

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of March 1, 2009
"Communion with the Triune God"**

[Today's message focuses on the relationship within the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and how that relationship impacts us.]

[Topics: Relationship; Communion; Connecting with God]

Excerpt: How many of you have read the book, *The Shack*? It's the story of Mackenzie Phillips who loses his daughter. She disappears from a campground in eastern Oregon. He goes through four years of total heartache and misery. And then one day, he gets a letter that asks him if he would come to the shack out in eastern Oregon. Now this is the place where they had found some of the clothing of his daughter.

So this shack carried a lot of heartache for him. Now he gets this letter asking him to go there and it's signed Papa. Well, with great reluctance he drives out to eastern Oregon and as he arrives this broken down old shack suddenly becomes different and a little transformed. There is smoke coming out of the chimney.

In a sense this is a vision of him coming to the shack. He senses that this might be God who has invited him there. So he ponders about what he should do. Should he knock on the door or should he just barge in?

Just as he's about to knock, the door flies open, this black lady jumps out and gives him this gigantic hug. And she says, "Oh, I've been waiting to see you!" She introduces herself as Papa. Well, now, he's all confused because Pop is what his wife has always called God. And yet Papa is a black woman.

And then Mac is introduced to a woman named Sarayu. She's kind of like a waif of thing, who sort of floats into the room and talks to him. Mac looks at her but he can't quite see her and yet he can. And then a man comes into the room, and he's sort of dressed in bib overalls. And he's been obviously working out in the shop. And he's a very manly-type guy.

And so Mac is wrestling in his mind as to who these beings are. And before it's over they explain that they are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Now obviously, the Father isn't a black woman; neither is he a white man. God is none of the above. God is Spirit. It's just a fictional story.

But Mac goes through this whole process of learning what God thinks like. And in the process of the story, he finds healing. In the book, Mac goes through the process of learning who God is and what it is we need to know about God. And the love of God that is expressed in the story overwhelms most people who read it. You can feel that love from God.

And if you've gone through something bad in your life, as Mackenzie Phillips did, you find it very hard to feel God's love. If anything we feel abandoned by God or that he's

upset with us. And so we go through this process of trying to determine what exactly is our relationship with God like when we go through hard times. Maybe some of you are going through some hard times right now.

Some of us have lost family members this past year. Others are now going through some financial difficulties. And so at times like these, we need to think about our relationship with God.

Now at the beginning of creation, God has said that everything was very good – except one thing. What was that one thing that wasn't good? It wasn't good for man to be alone! You see God is about relationship. And that doesn't mean that Adam needed a woman. He also needed a relationship.

It's not good for any of us to be alone. God is about relationship and has been through eternity as a triune God relating as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So God loves relationship and he wants us to experience that kind of relationship. So that's why it wasn't good for Adam to be alone.

And so God made an appropriate person for Adam to have a good relationship. Now sadly that went away very quickly. And we've had a hard time making those good relationships work ever since. And marriage is one of most difficult things we face in life today – how to marry the right person and then how to stay married to that person. Even if we marry the right person, it takes a lot of work to make that relationship last. And so we realize that it's a growing process.

We need to spend some time today looking at what's called Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" where Jesus talks about this relationship which God wants to draw us into. Now the passage we will quote most use this mostly in conjunction with church unity. Now these verses certainly apply to that. But that misses the point if that's all we focus on.

Now in **John 17**, near the end of Jesus' prayer, he says, **20) "My prayer is not for them alone."** Earlier in this prayer, Jesus was praying about specific things for his disciples. But now he shifts his focus.

"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message," He's now praying into the future for those who come along after the disciples and apostles – those who come to him during the following centuries. So, this is Jesus praying for you and me and for the people out there who don't yet know Jesus Christ.

21) "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."

You can see why there is so much emphasis on church unity from this Scripture. This is also talking about – how do we connect to the Father; how do we relate to God? What kind of relationship is going to happen to a believer and to the group of believers called the church? So as Jesus is connected to the Father, he wants us to be connected in the same way. So that we would have that connection point to the Father like Jesus has.

"May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Part of the way of the Gospel message goes out, is that we, as believers, enter into the Father's life through Jesus Christ. There is to be a life connection, a life relationship

between us and the God of this universe – experiencing him, living with him, connecting with him, and literally being in oneness with him.

So many of our connections with God are distant – we pray once in a while, we study the Bible once in a while. But Jesus is saying here that he is praying for all those who come along and believe will have this amazing connection with you Father as I have.

22) "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:" So Jesus has passed on the glory that the Father gave him. So, what did the Father give him? He gave him the life of God poured into a human being. He gave him connection. Jesus was absolutely connected to the Father to where he said that everything the Father has told him to do, he's done it.

Jesus said, "I've completed the work you gave me. When you've seen me, you've perfectly seen the Father." The verb translated "I have given them" is a perfect tense verb meaning it is finished and yet on going.

Now it's hard for us to look in the mirror every morning when we get up and see the glory of God. We tend to see ourselves, don't we? We see the flesh. But what God sees is the glory of Jesus Christ that he has poured out into us. He's building a new creation in us through Jesus. He's connecting to us in a vital way that's drawing us into that glorious relationship with him, into that oneness with him.

When pastor Glen prays, he spends a lot of time focusing his prayers on the relationship that God has and then asks God to help him enter into that relationship that you have as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He says that he hardly ever gets to ask what he wants because he is busy thinking about that connection, that relationship.

Once Pastor Glen gets that connection, what he wanted is not nearly so important to him because he is experiencing what God wants for him. We were once separated from God by our sins, by our lack of response to God.

In the Bible study this morning we were looking at Romans chapter one and talking about how man turned away from the knowledge of God, back at the time of the Garden of Eden. It says that they knew God, but turned away from him. And then it says he gave them over to where they started going down hill; they went to their sinful desires and then went even to what was unnatural. They turned further away from God.

Now Jesus comes along and says, "Let me bring you back, draw you back to the Father out of all that mess, all that pain, all that suffering." As we discussed this morning, the "wrath of God" is not that God is sitting up there in heaven with a hammer waiting to clobber us.

Dr. Gary Deddo talks about the wrath of God on "You Are Included" video on our denominational website. He likened the wrath of God to the analogy of when you go sailing and are going along with the wind. When we do that, it's beautiful. No sound. You're just coasting along and the ship is going along with the waves. He then said the minute you turn to go back home against the wind, it's like all hell breaks loose. All of sudden the waves are going against you, and your sail is flapping against the wind. The wind is blowing in your face and you are struggling. But nothing has changed except

you. The wind or the water didn't get any faster. Nothing changed except you turned against the flow.

When we're going with the flow of God, things are going well. When you turn and go against the flow of God, God didn't change, you changed. And you're getting it in the face all the way. That's the wrath of God. That's going against what God has made. So now Jesus is saying, "Why don't you turn back into the flow? Let me help you build this relationship with God. Jesus is inviting us into that relationship.

23) "I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Jesus is saying that he wants the world to know how much you love me by letting them experiencing that – by drawing them into that connection, into that relationship and experiencing it. And then the world will say, "Wow, that's what it's about. That's what God is doing."

Now here's a quote from Robert Capon, who writes a lot about this connection. He uses the word "coinherence" for the connection of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which we enter into. The western church has tended to use this word for that connection.

"To give that mystery its proper theological name, it's the coinherence of the three Persons --- in all their acts and in every aspect of their essence – in the unity of their 'Godness.' So, coinherence is this connection between Father, Son and Holy Spirit or their Godness.

But the most fascinating thing about this coinherence is that it rubs off on the world that the Trinity brings forth. This life of God impacts all of creation especially us.

When God creates man in his own image, for instance ("man," just to remind you, is the 'adham, male and female), he makes us into beings totally in love with mutual indwelling, with walking into, with dancing into relationships at every turn of our lives.

He is say that since God has this connection, he makes us humans love to be with others. The worst thing you can do to a human being is to take them completely away from other people. Put them on a desert island, and they start to deteriorate. During the Second World War, they did some horrible experiments with babies by not letting any adults touch them. Many of the babies died for lack of touch.

God created us to want to come together, to want to be in groups. Pastor Glen knows we feel this way because we live in Los Angeles. If not we would live in Wyoming, where there aren't hardly any people. As human beings we love connections and we enjoy being around people even though some of us who like watching TV a lot once in a while get stir crazy and go down to the local mall just to be around folks.

For one thing, he's made us positively wild about turning two people into "one flesh" in marriage. Yes, we love to get married. Now some people are cheating these days and aren't going through the proper process. But we love that connection. We don't have to have signs everywhere that say, "Please get together with somebody."

For another, he's make us just a driven to implicate ourselves in friendships, families, towns, cities, and states. He's made a sociable world. And when we (at our best) dance our way into that creation, it becomes a vast ballet of coinherences. All life, including animals, like to get together. They go in herds, flocks, or one type of group or another. Human beings are the same way. We love to be together.

But when (at our worst) we trample that world underfoot, it becomes precisely a failure of coinherence – a place where all our joinings go sour. When we don't do it well, those relationships become broken. The connection falls apart. And one of the most painful things to a human being is to have one of those broken relationships. Those of you who have been divorced can say amen. Those of you who have family members you can't talk to can say amen. When that coinherence breaks down, it's painful for us.

"But it's not only human creatures who are made in the image of this dance. The whole natural order – from the nearest grain of sand to the farthest star – is just as much an image of the mutual indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity. Nothing in creation acts or exists by itself; everything interacts with everything else. Poetry invites us to fall in love with this dance. Science charms us with the intricacy and the elegance of it. And theology, at its best, lifts us to the true Reason for the dancing in the first place." (Robert F. Capon, Genesis the Movie).

It's all about our connection with God. As Jesus enters into the Father, then we enter into that connection with God through Jesus. But it's so vital to understand how much God wants that relationship with us. God doesn't want just a bunch of obedient people. Too many churches tell their members, "Just do what God tells you to do. Just do the rules."

God's not into rules. God is into relationship. God wants people who love him, who respond to him, who dance with him and experience life with him. And you know what, if you fall down and screw up, he doesn't care. He wants you to get up and dance some more. He wants you to continue to experience life with him.

Last Thursday night, bishop N. T. Wright spoke at Lake Avenue Chapel and some of us had a change to go over to listen to him. Dr. Wright is one of the leading scholars in the theological field. He was talking about virtue and the character it takes to live life well. He said that so many people think that since we're under grace that how we live life doesn't matter any more. But he said, it does matter how well we live and how well we take care of things.

He used the analogy of pilot Sully Sullenberger. He said the reason he landed that plane on the Hudson River is because he spent years practicing. He spent time in the simulator; he spent extra time taking off and landing plus all the years of flying he had done. He spent years developing the character that prepared him to be ready when a crisis came.

He said as Christians we need to do the same thing. We dance with God, we live with God, we make the effort to experience God, so that when a problem comes, we're ready for it. So when you face a personal crisis, it's not, "Oh God, where did you go?" But instead it's, "Oh God, here we go!" We need to think, "We're in the dance together and this is obviously the steps you're taking me on right now. How do I experience that? How do I walk in that?"

And so we need to prepare ahead of time. Bishop Wright talked about the need for all of us to do that. He also talked about how the church is the advanced stage of the New

Heavens and the New Earth. We're preparing for what we are going to be after the resurrection when Christ ushers in the New Heavens and the New Earth. We are preparing now by entering into that relationship with God, dancing with God, moving with God, experiencing God.

Bishop Wright called this "learning the language of the new creation." He used the analogy of learning a new language. He said if you are planning to go to Italy for vacation and speak Italian there, then you need to learn the language before you go. Well, in the same way, we are learning the language of the kingdom of God.

We are currently learning how to live in the New Heavens and the New Earth as we are experiencing God right now and learning how he thinks. And so Christ is inviting us into that relationship.

So, what does the unity look like? Are we to all look exactly the same? Jesus said back in **verse 9 of John 17** when he was praying for his disciples, which all of us who believe in him have become.

"I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10) All I have is yours, and all you have is mine."

Pastor Glen believes verse 10 is God's definition of unity. God shares everything – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – among themselves. And when Jesus came to this earth, he had that connection with God. All that belonged to the Father, he had been given to Jesus. And all that Jesus had, he offered back up to the Father.

It wasn't like – how much can I get my hands on? But it was a sharing. And God the Father shares with Jesus and Jesus shares back. Now to most of us as humans that scares the daylight out of us. Because if we say that to another human being, we instantly think selfishness and try to get everything we can. And before long, we're mad at each other.

How many of you parents have loaned money to your kids and they've promised to pay it back? Now how many of them actually did? If you loan them money you've become a bank and are no longer Dad and Mom to them. Your children reason – because you see, what's yours is mine. And besides Dad and Mom you're supposed to do this, because I'm in a crisis. Woe is me!

So, as humans, we would take what God has said in this verse and make it a whole selfish operation. But that's NOT what God's talking about. God is talking about this coinherence, this connection of life, this connection of giving and sharing, and that we're in this together. This now brings unity, because we're not all dividing our little pieces of turf and saying that's mine and don't you touch. Which is what churches do. "This is ours and don't you touch. These are our people and don't you touch." The Christian church has done too much of that through the years.

Jesus finishes his thought in rest of **verse 10**, **"And glory has come to me through them."** We know that the glory God the Father has, he has given to Jesus. But he has given it to Jesus through the disciples. The Father shares his glory by allowing Christ to work through us – as we experience life together. We should want to draw others into that so Christ can have more glory, as more people participate and become involved.

We need to be thinking about what Christ is drawing us into when he says, "**him in us and us in him. And all of us are in the Father.**" It's all a very intimate personal relationship Jesus has brought us into. And he wants us to experience that.

In the Bible, the terms of that relationship are very sexual. The relationship between husband and wife were created to represent our relationship with God as Paul wrote about in **Ephesians 5.**

And it's no wonder in our world today that so much of that has been twisted— all the sexuality issues, and what is real intimacy and what is closeness. They have taken it out of the connectedness to God and just made it something else. And so it's become a broken thing instead of a healing thing.

So relationship is the key. That's what God is looking for. That's what he's drawing us into— not just obedience; not just to be good kids. God wants people who will love and respond to him. And when we do that, we will become a good kid. We'll become like him. But if we're just trying to do it to be obedient, it's going to be backwards. Pastor Glen knows that many times his kids obeyed him but the relationship wasn't all what it should have been. Obedience doesn't necessarily mean relationship. And God wants the relationship.

Now back in **verse 20** again. "**My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.**" He wants to draw us into that connection. He wants to invite us into that connection.

Now we're coming to the communion table today. No one has to come. It's not required. It's an invitation. It's an invitation to come to the relationship. It's an invitation to come and say, yes, you Jesus have entered into the Father and the Father has given you what you have Jesus, and you've offered it to us, and you've invited us to come. And you said if we eat your flesh and drink your blood, we have the eternal life of God living in us.

And so God invites us to come. Maybe you are a brand new person here today and you don't know anything about Christianity, but Jesus is inviting you into a brand new relationship with the Father. And he does it by the table, by the bread, which represents his broken body. The fact that he was actually a human being living in the flesh and that he died for us – that we could be healed of all of our brokenness. And his blood poured out on the ground represented by the grape juice or the wine – that he poured out for us in order to give us forgiveness so that we could enter into that relationship. So now he invites us, as often as we come, to partake.

So we come into what blossoms out of the fact that we are forgiven and healed. What comes out of that is life with God. And so we're coming not to a table of death but to a table of life and a chance to enter in and to experience that life. All this was offered by way of Christ's sacrifice.

So today you are invited to come. But it's an invitation, an opportunity for you to come and enter in. Just as if Pastor Glen chooses to dance with his wife, it's an invitation. He can't demand that she dance. He has to invite her to dance. It's the same way with Jesus Christ. He invites us to come. He says, would you come, would you participate with me.

We come as a sacrament. Now a sacrament is a visible representation of an invisible reality. The invisible reality is that Jesus Christ completely did what we need done for us to be right with God. He completely fixed it – it doesn't matter how bad we were as sinners, it's been completely taken away. Let's pray.

Key Scripture: John 17:20-23, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21) that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22) I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23) I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

General Group Question: What is God's greatest desire for us?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. Now at the beginning of creation, God has said that everything was very good – except one thing. What was that one thing that wasn't good? How did God correct it?
2. Why are personal relationships so hard to properly maintain?
3. What kind of relationship do the three personages of the Godhead have with each other? Why is that important to us?
4. What kind of relationship did Jesus want us to have with the Father? How can this come about?
5. Dr. Gary Deddo's analogy about the wrath of God make sense to you? Why or why not?
6. Do you believe God created us to have deep intimate relationships with each other and with him? Briefly explain your answer.
7. Based on **John 17:10**, what is God's definition of unity?
8. Is God into rules or relationships? Briefly explain.
9. How can you experience a deeper, more meaningful relationship with God?