

Three Dynamic Pictures

The Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, remains forever our model for community, the foundation of our life and the launching point for all our thinking. The Trinity also fries my mental circuits while ravishing my heart! We learn by comparing what we already know with what we are striving to learn. Yet nothing within our realm of knowing adequately prepares our minds for such revelation.

Of course, the Bible rushes to our rescue again to begin to grasp the *mystery of godliness*. Since God transcends our ability to fully comprehend, the NT provides **three** overarching, relational pictures of how the infinite, eternal God relates to His finite, created, still-in process people. Through these three powerful, broad pathways or causeways, we engage His presence.

Look at 1 Thessalonians chapter one for one example of this indivisible, dynamic threefold picture of our relationship.

1. **WORSHIP:** *Upward:* Give back *freely* to God (**Marriage**) – 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3
2. **MISSION:** *Outward:* Reach out *incarnationally* toward the lost world (**Kingdom of God**) – 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5a
3. **COMMUNITY:** *Inward:* Grow up *relationally* to build up and train one another for maturity and ministry (**Family of God**) – 1 Thessalonians 1:5b-7

Worship: *our generous Groom. Mission:* *our great King. Community:* *our good Father.*¹

I was saved at twenty-five into a church group that primarily focused on the **Family** of God. God as Father and His people as His children. I presently fellowship with a group that primarily focuses on the **Kingdom** of God. God as King and His people as His servants.

Each alone is wonderful yet too limited to capture the rich nuances of our indescribable relationship. These “*warriors*” would be helped to shift from a primarily-one to a *Both/And/And*. Now, I’m also not saying that either church was Biblically deficient. Each collapses all three dynamic pictures into their limited view. However, this narrower focus hijacks the unique emphasis each of the three pictures brings to our understanding.

1. God is our Father and I’m His Beloved Child.

This picture emphasizes the inbreaking of our good Father’s presence. He adopts us into His *Family* with the full rights and showered love of children. A good Father raises up his children over time from dependence into *interdependence*. In the 1st century Jewish culture, a father cultivated and raised up children to learn the family way and to participate in the “*family business*.” This Reality emphasizes the Father’s authority and care, love and patience. He disciplines us in life-skills and disciplines for character development. This lifelong process grows us into the family likeness. We never outgrow our Father/child relationship. Soak in the following until your heart is warmed.

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1).

¹ Of course, Scripture uses a number of other impersonal metaphors on an ascending scale to describe this relationship, beginning with metaphors like the Potter/clay, Shepherd/sheep and Vine/branch. I’m focusing on the three primary relationships.

2. God is our King and I'm His servant-warrior.

This depicts the inbreaking of God's Kingly presence in all His greatness. In the *Kingdom* of God, He trains His people to go to war as fully equipped and competent young warriors. We respond to our King's orders to rescue and free captives as He strategically places us where He needs us. When Jesus came, He threw down the gauntlet to Satan. "I have come to destroy your works and to take back the strongman's possessions" (1 John 3:3:8b; Mark 3:27). One aspect of our life as His intimate allies is on the battlefield in an attack-counterattack mode in the world as His trained army. We respond as His faithful soldiers in battle. "Yes, Sir!" None dare go AWOL. Our Commander-in-Chief calls us to warfare.

3. God is our Groom/Husband and I'm His lovely Bride/Wife.

How do we attempt to get our minds around the fullness of our relationship with our Ephesians 3:20 God? The NT lifts us up to the heights! Such intense intimacy revealed in marriage was impossible in the OT before Jesus. He displayed His Father more fully and also our *identity* as image-bearers.

He gives Himself wholeheartedly to us as His Bride. The inbreaking of God's presence as our generous Groom begins as we believe Him and return such amazing love, He yearns for us to give ourselves wholeheartedly to Him as our closest friend and passionate lover like with familiar words from the *Song of Songs*.

The writers use the intense intimacy of a married couple to push the frontiers of our imaginations. They employ the romantic love between a husband and his wife as most powerfully incarnating this deepest longed-for human spiritual interaction between God and His followers. As Paul describes a husband's love-commitment to his wife in detail in Ephesians 5:31-32, he provides insight into Genesis 2:24 as he finishes with this.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to **Christ** and the **church**.

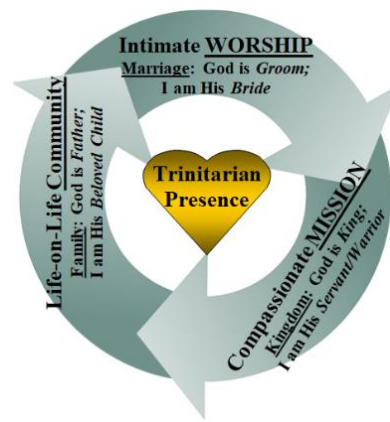
Stop a moment and think how audacious such intimacy as a marriage is! Jesus is the *generous Groom* ravished by love for His people as His bride, and our heart becomes unhinged! This picture of lasting friendship (John 15:12-17) is so intimate that Scripture waited until the coming of Jesus to clearly reveal such a relationship (Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 19:7).

Do you feel God's spiritual desire for you that matches the physical desire of a groom on his wedding night for his bride?

Saturate your heart with this vision Paul paints of our intimate relationship with Christ. He compares Jesus' relationship with these followers of Jesus in Corinth with a husband intensely in love with His wife.

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Our minds can scarcely conceive such an intimate relationship with our all-powerful and all-knowing Creator and Sustainer! Please don't settle until you do at times. Don't rest satisfied to be



a concubine or mistress, begging for a quick “interruption” to enter occasionally into His presence.

God designed humanity in Genesis 1 and 2 to *live loved* by Him and still focuses on this at the end. Love is not only an emotion. With *agape* love in the NT, we not only *feel* something but *do* something to sacrifice for the object of our love, regardless of cost. Receive and then give to get more to give again.

God stands always available for His Bride, moving toward her highest and best. As His Bride, we willingly melt into His embrace. Our Groom/Husband is all-in with wholehearted support for us. Aligning with that love, we as His Bride are growing in our wholehearted response to His advances.

“I’m all in with You, my Beloved” even when my actions may not always reflect my heart-attitude. Jesus reveals His Father in the New Testament in a way impossible in the Old Testament (Hebrews 1:1-3a). Like interactive dance partners, with the husband as the lead, this picture as intimate allies in *marriage* bursts into clearest light in the blazing brilliance of the incarnation. Such intimacy and full partnership in marriage raises our collaborative, interactive relationship as friends to its apex.

Don’t diminish the possibilities God has prepared for us by limiting our view of God. Embrace the *creative tension* of all three dynamic pictures of our relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit. Then give it away. Love demands a response!

Synthesis: our three divine Partners summon us into co-mission with them. God designed the dynamic intersection *of all three* as a “*force multiplier*” for thriving growth. Embrace our full identity in all three without reducing the scope of any of the three. This *Both/And/And* paradoxical tension places us in this nutrition-rich environment to best *rest* in them as our home.

What is your connected relationship with God through each of the three pathways?

Strong or weak? How could you strengthen the one that is presently your “minimum factor”?