

Trinitarian Fellowship: The Word, The Spirit, and Life Together
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 3
© Dallas Willard Ministries

1. Introduction

Did you ever wonder what God was doing before the creation of the universe?

In this session Dallas talks about this. Here is where the idea of the Trinity is so foundational: That God experiences the beauty and the wonder of community relationship within himself – Father, Son, and Spirit – throughout eternity. In the fellowship of the Trinity, there is no unresolved conflict. There is joy. There is mutual submission. There is a dance of servanthood and delight that never ends.

Think of the best relationship you know. Think about the richest, fullest, most satisfying moment in that relationship. That's a tiny echo, a little foreshadowing, of the fellowship to which you have been invited.

You have been invited to be a part of the great dance, the continually increasing _____ of relationship – Father, Son, Spirit, and you!

This is the richness that lies before us, and, in this session, Dallas is going to help us understand how it actually begins right here, right now.

2. God is near, but gives us room.

"Obviously God must guide us in a way that will develop spontaneity in us. The development of character, rather than direction in this, that, and the other matter, must be the primary purpose of the Father. He will guide us, but he won't override us. That fact should make us use with caution the method of sitting down with a pencil and blank sheet of paper to write down the instructions dictated by God for the day. Suppose a parent would dictate to the child minutely everything he is to do during the day. The child would be stunted under that regime. The parent must guide in such a manner, and to the degree, that autonomous character, capable of making right decisions for itself, is produced. God does the same."

— E. Stanley Jones

God leaves us room to decide, to feel, to experience the consequences of events, and to learn how to look to God in everything without expecting to be told _____ to _____.

That is in the context of his constant teaching and our constant speaking.

It's not all about what we're to do; it's about how things are. That's a major part of our relationship to him.

Where does it all begin?



In the Trinity.

Trinitarian Fellowship: The Word, The Spirit, and Life Together
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 3
© Dallas Willard Ministries

3. The Trinity is the model of life with God.

a. What was the glory that Jesus had with the Father before the world existed?

- They [The Trinity] were enjoying one another in the dimensions of personal reality that make the created universe look like a pinpoint.
- The greatness of the Persons that make up the Trinity is the ultimate and eternal reality. It is the Kingdom of God before there was an Earth.
- It is a matter of the Persons that make up the Trinity being in love with one another and _____ one another.

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life [this is eternal living], that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed."

John 17:1-5 (NRSVUE)

b. Persons are made up of experiences.

- They are not made of material of any kind. They are made up of _____.
- Experiences are not physical realities; they're _____ realities. You meet God in your experiences.
- The Trinity consists of inexhaustible experiences.

c. Intimacy is a matter of shared experience.

- To be intimate with God is to share his experiences.
- _____ is the first level of shared experience. It doesn't have to be verbalized in the way we ordinarily think of it.
- The glory that Jesus had with the Father before the world existed was this marvelous company of persons sharing one another and the exploration, thoughts, feelings, and dimensions of experience that we can't identify or imagine.

Trinitarian Fellowship: The Word, The Spirit, and Life Together
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 3
© Dallas Willard Ministries

d. Jesus prayed for us who are his apprentices in Kingdom living that we should know one another with the kind of intimacy that is present between his Father and him.

- For the most part, we are not about to go there because we are too scared. We know intimacy makes us _____ and, as a consequence, we keep our distance. We know we must do that because it is not safe to do otherwise.
- What might the fellowship of apprentices be other than progressively moving, in the company of Jesus and the Trinity, more and more into the open where we are able to trust one another?
- In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes what it is like for people to come together in Christ.
 - It is not safe to come together **except in Christ** because you have conflicting _____ that are not subordinated to God, and the result is alienation. That's the condition of human beings. All the evils that you see in human life come from _____ that, in turn, comes from thinking _____ about God.
 - It's only as you come to know the complete safety that you have in the Kingdom of God that you can begin to move toward other people in the kind of shared life that is found in the Trinity.
 - There's no subordination in the Trinity because the members of the Trinity will not put up with it – because they love one another. They _____ one another.
→ There's no subordination in those who are living in the Trinity.
 - In the Trinity, because there's no alienation, they don't have a conversation; they have communion, and they have union.
 - _____ is where you start to overcome alienation.

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

John 17:21-24 (NRSVUE)

Trinitarian Fellowship: The Word, The Spirit, and Life Together
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 3
© Dallas Willard Ministries

e. Jesus prayed (verse 22) that “the glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

- How is this possible?

Because the Trinity, which is One, _____ us into its fellowship and because of the extension of the Trinity to human beings who have come disciples of Christ and have been baptized in the name [*the reality*] of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

- This is **not** saying as you get them wet, in one way or another, say over them “...in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Rather, it is saying to pull the disciples into communitarian, Trinitarian _____. Then they begin to get a taste of what real life is like and the union of his people is such that you notice, “...I in them and Thou in me; that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know you sent me, and did love them even as you loved me.... that they may behold my glory.”

f. The true way to present Christ is embodied in his _____.

- That glorious community stands forth in Earth, and when people see it, there is no argument left.
- Where’s the competition for being a follower of Christ? *There is none.*

You are invited to practice intimate fellowship with the Trinity.

Trinitarian Fellowship: The Word, The Spirit, and Life Together
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 3
© Dallas Willard Ministries

4. Brother Lawrence and *Practicing the Presence of God*: Key points from a conversation between Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and John Ortberg

- Brother Lawrence practiced the presence of God in the kitchen while he was washing dishes. He said it took him ten years to come into that sense of the practice of the presence of God - to be as much in the presence of God while he was washing pots and pans as he was at the Holy Eucharist. He is a great picture of the hiddenness of the Kingdom.
- Brother Lawrence was intimate with God. He shared God's life right where he was. He did that by not allowing what he was doing to stand against being with God.
- **Intimacy with God is what makes a person a source of light and power.**
- Jesus said anyone who believes on me from his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:38 KJV). Brother Lawrence is illustrative of that; he is so good at helping ordinary people have hope about their lives.
- Dallas teaches that intimacy is built on shared experience, and persons are made up by experiences. John Ortberg asks him to offer an explanation of the meaning of *experience* in this context. Dallas says an experience is a conscious event that becomes a part of your life. You live through experiences. They make up your life, and, since they are shareable, they provide a basis for our lives being shared and for us being intimate with one another.
- For Brother Lawrence, work was not an obstacle, but an avenue.
- The inclusion of you and me and you and others in the Trinitarian fellowship is primarily a matter of bringing our work with us and expecting what we are doing to be a manifestation of the presence of God in our lives. As we do that, we begin to build a substance in our experience that is nourishing to everyone with whom we come in contact. Brother Lawrence is still feeding people by the hundreds.
- We build a history with God through our experiences. It isn't anyplace else and it's nobody else's. It enriches other people and, as that happens in you, it changes you. That's something that you and God have that's private and precious, and anybody can have. That's what makes our lives bigger than our work or our reputation or our success or our bank account. Our *spiritual substance* turns out to be the greatest substance - greater than anything in the world apart from it.

Trinitarian Fellowship: The Word, The Spirit, and Life Together
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 3
© Dallas Willard Ministries

- *Substance* is a biblical term, and it refers to the underlying reality that holds everything else up. In our lives, it isn't the physical side; it's the spiritual side that holds everything else up. That's where eternal life and eternal living comes in because God moves in there with us.

*Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them,
and we will come to them and make our home with them.*

John 14:23 NRSVUE

5. Bonus Session: To Live is Christ

- It's very important for us to understand that intimacy with God and life at a Trinitarian level comes from a kind of understanding and shared feeling and shared action.
- We are given responsibilities to _____ for what is good and to _____ it under God - sharing his life, doing what is good, trusting him, often putting ourselves in a position where what we might think should happen does not happen - even to the point of martyrdom. A lot of people could die for Jesus Christ who can't _____ for him. They don't know how to live. They haven't been taught.
- If we live in this Trinitarian life that is, literally, out of this world, things may happen that we don't want to happen, we don't like, we don't enjoy, but that life is greater than anything that can happen to us in this world, and it is not possible to take that away because it's rooted in the Trinity and the Trinity is _____.
- Look at Revelation 22:5. You need to really take this in because so many Christians, as they grow older, begin acting as if their life is at an end. It has hardly begun. If they don't understand who they are, and they don't understand what kind of world they're in, then they will grow old, and they will think this is the end. One of the greatest ministries that is left undone in our culture by the church is ministry to older people in terms of the kingdom of God and teaching them that it doesn't matter if they're old, they're still in the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God, they are _____ and their lives have _____.

*Then God said, "Let Us
make man in Our image,
according to Our likeness;
and let them rule over the
fish of the sea and over the
birds of the sky and over the
cattle and over all the earth,
and over every creeping thing
that creeps on the earth."*

(Genesis 1:26 NASB)

Trinitarian Fellowship: The Word, The Spirit, and Life Together
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 3
© Dallas Willard Ministries

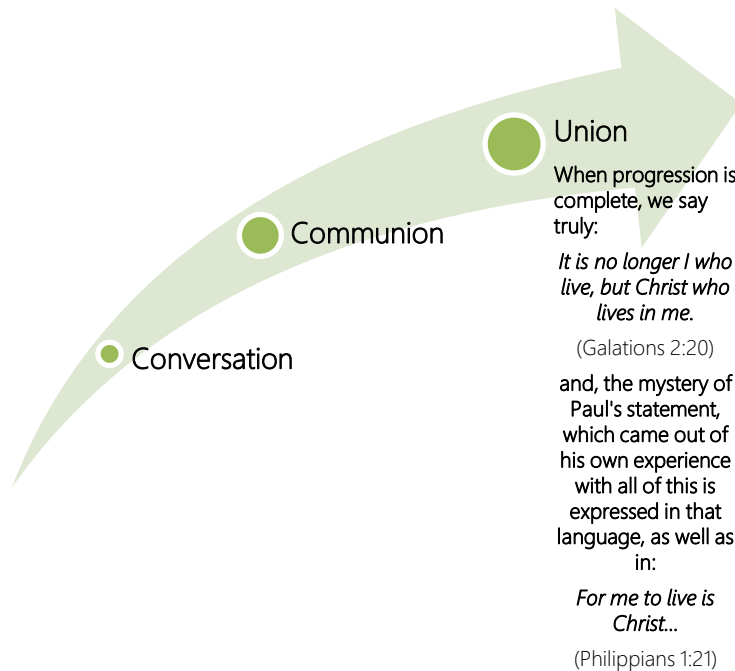
So, look at this verse:

*And there will no longer be any night;
and they will not have need of the light of
a lamp nor the light of the sun, because
the Lord God will illumine them; and they
will reign forever and ever.*

Revelation 22:5 (NASB 1995)

That's what our lives are about, and that is forever.

In summary, the purpose of God's redemptive work: _____ advances into communion
into _____.



Additional Reading Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Spire/Baker, 1967).