

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of November 1, 2009
"The Dance of God"**

[Today's message emphasizes that the triune God is about relationship, and that He has created the desire in us to want to have relationships.]

[Topics: Intimate Relationship; Dance of God; "I in Them"]

Excerpt: Today's message is designed to help us have a greater understanding of entering into what God has for us and near the end of the message we'll talk about what that means for you and me, which will lead us to the communion table.

Now what is the most legal severe punishment in America that can be given in a prison? Solitary confinement is the worst thing they can do to you! The authorities can put you in a cell all by yourself for days, weeks, months or even years.

Why would solitary confinement be such a horrible thing? Why is that such a punishment? Misbehaved prisoners will cry out and say, "You can do anything to me, but please don't put me into solitary."

Now most of us have a very difficult time being alone. We don't mind sitting alone quietly for a while, maybe reading the Bible or a book. But enduring long periods of time with no people around, most of us start getting stir crazy.

You mothers need some adult conversation after caring for and talking with small children all day. And when our ladies are SO busy taking care of families and kids all week long, what do they do to relax – they have a lady's night out and stay up half the night talking to each other!

So why do we do that? That's because of who we are and it's also because of who God is. That's why solitary is so bad. That's why it wasn't good that Adam should be alone, and that's why God wants us to walk in what he has for us.

Let's start with one of the verses Tony used last week. **John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** As Tony said last week, the word "with" has a broader meaning than we tend to think of in the English language. We tend to think of with someone in a casual way. But it means much more than that.

Pastor Glen asked Daniel and Drew to come up to the front. When they were sitting back there on the pew, were they in church with pastor Glen? Yes, of course. And now when they are standing next to pastor Glen, are they with him? Yes. And when pastor Glen put his arm around them, are they with him? Yes. Each time the "with" became more personal.

Now when pastor Glen talked to each of them face-to-face, the “with” became even more personal. So it’s much more “with” in a personal way when pastor Glen was talking with Daniel and Drew face-to-face as opposed that all three of them were in the same room together.

Then pastor Glen asked his wife Connie to join him upfront. They held each other in a dance hold. Pastor Glen asked the congregation, “Isn’t dancing together a more intimate “with” than just talking to someone face-to-face?”

The word “with” here in John 1:1 means a very intimate relationship. It means this intimate interconnection between the Word and the Father. There was this amazing interaction. There is such a unity that exists between the Father and Jesus, that it’s difficult for us to grasp the interaction of the Trinity, and how the Holy Spirit responds between Father and Son, as that relationship takes place.

There’s an interactive relationship taking place between them. There’s this dynamic intimate relationship or dance taking place. The early church called this a perichoretic relationship, meaning that intertwining, that interpenetrating that takes place. Interaction is constantly taking place.

Do we realize that there is worship happening inside the Trinity all the time? It’s because Jesus said, “The Father gives me glory. And I give the Father glory. And the Holy Spirit gives the Father and me glory.”

What’s that? That’s worship, isn’t it? The Father, Son and Holy Spirit worship within the Godhead. Jesus, the Son constantly gives worship to the Father, constantly gives glory to the Father. And the Father gives glory to the Son. And the Son gives it to the Holy Spirit and vice versa. And there’s constant interaction taking place. And this interrelationship is so dynamic that the early church called it the perichoresis – this intertwining.

Now there’s another very similar word – perichoreuo, which means “to dance around” or “to dance in a circle.” Our English word “choreograph” comes from this word. So choreograph is the planning and arranging the movements, steps, and patterns of dancers and also the planning and arranging of an activity. So the early church called this triune God relationship “the dance of God,” because of the similarity of these two words.

From Scripture we know that God is a God of love. And God wanted to share that loving relationship. God is so outgoing that he wanted to share this with others. **John 1:2, "He (the Word) was with God in the beginning."**

From the very beginning, there was this relationship. Jesus was NOT created somewhere down the line. From the very beginning the triune God has had this amazing relationship – this face-to-face – for a better word dance.

Now in **John 17**, we find Jesus praying to his Father, just before he’s going to go through the ordeal of his crucifixion. **20) "My prayer is not for them alone."** In the previous verses, Jesus was praying for his disciples, those who were walking with him for three and half years.

"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message," So, Jesus is saying here that he is praying for those who will hear the message through his disciples and will also respond.

21) "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." Here's that "with" relationship, that intertwining relationship. **"May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."** So now Jesus says he's going to be inviting mankind into that triune relationship. God wants us to be a part of that relationship, because God is a God of love.

22) "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:" Notice Jesus wants us to be all one by entering into that relationship through him. And he's done that by giving us his glory that the Father gave him. This is done through the Holy Spirit that he pours out to us.

23) "I in them and you in me." Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus comes to interpenetrate us as he comes to live in us and bring us an "abundant life." He also empowers us through the Holy Spirit. And so we, too, become a part of the dance. We are now dancing with Jesus and he is dancing with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We enter into that triune relationship.

Pastor Glen was reading earlier this week an article about how Jesus is the only way and how that makes so many people uptight. People want to know how could Jesus be the only way to God? You see, other faiths or religions talk about being good people, doing good things, serving people, honoring God.

But no other faith has a being that literally enters into us and invites us into a relationship with the God of the heavens. And who promises to empower our lives. That's why Jesus is the only way, because he literally makes it happen to us. It's not a matter of being exclusive; it's a matter of the only way it can happen.

"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." So this relationship that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have and draws us into helps the world know who we are. That's because we are representing God. Now we are in this dance process with God, this interaction with the God of the universe.

Now the key is that we spend time enough with him, that we learn to experience that dance. So when people ask you, "Why are you a Christian?" We should be able to tell them, "I've experienced God. I've experienced this life of interaction with God."

You know the Enemy likes nothing better than we all become so busy that we can't do that. We get so busy that we're just hanging on by our fingernails and miss the opportunity to spend time with our God and to really experience what he has for us.

24) "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

So Jesus says that he wants all that have been given to him to be with him where he is. Jesus has ascended to heaven and he wants us to be in relationship with the Father just as he is. Remember that heaven isn't a place, but rather a relationship we enter into beyond this life. The only way to see Jesus' glory is to become like him.

So with all this great relationship that Jesus is talking about, how do we come up with such a feeling about such an austere God in the Western church today? Where do we get this idea that God is a mean being off in the corner somewhere?

Well, part of it goes back to the late 300's AD when Augustine, who was a Greek, got converted in Northern Africa. He brought with him a lot of philosophical thoughts from Plato and others. One of the concepts he adhered to was that flesh was bad and spirit was good.

Up until the late 300s, when the church leaders wrote about God the Father and Jesus, they quoted Jesus statement that if one has seen Jesus, then they've seen the Father. The early church used Jesus as the model to know and understand the Father.

But when Augustine began to write about God, he use philosophy and logic to talk about God. He reasoned, that since there are laws in nature, there must be a lawgiver, etc. So he began to look at God from the viewpoint of logic. And he began to create this different view of God. And he didn't put Jesus in the picture.

And so Augustine began to write about God as this holy God, other than us. God became this holy austere God, who's out there somewhere. And that's how the Western church began to look at God.

So in our handout you will find the Nicene Creed. It was written in 325 AD, which presents a very personable loving God. Let's read it together out loud.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance (essence) with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Nicene Creed said that God is this almighty Father in heaven and by the way, we know him through Jesus. But Augustine changed this viewpoint. He described God as this austere, holy God. Many churches today have this focus. They say that God is holy and can't have anything to do with sin. God is up there somewhere.

So, now let's look at the Westminster Confession of Faith developed in 1846. It's basically derived out of Calvinism.

- I. There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty.*
- II. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; he is the alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature; so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.*
- III. In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.*

Now, does that make you feel warm and fuzzy? Now while everything they say there is true, it's written at such arm's length. And this is what many people learn and memorize when they come to confirmation. They also have a catechism they must study as well.

Here are some of the questions about God in the catechism. Question 5: What do the Scriptures principally teach? Answer: The Scriptures principally teach, : What man is to believe concerning God, and: What duty God requires of man. (Now it's true, but there's much more to it than that).

Question 6: What do the Scriptures make known of God? Answer: The Scriptures make known: What God is, the persons in the Godhead, his decrees, and the execution of his decrees.

Question 7: What is God? Answer: God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most

holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.

So to be confirmed you have to memorize this. Now if you memorize this as a definition of who God is, how is God going to seem to you? Kind of distant, kind of awesome, kind of out there somewhere. So is it any wonder that God appears so distant to many in the Western churches?

Now the Eastern churches focus on Jesus, because he tells us who the Father is. Jesus tells us in John 17 that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. And since we are in Jesus and he is in us, as humans, we are all in this relationship with God together.

1 John 3:2 talks about a time will come when the children of God will be with him and we will be like him. At that time, we will have completely entered into that relationship. Yet now we can be a part of that relationship because he's offered it to us through the Holy Spirit. And Jesus draws into that.

Now how does that affect you and me? Since God has drawn us into that relationship and we are in the dance – meaning everywhere around us God is in action – that means we are with God.

We often ask ourselves – if God's got us in this dance with him, why am I having troubles in this life? We need to look at our lives not through the eyes of the flesh. We need to ask, "OK, God; where are you in all of this?"

Pastor Glen then cited the example of one of our members Glen McC who is the hospital and has marvelous nurses and hospice people taking care of him. He's got a wonderful attitude. Now here's a guy dying of cancer. And he tells pastor Glen in the greatest spirit, "Isn't that a wonderful thing for our nation come together for the world series." This was even after he said that the world series wasn't high on his list of priorities.

He could have said some things in bitterness concerning his health or talk about "woe is me," but he didn't. You see, that's God working in his life. But too often we miss that and ask, "God why are you letting this happen?" We need to be thinking – what is God doing in this situation?

Or if you are going through difficult times and maybe you don't have a job. We need to think about what God is doing in this situation. "You've obviously brought me to the dance, you've brought me into this relationship. So help me see what you are doing around me. Whose lives are you touching? Whose lives am I touching? Whose lives are touching me? Who are you using to touch me?"

Do you notice that often times when we are going through a difficult time in our marriage we push each other away instead of drawing closer together? When this happens we need to ask where God is in this and ask how to we become more drawn together, more personal, more intimate with each other, since he brought us together.

When we experience difficult times, we too often push away from God. We say, "I don't know why God doesn't find me a job? I don't know why he doesn't bless me financially? I don't know why he doesn't heal me?"

Instead of asking those kind of questions, we must look for what God is doing. That will change our view. It will help us see how God is moving. So, if you feel like God has abandoned you step into the dance. You spend a little spare time with God and do some flowing together so that God can show you what he already doing. We tend to focus on what he's not doing. So, as we go through life, especially in those trials, in those problems and in those difficulties, we need to be looking for that relationship that Jesus has entered us into.

As we look around our congregation, we need to ask, "What's God doing? What's he doing out there in the community?" About a week ago or so, pastor Glen asked us to pray and ask God to show us what he is doing in our community so that we can join with him.

And since then, almost every meeting that pastor Glen had been to, they've talked about schools or kids. After the 4th meeting, the lights went on and pastor Gen felt that God was speaking here. So how do we, as a church, connect with schools and kids in a greater way?

You see, God knows if you catch these kids in elementary school and you work with them, they become better adults. So the key is to look at what God is doing. God is working in our society with a lot of local, state and federal government programs to help those in need.

We need to ask God how can we find some of those places out there and connect into them so that we can find more financial help or job search help or whatever it might be. It's amazing the number of people who are willing to serve out there only because God has put it their heart. These programs are the heart of God being expressed. The Bible tells us that God puts those government people in place for our benefit.

The point is that God is dancing all around us. He's moving all around us. So when we're going through difficult times or glorious times, praise him and thank him for the opportunities he gives us. God does such good things for us. He wants us to be with him as Jesus is with him in this wonderful relationship.

So as we go through life, look for God's fingerprints. Especially when you go through hard times, know that God is dancing with you, how God is face-to-face with you and drawing you into that relationship with him.

Now we're going to come to the communion table, which also reminds us that God is drawing us in. That Jesus Christ not only died for us, got beaten for us, shed his blood for us, but he also draws us into a relationship.

Jesus tells us that he wants us to know that he is with us to the very end. He then said, "I'm going to leave you some bread and some wine, and I want you to partake of that once in a while in order for you to remember that I'm with you, that I've drawn you in."

Remember, we've just read John 17 where Jesus said, "I in them." How much more in them can he get when Jesus said, "I want you to eat a piece of bread that represents me and I want you to drink a little from a cup that represents me and I will be in you."

In some miraculous way, the very presence of Jesus enters into us even beyond the Holy Spirit being in us. There's that connection when we come to the communion table of connecting with Jesus Christ and becoming part of that relationship.

We invite you to come to the table and enter into the dance. Come and be a part of it.

Key Scripture: John 17:20-21, "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.

General Group Question: What is the most important physical relationship do you have in your life? What is the most important spiritual relationship do you have?

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. How does the deeper meaning of the word "with" in John 1:1-2 help explain our relationship with God?
2. Briefly explain how the concept of perichoresis helps us better understand the intertwining relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
3. In John 17:20-23, how was Jesus going to accomplish that all believers were going to become one?
4. How will we, as followers of Jesus, be able to see his glory as he said we would in John 17:24?
5. Who was one of the first Christians who wrote that God was an austere holy God? What influenced him to write this? Is that an accurate description of God? Why or why not?
6. How does the Nicene Creed depict God?
7. How does the Westminster Confession of faith depict God?
8. When you are going through difficult times, how should you approach God?
9. What can you personally do to become more intimate with God and to be more involved in the dance of God?