

Garden Church

House Church Handbook *Vol. 2*

Love God



gardenchurch.life/leader

“One of Jesus’ final instructions to his disciples was that they should “teach them [other disciples] to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). However, his commands are peppered throughout the first five books of the New Testament and the early part of Revelation, so it is not easy to draw out the key themes of his teaching without some detailed analysis.” - Matthew Duncan, Teach Them to Obey

As a House Church we want to grow together in being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did. During the lifespan of your House Church you will hold each other accountable to learn Jesus’ commands and to go out to live them out. The results will be that each person who is committed to walking in life with one another will also see the fruit of intimacy with Jesus. It is the balance of the collective holding the individual to become dependent on Christ.

Important Note:

In the first few months of House Church, Leaders will model and carry out the rhythms of House Church (Family, Meals, Worship, Scripture, Prayer, and Spirit). Find ways to invite others to participate.

Required Reading:

Teach Them to Obey: Studies for Disciples (p.27-40)

Recommended Reading:

God Has a Name

Experiencing the Trinity

Take Practice of the Presence of God

Delighting in the Trinity

The Deep Things of God

The Practice of Being with Jesus

How to be Filled with the Holy Spirit

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God: Community of Love

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Week 1

Overview:

Who is the God we are called to love? God is a community of love. It is that community we are invited to share, know, and dance with. We will spend this week introducing our hearts to the heart of the Creator.

Discussion:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God,
Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come.
Amen.

Nicene Creed

Discipleship to Jesus lives to move in a few directions. **Followers should seek to become more like Jesus as they also deepen their relationship with God and others (Diag. 1).** While we want to know Jesus as our rabbi, we are invited to something deeper. Jesus is the bridge for us to know God in His fullness.

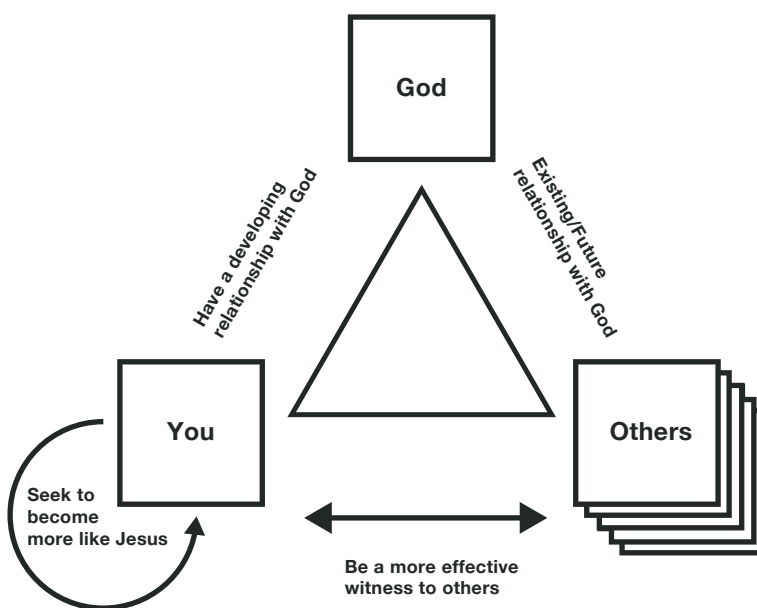
Walking with God is a life long journey which leads us into a deeper knowing of Him. While this knowing may be through a mirror dimly on this side of life, we can learn from the Christian tradition in order to carry orthodox parameters as we engage with God. Because, as followers of Jesus, we worship a triune God.

Centuries have been spent trying to verbalize and understand the Trinity, because it is a doctrine that is left for distant theologians. The Trinity is fundamental to our faith, and a necessary

Followers should seek to become more like Jesus as they also deepen their relationship with God and others

Diag. 1

**Discipleship:
Follow Jesus.
Love God.
Love Your Neighbor.**



theological basis in order to align with orthodox Christianity. When we grow in understanding the Trinity, it helps us live out our faith in a wholistic way.

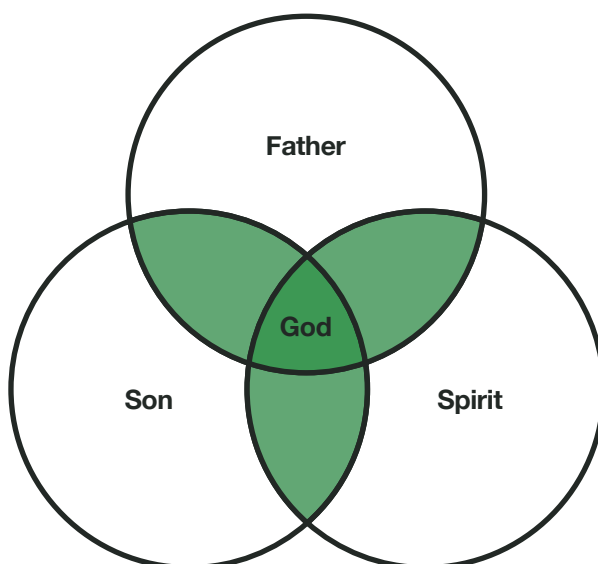
Why does this matter? Why should we talk about it in House Church? How does it impact my discipleship?

God is a community of love. We serve one God who is three persons. This is a hard thing for most people to understand, but this is not for us to know as a way to argue about it. As a community of love, we are invited to dance with God as a son and daughter.

See, God is love and knows how to love, and this love is something we get to step into. It is how we talk to God, it is how we relate to God, it is also how we allow God to shape us. The Trinity is not head knowledge, but heart knowledge that shapes how we live out our faith.

The early Christian creeds were formed through those who wrestled with trying to understand how there is one God that is three persons. The words in these creeds were meticulously chosen, because the writers knew that how they articulated these creeds would help followers of Jesus shape their imagination towards the biblical image of God revealed through Jesus.

Jesus, then becomes our baseline in this journey of understanding God. We know that God always looks like Jesus. Yet the distinguishing piece we must remember, is that Jesus is not the Father, and not the Spirit. However, it is through Jesus where we see the fullness of God (Colossians 1:15-20). This gives us the confidence to know that that God, and all the persons of the godhead, align with the heart and character of Jesus. That will be our guiding line.



The Trinity: Community of Love

God is three persons who love one another. God is love (1 John 4:7-21). We must understand that at the very center of God is love. This love is expressed through three persons. Neither are superior over the other, and all are in submission to one another. It is the divine dance that expresses itself through love.

Father

God chose to reveal Himself in the person of the Father originally. All of the universe and life was created from the Father. The Father doesn't do this alone, but creates in partnership with the Spirit (Genesis 1:2) by the Son (Colossians 1:16). It is the Father's love for the Son and the Spirit that creates the whole universe.

Our Father invites us to relate to Him as that, the Father of the universe. This is not some mean father, but one of love. It is His will that we are invited to observe and submit to. The Father was mankind's first step of knowing love in history.

Son

Love again invites us to know Him closer. God moves into the neighborhood as the second person of the Trinity, the Son, Jesus Christ. God put on flesh to display Love. The Son, lived in human history modeling for humanity what life is supposed to look like according to the Father's will. A life empowered by Love. While Jesus was fully man and fully God, He lived a life of submitting to the Father's will empowered by the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

This submission brought the Son of Love to die, and save humanity from sin and death. So the Son is also Savior. Additionally, when Jesus was resurrected after death, it was a reign of a new

time. The Kingdom of God was being established. The Father's will was that the Son would be King. So the Son reveals God's love through Rabbi, Friend, Savior, and King. Our response then is to specifically proclaim and worship Jesus as Lord.

Spirit

The God of Love not only moves near us through the Son. God then moves closer to live IN and THROUGH us. The Holy Spirit dwelt and empowered the Son to live in obedience to the Father. The same Spirit that lived in Christ now lives in us. God's empowering presence of love is now active and alive in us!

God's Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in our lives as a marker of His presence. It is God's breath, life, and power. Jesus made miracles happen through the Holy Spirit. Prophecy happens through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the one who moves God's Kingdom of love forward.

Discipleship and the Trinity

Through God's love, we are invited into living life as it was intended, free from sin and death to love God and love others. When we accept and believe the Gospel and confess that Jesus is Lord, we are born again into a new humanity. **Like Jesus, this humanity is empowered by God's Spirit; to be with, become, and do what Jesus did, all in obedience to the Father's will. (Diag. 3)**

Our discipleship is now found at the center of the divine dance of God, in the Community of Love. We will spend this month learning what that looks like, and how we can posture ourselves for a lifetime of growing to know this God.

Guiding Questions

How often do you think of God as Trinity?

How have you experienced God's love?

Possible Responses

This is a heavier topic than most weeks. Most people don't think about and dive into the deep topic of the Trinity. Allow for more time of discussion, processing, and decompression.

If there are any questions that are asked that need more research or thought, take notes and reach out to your Regional House Church Pastor. You will be spending the few weeks learning more about each person of the Trinity, and some questions might be answered in that time.

Practice (together):

We must learn how to see God as living, breathing, and speaking here and now.

For the next three weeks we will be bringing people in the middle of the room to pray for them,

"If Jesus were to walk in the room what would he say to _____?"

Take time to do this for everyone in the room.

Practice (homework):

Practice the discipline of Silence & Solitude.

Simply enjoy the Lord's presence.

Use your imagination to be in the presence of the Trinity.

Additional Resources

Book: God Has a Name by John Mark Comer

Book: Experiencing the Trinity by Darrell W. Johnson

Book: Delighting in the Trinity by Michael Reeves

Book: The Deep Things of God by Fred Sanders

Citations

Diagram 1: Discipleship Visual from Teach Them to Obey by Duncan Matheson

Diagram 2: Visual Icon: the Trinity by Garden Church

Receive the Holy Spirit

Week 2

Overview:

The Father sends the Son who is filled by the Spirit in order to carry out God's will into the world. The Spirit is then sent from the Son to dwell in each believer, to then live like the Son as He obeyed the Father. The Holy Spirit must be whom we rely on if our discipleship will be more than just legalistic restructuring of our lives. We must be utterly reliant on the Holy Spirit to empower us for our everyday ordinary lives as disciples. This week we will discuss what it means to receive the Holy Spirit, and to continually be filled by Him.

Discussion:

15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. - Ephesians 5:15-20

The Holy Spirit is part of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a force or some abstract other. In the same way we can have a living relationship with God the Father and God the Son, Jesus, we can be in a living relationship with the Holy Spirit. In the same way that we grow in our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, we can grow in our relationship with the Holy Spirit. Our relationship with the Holy Spirit doesn't have to be mystical and marked only by moments of emotional ecstasy—although it is normal to experience big emotions when we encounter the Holy Spirit. It's important to understand that big emotions are not the ultimate and only sign that the Holy Spirit is present and active in our lives. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is not some force somewhere out there, essential to faith and living but absent and foreign. The Holy Spirit is God in us.

We see throughout scripture the same narrative of truth, that God has always desired a close and personal presence with His people. He walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the Garden, dwelled among His people in the pillar of cloud and fire, and descended upon the Temple of His presence. God became flesh and descended from heaven to be Emmanuel—God with us. Now through the Holy Spirit, God is closer than ever—God in us. God made it so that those who belong to Him, those saved by grace through faith, are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. You and me, broken, imperfect dusty pots of clay, are the dwelling place of God the Holy Spirit.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” - John 14:16-18

It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live Holy lives. We are able to live consecrated lives, obey the word of God, honor, love and serve God and people because of the Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit gives us a deep revelation of who God is and who we are in light of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of calvary. We are transformed ‘from one form of glory to the next’ through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. - Romans 8:9-11

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” - 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

The Holy Spirit is real, very much alive, holy and fully God. He is in you and me, and He wants us to live close to Him, in our regular, mundane, everyday lives, as we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling and as we walk alongside our Christian community.

Guiding Questions

How have you experienced God's presence?

Do you know God as active and alive through the Holy Spirit?

Possible Responses

As mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit is alive. He speaks, helps, guides, comforts, instructs, and heals in miraculous ways. The Holy Spirit is God and He can do whatever He wants to. But He loves us and is invitational in the way He chooses to do life with us. He won't force Himself on us, and so there is a very real opportunity for us to 'quench' the Holy Spirit. We can quench the Holy Spirit by disobeying Him, by creating an inviolable and sanctimonious structure in our small groups, one that does not permit spontaneity or the special leading of the Spirit. [This is a great resource to read more about quenching the Holy Spirit: *Seven Ways to Quench the Spirit | Desiring God*]. I write this to say that even though the Holy Spirit is the God of the universe who can do whatever He wants, there are ways we can suppress His voice and what He wants to do.

**Before outlining specific practicals, something important to consider is this:*

The Holy Spirit is powerful and can, will, and wants to do powerful things in us and through us. He wants to bring healing, deliverance, and fullness of joy. He wants to give us identity and restore our souls. He wants to reconcile broken relationships, lead us to repentance (again and again), and He wants to give us deep deep revelation of God. He wants to give us eyes to see and ears to hear—He wants to make us new. When we surrender to the Holy Spirit, He can do just that. But sometimes healing and deliverance and repentance can be messy or unpredictable. It can be a silent softening of our hearts as we sleep at night or a loud weeping on the floor after bringing into the light what the enemy has been enslaving us to. It is uncomfortable. To live a life fully surrendered to the Holy Spirit in community, we have to trust the people in our community. We have to be willing to be completely uncomfortable and undone in front of the people we call our community in order to be fully surrendered to the Holy Spirit, not holding anything back. Without trust, we close ourselves off from letting the Holy Spirit do what He wants to do, potentially holding us back from healing and actual change.

Practice (together):

1. Share testimonies

Make time and space for everyone to share their testimony, or at least part of it since our whole lives are but hundreds of testimonies strung together. But let everyone share how they came to know Jesus. Give enough time for this, and don't rush it, share over a few weeks or a longer get together depending on how big your group is.

2. Affirm, encourage and build one another up

Affirm one another. You can do this by writing letters - let each member write a letter of affirmation for each other member in the group. Or you can affirm each other out loud when you meet. Let each person affirm each other person. "Affirming", encouraging and building one another up is simply calling out the good and godly that you see in them (Hebrews 3:13).

God does amazing relationship building when we let each other in and when we feel seen and understood by people.

Practice (homework):

The model of relationship exists because God wanted to be in relationship with us first. A relationship with the Holy Spirit doesn't need to be some abstract idea.

The Holy Spirit as a relational being wants to have a living relationship with us. The word "relationship" doesn't take on a new meaning when it comes to God. When we're in relationship with someone, we get to know them over time. We spend time with them, we talk to them, we listen to them, we give them space in our lives. It's the same with God. That being said, think of what it takes to build a relationship with another person. What does that look like practically?

1. Spend time together

Set aside time to just be with the Holy Spirit. Uninterrupted. You can listen to worship music to help quiet your mind and heart. Go for a walk or sit in a quiet space. Just be.

2. Read scripture

Not only is scripture the word of God, it is Holy Spirit breathed and inspired. Read it to get to know God, to get used to His voice, what He sounds like, the kinds of things He'd say (John 10:27) and to be transformed.

3. Talk to Him

That's it. Have conversations with Him, share your thoughts and your cares. What excites you, what frightens you, what keeps you up at night, what you're wondering about. And then listen for His response. It does not have to be very formal and you don't have to use big words or abstract phrases. Just use your words, talk to Him, and wait to hear what He has to say back. He loves to talk back.

4. Pray for others

Pray for your friends and family, colleagues, and other people you know. Pray for people who have specific prayer requests or who you know needs to be prayed for, or for someone who pops into your mind. Make your requests for them known to God, but then wait and listen to hear from God too. Sometimes the Lord will give us words to encourage those we pray for, or He may give us the words to say when we pray. And if you believe God has given you words of encouragement and comfort for those whom you're praying for, then share it with them. Some verbiage that might be helpful when sharing encouraging words from the Holy Spirit could be: "Something I felt the Spirit put on my heart during prayer recently was..." "When I was praying, I felt like God wanted to say...to you." The more you practice hearing the voice of God in community, the more you will get to know His voice and the more you'll grow in boldness to listen, hear and share.

Additional Resources

Article: Holy Spirit: Seven Ways to Quench the Spirit | Desiring God

Webpage: gardenchurch.life/empowered

Book: More by Simon Ponsonby

Book: God's Empowering Presence by Gordon Fee

Acknowledgement

Content & Discussion: Zhane Leavey

Overview:

As a House Church we will not settle for simply meeting to talk about God from afar where our day to day isn't impacted. No, we are able to enter into the tradition of discipleship when we say "yes" to Jesus as Savior, Rabbi, and King. We want to learn from Jesus to experience the "abundant life," that is promised to those who follow Him. This doesn't come by believing in Jesus just in our minds and checking off mental checkboxes. **We will experience abundant life through true faith, by aligning our lives to a new reality, that Jesus is Lord and his reign requires us to shift how our inner and outer life proclaim the good news of King Jesus.** This is the invitation to live the Way of Jesus.

Discussion:

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." - **Matthew 28:16-20**

Before he left the twelve, Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and make more disciples. So that there is no confusion of how they were to do this, Jesus reminds them to specifically, "teach them to obey all that I have commanded."

Obedience is a necessary component to our relationship to Jesus. As followers of Jesus, This is where faith comes into play. Faith has to be more than just believing the right information and facts about Jesus, God, love, the Kingdom, discipleship, etc. Then what is "faith?" James, the brother of Jesus, helps us understand that faith separated from action is dead (James 2:14-26). Head knowledge doesn't translate to loving God or loving others.

Jesus sends out his disciples to go out and teach **commands**. Because, true faith means believing what Jesus taught so that it actually changes the way we live. If we really believe Jesus' words, lifestyle, wisdom, correction, and commands, then it demands a response. The response is a life transformed by God. This is why Jesus lived among us. He modeled for us the abundant life that God has for the world, but because of sin, we live out of our own definitions of the good life, and some of us attach Jesus on top of that and call that discipleship.

We must see Jesus' life and example more than simply all extra "stuff" that leads to his death. It is through the life of Jesus, that his death has meaning. It is then through his life and death that the resurrection opens up a whole new world of possibilities for those who choose to disciple under Jesus.

This point cannot be overstated enough. Jesus didn't just live, but he *truly* lived. He was indwelt with the power of the Holy Spirit and lived in obedience with the Father's will. This is not a show, but a modeling of the abundant life that is available to us. The reason we can trust Jesus' commands is because of his life and words. This has real implications for every one of our lives. Not just theoretically, but practically.

Jesus knows what it's like to have power and choose to not use it for violence. While living in the Roman empire who was marked by violence, Jesus chose to live by a different values and chose non-violence. Jesus knows what it's like to have cultural narratives tell you to fear or hate another group. Yet He chose to see each person through compassionate love, even his enemies. Jesus knows what it's like to have friends that disappoint you. Friends that betray you. Friends that hurt you. Friends that are annoying. And knows how to not be consumed by social obligations or bitterness.

Jesus knows what it is liked to be tempted in every single way, and yet stay the course and be faithful to the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 4:15).

This is the foundation that faith is built on. This is not self-help, but an intentional replacing of our cultural narratives to live out the kingdom life here, in our own lives, together. So for the life of House Church, we will learn what Jesus commanded and model our lives around that. In this journey we will learn more about God, grow in our own discipleship to Jesus, and get the privilege of holding each other accountable to the abundant life.

Eventually, we will give this away through the gift of multiplication, where we get to invite others to experience the abundant life.

Guiding Questions

What comes to mind when you think of discipleship?

Have you ever thought about the life of Jesus? Did you ever think it had an impact on your life?

Are there any significant moments in your own discipleship to Jesus that stand out? How has God used other people in your life to strengthen that discipleship?

Possible Responses

We want to avoid talking about discipleship as purely a theoretical reality. Our hope is that everyone in your group is spending time with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did.

House Church help creates the space, time, and relationships for this to happen both together and throughout the week. Here is a communal practice and individual homework that you can invite your House Church to participate in.

Communal Practice:

We must learn how to see Jesus as living, breathing, and speaking here and now.

Take time to sit in silence and ask God, "If Jesus were to walk in the room what would he say?"

Share any impression with the room. Celebrate risk in any form, both in successful words and in those that don't resonate.

You can also encourage the House Church that you will continue to learn how to hear from God in future times together.

Homework:

By this time members of your House Church should have at least one other person they are in relationship with.

Have everyone pair up to either meet up for coffee or to text/call the other with some intentional questions by the following week.

1. What is something meaningful that has happened to you this last week? Meaningful can be a high or a low.
2. What is the most recent thing that God has taught you?
3. How can I be praying for you this next week?

Additional Resources

Book: The Practice of Being with Jesus by Chris Cruz

Book: What if Jesus Was Serious? by Skye Jethani

Hear and Obey the Father

Week 4

Overview:

We must commit to loving God. This is not an option for us to choose, but a requirement if we are to follow Jesus. Yet loving God demands us to deny the default of loving ourselves. Jesus models a life that loved God and loved others. As disciples, we must learn how to listen to the Spirit, become like Jesus, and grow in obedience to the Father. In this, we align our lives to the original intent of human relationship with God.

Discussion:

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. - John 5:19-20

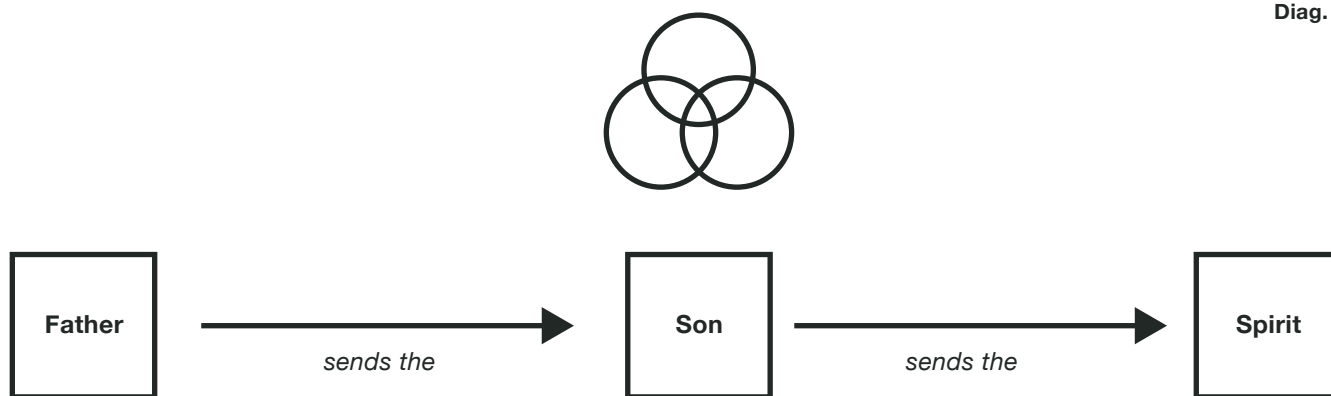
"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." - Luke 15:20b (the parable of the prodigal son)

Jesus is our only example of what it means to live life in abundance. In order for us to receive this abundant life we must choose to follow him. To follow Jesus requires admittance that we are lacking, belief that Jesus is the truth, and a confession of our own life and shortcomings (sins). We call this process repentance, and many of us may think that repentance is a once and done kind of action. However, it is one of those beautiful practices that followers of Jesus are invited to practice regularly. Why? Because we aren't perfect and despite our best efforts we will continue to make mistakes, even when we are in a saving relationship with Jesus.

Repentance is needed everyday of our lives as Jesus teaches us how to (re)view God, (re)view ourselves and our identity, (re)view our relationship with others and our surroundings, (re)view our actions and inactions, and (re)view the world around us through the lens of the kingdom. We must understand this, because it starts to shift us towards a posture of humility and willingness to learn from Jesus and submit our preconceived notions to His rule and understanding. This is important to keep in mind, because for us, Jesus really wants us to know God the Father, as He *knows* Him.

This last month, we have read, discussed, and reflected on God. The Triune community of love at the center of the universe. The Trinity is one God made up of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Diag. 1

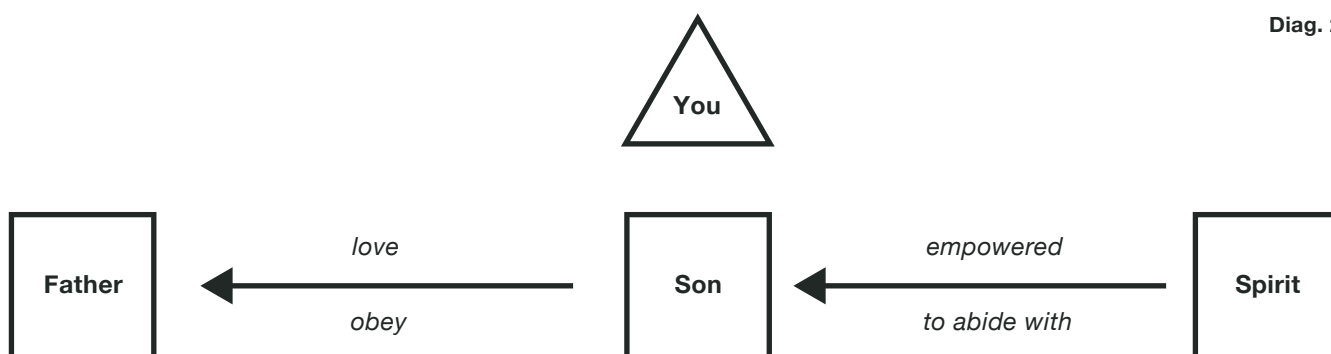


God chose to reveal Himself in the person of the Father originally. All of the universe and life was created from the Father. The Father doesn't do this alone, but creates in partnership with the Spirit (Genesis 1:2) by the Son (Colossians 1:16). It is the Father's love for the Son and the Spirit that creates the whole universe.

Our Father invites us to relate to Him as that, the Father of the universe. This is not some mean father, but one of love. It is His will that we are invited to observe and submit to. The Father was mankind's first step of knowing love in history.

However, the Father doesn't love us from afar, or even expects us to love Him from afar. He loves us intimately and ferociously. See, we experience God's love through the Father *sending the Son who then sends the Spirit to be in us*. (diag. 1).

Diag. 2



We are then *empowered* by the Holy Spirit to *abide* with Jesus, which will result in being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did. The more we spend time with Jesus and listen to the Spirit's guidance, the fruit will be to, like Jesus, grow in love and obedience to the Father.

Let's revisit our conversation on repentance. We must learn to regularly repent and reorient ourselves towards the right understanding of who God is in His fullness. This is not a guilt and shame relationship between us and God, repentance is a beautiful thing when we are met with

the real God. An authentic encounter with God requires that all of our idols, cultural expectations, and false theology be laid down. If our default posture when approaching God is one of humility and repentance, it sets us up to grow in a genuine loving relationship with God in His fullness! The reason this is important, is if we have a false view of the Father, Son, or Spirit, we will live out a faith that is defined by lies, assumptions, religiosity, fear, and shame.

Our God is one who is constantly inviting us to know Him deeper and deeper because of His love for us. God loves you. Jesus gives us a glimpse of how much the Father loves us in His story of the Prodigal Son. In summary, a boy shames his family by requesting his inheritance early. This boy squanders all he had on the pleasures of this world and is left with nothing except food from a pig trough. In an act of desperation, this boy heads home to work as a slave in his old household in order to have some sort of food and shelter. Full of shame and guilt, he practices his apology to his father to try to earn favor with him, because if he does, maybe his father will take him back. Yet, while the boy was a long way off, the father sees him and runs to meet his boy. Before an apology could be issued, the father clothes his son in the robes of his house and welcomes him back with a hug, a kiss, and a celebration.

This story is one of the clearest images of the Father that Jesus gives us. Our Father is one of radical love, grace, and kindness. As His sons and daughters we have been welcomed, celebrated, and redeemed. We have been lavished with love, and all that is asked in return in this household is love is returned. The Church's mandate is to love God and love others, because we have been loved so deeply. However, this love does something to our souls. It transforms us to become people who *know* love and know *how to* love.

This is the Father that Jesus knew. This is the Father that the Spirit knows. You are invited to know this Father as well.

Guiding Questions

When was the last time you were surprised by God, and it brought you to a deeper knowing of Him? How did you respond?

How often do you think about the Father's love? Are there any challenges with receiving the Father's love?

Communal Practice:

Ministry Time

One way to grow in love is to listen to the Father's voice on behalf of someone else.

Break up into groups of 2-3. In those groups pray for one another. Create space for risk and simple prayer. Have those praying not ask any questions of those being prayed for, instead ask God silently, "Father, what do you have to say about _____."

Leave enough time for everyone to get prayer. Come back for a time of debriefing and sharing of stories.

Homework:

Practice the discipline of Silence & Solitude.

Simply enjoy the Father's presence.

Additional Resources

Book: Abba's Child by Brennan Manning

Book: Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning

House Churches are
the primary
environment to
experience discipleship
at Garden Church.

**Learn more at:
gardenchurch.life/leaders**