

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### Trinity

Let me begin by saying that if you want to read a really good, important (and easy to read) book that details the importance and relevance of the Trinity, I would recommend *"The Great Dance"* by Baxter Kruger. Much of what follows is owed to him (and I'll be including as many excerpts from the book as I can legally get away with).

We all know Keith Walatka, right? Now, if someone were to say that the most important thing you need to know about Keith is that he rides a motorcycle, how would you respond? The truth is, Keith DOES ride a motorcycle...but that is FAR from the most important thing about him. But we can understand that if someone actually thought that about Keith, they really wouldn't know him very well, nor relate with him as well as they could.

But what about God? What's the most important, most fundamental, most essential thing we need to know about God? And what is at stake in this question?

Before we dive too deep into that, a quick preface, an important reminder. No one's view of God is perfect and complete. Or another way of saying that, no one has perfect doctrine. Thankfully we are not "saved" based on how right our beliefs are, just as we are not saved based on how good we are or how much "good works" we do. We will always fall short. But that's not to say that orthodoxy and orthopraxis are not important...they do affect the quality of our lives and our relationship with God.

So, again, what is most important to understand about God? The "Great Dance" is the term Baxter Kruger uses to describe the Trinity.

*"The great dance is all about the abounding life--the fellowship and togetherness, the love and passion and joy--shared by the Father, Son and Spirit. The incarnation is the staggering act of this God reaching out to share their great dance with us. Our humanity is the theatre in and through which the great dance is played out in our lives, and human history is the harrowing experience through which we are educated as to the truth of our identity."* When we think about God, our starting place should be the Trinity, the relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit.

This, then, affects our view/understanding of humanity, our identity and purpose. As Kruger goes on to say...

*"...the central passion of the human heart is to be filled with the great dance, and the chief and maddening riddle of human life is to understand what the dance is and how to live in it."* We were created by (as a result of) this "great dance", and our purpose and fulfillment is found in participating in it, in the life of the Triune God.

Once more, *“God is not some faceless, all-powerful abstraction. God is Father, Son and Spirit, existing in a passionate and joyous fellowship. The Trinity is not three highly committed religious types sitting around some room in heaven. The Trinity is a circle of shared life, and the life shared is full, not empty, abounding and rich and beautiful, not lonely and sad and boring...The great dance is all about the abounding life shared by the Father, Son and Spirit...all begins with the Trinity and the great dance of life shared by the Father, Son and Spirit. That is the rhyme and reason and mystery of it all.”*

Theologically speaking, *“It all boils down to three things: First, there is the Trinity and the great dance of life and glory and joy shared by the Father, Son and Spirit; second, there is the incarnation as the act of the Father, Son and Spirit reaching down, extending the circle, their great dance of life, to us; third, there is our humanity, which is the theatre in which the great dance is played out through the Spirit.”* We need to have this firmly in mind.

Furthermore, *“The Trinity is the most beautiful doctrine in the Christian faith. But it has been disastrously neglected and forgotten, and when it is talked about, the discussion is dominated by those philosophical types who get caught up in the technicalities and miss the main and beautiful point of it all. What the doctrine of the Trinity is telling us is that God is fundamentally a relational being...God has always existed in relationship. Fellowship, camaraderie, togetherness, communion have always been at the center of the very being of God, and always will be.”*

Going a bit deeper, *“Jesus came to be the mediator, the one in whom the divine and the human meet and share life. That is what he did in his incarnate life, death, resurrection and ascension. He forged a connection between the Trinity and us (you and me) and the rest of the human race. He brought about a union between divine and human existence. He opened the great dance and drew us within it.”* As we consider “faith”, then, *“...the great question for us is this: Did the purpose of the Trinity find fulfillment in Jesus Christ? Did he accomplish this union, this connection between the divine life and our lives? Did he draw us within the circle of the Trinitarian dance? This question is the watershed question of the new millennium. Did Jesus Christ unite the Trinity with the human race, or not? How you answer this question determines everything else to be said.”*

Historically speaking, *“The early Church saw that what was fundamental about God was the Trinity. But in the development of Western theology (our tradition), the holiness of God was substituted for the Trinity as the fundamental truth about God. In truth, it was a false view of the holiness of God that was substituted. For the holiness of God, properly understood, is simply beautiful. If we took the joy and the fullness and the love of the Father, Son and Spirit, their mutual delight and passion, the sheer togetherness of their relationship, its intimacy, harmony and wholeness, and rolled them all into one word, it would be ‘holiness.’ The holiness of God is one of the special words we have to describe the wonder and the beauty, the uniqueness and health and rightness of the Trinitarian life. But in the Western tradition, the holiness of God was detached from the Trinity and reconceived within the world of law and order, crime and punishment, blind and cold justice. Reconceived within this stainless-steel world of pure law,*

*'holiness' came to mean 'legal perfection' or 'moral rectitude.' This notion of holiness was then taken back into the doctrine of God and substituted for the Trinity as the deepest truth about God--the driving force of divine existence...The gospel in the Western model begins with the statement that God is holy (holy in the legal sense). The human race fell into sin and is liable to punishment. Jesus Christ, against this backdrop, comes to satisfy the holiness and justice of God. On the cross, the guilt of the human race is placed upon Jesus Christ, and God's punishment for sin is poured out upon him. God's justice is satisfied and we are forgiven-- legally clean."*

As this happened, things got really screwy. Our entire concept/view/understanding of God was skewed. Practically speaking, God became viewed as an angry Being that needed to be appeased. The cross became more central than Jesus. And while we would never want to minimize what Jesus accomplished on the cross, He is still much bigger than that. Additionally, there was shift from an emphasis of adoption (into the "Great Dance") to an emphasis on justification. Again, while justification is incredibly important, our adoption is more important and more central. We are more than forgiven. We are participants in the "Great Dance". Also, from a missiological standpoint, if we get this wrong, then what message are we sharing with others? It stands to reason that if we misunderstand God, then whatever we share with others about God will only further the misunderstanding. We, the church, are called to represent and reflect the Triune God to the world. When people see the church, they should see a glimpse of the "Great Dance".

Let's return to our opening example of Keith. Let's say someone were to say that the most important thing you need to know about Keith is that he's a pastor. Is that correct/accurate? Well, it's certainly more central than knowing he rides a motorcycle. But is it the most essential, most fundamental thing to know about Keith? Similarly, being "closer to central" about God can still create a fundamentally flawed understanding of God...and a flawed understanding of God naturally results in a flawed understanding of humanity. The central, most essential thing to know about God is that God is a divine community (Trinity) of Father, Son and Spirit, who exist in perfect love, joy, peace, passion, and harmony. If this is not our starting point, everything else will be off target.

- Q. What is the most important thing to know about God? What makes you think that? How do you know that to be true?**
- Q. If you were going to tell someone about God, or if someone asked you to describe God, where would you start? (And why there?)**
- Q. We are probably familiar with the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5:22-23 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control). As "fruit" of the Spirit, we can also understand these words to describe what God is like. Spend some time reflecting on those words. How do these words/descriptions line up with your understanding/conception of God? Explain.**
- Q. What do we lose if we don't properly understand the Trinity?**

- Q. What happens when we disconnect the idea of “holiness” from the Trinity?**
- Q. What happens when we emphasize justification over adoption?**
- Q. Think back to you earliest conceptions of God. Describe those early impressions God, as well as how your understanding of God has evolved over the years. What were some keys for your growth and reconceiving of God?**
- Q. Describe a time when you’ve been misunderstood (like someone didn’t understand the “real you”—what you’re really like, your motivations, your character and personality, etc. How did that make you feel? How did you go about clearing up that misunderstanding/misconception? Now consider that God is the most misunderstood Person ever. How would/could He go about clearing that up?**
- Q. From your observation, what is most misunderstood/misconceived about God?**
- Q. How can/do we, as the Church, go about helping people understand God?**