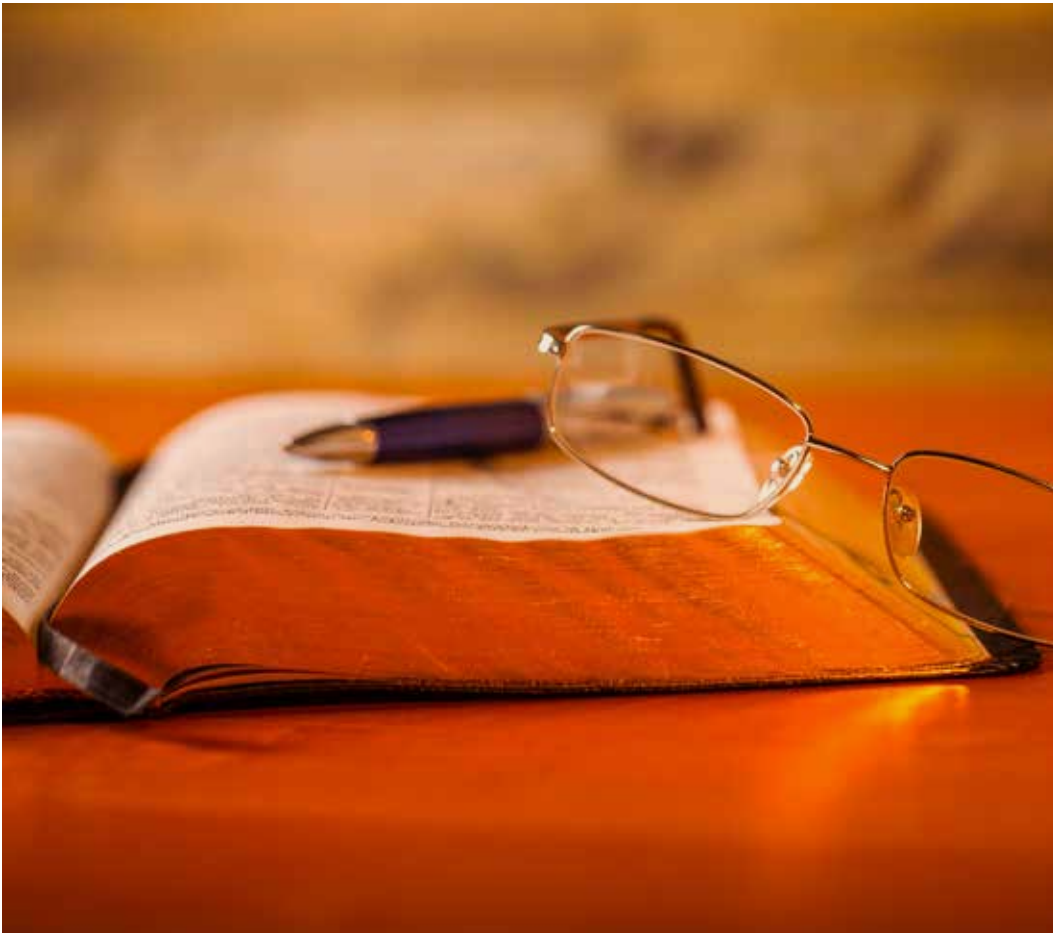


SESSION 1

The Nature of God



QUESTION 1:

When have you looked for answers for something beyond your understanding?

THE POINT

God has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

THE PASSAGES

John 14:8-11,16-20,23-26

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Daylight saving time. Some of us welcome it. Others think it's unnecessary. The rest of us dread it because we struggle every spring and fall to change the clocks in our cars!

We all face things that seem complicated to us, but with enough work and determination we usually can figure them out. Yet some things are beyond our ability to grasp. A four-year-old may be learning to count, but we don't expect him to be able to understand advanced calculus. The child's brain is still developing and it will be a while before abstract ideas like calculus are within his ability to understand. While calculus is beyond his comprehension now, he will grow in his understanding.

One subject that remains beyond our ability to grasp is the Trinity. A key truth in Scripture is that God has revealed Himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Three Persons, but One God. Our finite minds cannot fully comprehend how three can be one, but we can still appreciate the beauty of the nature of God.

John 14:8-11

8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

KEY WORDS: The very works' sake (v. 11)—The miracles that Jesus performed. These not only demonstrated Jesus is God, but they also validated the truth of His words and teaching.

When we think about the Trinity, it's easy to get our brains in a twist. How can *one* be *three*? Are there three Gods? Are they really all the same, but we just have three names for them?

The Trinity is a word we use to try to put God's nature into human words. It describes the three ways God has revealed Himself to us. He has revealed Himself as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, we do not find the word "Trinity" anywhere in Scripture, but many passages help us understand exactly how it works. John 14 is one of those places.

On Jesus' last night with His disciples before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus told them, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him" (v. 7). This wasn't clear to Philip, so he made a request: "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jesus essentially told him, "You're looking at Him." Jesus equated Himself with the Father, but He was not saying He *is* the Father. As He said on an earlier occasion: "I and my Father are one" (10:30).

Legend has it that when Patrick went to Ireland to share the gospel, the people were having trouble understanding the Trinity. So he reached down, plucked a clover from the ground, and explained how the clover had three distinct leaves, but it was just one plant. This might be a helpful way to get the idea of the Trinity in our minds, but it falls short in an important way: God is not divided into parts. Each part of a clover is just a part of the whole. But each Person of the Trinity is *fully* God, not just a part of Him. (Every analogy used to help us understand the Trinity works to a point, but they all fall short.)

Our inability to fully understand how the Father and the Son are one but separate does not mean we can't appreciate the way He works. We might not understand how an engine works in our cars—we may have no idea what each individual part does—but we can still rely on it to take us from place to place. In the same way, we may not understand exactly how God works, but we can know and trust that He does work.

When the Word of God became flesh and made His home among us (1:14), He came to us as Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus is fully God, and He revealed God to us in a way we can relate to. He became human like us. He looked like us. He could walk with us and talk with us. The people could see and touch Jesus. And most importantly, even though He is God, Jesus died as a human. The key difference is that Jesus died with our sins upon Himself. He died in our place so that we could be cleansed from our sins and have eternal life with Him.

Look back at what Jesus said to Philip. By looking at Jesus—a historical figure, a man with flesh and blood—we see God. God the Son shows us God the Father.

Every culture in every place and every time can know God “because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead”

(Rom. 1:19-20). But Jesus reveals God in a different way. He does so in a personal, relatable way. Jesus, who is fully human, is also fully God. God the Father, the sovereign all-powerful, holy Creator of the universe, can be seen in Jesus Christ, God the Son.

QUESTION 2:

In what ways does Jesus show us what God is like?

ENGAGE

What are some attributes or character traits of your father that are also evident in your life? Use the space below to record your answers.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

John 14:16-20

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

19 Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

KEY WORD: Comforter (v. 16)—Literally, one called alongside another. The Spirit protects, guides, and supports believers until Jesus returns.

It's hard giving people bad news. We don't like to see their faces fall or their spirits dampen. You might have been in that position before, trying to find the gentlest way to tell somebody something you know will upset him or make him sad. A man in one of my discipleship groups had to call his oldest son to tell him that his middle son was going away to a live-in rehab facility. He knew this would cause a huge mix of feelings: hope and joy because his brother was getting needed treatment, but sadness and heartbreak because they weren't going to see him for a while. Delivering hard news is difficult, but it is easier if there's good news that accompanies it.

Jesus had just given His disciples seemingly sad news: He was going away, and they couldn't come with Him. It had already been a traumatic night because they learned one of *them* would betray Jesus before the night was over. But Jesus didn't leave them hanging in despair. He was about to leave them, but He would be giving them a gift that was, if they could believe it, better than the gift they had sitting in front of them. Jesus told them later that evening that it was *good* that He was going, because if He didn't, the gift wouldn't come (John 16:7).

This gift, Jesus said, would be a "Comforter," translated from a Greek word that literally means "a calling to one's side." It refers to someone who comes alongside us to comfort, encourage, and exhort us. Specifically, Jesus was referring to the third Person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. A key to understanding the Holy Spirit is Jesus' use of the word *another*. The Greek language had two words for "other/another," and Jesus used the word that means "another of the same kind." In other words, this Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would be just like Jesus! They are both God.

DIGGING DEEPER**THE COUNSELOR**

See the article “The Counselor” on

pp. 24-27 for an explanation of the Greek term *parakletos*, translated variously as “counselor,” “helper,” “advocate,” and “comforter.”

Jesus told us two things about the Holy Spirit:

1. The Comforter was coming so that the disciples wouldn't be left “as orphans.” Jesus wanted them to know that His physical absence didn't mean that the Father had left them on their own.
2. The Comforter was coming so that they could still have access to God just as they had access to God when they talked with Jesus face-to-face.

QUESTION 3:

How does the Holy Spirit work in the life of a believer?

The eleven disciples sitting with Jesus—Judas had already departed (13:30)—had already fulfilled the only requirement for receiving the Holy Spirit: they recognized and acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, the One who came to save them. The promise of the Holy Spirit meant they would not be disconnected from a relationship with God.

This is also good news for us. We don't have Jesus physically standing beside us, eating dinner with us, or teaching us face-to-face. But we still have access to Him because we have His Holy Spirit. When Jesus, the Son of God, is in your life, God the Holy Spirit is in your life. The Holy Spirit will work through you in ways you can't comprehend in order to carry out the desires and the will of the Father.

QUESTION 4:

What are the benefits of having the Holy Spirit in your life?

John 14:23-26

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

One of my friends took a college course on the history of the English language. He learned how English is a blend of a lot of languages, including French. To illustrate this, the professor passed around an article written in French. Bit by bit, the professor walked them through the French, showing them that, when they had someone helping them read it, they were able to use what they had already learned to understand more than they thought they could.

In a sense, this is what Jesus did when He gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit—but on a scale we can't even imagine. When Jesus said it was good that He was going away and the Holy Spirit was taking His place (16:7), He meant it. In God's Word, we have the written testimonies of people who encountered the living Jesus; they recorded what Jesus said and did while He was on earth. But now we have the Holy Spirit to guide us in the same way Jesus guided His disciples.

Jesus said the Spirit would “teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto

you.” Later, as the Spirit moved God’s people to action, we see Him empowering them to share the Gospel in languages they didn’t speak (Acts 2:4), heal the sick and the lame (3:1-9), and discern truth from lies (5:3-4). Whatever the act or situation, each time someone did an amazing thing through the power of the Holy Spirit, it was to further the kingdom of God. It allowed them to reach people who had been unreachable, speak to those who had not heard, and teach the gospel and make disciples in impossible places.

The Holy Spirit we read about in Scripture is the exact same Spirit at work in our hearts today. He still convicts us, moves us, and empowers us. And He dwells inside of everyone who calls Jesus Lord. The Father sent the Son to give us an example to follow and to die for our sins. He sent the Holy Spirit to continue the work of the Son by empowering believers to be His church.

In a similar way to the professor who helped her students understand French even though they didn’t speak a word of it, the Holy Spirit comes alongside us and instructs us in the ways of God. Through the Holy Spirit we can find God’s truth in Scripture, live the way Jesus taught, and carry out the work that Jesus left for us to do: to make disciples of all nations.

QUESTION 5:

How does it make you feel to know that God abides with you and the Spirit helps you understand His Word?

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do with the truth about how God has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

- ▶ **Pray.** Give thanks to God for being a God who reveals Himself to us. Thank Him for coming to us in Jesus Christ and for giving us His Holy Spirit to work in us and through us.
- ▶ **Study.** Compare two passages: Genesis 1:1-2 and John 1:1-18. Underline where you see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in these passages. Make note of the similarities and differences in how the three Persons of the Trinity are described.
- ▶ **Display.** Just as the world around us reveals God, we are called to reveal Him to those around us. Trust the Holy Spirit to give you the opportunity and the words to point others to Jesus.

