

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## The Trinity



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Does the idea of God being a Trinity encourage you, confuse you, both? Why?



### Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Why is God 'Father, Son, Spirit'? Early Christians came to experience and understand God in three main ways – as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three distinct persons in one.

This understanding is not set out in the Bible as a teaching – the word Trinity is not used – but its reality can be seen through both the Old and New Testaments – God is three-in-one from the beginning.

Jewish people would pray the 'Shema' morning and evening, at the end of each day and at the time of death, saying "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord." (Deuteronomy 6: 4)

But God is also described with various names and as distinct persons:

**The Word of God.** God's 'Word' exists separately from God, but comes from God, speaking life, guidance, and salvation into being. (e.g. Isaiah 55:10–11). The Word creates.

**The Spirit of God.** Right at the beginning of Genesis (1:2) the Spirit hovers over creation – God's presence and power. The Spirit comes upon people at various times and in various ways. The Spirit empowers.

**Wisdom** (especially in Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes) who is described as a female figure, alongside God but dependent on Him (e.g. Proverbs 9:1–6) and who acts in the world.



Where is the Trinity in Jesus' life and the New Testament? With Jesus, his followers came to understand that God was doing something that was both new – a New Covenant which completed all the promises God had made His people through Jesus – and continuous with what had gone before. When it came to knowing God, they already had categories for understanding God but began to see Him in new ways.

**Father:** The God Jesus taught His disciples to know as 'Father' was the God of Israel, and He related personally to Him as a distinct being.

**Son:** Jesus, who was fully human, also acted in ways that only the God of Israel could do – healing, and offering forgiveness of sins. His followers used ways of describing Him that were divine – the glory of God, or the wisdom of God. John described Jesus as being "with God", but also said He "was God".

**Spirit:** The Spirit was the presence through which people could be born again, whom Jesus promised to send, and who came at Pentecost. The Spirit is the person through whom the love of the Father and Son can be known. The three persons already described could be known and understood in the life of Jesus, sometimes clearly active in one event, and sometimes in different ways. For example, at the one event of Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9-11), the Spirit comes down on Jesus, and the voice of the Father describes Him as my "beloved Son".

**Discuss:** Why is it important that we can see how God is three in one throughout the whole story of the Bible?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Mark 1: 9-11 in which Jesus is baptised

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about people?

How does this passage call me to obey God?

What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of God as Father and/or Son and/or Spirit. Which person of the Trinity do you most relate to? How have you experienced this?



# Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

Where did the word “Trinity” come from and what does it protect us from?

Loving God as Father, Son and Spirit was an experience, in the ways that people worshipped, prayed, baptised, and knew God, before it became a teaching. The teaching evolved over a few centuries. It has provided a strong and reliable way of speaking of God - not as a way of ‘tying God down’ or controlling God (who is an ‘eternal mystery’), but as a way of protecting us from some of those false and damaging pictures of God, or ways that we can make Him in our own image:

It protects us against thinking God has multiple or split personalities: the Trinity does not mean that God sometimes shows himself to us as Father, sometimes as Son, and sometimes as Spirit. He is all three at the same time.

It protects us from only knowing God in smaller reduced ways: such as believing that God could only be separate and distant from us, or could only be within us, or could only be a ‘divine human being’. The Trinity helps us to hold all these things together.

The Trinity helps us be disciples by experiencing God as a relationship of love. Being Trinity means that God gives and receives within God’s very being like a circle of endless giving love. That is why God IS love. God is never “solitary”, but always in loving relationship

Rublev’s icon (on the handout) is an ancient and famous picture which shows the love that flows within God’s very being. When looking at it, the writer Henri Nouwen said, “Notice the movement from the Father towards the Son and the movement of both Son and Spirit towards the Father. There is a circle of love where all relate to one another...The point isn't to understand. The point is to know and be known by this God so that we can participate in his love.”

The Trinity means God invites us into this relationship of love. We think of love as having limits, but God’s self-giving love does not run out and is not exclusive. In the icon, this is shown by the fact that there is a fourth place at the table, for you, the viewer. The nature of God’s love is that God shares it even with those created beings, ourselves, who are alienated from God or even opposed to God.

## Responding to God’s leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, “What might God be showing me and how might I respond?” They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, “Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?”



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you have given to us your servants grace,  
by the confession of a true faith,  
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity,  
and in the power of your divine Majesty  
to worship the Unity:

Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship,  
and bring us at last to see you  
in your one and eternal glory,  
O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit  
live and reign,  
one God,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.





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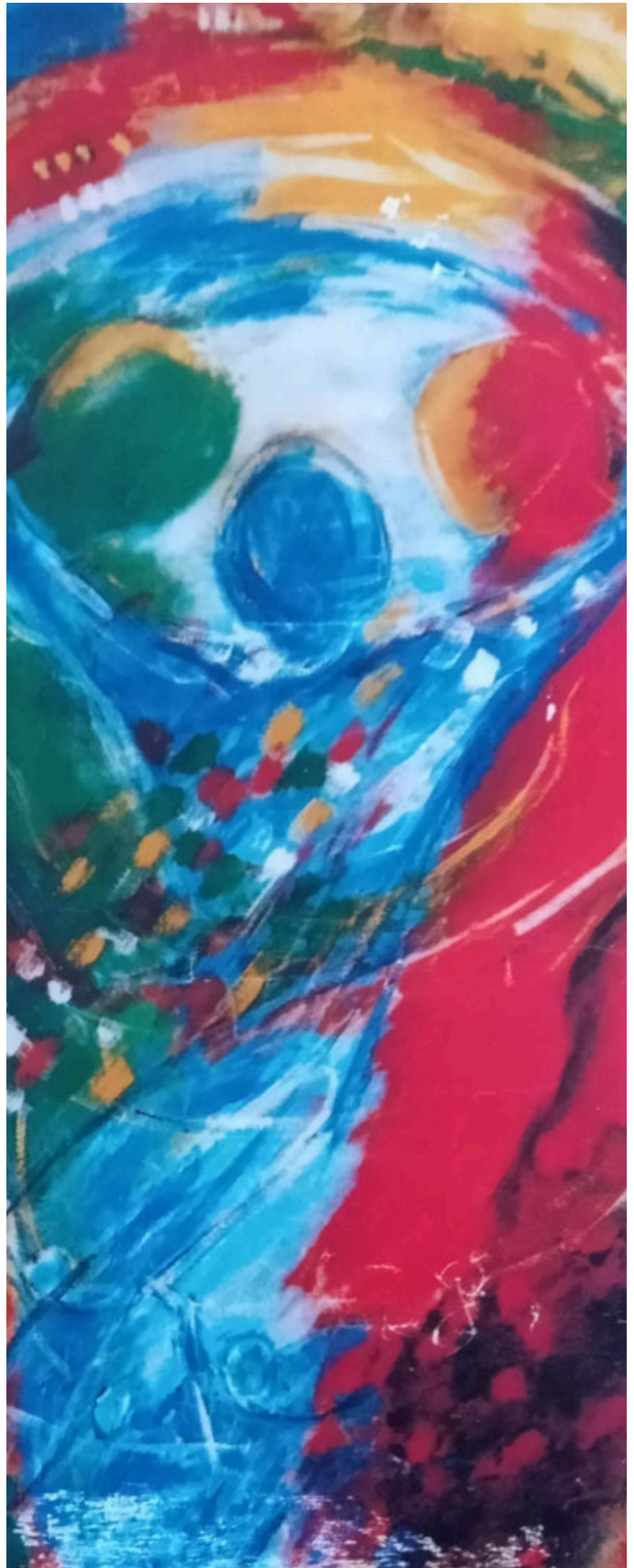
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## Additional notes:

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