

*Introducing Our Faith: The Living God*  
Worksheet for Week 2  
The Relational God

These worksheets will introduce you to the material we'll talk about in class each week and provide you with a structured set of daily Bible readings related to the weekly topics. I'd suggest you begin by reading this worksheet and move on to the daily Bible readings. If you have a study bible, you might look up a few cross-references to other passages.

*God – personal and triune*

The Jews of Jesus' day were fiercely monotheistic, making them unique in the ancient world. Despite the pantheons offered up by competing religions, the Jews insisted that there was one, and only one, God – YHWH, who created all that there is and had chosen Israel to be the means of creation's renewal. The first Christians were all Jewish and undoubtedly as monotheistic as their brethren. This soon posed for them a significant problem. Jesus said and did things that only God could say and do! Who was Jesus? Could he possibly be God himself? But how could this be if there is only one God? In the writings of the New Testament, the first Christians came to understand that God had revealed, through Jesus, his deeper nature. Namely, that while there is unity in God – yes, there is one God – there is also community, fellowship, and love in God's very being. In many ways, John's gospel is written to convince readers that Jesus is fully God (see the opening paragraph of John's gospel!). From this beginning, Christians came to believe and proclaim that God is triune – one God, three persons.

Without question, for many Christians, the whole notion of the trinity is one of the most perplexing and seemingly irrelevant. Though we might affirm a statement something like this, “We believe in one God, who has always known himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,<sup>1</sup>” it can be pretty hard us to see that this makes much sense or that it makes much difference in our lives as Christians. Yet, our belief in a personal, triune God is foundational to all that makes Christianity unique among the world's major religions. In this course, we'll see how our beliefs in the trinity underlie nearly everything else we affirm and proclaim as Christians.

*God is Love . . . God is community . . . God is relational*

In a letter, John wrote that, “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” (1John 4:16b) What do you think John meant by saying – “God is love”? Did he mean that God loves more than anyone? that God loves without ceasing? or perhaps that God loves truly? All this is accurate, but it isn't saying that God is love. After all, it seems almost nonsensical. Love must have an object. We love something or we love someone. How could any single person, in isolation, be love? However, when we proclaim that God is unity in three persons, then the statement that God is love makes perfect sense. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have always been, are now, and always will be in loving relationship with one another. God is love because God is inherently relational. The loving relationships among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit form the basis of God's very essence. The three persons of the Godhead<sup>2</sup> live in eternal community, in a loving community of three persons.

What might this mean for us? The opening chapters of Genesis tell us that humans are made in God's image. Perhaps this means that we too are inherently relational. That we are made to live in loving relationship with one another. That living our lives in isolation diminishes the image of God within us. The doctrine of the trinity ought to cause us to hear the vision statement of St. Andrew in an entirely new light!

---

<sup>1</sup> In the UMC, we say this much more formally: “There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” from our Articles of Religion, in the 2002 *Book of Discipline*.

<sup>2</sup> Yet another way to express God's unity-in-threeness. You'll find that people use many words and images in the effort to express the unity and relationality of God. Most of these efforts are helpful, but none are complete or wholly sufficient. If you think that you've got the mysteries of the trinity all figured out, you are wrong!

## Bible Readings for Week 2

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings? What do they tell us about God's nature?

<p><b>Day 1 Deuteronomy 6:4; Ezekiel 20:5-20 The one true God is the God who saved the Israelites</b></p>	<p><b>Day 2 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 God and Jesus Christ are clearly distinct</b></p>
<p><b>Day 3 John 1:1-5 &amp; 14:8-14 John stresses the unity of the Father and Jesus</b></p>	<p><b>Day 4 John 15:26-27; 16: 4-14 The close relationship between Jesus and the Spirit</b></p>
<p><b>Day 5 2 Corinthians 13:13; Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 "Trinitarian formulas" in the NT</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b></p>