

# The Triune God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let me add my hello to you and my welcome to church. My voice is particularly bassy tonight and I apologise for that. I'll do my best not to cough over the microphone.

We are beginning a new series tonight which is very exciting. It's exciting because of the topic. It's also daunting as a preacher. We're beginning a series called Knowing God which we are going to sit in for the next six weeks.

And the goal of this series is, like it sounds, for us to really reflect on and soak in who God is, to look at his character, to try and understand him better.

I want to recommend a couple of books to you right up front. We stole the title from this book, Knowing God by J.I. Packer which is a sensational read. We're not following the book necessarily but it is a great book for the sort of things that we're going to be looking at and wrestling with over the next couple of weeks.

And this slightly smaller book by Bruce Ware called Father, Son and Holy Spirit I have found particularly helpful as I have wrestled with the doctrine of the Trinity which we are going to do over the next six weeks.

[ 1 : 12 ] It may feel daunting even to use that word Trinity as we get ready for six weeks of wrestling with it. And you may be sitting there thinking, why this?

Surely there are many other series that we could look at. There might be really specific practical concerns that you would love us to wrestle with. Maybe your work-life balance.

Maybe your finances. Maybe any number of other things. But we have chosen this and it's worth us asking the question why. Because there is a danger in a series like this.

There is a danger when we wrestle with who God is when we wrestle with theology ultimately.

That's what we're doing. There's the danger that we approach it simply with the goal that we will know stuff.

That we will have more anecdotes about who God is. That we will have more ammunition to shout back at people when we get in arguments at work or uni or school. There is of course the danger that we are just doing this series so that we know more stuff about God.

[ 2 : 19 ] If that is our goal, if that is your goal, you are on a path to self-satisfaction, self-condemnation and self-righteousness which are all of no value.

And so we need to be really careful about our motivations when we look at something like the character of God. We need to ensure that we're coming at this for more than just information.

Theology is one of those nerdy words which sometimes immediately gives us a picture of just library, university, high pants, whatever other things you're thinking of.

We need to ensure that that's not our goal for this series. It's not our goal ever when we open the Bible and particularly as we wrestle with knowing God, we don't just want to know more stuff about God at the end.

If that's where we get to, we will have wasted six weeks of time together and six weeks of opening the Bible together. So theology, which is basically the study of God, is a gift.

[ 3 : 15 ] It is something in which we can find great encouragement. Let me read to you the words of a very, very great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, when beginning a sermon at the age of 20, which is slightly intimidating.

But let me read you very briefly his introduction as he began wrestling with this topic specifically. He said that the most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity.

Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of a man as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the deity.

And whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound.

In musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief. And in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares?

[ 4 : 22 ] Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea. Be lost in his immensity, and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated.

I know nothing which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief, so speak peace to the winds of trial as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.

He finds in his study of God comfort, encouragement, challenge, rebuke, healing, inspiration, and that is why we're going to spend some time wrestling with what is a difficult topic.

I want to acknowledge that it'll be hard for the next six weeks, but it's worth it for those reasons that he has just articulated for us. Theology is a gift to us for our sake.

It's not a pointless exercise. It is a gift that God has given us, but more than a gift, it is a necessity.

According to Jesus himself, the eternal life that we have is knowing God.

[ 5 : 26 ] In John 17, he says it explicitly, this is eternal life that they may know you, the one true God. And so we must do theology, because that is the life that Jesus has died and risen again to give us.

But as well as being a gift and as well as being a necessity, theology is, as Spurgeon has said, incredibly practical. You might think of other places you want to start, thinking about the character of God may appear abstract, but we need to remember that God is the ultimate reality in the universe. He is the defining true thing. He is the measure for all other things. He is the means and the necessary means by which we can look at other things, look at our finances, look at our work-life balance, look at whatever else it may be.

It doesn't appear attractive at first. It's like when you're designing a house or going to look at a house that you want to buy. You don't start with the sewage system. You start with the veneer on the outside or what gardens you might have.

The sewage system doesn't appear appealing or attractive, but a house is not functional if it doesn't have some sort of sewage system. Fairly soon, if you completely neglected to ensure that it was working, it would destroy the nice grass and the nice veneer and the nice carpets in your house.

[ 6 : 46 ] Now, of course, there's a problem there because we're saying that God is like sewage, but the point is it doesn't appear attractive in a setting like this with the Bible open to go straight to just thinking about who God is.

We want to jump to the more interesting stuff, the stuff that really touches us immediately, like sexual purity, like generosity, like love.

But unless we understand the character of God, we can't do those things because the character of God is central. He is the thing that defines the way we use our finances, the way we treat one another, the way we use our time.

And so we will begin this year by wrestling with what appears abstract, with what might be intimidating, with what might be scary, and we will wrestle with our God who is Trinity.

The passages that Tim read out for us before in the Philippians passage, Paul expresses a deep desire that he might know God. And I want to begin, you may think I've already begun, I want to begin by asking the question, what can we actually know about God?

[ 7 : 56 ] As Christians, we love to talk about having a relationship with God. That sounds fantastic, but what do we even mean by that? I mean, God is up there, isn't he?

So when we describe a relationship with God, do we mean the same thing that we mean when we talk about relationships with one another? How do relationships work when you meet somebody? You initiate them by slowly getting to know them. The relationship only works if both parties are gradually giving more of themselves, and giving more access of themselves to the other person. And progressively, as you learn more of what things excite them, and what things upset them, and what things anger them, and you become invested in those things, and you become excited by what excites them, and saddened by what saddens them, and offended by what offends them, your relationship grows, and is strengthened, and you come closer together.

I don't mean merely romantic relationships. This might be just a friend that you meet, this might be an acquaintance, this could even be a family member. I am enjoying getting to know my son at the moment.

[ 9 : 02 ] We've only had him for 10 months, and progressively, as he discovers more of who he is, he's able to disclose more of who he is to me and Sal as well.

And so as we get to know him, he gets to know more of us, and the relationship grows. For a relationship, there needs to be some sort of access given.

And when there's a superior in the relationship, the access is entirely one directional. Imagine for a second that you have won some sort of lottery, and you are given the opportunity to meet the queen.

And not just that meet the queen where you stand in a queue, shake the hand, or curtsy, or whatever, and then she moves on and pays no attention to you, but meet the queen in a way where you get to sit down with her, have some face time, just you and her.

And initially, you sit down, and if she was to insist that you referred to her as her majesty, if she was to limit the discussion to the weather, or the current affairs that were going on, you might walk away a little bit disappointed, because even though you had met her, and you had spoken to her, and you knew her name, you probably wouldn't say you had a relationship with her.

[ 10 : 18 ] But if she was to invite you in, and as you sat down, she said, please call me Liz. And she began to give you a little bit more access to who she is.

She began to share her frustration at the comical version of a family that she has. She began to talk about and discuss the things that have been difficult in her lifetime.

She began to share some of her personal experiences. She began to let you in to see who she is and what matters to her. Only then would you begin to feel like there was some sort of relationship. And can you see that you can only have a relationship in so much as she reveals herself to you? It's entirely her prerogative. As the queen, she could just ring her secret service and probably find out everything there is to know about you.

But for you to know her, she needs to make a decision that she will show herself to you. Only what is revealed can be known. And the same is true of us and God. There is a relationship between us and God, but it's not a relationship between equals.

[ 11 : 22 ] Our relationship with God is limited to what He shows us of Himself. And so really quickly, I want to have a look at how He shows us Himself.

The Bible tells us in Romans chapter 1 that in nature, we get a bit of a glimpse into God. In nature, we begin to see that God is powerful and immense. We get to see that God is sovereign, that God is in control, that God looks after and sustains even the little things, that God can control the storms and the seasons and the days and the nights and the years and the generations.

But it's not until we get to Jesus that we begin to see some serious revealing, some serious revelation. There is a verse at the beginning of the book of Hebrews. Sorry, I should have bookmarked lots of these, but I'll flick around.

There is a verse at the very beginning of Hebrews in Hebrews chapter 1 which says this, In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed heir of all things and through whom He made the universe.

God gives Jesus so that we can see Him, so that we can get a fuller picture of Him. Colossians 1 talks about Jesus being the exact representation of the Father in heaven, that the point of Jesus arriving, the point of Jesus coming to earth is so that we can see what bits of God He wants us to see, so that there will be something on show that we can begin to relate to.

[ 12 : 55 ] He already knows us, He made us, He's the Creator, but the bit that we relate with is the bit that God has shown us and the bit that He has shown us is His Son, Jesus.

But the amazing good thing about our God, even though He is far above us, even though He is far beyond us, is that He actually wants to be known.

Sometimes there is this inkling that maybe God is happier, separate from us, that maybe God kind of humors us by just dangling a carrot, but repeatedly throughout Scripture, God shows us that His desire is for people, humans, to know Him.

In Jeremiah chapter 31, God makes a covenant with His people. Jeremiah 31, 33 says this, This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel.

After that time, declares the Lord, I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother saying, Know the Lord, because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest,

declares the Lord.

[ 14 : 11 ] God's plan from the beginning was that people would know Him. People have been missing it and rejecting it, but even from way back here before Jesus, God's agenda was that all people would know Him, not know about Him, not have some idea who He is, not be able to spell His name, but have a relationship with Him.

We flick forward into the New Testament, into John chapter 17, and this time we have Jesus praying. John 17 is a chapter we're probably going to go back to a couple of times over the next few weeks, but in John 17 and verse 6, Jesus says this, I have revealed you, talking to His Father in heaven, to those whom you gave me out of the world.

The job that Jesus was given by God was to reveal God, to show God, and so everything He does on earth is to show us the God of heaven so that we might know Him.

The relationship is not to be just information, the relationship is to be information and response. It's to be head and heart and hands and feet and whole of life.

God shows us who He is that that might shape who we are and that that might shape the lives that we live. The end point that we see in Scripture is every tongue confessing that Jesus is Lord, is every knee bowing because finally they know who God is, because finally they are confronted with His majesty.

[ 15 : 41 ] God is not hiding, God's goal is not to be hard to find, His goal is that people would know Him. So what can we know of God? We can know what He has revealed and what has He revealed?

He has revealed Himself in His Son, He has revealed Himself in His creation and for us He has compiled those things in Scripture so that even thousands of years after Jesus' life, death and resurrection we still can meet God.

We can still have Him speak to us. Our relationship with God is not exactly like our other relationships. We can't see God but we can have Him speak to us every day.

We can have Him show us more of His character through the people around us. We can have a relationship with Him. One thing that we're going to wrestle with in particular over the next few weeks is that God has revealed Himself as Trinity.

He hasn't used the word Trinity and the word is sometimes something that we trip over but He has revealed Himself as a God who is three and a God who is one.

[ 16 : 54 ] This is the bit where we start to get concerned, our heads start to spin, we start to get nervous but the testimony of the Bible is that God is Father, God is Son and God is Holy Spirit.

I want to put it out there straight away. this is a truth that is incomprehensible. This is a truth that is beyond us but it's still true which means it still matters and the reason it matters is because we can only have a relationship with what God has revealed to us and God has revealed to us that He is Trinity.

So if we're going to have a relationship with God, it needs to be with the God who is Trinity. Over the next few weeks you're going to find that I repeat myself a lot. I'm not doing it by accident hopefully.

There are things that Scripture testifies to over and over again. We will go to verse after verse that tells us that there is one God and one God alone and so I will keep telling you that.

We will go to verses that tell us that Jesus is God, that the Spirit is God, that the Father is God over and over again because that is what Scripture tells us.

[ 18 : 15 ] We are still then standing in that awkward position of saying there's one but there's three but there's one but there's three but we need to be clear Scripture keeps saying them so they're true. What we want to wrestle with, what do we do with that fact?

That there is a oneness in God, a unity that cannot be broken, that cannot be separated but there is also a distinction, there is a threeness in God.

So again, what do we do with that? Well, it's okay for us to acknowledge that it's hard to understand. We need to remember that we are trying to contain a God who is infinite, a God who is outside of this apparently infinite galaxy that we live in.

He created it and yet we're trying to collect all of that power and majesty and condense it into our little brains. That's never going to work.

I was trying to think of an illustration to show us the difference between something finite, trying to understand something that's infinite and I couldn't come up with anything because there is nothing

that is that ridiculous and that far apart.

[ 19 : 29 ] Seriously, I was asking around and I was just looking for something that showed that the immense gap between finite and infinite and finite being contained and infinite being uncontained and that trying to understand.

You can't do it because it is just so overwhelmingly unrealistic but yet that is what we're trying to wrestle with right now. And that might be frustrating and discouraging but just be reminded that God wants to be known.

That's His goal and so He will give us what we need to know Him. He will give us enough that we can understand who He is and that we can have a relationship with Him.

And so to this point in terms of what we can know about God and the relationship that we can have all I want to say for tonight is that God has revealed Himself in nature, in His Son, in Scripture and that revelation is that God is triune.

that God is one and God is three and that's the God that we are in a relationship with. The testimony of 1 Corinthians 13 which Tim read out, you might have been wondering why are we reading this wedding passage?

[ 20 : 38 ] If you've got it in front of you, have a look at 1 Corinthians 13. Verse 9, We know in part and we prophesy in part but when perfection comes the imperfect disappears.

Now I want to go down to verse 12. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror. Then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part. Then I shall know fully even as I am fully known.

The barrier for us now is not just our finiteness and God's infinity. The barrier for us now is the fact that we are imperfect and He is perfect.

It is complex. There's no denying it. It is difficult. There's no denying it but it is true and the barrier for us to this truth is the fact that we are sinful people and that is why again this relationship we have with God starts with Him revealing Himself not us finding Him.

Not us grasping who He is. Not us studying to a point where suddenly we can understand it. It's necessarily His initiative to choose to reveal to us and to enable us to understand enough of Him that we might be shaped by it and that it might change us.

[ 21 : 53 ] Now because of the fun that we are going to have wrestling with the Trinity for the next six weeks I wanted to flag for you that in week five I know it sounds like a long way away in week five we are actually going to give some time in our service for questions.

Now you might be a little bit shy about asking questions in the service at any point between now and then you can email me a question. I won't name you I won't it would be anonymous that's fine but chances are if you're wrestling with it there's other people as well so please be brave enough to throw it up there and it will bless all of us to wrestle with it.

I want to tell you in advance I won't have all the answers but it will be good for us to see what things that we are grasping and what things we're missing as well together so that's going to be in a few weeks. The Trinity is a stumbling block for some of us because for some of us we have had different illustrations thrown at us over the years that can be less than helpful.

Well intentioned but not necessarily helpful. The water one is the first one that came to mind. We think of the Trinity as water, steam and ice.

H<sub>2</sub>O has its three forms. It's a good idea there is threeness but there's not oneness in the water, steam and ice because God is one and three at the same time whereas water can be water, ice or steam.

[ 23 : 10 ] Now someone very smart in our congregation has apparently pointed out to me that it is actually possible for water to be the three at the same time but I've never heard that version of the illustration with God so when I was told the illustration it was unhelpful.

The point is the reason the Trinity can be confusing is as soon as somebody gives you something to help you understand it you suddenly realise that that's completely inadequate and it's actually distracting and that's kind of encouraging.

If God could be explained in water, steam and ice I'd be kind of disappointed. I don't know how much confidence I could have in this water, steam and ice God to save me from my sins and give me eternal life.

It is hard. It is frustrating. But the majesty of God is an encouragement. It's who He is. He's not going to dumb it down for us.

He's giving us enough of Himself that we might know Him. And then that verse in 1 Corinthians 13 Now I know in part then I shall know fully even as I am fully known.

[ 24 : 15 ] Once we have been fully transformed once Jesus has come back then we will get to grasp and bask in and rejoice in and enjoy God in His fullness.

Without the blinkers required to stop us from becoming overwhelmed we will get God fully when He finally comes back. Trinity is who God is and to reject it or to avoid it because it's difficult is to reject or avoid God.

Because this is Him. There is no other version. To have a different God than this is to have a God that you've made up. A God who is not God at all. And so it's important that we wrestle with this and so we will.

And we probably will continue to for many more years in our lives. In Matthew 28 the disciples are instructed to go into all the nations baptizing into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

One name. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The God we worship His name is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The God who you follow His name is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[ 25 : 18 ] And so we are going to wrestle with we are going to ask God to give us eyes to see hearts to understand that we might be shaped by who He is and by His character.

But lastly tonight was looking at what we can know about God the relationship that we can have and it's kind of introductory because we're going to start looking at each member of the Trinity going forward but I wanted to before we finish quickly wrestle with what it means to be known by God because a relationship is two way.

God has the seat of authority He's the one who initiates He's the one who reveals but it is a relationship where we know Him and He knows us.

So what does that mean? What's so unique about that? Because on one level you could say God knows everyone God made everything God made everyone Psalm 139 testifies that God knits us together in our mother's womb that He knows every step before we take it and so what do we mean when we talk about being known by God in a relationship with Him?

Let me take you to two examples really quickly if you're fast jumping through your Bible flick back to Exodus 33 if not you can just listen in you might be faster than me anyway to be honest with you Exodus 33 this is an incident involving Moses talking to God and in Exodus 33 beginning at verse 12 Moses said to the Lord you have been telling me lead these people but you have not let me know whom you will send with me you have said this is quoting God I know you by name and you have found favour with me if you're pleased with me teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you remember that this nation is your people the Lord replied my presence will go with you and I will give you rest then Moses said to him if your presence does not go with us do not send us up from here how will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us what else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth he's really keeping it verse 17 and the Lord said to Moses

[ 27 : 31 ] I will do the very thing you have asked because I am pleased with you and I know you by name God's knowing of Moses here is not simply a knowledge about it's not simply a knowledge of here God's knowing of Moses is directly connected to God's saving work in Moses circumstance God's saving work in Israel's history God knowing Moses is directly connected with God leading Israel out of Egypt of his presence going with them and continuing to look after them really quickly in the New Testament just to show you that this isn't just the Old Testament before we get to Jesus John 10 verse 14 Jesus says I am the good shepherd I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep I know my sheep and my sheep know me there's the two-way relationship that God has designed for us and then at the end there I lay down my life for the sheep

Jesus does not lay down his life for the sheep because the sheep know him it's his knowledge of the sheep that moves him to lay down his life God's knowing of us God's knowledge of us God's side of the relationship is directly connected to his saving mercy in our lives this is an amazing blessing because as you wrestle with things like theology and difficult concepts like the trinity it's easy to feel inferior to maybe people who have read more than you or have studied more than you or know more than you or can use bigger words than you but here we are seeing that the thing that saves you is not your knowledge knowledge is not your level of understanding it's God's knowledge of you it's God's knowing of you it's God's choosing of you it's God's loving of you and so that means that as we begin this series we can take away that burden of I need to reach a point of

knowing a point of understanding a point of knowledge of this trinity thing to really be a Christian what God is saying is I know you I love you I know you inside out and I've still chosen to love you even though I know everything about you there is nothing that could stop me from loving you and so your knowledge of him is just a gift that he has given you the reason it is worth wrestling with things like the trinity is because in the character of God just like Spurgeon encourages us and like scripture shows us we find comfort when we're alone we find strength when we are weak we find healing when we are sick our knowing of God is a gift because he saved us not something that in some way could earn his saving for us it matters that we wrestle with the character of the God that we follow and serve because he is the one who will shape us to live life the way he has designed it it's God's knowledge that saves us and our knowledge of God is merely a gift for our joy for our sake that we might know the God who is love that we might know the God who is hope that we might know the God who is so far above and beyond our understanding that sometimes it hurts our head to think about that is God's gift to give us access to the greatest thing that there is himself as we move into this series over the next few weeks I want to encourage you that in the times where maybe you're feeling a little bit overwhelmed or discouraged please persevere please put up your hand if you've got questions please let us know if you're struggling to understand things because the point of wrestling with who God is is not to know stuff is not to show off but is that all of us might have our lives changed is that all of us might as we get to know God better love him more and feel loved by him more might grasp more of just the lengths that he went to just how amazing it is that a God who is one and three at the same time would choose to become human for us the goal is that he gets glory and that we progressively become more like his son I'm going to pray for us and then in just a second Danny's going to continue for us Father God we acknowledge that there are aspects of theology and there are aspects of studying you and your character that are intimidating and maybe appear abstract and potentially even unhelpful but God give us the patience and the perseverance to push through in those moments and to recognize that there is nothing better than knowing you Lord keep us from settling for a less version of you than the one that you have revealed in scripture and in your son Lord as we come up against things that we don't understand give us the humility to acknowledge it and to ask for your help

[ 32 : 56 ] God and I pray that the result of looking at you as Father Son and Holy Spirit will be that we are more confident in the forgiveness you have for us more confident in the love that you have worked in Jesus and more excited to love and serve you with every minute that you give us Father we thank you for your word and pray that by it you might show us yourself more clearly and might change and shape us that we might shine you into a world that doesn't know you Amen have a selfish dream all right ■■ awesome tom