

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

TARA-LEIGH COBBLE

HE'S WHERE THE JOY IS

GETTING TO KNOW THE CAPTIVATING
GOD OF THE TRINITY

TARA-LEIGH COBBLE

HE'S
WHERE
THE
JOY IS

GETTING TO KNOW THE CAPTIVATING
GOD OF THE TRINITY

Lifeway Press®
Nashville, TN

**EDITORIAL TEAM,
LIFEWAY WOMEN
PUBLISHING**

Becky Loyd

Director, Lifeway Women

Tina Boesch

Manager, Lifeway Women
Publishing

Sarah Doss

Editorial Project Leader,
Lifeway Women Publishing

Mike Wakefield

Content Editor

Erin Franklin

Production Editor

Chelsea Waack

Graphic Designer

Lauren Ervin

Cover Designer

Published by Lifeway Press® · © 2021 Tara-Leigh Cobble

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to Lifeway Press®; One Lifeway Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234.

ISBN: 978-1-0877-3984-7

Item: 005831206

Dewey decimal classification: 231.044

Subject heading: GOD / JESUS CHRIST—DIVINITY / TRINITY / HOLY SPIRIT

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright ©2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. Scripture quotations marked NASB taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.lockman.org. Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™ Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the Holy Bible, King James Version.

To order additional copies of this resource, write Lifeway Resources Customer Service; One Lifeway Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234; FAX order to 615.251.5933; call toll-free 800.458.2772; email orderentry@lifeway.com; or order online at lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States of America

Lifeway Women Publishing,
Lifeway Resources,
One Lifeway Plaza,
Nashville, TN 37234

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5	About the Author
6	A Word from the Author
10	Session One: Introduction
12	Session Two: Unity & Diversity
48	Session Three: God the Father
80	Session Four: God the Son
114	Session Five: God the Spirit
148	Session Six: Prayer & Communication
178	Session Seven: In His Image
210	Leader Helps
214	Glossary
215	Heresies
216	Athanasian Creed
219	Further Study
220	Endnotes



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tara-Leigh Cobble's zeal for biblical literacy led her to create D-Group (Discipleship Group), which has grown into an international network of three hundred-plus Bible studies that meet every week in homes, churches, and online. She also writes and hosts a daily radio show called *The God Shot*, as well as a daily podcast called *The Bible Recap* which unpacks the richness of Scripture alongside the chronological one-year reading plan. In just over two years, the podcast garnered seventy million downloads and reached number three on the Apple Podcast top overall charts. More than twenty thousand churches around the world have joined their reading plan to know and love God better. Her book, *The Bible Recap*, a 365-day guide to reading through the Bible, aims to help people not only read and understand Scripture but *love* it too!

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

If you had to describe God's personality, what would you say? Not what He does, but His demeanor. Not what He's capable of, but what He's like.

Here's how King David described God: "in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). He also said God's presence brings gladness and joy (Ps. 21:6)!

Does it surprise you to know that God is happy? He is infinitely joyful! And because He's so delighted, that's how He can be delightful to us—by sharing who He is with us. If joy is your goal, knowing the triune God will be supremely useful to you. In fact, this is the only path to true joy.

But that doesn't mean it will be an easy path. Everything beautiful in life has some level of unavoidable difficulty attached to it, including our best and strongest relationships. In every relationship, you have to go through the process of getting to know the other person. Along the way you face misunderstandings and miscommunications; maybe you also encounter unmet expectations—all as a part of building the relationship. People are wonderfully complex, aren't we?

Our relationship with God has a lot of those same complexities because He's a Person too. Three Persons, actually—Father, Son, and Spirit. You're likely here because you already agree with the idea of the trinitarian God of the Bible, but you don't necessarily know what that means. So, to a certain degree, I'll assume we're on the same page and that I don't need to spend paragraphs or pages convincing you God exists or the Bible is true. However, even those of us who consent to belief in the Trinity have a hard time grasping exactly what (or Who?) it is (They are?). See how complex it already feels?

J. I. Packer said the doctrine of the Trinity "confronts us with perhaps the most difficult thought that the human mind has ever been asked to handle. It is not easy; but it is true."¹ Someone once said, "If you don't believe in the Trinity, you will lose your soul. But if you try to understand it, you will lose your mind."² It's true that some things are beyond our complete knowledge, but they aren't beyond our partial knowledge. So in this study, we'll make it our aim to know the highest percentage of what our minds can possibly grasp. After all, knowing Him is the path to joy, and I want as much joy as possible.

What makes this doctrine so challenging? Why do people tend to brush over it instead of dig in? Here are a few things that contribute to our collective confusion and difficulty with the Trinity.

Simplified explanations

If you've ever been part of a Bible study or a Sunday School class that talked about the Trinity, you've likely heard analogies of shamrocks and eggs and H₂O. Maybe someone has drawn a picture of a triangle or a shield. Every analogy of the Trinity breaks down at some level, simply because there's nothing else in existence quite like God. Everything else has a point of origin and relies on the things around it for its definition, but God is uncreated and has always been who He is.

Some analogies are better than others, but even those require caveats. Other analogies are downright heretical—which is to say, they tell more of a lie about God than a truth, and they're more harmful than helpful in giving us a right view of God. (See a list of heresies on p. 215.) He isn't dependent on anything else to be who He is, so when we compare Him to something that inherently is dependent on something else, it will always lead us down the wrong path. We crave analogies because they seem to help simplify God, and we prefer to simplify Him because it's easier than studying His complexity. But is that how you want to be known? Is that how you aim to build a relationship with anyone you love? Simplified explanations fall short of being enlightening or fulfilling in our relationship with God.

Selfishness

This answer may not apply to you, but it certainly does to me. My selfishness was one of the biggest hurdles that kept me from digging into the Trinity. I preferred to focus on God's promises to me and all the things He could do to benefit me, so I was content to stop short of looking for who He is. I tuned out when someone mentioned the Trinity—not because I already knew all the details, but because I didn't yet know enough. I was in for a real surprise when I did begin to study the Trinity. It isn't just a theological concept; fundamentally, it's a relationship. To have a healthy, functioning relationship, you have to look beyond yourself and get to know the other person involved.

The Bible never uses the word *Trinity*.

However, that doesn't mean the triune God is not addressed in Scripture. In fact, we'll read more Trinity-related passages in this study than you can imagine! The idea of the Trinity is found throughout the Bible, starting in Genesis 1:1. Jesus talked about it in the Gospels, and the apostles affirmed it throughout their New Testament letters. Still, the early church struggled to summarize it until a theologian named Tertullian, who lived about a century after Jesus' resurrection, created the word *Trinity* to succinctly reference Scripture's teaching about God.³

(By the way, many books cover how and why and when the early church named and articulated the doctrine of the Trinity as it appears in Scripture. Other books investigate the original words and languages used in Scripture to explain the Trinity. And there are still others that show how the Trinity is unique to Christianity and how our triune God stands in stark contrast to the gods of other religions. We won't cover those topics in-depth, but in case you're interested in learning more about any of them, I've built out a list of suggestions on p. 219.)

This doctrine is absolutely necessary to the Christian faith. Its importance can't be overemphasized. Theologian Ligon Duncan said that asking, *Is the identity of the Trinity important to the Gospel?* is similar to asking, "Is who your wife is central to your marriage?"⁴ Without the Trinity as the core of our beliefs, every other doctrine of our faith starts to come unglued and unhinged. You cannot have the Christian faith without a triune God. This is a bold statement, but the creeds support it. (See pp. 216–218 to read the Athanasian Creed.) Every other Christian belief is built on this foundation. Without it, we slide into the cultic beliefs of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Muslims.

It's tempting to diminish the importance of the Trinity and to seek a false peace by simply "focusing on the Word of God." But that's shallow at best and foolish at least. In fact, God's Word is precisely where we learn about His Persons; He's given it to us so we can know Him in greater depth. How heartless and arrogant to want to know less of Him than He has made possible. People who truly know God have always wanted to know God more—both for their own sakes and for the sake of being able to talk more clearly about Him and His love with others. So I'm glad you're here, trying—digging in. And I know God smiles at it too. He loves to be known and understood and loved, just like you love to be known and understood and loved.

A FEW NOTES ABOUT THIS STUDY

In each week, I've put all the teaching and questions together, but feel free to divide it up throughout your week as best fits your schedule. There's also a Daily Bible Reading (just one chapter per day) which connects to that week's topic. I encourage you to take three to four minutes each day to make Daily Bible Reading a part of your regular practice instead of doing it all at one time. Each week also includes Scripture Memory, a Prayer Walk (I've included prayer prompts that relate to each week's topic!), and a practical response to what we've learned—we call it the Weekly Challenge. Since we're already leaning into Bible study, I've added these other disciplines to help us build out a more well-rounded spiritual life. Plus, it's just nice to have some variety! The days are numbered each week, but rest assured you can "shuffle the deck" however you need to—the days don't necessarily build on each other. All that to say: the structure is there as a tool. Use it if it's helpful for you, but feel free to disregard it if it isn't.

As you can tell, this study has multiple components. So I've provided a checklist at the beginning of each week to help you organize your Bible study experience. I don't want you to miss anything!

This is a Scripture-heavy study. If you're already familiar with Scripture, my hope is that you'll discover new truths you've never seen before. If you're new to Scripture, I believe you'll feel more equipped and less intimidated to study it by the end of these seven sessions. Some questions will require you to refer to a Greek or Hebrew lexicon, but you don't need to buy one. Plenty of free ones are online. (My favorite is blueletterbible.org.)

By the end of this study, you'll be shocked at the dimension and texture and beauty you've started to see in the triune God. It has been there all along—in the Bible we read and the songs we sing—but perhaps we're too familiar with it to notice it. Chances are you're already immersed in the doctrine of the Trinity, so you likely won't have to change any of your beliefs as you read this study; you'll just develop them. They will grow muscles! So will you bring your best to these seven sessions? It will be challenging, but by God's power at work within you, I believe you will come to know and love Him more than you ever thought possible!

session one

INTRODUCTION

#HESWERETHEJOYIS

1. DISCUSS the following questions:

1. Why are you interested in doing a study about the Trinity?
2. How would you define the Trinity?
3. Which Person of the Trinity are you most excited to learn more about? Why?
4. Based on your current understanding, how would you explain the roles the Persons of the Trinity have played in the story of your salvation? What might be some Bible verses that speak to these roles?

2. WATCH the Session One video teaching.

session two

UNITY & DIVERSITY

#HESWERETHEJOYIS

THE WEEK AHEAD

These are the elements of your personal study for the week. Feel free to do them in whatever order works best for your schedule. Check off the items as you move through them.

↓

DAILY BIBLE READING & PODCAST

Each day this week you'll read a chapter of Scripture and answer a series of questions to help you reflect on what you read.

- Day 1
- Day 2
- Day 3
- Day 4
- Day 5
- Day 6
- Day 7

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Five days this week you'll work on memorizing 1 John 1:5. Each day you'll find a prompt or easy exercise to help you.

- Day 1
- Day 2
- Day 3
- Day 4
- Day 5

STUDY

This session's study will lay the foundation for our study of the triune God. You'll get an overview of His character and work, and you'll look at the three foundations of the Trinity. Feel free to work through this content at your own pace.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

The weekly challenge will help you process and respond to what you've studied this week. We encourage you to do this after you've worked through the teaching content.

PRAYER WALK

Choose a day this week to prayer walk. We've provided some guidelines to help you structure this time with God.

GROUP MEETING

Meet with your group to watch and discuss the video teaching.

DAY 1

DAILY BIBLE READING & PODCAST: GENESIS 1



Read the Daily Bible Reading chapter for the day or listen to the podcast for the day.

Daily Bible Reading Questions:

Where did you see God show up in the text today?

What did you notice about His character or His attributes?

Did you read anything that pointed to what He loves, what He hates, what He does, or what motivates His actions? If so, list what you found below.

To access the daily podcast, visit
lifeway.com/wherethejoyis

DAILY BIBLE READING & PODCAST: EPHESIANS 1



Read the Daily Bible Reading chapter for the day or listen to the podcast for the day.

Daily Bible Reading Questions:

Where did you see God show up in the text today?

What did you notice about His character or His attributes?

Did you read anything that pointed to what He loves, what He hates, what He does, or what motivates His actions? If so, list what you found below.

DAY 3

DAILY BIBLE READING & PODCAST: PHILIPPIANS 1



Read the Daily Bible Reading chapter for the day or listen to the podcast for the day.

Daily Bible Reading Questions:

Where did you see God show up in the text today?

What did you notice about His character or His attributes?

Did you read anything that pointed to what He loves, what He hates, what He does, or what motivates His actions? If so, list what you found below.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY: 1 JOHN 5:1

Today, we begin working on this week's Scripture memory verse. On Days Three through Seven of each week, we'll provide different daily prompts to help you succeed at this. Scripture memory can be challenging, whether this is your first attempt or a regular discipline. But don't underestimate the work God can do in and through you. Commit two to five minutes of your day to memorizing Scripture and watch what happens in just a few days. We gain strength by repetition, so today we'll focus on getting in some reps.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

1 JOHN 5:1

Read the verse aloud three times and/or sing along with the verse song if it's helpful.

Write the verse three times in the space provided.

To sing along with the verse song from the podcast, visit lifeway.com/wherethejoyis

4

DAY

DAILY BIBLE READING & PODCAST: COLOSSIANS 1



Read the Daily Bible Reading chapter for the day or listen to the podcast for the day.

Daily Bible Reading Questions:

Where did you see God show up in the text today?

What did you notice about His character or His attributes?

Did you read anything that pointed to what He loves, what He hates, what He does, or what motivates His actions? If so, list what you found below.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY: 1 JOHN 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

1 JOHN 5:1

Read the verse aloud three times and/or sing along with the verse song if it's helpful.

Because it's important for us to not only memorize Scripture but to make sure we comprehend it as well, write the verse in your own words.

5 DAY

DAILY BIBLE READING & PODCAST: HEBREWS 1



Read the Daily Bible Reading chapter for the day or listen to the podcast for the day.

Daily Bible Reading Questions:

Where did you see God show up in the text today?

What did you notice about His character or His attributes?

Did you read anything that pointed to what He loves, what He hates, what He does, or what motivates His actions? If so, list what you found below.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY: 1 JOHN 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

1 JOHN 5:1

Read the verse aloud three times and/or sing along with the verse song if it's helpful.

Today, let's see what kind of progress you're making with your reps. Cover the verse above and then try to write it from memory in the space provided. You can glance back at it as needed, but be sure to finish each attempt. Keep trying until you're able to write it from start to finish without looking.

6 DAY

DAILY BIBLE READING & PODCAST: ROMANS 1



Read the Daily Bible Reading chapter for the day or listen to the podcast for the day.

Daily Bible Reading Questions:

Where did you see God show up in the text today?

What did you notice about His character or His attributes?

Did you read anything that pointed to what He loves, what He hates, what He does, or what motivates His actions? If so, list what you found below.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY: 1 JOHN 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

1 JOHN 5:1

Read the verse aloud three times and/or sing along with the verse song if it's helpful.

This verse is packed full of truth! It may be short, but it is dense. Try to discover at least three truths in this verse and write them below.

7 DAY

DAILY BIBLE READING & PODCAST: ROMANS 8



Read the Daily Bible Reading chapter for the day or listen to the podcast for the day.

Daily Bible Reading Questions:

Where did you see God show up in the text today?

What did you notice about His character or His attributes?

Did you read anything that pointed to what He loves, what He hates, what He does, or what motivates His actions? If so, list what you found below.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY: 1 JOHN 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

1 JOHN 5:1

Read the verse aloud three times and/or sing along with the verse song if it's helpful.

If you enjoy creating, draw a picture in the space provided of what this verse brings to mind visually for you. If you'd rather not draw a picture, write the verse from memory.

GOD'S REVEALING

Have you ever fumbled through your house in a power outage, bumping into walls and bruising your shins on the coffee table? You easily navigate your way around that furniture on a daily basis, but with the lights off, it can be more of a challenge. Many of us who have spent time in church or in Scripture keep bumping into the Trinity but aren't able to identify or describe it clearly. There's a good reason for that. Through most of the Bible, it may seem as though God doesn't say a lot about the Trinity—at least not directly.

I borrowed the darkened house illustration from B. B. Warfield, who said the Old Testament is like a furnished room that is dimly lit, and the New Testament is where God flips on the light switch.¹ This is especially true where the Trinity is concerned. The Trinity "furniture" has been there all along, sitting in the same spots, and the New Testament light just reveals where the furniture has always been.

It's not as though God was being cruel in the Old Testament. He wasn't trying to bruise any shins. He knows relationships work best through progressive revelation, a gradual revealing of more and more information over time. In healthy relationships, we don't expect to share or learn everything the first time we meet someone. This is how Scripture describes God's relationship with humanity. He didn't reveal His whole plan for His people at one time. Instead, He used different means at different times, patiently giving us more information piece by piece as He moved through the process.

Despite God's progressive revelation, you and I have most likely suffered from another problem: We've been living in this furnished, lit house while wearing blindfolds. We've bumped into some things here and there; we've sat on them and trusted their ability to hold us up. Perhaps we've even occasionally gotten a glimpse of the room layout when we tilt our heads at just the right angle. But we haven't actively explored what He progressively revealed. Now is the time for us to take our blindfolds off and let the light of Scripture show us the beauty and design of this house we've been living in.

These highlighted words can be found in the glossary on page 214.

Look through the list of heresies on page 215. Have you ever heard of or encountered any of these? Have you ever believed any of them? If so, which ones? List them below. As we make our way through this study, you'll discover verses that speak truth to the lies you've believed or encountered. When you come across those verses, refer back to the "Heresies" page and make note of the verses beside the heresies they address.

Much of what we know about the Trinity wasn't revealed until the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God's first priority was explaining to His people that He is ONE God—the one true God. Polytheism was rampant among all the other nations, and God wanted to redirect the hearts of His people to the truth, so He repeated this theme throughout the Old Testament. In fact, to both ancient and modern Jews who rely on the Old Testament, the most important Scripture is generally regarded to be Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." God is one. This doctrine stands out as the most important doctrine of the Old Testament, the heart of monotheism (the belief in one God—as opposed to polytheism, the belief in many gods). But this verse points to far more than just the fact that there is one God—it points to His preeminence as the one true God. He is singular in His essence and superior in His being.

Since the ancient Jews were surrounded by polytheistic nations, the Old Testament writers spent a lot of effort establishing there is one true God. Only then could God begin to introduce more complexity about Himself: He is one God who consists of three Persons. In the next steps of His progressive revelation, God sent His Son to earth to dwell among the people and then sent His Spirit to dwell within His people.

Read Hebrews 1:1-3.

How did God speak to His people during the days of the Old Testament?	How did He speak to them during the days of the New Testament?

God's process remains obscured to someone who only reads the Old Testament. To see the Trinity in the Old Testament, you have to read it through the New Testament lens. But make no mistake: God had been dropping hints about the Trinity since Genesis 1. We'll see some of them in this study.

There's one important thing we must note when it comes to Scripture's progressive revelation: it is not corrective revelation. When God reveals something new, He doesn't negate something He previously revealed. He builds on and expands what He has already revealed. For instance, even in Genesis 1, the first chapter of the Old Testament, we see hints of the Trinity—God's Word and His Spirit were the means God used to do His work of creation. God was doing one work—creating the universe—through what we only later come to understand as His three Persons.

Read Genesis 1:1-2 and then read John 1:1-3.

Which Persons of the Trinity appear to have been present at creation?

Read Genesis 1:26.

Who is speaking here? Who are the "us/our" statements referring to?

In John 1, we find out that Jesus was present in creation, as described in Genesis 1, as was God's Spirit, who "was hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). When the New Testament points to the Spirit, His actions are described with similar fluttering, wind-related words, helping us see He is the same Person who was present and active at creation. The Old and New Testaments work together to help us better understand what God has been saying all along about His presence and activity in our world.

Let's spend some time looking at God's unity as it applies to His oneness and His diversity as it applies to the three Persons of the Trinity.

GOD'S UNITY

The divine nature is really and entirely identical with each of the three persons, all of whom can therefore be called one.²

THOMAS AQUINAS

As we move through this study, we'll cover the three foundations of the Trinity multiple times so you'll know them by heart when we finish.

THE FIRST FOUNDATION OF THE TRINITY IS: **THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD.**

The Bible's descriptions of *Elohim* (the name God gives Himself in Gen. 1:1) and His actions set Him apart from all other gods of all other religions.³ The Old Testament authors repeatedly emphasized the theme of God's superiority and His oneness. These two themes are tied together—not only is our God the one true God who is set apart in power and eternity, but He is ONE God. If there were any other gods on His level, they would have to be eternal like Him and all-powerful like Him, which is functionally impossible—not only because one of them would've had to create the other, but because that would also require one to predate the other.

Look up the following verses. In your Bible, circle the words that point to God’s oneness and unity or write them beside the references below.

- Exodus 20:3
- Deuteronomy 6:4-5
- Isaiah 43:10
- Isaiah 44:24
- Isaiah 45:22

Since progressive revelation isn’t corrective, the New Testament reiterates the theme of “one-ness” from the Old Testament, even as it helps understand the three Persons of God.

Read the following verses slowly and carefully and then note the following information beside each reference: What aspects of these passages point to God’s unity and oneness? What aspects point to His diversity of Persons?

Verse	What aspects of these passages point to God’s unity and oneness?	What aspects point to His diversity of Persons?
Genesis 1:26-27		
Matthew 28:19		
1 Corinthians 8:6		

The fact that we are baptized into only one name, not names (see Matt. 28:19), is significant, especially as it refers collectively to the three Persons of God. In Scripture, a name represents the will, character, and essence of a person. The Trinity has one will, character, and essence across all three divine Persons, even in the Old Testament where the Trinity is less evident.

Consistency

If you've ever studied the Old Testament, you may have come away thinking something along these lines: *Why is God so angry in the Old Testament? I like the New Testament better. God is so much nicer after Jesus shows up on the scene.*

If you've had similar thoughts, you're not alone. I've had them too. But when we pull God and His actions out of context, as we're often prone to do, it's easy to misunderstand His character. If we divide Him into three Persons without remembering He is ONE, we may begin to assign certain temperaments to the Persons of the Trinity (i.e. the Father is the angry one; Jesus is the nice one, and the Spirit is the weird and/or mysterious one). The good news for us (as we will come to see in the pages ahead) is that this is theologically impossible. Much to our relief, "Old Testament God" isn't unlikable as we've believed Him to be. For all of us who have ever felt that way, Scripture is here to set us straight and invite us into something much more beautiful and winsome. Whew!

Contrary to popular thought, God doesn't undergo a personality transplant at the end of the Old Testament. When we follow the storyline of Scripture, we see a God who created mankind out of an overflow of love, who clothed Adam and Eve before they even repented, who rescued the Israelites out of slavery and then led them as they established a functioning society, joyfully choosing to set up camp in their midst and repeatedly forgiving them, blessing them, and reminding them He was sending a Messiah to rescue them. This is the heart of God evident in the scope of the Old Testament's metanarrative. All along He dropped hints of what was coming, and then He delivered on His promise!

Of course, if we drop down in the middle of the Old Testament in a time when He's punishing the Israelites, He seems harsh. We won't understand why His laws were helpful and necessary. We'll fail to notice He's already told them repeatedly not to do that specific sinful thing, told them what type of punishment to expect if/when they do it, and then continued to provide for them and protect them despite their rebellion. With our limited information, we'll view Him as strict or angry, and we won't draw near to Him. We'll prefer to stay in the New Testament where we can read about Jesus, who paid for all the sins we know we've committed. This is a common problem we encounter when we don't read the story of Scripture chronologically (in the order it happened, not the order it is laid out). Reading the Bible at all is great, but reading chronologically can help us get to know God in the order He chose to reveal Himself through progressive revelation.

There is a necessary process of the gospel: we must be confronted with God's laws and requirements, see that we fall short and can't obey His laws, and realize our need for rescue. Jesus came to be that Rescuer—He not only paid our sin debt, but He also granted us His righteousness! This is how progressive revelation works in our relationship with God, and it's the reason we still desperately need the truths of the Old Testament to see Him rightly!

The same is true of our understanding of the Trinity. Without the Old Testament, it might be easy to divide God into three separate Gods, or even to think God shape-shifts from one "form" into the other. (See *Tritheism* and *Modalism* in the list of heresies on p. 215.) But when we read Scripture as a whole, we see His oneness throughout, which helps us maintain this doctrinal balance: *Each Person of the Trinity indwells the other two*. We can't emphasize one Person of God over the others. It's vital to view them holistically, or we'll be led into heresy. But the Trinity doesn't mean God is divided into three parts like pieces of a pie. *Each Person of the Trinity fully possesses/is the complete divine essence*. The word we use to describe this is consubstantial—regarded as the same in substance or essence.

Since they are all equally and fully divine within the Trinity unto themselves, no one Person plays an eternally dominant role. They each point to the others. The Father glorifies and points to the Son. The Son glorifies and points to the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit glorifies and points to the

Son and the Father. Understanding this truth is VITAL. It shows us so much about God’s character. He is always pointing externally—even with Himself. This shows us the heart of God is focused on outgoing love.

The Persons of God aren’t only united in their essence, but they’re united in their purpose as well. And this divine, eternal unity is inseparable. God has always been One, and He has always been Three. He didn’t become this way to serve some kind of purpose or function; it is who He is and how He is.

Recall the first foundation of the Trinity and write it below.

GOD’S DIVERSITY

THE SECOND FOUNDATION OF THE TRINITY IS: **THERE ARE THREE DIVINE PERSONS OF THE ONE TRUE GOD.**

Read Genesis 1:1.

Look up *Elohim* (the name God uses for Himself in this verse) in a Hebrew lexicon. What part of speech is it? In what form—singular or plural? What is noteworthy about this?

In his book *Shared Life*, Donald Macleod said, “The New Testament disclosure of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the best, and possibly the only, explanation of God’s giving himself a plural name [*Elohim*]” in the Old Testament.⁴

Having a God who is one in nature/being and three in Persons can seem confusing or contradictory, but that’s simply because there’s nothing else like Him in existence. No other religion in the history of the world has ever had a God like this, and we would do well to learn about Him since He’s the foundation of our faith.

Not long after God flipped the lights on in the New Testament, Christians began trying to find ways to summarize and explain this doctrine. As we discussed in “A Word from the Author,” all analogies sacrifice some aspect of who He is and lead us to one or more heresies we discussed in the Introduction. (See p. 215.) As complex as the Trinity may be, you and I benefit personally from the fact that God is both One and triune. So we won’t simplify His complexity; we’ll study it. After all, stained glass windows are more captivating because of their many panes and colors. Diamonds are more brilliant and valuable as their facets increase. God’s complexity adds to His beauty, and not only does He invite us into His mysteries, but He offers wisdom if we ask Him (Jas. 1:5), and He shares His secrets with His friends (Ps. 25:14)—and that’s you!

THE THIRD FOUNDATION OF THE TRINITY IS: **THE THREE PERSONS ARE COEQUAL, CO-ETERNAL, AND CO-RELATIONAL.**

God is one essence (or nature) and three Persons: The Father, Son, and Spirit are all equally and fully God, and “the being of each Person is equal to the whole being of God.”⁵ They’re not only equal in character and personality, but in power, glory, and eternity. Since they’re all co-eternal, that means none of them were created by the others. This is important, and it’s one of the places where our modern, Western mindset often fails us because we’re tempted to attach ages to their names.

We think of a father as one who comes before a son and who played a role in creating that son and who must be separate from the son even though they share some DNA. But in the eternal Godhead, the name *Father* points to One who gives His identity to another person; He is the Unbegotten and the Begetter. The “Son” is the One who displays that identity. Hebrews 5:5 describes Jesus as being “begotten” of the Father, which conveys the idea of the Father appointing the Son, not creating Him. To prevent any confusion about this, theologians often use the phrase “eternally begotten” to describe Jesus (John 1:1-18). As for the Spirit, Jesus described Him as the One who “proceeds from” the Father (John 15:26), and there’s also evidence He proceeds from the Son (John 16:7). While we may not understand this fully, Scripture helps us understand it better.

These descriptions of appointing, sending, begetting, and proceeding tell us a lot about the Trinity: they're united in their mission, and they have distinct roles as they engage with us in that mission.

While the three members of the Trinity are distinct, this does not mean that any is inferior to the other. Instead, they are all identical in attributes. They are equal in power, love, mercy, justice, holiness, knowledge, and all other qualities. Each Person is fully God.⁶

MATT PERMAN

Since they are co-eternal and coequal Persons on a united mission, it's vital for us to remember that one of them isn't more important than the other. In his book *Forgotten Trinity*, James R. White described it like this: "Just because the Father, Son, and Spirit do different things does not mean that any one of them is inferior to the others in nature. Think of it this way: in eternity past, the Father, Son, and Spirit voluntarily and freely chose the roles they would take in bringing about the redemption of God's people . . . Each took different roles of necessity."⁷

Look up the following verses. In your Bible, circle each reference (including nouns and pronouns) to a Person of the Trinity—or write them beside the verses below. Note: in these verses, *God* usually refers to the Father.

- **Matthew 28:19**
- **Luke 10:21**
- **2 Corinthians 1:21-22**
- **2 Corinthians 13:14 (v. 13 in the CSB translation)**
- **Ephesians 3:14**

It's common to refer to the Persons of God in this order: the Father is the first Person of God; the Son is the second Person of God; and the Spirit is the third Person of God. But it's important to note that this order doesn't mean one Person is older or more important than the others. Instead, this order points to God's progressive revelation in Scripture and in relationship with us.

You may wonder why this has to be so complex. Why can't He just be "God" and let that be all we need to know? In his book *The Deep Things of God*, Fred Sanders said,

God's way of being God is to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit simultaneously from all eternity, perfectly complete in a triune fellowship of love. If we don't take this as our starting point, everything we say about the practical relevance of the Trinity could lead us to one colossal misunderstanding: thinking of God the Trinity as a means to some other end.⁸

If we preferred worshiping the version of Him we've imagined instead of getting to know who He really is, we'd be guilty of idolatry at worst and laziness at best. And on top of that, we'd be missing out on some of the most beautiful aspects of who He is and the joy that comes from knowing Him more!

There are things we can't see about Him if we don't look closely at His tri-unity. For instance, if God were unipersonal instead of triune, He couldn't be love in His essence. It would be something He does, not something He is because He wouldn't have been capable of love until He created something to love. Love requires an "other." That means He would've been Creator before He was Love, and His love would be attached to His accomplishments. But since He has always been a community of love within Himself, then love is at the core of who He is. He has always been other-oriented. God faces outward. Tim Keller said this means that "love is cosmic ultimate reality." Keller goes on to explain that without the Trinity, the ultimate reality of love falls apart.⁹ For instance, polytheists worship gods who are contending for power, not love. In eastern religions, where god is merely a force, their god is impersonal and can't contain love, be love, or give love.

One of the ways we see the love within the Godhead (another name for the Trinity), is when they talk to or about each other. This happens most often in the New Testament. In the Gospels, we get to eavesdrop on Jesus' prayer life where He talks directly to the Father, and we also hear Him describing the work of the Holy Spirit to His disciples. These conversations reveal not only that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct Persons, but that they're each

focused on the others, deferring to them and pointing toward their glory out of their love for each other. It becomes clear that they aim to glorify each other.

Look up the verses below then answer the following questions for each verse: Who is speaking? Who is the speaker speaking to or about? Why? (You may need to read the surrounding context to find answers.)

Verse	Who is speaking?	Who is He speaking to or about?	Why?
Matthew 3:17			
Matthew 17:5			
Luke 22:42			
John 14:26			
John 14:31			
John 16:7			
John 17:24			

Recall the second foundation of the Trinity and write it below.

Recall the third foundation of the Trinity and write it below.

GOD'S RELATIONSHIPS

In the previous section, we saw how much the Trinity loves each other, points to each other, and glorifies each other. Their actions are motivated by love! And because this is all built on and fueled by perfect love, that means there is deep, abiding, gospel joy at the heart of the Trinity. That joy is not just contained within God Himself—it's joy for us too!

God is inherently relational. In this section, we'll look at two general categories of God's relationships: His relationship within the Trinity and His relationship with humanity.

What we've been talking about up to this point is primarily God's relationship within Himself—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. This internal life of God is what theologians often refer to as the **Immanent Trinity** because *immanent* means "existing or operating within; inherent."¹⁰ (Note: Some theologians prefer to use the term *Ontological Trinity* instead of *Immanent Trinity*. Both titles refer to the same thing.)

This term points to all the things we've covered in the previous sections about how God operates within Himself, the inner life of the divine community of the Father, Son, and Spirit. "God is love" within Himself.

Even though we all love hearing about ourselves, it's important that we cover this relationship first because, as Fred Sanders said, "God is Trinity primarily for himself and only secondarily for us."¹¹ If that comes as a shock or a surprise, hang in there—we'll eventually see why this is not only important but comforting. It would be wrong to think of ourselves as God's primary focal point and purpose; that is not the message of Scripture.

The closer we lean in to see Him, the more we'll discover about Him and the more His joy will embed itself into our lives. He created us and invited us into a preexisting joy. Scripture never tells us why God created the world and mankind, but it does tell us what God was doing before He made us. For all eternity, He has been and is and will be reveling in infinite communal love, which means God is infinitely happy! If God were singular, His reasons for creating the world would've been rooted in need, boredom, loneliness, or power—all of which would point to His selfishness in creating. Instead, He was already fulfilled in His triune perfection.

Read John 17:24.

Circle the word that points to God's pre-creation action or note it below.

What was God doing before He created the world? Love. And this wasn't a one-way love; the Persons of God point outside themselves to each other as a result of love.

Look up the following verses (and their context) and then fill in the blank to show who was glorifying/pointing to whom:

John 16:13-15

_____ will glorify Jesus.

_____ will declare the words of _____.

The words of Jesus are from _____.

Look up the following verses (and their context) and then fill in the blank to show who was glorifying/pointing to whom:

John 17:4-5

Jesus glorified _____.

Jesus asked _____ to glorify Him.

If humans were God's focal point, He would be unfulfilled without us, which means He wouldn't be infinitely happy. We very much want and need a happy God, so it's good news for us that He is! Fred Sanders said, "The boundless life that God lives in himself, at home, within the happy land of the Trinity above all worlds, is perfect. It is complete, inexhaustibly full, and infinitely blessed."¹² We see this emphasized in Scripture's teachings of the early church as well.

Read Acts 17:24-25.

According to that passage, what does God need? What needs God? Why?

God needs nothing. That's why He can love so well. This is the best hint we have about why God would create the world—out of an overflow of His infinite love and happiness!

This brings us to the second category of God's relationships; it's something theologians often refer to as the **Economic Trinity**. The word *economic* comes from the Greek word *oikonomia*, which means *household management*.¹³ This phrase essentially relates to how the triune God works outside of Himself, and more specifically, within His family. (That's us!) It refers to all the ways God's personal love spills out into the world.

Before we move deeper into this, let's summarize the internal/external relationships of the Trinity.

Immanent Trinity (internal relationships that pertain to being)

- The Father is the Father because He eternally begets the Son.
- The Son is the Son because He is eternally begotten of the Father.
- The Spirit is the Spirit because He eternally proceeds from the Father, through the Son.

Economic Trinity (external relationships that pertain to doing)

- The Father sent the Son.
- The Son is sent by/of the Father.
- The Spirit is sent by/of the Father and the Son.

These details undergird everything else we'll cover in this study. We will spend time focusing on specific ways the Economic Trinity engages with humanity, but it's important to remember that everything God does flows from who He is, not the other way around. "Trinity" is not the work uniform He puts on when He deals with humanity; it's who He has always been throughout all eternity, unchanged.

You're probably already familiar with some of the major aspects of God's external work—it includes creation, salvation, and restoration. We tend to assign certain works to certain Persons of the Trinity—we think of the Father as the One who created the world, the Son as the One who saved us, etc.—but Scripture reveals that each Person of the Trinity is active in the whole process. While they each have unique roles, they have one shared goal and are each vital in God's relationship with His children.

Read 1 Peter 1:1-2.

What role did Peter attribute to each of the Persons of God in the process of adopting these people into His family?

Father	
Spirit	
Son	

Fred Sanders frequently reiterates in his writings, "The Trinity is the gospel."¹⁴ Without the active engagement of any one of them in our lives, our rescue would fall apart. Inasmuch as they all point to each other and seek to glorify each other in their unity, they work together to pour that love out toward us. The cross demonstrates the infinite loving heart of God to us. It shows us who God has been all along, independent of us. This is why it's so important that God's triune nature is first for Him and secondarily for us. Since we have a God who is already completely fulfilled within Himself, He delights to share that unity and joy! "If this is true," Tim Keller said, "then your absolute highest purpose, your meaning, and the only way you'll ever be happy is if you are glorifying God above all other things."¹⁵ As we seek to live for God's glory, we'll get the joy and delight that comes as a result.

Has there been a time when you actively tried to glorify God in your actions, not out of pressure or guilt, but out of joy? If so, describe that experience and/or the kind of thoughts that came to mind at the time.

Think of a time when you've actively disregarded God and sought to glorify yourself instead. Describe that experience and/or the kinds of thoughts that came to mind at the time.

Love is inherent to who God is. That's what He has extended to us and invited us into. He wants joy for you, and that's why He draws you near—because He's where the joy is!

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

The Weekly Challenge is our practical response to what we've learned in our study and in God's Word this week.

This week we learned that love is at the very core of God's nature. He has always been acting in love—toward Himself and toward you! Since we all want to feel loved, pray and ask Him to give you eyes to recognize His love for you in the various ways it shows up. Throughout this week, be attentive to the ways you feel and see His love for you, trying to identify at least one way each day. Note your experience on your phone, in your journal, or below. Thank God for those glimpses of His character and His relationship with you.

Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his
steadfast love endures forever.

PSALM 136:26

If you're the artistic type, you might even want to create a painting or write a song about the ways you see His love show up in your life.

If weather and health permit, take a thirty-minute prayer walk. If you're unable to go for a walk, try to find a place outside or a quiet spot in your home where you can sit and talk with God. Use the following prompts to guide your prayer time. Silence your phone and set a recurring timer for every ten minutes. Each prompt represents a ten-minute segment of prayer.



Section A (Minutes 1–10): Praise God for who He is and what He does (Ps. 136:26). Thank Him for anything He has taught you about Himself this week. Thank Him for the blessings He has brought into your life.



Section B (Minutes 11–20): Ask God to search your heart and reveal any of your sinful thoughts, words, attitudes, or actions. Confess your sin to Him when He reveals it to you. Because Jesus has already paid your sin debt, there is no shame in these confessions—only freedom and peace (Rom. 8:1-3). Ask Him to turn your heart from sin and turn it toward Himself instead.



Section C (Minutes 21–30): Talk to God about any of your needs or wants (Matt. 7:11). He invites us to bring both the big things and the small things to Him. He already knows what's on your heart and mind, but He wants you to share it with Him in conversation.

4. DISCUSS your personal study from last week and today's teaching video using the following questions:

The three foundations of the Trinity are:

1. There is only one God.
2. There are three divine Persons of the one true God.
3. The three Persons are coequal, co-eternal, and co-relational.

Have you ever struggled to believe any of these foundations? If so, was this session helpful for you? Explain.

What heresies have you encountered or believed? After this week's study, do you have a firmer grasp on why they're inaccurate? Explain.

How did the study this week help you come to a greater understanding of God's character as being consistent throughout Scripture?

How do we benefit from the fact that God is a triune God instead of a solitary god? How would a solitary god be different?

Fred Sanders said, "God is Trinity primarily for himself and only secondarily for us."¹⁶ What did you think about this quote when you first read it? Was it offensive to you? If so, why?

How did your understanding of that quote shift, if at all, after completing this week's personal study?

How would you describe the differences between the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity?

What was your favorite takeaway from this week's study? How will it impact the way you live this week?

5. CLOSE with prayer.

Get the most from your study.

Customize your Bible study time with a guided experience.



Join Tara-Leigh Cobble in this 7-session study as she breaks down the intimidating doctrine of the Trinity. You'll discover a beautiful, foundational view of our triune God that will transform how you relate to Him. Understanding God's three-in-oneness and each of the Persons of God individually—Father, Son, and Spirit—will lead you to deeper intimacy with God and greater joy in knowing Him!

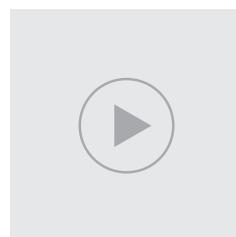
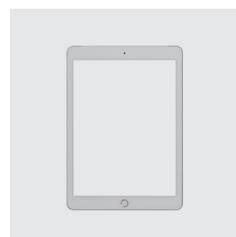
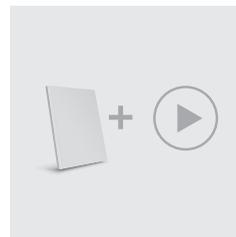
In this study you'll:

- Learn about the unity and diversity of the Trinity.
- Explore the roles of each person of the Trinity.
- Unpack theological truths about prayer and how we can commune with and talk to God.
- Understand how to apply the truth of who God is in the Trinity to your everyday life and how you can relate to Him.

To enrich your study experience, consider the accompanying *He's Where the Joy Is* video or audio teaching sessions. Although you can complete the study without the video or audio sessions, each session packs fundamental truths into approximately 15–20 minutes of teaching from Tara-Leigh Cobble.

Studying on your own or with a friend? Watch or listen to Tara-Leigh Cobble's teaching sessions, available for rent or purchase at lifeway.com/wherethejoyis.

Leading a group? Our leader kits are designed for leaders and make it easy to get your group started. (Leader kit includes one *He's Where the Joy Is* Bible study book, DVDs with teaching videos, and teaching video downloads for three additional users.) Get yours at lifeway.com/wherethejoyis.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit lifeway.com/wherethejoyis to explore the entire study family—*Bible study book*, *leader kit*, *Bible study eBook*, *video teaching sessions*, and *audio teaching sessions*—along with a free session sample, video clips, and church promotional materials.