

## Study 1. God is love (doctrine of the Trinity)

Big idea: there is one God who created everything. The Father is God. Jesus is God. The Spirit is God. And they are the same God, not three different gods.

What's your best DIY victory (or disaster, if you prefer?)

If your group is less handy than average you might go with baking victory instead.

### There is one God

Read Genesis 1:1. This is a very simple starting point for understanding God. God made everything. Many religions and philosophies agree on this much - but who is this God, and what is he, she, it or they like?

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5

This is one of the most important passages in Judaism. It's called the "Shema" (from the Hebrew word for "hear") and many Jews will recite it in the morning and at night time each day. It affirms their faith in one God.

- What does it mean that "the Lord our God is one" - what would the other possibilities be? How would the universe be different if this were not true?

Read Psalm 96:1-13

- In this Psalm, what are some of the things that God does?
- How is God different to all the other "gods"?
- How would you describe the natural relationship between creator and creatures?

Read Exodus 34:4-14

- What is this God like?
- Hang on, is it right for God to be “jealous”?

“Jealous” in English today has negative connotations – like a clingy friend or a sibling coveting your gifts at Christmas. But in the Bible’s original languages the word is more neutral – it’s about a focused emotion, which can be either good or bad depending on what the emotion is aiming at. So when you intensely desire something which belongs to another person that is obviously bad. But what about an author who seeks to be identified as the true author of a work in response to an act of blatant plagiarism? Or someone who is wrongfully convicted of a crime and so seeks to defend their reputation and gain their freedom? Both people could be described (in Biblical terms) as being *jealous* for their own name.

## Jesus is that same God

Read John 1:1-18

In this passage, the “Word” refers to Jesus.

Activity: draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper or a whiteboard. On one side write “creator”, on the other side write “created”. Ask your group to place different things on the drawing:

- Where does God the Father go?
- Where do the earth, the sun, waterfalls and iPhones go?
- Where do people go?
- Where does Jesus go?
- How much of the stuff on the “created” side were created through Jesus?

Read Titus 2:11-14

- What two words are used to describe Jesus in verse 13?

## The Spirit is that same God

We will look at the Holy Spirit in Study 7, but for now it’s important that we point out that the Spirit is God too. Go back and re-read Genesis 1:1-2. Where is the Spirit here?

For more on the Spirit’s identity you could also look at John 15:26 and Galatians 4:6.

Read Matthew 28:19

- What is significant about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sharing a “name”?

## The Father, Son and Spirit have always existed in a relationship of mutual love, order and equality

Divide the group up and look at some of these passages. What do they tell us about the relationships between Father, Son and Spirit?

- John 1:18
- John 5:19-20
- John 14:26

- John 15:26
- Luke 3:22
- Luke 11:13
- 1 Corinthians 11:3

Theologian Peter Jensen summarises the beauty in God's life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

"To our surprise, therefore, we find that within the life of God there exists from all eternity, relationships. For there is one who addresses another, and one who delights to hear and respond, and a third through whom both are at work; and yet all three are one in being, purpose, will, wisdom, might and standing. The experience of relationship which, for us, can only be extrinsic, is with God intrinsic.... He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; not names given merely for our benefit, but names that are eternally true and reveal the relationships that exist in God's life." Peter Jensen, *At the Heart of the Universe*.

### Implications

- "Only a Christian can truly say that 'God is love'". Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?
- If God is the creator, and we are creatures, then how is it possible for us to get to know him personally?
- Which is most true to God's identity - that he is creator or that he is Father?

Read John 17:20-23

- What aspects of the relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit are we invited to imitate here?
- What else might we imitate about the divine relationships? Do we need to be careful of any limits here?

### Prayer ideas

As you begin to pray, start by praising God for who he is. Different people might like to throw in short one sentence prayers of praise, starting with "God we praise you that you...". (This will also remind everyone of who you are speaking with!)