

4: ALL THREE

One man I spent time with had been saved for years. He loved Jesus. He went to seminary and shared Jesus regularly. However, he rarely had consistent intimacy with God. We walked through his relationship individually with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We discovered he had little relationship with the Father and even less with the Spirit. His difficulty with the Father came from his relationship with his earthly father. His difficulty with the Spirit came from a combination of his seminary training and his profession.

He went to a seminary that emphasized exegetical work in the Scriptures but neglected the Holy Spirit. In his professional field, the physical meant everything and the spiritual did not exist. Once the sources of his imbalance were identified, he repented of his sins, forgave his father, and renounced the false teaching he had believed. His relationship with the Father and the Spirit began to grow. Today he walks in life in ways he could not have before.

Another man was strong in the Spirit but not as much in the Son or the Father. Consequently he wrestled with grace and identifying himself as a son of God. He was focused on signs and wonders and became judgmental of Christians who did not experience any.

Many times in Jesus' life He dealt with demon-possessed people in scenes we would love to have seen. Every time, without raising a finger, Jesus forced the demons to leave the people they were terrorizing. On one occasion His power source was challenged. Some people actually accused Him of casting out demons by satanic power. Jesus corrected them by saying, "I cast out demons by the Spirit of God" (Matthew 12:28). His power source was the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Luke 4:1 says Jesus was, "full of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit was not called on remotely or partially involved in Jesus' life. Jesus lived in intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit who empowered His life.¹

What about Jesus and His Father? Scripture says Jesus had a deep relationship with His Father. He regularly withdrew from His work to rest in the presence of His Father and pray. He followed His Father's leading, seeking to glorify Him in all things: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). He was so intimate with His Father that He could say in John 5:19–20,

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.

While on earth, Jesus the Son of God lived full of the Holy Spirit in perfect relationship with God the Father.

THE WAY OF REST:

One God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Two Kingdoms

Three Enemies

Four Promises

Five Disciplines

Jesus' Kingdom way, His Way of Rest, is Trinitarian living. To walk in Jesus' way is to walk in healthy, full relationships with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Consider this: Jesus came not

just to forgive you of your sins but to forgive your sins so that you would be reconnected with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). It is amazing to believe and meditate on the truth that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit equally love you with perfect love!

This is what it means to walk in Trinitarian balance. Trinitarian balance happens when any person lives in a healthy relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, most Christians have some kind of imbalance. They have greater intimacy with one

or two persons of the Trinity to the neglect of the other(s). They are strong in the Holy Spirit but weak in Jesus and/or the Father. They have intimacy with the Father and the Son but are hesitant in the Spirit. As we will see, Trinitarian imbalance has profound effects on a person's ability to walk in the promises of God for his or her life. It is not unusual for people to experience great movements of freedom by working through their imbalance. This chapter focuses on Jesus' Trinitarian teachings.

As an aside, one thing you will begin to notice as you open up to Trinitarian balance is how specific the biblical authors were in ascribing particular works to specific persons of the Trinity. The Apostle Paul loved to talk about the different persons of the Trinity. For example, he writes in 2 Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God (the Father), and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." He writes in Romans 8:2, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."² Trinitarian balance was what Jesus walked in, and it's what His disciples taught!

THE TRINITY DEFINED

God has always revealed Himself as a Triune God. The people of God have traditionally defined the Trinity in this way:

1. There is only one God.
2. God exists in three distinct persons.
3. Each person is fully God.

This is the orthodox definition of God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. In Trinitarian balance we amend the definition to include truths about the relationship and roles in the Trinity taught from Jesus and others in the Bible. Relational Trinitarianism is defined as:

1. There is only one God.
2. God exists in three distinct persons in love with each other.
3. Each person is fully God.
4. Each person has distinct responsibilities that the others will not do.
5. We are invited into a loving relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The classic definition has three concepts, whereas the relational definition has five. Let's work through each concept being careful to clearly understand each.

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD.

Jesus was a monotheist. He believed in one God. He prayed to one God (John 17:1–3), sought one God (John 5:19–20), taught one God (Matthew 22:34–40), and followed one God (Luke 22:39–46).³

He had no doubt about the existence of one supernatural, spiritual being who existed before creation, created time, and guided everything according to His holy will. Against polytheism (the worship of many gods), idolatry (worshipping anyone or anything more than God), agnosticism (a belief in some form of spirituality but uncertain on absolute truth), and atheism (rejecting the existence of any god), Jesus believed in one God and enjoyed deep, personal fellowship Him.

GOD EXISTS IN THREE PERSONS WHO ARE IN LOVE WITH EACH OTHER.

This aspect of God is peculiar to the God of the Bible. No other gods reveal themselves to be one God who exists in three distinct persons. The math simply does not add up. Nevertheless, Jesus and the rest of Scripture teach that God exists as three distinct persons who are in perfect love with each other.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus gives His disciples a command known as the Great Commission: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” According to Jesus, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons equal to each other.⁴

The Apostle Paul teaches in Galatians 4:1–7 that anyone who gives their life to God is adopted into God’s family. He says in verse 6, “Because you are sons, God (Father) has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”⁵ The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are shown to be distinct persons working together to bring reconciliation to man. No matter how unimaginable it may seem to man, God is one God who is three distinct persons. In some regard this should give us comfort and make sense—there should be things about the God of All Creation we just do not understand!

Scripture then teaches us that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love each other. They wholly, purely, and perfectly love each other. 1 John 4:8 says, “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” In 1 John 4:18, the apostle writes, “There is no fear in love.” There is no jealousy, tension, anxiety, doubt, deception, anger, compromise, scheming, pride, or boastfulness among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. None. They are deeply, perfectly in love with each other.

EACH PERSON IS FULLY GOD.

In John 8, Jesus claimed to be God Himself. A group of religious leaders called the Pharisees got into a discussion with Him about what it meant to be free. The Pharisees argued that they were related to Abraham, the patriarch of all Israel and the receiver of God's promises; therefore, they were free. Jesus trumped their reliance on their lineage in 8:58 by saying, "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."

This may not sound like much to you, but the Jews knew exactly what Jesus was saying. Verse 59 says the Pharisees picked up rocks to stone Him for blasphemy. Jesus had just claimed to be God. "I am" was the name God shared with Moses in Exodus 3. In Exodus, God told Moses to lead the nation of Israel out of Egypt. Moses asked God whom he should say sent him when he goes to lead Israel. God responded, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). Jesus claimed to be God, and the Israelites knew it.

Furthermore, the Father is also God. In fact, the Father is regularly called God. In Matthew 6:25–33, Jesus uses Father and God interchangeably. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:2, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." That the Father is God is widely attested to throughout Scripture.

Finally, we are taught that the Spirit is God. That Jesus names the Spirit alongside the Father and the Son in His Great Commission places the Spirit on equal footing with the Father and the Son. And Jesus says in Mark 3:28–29, "Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." It is only possible to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is God.

Many different groups of people and religions deny various aspects of the Trinity. Islam claims the same God but rejects that Jesus is equally God, reducing Him to a prophet. Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses also reject the truth that Jesus is God in the flesh. Others have different views on the reality and nature of the Holy Spirit. In spite of these beliefs, God reveals Himself in Scripture as one God who exists as three distinct persons, each fully God, and each in perfect love with one another. Jesus' Kingdom way is Trinitarian, a dynamic, intimate, constant interaction between all three persons.

EACH PERSON HAS RESPONSIBILITIES THE OTHER PERSONS WILL NOT DO.

This is critical to understand for anyone who wants to walk in the way of Jesus. Each person of the Trinity has different responsibilities in creation. The Father has work the Son and Spirit don't have and will not do. The Spirit has work the Father and Son don't have and will not do. The Son has work the Spirit and Father don't have and will not do. This is beautiful because it helps us know and experience the love of all three. And it can help explain why, even though we may love Jesus, we do not experience His life.

The night before Jesus was crucified, He spent time in the Garden of Gethsemane praying. He was in agony while pushing against God's plan for His life. Luke 22:42 records Jesus saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Jesus lived according to the will of His Father. The Father had the plan, not the Son. In fact, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father, who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done." The Father has the plan—not the Son or the Spirit. Therefore, we should appeal to the Father to make His will known to us.

Galatians 4:1–7 is another great example of Trinitarian responsibilities. The Father sends the Son to redeem us so that we may be adopted, and the Father sends the Spirit into the hearts of those who surrender to Him to seal their adoption. The Son did not send the Father. The Spirit did not redeem us. The Father does not enter our hearts.

Paul clearly details that adoption is the plan of our Father, made possible through the sacrificial death of the Son, and applied to us by the Spirit. Each has a distinct role to perfectly carry out! As God moved man to write Scripture, He was careful to clarify which person of the Trinity was at work. As disciples of Jesus, we want to understand who is responsible for what in our lives.⁶

THE FATHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

God the Father is the perfection of fatherhood.

- He has a will in creation and for our lives.
(Matthew 6:9–13 [specifically verse 10b], Romans 12:1–2, Hebrews 10:1–10, Colossians 1:9, 1 John 5:14)
- The Father adopts us into His family, giving us a new identity, and is faithful in providing for all of our needs.
(Galatians 4:1–7, Matthew 6:9–13 [specifically verse 9]).
- The Father also sets the timing for salvation.
(Acts 1:6–8, Galatians 4:1–7).

These responsibilities belong exclusively to the Father. If we have a strained relationship with the Father, then we will not enjoy His presence or the benefit of His work.

THE SON'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The Son also has responsibilities in creation and in our lives:

- The Son became incarnate as Jesus. (John 1:1–18, Hebrews 1:1–4)
- The Son offers atonements through his sacrifices. (Romans 10:13, Hebrews 10:10, 14)
- The Son also loves (John 15:9) and gives authority in His name. (Luke 10:1–24, Matthew 28:18–20, Ephesians 2:1–10)

These responsibilities belong exclusively to the Son. If we deny or limit our relationship with Him, then we will not know these truths for our lives.

THE SPIRIT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The Spirit has many responsibilities as well:

- The Spirit reveals the Father and His will to us.
(1 Corinthians 2:6–13, Ephesians 1:15–17, Colossians 1:9)
- The Spirit is actively at work in the world and in our lives today.
(John 14:16–17, 16:5–11, Acts 1:7–8, Ephesians 1:13)
- The Spirit renews and sanctifies us .
(John 3:3, 1 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:22–23)
- The Spirit empowers us for holiness (Romans 8:1–17) and empowers us for ministry.
(Luke 4:16–19, Acts 1:7–8, Ephesians 3:14–19)
- The Spirit gifts us (1 Corinthians 12), reveals Jesus (John 15:26–27), gives us intimacy with the Father and the Son (John 14:16, Romans 8:9), and clarifies truth.
(John 14:26, John 16:12–14)

The Holy Spirit is the One today who conveys the will and love of the Father, the effective work and authority of Jesus, and empowerment for life and ministry. He is fully God. Having a relationship with Him is critical. This is why the New Testament says we can grieve the Holy Spirit, but it does not say we can grieve the Father and the Son. These responsibilities belong exclusively to the Spirit. If we limit the Spirit, then we limit His presence and His effectiveness in our lives.

I hope you are seeing with greater clarity that Jesus lived in healthy relationships with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To walk in Jesus' way is to walk in intimacy with each person of the Trinity.

I discipled a man who struggled with insecurity. He had been in the church a long time and served the Lord by leading worship in small groups. However, he never felt victory or power in his life. We walked through Trinitarian balance and discovered he had difficulties with the Holy Spirit. His difficulties came from experiences with friends while growing up.

A charismatic movement came through his town and many of his friends got involved. This man watched his friends begin to abuse others based on their spiritual experiences. His experience made him very resistant to the Holy Spirit. Consequently, he suffered in his faith. Once we identified the lies he believed, he was freed to enjoy the Spirit and his insecurity faded.

WE ARE INVITED INTO A LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT.

We briefly covered this at the beginning of this chapter, but it needs further discussion. When a person comes to faith in Jesus, they're brought from death to life, from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of God, and from Satan to the family of God. **We are adopted into Trinitarian, perfect love.** The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit equally, passionately love us.

Let's look again at what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 13:14. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." Draw deeply into the Trinitarian intimacy of that verse! From the middle of a prayer Jesus makes to His Father in John 17:22–23, Jesus says,

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; *I in them* and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and *loved them, even as You have loved Me* (emphasis added).

Scripture continually adds to the love of each of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the people of God. This is the joy of salvation! We're not just forgiven—we're birthed into perfect, holy, pure, gracious, merciful, Trinitarian love! Part of the glory of the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is their work to meet us wherever we are, healing and freeing us as we will allow them to work. No matter what the condition of our imbalance may be, God is actively working to restore us.

OTHER TYPES OF IMBALANCE

Trinitarian imbalance can also be caused by putting other persons or things above one, two, or all three persons of the Trinity. Some may place the church, or their role in it, at a level equal to or above God. When God says that we will have no other gods or idols, the church is certainly included (Revelation 2:1–7). Some may elevate the Bible above the Trinity. Jesus warns against this in John 5:38–40. Others may elevate their denominational affiliation higher than God. There may be additional causes not listed that keep a person from intimacy with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As you evaluate your Trinitarian condition, be open to considering other persons or things that you have allowed to have priority over the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

HEALING AND RESTORATION

How does a person walking in imbalance find restoration?

The Holy Spirit may lead you to balance on your own. He may lead you to someone who can help you because the issues are so personal you cannot see them. Regardless, restoration begins when the sources of imbalance are identified.

Is the imbalance caused by a bad relationship with an earthly father? Is it caused by a bad experience with a charismatic movement? Is the condition the result of denominational teaching? Is it the result of some traumatic experience? Once the sources of imbalance are identified, a person can respond according to the need.

For example:

- Someone has neglected the Father and his or her family background caused their imbalance. The person was victimized by another family member, but blames their father for not protecting them. The person transferred that anger from their earthly father to God the Father. Restoration happens as the person asks for and receives forgiveness from God the Father. Restoration continues as the person, now full of the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, forgives his or her earthly father.
- One person is strong in the Holy Spirit but resists Jesus and the Father. It's later discovered that this was caused by a traumatic experience while attending an institutional church. The person equates the Father and the Son with institutionalism. There's an opportunity for the person to ask the Father and the Son for forgiveness, breaking the lie they've believed for years. Once this happens, the person is immediately restored in their relationships with the Father and the Son.

As I discipled a man, he said, “I’m good with God, the Son, and the Spirit.” I noticed, however, that every time he referenced the Father, he said, “God.” I pointed this out to him.

“I noticed that every time you refer to the Father you say God. How is your relationship with your dad?”

“Terrible.”

His relationship with his earthly father was hindering him from even calling God, “Father.” He never noticed it because he was in relationship with God. Eventually we worked through his dad issue and were able to enjoy His Father and his identity as son.

Trinitarian imbalance comes in many different forms. Hopefully, through the examples given, anyone will be able to know the path of restoration.

TRINITARIAN PRAYING

In light of the Trinity, prayer can become confusing. To whom are we to pray to? Is it okay to pray to all three?

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray to the Father. He begins the prayer by saying, “Our Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). So Jesus' prayer is addressed to our Father.

Paul offers some great Trinitarian insight in two places that can guide our prayers. First, he writes in Ephesians 2:18, “For through Him (Christ) we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” This passage indicates that we pray by the Spirit and in the Spirit. We pray to the Father by accessing Him through Jesus the Son.

Second, Paul gives a prayer in Ephesians 3:14–21 that provides another example of the specific works of each person in the Trinity:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

From Jesus and Paul we can conclude that we are to pray to the Father, through Jesus, in the Spirit. However, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equally God. Therefore, praying to Jesus and the Spirit is certainly not wrong. As we get healthier in Trinitarian balance, our comfort, freedom, and joy in Trinitarian praying will increase.

Do not get discouraged if this feels awkward at first. You walk by grace. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love you. Enjoy praying and learning to pray!

CONCLUSION

Jesus' way of life is Trinitarian living. It's exciting to consider the reality that you are loved fully and equally by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's wonderful to walk in intimacy with each, knowing Them and being known by Them. Imbalance is a crippling condition that is the cause of so many issues in a person's life. It's unfortunate how pervasive such imbalance is.

ALL THREE: CHAPTER WORK

Begin your time reflecting on each person of the Trinity. As you move from one to another, consider how much each loves each other and each loves you. Write anything you see or feel here.

1. Read Titus 3:3–7, Romans 5:1–5, and John 14:26. Note the Trinitarian activity in each.

2. With which person(s) of the Trinity do you have the most intimacy?

3. With which person(s) of the Trinity do you have the least intimacy?

4. Make a column for each person of the Trinity with whom you do not have great intimacy. Write the person's name at the top of the column. Underneath each column, write the issues that keep you from deeper intimacy. After writing your initial list, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal other issues you may have that you're not aware of.

5. Respond to each issue by asking for forgiveness for allowing that specific issue to keep you from intimacy. After you ask for forgiveness, receive it! Many people continually ask for forgiveness that has already been given—they have just not received it. Embrace the new condition of your relationship! As you continue to seek God in His Word, enjoy the ways the different authors write about the persons of the Trinity.