

# Pursuing Divine Friendship

## *Experiencing the Trinity*

This journey explores issues of the Trinity (from Eph 3:14-21). Although it is easy to think of the Trinity as an obscure doctrine in ancient creeds, the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—presents a fabulous picture of divine friendship, which is the fountainhead for true community and personhood. Through discussions and exercises on friendship and community, you will seek to foster a biblical sense of self, relationships, and spirituality, and to put divine friendship at the center of your small group.

### **Session One: Divine Friendship**

#### **Saturday, 10:30 – 12:30**

Describe a friendship that has had a good influence upon you. What made it tick?

What is one strength that you bring into your friendships?  
One weakness?

What, if anything, makes Christian community/friendship distinctive?

*God gives us a picture of relationship and community in Himself. God does not exist alone, but rather is in continuous relationship with the other members of the Trinity. Each member of the Trinity has its own ministry, and each is constantly deflecting glory to one another.*

*Read Ephesians 3:14-21*

- Briefly discuss any initial thoughts on the passage. Is there a verse that stands out to you? Did you have any questions? Are there areas of agreement/disagreement?
- Verses 16 & 17 give us a glimpse of the ministries of each member of the Trinity. To which person of the Trinity do you connect most/least immediately? Why?
- How do you see the Trinity as a picture of Divine Friendship? Draw your answer from this passage, other texts, and your own experience.
- How and why does Paul connect prayer, the Trinity and community together?
- Spend the final moments in Trinitarian praise. Declare through prayerful adoration how God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit amazes you.

The Father gives himself in the Son, and the Son in the Father in an everlasting delight, each in the other, and a loving embracing, the one the other...Just as the Father ceaselessly contemplates all things anew in the birth of his Son, so all things are loved anew by the Father and by the Son in the flowing-out of the Holy Ghost in eternal love. And this is the operative meeting of the Father and of the Son in which we are lovingly embraced through the Holy Ghost in eternal love.

--Jan Van Ruysbroeck

## **Session Two: Community** **Saturday, 7:30 – 9:00**

O eternal Trinity! O Godhead!  
You are a deep sea, into which  
the deeper I enter the more I  
find, and the more I find the  
more I seek.

--Catherine of Sienna

### An Exercise in Community Life

Scripture provides many commandments directed at the community of faith. The New Testament places much of the spiritual development of individuals within the context of corporate Christian experience. Included below are five commandments, which you can use to focus your discussion. Feel free to add some others. Take time as individuals to circle your answers to indicate whether each discipline is part of your present experience in small group and community life (1=almost never; 7=almost always). Do you have any new ideas on how to apply this discipline in your small group? What makes it hard to apply each discipline?

After everyone has finished, take time to discuss the answers as a group.

- **Confession of sin (Read James 5:16)**

Part of your present experience:            1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Ideas how to apply in group: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- **Prayer (Read Eph 6:18)**

Part of your present experience:            1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Ideas how to apply in group: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- **Encourage one another in holiness (Read Heb 3:12-13)**

Part of your present experience:            1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Ideas how to apply in group: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- **Honor one another (Read Rom 12:10)**

Part of your present experience:            1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Ideas how to apply in group: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- **Carry burdens (Read Gal 6:2)**

Part of your present experience:            1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Ideas how to apply in group: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## An Exercise in Trinitarian Prayer

We often pray for the details of one another's lives (up-coming exam, family's health, problem with work, etc.). Of course, we must pray for our daily concerns, but Paul's prayer challenges us to pray BIG, to pray as if our theology really mattered. Take some time to reflect upon Eph 3:14-21. In the middle column, jot down what you think is the central principle that Paul is praying. In the right column, write a brief prayer that captures the principle in your own words.

- Take 5 minutes to reflect privately/individually.
- Discuss each section as a group. Give people a chance to share their own prayers.
- Spend the final time praying (at least 15 minutes). Have members pray their prayers for the group, or take turns focusing prayers on an individual. Be creative! If you don't have time to really pray, then devote extra time on Sunday to pray these prayers.

Paul's Prayer	Paul's Principle	My Prayer
<p>For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.</p> <p><i>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,</i></p> <p>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.</p> <p><i>And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,</i></p> <p>and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.</p> <p><i>Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,</i></p> <p>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.</p>		

## **Session Three: Community and Personhood**

### **Sunday 10:15-12:00**

We were not made to be alone. We were made not just for relationships, but to become people 'in Christ', relating to God. As we abandon ourselves to God, moment by moment, our significance and identity will be in his hands...As we reflect on our lives, we begin to recognize that our own uniqueness is something that we do not handle very well...This is why I oscillate between pride and anxiety: pride that I am not you (thank goodness!), and anxiety that I am alone with my uniqueness. This quest for ourselves, which is so obvious in the narcissism of our society, makes us jump through all sorts of hoops on the assumption that what we do, what we look like, what we achieve and what we earn determines who we are.

--James Houston

Read the quotation above and discuss the following questions.

- Think about how you spend your time, make decisions, pray, work, etc. In what ways do you tend toward individualism?
- In what ways do you depend upon others for a sense of significance or security?

*Read Ephesians 3:14-21*

- How does the passage illuminate what it means to be a person?
- What does it mean to have your "inner being" shaped by the Spirit? How does that become manifest in the ways you think, feel, and act? How can small group be a community of persons becoming conformed to the image of Christ?
- One way we can "grasp with all the saints" the love of Christ is to invite others into our journey of faith. Take time to share with the group one specific experience or lesson in which the love of God has become more tangible this past year.
- By way of closing, you may want to pray the prayers that you wrote from yesterday's Exercise in Trinitarian Prayer. Or you may wish to thank God for the various ways that he has demonstrated his love. In any case, the most appropriate way to close our reflections upon Paul's prayer is to pray!