communion International*, accessed Nov. 17, 2017, <https://www.gci.org/God/deityHS>. Morrison goes on point out that triadic formulas do not necessarily prove divinity, but certainly support it. In addition, he notes that the Spirit has “divine attributes,” is “equated with God,” and does the “work of God.”

Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, and Tertullian.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes they wrote as apologists, and often they wrote against different heresies to bring clarity.

Although different aberrations and heresies developed through these years, it was the specific heresies related to Christology that led to clarity concerning Trinitarian theology. Wilhite notes some of these different heresies in *The Gospel According to the Heretics*. The point, of course, is not that the Heretics wrote the gospel, but that the different errors in thinking presented by the heretics forced the church to be clear about the Trinity and content of the gospel.<sup>47</sup> According to Emery, a couple of the key heresies that led to greater clarity were “adoptionism” (the belief that Jesus was “simply a man who was adopted as a son by God”), and “modalism” (the belief that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were “only ‘modes’ of manifestation of the same one God”).<sup>48</sup> Wilhite shows the positive development of orthodoxy in pointing to Tertullian who states that the Father is distinct from the Son and the Spirit, but they are not three different gods. Wilhite goes on to note “Tertullian’s formula that God is *una substansia, tres personae* would become the norm for Trinitarian orthodoxy. God is one essence in three persons. Therefore, the oneness/*monarchia* and the threeness/*economia* are held together in tension.”<sup>49</sup>

Another significant heresy that shaped the development of Trinitarian thought is Arianism. Emery notes that although Arius had denied modalism he “could not accept

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<sup>46</sup> Stephen M. Hildebrand, “The Trinity in the Ante-Nicene Fathers,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 95-107. It is worth noting that, according to Hildebrand, that some question the clarity of Justin’s Trinitarian thinking. “In confession and in liturgical practice, Justin was clearly Trinitarian, though in his theological formulations he is sometimes Trinitarian, sometimes binitarian,” 98. The early church was on a journey toward clarity about these issues.

<sup>47</sup> Wilhite, *The Gospel According to the Heretics*, vii.

<sup>48</sup> Emery, *The Trinity*, 59-61.

<sup>49</sup> Wilhite, *The Gospel According to the Heretics*, 99.

that the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, or that the Son is of the same substance as the Father.” He goes on to say that for Arius, the logic is that “God” is eternally unbegotten and since the Son is begotten, he cannot be divine. Arius thus believed that there was a time when the Son was not, and therefore he is not God, but only the highest of creation.<sup>50</sup> Against the backdrop of the Arian heresy, also called “subordinationism,” the church leaders were called for the famous council at Nicaea in A.D. 325.

Athanasius famously wrote *On the Incarnation of the Word*, which Hardy notes would become the “point of departure for later patristic thought.”<sup>51</sup> Even though Athanasius was not yet a bishop at the Council of Nicaea, he was present as an assistant to Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria. And because Athanasius had been forced to wrestle through many of the issues in his support of Alexander and the ongoing battle against the Arians, his thinking was significant in writing what became the Nicene Creed (see Appendix B). T. F. Torrance gives credit to Athanasius for more fully developing the importance of the *homoousios* concept, which was one of significant phrases of the Creed and states that Jesus is of the “same substance” as the Father.<sup>52</sup> Torrance also notes that the Creed, following the example of Paul in Galatians, pronounces anathema on “those who taught that the Son of God was not eternally one with the Father but of a different hypostasis or being from him, for the very substance of the catholic faith was thereby

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<sup>50</sup> Emery, *The Trinity*, 62.

<sup>51</sup> Edward R. Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 48. While Athanasius was called the “Father of Orthodoxy” he was also a controversial figure, both in the advancement of theology and in politics with Rome. In the fourth century, it was not always easy to tell where theology stopped and politics started. In the process of navigating those issues, Athanasius was exiled on five different occasions.

<sup>52</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2006), 10. Another English term used to describe being of the same substance is “consubstantial.”



being denied.”<sup>53</sup> While the Church Fathers were getting greater clarity about the person of Jesus, greater clarity was still needed about the person of the Holy Spirit.

*The Church Fathers and the Person of the Holy Spirit*

Although the unity produced by Nicaea was incomplete,<sup>54</sup> the *homoousias* between Jesus and the Father laid the groundwork for deeper reflection on the Trinity. In addition to Athanasius, other significant Trinitarian voices were Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus (these three were also known as the Cappadocian Fathers), and Augustine of Hippo. These voices also represent what came to be known as Eastern (Athanasius and Cappadocians) and Western (Augustine) perspectives about the Trinity.<sup>55</sup>

While the divinity of the Holy Spirit was not necessarily the focus of Nicaea (325), the question became more focused in the years following. Torrance notes that Athanasius “laid down a firm foundation for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in showing that our knowledge of the Spirit, in his relation to God and in his own divine nature as Spirit in God, must be taken from our knowledge of the Son, and applying to the Holy Spirit the *homoousios* as it had been applied to the Son.”<sup>56</sup> In his *On the Incarnation of*

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<sup>53</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 24.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-123.

<sup>55</sup> While it is beyond the scope of the chapter to explore the differences between East and West, much has been written to highlight the differences, and much has been written to advocate learning from the best of both traditions. A good example of both dialogue and critique is *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), in which Miraslov Volf (writing from a Free Church perspective) engages in dialogue between two prominent theologians representing the East (Metropolitan John Zizioulas) and the West (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger [who later became Pope Benedict XVI]). Historically the famous *filioque* (“and the Son”) addition to the Nicene Creed became a focal point of the division, but there were other differences, and over time, those differences were exacerbated by theologies and conclusions built on those differences. But we are living in a time where increasing dialogue could lead to greater healing and unity between the East and the West.

*the Word*, Athanasius stated “If the Son is of (*ek*) the Father and is proper to his being (*idios tēs ousias autou*), the Spirit who is said to be of (*ek*) God must also be proper to the Son in respect of his being (*idion einai kai ousian tou Yiou*).”<sup>57</sup> Emery notes that Athanasius also appealed to the Trinitarian baptismal formula given by Jesus, which “shows that the confession of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forms an indissociable whole.”<sup>58</sup>

Later in the fourth century (ca. 374), Basil the Great wrote *On the Holy Spirit*, a book that is considered the most “complete and clear defense of the full divinity of the Holy Spirit in its time.”<sup>59</sup> Early in the book Basil notes that the occasion for writing was that some were objecting to the language of his prayer, which attributes glory to the Holy Spirit along with the Father and the Son.<sup>60</sup> Hildebrand summarizes Basil’s argument in stating:

In *On the Holy Spirit* Basil incorporates the Holy Spirit into the archetype-image metaphor (that the Emperor and his Son are of the same nature), thereby biblically grounding the communion of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. According to Basil, the image of God mediates to us knowledge of the archetype: but we can only fix our gaze upon the image by being joined to the Spirit of knowledge. This Spirit of knowledge “supplies to those who love to see the truth, the power to see the image in himself.” Basil garners the support of the Scriptures for this role of the Spirit...and then shows in himself the glory of the Only-begotten and furnishes to true worshippers the knowledge of God himself. The way, then, to knowledge of God is from the one Spirit, through the one Son, to the

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<sup>56</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 231.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>58</sup> Emery, *The Trinity*, 64-65.

<sup>59</sup> Wilhite, *The Gospel According to Heretics*, 125.

<sup>60</sup> Basil, and Stephen M. Hildebrand, *On the Holy Spirit* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 29-30. This prayer seemed to be an early version of the Gloria Patri doxology, in which Basil states that he “renders to the glory due to God in both ways, namely, to the Father, with the Son together with the Holy Spirit, and to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit,” 29.

one Father...the Holy Spirit is the light that makes visible the Image, and the Image cannot be seen without this Light.<sup>61</sup>

Like Athanasius, Basil also points to the importance of the baptismal formula for the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Basil states “What led me to glorify the Spirit is in the first place, the honour (time) conferred by the Lord in associating Him with Himself and with His Father at baptism; and secondly, the fact that of each of us is introduced to the knowledge of God by such an initiation.<sup>62</sup> Emery’s concluding thought about Basil’s contribution on the Holy Spirit is incisive when he notes, “St. Basil offers here a criterion that even today retains its decisive value. His explanations are guided by the coherence of Christian faith in its major expressions (baptism, credo, glorification of God).”<sup>63</sup>

#### *The Church Fathers and the Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*

After establishing the divinity of Jesus and the divinity of the Holy Spirit, the Church Fathers would go on to think about the way the persons of the Trinity related to each other. While there are different perspectives about the persons of the Trinity and their inner relations with one another, this chapter is emphasizing the relational dynamic because of the promise it offers when introducing new and developing disciples to the Trinity.

Zizioulas follows the development of Athanasius’ thought and observes, “By connecting the Son’s being with the very substance of God, Athanasius also transformed the idea of substance.”<sup>64</sup> Zizioulas goes on, “To say that the Son belongs to God’s

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<sup>61</sup> Basil and Hildebrand, *On the Holy Spirit*, 24-25.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Emery, *The Trinity*, 66.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>64</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 84.

substance implies that substance *possesses almost by definition a relational character*.

Has God ever existed without His own (Son)? The question has extreme ontological importance.”<sup>65</sup> The important point that Zizioulas is making is that the ontological heart of God is relational, that is, persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in relationship and community.

Basil and the other Cappadocian Fathers would then build on the work on Athanasius to further develop Trinitarian ontology using *ousia* and *hypostasis* with *prosopon* (a relational term). In this frame of reference, Zizioulas notes, “*To be and to be in relation* becomes identical.”<sup>66</sup> The resulting Cappadocian position is that “the final assertion of ontology in God has to be attached not to the unique *ousia* of God but *to the Father*, that is, to a *hypostasis* or person.”<sup>67</sup> Hastings notes that the result of these moves “was that *hypostasis* was elevated to supremacy as the ultimate ontological category in philosophy, as opposed to substance.”<sup>68</sup>

In other words, when Jesus comes as the *Son*, the revelation is that he is the Son *of his Father*, and their love is shared in the Holy Spirit. To talk about who God is, we have to talk about the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although God is one, there is an important relational distinction that we can make with apophatic terms so that the Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son (see Figure 1 below).

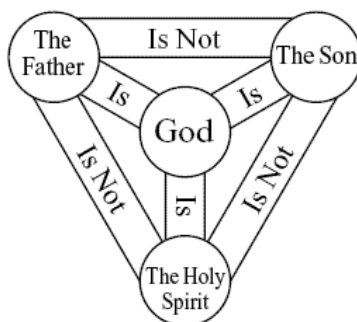
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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 94.

Figure 1. The Shield of the Trinity<sup>69</sup>

The result is that there is oneness of love, relationship and purpose that is so full and complete that we must say that God is one, but there is also clear distinction within the relationships. As the church matured in this relational understanding of the Trinity, Twombly notes that the term *perichoresis* was used by John of Damascus to give a “condensed expression” of the “mutual indwelling of the Father, Son, and Spirit” and that this *perichoresis* is qualified to say the persons are both “inseparable” and “without confusion.”<sup>70</sup> While humans cannot mutually indwell one another, *perichoresis* helps to communicate a key part of God's identity and image. Hastings notes that this way of understanding God's personhood has implications for humanity because “Jesus is not presented to us as merely an example. He is ontically related to humanity.”<sup>71</sup> Jesus redefines what real personhood is, and Hastings adds, “personhood is defined in relation to the other, just as in the Trinity. Human persons have their origin and destiny to be in relation with the other (God) and the other human.” Thus, while we cannot experience

<sup>69</sup> Anonymous, “Shield of the Trinity,” accessed Nov. 21, 2017, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shield-Trinity-Scutum-Fidei-English.png>.

<sup>70</sup> Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood*, 8-9.

<sup>71</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 96-96. Hastings is tracing the thought of the Cappadocians followed by a more modern interpretation by Karl Barth.

*perichoresis* the way God does, the idea does inform a healthy relational trajectory in life. Healthy families and churches are united and one while maintaining distinction and boundaries. Health is marked by oneness with differentiation, and dysfunction is marked by lack of boundaries or isolation. The take away point here is that being in the image of a relational God means that human “beings” are created to be “in communion.”

To conclude this section, the way the Church Fathers worked out the oneness of being with distinction in relationships between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit should now inform the way we understand the foundational idea that “God is Love” (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). From all eternity, the Father and the Son have shared their other-centered and self-giving love in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. When seen in this light, the cross becomes even more than the place where sin is dealt with, it becomes a key way of understanding that God’s love is relational, other-centered, and self-giving. As we begin to understand the nature and relationships of God, we also gain insight to the priority that Jesus places on love above all other things. The shared and overflowing love of God is the foundation of life and health for humanity. This is what we were made for and it is the theological foundation for understanding the Trinity as “relational God of Love.” But there are other important considerations in our understanding of God’s triune nature, and we now turn to the somewhat surprising issue of what we know and what we think we know about the Trinity.

*What We Know and What We Think  
We Know About the Trinity*

After discussing the development of Trinitarian theology, it will also be good to pause and consider how that knowledge is received and processed by us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is also a surprising side of what we know and what we think we know. The surprising side is that things are better and worse than we think.

*Tacit Knowledge*

Things are better than what we think because of what Michael Polanyi famously called *The Tacit Dimension*. Sanders notes that in “reflecting on the process of scientific discovery,” Polanyi became “aware of the crucial importance of elements normally disregarded as imponderable factors and left unexamined in the standard accounts of how scientific knowledge comes about.”<sup>72</sup> What Polanyi discovered was that scientists draw on a base of knowledge that was not in the forefront of their minds (tacit knowledge). Then the scientists, usually in a community, can take creative steps forward by “following hunches, discerning meaningful patterns, and framing the right experimental situations” because the information (tacit knowledge) that was in the back of their minds is now being focused upon.

The connection of tacit knowledge in Trinitarian thinking is important. People know more than they think they do. Part of the issue that this project deals with is that people often fail to see the importance of Trinitarian thinking for discipleship, and as a result, these themes are left in the background. But what if these themes of Trinitarian theology could be introduced through basic discipleship and using more accessible terms like *the Relational God of Love*? The contention of this project is that the introduction of

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<sup>72</sup> Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, 48.

a basic discipleship plan will help bring needed focus to Trinitarian theology and draw numerous creative connections and discoveries for the future. T. F. Torrance made brilliant use of Polanyi's research and notes how much Trinitarian theology relies on the tacit dimension:

A child by the age of five has learned, we are told, an astonishing amount about the physical world to which he or she has become spontaneously and intuitively adapted—far more than the child could ever understand if he or she turned out to be the most brilliant of physicists. Likewise, I believe, we learn far more about God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into whose name we have been baptized, with the family and fellowship and living tradition of the Church than we can ever say: it becomes built into the structure of our souls and minds, and we know much more than we can ever tell. This is what happens evangelically and personally to us within the membership of the Church, the Body of Christ in the world, when through the transforming power of his Word and Spirit our minds become inwardly and intuitively adapted to know the living God. We become spiritually and intellectually implicated in patterns of divine order that are beyond our powers fully to articulate in explicit terms, but we are aware of being apprehended by divine Truth as it is in Jesus which steadily presses for increasing realization in our understanding, articulation, and confession of faith. That is how Christian history gains its initial impetus, and is then reinforced through constant reading and study of the Bible with the community of the faithful.<sup>73</sup>

Sanders notes that there are portions of the church, especially the high church, that build tacit knowledge through liturgy, tradition and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>74</sup> The challenge for the Evangelical church is to build on strengths like a high view of Scripture, love for community, a desire to share the gospel with others, and a desire to help others grow in the faith. While Evangelicals may not utilize the classical liturgical and sacramental forms found in high churches, they do normally offer opportunities for Christian education. This current project will show how the use of

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<sup>73</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 89, quoted in Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, 50.

<sup>74</sup> Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, 51-52.



intentional preaching, training, Scripture-based discipleship that emphasizes obedience can create a greater awareness of the tacit knowledge already held by believers.

### *Worldview Knowledge*

While we can be helped by knowledge that we did not know that we even had (tacit knowledge), we can also be hurt by knowledge that we thought we already had but have not actually acquired. Worldview knowledge is our perception of “the way things are.” Charles Kraft defines worldview “as the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments underlying a people’s perception of REALITY.”<sup>75</sup> Kraft uses capital letters in the previous quote to show that there is a difference between our subjective view of reality (small letters) and the objective truth of reality (capital letters). This idea could be heard in Paul’s words, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12). Even for Christians, worldviews are a product of people, culture, science, art, entertainment, and the list goes on. Worldview is what we do not think about in our thinking, unless we intentionally think about it. The point for this chapter is that we need to be aware of these potentially hidden perspectives and how they may hinder our thinking about God.

For example, in John 9, Jesus heals a man that was born blind. The Pharisees cannot accept the healing of the blind man because they “know” that Jesus is not from God because he breaks the Sabbath and is a sinner (Jn. 9:16, 24, 29). Kraft insightfully calls this the “what we think we know problem” and notes that Harvard theologian Krister Stendahl said, “It’s not so much what we don’t know, but what we think we know

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<sup>75</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Ann Arbor: Vine Books, 1989), 20.

that obstructs our vision.”<sup>76</sup> The Pharisees studied the Scriptures relentlessly and yet they missed God’s personal visit to them, because of their assumptions.

Thus, it is possible that our knowledge is worse than what we think because of assumptions in our Western worldview. We are often unconsciously marked by the Enlightenment, scientific rationalism, materialism, individualism, and for many a deistic view of God (he is there, but distant and far away). While a Western worldview is not necessarily bad (everyone has a worldview), an unexamined worldview might allow us to think thoughts about God as if they are absolute truth when they are in fact false. Jesus said that the darkness is great when the light that you think you have is actually darkness, but you hold onto it as though it were light (Mt. 6:23).

This brings us back to the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the sending of the Spirit. While no one can interpret God or the Scriptures perfectly, as stated earlier, God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ is the bedrock for understanding what God is like. Jesus is the only way for us to understand reality as God sees it. Jesus is the truth. Without continually aligning to the person of Jesus, the temptation will be to think that we can understand God through the lens of worldview (although we probably would not be aware of doing so). Examples of this type of thinking would include: God is like an old grandfather; God is distant and disconnected; God is throwing lightning bolts like Zeus or a hammer like Thor; God is mainly angry; God forgives us and may even like us because of Jesus, but he is reluctant. This is to list but a few examples. Without continually aligning our view of God to Jesus, the temptation will be to look for God behind the God that Jesus reveals.

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<sup>76</sup> Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 65.

The reason that worldview knowledge is so important in our understanding of God and discipleship is that there is a conversion of the mind that needs to happen. In other words, there is a repentance that needs to happen. Of course, repentance is ultimately about more than worldview, it includes our fallen minds and the need for the Light of the World to shine inside us so that we can see. Jesus is calling us to agree with him about the reality of God. Part of the discipleship process is waking up and learning to spot assumptions and ideas about God that do not look the God that Jesus loves and reveals to us.

An important point to note as we finish this section is to acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in giving us tacit knowledge and in leading us to an awareness of our fallen worldview. As mentioned earlier, part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to make the hidden things of God known to us (1 Cor. 2:10-16), so we expect to receive help from the Spirit in highlighting our tacit knowledge and in exposing unhelpful aspects of our worldview.

As we transition to the second major portion of the chapter, we will begin applying the importance of Trinitarian theology to key areas of worship, community, and mission. These are the key areas of lifelong discipleship that we live in and revisit repeatedly on the path to maturity.

### *Worship: Into the Circle of Love*

A robust Trinitarian theology gives disciples an ever-increasing perspective and reasons for worship. In numerous places in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul is filled with worship and joy as he communicates the fullness of what God has done for us in Christ. In his opening, he states, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who

has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Then in the next verse he makes it clear that it was always God’s plan to include us and to adopt us into his family. “For he (God) chose us in him (Christ) before the creation of the world...to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ...” (Eph. 1:4-5). The story of salvation is that God made a way for us to be included in the circle of love and to participate in the worship of heaven.

In his book *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, James B. Torrance (the younger brother of the already quoted T. F.) notes how “God made men and women in his own image to be the priests of creation and to express on behalf of all creatures the praises of God, so that through human lips the heavens might declare the glory of God.”<sup>77</sup> So what happens when humanity stumbles in the Fall and is unable to fulfill our purpose? Torrance goes on to state,

The good news is that God comes to us in Jesus to stand in for us and bring to fulfillment his purposes of worship and communion. Jesus comes to be the priest of creation to do for us, men and women, what we failed to do, to offer to the Father the worship and the praise that we failed to offer, to glorify God with a life of perfect love and obedience, to be the one true servant of the Lord. In him and through him we are renewed by the Spirit in the image of God and in the worship of God in a life of shared communion.<sup>78</sup>

Rather than being on a scrapheap because of our sin and brokenness, Jesus comes to do what we could not and brings us into a participation in his worship and shared communion of the Triune God. How does this happen? Part of the answer to that question is found in looking at the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>77</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 14.

*The Vicarious Humanity of Christ*

At this point, it is important that we remember the Trinitarian fullness of the gospel. God has a plan to adopt us and bring us into fellowship. That is a plan that is far greater than just having our sins forgiven so that we can go to heaven one day (although it is not less than that). When we start the story with humanity and the sin problem, we risk limiting the good news to what happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but the good news concerns the entire life of Jesus—incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and return. Kruger notes that J. B. Torrance called this incredible exchange the “vicarious humanity” of Christ. Kruger continues,

The point of speaking of the vicarious humanity of Christ is to say *He* took *our* place, not only to take away our guilt on the cross, which He certainly did, but to be the substitute of our entire human existence. This sounds rather frightening at first. But it does not mean that He came to replace us. It means that He came to exchange humanities with us. He came to exchange what *He is* and has with what *we are* and have.<sup>79</sup>

“Christian worship,” therefore, according to J. B. Torrance, “is our participation through the Spirit in the Son’s communion with the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession. It is our response to the Father of all that he has done for us in Christ.”<sup>80</sup> So whatever we say about worship must be in light of what God has done for us in Christ – in other words, in light of grace. That God executed the plan to save us while we were still “sinners” and “enemies in our minds” is grace (Rom. 5:8, Col. 1:21). We respond to God, and as Torrance is famous for saying, we do not condition God to be gracious to us.<sup>81</sup> God is eternally gracious. In time, God loves us and brings us into the

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<sup>79</sup> C. Baxter Kruger, *God Is for Us* (Jackson, MS: Perichoresis Press, 2000), 41.

<sup>80</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 15.

circle of love as an expression of love and grace. Jesus then leads us in the ongoing worship and prayer of heaven (Heb. 8:1-2). Andrew Purves emphasizes that true Trinitarian worship is not about the things we do, but rather, it is about participation with Jesus, who has gone before us, and leads all of creation in praise and thanksgiving to the Father in the joy and power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>82</sup>

### *The Mediation of Christ*

Another way of describing Jesus' central role in our understanding of God as triune is to describe Jesus as the mediator between God and humans (1 Tim. 2:5). By remembering the story of God, we get a sense of the importance of Jesus' work as the mediator. God came to a pagan named Abram and promised that all nations would be blessed through his family. After God rescued the Israelites from captivity, he made a covenant with them and wanted to draw close to them. But the nearness of God also demonstrated the sinfulness of Israel, and the fact that they could not fulfill God's purpose for them, and for the world through them. Out of this great tension between God and Israel, God sends his Son Jesus in the incarnation so that God and man can be one.

T. F. Torrance notes,

In Jesus, as the angel announced to the Virgin Mary, there was born none other than *Emmanuel*, "God with us," that is, the mediator between God and man, who is both God and man in one incarnate Person, in whom and through whom and in

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<sup>81</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 16. Although beyond the scope of what we can cover in this chapter, Torrance has great insight on the difference between a covenant view of God and a contract view of God. In the first frame, God unconditionally offers his love to us in Jesus Christ, and in the second frame, God is conditioned by our right responses, repentance, etc., to love us and welcome us. That is why he emphatically states that "evangelical repentance" is responding to what God has done for us in Christ, as opposed to repenting in order to condition God to giving forgiveness and the benefits of salvation.

<sup>82</sup> Andrew Purves, *The Crucifixion of Ministry: Surrendering Out Ambitions to the Service of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 89.

the form of whom divine reconciliation is finally accomplished. In this Jesus, however, the Jew in whom the Creator Word and man the creature, the God of the covenant and man the covenanted partner, are brought together, and all the intensifying conflict of Israel with God, are brought to their supreme culmination so that from the moment of his birth at Bethlehem the road ran straight to the crucifixion.<sup>83</sup>

Through the incarnation, God penetrates the depths of fallen humanity and takes that humanity with him to the cross. As the mediator, Jesus represents God to humanity and humanity to God. In some of his personal notes on John McLeod Campbell, J. B. Torrance observes that Jesus, on behalf of humanity, responds positively to the forgiveness that God offers and accept the judgment that coincides with that forgiveness.<sup>84</sup>

### *The Trajectory of Union and Love*

The trajectory of Jesus' work as mediator is union with him in the Triune life of God. The "in Christ" and "with Christ" statements of the New Testament frequently emphasize this. In Galatians Paul declares, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (2:20). Similarly, in Romans, Paul states, "For we know that our old self was crucified with Christ on the cross" (6:6). Paul speaks of a past tense fact of our old Adamic humanity included in the death on the cross. The point is that our relational inclusion and union with Christ means that because he

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 29.

<sup>84</sup> James Torrance, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Notes given out by Alan Torrance, the son of James, while speaking at Duke University, Nov. 2012). J. B. Torrance gives an interesting analogy of two friends who have had a fight and been estranged. If one friend goes to the other and says, "I forgive you." Will that be received as good news? Probably not, because giving forgiveness also implies judgment and guilt—and the need for forgiveness. That is what God does for us in Jesus, and what Jesus is able to accept on our behalf.

died, we died. And because he lives, we live. And because he ascended, we have ascended. We participate in his relationship with the Father and their shared love and anointing in the Holy Spirit. Pinnock points out that thinking “of salvation in this way is to recover what early theologians called *theosis*. This category invites us to think of the goal of salvation as participation in the divine nature, in a way that preserves distinction proper to Creator and creature without losing sight of their union.”<sup>85</sup>

Jesus emphasizes this vicarious and mediating work in John 17 when he concludes the high priestly prayer,

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. . . . I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and that I myself may be in them. (Jn. 17:24, 26)

Two observations can be made here. The first is that Jesus wants us to make the connection between his *glory* and the *love* shared between the Father and the Son from before the creation of the world (v. 24). For whatever else we may say about glory (God’s outshining perfections, the way things should be, etc.), for Jesus, there is a clear connection between the glory of God and the love shared in the inner relations of God. The second is that Jesus has revealed the Father to us, and will continue to do so, in order that *we may know the Father’s love for the Son*, and that the Father’s love for the Son will be in us (v. 26). Because of Christ’s vicarious and mediating work (including the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension), we can enter into a loving communion with God and experience the divine life (or “eternal life”) by way of the Spirit’s uniting us to Christ which is to say we are adopted as children of God.

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<sup>85</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 150-51.



Our response to this divine intervention is to live a life of love and worship. We are called to fully enter into the circle of love knowing that as we experience God's eternal life, we become a place where heaven is touching earth. We become a very real part of God's answer to our prayer, "...on earth as it is in heaven." On a practical level, the place where this love and worship gets worked out is with other disciples of Christ in the church.

*Community: The Relational Image of God*

What will community in the image of a relational and loving God look like? A great place to go for that answer is Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians is perhaps the most important letter in the New Testament for understanding God's intention for healthy and loving relationships in community. In the introduction to his Ephesians commentary Klyne Snodgrass notes, "Ephesians is relentlessly relational. All relations in this letter are viewed—not individualistically—but from the perspective of union with Christ. From life with Christ we relate to God and to others. We are part of Christ and part of each other (cf. 4:25; 5:30), a statement that also functions as a fitting summary of what it means to be a Christian."<sup>86</sup>

In Ephesians, Paul is affirming that our trajectory is to grow to maturity in the faith, knowledge, and fullness of Christ (4:13). Paul also wants the church to know that it is God's eternal purpose to show what he is in and through the church (3:10-11). As a result, community in the image of God, the church, is an ongoing relational journey toward maturity as disciples.

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<sup>86</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, ed. Terry Muck (The NIV Application Commentary 10; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 19.

In an analogous way to God's unity and distinction, Paul states that in Christ, God has created a unified body out of many distinct and individual parts: "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (1:22-23). Later, Paul gives specific instances of this principle by showing how in Christ God has taken broken and divided humanity, both Jew and Gentile, and brought us together through the blood of Christ (2:13). This can be further seen when he explains, "For his purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (2:15-16). Paul goes on to say that all of this was a mystery, but now the mystery has been revealed, and all the nations along with the Jews, share together in the promise of being God's community in Christ Jesus (3:2-6). For through Jesus Christ, everyone now has access to the Father, by one Spirit (2:18), and these three are one God, the relational God of love.

Just as God's plan for adoption from before creation is plan A and not plan B, so God's plan for a community that looks like his body (1:23), expresses his relational unity (2:15), is growing into the fullness of Christ together (4:13), and is marked by love (4:16, 5:2)<sup>87</sup> is also plan A, and not plan B. In fact, Paul goes on to say that the church is the eternal purpose that God has accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11). Paul then concludes this important section of the New Testament on the revelation of Christ and the

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<sup>87</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, ed. D. A. Carson, (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 2. O'Brien notes "Love...is foundational throughout the letter," and he goes on to say that "it has been claimed that, apart from 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians has more references per page to love, or at least believers living *in love*, than anywhere else in the Pauline letters."

church with a doxology that proclaims glory for God, the way God really is, would be seen in Christ and in the church throughout all generations, forever and ever (3:20-21).<sup>88</sup>

Paul is saying something here about relationships and communion in the church, and that theme is picked up again by the Cappadocian Fathers that we mentioned earlier. In tracing an ontology of the church, Gunton notes, “the first thing to be said about the being of God is that it consists in personal communion. Communion is for Basil an ontological category. The *nature* of God is communion.”<sup>89</sup> The point is not that we can know everything that happens in the inner relations of God, but that the image of God, or perhaps more specifically, the image of the Trinity, is seen in loving relationships. At the heart of who we are in the church is people that have been and are being brought into ever-deeper loving relationships with others.

### *Healthy Church Life and Trajectory*

Since the aim of this project includes the pastoral application, it is worth taking a moment to speak about how Christians often encounter and receive a message about the relational God of love. This encounter is one that pastors can observe when Christians hear about the relationships of love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and something goes off within us, something affirming in our direction and trajectory. For centuries Christians have dreamed about the life and vitality of the early church.

Contemporary Christians often wonder, “Why can’t we see church life like we read about in the book of Acts and in the New Testament?” A Trinitarian perspective can show how

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<sup>88</sup> One of the ways that God gets glory in the church is through our loving relationships—with God and each other. Snodgrass notes “the passage assumes an unending relation between God, his people, and Christ. The presence of the people with God, made possible by Christ, will be cause for eternal praise. This is what Paul had in mind in 1:18 with the expression “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 183).

<sup>89</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 71.

the Christian positively responds when hearing about the life, love, and sacrifice between the early Christians in the book of Acts. This is because humans are made in the image of the relational God of love. We are made for a life of love together because we are made in the image of God who is a community of love together. In other words, we cannot disconnect the theological vision that we have laid out in this chapter from the reality of living life together with others in the church. When we get relationships right in the church, we feel the pleasure of God because we were made in God's image. Smail puts it this way,

We are in the image of God, not just because our personhood is dependent on our relationality, but because, by virtue of our creation by the triune God, we mirror the Father, we mirror the Son, and we mirror the Holy Spirit. To be authentically human means to reflect in our relationships, first, the specific relationship that the Father has with the Son, second, the specific relationship that the Son has with the Father, and third, the specific relationship that the Spirit has with the Father and the Son.<sup>90</sup>

The important point for community is that our personhood is more than that of isolated individuals. Hastings notes that our concept of personhood should be “governed by an understanding of Trinitarian persons” as opposed to “the Western Cartesian notion of the self.”<sup>91</sup> Even though we cannot walk in the internal community of the Triune God described by the church fathers as *perichoresis* (internal oneness without losing distinction), we can move in a *trajectory* of increasing love and sharing because, in Christ, we share a common life. The New Testament resonates with this truth, “Christ in you (plural) is the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). In the promise of the coming Spirit, Jesus reminds the disciples, “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, you are in me,

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<sup>90</sup> Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 153.

<sup>91</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 98.

and I am in you” (Jn. 14:20). And once again at the end of the high priestly prayer Jesus prays, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (Jn. 17:21).

Trajectory is a good word to remember in our discussion about community because, as N. T. Wright notes, we are an eschatological people. We are “signpost”<sup>92</sup> people pointing the way forward, to the way things should be, and to the way things will be. We are moving forward into a future that is being shaped by our vision of God as Triune, relational, and loving.

With this perichoretic trajectory in place, we can now turn to a discussion of a couple of ways that the “Trinitarian shape”<sup>93</sup> of our theology could positively affect our community and church life.

### *Healthy Church Life and Worship*

Church life is a matrix of so many kinds of activities. Discipleship can happen in groups of two or three people together. Additionally, small groups can meet to invite God’s presence, share meals, exercise spiritual gifts, and multiply when things get crowded. Sunday worship usually entails the whole congregation gathering together for singing, prayer, communion, baptisms, preaching from the Scriptures, testimonies, training, and fellowship, among other things.

Even though *perichoresis* cannot physically happen, there is a sense in which it is experienced in worship times together. As we gather week after week and pray that we

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<sup>92</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 209.

<sup>93</sup> Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005). I give credit here to Seamands for the helpful and descriptive phrase, “The Trinitarian Shape.”

would join with the sounds of heaven in our worship, the result is that the corporate gathering becomes as it were “a thin place” between heaven and earth. Theologian and musician Jeremy Begbie writes,

When more than one sound is present, occupying the same space while remaining audibly distinct, we may speak of a space not of mutual exclusion but of “interpenetration.” Sounds do not have to “cut each other off” or obscure each other, in the manner of visually perceived objects. The tones of the chord can be heard sounding *through* each other. In the acoustic realm, in other words, there is not neat distinction between a place and its occupant . . . Music directly “pulls the strings,” so to speak, of the spatial framework in which it is deployed—no neat divide marks off the occupant and place in musical experience. We need only to think of a three-tone major chord, in which we hear as three distinct, mutually enhancing (not mutually exclusive) sounds, but together occupying the same aural space.<sup>94</sup>

Begbie’s use of the chord to describe occupying the same space opens the possibilities for thinking about the ways that we influence one another in healthy church life. Every worship service becomes a potential point of sharing life and love together. Leithart notes that this happens when “we pass on the vibrations of our excitement to others, so that our excitement evokes excitement. We pour our excited souls out to others, so that our enthusiasms dwell in them.”<sup>95</sup> Leithart observes that Jonathan Edwards believed that singing in the New Jerusalem represented the “ideal society.” Leithart goes on to make his own observation that our singing in the congregation affects those around us. The vibrations from our voice touch the person next to us, and vibrations from their voices

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<sup>94</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200), 24, quoted in Peter J. Leithart, *Traces of the Trinity: Signs of God in Creation and Human Experience* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 88. This is an excellent book that pursues the topic and experience of *perichoresis* in the natural world through things like sex, time, words, chords, and the imagination.

<sup>95</sup> Leithart, *Traces of the Trinity*, 94.

touch us as well. The bodies all remain distinct, but there is a mutual sharing at the same time.<sup>96</sup>

Another key area for conversation regarding church life and worship is how we relate to different sacraments within the church. A sacrament is something that we do physically to experience the grace of God, or as John Howard Yoder states, “Human action in which God acts.”<sup>97</sup> Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the most commonly referenced sacraments of the church and, in a “low church” context, there is often a need for exploring the Trinitarian themes in both. Yoder refers to five “practices” that the church does before the watching world, and he expands the ritual of breaking bread to include the common meal.<sup>98</sup> What is so powerful about providing hospitality and eating meals is that we are making room for others and we are leveling the distinctions as we eat food around a common table. Ultimately, redemption and reconciliation is about God hosting us within God’s own communion as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The important opportunity in the realm of sacraments and “practices” where we experience God’s presence is to elevate our tacit knowledge of God in these practices and think in terms of the Trinitarian ways of expressing those practices. The ancient churches have been doing this for centuries and there are practical opportunities for intentionally tuning our hearts to Trinitarian themes in our prayer meetings, worship songs, common meals, periods of silence, and many other creative areas just waiting to be discovered.

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<sup>96</sup> Leithart, *Traces of the Trinity*, 94-96.

<sup>97</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 71.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-24.

*Healthy Church Life and Relationships*

A second area to highlight in the discussion of community in God's image is love for one another. At the heart of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit community is love. At the heart of the Trinity is other-centered, other-preferring, humble love. Jesus reveals this love in that he does nothing of his own initiative (Jn. 5:19). The Holy Spirit always points to the Son and to the Father, the Father gives everything to the Son (Jn. 16:15), and the Son ultimately will give everything to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Right relationships are at the heart of the relational God of love, and in contrast, Zizioulas defines sin and the Fall as "human beings turning away from communion" with God.<sup>99</sup>

Loving one another is simple and complex at the same time. John states that God is love and that we participate in God's love by loving our brothers and sisters. If we love one another "before the watching world," to borrow the phrase from Yoder, we change the world. A practical application of this kind of love for one another comes from the first verse of John's Gospel which states that the Son "was with God." Kruger notes, "the preposition *with* here carries the Hebrew idea of being face-to-face. It is an idea of personal relationship, of intimacy."<sup>100</sup> From all eternity Jesus and the Father have been face to face, turned toward one another in love. Pastorally, Christians should strive to be churches and communities committed to turning toward one another in love, because this is the image of God. Instead of walking away when things get hard, Christians should turn toward one another—face to face. We must ground ourselves in the Trinitarian

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<sup>99</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 82. Volf also picks up another important point from Zizioulas on the importance of being created for community when he notes that in the Fall our basic "personhood is perverted" and we become "individuals." As a result salvation must consist in a process of "ontological deindividualization that actualizes personhood." Perhaps that is an overstatement, but it does highlight a high view of God as persons in community that should have an impact on the value that we have for community as a part of the maturing process, 81, 83.

<sup>100</sup> Kruger, *The Shack Revisited*, 67.



version of other-centered, self-giving, turning-toward relationships because other ideals will not stand the pressures of real relationships in community. Bonhoeffer told his students to “slay their idealizations of the church” because, “Those who love their dream of the Christian community more than the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial.”<sup>101</sup> Perhaps in contrast to an idealized dream, healthy church life is lived with real people, which means there will always be opportunities to turn toward one another and work on relationships.

God is healing, restoring, and making things right, and relationships are at the front of all that he is doing. These things are relatively simple to say, but they can only be lived out in the power of the Spirit. Smail notes, “right relationships and the community they make possible are the measure of humanity; the state of our relationships show whether and how far we are imaging Jesus who is the image of God.”<sup>102</sup> Living with right and reconciling relationships within the church sets the stage for joining God’s mission to the world, a topic to which we can now turn.

### *Mission: The Father’s Sending*

Although the mission of the church is often conceived as an optional add-on for committed Christians, healthy Trinitarian thinking will help us to see that participating in God’s life is also a participation in God’s mission. In this section, we are building on the theology that we have been laying out during the earlier parts of the chapter. As participants in the love and fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we also want

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<sup>101</sup> Quoted in McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014), 40.

<sup>102</sup> Smail, *Like Father, Like Son*, 281.

to do what God is doing. God was sending the Son and the Spirit to make things right with broken and fallen humanity, and now our existence as the body of Christ cannot be separated from the mission of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*From the Heart of God*

Some of the clearest Trinitarian language in the New Testament is also commissioning language as well. Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Mt. 28:18). Perhaps some participate in mission as an expression of obedience, but at an even deeper level mission is connected to the very inner life of God. John Flett, in his book, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community* states, “God’s apostolic movement into the world is not a second step alongside who he actually is in and for himself . . . God the Father ‘sends’ the Son and Spirit from all eternity in the distinction and unity that is his own perfect life.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, God sending his Son and the Spirit is not a secondary or derivative action, but rather, the sending is a part of God’s nature in that God is love, and the same impetus in God that constitutes him as communal is the same impetus in God that constitutes him as redemptive, that is missional. “Mission” in this sense is understood as the outpouring of God’s love, the essence of who God is. One of many significant implications from this observation is that the church must participate in the mission of God, not as a secondary action, but rather, as a part of her identity. Mission is no longer optional. It is part of imitating the life of God and bearing his image.

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<sup>103</sup> John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 241-242.

The commission in John's Gospel also speaks to participation in the Trinitarian mission with great clarity. Jesus said to the disciples, "Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn. 20:21-22). Hastings calls this the "Greatest Co-Mission" and states,

The Father's sending (of the Son) is to continue in the disciples' sending 'for the earthly continuation of his work.' Jesus' statement is thus not merely motivation by example—you are sent because I am sent. There is an actual correspondence between his sending from the Father and their sending from Christ. Each assumes a union. Just as Christ is sent as the Son in union with the Father, so now they were sent ones because of their union with Christ, by the Spirit he was about to breathe into them. The Spirit would mediate the presence of Christ in them so that they would be his body, his hands and feet on the earth. This is the miracle of theosis, the union of Christ with his church.<sup>104</sup>

The exciting news is that we are joining in with the Triune God of love and relationships. This commission means participating with him and in his power. Moltmann famously said, "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in their world; it is a mission of the Son and Spirit through the Father that includes the church."<sup>105</sup> God's overflowing heart of love means that he is always reaching out to us in love, and he is inviting us to share that love with the world around us. Another important aspect about God's mission is that we are moving toward a time when there will be no separation between heaven and earth—New Creation.

### *With a View to New Creation*

Although the modern gospel is often truncated so that it pictures going to heaven as the end of the story, God's mission is more fully conceived as a plan to make all things right with people and with the creation. The culmination of the biblical story is found in

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<sup>104</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 82.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

the joining of the new heavens and the new earth—and this end is the New Creation.<sup>106</sup> Speaking to this issue, Wright emphasizes that the commission in John 20 is set in the context of New Creation. In his Gospel, John is drawing a direct connection between Gen. 1 and Jn. 1 so that “Easter now functions as the beginning of the new creation. The Word through whom all things were made is now the Word through whom all things are remade.” Wright goes on to say that in the John 20 commission disciples are to be “for the world what Jesus was for Israel: ‘As the Father sent me,’ he says, ‘so I send you.’”<sup>107</sup>

The church’s commission is connected to New Creation and the restoration of all things, which implies that this commission is more than getting people ready for life after death. The church’s commission touches on all aspects of life. It includes the concern for the salvation of the soul and the concern for justice. The New Creation frame of reference helps to remind believers that they are eschatological people that live with vision for the way things will be. This provides Christians with the vision that one-day everything will be made right, and until then, they will follow the Lord in helping people to experience as much of his eschatological future in the present as possible.

Although mission is often conceived as leaving and going to another place to share the good news, an important aspect of mission is that we live out the priorities of the relational God of love *within our own community*. We must live and model the reality of love, forgiveness, unity, witness, and disciple-making before, or at least concurrent with sending others to new places to make disciples and start new communities that will bear God’s image. Participating in God’s mission of making things right (in our

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<sup>106</sup> See Rev. 21:1-5; 2 Pet. 3:13; Acts 3:21.

<sup>107</sup> Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 238-239.

relationship with him and the world around us) starts right where we live our lives and moves out in expanding circles of concern and influence.

Hastings is giving a practical voice to Karl Barth when he states, “Jesus is calling us to consider our relatedness and mission to all of humanity.”<sup>108</sup> When we believe that Jesus died on the cross for *all* of humanity, we are given an opportunity to see the end of all things in a new light. Everyone matters to God. The things that we do or do not do matter – in the church, in the city, and in the world. That puts the famous quote from Dr. Martin Luther King into perspective, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”<sup>109</sup> Archbishop Tutu makes a similar point in stating,

We say that a person is a person through other persons. We are made for togetherness, to live in a delicate network of interdependence. The totally self-sufficient person is sub-human, for none of us comes fully formed into the world. I need other human beings in order to be human myself. I would not know how to walk, talk, think, behave as a human person except by learning it all from other human beings. . . . the *summum bonum* is communal harmony. Anger, hatred, resentment—all are corrosive of this good. If one person is dehumanized, then inexorably we are all diminished and dehumanized in our turn.<sup>110</sup>

One of the many important points here is that our prayerful abiding in Christ in the power of the Spirit will always move us forward in the mission of the relational God of love.

It must also be admitted that there are challenges in pursuing the mission of the Triune God. The subtitle of Hastings’ book *Hope for Re-evangelizing the West* helps to

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<sup>108</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 97.

<sup>109</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail,’” *The Atlantic* (April 16, 2013), accessed Nov. 27, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/04/martin-luther-kings-letter-from-birmingham-jail/274668/>.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Smail, *Like Father, Like Son*, 139.

point out the need for the church to break free of the entrapment that marks many aspects of Western culture. Some of these key aspects of culture are faith in human progress, consumerism, secularism, the dichotomization of reason and faith along with the natural and the supernatural, dualism, materialism, individualism, technocracy, and ethnocentrism.<sup>111</sup> That is a staggering list of “isms,” but it is not hard to see the relevance and the temptation of the church to be affected and to pull back because of these different issues. We must remember that Jesus came to his disciples who were behind locked doors for fear of the Jews (Jn. 20:19). Joining God’s mission to make things right in the world will always involve coming out from behind locked doors and coming out from the ways that we have been limited by the culture around us.

### *Sharing the Message of the Kingdom of God*

At the heart of the call to participate in God’s mission to the world is the good news about King Jesus and the arrival of the kingdom of God. This truth needs to be considered in light of the doctrine of the Trinity. While all four Gospels capture this message, the Gospel of Mark is a good example to consider. After his baptism, “Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said, ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mk. 1:14-15)! Jesus then models what the coming kingdom looks like in his absolute dependence on God—listening, obeying, healing, forgiving, setting the oppressed free, and proclaiming the radical love of God (even for enemies). In participating in God’s mission, our calling is also to announce the reign of Jesus and the news that God’s kingdom is here. Newbigin observes, “The reign of God is not a new ‘movement’ in which those interested may

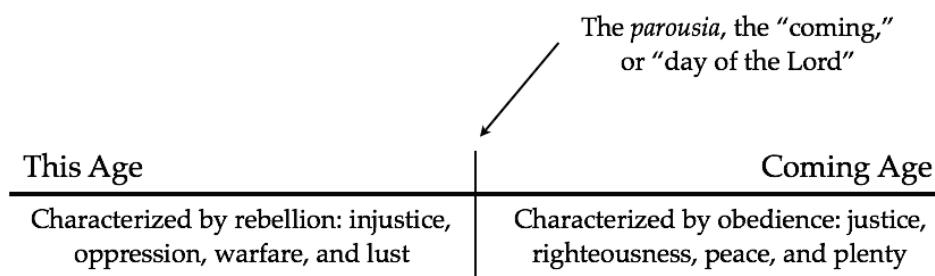
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<sup>111</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 59-69.

enlist. It is not a cause for support, a cause that might succeed or fail according to the amount of support it attracts. It is, to be precise, the reign of God, the fact that God whom Jesus knows as Father is the sovereign ruler of all peoples and all things.”<sup>112</sup>

In participating in the mission of God and proclaiming the kingdom of God, we quickly realize that there is tension between the message we proclaim and the world in which we live. Camp captures this tension with a helpful illustration (see Figure 2 below). He notes that the “New Testament, in continuity with the Old, draws a sharp contrast between *this aeon* and the *coming aeon*, between ‘this age’ and the ‘coming age,’ as it is commonly translated.”<sup>113</sup> Camp depicts the stark difference between the two ages and the expectation that the ages would be separated by the “day of the Lord.”

Figure 2. Common Jewish Eschatological Expectation<sup>114</sup>



In this view, one age ends and another begins at the “coming” of the Lord. It is clean and sharp. In fact, Jesus uses this kind of language in his teaching as well.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>112</sup> James Edward and Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 34.

<sup>113</sup> Lee C. Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 67.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Mt. 12:32; Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30.

What the Jews did not expect, however, was that the coming age would push back into this age in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. They had no way of knowing that the resurrection that they longed for at the end of the age would happen in the middle of this age. Again, Camp's illustration in Figure 3 helps us to imagine the overlap of the two ages.

Figure 3. New Testament Eschatology<sup>116</sup>



The power of this illustration for describing the theology of the gospel of the kingdom is that disciples can boldly follow Jesus and proclaim that God's reign is here. Christians can expect God's message to touch lives, God's power to bring healing, and God's mercy to set people free. But we also realize, with George Eldon Ladd (and others), that we live between the times and that God's kingdom is "now" and it is also "not yet."<sup>117</sup> Only when Jesus comes again will we see the fulfillment and totality of his reign.

At this point, it will be good to again mention the idea of being a "signpost." Christians do not have all the answers, but they should point to the way things will be with their love for God and others – their relationality which is in the image of God's relationality. Newbigin comments that the overall life and mission of the church in the power of the Spirit becomes a "hermeneutic of the world's continuing history" and as we

<sup>116</sup> Camp, *Mere Discipleship*, 68.

<sup>117</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 368.



do this, the Spirit will glorify Jesus through us.<sup>118</sup> We live this way before the world, and we share the good news “with universal intent”<sup>119</sup> in order that all of humanity might know the good news of God’s reign in and through Jesus.

*Reproducing Discipleship in the Context  
of the Trinitarian Community*

In discussing the concrete reflections of God’s triune relationships, it will help for me to speak specifically about the church where this project will be implemented, Christ Fellowship, now known as Antioch Community Church in Fort Worth.<sup>120</sup> Reproducing church life is central to this congregation, and it is central to the larger Antioch Movement.<sup>121</sup> The heart of the movement is a passion for Jesus and his purposes in the earth and to see the church become a life-giving, multiplying, reproducing, and Christ-manifesting church. That means reproducing disciples, LifeGroups (house to house), congregations, and new movements so that God’s love, salvation, and glory will be known in every nation. If discipleship is an intentional lifestyle of following Jesus, then reproducing discipleship is intentionally meeting with and helping others so that they can become disciples that know how to make other disciples (2 Tim. 2:2). Furthermore,

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<sup>118</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 78.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 192. Newbigin uses the phrase “with universal intent” with regard to mission in order to communicate God’s heart for all people.

<sup>120</sup> We planted Christ Fellowship in 1993 and changed the name to Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth during this writing project on Jan. 1, 2018.

<sup>121</sup> The Antioch Movement grew out of a college ministry at Highland Baptist Church in Waco, TX. Under the leadership of Jimmy Seibert, the students began reaching out to different parts of the world and that eventually led to starting new churches. In 1999, Antioch Community Church was started and continued to start reproducing churches around the U.S. and the world. Currently there are 30 U.S. churches and 86 international teams that have resulted in many tens of thousands of baptized believers. More of the Antioch story can be found in Jimmy Seibert, *Passion and Purpose: Believing the Church Can Still Change the World* (Brentwood, TN: Clear Day Publishing, 2014).

reproducing discipleship in light of the divine community seeks to build a discipleship culture of lifelong learning and growth that is shaped by God's relational, loving, and sending character.

### *Discipleship in Community*

It would be hard to overstate the importance of community in the process of discipleship. The emphasis of this project is to say that the Triune God is relational, that God's being is "persons in community." The emphasis of this chapter has been to unpack some of the priority of God's loving and relational nature in ways that point to application in the church. One of the rich ways that this theology translates to discipleship in the church is to emphasize community. Paul notes that the riches of Christ are unsearchable, but the way those riches are being administrated and distributed is through the church (Eph. 3:8-9). When seen in this light, the church is hardly an afterthought, or simply a place for Christians to gather and do things now that they are saved. Rather, the church is the wisdom of God on display to the heavenly realms and is nothing less than the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:10-11). The point for discipleship is that God has always planned for our flourishing to be together with him and together with others. In *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church*, Scot McKnight shows how very "social the vision is" and notes that Jesus' vision is "a fellowship, a community, a society, and not simply the eternal life of an individual in the presence of God."<sup>122</sup> Practically, that means that discipleship happens best in community with others.

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<sup>122</sup> McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 193.

Meeting from house to house in small, reproducing groups and meeting in intentional discipleship groups of a few people focused on following and obeying Jesus creates an atmosphere for spiritual growth. In his classic text on discipleship, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert Coleman asks, “After all, if Jesus, the Son of God, found it necessary to stay almost constantly with his few disciples for three years, and even one of them was lost, how can a church expect to do this job on an assembly line basis a few days out of the year?”<sup>123</sup> There is no substitute for what we call “life-on-life discipleship,” which means intentional time, conversations, projects, and meals.

### *Simple Tools and Solid Theology*

Part of the burden for this project is to articulate a biblical and theological foundation that will help our church, and perhaps others, to have simple and accessible tools that will help foster lifelong discipleship into the image of the triune God. This project is emphasizing the simple tools of a training class for the Discipleship School and a Discovery Bible Study track on the Relational God of Love for reproducible discipleship.<sup>124</sup>

We also need many other “entry points” for developing a more robust perspective about the Triune nature of God and what that will mean for worship, community, and mission. That is, we need concrete ways of elevating church members’ tacit knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity to an intentional and embodied awareness. Other “entry points” might include an intentional emphasis on the Trinity in our worship songs, prayers, baptisms, celebration of the Lord’s Supper, website content, or even short tracts

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<sup>123</sup> Robert E. Coleman and Roy J. Fish, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: F.H. Revell, 1993), 50.

<sup>124</sup> Defined in Chapter One and expanded in Chapter Three.

for those who want to learn and grow. Still other entry points could be regularly emphasizing spiritual disciplines or practices that have helped to edify the church down through the centuries.<sup>125</sup> James Bryan Smith notes that the church has used the *regula*, (also known as the “rule of life”) going all the way back to the *Didache*. He goes on to note that Benedict wrote the most popular and enduring *regula*, and the Methodists established their movement around a few key rules, plans, or methods for growth (hence, their name “Methodists”). But Smith’s point in telling the story is that it is good to write out a simple plan for growth, a “soul-training plan.”<sup>126</sup> While an emphasis on the relational dynamic of the Trinity as seen in the “Relational God of Love” is not all of what we work on in discipleship, it is a growth area, and focus in this area will help us in the future.

On an individual level, an example of part of a “soul training plan” might be: spending time with Jesus every morning that includes worship, prayer, Bible reading, and waiting on the Lord in stillness, giving beyond the tithe, and reading one spiritual book each month. On the corporate level, it might be to schedule a three-day fast for the church (twice a year) and to schedule quarterly extended nights of worship and prayer for the whole church. To elevate these individual and corporate practices into a more intentional Trinitarian framework, a church could schedule an annual *enthusiastic* training in the discipleship school on the Relational God of Love followed by a five-week Discovery Bible Study to build Trinitarian focus and training into the spiritual life of the church. In all of this, a key part of the journey is helping others to see the joy and beauty of knowing

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<sup>125</sup> Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Eugene Peterson are just a few of the authors who have helped to lead a renewal of interest in the spiritual practices of the ancient church.

<sup>126</sup> James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community: Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 190-191.

God, as God really is—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We want to build on our existing strengths, and at the same time, intentionally deepen our vision of the Triune God of Grace and Love.

Although we may use different types of tools, the result that we want to see is a living relationship with God. This should be a relationship where we have fellowship and life and where we expect the Holy Spirit to lead us into an ever deeper and personal relationship with the Father and the Son in the context of community with others. A relationship where we expect to hear the triune God speak to us, not as a special experience that only happens occasionally, but as occurred in the life of Jesus. One of the most prominent features in the life of Jesus is how he listened and responded to his Father and was empowered and led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus modeled for us what true humanity is to look like and how true humanity is to relate to God. And in this relationship, we are shaped more and more into the image of Christ and the relational God of love that he reveals.

### *A New Beginning*

While “a new beginning” may seem a bit grandiose, there is need to understand the potential for positive change through integrating a more fully Trinitarian theology into the discipleship culture of the missional and reproducing church. We validate the already-existing healthy marks of these churches: passionate love for Jesus and vibrant spirituality, reproducing leadership, use of spiritual gifts, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, functional structures, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Christian Schwartz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2006), 22-37.

These healthy characteristics identified by Christian Schwartz in the largest worldwide church survey have truly marked churches like Christ Fellowship/Antioch Fort Worth, the Antioch Movement, and many similar types of missional and reproducing churches. Our hope is to deepen and enrich these churches by pointing to a more fully Trinitarian vision of God. Our hope is that an emphasis on the relational and loving nature of God will have traction with everyday, “non-expert” disciples. Our hope is that the everyday disciples will see that the relational dynamic is very much at the heart of what Jesus Christ, the *Son* of God reveals in his relationship with his *Father* in the *Spirit*. Our hope is that these disciples will be encouraged into a lifelong journey that impacts our worship, community, and mission.

The proposed change in this project may not seem great at first, but consider the change over time. Imagine two ski boats cruising in the water side by side. They are on the same course and running parallel in the water. But now imagine that one of the boats makes a slight adjustment in trajectory. It is only a few degrees, but over time the two boats will get further and further from each other. That is the “nudge” that is being proposed in this project. A “nudge” may not seem like “a new beginning” *now*, but what will this mean over time? More importantly, if the “nudge” articulated in this chapter is truly a more accurate view of God, what will that mean for the worship, community, and mission of the church in the future?

There are many different factors that influence meaningful change in our values. Within the Antioch movement, we often talk about the change process in terms of awareness, biblical conviction, lifestyle change, accountability, and the rejection of

excuses (life has been hard, my parents, etc.).<sup>128</sup> Another way to think about change is in terms of systems theory. Every family and congregation is a system, a single whole that is made up of unique and distinct parts.<sup>129</sup> The idea is that because there is unity and oneness, when anxiety is experienced by one part it will affect the whole. The path to growth and maturity then, is to differentiate and understand that though we are one, we are also unique people within the whole. We are neither fused, nor are we cut off.<sup>130</sup> As one group of pastoral thinkers recently said, “Understanding how people are enmeshed in a living system and how it affects both our congregation and us is vital to transformational leadership.”<sup>131</sup> The critical point here is that introducing the adjustment toward a more fully Trinitarian discipleship is a leadership move that, even though small, has the potential for great impact within the whole congregation. Like the power of the small atom that we mentioned in Chapter One, Trinitarian discipleship has great and untapped potential for future of the church.

A final thought along these lines and for this chapter is that when Einstein developed relativity theory, he introduced a thought into the world of physics, that contrary to the closed Newtonian system, relationships hold the world together. That thought is still being unpacked over time. And, on the cosmic scale, when Jesus came into the world, he proved that God is not solitary and alone, but a God of relationship—

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<sup>128</sup> I give credit here to Jimmy Seibert, who leads the Antioch Movement and first shared this process with me on a plane ride home from Siberia in 1999.

<sup>129</sup> As Paul states, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though it’s parts are many, they form one body” (1 Cor. 12:12).

<sup>130</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 26-27.

<sup>131</sup> Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (Indianapolis: Wiley, 2016), 30.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That thought is still being unpacked, and disciples everywhere need to join this endeavor, because it will touch the key areas of worship, community, and our mission to the world.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Description of the Project

#### *Introduction*

##### *Area of Interest*

The process leading up to this project took several years to unfold. Throughout my years of ministry, I have tried to remain Christ-centered in all that I do and in all that we do at Christ Fellowship, a missional and reproducing church that we planted 25 years ago with a handful of friends. We began the church with a heart to worship God in all the freedom and expression that we saw in the Scriptures. We wanted to *be the church* of Jesus Christ in life and power. We wanted to serve God's purpose in our generation. We began the church by asking, "What would we do if we were missionaries coming to this city from another nation?" We believed that Jesus would lead us as the head of the church, and we have prayed, "Jesus, you are the head of the church, lead us," more times that we could count.

Eventually our Christ-centered, worship-oriented, and missional approach to ministry led to a greater appreciation of Trinitarian theology. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who reveals his relationship with his Father in the shared love and communion of the Holy Spirit. The more I thought about God as Triune and relational, the more I saw the beauty and excellence of God. Knowing God as loving and relational made me want to worship, and I learned that knowing God in this way was healing for my soul.

I needed to know that God was eternally a God of love and relationship and that he did not start loving after creation. I realized that I needed to hear the Father's heart of

love for me personally and frequently, maybe even daily. I needed to overcome different versions of God that did not look like Jesus. I needed to realize that the Holy Spirit was (and is) so pleased to lead me into the truth (he had been doing it all along, even when I did not realize it).

Thinking deeply about the Trinitarian nature of God helped me to see the priority of loving God and loving others. I started to connect the importance of love and relationships to the core message of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. I realized that this is the way God really is and that God's relational and loving nature should impact the way we do worship, community, and even our mission to the world around us.

#### *Area of Inquiry*

Over time, I decided to go back to school to work on a Doctor of Ministry degree with the implications of Trinitarian theology for ministry at the forefront of my mind. Although I was not sure of the focused application, I knew from the beginning that a Christ-centered, Trinitarian theology should have an impact, but where should the focus be?

At one point, I considered giving time and focus to the impact of a healthy Trinitarian focus on leadership teams (of course, that could still be an area to look at later). But the breakthrough for the area of inquiry came through conversation with my wife. She noticed that when people would ask about my studies and what I was eventually going to write about, many would not be able to stay focused on the conversation after I started using words like "Trinitarian" and "theology." One night after another one of those conversations, we came home and reflected on what was happening. Once those words were used, people would kind of check out or look up at ceiling with a

far away or confused look. And, interestingly, many of the people were not beginners in the faith, but rather, strong and committed disciples.

A clear and practical need for the church started to form in my mind. People need training and discipleship in Trinitarian thinking, but if they do not see that it is helpful and relevant to their lives, their motivation for learning will be low. So how do we increase the value for discipleship in Trinitarian thinking? How do we help people see that thinking about the relational and loving nature of God will help us in worship, in community, and in our mission?

A theory started forming—if we could get the average disciple to intentionally engage with the triune and relational nature of God, and then make the connections to the basic areas of discipleship like worship, community, and mission—then we could prepare the way for a lifestyle of Trinitarian discipleship. Another supporting reason for choosing these basic areas of discipleship is that our core values at Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth are to love God, love one another, and love those who do not know Christ. Each of those values directly connects to the core church practices of worship, community, and mission. My theory is that if we can get disciples to see that Trinitarian discipleship is important for our most basic values and most basic aspects of church life like worship, community and mission, then Trinitarian discipleship could and should be a value for our ongoing discipleship and life together. Another aspect of my theory was to make the term “Trinity” more accessible by alternately talking about God as the “Relational God of Love.” A final key piece of my theory developed out of my research into tacit knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Michael Polanyi famously advanced this theory and T. F. Torrance and others showed the relevance of tacit knowledge for Trinitarian studies. The

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<sup>1</sup> See the “Tacit Knowledge” section in Chapter Two for more on this topic.

importance of tacit knowledge for this project is that we know more than we think we do, and in community and conversation, we can take the knowledge that might otherwise seem irrelevant or unknowable and apply it to our understanding of God and our discipleship.

The resulting goal for the project is to encourage a deeper value for Trinitarian discipleship and help disciples grow in their appreciation of the relational image of God. While helping disciples toward a deeper value of Trinitarian discipleship may not seem revolutionary, my contention is that, over time, a proper view of the relational image of God could have a tremendous impact on worship, community, and mission of the church. The next aspect of the project description is research design.

### *Research Design*

For research design, I will be using a *between-subjects* design that W. Paul Vogt, Dianne C. Gardner, and Lynne M. Haeffele define as “a study in which comparisons are made between groups of subjects, such as members of the control and experimental groups in an experiment.”<sup>2</sup> The proposal for this project is to use a survey that will measure the two similar, but distinct groups of discipleship school students.

### *Dependent Variables*

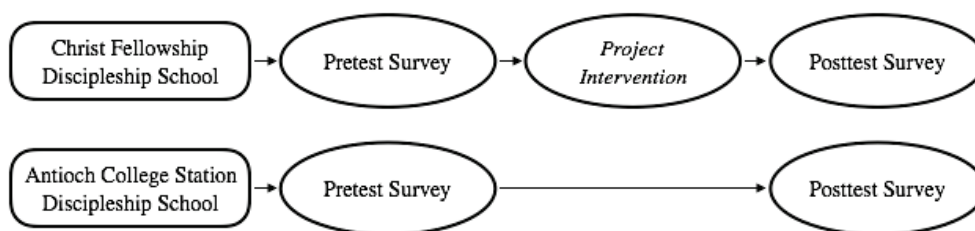
The survey measures the dependent variables of the core values of Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth and the larger Antioch Movement (Love God, Love one another, and Love those who don't know Christ). In addition, the survey will measure the dependent variable of the student's value for Trinitarian

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<sup>2</sup> W. Paul Vogt, Dianne C. Gardner, and Lynne M. Haeffele, *'When' To Use 'What' Research Design*, (New York: Guilford, 2012), 164, 336.

discipleship with an emphasis on worship, community, and joining God's mission to the world around us. The experiment group will be the discipleship school of Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth and the control group will be the discipleship school of Antioch Community Church in College Station, TX. The discipleship school of Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth will receive the intervention and the process is illustrated below in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Pretest, Intervention, Posttest



The students of both groups will be given the same survey before and after the project intervention, but the Antioch College Station Discipleship School will not be given the intervention. The survey starts with a few general demographic questions and is then followed by 51 questions that measure the student's value for the core values of the Antioch Movement and the student's value for Trinitarian discipleship. The first half of the survey covers the core values and follows below:

### Loving God

1. I am intentional about scheduling personal time with God on a daily basis.  
*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*
2. I am sensitive to God's Spirit for counsel in my life.  
*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*
3. When I have a need, I know how to find help in the Scriptures.  
*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

4. I hear God speak to me.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
5. The way that I use my time reflects that God is my highest priority.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*

### **Loving Others**

6. I know from the Scriptures how God expects me to relate toward my family members.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
7. I am committed to forgiving and resolving conflict with others.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
8. My circle of healthy, transparent relationships is consistently growing.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
9. I relate to someone that I would say mentors or disciples me.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
10. If I am mentored (discipled), does that person also attend CF? **Yes No N/A**
11. I have confidence that I could effectively disciple a new believer.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
12. I intentionally invest in one or two others to further their growth in Christ.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*

### **Loving Those Who Don't Know Jesus**

13. God has given me a love for others, including other races, cultures, and nations.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
14. I feel personally responsible to share my faith with those that don't know Jesus.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
15. I feel confident that I can lead someone to Christ that wants to know Him.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
16. I can recount my personal testimony to others.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
17. I have a desire to participate in planting churches in other parts of the world by praying, giving, or going.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
18. I have taken part in a missions trip of any length within the past three years.  
**Yes No**  
*If so, where \_\_\_\_\_*  
*Was the trip through Christ Fellowship or Antioch? Yes No*

## Family

19. I am equipped to disciple my children or grandchildren to love and follow God.  
*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*
20. As a family, we strive to have family devotions and pray together.  
*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*
21. I see a growing passion in my children to follow Jesus.  
*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

## Sphere

22. What do you identify as your primary sphere of influence?  
 (Your sphere is where you have relationships, some degree of influence, and spend a large portion of your time. Could be your workplace, but for some it might be more centered around a geographic area or social organization.)

Circle one only: Business    Healthcare    Home/Neighborhood    Arts

Social services    Higher Education    Student    Politics    Sports

Primary/Secondary Education      Other: \_\_\_\_\_

23. I feel God has called me to my sphere of influence (which includes my workplace).  
*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*
24. Christ Fellowship/Antioch empowers me to purposefully live on mission with God within my sphere of influence.  
*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*
25. My Lifegroup empowers me to purposefully live on mission with God within my sphere of influence.  
*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

My expectation going into the project is that the students of the two discipleship schools will have similar results on the first half of the survey because of the shared core values in the movement.

Then, the second half of the survey covers “The Relational God of Love” and measures the student’s value for Trinitarian discipleship and follows below:

### Relational God of Love (Trinitarian Discipleship)

26. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh and the definitive, self-revelation of God to the world.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
27. At the center of the New Testament is Jesus Christ and his relationship with his Father in the Spirit.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
28. We do not ever want to interpret God or the Bible in a way that is contrary to the life and teachings of Jesus.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
29. My value for worship is impacted by considering the loving and relational nature of God.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
30. I believe that Christian community should reflect the community within the Trinity.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
31. The best way to understand God and the Bible is by looking at the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
32. The Christian and Muslim conception of God is basically the same with a different name.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
33. Understanding God as “persons in relationship” is one of the most basic things we can say about God.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
34. God is Christ-like and in him there is no un-Christlikeness at all.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
35. “God is Love” is one of many equal attributes such as “God is Wrath.”  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
36. After the fall of Adam and Eve, God created a rescue plan so that we could be saved and go to heaven.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
37. Before creation, God planned to adopt us into the very circle of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
38. I practice forgiveness because I have already been forgiven in Christ.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*
39. I value turning toward those with whom I am having relational problems because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always turning one another.  
*Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree*



40. It is reasonable to expect my love and worship of God to decline after many years of discipleship.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
41. Joining God's mission to the world is a great option for committed Christians, but is not necessary for all disciples.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
42. All Christians are called to God's mission, but it's not the same mission that the Father gave to Jesus.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
43. Jesus reveals a key part of God, but there is a deeper part of God that we also need to know as well.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
44. I believe that growing in understanding of the Trinity is important for my life as a disciple of Christ.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
45. I believe that growing in understanding of the Trinity is optional and not always relevant for my life situations.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
46. Disciples of Christ should spend time contemplating and talking about the Trinity among friends in order to understand what worship, community, and mission is supposed to look like.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
47. I place a high value on worship that is shaped by a Trinitarian perspective about God.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
48. I place a high value on community that is shaped by Trinitarian thinking about God.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
49. I place a high value on doing ministry and mission in a way that is shaped by the Trinitarian nature of God.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
50. I am currently committed to a lifelong journey of discipleship into the image of the relational God of love that Jesus reveals.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*
51. I value the importance of discipleship that helps others to see the importance of Trinitarian thinking for church life and our mission to the world.  
*Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree*

My expectation going into the project is that the two discipleship schools will have somewhat similar results for the portion on “The Relational God of Love” and Trinitarian Discipleship for the pretest. The anticipated outcome for the project is that the students of the Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth Discipleship School will have a notable improvement upon taking the posttest survey. In addition, the Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth students will be given the final open ended questions to describe their learning experience during the intervention:

- What did you receive and learn from the training?
- Please take a few moments to share how your value for Trinitarian discipleship has been shaped by our class and the Discovery Bible Study. Please feel free to mention how knowing the “Relational God of Love” might affect worship, community, and/or joining God's mission together.

The key growth area in both dependent variables will be the *value that the students give* to the core values of the movement and the *value that the students give* to Trinitarian discipleship. The specific area of growth that we will be looking for is in relation to the second half of the survey on Trinitarian discipleship. Next, we will look at the independent variables, which represent the intervention and *cause* in this study.

#### *Independent Variables (Project Intervention)*

From the beginning of the project, my goal has been to work through our existing structures so that the research and the project design could be reproducible, both at Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth and at other Antioch churches. One of our strengths is that we value a discipleship culture, where everyone in the church is encouraged to connect with others and intentionally help one another become reproducing disciples of Christ. For basic discipleship, we use the Discovery Bible Study

(DBS), which is a simple method in which a few people come together and ask the Holy Spirit for leadership into truth, then read Scripture and discuss a few questions that move toward application and obedience. Another existing structure is the discipleship school. Christ Fellowship and the other Antioch churches use this model and encourage every member to go through the school at some point in their journey as a member of the church.

Building on these existing structures, the independent variables that represent the project intervention will be a class for the discipleship school of Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth followed by a five-week Discovery Bible Study. The first independent variable will be a class that will emphasize the importance of Trinitarian theology and lifelong Trinitarian discipleship for the church. The outline for the class will be an overview of Chapter Two from this project and is presented below.

#### Jesus and the Relational God of Love

1. Introduction
2. The Starting Point Is Jesus: The Sending of the Son
  - a. *Seeing God Through the Lens of Jesus*
  - b. *Seeing the Bible Through the Lens of Jesus*
3. The Sending of the Spirit
4. The Relational God of Love
5. The Development of Trinitarian Thought in the Early Church
  - a. *In the New Testament*
  - b. *The Church Fathers and the Person of Jesus*
  - c. *The Church Fathers and the Person of the Holy Spirit*
  - d. *The Church Fathers and the Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*

6. What We Know and What We Think We Know
  - a. *Tacit Knowledge*
  - b. *Worldview Knowledge*

#### Helping Disciples Value the Trinitarian Journey Towards Maturity

1. Worship: Into the Circle of Love
  - a. *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ*
  - b. *The Mediation of Christ*
  - c. *The Trajectory of Union and Love*
2. Community: The Relational Image of God
  - a. *Healthy Church Life and Trajectory*
  - b. *Healthy Church Life and Worship*
  - c. *Healthy Church Life and Relationships*
3. Mission: The Father's Sending
  - a. *From the Heart of God*
  - b. *With a View to New Creation*
  - c. *Sharing the Message of the Kingdom of God*
4. Reproducing Discipleship in the Context of Trinitarian Community
  - a. *Discipleship in Community*
  - b. *Simple Tools and Solid Theology*
5. A New Beginning

After the discipleship school training, the second independent variable will be the five-week Discovery Bible Study on “The Relational God of Love.” Students will be formed into groups of three and we will use 40 minutes of class time each week for DBS training. The benefits will be that the students will get training in Trinitarian thinking *and* they will get practical training in how to do the Discovery Bible Study method for discipleship.

Figure 5 shows the simple and reproducible DBS bookmark on “Relational God of Love” created for this part of the intervention.

Figure 5. Discovery Bible Study Bookmark  
for the Relational God of Love

**Relational God of Love  
Discovery Bible Study**

**Read this aloud at the beginning of each lesson:**

Knowing Jesus and the Relational God of Love that He reveals to us is absolutely critical for growth and maturity as disciples of Christ. The purpose of this Discovery Bible Study is to introduce disciples to the foundational love and relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Trinity) and help disciples enter into a life-long journey of receiving and expressing this love and relationship through our worship, community, and mission to the world around us.

*Start the lesson each week by turning to God and waiting in stillness for one full minute. As you lean into the stillness, ask God to speak to you through the reading of the Scriptures, the questions, and the interaction with each other.*

**Relational God of Love  
Discovery Bible Study**

Read each passage in two different versions. Read passages in parenthesis together then ask the questions.

**Week 1 - The Starting Point Is Jesus**  
Heb. 1:1-3; (Jn. 14:8-9; Mt. 11:27; Jn. 1:18)

**Week 2 – The Triune God of Love and Relationship**  
Mk. 1:9-11; 1 Jn. 4:7-13; Eph. 1:3-5

**Week 3 – Love and Worship (Love God)**  
Jn. 17:24-26; Jn. 4:21-24; Eph. 2:18; Lk. 10:21-22; 2 Cor. 1:21-22

**Week 4 – Community in God's Image (Love Others)**  
(Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Jn. 1:3); Acts. 2:42-47; Eph. 2:13-22

**Week 5 – Joining God's Mission to the World (Change the World)**  
Jn. 20:19-23; Mt. 28:18-20

**Questions for Discussion:**

- What is the main point?
- What does this reveal about the Relational God of Love?
- What does this reveal about us?
- What can you apply from this passage?

Wrap up each week by asking how would you share this lesson with someone else? (Just a few sentences in your own words on "The Starting Point Is Jesus," etc.)  
If you don't finish, please complete any passages and questions from the week during your time with the Lord.

As students sit down and ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate a passage, and to specifically ask what the passage reveals about the Relational God of Love, my contention is that students will gain fresh insight and appreciation for the relational image of God.

### *Online Class Journal*

Another simple tool to measure progress and help with engagement during the middle of the DBS process will be an online journal for the discipleship school class. The students will be asked to make two entries on a shared Google Doc. The purpose of this online journal will be to capture some of the things that students are learning, make sure that everyone is engaging, and try to identify areas where students might need help. Next, we turn to the methods that we will use for gathering data and keeping the project on track.

### *Evaluation Methodology*

The survey will be uploaded to Google Forms then administered electronically through a shared link that will be provided to each of the discipleship schools. Each school will receive a unique link that is for their pretest survey, and then another separate link for the posttest survey. The survey will be administered during the class time in both schools to ensure full participation from the students (approximately 33 participants in the Christ Fellowship School and approximately 38 participants in College Station School).

Google Forms is useful for this type of data gathering and can create pie or bar charts comparing the different responses per question (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure). All the data that is gathered from the Pretest and Posttest Surveys will then be entered in a spreadsheet for comparison between the schools. The following columns in Figure 6 will be helpful for comparison.

Figure 6. Spreadsheet Columns for Data Evaluation

Survey Questions Below	CF – PreTest	CF – Posttest	% Difference	ACS – Pre	ACS – Post	% Difference
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After the posttest survey, the differences will be calculated and the hope will be that the project intervention helped to increase the value for Trinitarian discipleship.

### *Ethics*

Great care will be taken to safeguard the data of the participants from both discipleship schools. All the students participating will remain anonymous. The comparative analysis will focus on the groups and the effect of the intervention strategy with the students of Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth. All the data from both pretest and posttest surveys will be stored on a password protected Google Forms page. Prior to the first survey, both groups of discipleship school students will be given an explanation to help them understand the project and what is being asked of them.

### *Desired Outcomes*

The goal for this project, as mentioned at the end of Chapter Two, is to encourage the students toward a more fully Trinitarian faith and discipleship. Positive data toward this goal will show that students have a greater value for Trinitarian theology after the independent variables and project intervention. Through the convergence of the training in the classroom and the “hands-on” inductive learning that happens through Discovery Bible study, the hope is that the students will make the important connections between the Trinity, discipleship and the impact on healthy church life. As those connections are

made, my contention is that a greater understanding of God's relational nature and love will be released in the hearts of the students, which will be a key internal motivator for becoming students that value the Relational God of Love in their lifelong discipleship.

From a leadership standpoint, a project that successfully affects the trajectory of the students toward a more fully Trinitarian faith will be important. At Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church - Fort Worth we will want to continue the project intervention in upcoming discipleship schools. In addition, I believe that there will be an interest among other discipleship schools in the Antioch Movement for helping students more deeply value *The Relational God of Love and Lifelong Discipleship*.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results of the Project

#### *Introduction*

The project was administered over a seven-week period according to the plan just described in the previous chapter. Both the Antioch Discipleship School in College Station and the Christ Fellowship Discipleship School in Fort Worth received the initial pretest survey. Then the Fort Worth group was given the intervention, which consisted of a night of training and a five-week Discovery Bible Study (DBS). During the intervention, the students were positive about the process, so we were hopeful about the posttest surveys and these data that we would gather.

After the final DBS meeting, we administered the posttest survey to both discipleship schools and began to examine the results. In this chapter, we will look at the primary findings and explanation, the secondary findings and explanation, and then conclude the chapter with a summary.

While being intentional not to overstate the impact of the project, we did see positive trending answers in the posttest survey of the Fort Worth group that received the intervention, and the open-ended answers suggest support for these statistical data. We will begin by looking at the Primary Findings and Explanation.

#### *Primary Findings and Explanation*

Once the surveys were completed these data were entered into a spreadsheet that calculated and compared the percentage difference between the pretest and posttest

surveys for Fort Worth as well as the percentage difference between the pretest and posttest surveys for College Station. In addition, the final spreadsheet also calculated the percentage differences between the pretest and posttest results of the two schools together followed by a column that measured the overall comparison difference. An example of these data columns can be seen in Figure 7 below and the final spreadsheet of all these data can be found in Appendix C.

Figure 7. Final Spreadsheet Columns for Data Evaluation

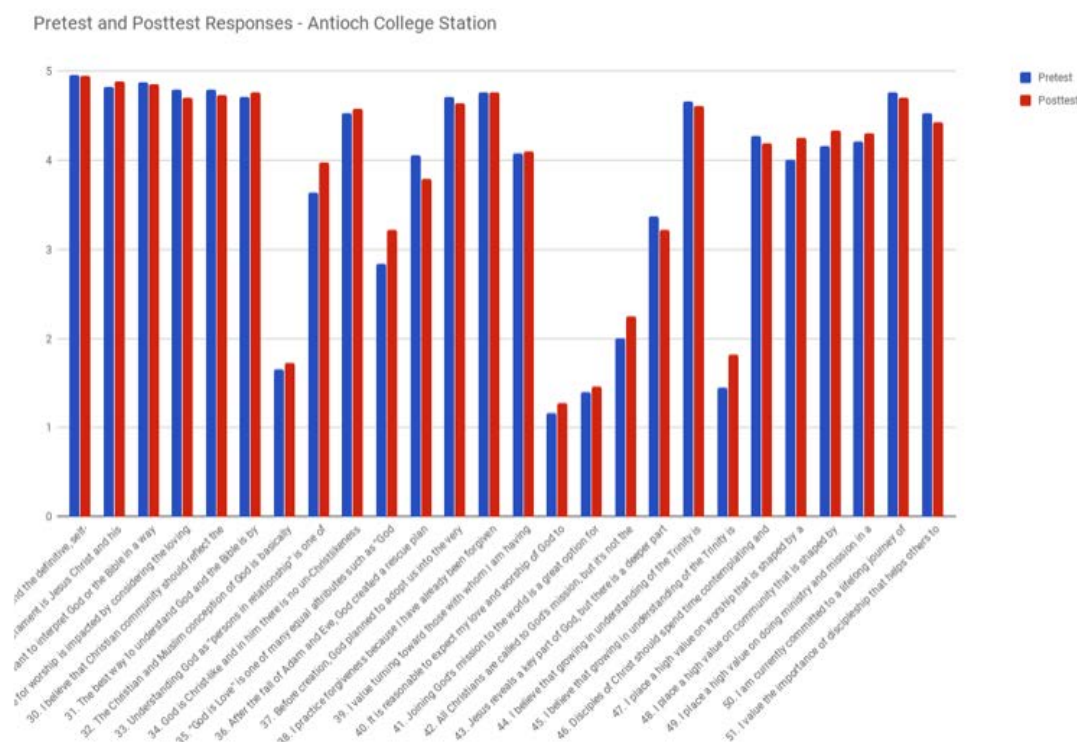
Questions Below	CF - PreTest	CF - Posttest	CF % Diff	ACS - Pre	ACS - Post	ACS % Diff	%Diff CF vs. ACS pre-test	%Diff CF vs. ACS post	overall growth comparison (difference between column I and H, which is the same as D minus G)
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Part one of the survey (Questions 1–25) was constructed to measure the three core values of the Antioch Movement (Love God, Love One Another, and Love Those Who Don’t Know Christ). The purpose of this section of questions was to establish a common ground of shared values between the two discipleship schools. As expected, both College Station and Fort Worth students communicated a high commitment to the core values of the movement.

Part two of the survey (Questions 26–51) was constructed to measure the value that students gave to Trinitarian discipleship in the specific areas of worship, community, and mission. As noted in Chapter Two, the goal in this study has been to look for the “nudge” in the value that the students place on Trinitarian discipleship. We believe that the positive movement in the Fort Worth group (from pretest survey to posttest survey) suggests an increasing value for Trinitarian discipleship and that the open-ended answers support a positive “nudge” in the perspective of the students.

Although the strongest weight was placed on the open-ended answers of the students, we also converted these survey data to a Likert Scale to picture the trends of the answers from both the College Station and the Fort Worth groups. Figure 8 represents the Likert Scale for the College Station group that did not receive the intervention (Questions 26–51).

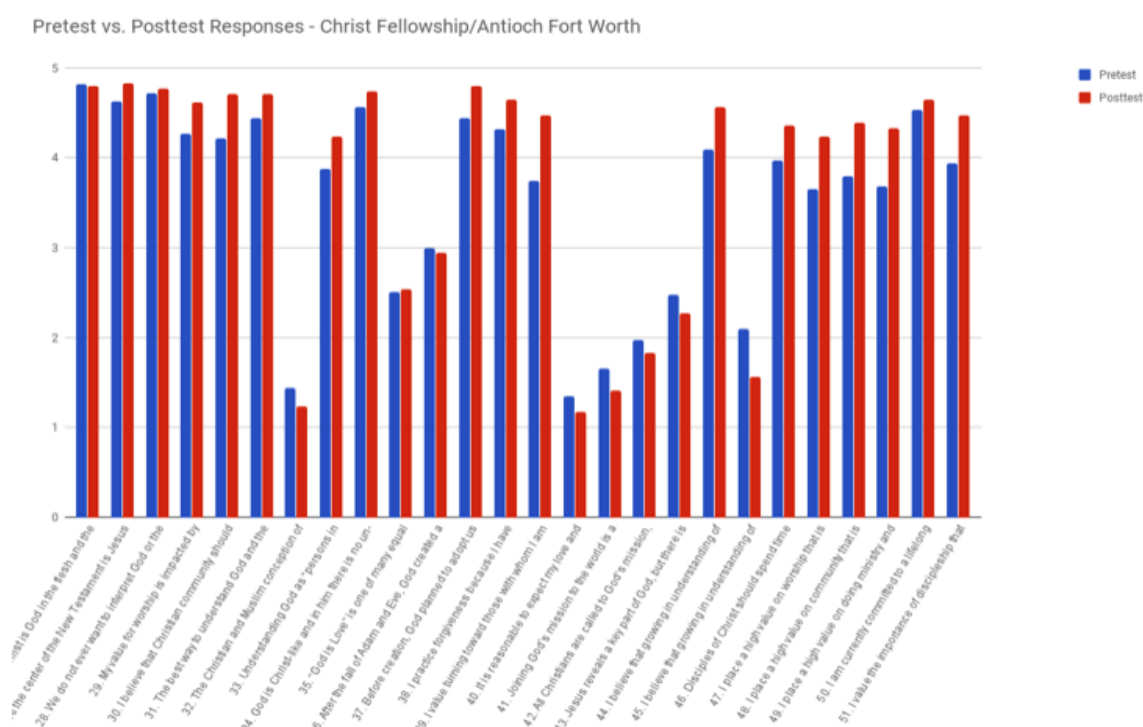
Figure 8. College Station Pretest and Posttest Comparison for Trinitarian Questions



As a control group, the answers of the College Station discipleship school were relatively flat. There was not a conclusive trend one way or another. While we cannot know all the factors that may or may not have contributed to any differences between the pretest and the posttest surveys, these answers were helpful as a reference point for a group not receiving the intervention.

In contrast to the control group, the Fort Worth discipleship school that received the intervention exhibited clear trends of growth from the pretest survey to the posttest survey. Figure 9 is the Likert Scale for the Fort Worth group and illustrates the growth trends between the pretest survey and the posttest survey (questions 26-51).

Figure 9. Fort Worth Pretest and Posttest Comparison for Trinitarian Questions



Although we cannot isolate all the variables that may have affected the differences between the two schools, the positive trends in the Fort Worth group suggested a connection to the project intervention. We will now turn to specific questions in the areas of worship, community, and mission and the support given by the open-ended answers (a full list of the open-ended answers can be found in Appendix D).

*Worship and the Value for Trinitarian Discipleship*

Different questions were specifically aimed at measuring the value for worship and the connection to Trinitarian discipleship. Question 29 asked, “My value for worship is impacted by considering the loving and relational nature of God.” The posttest results showed that the “Strongly Agree” answers improved from 44.1% to 64.7%, a net change of 20.6 percentage points. One representative student said, “it’s all about receiving and returning the Father’s love, through Jesus, and being empowered by the Holy Spirit. Everything of God (is connected to) his relational love, and if I’m partaking in God, then I experience that love as well.”

Question 47 was also worship-focused and asked, “I place a high value on worship that is shaped by a Trinitarian perspective about God.” The students scored large increases from the pretest to the posttest answers. One notable aspect of their answers was the “Not Sure” responses that dropped from 38.2% to 5.9%. In addition, the “Strongly Agree” answers increased from 17.6% to 41.2%. These were encouraging percentage reports and were supported by one student who said, “Knowing the Relational God of Love has given me a more rounded view of God so that my prayers and worship have shifted to an even deeper place.” And another student who noted, “Knowing the relational God of love allows me to love and worship . . . and to know the true love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on a deeper level . . . it has given me great joy!”

One of the key problems that this project tried to address was that disciples often disengaged when the subject of the Trinity was brought up. The open-ended answers pointed toward the idea that students were making the connection that Trinitarian discipleship was important and practical for their lives. One student said, “Understanding

who God is and how he relates to us (inviting us into relationship with him by Jesus through the Holy Spirit) *changes everything*” (emphasis added). Another student noted,

For me, this class has fundamentally changed how I see myself in relationship to God. I now see that I am dead center in the loving relationship of the Trinity, and that has changed how I have handled conflict with family, issues at work, and the way I pray and listen. I have started to develop an awareness of God that was not present before, and out of that I am more confident in hearing Him and knowing His purposes for my life.

Still another student echoed the concern that the Trinity would be left on the periphery in our discipleship, “Understanding the Trinity is an integral part of understanding God, His love for us, and His love for others. The Trinity is not merely an obscure theological idea that we can ignore or put to the side; rather it needs to be *a foundational part of our journey*” (emphasis added).

### *Community and the Value for Trinitarian Discipleship*

Perhaps one of the most important primary findings was that the relational dynamic of God (the Relational God of Love) seemed to have direct and practical implications for the way we relate to one another and bear God’s image together in community. Question 30 stated, “I believe that Christian community should reflect the community within the Trinity.” Those who answered “Not Sure” dropped from 20.6% to 0.0% and those who answered “Strongly Agree” jumped from 41.2% to 70.6%. Question 33 was similar and asked, “Understanding God as ‘persons in relationship’ is one of the most basic things we can say about God.” Again, an important shift was noted as those who selected “Not Sure” dropped from 29.4% to 8.8% and those who chose “Strongly Agree” increased from 17.6% to 38.2%. The open-ended answers seemed to add further support to the survey responses. One student stated, “Knowing God as three persons in

relationship with each other places a higher value on being in relationship with others. It also helped me to understand the love God has for me even more by knowing that He wants to draw us into His Trinitarian love. This empowers me to want to share that love with others.”

Another survey question highlighted the relational dynamic and asked, “I value turning toward those with whom I am having relational problems because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always turning to one another.” Those who responded “Not Sure” dropped from 20.6% to 0.0% and those who responded either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” increased from 67.6% to 100%. One student offered a supporting thought and stated, “I can turn toward people that hurt me because God has turned toward me. My life with Christ now is me being consistently and eternally brought into the eternal, ongoing, growing up-and-to-the-right relationship with God from now until forever in communion with others at the same time.”

A final community observation came from Question 48, which asked, “I place a high value on community that is shaped by Trinitarian thinking about God.” The “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” responses jumped from 64.7% to 98.2%. Many of the open-ended responses also captured and seemed to support this increase in value. One student said, “How I relate to others in the church has been greatly affected by the positive change in my understanding of the Trinity...my thinking about the Trinity has really transformed my ideas about God and how the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit impact my daily walk with Christ.” Another student stated that the project helped them understand “why I desire intimacy with the body of Christ . . . it helped me

see more clearly how to live in community and why this is important . . . being an ‘island’ on my own with faith is missing out on the bigger perspective and point.”

### *Mission and the Value for Trinitarian Discipleship*

The third primary finding concerned the value for mission and Trinitarian discipleship. Question 44 states, “I believe that growing in understanding of the Trinity is important for my life as a disciple of Christ.” Over 20.0% moved from “Not Sure” (14.7%) or “Disagreed” (5.9%) in the pretest survey to “Strongly Agree” in the posttest survey. One student stated, “Moving forward I feel these ideas are vital to share in discipleship because of the clarity it brings to God and how he interacts with us through the life of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.” Another student stated, “I believed in the Trinity previously, but I did not understand it to the depth that I do now. It’s practical application and meaning for how we relate to others and ourselves has brought new meaning to me for what it means to be Christian.”

Question 49 looked directly at the value that the students gave to Trinitarian discipleship and asked, “I place a high value on doing ministry and mission in a way that is shaped by the Trinitarian nature of God.” Those who answered “Not Sure” dropped from 32.4% to 2.9% and those who answered “Strongly Agree” increased from 17.6% to 41.2%. One representative student responded, “God’s commission, his command to us to make disciples is not an isolated, onerous task that he’s commanding us to do. It fits with a pattern of him inviting us into who he is, his authority, his love, his purpose.” Another student noted, “I’ve received so much from this semester in discipleship school. How I look at people has changed completely. . . . Seeing God as the relational God of love has shaped and grown how I worship, disciple people and how I love them.”



Question 51 asked, “I value the importance of discipleship that helps others to see the importance of Trinitarian thinking for church life and our mission to the world.”

Again, the significant response was that those who chose “Not Sure” dropped from 29.4% to 2.9% and those who chose “Strongly Agree” increased from 23.5% to 50.0%.

Some of the student responses were supportive of these data. One student said, “Understanding the Trinity has become more practical and approachable. I now feel I am able to better discuss/communicate this doctrine and also apply it more effectively to my own circumstances in a way that would be attractive to others.” Another student said,

Understanding the relational God of love is vital in discipleship, worship, mission, etc. . . . When we are in relationship with God, Jesus and Holy Spirit we are transformed into his likeness, and as that transformation takes shape, the world around us can’t help but be changed. We are not just believers waiting around to “go to heaven,” but instead, we are participants in a kingdom that is here and now. We live with purpose, passion, peace, joy, patience, kindness and mission. We live expectant lives . . . lives that draw others to this same relational God of love that has rocked our worlds!

The primary findings suggested that the project was helpful for increasing the value of Trinitarian discipleship in a way that could have an impact on our worship, community, and mission. The open-ended answers allowed the students to speak, in their own words, and gave additional support to the potential impact of the intervention and project.

### *Secondary Findings and Explanation*

In addition to the primary findings, some of significant secondary findings started to emerge while analyzing these data. Each of these findings represented data that were helpful, a bit surprising, and will need to be considered for the future.

### *Surprised by Joy*

While reading through the open-ended responses, I was encouraged by the intensity and enthusiasm of many of the answers. I suddenly became aware of expressions of “joy” in the answers that I was reading. One student said, “It has given me great *joy* (emphasis added) and great peace to be able to soak up...the relational God of love.” Another said, “I contemplate the Trinity, His presence, and pray with him frequently throughout the day now. It’s brought *joy* (emphasis added) to all the pieces of my life.” Still another said, “I have learned about the character of God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and how they have brought me into their never-ending circle of sacrificial, joyful love.”

The project was focused on knowing the relational God of love that Jesus reveals to us, and in retrospect, it makes complete sense that the students would experience joy in this process. This finding should be an important part of future work because of the motivational power of joy. We move toward things that we think will give us joy.

### *Annual Surveys for Core Values*

Another secondary finding concerned the need to do a survey for core values at the beginning of each discipleship school. I originally included the first 25 questions to establish the idea that these schools were similar in their shared core values (Love God, Love One Another, Love Those Who Don’t Know Christ), and in large measure, the pretest surveys for both schools confirmed the shared values. For example, in response to Question 1, “I am intentional about scheduling personal time with God on a daily basis,” 82.4% from Fort Worth chose “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” compared to 100% from College Station. Both were strong responses, and neither response was surprising because

we encouraged everyone to spend daily time with God. Or consider Question 3, “When I have a need, I know how to find help in the Scriptures.” Just over 94.0% of the students from Fort Worth chose “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” compared with just over 92.0% from College Station. There are many other similar areas of comparison between the two schools and their answers to the questions about core values.

The important secondary finding for the Fort Worth group, however, was the number of students who choose “Disagree” on some of the questions related to core values. For example, on Question 1 about spending daily time with God, even though 82.4% “Strongly Agree” or “Agree,” I was surprised by the 17.6% who choose “Disagree.” On Question 4, 14.7% of the Fort Worth students disagreed that they hear God speak to them. On Question 12, 35.3% disagreed that they have one or two people that they are investing in for discipleship. On Question 14, 29.4% disagreed that they feel personally responsible to share Jesus with others. On Question 15, 32.4% disagreed that they felt they could personally lead someone to Christ.

Now, the good news was that we addressed those issues, and there was tremendous improvement in each of those areas. But the point was that we focused on those areas because we *learned* about the need through the students’ answers in the first survey. We had assumed that the students possessed these values because they were such a key part of our identity, but the survey helped us to understand that the students needed specific help in some of these areas.

### *The Importance of Discovery Bible Studies*

Going into the project and intervention, we knew that Discovery Bible Studies (DBS) were important; they were already being used around the world in wonderful ways. But only a few of our students had led a DBS before this project. I had expected the students to learn about Trinitarian theology and discipleship as they used the DBS, but the surprising secondary finding was how much they liked the DBS process itself. One student said, “It was amazing doing a DBS with people and learning together...Love the DBS!” Another student said, “The DBS is now a tool I have to share and multiply (God’s life and presence). It allows me to share in God’s love with others and practice it in what we do.”

To make this observation another way, I was primarily looking at the DBS as a simple process for imparting the importance of Trinitarian discipleship. The students did express enthusiasm for discovering more about Jesus and the relational God of love, *and* they expressed enthusiasm for the DBS process itself. That finding was very encouraging for the future of this form of inductive discipleship.

### *The Question Shapes the Answer*

The final secondary finding concerned an aspect of the DBS process. In a standard DBS, the key question about God would be “What does this passage reveal about God?” That was a great question, but I wanted to help the students in the process of specifically looking for the Trinity in the scriptures, and so the key question for the DBS in the project was “What does this passage reveal about the relational God of love?” That question proved to be important in helping the students to make connections that they had not made before. One student said, “All of the scriptures that were used I knew, but it was

amazing to see how many there were all together and to go deeper in them. I have more of an awareness of the communal/relational nature of God.” Another student said, “I had not specifically looked at these passages before regarding the relational nature of God. It helped me think about them through a different lens and understand God better.”

I also made one additional adjustment between the first week of the DBS and the second. Some of the feedback that I was getting let me know that the students were making observations about the relational nature of God and about his love, but still needed to identify more about the “Trinity” as they worked through the DBS. So, at the beginning of the DBS for week two I simply said, “Remember that the ‘Relational God of Love’ is another phrase for understanding ‘the Trinity.’” The students responded positively to this simple reminder and one said,

It was amazing to see scripture “come alive” with passages over and over again pointing to the Trinity. I’ve always believed in the Trinity and worshiped the Godhead as so, but didn’t realize all the passages that talked about it! I don’t think I can read scripture now without noticing the Father, Son and Spirit pointing back to one another. The study was great, and the emphasis even greater.

A final student noted, “Knowing the relational God of love gives a different perspective to passages that I have read over and over.”

By asking a question that was different than the norm, we were able to help the students put on a new set of glasses and see Scripture in a new light. This secondary finding potentially pointed the way toward a broadened use of DBS for other specific areas of emphasis and theology.

### *Summary of Intervention and Findings*

The goal of the project was to help students grow in the value that they give to Trinitarian discipleship. The difference in the pretest and posttest survey scores suggested that the intervention was successful and helped to “nudge” and increase the value that students have for Trinitarian discipleship. The greatest weight, however, was given to the students’ open-ended answers. In the open-ended answers the students gave support for the increased value for Trinitarian discipleship in their own words.

The primary findings pointed to growth in the key areas of worship, community, and mission as an expression of Trinitarian discipleship. The open-ended answers supported the assertion that the intervention helped the students grow in each of the three primary areas. The students found the training and the DBS practical, which was an early desire in this project. Of the three primary areas, community seemed to be the most practical for the students because they could see the direct connection to the image of the relational God of love displayed in our community together in church life.

The secondary findings also revealed some important lessons learned from the project and included: the joy of the students in the process of growing in Trinitarian discipleship, the need for annual surveys to assess the church’s core values in the students, the importance of DBS in the learning process, and the future possibilities of using focused questions in DBS discipleship.

In Chapter Two, I noted the importance of tacit knowledge in Trinitarian theology and discipleship. The learning that the students described in the open-ended answers seemed to support the idea that we know more than we think we do about the Trinity. In

addition, like Polanyi's scientists who learned best in community, the students in the discipleship school also noted the importance of learning in the context of community.

As a result, these data for *The Relational God of Love and Lifelong Discipleship* project were encouraging for the potential of this type of intervention and training for discipleship school students. Moving forward, the project will be helpful in the larger body of literature connected to Trinitarian theology and discipleship. While the project is only a beginning, there will be future opportunities to build on the research and the learning gained through this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Evaluation and Significance of the Project

#### *Biblical and Theological Significance of the Project*

In this project, we address the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. More specifically, we have focused on how practicing Christians can understand and appreciate God's self-revelation as Triune. In the New Testament, we see the centrality of Jesus, the Son of God, and his relationship to his Father in the shared love and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

As mentioned in the introduction of Chapter One, the theological significance of this subject is comparable to Einstein's theory of relativity. Just as Einstein's theory of relativity was paradigm shifting for understanding the physical universe, the doctrine of the Trinity is necessary for believers to accurately understand and relate to the Triune God. If God truly is relational and loving at the core of his ontological being, then communicating that truth as a foundational reality of life is critical. The biblical and theological burden of this project has been to find new ways of communicating these important and weighty truths to normal, everyday disciples of Christ.

The project has deeply strengthened my personal resolve that the relational dynamic of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit needs to be communicated in repeated and sustained ways to envision, equip, and empower the church to fulfill God's eternal purpose on the earth. But for many, this will be a paradigm level shift in thinking about God. A loving relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all eternity is very different from a distant, unknowable, amorphous, omni-being in the imagination of the



fallen mind. This false god is a creation of broken humanity and unlike the God that Jesus reveals to us in the Scriptures.

The theological implications are significant. Hermeneutics and biblical interpretation must reflect a sustained effort to see Scripture through God's own self-revelation in the sending of the Son and the Spirit. This hermeneutic allows us to read about Jesus and look for the Father and Spirit working in and through him. This hermeneutic allows us to read about the Spirit and look for Jesus and the Father. This hermeneutic allows us to read about God and know that we are always talking about the eternal loving and self-giving relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Catherine LaCugna captures this thought well when she states,

The form of God's life in the economy dictates both the shape of our experience of that life and our reflection on that experience. Led by the Spirit more deeply into the life of Christ, we see the unveiled face of the living God. God's glory is beheld in Jesus Christ who is the instrument of our election, our adoption as daughters and sons of God, our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, and the cause of our everlasting inheritance of glory (Ephesians). In order to formulate an ethics that is authentically Christian, an ecclesiology and sacramental theology that are christological and pneumatological, a spirituality that is not generic but is shaped by the Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, we must adhere to the form of God's self-revelation, God's concrete existence as Christ and Spirit. The purpose of the discipline of theology is to contemplate and serve that economy, to throw light on it if possible, so that we may behold the glory of God, *doxa theou*, ever more acutely.<sup>1</sup>

We are getting at the heart of theology when we see the relational God of love and his glory as *beautiful*. Like the students in the project who expressed joy, it will be a good thing for more and more people to know God as he has revealed himself in the sending of the Son and the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 378.

One of the theological results of Trinitarian thinking is that the gospel becomes much better news. The Father's heart is revealed in Jesus Christ. That truth is a soothing balm compared to the idea that the Father had to be conditioned by Jesus into loving and forgiving us. Thinking deeply about the Trinity helps the good news to be even better news.

Another way of considering the biblical and theological significance of the project is to ask *what was God doing before creation?*<sup>2</sup> That question is important because it points to the heart of God's identity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a relationship of love from all eternity. Understanding God's identity in this way will shape our understanding of God's actions in history. God acts out of *who* he is. A more informed theology of God will lead to a more informed soteriology, a more informed ecclesiology, and a more informed missiology. If we start with a view of God as a loving Trinity, then salvation will involve forgiveness and an ultimate restoration of relationship with God and others. That view of salvation will then affect the way we view the church and the importance that we give to relationships and God's purpose for the church. That view of the church will then affect what we do in mission and our common purpose to join in what God is doing to make things right in all relationships and in all the creation.

On the other hand, someone might have a view of God that only focuses on him as a ruler, instead of primarily being loving and relational. What would then happen to our salvation, church life, and mission? The result would be that salvation would primarily be about being saved from our inability to keep the rules. God then is understood to be a policeman who is concerned about our law keeping and he is ready to

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<sup>2</sup> Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 19. Reeves asks this important question as the title of Chapter One.

punish our mistakes. The church then becomes a gathering of saved people who are in a holding cell, waiting for Jesus to come and set us free. Then, in this frame, the mission is a command (another rule) for the saved people to obey.

The point is that the relational and loving nature of God is one of the most central things that we can say about God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always been in a loving relationship—even before creation. And yet, out of the depth and mystery of that eternal love, God created a world that he could love, and he made creatures that could freely love him back. The Apostle John captures this truth and simply states, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him” (1 Jn. 4:16b).

Without overstating the case, we must ask if there is any area of theology that is not, or should not be impacted by a more robust Trinitarian theology? Which brings us back to the basic burden of this project, which is to create a “nudge” in the trajectory of the normal, everyday disciple and the value that they give to Trinitarian-shaped discipleship. If more disciples can catch the vision of the importance of Trinitarian thinking for their lives, then more disciples can be involved in the creative implications for ministry that accompany being shaped into the image of the relational God of love. In the next section, we will consider some of the practical implications for ministry.

### *Implications for Ministry*

In the same way that we asked if there are any areas of theology that would not be impacted by a more robust Trinitarian theology, we could also ask the same question about the implications for ministry. If God is relational at the core of his being, then relationship with God and with others rises to paramount importance. The project focused on a relatively narrow slice of ministry in focusing on discipleship, but the implications

for ministry are broad. The importance of relationship touches most every area of ministry and helps us understand that we can do nothing without Jesus (Jn. 15:5) and we will gain nothing without love (1 Cor. 13:3). Through a quick survey of expanding concentric circles of concern, we can see some of the important implications of Trinitarian thought for ministry in the church.

### *In Our Personal Lives*

Any lasting ministry that we bring to the church must flow out of the reality of our personal relationship with God, which is the first circle of concern. The most basic and most important spiritual discipline and practice is spending daily time with God. There are so many important facets of this practice that could be mentioned, but there is no substitute for doing it on a regular and daily basis. Relationship with God is at the heart of this practice. Whether it is personal worship, spending time in the Scriptures, stillness and contemplation, receiving the Father's love, intercession and waiting on the Lord for others—each of these dynamics involve a deepening relationship with God and will lead to a deepening relationship with others.

Our model for relating to God in this way is, of course, Jesus. He got up early to pray and modeled a life of communion and dependence on the Father in the Spirit. All of Jesus' words and actions flow from personal communion and relationship with the Father and the Spirit (Jn. 12:49-50; Jn. 5:19). The exciting thing is that we get to participate with him in the shared love and fellowship of the Trinity.

In addition, each of the areas of concern that we focused on in this project (worship, community, and mission) are shaped and molded in and through our personal time with God. Not only do we express personal worship, but also our corporate worship

deepens when it flows from the reality of personal time with God. Not only do we experience God's loving community in private, but we also receive instruction from God for living in loving community with others (i.e., when to repent, ask forgiveness, talk less, serve someone, give an anonymous gift, etc.) And our own sense of personal mission will always be strengthened as we spend time in the presence of God and calibrate our hearts to his mission and concerns.

Practically, spending personal time with God is a daily response to an invitation to know and relate to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is always wooing, drawing, convicting, guiding, comforting, empowering, and bringing glory to Jesus by revealing him to us. Jesus always loves us as his bride, leads us as his body, speaks to us as his sheep, and unites us as his people. The Father is always communicating his love to us, our adoption into his family as sons and daughters, and our calling to grow up, mature, and bear the image of Christ. In this personal time with God a prayer as simple as the ten-word *Jesus Prayer* (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me) becomes a doorway to contemplation and Trinitarian fellowship. We then live into the other implications for ministry *out of* a rooted and secret history with the relational God of Love in our personal lives.

### *In Our Church Life Together*

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the students made early and practical connections of the importance of Trinitarian discipleship as we talked about relationships in the church, which is the second circle of concern. Not only do we bear God's image as individuals, but we also bear God's image together as a corporate group. In a similar way to the idea that God is one God with distinct persons, we in the church are called to be

one people with distinct families and individuals. The following list, though not complete, represents some of the key practical areas that will be impacted by teaching a more robust Trinitarian theology to members of the church.

*Discipleship.* The Great Commission given by Jesus is a call, not just to make disciples, but also to make disciples that are immersed in the Trinitarian understanding of God. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt. 28:19-20). This current project on *The Relational God of Love and Lifelong Discipleship* offers a practical way forward for churches to combine a focused teaching on Trinitarian theology followed by a five-week Discovery Bible Study. In addition, the second chapter of this project could be offered as reading for students in preparation for the class. Still another practical implication for discipleship and ministry is that I have been invited to participate in a group of Antioch leaders that are considering creative training methods for the Antioch Discipleship Schools. In the context of discipleship-oriented churches, the project could provide a simple and reproducible way to deepen the value for Trinitarian discipleship across the Antioch Movement.

*Evangelism.* A more robust Trinitarian theology will also impact the way we share the gospel. Evangelism in this frame of reference would involve telling the story of the relational God of love, of the loss and suffering caused by the fall in the Garden, and the reconciliation that is available to all through the self-giving love of God seen in Jesus Christ on the cross. The invitation to believe and follow Jesus is an invitation to love and to right relationships with God and with his people. Of course, there is more to say about

sin, forgiveness, judgment, atonement, and other dynamics of salvation, but the key thing to remember is that God the Father is acting through the sending of the Son and the Spirit to adopt us into his family so that we can bear his image, share in his life and love, and express his reign on the earth.

*Preaching.* Trinitarian theology is already having a significant impact on the preaching at Antioch Fort Worth. I have preached specific messages on the Trinity as a topic, but more often, I will preach a message that draws on Trinitarian theology to make a point. For example, I recently preached “Community in God’s Image” from Acts 2:42-47 and emphasized that just as God’s actions flow from his identity, so also our actions should flow from our identity in Christ. At Antioch, we also use a Sermon Planning Team, which gives me an additional opportunity to speak to the issue of Trinitarian theology as we plan our sermons. Finally, we try to stay connected to the church calendar in our preaching, which gives regular opportunities to address Trinitarian themes in preaching (Advent, Baptism, Transfiguration, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday).

*Worship and Singing.* The implications for ministry in worship and singing certainly include lyrics to the songs that we sing. Due to the emphasis that we give to Trinitarian theology in our preaching, there is a great response from the congregation when we sing those themes in worship. Still, finding songs with Trinitarian themes is a growth area for us, and more generally, for the modern worship genre. Another implication is that our worship leaders have an opportunity to coach the church to see how we reflect the Trinity in our worship times (we are individuals, but we sing in ways that accents our oneness). While we expect our singing to have an immediate impact, we

also believe that other expressions of worship will be impacted by our commitment to Trinitarian theology (corporate prayers, the Lord's Supper, baptisms, responsive readings, various art forms, and staying connected to the historic church calendar, etc.).

*Listening Prayer.* Healing from the wounds of the past is an ongoing need in the church and Trinitarian theology is critical for getting help. So many of our wounds deal with two main lies that we believe—a lie about God, and a lie about ourselves. Listening Prayer focuses on hearing the truth about who God is and the truth about our own identity in Christ. The loving and relational dynamic of the Trinity often stands in contrast to the false images of God that people imagine because of their own wounds and pain. In Listening Prayer, we renounce the lies about God and ourselves and receive the truth that God has for our hearts in exchange for the lies.

*LifeGroups.* We originally planted the church as a cell church. Although the name of the cell group has now changed to LifeGroup, the value for church that meets from house to house with the goal of multiplication is as strong as ever. These groups still form the core of the church with over eighty percent of the members actively involved. The relational implications of Trinitarian theology for the LifeGroups are significant and cannot be overstated. For example, LifeGroups facilitate “One Another” ministry described 59 different times in the New Testament (see Appendix E for the specific examples). LifeGroups facilitate the use of spiritual gifts to build up the church in ways that time and space do not allow when the larger church gathers on Sundays. LifeGroups facilitate relational evangelism that is powerful because seeking friends are brought into the context of Acts 2 community where they can see love and discipleship in action. LifeGroups facilitate eating meals together, which is a major way that the early Christians



met together and encountered the Lord (Acts 2:42-47, Lk. 24:30-32). There are many other practical things to say about LifeGroups, but the main point is that LifeGroups are a primary structure in the church for facilitating the love and life that we see shared in the Trinity.

*Leadership and Decision Making.* Since planting the church over twenty-five years ago, our primary leadership value and directive has been to “submit to the headship of Christ.” That value has only been strengthened by the Trinitarian emphasis on self-giving love and mutual submission as an expression of that relationship and love. Elder teams and leadership teams in the church will benefit from reflection on this dynamic of the Trinity and make better decisions when there is a commitment to discerning God’s will together. As the Lead Pastor, I lead the team of elders, but I lead them as an equal and it would be foolish to make unilateral decisions that did not humbly consider their counsel. Practically, we prayerfully consider an issue and offer ourselves to the Lord (as best we can) that we might know his will and be led by him. Then, each member of the team is invited to give counsel and we eventually form a proposal. We then practice “consent decision making” where each member of the team is invited to give consent, which is different than approving every single detail of a proposal. Someone would not give consent if there were a “paramount objection” (an overarching reason why the proposal would not work). When we give consent to a proposal, we then get to celebrate a clear decision and give praise to God that he is leading us as a church and in our decision-making.<sup>3</sup> The entire process of discerning God’s will together has been deeply strengthened through reflection on Trinitarian theology.

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<sup>3</sup> Consent decision-making has its roots in the Quaker tradition where a group waits in expectant silence for the Lord to speak about an issue at hand. For more on this topic, see John Buck and Sharon

*Conflict Resolution.* Another implication for ministry in the church context involves conflict resolution. Some of the key Trinitarian theological influences should strengthen our resolve for conflict resolution in the church, two of which I will mention. The first is that, like the Trinity that is turned toward one another from all eternity, we value turning toward one another as an expression of the image of God in our community. Sometimes that is hard and sometimes things do not work out. In a conflict situation, everyone is free to respond and keep turning toward one another, or to walk away. But when we turn toward one another and meet face to face there is always an opportunity for the Spirit of God to bring the peace that Jesus made real and available through his life, death, and resurrection. The second is that, again like the Trinity, the church is a unified whole, a single system made up of many individual people, families, and LifeGroups. Like the earlier connection that I made between the Trinity and family systems theory in Chapter Two, when someone in the church is hurting or offended, the larger group will feel the anxiety *because we are also a unified whole*. Our commitment must then be to help the hurting person, and make sure that we respond with love, maturity, and clarity so that they and the church can move forward in life.

*Diversity.* A final implication for Trinitarian theology in our church life together is diversity. There are numerous theological reasons for promoting diversity in the body of Christ. The issue of diversity is the occasion for writing a number of the New Testament letters and is the topic of the famous Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Are the Gentiles included with the Jews in the body of the Messiah? Paul emphatically says yes, and notes that this used to be hidden, but it has now been revealed (Eph. 3:2-6). The

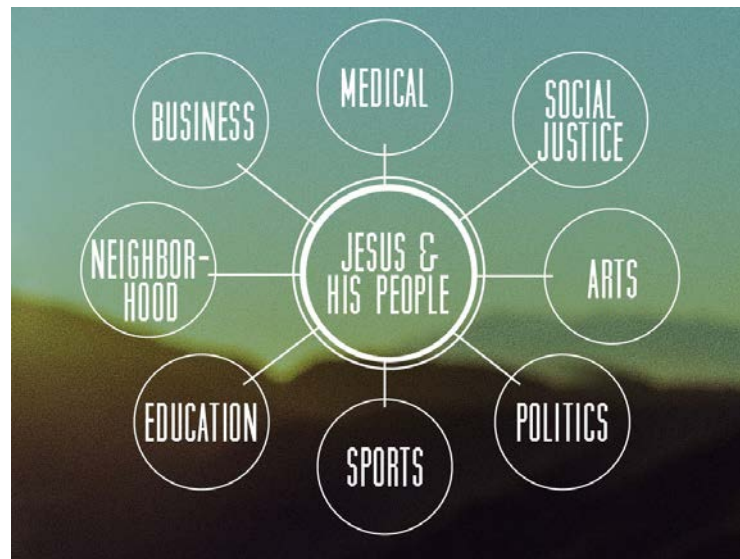
important theological implication is that the Triune God is overflowing in love in creation, overflowing in love to people, overflowing in love in salvation, and calls us to be overflowing in love to the “other” (those who are different by race, education, or social status). And to that end, a specific implication for our church life is that we would be marked by the diversity of our city. We are currently twenty to twenty-five percent minority and we want to see that increase to look like the diversity of our city. The church building sits at a crossroads between three major areas of primarily Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanic areas of the city. Our goal is to see Antioch Fort Worth be a multi-ethnic, epicenter, life-giving, multiplying, reproducing, Christ-manifesting church.

### *In the City*

The third expanding circle of concern and implication for ministry is joining God’s mission to the city of Fort Worth. In 2002, we moved the church from Grapevine to Fort Worth. Over 200 people came with us and many of those sold their homes to move as “missionaries to Fort Worth.” Before moving, we had a team preparing to leave for Thailand as missionaries, and the challenge we gave to our own people was “You may never move as a missionary to Thailand, but would you consider selling your house, keeping your same job, and moving with us as missionaries to Fort Worth.” There were so many important things that God used to help us make the decision to move, but at the heart of the decision was an invitation to be a part of fulfilling the Great Commission. Now, many years later, that decision continues to mature and be influenced by a more fully Trinitarian theology, which means that we want to immerse disciples into the reality of the Trinity as we move out into our different spheres of influence in the city.

Even though we were already using “missionary” language and training our people to live intentional lives and pursue God's purpose in every way possible, in the last few years we have emphasized the importance of our spheres of influence in the city. What we realized was that ninety-nine percent of people in the world will never be in full time ministry, so how do we empower and envision those people to impact their sphere of influence. In the Antioch Movement, we use the following diagram in Figure 10 to illustrate the potential impact of the church that joins the mission of God to make things right in the world.

Figure 10. Spheres Diagram



The power of this simple diagram is to illustrate the gathering of Jesus and his people and the sending of those people out into the places where they work and live their lives. “As the Father sent me, I am sending you” (Jn. 20:21) is a Trinitarian invitation to look for God’s activity in our spheres of influence, and then join him.

We recently had an entire Sunday devoted to equipping, envisioning, and empowering the church to see the importance of their missionary role in the different

spheres of life. We had testimonies from different people reaching out in the spheres—doctors, business leaders, educators, those reaching their neighbors, those fighting against human trafficking, and even one of our elders who works in the political sphere as a city councilman in Fort Worth. We also offered a social media invitation to communicate about the different ways people are being ambassadors for Christ by sharing a short video or post at #myspherematters. We finished the morning by naming each specific sphere and having everyone who worked in a sphere to stand and receive a commission and blessing to be an ambassador and to represent Jesus in their sphere.

The call to participate in the mission of the Triune God to our city means that we must think differently about our work and the places where we spend most of our time. We must think differently about our availability for other people in our lives and the twenty-first century temptation to cram the calendar so full that there is no room for the mission, or more simply, there is no room for people. Even in the urban areas of the city people still feel isolated, but that also means there are opportunities for building relationships.

Another implication of the mission to the city is that many other congregations of Jesus' people are also called to the same mission. In our sixteen years in the city of Fort Worth, we have been on a journey in partnership with many churches to reach our city with the good news of Jesus Christ. As pastors in the city, we have prayed together, we have eaten meals together, and we have worked on citywide initiatives together. Some of those things have worked well and some of the things have worked less well.

In the last couple of years, however, we have been tapping into something fresh and going deeper in relationship with each other. While I cannot speak for the other

pastors, my own journey into a more robust Trinitarian theology has certainly fueled some of my initiative. Just as we need to recognize our oneness and diversity within the local body as an expression of God's image, so we also need to recognize our oneness and diversity within the larger church in the city. Instead of a city-wide lunch with all the pastors in the city, we changed to a regional format, which allowed seven or eight pastors to meet for lunch and connect hearts at a much deeper level. Most often our format has been an icebreaker followed by sharing a victory, a struggle, and a time of prayer. The result of the meals has been significant and they represent deeper relationships and deeper trust between the pastors and the churches.

As we move forward, our goal is to keep relationships, prayer, and mission at the forefront of the things that we do together. We have now started a monthly prayer meeting for pastors. We are working through the material for "Christ Together," which is a city-reaching initiative that started in Austin, TX and is now in 70 cities around the country. Our goal in coming together for this part of the mission is that "every man, woman, and child in Fort Worth would have repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ."

### *In the Nations*

The final expanding concentric circle of concern is the part of the Trinitarian mission of the Father, Son, and Spirit to go to the nations. The Great Commission is shared with different language but the call is the same. In Mt. 28:18, Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of *all nations*" and baptize them into the Triune name of God. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes

on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and *to the ends of the earth.*”

The implication for us in this circle of concern is that we would be like the church that we read about in the book of Acts, especially the church at Antioch. The church at Antioch was diverse and they figured out a way to own the whole process of not only being the church, but also learning how to send out missionaries while maintaining a stable home base for caring for the missionaries as they come and go.

Many years ago, the leaders in our movement began to ask, “What would it be like for the local church to own the whole process of making disciples and sending them out to the nations of the world?” Of course, not everyone is called to go, but we have been able to create a culture where everyone can and many want to be involved by praying, giving, or going. One of the important ways that we support the vision for reaching the nations is through the discipleship schools, like the two that were surveyed in this project. For those called to go to the nations, the next phase of training is the church planting school, which is specifically designed for those who have completed all other preparation and identified the city where they will be going.

At the movement level, a key verse and motivation for reaching the nations is that we would help hasten the Lord’s return as he said in Mt. 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” A more robust Trinitarian theology in this important circle will only strengthen the resolve to love well and live on mission for the sake of those who do not yet know Jesus Christ.

Each of the four expanding concentric circles of concern represents practical implication areas for ministry. In addition, each of the four areas are interconnected. They build on each other, but not just in a linear way. They are interconnected and have to be revisited again and again. The quality of our personal devotion and secret life with God will always be important—whether our additional ministry is in the local church, partnering with other churches to reach the city, or developing people and plans to reach the nations with the gospel. In the next section, we will consider possibilities for future research that flow from or have been inspired by *The Relational God of Love and Lifelong Discipleship* project.

#### *Possibilities for Future Research*

As an extension of the current project, one possibility for future research would be to do a follow up study in six months with the students of the discipleship school in Fort Worth. I could re-evaluate the students and ask a few questions concerning their value for Trinitarian discipleship such as:

- Are they maintaining the value for Trinitarian discipleship that was gained during the study?
- Have they spent time in discipleship with anyone else since completing the discipleship school?
- Have they used the Discovery Bible Study on *The Relational God of Love* to help disciple someone else?

I could then write an article on the results and set the context by describing this project and the results. The audience for the article might be our own church website, the Antioch Movement website, or online blogs or magazines that feature Trinitarian theology.



In addition, there are two distinct possibilities for using Chapter Two of this project as a launch point for writing projects. The first would be to simplify Chapter Two into a less academic and more streamlined version that would be for students of the discipleship schools in the Antioch Movement to read as a pre-requisite to a class on Trinitarian theology. The title of this short booklet might be *The Relational God of Love: The Importance of the Trinity for Our Life Together and Mission to the World Around Us*.

A second possibility would be to write a popular version of the theological chapter introducing the everyday disciple to the relational dynamic of the God and the practical implications for our lives. A title for this short book might be *The Relational God of Love: The Importance of the Trinity for Our Everyday Lives*.

A distinct, but related possibility for future research would be to apply the Trinitarian theological foundation to the area of church leadership and discerning God's will together. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, I almost went in this direction as I considered different possibilities for research. In the case of the current project, the need of the everyday disciple was stronger and as a result this project focused on helping increase the value for Trinitarian discipleship. But what if I could build on the learning from this project about the importance of relationships, other-centered love, and self-giving sacrifice—and apply those aspects of Trinitarian thought to the specific area of church leadership and teams, especially elder teams. There is certainly a need for this kind of coaching in the Antioch Movement, and probably in the larger body of Christ as well.

Still another possibility for research is with the work that is happening with the pastors in our city. Even in working on the current project, I have realized how much Trinitarian thinking and theology has converged with a value that I already had for unity in the body of Christ. The result has been that my desire for relationship with other pastors in the city has greatly increased, both with pastors from different races and pastors from different theological backgrounds. I believe that with a little more research, perhaps in the form of a simple interview, I could then write a motivational booklet that would cast vision for relationships between the churches in the city and cite quotes from pastors for each point made. The audience would be other pastors in the city that we hoped to partner with for the gospel.

A final possibility for future research would be writing a tract that draws on the Trinitarian theology that I have written about in this project. I believe that the tract could be based on the letter to the Ephesians. Also, a note here would be to say that any tract that helps people to real and lasting faith in Jesus Christ is great. Still, some tracts are better than others. The goal for this tract would be to start with God, his love, and his plan to adopt us into his family. Then, explain our dead condition apart from God and the wonder of his mercy and salvation that is offered to us in Jesus Christ. God really does love us and he has a wonderful plan for our lives, and that love and that plan started with him and his love, even before the creation.

### *Concluding Statement*

The burden going into this project was to show the importance of Trinitarian thinking and theology for the life and mission of the church. As I immersed myself into the subject, I discovered that many disciples found the idea of “Trinitarian theology”

somewhat intimidating. A research question began to form—how can we help normal, everyday disciples value the Trinitarian, relational nature of God? My heart was stirred as I began to dream about the possibilities for disciples and for the church. My hope was to create a project that could help improve the value that disciples give to Trinitarian discipleship. If we could positively nudge the trajectory and deepen the value given to Trinitarian discipleship, then the long-term implications for the church would be huge. As a result, *The Relational God of Love and Lifelong Discipleship* project was developed to address the need and the opportunities for Trinitarian discipleship.

The context for the project intervention was the discipleship school for Christ Fellowship/Antioch Community Church in Fort Worth. A similar discipleship school at Antioch Community Church in College Station was used as a control group. Both groups received a pretest survey, which asked questions about the common core values of the Antioch Movement and questions that measured the value students gave to Trinitarian discipleship. The project intervention, which consisted of a training session on Trinitarian theology and a five-week Discovery Bible Study on “The Relational God of Love,” was given to the Fort Worth group. After the intervention, both discipleship schools were given a posttest survey, and the Fort Worth group was also given an opportunity to give open-ended answers about their learning and experience during the project.

As expected, the answers for the College Station group remained consistent between the pretest and posttest surveys. And as hoped, the answers for the Fort Worth group had a positive trend for key questions that measured the value that the students gave to Trinitarian discipleship. A limitation of the study is that not all the variables could be isolated, but the positive results of the study were strongly supported by the

open-ended answers of the students. The goal of the study was to help create a positive “nudge” in trajectory and the open-ended answers described an enthusiasm for Trinitarian discipleship that was very encouraging.

In considering the overall impact of the project, the biblical and theological chapter presents an introduction to Trinitarian theology and will be a helpful addition to the larger body of literature on the subject. In addition, the project and intervention will also be helpful in the larger body of literature and will present numerous opportunities for further research. Most importantly, however, is that *The Relational God of Love and Lifelong Discipleship* project represents the potential for a healthy adjustment in our view of God and the implications for discipleship and the church.

The personal impact of doing the research and thinking deeply about the relational nature of God has been tremendous. Along with many of the students involved in the project, there is increasing joy and enthusiasm in my heart for knowing the Triune and relational God of love. And while some of those implications have been discussed, it seems that there is an adventure in discovery just waiting for disciples, for the church, and for our mission to the world. What would happen if more and more disciples entered the ongoing conversation and a deepening value for Trinitarian discipleship? May we live to see an ever-deepening impact of knowing the relational God of love that is revealed to us in the sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Christ Fellowship/Antioch Discipleship School Survey

For each question, give us your first impression by circling one answer or filling in the blank.

#### **Tell us about yourself.**

- Approximately how long have you attended Christ Fellowship/Antioch?  
*Less than 6 months   6-11 months   1-2 Years   3-5 Years   More than 5 years*
- On average how often do you attend Sunday services at CF/Antioch?  
*Less than once a month   once a month   twice a month   three times a month   every week*
- On average how often do you attend a Lifegroup?  
*Not currently in a Lifegroup   once a month   twice a month   three times a month   every week*
- What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ Gender      **M**      **F**
- Circle your highest level of education  
*High School   Some college   College Degree   Master's Degree   Doctorate*

#### **Loving God**

1. I am intentional about scheduling personal time with God on a daily basis.  
*Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree*
2. I am sensitive to God's Spirit for counsel in my life.  
*Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree*
3. When I have a need, I know how to find help in the Scriptures.  
*Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree*
4. I hear God speak to me.  
*Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree*
5. The way that I use my time reflects that God is my highest priority.  
*Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree*

#### **Loving Others**

6. I know from the Scriptures how God expects me to relate toward my family members.  
*Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree*

7. I am committed to forgiving and resolving conflict with others.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
8. My circle of healthy, transparent relationships is consistently growing.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
9. I relate to someone that I would say mentors or disciples me.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
10. If I am mentored (discipled), does that person also attend CF? *Yes No N/A*
11. I have confidence that I could effectively disciple a new believer.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
12. I intentionally invest in one or two others to further their growth in Christ.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*

### **Loving Those Who Don't Know Jesus**

13. God has given me a love for others, including other races, cultures, and nations.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
14. I feel personally responsible to share my faith with those that don't know Jesus.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
15. I feel confident that I can lead someone to Christ that wants to know Him.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
16. I can recount my personal testimony to others.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
17. I have a desire to participate in planting churches in other parts of the world by praying, giving, or going.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
18. I have taken part in a missions trip of any length within the past three years.  
*Yes No*  
*If so, where \_\_\_\_\_*  
*Was the trip through Christ Fellowship or Antioch? Yes No*

### **Family**

19. I am equipped to disciple my children or grandchildren to love and follow God.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*
20. As a family, we strive to have family devotions and pray together.  
*Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree*

21. I see a growing passion in my children to follow Jesus.

***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***

### **Sphere**

22. What do you identify as your primary sphere of influence?

(Your sphere is where you have relationships, some degree of influence, and spend a large portion of your time. Could be your workplace, but for some it might be more centered around a geographic area or social organization.)

Circle one only:      Business      Healthcare      Home/Neighborhood      Arts

Social services      Higher Education      Student      Politics      Sports

Primary/Secondary Education      Other:

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23. I feel God has called me to my sphere of influence (which includes my workplace).

***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***

24. Christ Fellowship/Antioch empowers me to purposefully live on mission with God within my sphere of influence.

***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***

25. My Lifegroup empowers me to purposefully live on mission with God within my sphere of influence.

***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***

### **Relational God of Love (Trinitarian Theology)**

26. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh and the definitive, self-revelation of God to the world.

***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***

27. At the center of the New Testament is Jesus Christ and his relationship with his Father in the Spirit.

***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***

28. We do not ever want to interpret God or the Bible in a way that is contrary to the life and teachings of Jesus.

***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***

29. My value for worship is impacted by considering the loving and relational nature of God.

***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***



30. I believe that Christian community should reflect the community within the Trinity.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
31. The best way to understand God and the Bible is by looking at the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
32. The Christian and Muslim conception of God is basically the same with a different name.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
33. Understanding God as “persons in relationship” is one of the most basic things we can say about God.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
34. God is Christ-like and in him there is no un-Christlikeness at all.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
35. “God is Love” is one of many equal attributes such as “God is Wrath.”  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
36. After the fall of Adam and Eve, God created a rescue plan so that we could be saved and go to heaven.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
37. Before creation, God planned to adopt us into the very circle of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
38. I practice forgiveness because I have already been forgiven in Christ.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
39. I value turning toward those with whom I am having relational problems because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always turning one another.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
40. It is reasonable to expect my love and worship of God to decline after many years of discipleship.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
41. Joining God’s mission to the world is a great option for committed Christians, but is not necessary for all disciples.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***

42. All Christians are called to God's mission, but it's not the same mission that the Father gave to Jesus.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
43. Jesus reveals a key part of God, but there is a deeper part of God that we also need to know as well.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
44. I believe that growing in understanding of the Trinity is important for my life as a disciple of Christ.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
45. I believe that growing in understanding of the Trinity is optional and not always relevant for my life situations.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
46. Disciples of Christ should spend time contemplating and talking about the Trinity among friends in order to understand what worship, community, and mission is supposed to look like.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
47. I place a high value on worship that is shaped by a Trinitarian perspective about God.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
48. I place a high value on community that is shaped by Trinitarian thinking about God.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
49. I place a high value on doing ministry and mission in a way that is shaped by the Trinitarian nature of God.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
50. I am currently committed to a lifelong journey of discipleship into the image of the relational God of love that Jesus reveals.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***
51. I value the importance of discipleship that helps others to see the importance of Trinitarian thinking for church life and our mission to the world.  
***Strongly Agree***      ***Agree***      ***Disagree***      ***Strongly Disagree***

## APPENDIX B

### The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.  
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## APPENDIX C

### Final Spreadsheet for Project Comparison Data

Questions Below	CF - PreTest	CF - Posttest	CF % Diff	ACS - Pre	ACS - Post	ACS % Diff	%Diff CF vs. ACS pre-test	%Diff CF vs. ACS post	overall growth comparison (difference between column I and H, which is the same as D minus G)
<b>Approximately how long have you attended Christ Fellowship/Antioch?</b>									
< 6 Months	3	5.9	2.9	0	0	0	3	5.9	2.9
6-11 Months	3	5.9	2.9	5.3	0	-5.3	-2.3	5.9	8.2
1-2 years	44.1	41.2	-2.9	21.1	18.2	-2.9	23	23	0
3 - 5 years	29.4	29.4	0	57.9	60.6	2.7	-28.5	-31.2	-2.7
> 5 years	20.6	17.6	-3	15.8	21.2	5.4	4.8	-3.6	-8.4
			0			0		0	0
<b>How often do you attend Sunday service?</b>									
< once a month	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
once a month	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2x a month	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3x a month	8.8	8.8	0	2.6	6.1	3.5	6.2	2.7	-3.5
every week	91.2	91.2	0	97.4	93.9	-3.5	-6.2	-2.7	3.5
<b>How often do you attend LG ?</b>									
< once a month	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
once a month	0	2.9	2.9	0	0	0	0	2.9	2.9
2x a month	8.8	8.8	0	2.6	3	0.4	6.2	5.8	-0.4
3x a month	20.6	17.6	-3	5.3	12.1	6.8	15.3	5.5	-9.8
every week	70.6	70.6	0	92.1	84.8	-7.3	-21.5	-14.2	7.3
<b>Average Age</b>	34.2 years			24.8					
<b>Gender</b>									
Male	55.9			39.5			16.4		
Female	44.1			60.5			-16.4		
<b>Education level</b>									
High School	3			5.3			-2.3		
Some college	17.6			7.9			9.7		
College Degree	61.8			78.9			-17.1		
Master's Degree	14.7			7.9			6.8		
Doctorate	3			0			3		
<b>1. I am intentional about scheduling personal time with God on a daily basis.</b>									
Strongly Agree	26.5	44.1	17.6	71.1	60.6	-10.5	-44.6	-16.5	28.1
Agree	55.9	44.1	-11.8	28.9	36.4	7.5	27	7.7	-19.3
Disagree	17.6	11.8	-5.8	0	3	3	17.6	8.8	-8.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>2. I am sensitive to God's Spirit for counsel in my life.</b>									
Strongly Agree	29.4	35.3	5.9	71.1	57.6	-13.5	-41.7	-22.3	19.4
Agree	55.9	61.8	5.9	28.9	42.4	13.5	27	19.4	-7.6
Disagree	14.7	2.9	-11.8	0	0	0	14.7	2.9	-11.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>3. When I have a need, I know how to find help in the Scriptures.</b>									
Strongly agree	32.4	55.9	23.5	47.4	42.4	-5	-15	13.5	28.5
Agree	61.8	41.2	-20.6	44.7	48.5	3.8	17.1	-7.3	-24.4



Questions Below	CF - PreTest	CF - Posttest	CF % Diff	ACS - Pre	ACS - Post	ACS % Diff	%Diff CF vs. ACS pre-test	%Diff CF vs. ACS post	overall growth comparison (difference between column I and H, which is the same as D minus G)
<b>12. I intentionally invest in one or two others to further their growth in Christ</b>									
Strongly Agree	32.4	44.1	11.7	84.2	57.6	-26.6	-51.8	-13.5	38.3
Agree	32.4	44.1	11.7	15.8	39.4	23.6	16.6	4.7	-11.9
Disagree	35.3	11.8	-23.5	0	3	3	35.3	8.8	-26.5
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>13. God has given me a love for others, including other races, cultures, and nations</b>									
Strongly Agree	44.1	64.7	20.6	71.1	63.6	-7.5	-27	1.1	28.1
Agree	50	32.4	-17.6	28.9	33.3	4.4	21.1	-0.9	-22
Disagree	5.9	2.9	-3	0	3	3	5.9	-0.1	-6
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>14. I feel personally responsible to share my faith with those that don't know Jesus</b>									
Strongly Agree	20.6	41.2	20.6	42.1	42.4	0.3	-21.5	-1.2	20.3
Agree	50	58.8	8.8	55.3	54.5	-0.8	-5.3	4.3	9.6
Disagree	29.4	0	-29.4	2.6	3	0.4	26.8	-3	-29.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>15. I feel confident that I can lead someone to Christ that wants to know Him</b>									
Strongly Agree	29.4	47.1	17.7	55.3	45.5	-9.8	-25.9	1.6	27.5
Agree	38.2	52.9	14.7	44.7	54.5	9.8	-6.5	-1.6	4.9
Disagree	32.4	0	-32.4	0	0	0	32.4	0	-32.4
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>16. I can recount my personal testimony to others</b>									
Strongly Agree	47.1	70.6	23.5	73.7	72.7	-1	-26.6	-2.1	24.5
Agree	44.1	29.4	-14.7	26.3	27.3	1	17.8	2.1	-15.7
Disagree	8.8	0	-8.8	0	0	0	8.8	0	-8.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>17. I have a desire to participate in planting churches in other parts of the world by prayer, giving, or going</b>									
Strongly Agree	29.4	47.1	17.7	68.4	63.6	-4.8	-39	-16.5	22.5
Agree	55.9	50	-5.9	23.7	33.3	9.6	32.2	16.7	-15.5
Disagree	14.7	2.9	-11.8	7.9	0	-7.9	6.8	2.9	-3.9
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	-3	-3
<b>18. I have taken part in a missions trip within the past 3 years</b>									
Yes	33.3	38.2	4.9	76.3	78.8	2.5	-43	-40.6	2.4
No	66.7	61.8	-4.9	23.7	21.2	-2.5	43	40.6	-2.4
If so, where?			0			0	0	0	0
<b>Was the trip through CF or Antioch?</b>									
Yes	83.3	48	-35.3	79.4	76.7	-2.7	3.9	-28.7	-32.6
No	16.7	52	35.3	20.6	23	2.4	-3.9	29	32.9
<b>19. I am equipped to disciple my children/grandchildren to love and follow God</b>									
Strongly Agree	17.6	32.4	14.8	28.9	36.4	7.5	-11.3	-4	7.3







Questions Below	CF - PreTest	CF - Posttest	CF % Diff	ACS - Pre	ACS - Post	ACS % Diff	%Diff CF vs. ACS pre-test	%Diff CF vs. ACS post	overall growth comparison (difference between column I and H, which is the same as D minus G)
Agree	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	-3	-3
Disagree	38.2	23.5	-14.7	23.7	33.3	9.6	14.5	-9.8	-24.3
Strongly Disagree	58.8	76.5	17.7	55.3	48.5	-6.8	3.5	28	24.5
Not Sure	3	0	-3	21.1	15.2	-5.9	-18.1	-15.2	2.9
<b>33. Understanding God as "persons in relationship" is one of the most basic things we can say about God.</b>									
Strongly Agree	17.6	38.2	20.6	18.4	30.3	11.9	-0.8	7.9	8.7
Agree	52.9	50	-2.9	39.5	42.4	2.9	13.4	7.6	-5.8
Disagree	0	2.9	2.9	13.2	6.1	-7.1	-13.2	-3.2	10
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not Sure	29.45	8.8	-20.65	28.9	21.2	-7.7	0.55	-12.4	-12.95
<b>34. God is Christ-like and in him there is no un-Christlikeness at all.</b>									
Strongly Agree	61.8	73.5	11.7	63.2	69.7	6.5	-1.4	3.8	5.2
Agree	35.3	26.5	-8.8	26.3	21.2	-5.1	9	5.3	-3.7
Disagree	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	-3	-3
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not Sure	0	0	0	10.5	6.1	-4.4	-10.5	-6.1	4.4
<b>35. "God is Love" is one of many equal attributes such as "God is Wrath."</b>									
Strongly Agree	0	11.8	11.8	7.9	18.2	10.3	-7.9	-6.4	1.5
Agree	14.7	11.8	-2.9	28.9	24.2	-4.7	-14.2	-12.4	1.8
Disagree	29.4	29.4	0	13.2	15.2	2	16.2	14.2	-2
Strongly Disagree	17.6	26.5	8.9	23.7	12.1	-11.6	-6.1	14.4	20.5
Not Sure	38.2	20.6	-17.6	26.3	30.3	4	11.9	-9.7	-21.6
<b>36. After the fall of Adam and Eve, God created a rescue plan so that we could be saved and go to heaven.</b>									
Strongly Agree	8.8	20.6	11.8	52.6	48.5	-4.1	-43.8	-27.9	15.9
Agree	32.4	26.5	-5.9	23.7	18.2	-5.5	8.7	8.3	-0.4
Disagree	26.5	20.6	-5.9	13.2	12.1	-1.1	13.3	8.5	-4.8
Strongly Disagree	11.8	26.5	14.7	5.3	12.1	6.8	6.5	14.4	7.9
Not Sure	20.6	5.9	-14.7	5.3	9.1	3.8	15.3	-3.2	-18.5
<b>37. Before creation, God planned to adopt us into the very circle of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.</b>									
Strongly Agree	50	79.4	29.4	73.7	69.7	-4	-23.7	9.7	33.4
Agree	44.1	20.6	-23.5	23.7	24.2	0.5	20.4	-3.6	-24
Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not Sure	5.9	0	-5.9	2.6	6.1	3.5	3.3	-6.1	-9.4
<b>38. I practice forgiveness because I have already been forgiven in Christ.</b>									
Strongly Agree	44.1	64.7	20.6	76.3	75.8	-0.5	-32.2	-11.1	21.1
Agree	50	35.3	-14.7	23.7	24.2	0.5	26.3	11.1	-15.2
Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not Sure	5.9	0	-5.9	0	0	0	5.9	0	-5.9

Questions Below	CF - PreTest	CF - Posttest	CF % Diff	ACS - Pre	ACS - Post	ACS % Diff	%Diff CF vs. ACS pre-test	%Diff CF vs. ACS post	overall growth comparison (difference between column I and H, which is the same as D minus G)
<b>39. I value turning toward those with whom I am having relational problems because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always turning one another.</b>									
Strongly Agree	17.6	47.1	29.5	36.8	30.3	-6.5	-19.2	16.8	36
Agree	50	52.9	2.9	34.2	51.5	17.3	15.8	1.4	-14.4
Disagree	11.8	0	-11.8	0	3	3	11.8	-3	-14.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not Sure	20.6	0	-20.6	28.9	15.2	-13.7	-8.3	-15.2	-6.9
<b>40. It is reasonable to expect my love and worship of God to decline after many years of discipleship.</b>									
Strongly Agree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Agree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	35.3	17.6	-17.7	15.8	21.2	5.4	19.5	-3.6	-23.1
Strongly Disagree	64.7	82.4	17.7	84.2	75.8	-8.4	-19.5	6.6	26.1
Not Sure	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	-3	-3
<b>41. Joining God's mission to the world is a great option for committed Christians, but is not necessary for all disciples.</b>									
Strongly Agree	0	2.9	2.9	2.6	3	0.4	-2.6	-0.1	2.5
Agree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	52.9	29.4	-23.5	28.9	27.3	-1.6	24	2.1	-21.9
Strongly Disagree	41.2	67.6	26.4	68.4	66.7	-1.7	-27.2	0.9	28.1
Not Sure	5.9	0	-5.9	0	3	3	5.9	-3	-8.9
<b>42. All Christians are called to God's mission, but it's not the same mission that the Father gave to Jesus.</b>									
Strongly Agree	0	8.8	8.8	2.6	6.1	3.5	-2.6	2.7	5.3
Agree	8.8	2.9	-5.9	7.9	9.1	1.2	0.9	-6.2	-7.1
Disagree	47.1	38.2	-8.9	23.7	30.3	6.6	23.4	7.9	-15.5
Strongly Disagree	32.4	50	17.6	44.7	33.3	-11.4	-12.3	16.7	29
Not Sure	11.8	0	-11.8	21.1	21.2	0.1	-9.3	-21.2	-11.9
<b>43. Jesus reveals a key part of God, but there is a deeper part of God that we also need to know as well.</b>									
Strongly Agree	0	8.8	8.8	18.4	15.2	-3.2	-18.4	-6.4	12
Agree	20.6	14.7	-5.9	39.5	39.4	-0.1	-18.9	-24.7	-5.8
Disagree	32.4	29.4	-3	23.7	18.2	-5.5	8.7	11.2	2.5
Strongly Disagree	20.6	38.2	17.6	7.9	15.2	7.3	12.7	23	10.3
Not Sure	26.5	8.8	-17.7	10.5	12.1	1.6	16	-3.3	-19.3
<b>44. I believe that growing in understanding of the Trinity is important for my life as a disciple of Christ.</b>									
Strongly Agree	35.3	55.9	20.6	68.4	60.6	-7.8	-33.1	-4.7	28.4
Agree	44.1	44.1	0	28.9	39.4	10.5	15.2	4.7	-10.5
Disagree	5.9	0	-5.9	0	0	0	5.9	0	-5.9
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not Sure	14.7	0	-14.7	2.6	0	-2.6	12.1	0	-12.1



Questions Below	CF - PreTest	CF - Posttest	CF % Diff	ACS - Pre	ACS - Post	ACS % Diff	%Diff CF vs. ACS pre-test	%Diff CF vs. ACS post	overall growth comparison (difference between column I and H, which is the same as D minus G)
Not Sure	3	0	-3	2.6	3	0.4	0.4	-3	-3.4
<b>51. I value the importance of discipleship that helps others to see the importance of Trinitarian thinking for church life and our mission to the world.</b>									
Strongly Agree	23.5	50	26.5	63.2	48.5	-14.7	-39.7	1.5	41.2
Agree	47.1	47.1	0	28.9	45.5	16.6	18.2	1.6	-16.6
Disagree	0	0	0	2.6	0	-2.6	-2.6	0	2.6
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not Sure	29.4	2.9	-26.5	5.3	6.1	0.8	24.1	-3.2	-27.3

## APPENDIX D

### Fort Worth Posttest Survey—Open-ended Responses

**What did you receive and learn from the training? Please take a few moments to share how our class and the Discovery Bible Study have shaped your value for Trinitarian discipleship. Please feel free to mention how knowing the “Relational God of Love” might affect worship, community, and/or joining God's mission together.**

Jesus is the exact representation of the Father

Knowing the relational God of love gives a different perspective to passages that I have read over and over and maybe even confuse wrath with love, etc. Knowing that we receive love from God helps us give love to others.

Learning more about the Trinity, and how it impacts my life as a believer independently and within the church has helped me in several areas. First, it explains why I desire to have intimacy with the body of Christ. Second, it has helped me see more clearly how to live in community and why this is important. Being an "island" on my own with my faith is missing out on a bigger perspective and point. DBS has helped me in breaking the Word down to the simplest of manners, yet it is also so deep in understanding key aspects of the Trinity, how it relates to my life, and how I can walk in it. I have learned about the character of God, the Son, and Holy Spirit and how they have brought me into their never-ending circle of sacrificial, joyful, love. By talking and sharing with others, DBS has helped me develop how to talk about the scriptures without additional "stuff", but the purity of the scripture is beautiful in how it by itself is all that is needed.

I think I have just gained perspective on how the trinity is more than just an image of God but an identity and one that we are meant to share it. This perspective means that the trinity is much more meaningful to me than it was before

This DBS not only brought community but shed light on practical use of lenses of Jesus. I would say I have grown in awareness and importance of God being all encompassing. Moving forward I feel these ideas are vital to share in discipleship because of the clarity it brings to God and how he interacts with us through the life of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

An understanding that God, Jesus, and the Spirit co-exist and their desire is to bring us into that coexistence.

It gave me a more clear aspect of how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all relate to one another. Having this understanding makes it more clear for me to learn about God because I understand their unison and purpose.

I contemplate the trinity, His presence, and pray with Him frequently throughout the day now. It's brought joy to all pieces of my life. The DBS is now a tool I have to

share that and multiply it. It allows me to share in God's love with others and practice it in what we do. For community it implies loving patience, submission, and rectification. For worship, it's all about receiving and returning the Father's love, through Jesus', and empowered by the Holy Spirit's. Everything of God is relationally loving and if I'm partaking in God, I [experientially] am too.

I had No idea that the phrase relational God of love sums up the essence of the Trinity. My life with God is relational and has a direct proportionality to my life with others. I cannot be full with others if I am not full with God. Because I am filled with the fullness of God in Christ, I can be full with others. I am free to forgive because I am freely forgiven. I can turn toward people that hurt me because God has turned toward me. My life with Christ now is me being consistently and eternally brought into the eternal ongoing growing up and to the right relationship with God from now until forever in communion with others at the same time.

I've received so much from this semester in discipleship school. How I look at people has changed completely. I've long had the head knowledge that I'm supposed to see people the way that Jesus sees them, but though this semester of D school, God finally connected my head knowledge to my heart, and has enabled me to truly love people as he loves them. Seeing God as the relational God of loved has shaped and grown how I worship, disciple people and how I love them.

God's commission, his command to us to make disciples, isn't an isolated onerous task that he's commanding us to do. It fits with a pattern of him inviting us into who he is, his authority, his love, his purpose. Living out that love in community with Christ and his spirit at the center is truly enough; it is what he has been looking for in us.

For me, this class has fundamentally changed how I see myself in relationship to God. I now see that I am dead center in the loving relationship of the Trinity, and that has changed how I have handled conflict with family, issues at work, and the way I pray and listen. I have started to develop an awareness of God that was not present before, and out of that am more confident in hearing Him and knowing His purposes for my life.

Understanding the Trinity is an integral part of understanding God, His love for us, and His love for others. The Trinity is not merely an obscure theological idea that we can ignore or put to the side; rather it needs to be a foundational part of our journey.

My ability to see it in scripture has grown and my language to explain my beliefs has grown as well. Know the Relational God of Love has given me a more rounded view of God so that my prayers and worship have shifted to an even deeper place.

It was amazing doing a DBS with people and learning together. All of the scriptures that were used I knew, but it was amazing to see how many there were all together and to go deeper in them. I have more of awareness of the communal/relational nature of God. Love the DBS!

I value the Trinitarian discipleship because it has allowed me to see scripture and know the true Love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit on a deeper level and gain more understanding and insight to see what that looks like. It has given me great joy and great peace to be able to soak up DBS through the relational God of Love. Knowing

about the relational God of love allows me to love and worship and be in fellowship with others from the eyes of Christ.

A better understanding of the trinity.

The biggest take away for me from the DBS is being reminded of how easy it can be to do simple Bible study for discipleship in a way that is easily reproducible. My desire is to find ways to take this first basic step and deepen Bible study to go beyond surface level interpretations to help believers mature with biblical and systematic theology.

I hadn't specifically looked at these passages before in regards to the relational nature of God. It helped me think about them through a different lens and understand God better.

It was amazing to see scripture "come alive" with passages over and over again pointing to the Trinity. I've always believed in the Trinity & worshiped the Godhead as so, but didn't realize all the passages that talked about it! I don't think I can read scripture now without noticing the Father, Son & Spirit pointing back to one another. The study was great, and the emphasis even greater. I really appreciated DBS!

Knowing God as three persons in relationship with each other places a higher value on being in relationship with others. It also helped me to understand the love God has for me even more by knowing that He wants to draw us into His Trinitarian love. This empowers me to want to share that love with others.

I use to struggle with prayer, but then I read a book that reframed how to view God as a father when I pray. Changing my view of God had huge implications on my prayer life. In the same way, I feel like this study has shifted how I view the Trinity and its impact on my walk as a believer. It's taken something abstract and made it relevant to every interaction I have both with God and within my community of believers. It is really powerful and shocking to be invited into the fellowship of the Trinity!

How God loves us and calls us into relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How we are to help teach other how they can have the same relationship with him as well.

Understanding the Trinity has become more practical and approachable. I now feel I am able to better discuss/communicate this doctrine and also apply it more effectively to my own circumstances in a way that would be attractive to others.

The greatest take away from this study of the Trinity for me is....

I am invited into the fellowship of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

Within this community/fellowship there is no rejection! There is only perfect love. A love that prefers one another. A love that is eager to invite others in. One that equips, imparts, empowers. A place of perfect peace. A place I am known, I am loved, and I am nurtured. I am not alone. This must look like Esther who put on her royal robes and STOOD in the inner court. I may put on the royal robes of His righteousness and Stand within the inner circle of the Trinity.

I've always looked at creative works as an individual pursuit but I am rethinking that

It started with Jesus and through his life on this earth, we began to know the Father and when Jesus went back to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit to guide us in the way of

the Father and the Son, we were taught the way of life that we as Christians were to live and love. Through the Bible study, we have learned to look at scripture differently, based on the Trinity, looking for the way it affects our lives.

Okay where these past few weeks my thinking about the Trinity has really transformed my ideas about God and how he the relationship of the Father Son and Holy Spirit impact my daily walk with Christ. Also how I relate to others in the church has been greatly affected by how my understanding is changed about the trinity in a positive way.

That my understanding of God the father is directly related to my relationship with Jesus. Thinking more about how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to each other and how it should impact my relationships, community, worship, and missional thinking has been new for me. More and more I am seeing that the way I relate to others and God should be a reflection of the Relational God of Love.

Understanding the relational God of love is vital in Discipleship, worship, mission, etc. Understanding who God is and how he relates to us (inviting us into relationship with him by Jesus through the Holy Spirit) changes everything. When we are in relationship with God, Jesus and Holy Spirit we are transformed into his likeness, and as that transformation takes shape, the world around us can't help but be changed. We are not just believers waiting around to "go to heaven", but instead, we are participants in a kingdom that is here and now. We live with purpose, passion, peace, joy, patience, kindness and mission. We live expectant lives.... lives that draw others to this same relational God of love that has rocked our worlds!

I need God. Without Jesus I can do nothing.

One of my favorite parts of the training was increased understanding of how we as Christians are invited into the fellowship that the Trinity shares. This radically changes my understanding of life and how I love people, because I am not loving others with my own love, but the love that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share with each other. This is both freeing and empowering.

I was impacted by constantly thinking and talking about God as relational. The truth that He calls us into the relationship that is the center of the universe is transformative. I think above all it's just changed my thinking and I'm constantly reminded of God in relationship - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in constant communication and love.

I believe in the Trinity previously did not understand it to the depth than I do now. It's practical application and meaning for how we relate to ourselves and others has brought new meaning to me what it means to be Christian.

Grew in an understanding of the Trinity and have new language to speak about relational God of love.



## APPENDIX E

### The Fifty-Nine “One Anothers” of the New Testament<sup>1</sup>

1. “Be at peace with each other.” (Mk. 9:50)
2. “Wash one another’s feet.” (Jn. 13:14)
3. “Love one another.” (Jn. 13:34)
4. “Love one another.” (Jn. 13:34)
5. “Love one another.” (Jn. 13:35)
6. “Love one another.” (Jn. 15:12)
7. “Love one another.” (Jn. 15:17)
8. “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” (Rom. 12:10)
9. “Honor one another above yourselves.” (Rom. 12:10)
10. “Live in harmony with one another.” (Rom. 12:16)
11. “Love one another.” (Rom. 13:8)
12. “Stop passing judgment on one another.” (Rom. 14:13)
13. “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.” (Rom. 15:7)
14. “Instruct one another.” (Rom. 15:14)
15. “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (Rom. 16:16)
16. “When you come together to eat, wait for each other.” (1 Cor. 11:33)
17. “Have equal concern for each other.” (1 Cor. 12:25)
18. “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (1 Cor. 16:20)
19. “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (2 Cor. 13:12)
20. “Serve one another in love.” (Gal. 5:13)
21. “If you keep on biting and devouring each other . . . you will be destroyed by each other.” (Gal. 5:15)
22. “Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” (Gal. 5:26)
23. “Carry each other’s burdens.” (Gal. 6:2)
24. “Be patient, bearing with one another in love.” (Eph. 4:2)
25. “Be kind and compassionate to one another.” (Eph. 4:32)
26. “Forgiving each other.” (Eph. 4:32)
27. “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.” (Eph. 5:19)
28. “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Eph. 5:21)
29. “In humility consider others better than yourselves.” (Phil. 2:3)
30. “Do not lie to each other.” (Col. 3:9)
31. “Bear with each other.” (Col. 3:13)
32. “Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.” (Col. 3:13)
33. “Teach [one another].” (Col. 3:16)
34. “Admonish one another.” (Col. 3:16)
35. “Make your love increase and overflow for each other.” (1 Thess. 3:12)
36. “Love each other.” (1 Thess. 4:9)
37. “Encourage each other.” (1 Thess. 4:18)

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<sup>1</sup> Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1991), 129-131.

38. "Encourage each other." (1 Thess. 5:11)
39. "Build each other up." (1 Thess. 5:11)
40. "Encourage one another daily." (Heb. 3:13)
41. "Spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Heb. 10:24)
42. "Encourage one another." (Heb. 10:25)
43. "Do not slander one another." (Js. 4:11)
44. "Don't grumble against each other." (Js. 5:9)
45. "Confess your sins to each other." (Js. 5:16)
46. "Pray for each other." (Js. 5:16)
47. "Love one another deeply, from the heart." (1 Pet. 3:8)
48. "Live in harmony with one another." (1 Pet. 3:8)
49. "Love each other deeply." (1 Pet. 4:8)
50. "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." (1 Pet. 4:9)
51. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others." (1 Pet. 4:10)
52. "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." (1 Pet. 5:5)
53. "Greet one another with a kiss of love." (1 Pet. 5:14)
54. "Love one another." (1 Jn. 3:11)
55. "Love one another." (1 Jn. 3:23)
56. "Love one another." (1 Jn. 4:7)
57. "Love one another." (1 Jn. 4:11)
58. "Love one another." (1 Jn. 4:12)
59. "Love one another." (2 Jn. 5)

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