



Prayer of Thanksgiving: that Jesus is the vine to whom we are to stay attached. **"4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."** (Joh 15:4-5 ESV)

Please do not forget to pray for all the shut-ins and isolated brothers and sisters in our congregations Mrs. Jack and C. Campbell (Fredericton) and J. Steffes (Caribou, Me), Mr. Ross Bathurst, P. Ward (Saint John) and others.

Update from Mr. Bill Hall, GCI Canadian Director dated August 14, 2019: *"Hello everyone. I just wanted to let you know that we sent a total of \$8605 to South Africa on August 1st to help in the relief efforts supporting our members in Mozambique. Please thank your congregations for their support".* The money was given by the following 3 congregations: Vancouver/Surrey-New Life Christian Fellowship; Abbotsford-Harvest Christian Fellowship and NB GCI congregation. Our contribution was \$500.00.

Please pray for the many Christians living in very troubled areas such as India, Kazakhstan, Burma (Myanmar) and others where Christians have to deal with persecution, corruption in high places, lack of food, high inflation, high unemployment, etc. Please pray that they be strengthened by God the Father, in our Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit. For more information, please see <https://www.vomcanada.com/News-Articles/>

Monthly GCI prayer guide is now posted in Featured Articles on our www.worshipim.ca website.

Should you have forgotten the password to enter "For members only" on the www.worshipim.ca website, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Vautour.

Tragic Mass Shootings and the Hope of Jesus

(from Mr. Williams – GCI Director – August 6, 2019)

Grace Communion International is one of 40 members of the National Association of Evangelicals. Recently the NAE released this motion.

*At a time when terror and violence are wreaking havoc in so many parts of our world, we remember that Jesus also endured persecution and violence on our behalf. Through his suffering, death and resurrection he opened the way to life for all humankind. May the faithful witness of the martyrs "of whom the world is not worthy" (**Hebrews 11:38**) draw many to put their faith in Christ, our only hope.*

I don't know how you may respond when you hear the back-to-back news of the shootings in El Paso, TX and Dayton, OH. Shock and outrage are common as the news streams across television stations and the internet. And then social media overwhelms us with a wide range of views on what immediate actions are needed (most responses are not helpful).

As Christians we are reminded of how broken this world is, and with the escalation of such stories, it's easy to become desensitized. As Christians we should mourn and grieve for the senseless loss of lives, while we pray for peace and hope for the families and friends of the victims. And we must not forget to pray for the families of the shooters as well.

As the NAE motion states, *"May the faithful witness of the martyrs 'of whom the world is not worthy' draw many to put their faith in Christ, our only hope."* The only hope to resolve the broken, violent attribute of humanity is for people to become new creatures in Christ. I pray that the Christian communities in El Paso and Dayton will rise up as genuine representatives of Jesus and be loving peacemakers who can point their neighbors to the only real hope, Jesus. May the church be the church to their communities in crisis.

As we pray for the hurting people of El Paso and Dayton, and the churches that serve them, let's remember that we are beseeching a living God who is not absent or aloof in these tragedies, but is present in the person of Jesus Christ. We lament for the families whose lives have been forever altered, we lament for the police and medical workers who will be impacted by the memories of these horrific episodes, and most of all we lament the hate that fueled this violence. In our reflection and lamentation let's be reminded of how much our world still needs to hear about the redeeming work of Jesus, and to be changed from people of anger, hate and violence, to people of love, joy and peace. Let's be those messengers who tell others about the life-changing Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man.

The news of these tragedies is not as surprising as it once may have been, and unfortunately, we will hear more such reports as time goes by, so how will we respond? The sense of deep pain and loss is natural; the wrongness and the senselessness are also natural, but for those who trust in Jesus, despair is not an option. Despair leads to hopelessness and demise. In tragedies like our country experienced over the first weekend of August, it drives believers to their knees before the throne of heaven, and to come away knowing that as strong and penetrating as our laments may be, they are framed in the hope and promises of a sovereign God who will make all things new in his time. Events that may shake our faith are surprisingly events that build our faith.

Praying for the peace of the world.

Greg Williams

God: Who Is God?

(from <https://www.gci.org/articles/who-is-god/>)

Is God a nice old man in the sky? A cranky being who wants to dish out "justice" on you? Is he like a human father or mother?

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was England's best-known preacher for most of the second half of the 19th century. In a sermon he gave when he was only 20, Spurgeon declared that the proper study for a Christian is the Godhead. Here is a quote from that sermon—it's one of my favorites:

The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with the solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God.

As have many other preachers and teachers, Spurgeon reminds us that the great and central question of Christianity is this: "Who is God?"

God's own answer is not a proposition, but a person: the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. As the self-revelation of God, Jesus is the focal point of our knowledge of God's nature. Jesus, who takes us to the Father and sends us the Spirit, teaches us to ask, "Who is God?," then bids us look to him for the definitive answer.

Throughout history, many great thinkers pondered the question, "Who is God?" Unfortunately, they often did not make Jesus the center of their investigations. Working from the central revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity was developed to answer the false reasoning and heretical ideas about God that had infiltrated the church in its first three centuries. Though the Trinity doctrine doesn't answer all questions about God's nature, it helps us focus on who God is without wandering away from sound doctrine. The early Christians were not unique in developing errors of reasoning as they pondered the nature of God. Theologians and philosophers of every age got it wrong, and our time is no exception. Old ideas have a way or repackaging themselves and worming their way into contemporary thinking. It is important that we are aware

of two errors that are prevalent in our day. Both lead to wrong conclusions and a distorted picture of who God is.

The first error is a modern version of pantheism—the idea that God is part of his creation instead of being distinct from it and Lord over it. Though Scripture tells us that creation tells us about God ([Romans 1:20](#)), there is an important difference between believing that God is *present to everything* and believing that *everything is God*.

Unfortunately, a belief in the divine spirituality of everything (often referred to as “the Universe”) is common today. Hungry for spirituality and put off by traditional religion, many people are seeking “enlightenment” in obscure and fringe ideas. Go into any large bookstore and you’ll find sections devoted to fantasy fiction and the occult. Video gamers are obsessed with ever more bizarre themes and fantastic creatures wielding supernatural powers. Technology is blurring the line between fantasy and reality, and the spiritual landscape is becoming cluttered with offbeat ideas.

The same thing happened in the early years of the church. People had an appetite for magic and mystery. As a result, many non-apostolic epistles and gospels were in circulation—offering a mix of truth and bizarre ideas about God, reflecting the popular culture of that day. Paul reminds us what happens when people lose their spiritual moorings:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. ([Romans 1:21-23](#))

A second prevalent error in our day concerning the nature of God is conceiving of God as a spirit force that dwells in everyone individually. From this perspective, God is viewed as a genie that we carry with us, making use of him as the need arises. It’s as though God is a cosmic smartphone with all kinds of useful apps. Following this line of faulty reasoning, we wrongly conclude that when we travel, we are taking God somewhere that he is not already present. God becomes dependent on us and limited by our limitations. As a result, God can’t be more faithful than we are. Though this false idea may boost our sense of self-importance, it is a false idea that negates the grace of God.

The truth of God’s nature, revealed in Jesus, is the opposite of this error. As the authors of the New Testament remind us, God remains faithful even when we are faithless. Our true importance is related to our identity as children of the God who not only dwells within us by his Spirit, but far beyond us. Our calling is to join God in what he is doing. We do so with great anticipation knowing that he has been at work long before we arrive on the scene. We are greatly privileged to share in what the Holy Spirit is doing to turn people around and to draw them into a reconciled relationship with the Father and the Son.

The more clearly we understand who God is, the better will be our understanding of who we are and of our calling to live in communion with Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Joseph Tkach

God: We Were Always On His Mind

<https://www.gci.org/articles/we-were-always-on-his-mind/>

The doctrine of the Trinity has been with us for more than 1,600 years. Most Christians consider it to be one of the “givens” of their faith, and don’t give it much thought. Theologian J.I. Packer noted that the Trinity is usually considered a little-thought-about piece of “theological lumber” that no one pays much attention to.¹

But whatever your level of understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, one thing you can know for sure: The Triune God is unchangeably committed to including you in the wonderful fellowship of the life of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

Communion

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are not three Gods, only one, and that God, the only true God, the God of the Bible, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This has always been a concept that is difficult to put into words. But let’s try. The Father, Son and Spirit, we might say, mutually indwell one another, that is, the

life they share is perfectly interpenetrating. In other words, there is no such thing as the Father apart from the Son and the Spirit. There is no such thing as the Son apart from the Father and the Spirit. And there is no Holy Spirit apart from the Father and the Son.

That means that when you are in Christ, you are included in the fellowship and joy of the life of the Triune God. It means the Father receives you and has fellowship with you as he does with Jesus. It means that the love that God once and for all demonstrated in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is no less than the love the Father has always had for you even before you were a believer, and he always will have that love for you.

It means that God has declared in Christ that you belong to him, that you are included, that you matter. That's why the Christian life is all about love: God's love for you and God's love in you.

God did not make us to be alone. To be created in God's image, as the Bible says humanity is ([Genesis 1:27](#)), is to be created for loving relationships, for communion with God and with one another. The systematic theologian Colin Gunton put it this way: "*God is already 'in advance' of creation, a communion of persons existing in loving relations.*"²

Mutual indwelling

This union/communion of Father, Son and Spirit was referred to as *perichoresis* by the early Greek fathers of the church. They used the word in the sense of *mutual indwelling*.³

Why does this matter? Because that inner life of love in the Triune God is what God shares with *us* in Jesus Christ. Theologian Michael Jenkins describes it this way:

*"Through the self-giving of Jesus Christ, through God's self-emptying assumption of our humanity, God shares God's own inner life and being in communion with us, uniting us to himself by the Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the God who is Love brings us into a real participation in the eternal life of God."*⁴

Too "theological" sounding? Let's make it simpler. Paul told the pagans at Athens that we all **"live and move and have our being"** in God ([Acts 17:28](#)). The God in whom we live and have our being is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, each existing in the other in perfect communion and love. The Son became human so that we humans can join him in that perfect communion of love that he shares with the Father and the Spirit. We learn this from God's perfect revelation of himself in Jesus Christ in the Scriptures:

- **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well"** ([John 14:6-7](#)).
- **"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?... Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me"** ([John 14:10-11](#)).
- **"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you"** ([John 14:20](#)).
- **"I pray also for those who will 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"** ([John 17:20-21](#)).
- **"God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross"** ([Colossians 1:19-20](#)).

Salvation flows from God's absolute love for and faithfulness to humanity, not from a desperate attempt to repair the damages of sin. God's gracious purpose for humanity existed *before* sin ever entered the picture ([Ephesians 1:4](#)). God has assured our future – he has, as Jesus said, **"been pleased to give you the kingdom"** ([Luke 12:32](#)). Jesus has taken us with him where he is ([Ephesians 2:6](#)).

God has purposed to never be without us. **"God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross"** ([Colossians 1:19-20](#)). We often forget that, but God never does.

In his embrace

In Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father, we mortal, sinning human beings, in spite of ourselves, are graciously and lovingly held in the divine embrace of the triune God. That is exactly what the Father intended for us from the beginning. **"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his**

sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves” (Ephesians 1:5-6).

Redemption starts with God’s nature, his absolute and unquenchable love for humanity, not with human sin. Through the incarnation of the Son, his becoming one of us and making us one with him, God includes us humans in the all-embracing love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. God made us for this very reason – so that in Christ we can be his beloved children. This has been God’s will for us from before creation:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.... He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ...to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ. (Ephesians 1:4-6, 9-10)

Through the atoning incarnation of the Son, humans are already forgiven, reconciled and saved in him. Divine amnesty has been proclaimed for all humanity in Christ. The sin that entered the human experience through Adam cannot hold a candle to the overwhelming flood of God’s grace through Jesus Christ. **“Consequently,”** the apostle Paul wrote, **“just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people” (Romans 5:18).**

Universal salvation?

So will everyone automatically – perhaps even against their will – enter into the joy of knowing and loving God? Such a thing is an oxymoron, a self-contradiction, because it is impossible for you to love someone against your will. God draws all humanity to himself (John 12:32), but he does not force anyone to come. God wants everyone to come to faith (1 Timothy 2:4), but he does not force anyone. God loves every person (John 3:16), but he doesn’t force anyone to love him – love has to be voluntary, freely given, or it is not love.

Contrary to the idea of universal salvation, only those who trust Jesus are able to love him and experience the joy of his salvation. Those who don’t trust him, who refuse his forgiveness or the salvation he has already won for them, whether because they don’t want it or simply because they don’t care, can’t love him and enjoy fellowship with him. For those who consider God their enemy, God’s constant love for them is grossly annoying. The more they are confronted with his love, the more they hate him. For those who hate God, life in God’s world is hell.

As C.S. Lewis put it, *“The damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.”*⁵ Or as Robert Capon explained: *“There is no sin you can commit that God in Jesus hasn’t forgiven already. The only way you can get yourself into permanent [trouble] is to refuse forgiveness. That’s hell.”*⁶

Always on his mind

The doctrine of the Trinity is far more than a creed to be recited or words printed on a statement of faith. The central biblical truth that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit actually shapes our faith and our lives as Christians. The wonderful and beautiful fellowship shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit is the fellowship of love into which our Savior Jesus places us through his life, death, resurrection and ascension as God in the flesh (John 16:27; 1 John 1:2-3).

From before all time, the Triune God determined to bring humanity into the indescribable life and fellowship and joy that Father, Son and Holy Spirit share together as the one true God (Ephesians 1:4-10). In Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, we have been made acceptable to the Father, and in Jesus we are included in the fellowship and joy of the shared life of the Trinity (Ephesians 2:4-6). The church is made up of those who have already come to faith in Christ. But redemption applies to all (1 John 2:1-2). The gap has been bridged. The price has been paid. The way is open for the human race – like the prodigal son in the parable – to come home.

Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension are proof of the total and unwavering devotion of the Father to his loving purpose of including humanity in the joy and fellowship of the life of the Trinity. Jesus is

the proof that the Father will never abandon us. In Jesus, the Father has adopted us and made us his beloved children, and he will never forsake his plans for us.

When we trust Jesus to be our all in all, it is not an empty trust. He *is* our all in all. In him, our sins are forgiven, our hearts are made new, and we are included in the life he shares with the Father and the Spirit.

Salvation is the result of the Father's ever-faithful love and power, proven through Jesus Christ and ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. It's not our faith that saves us. It's God alone – Father, Son and Spirit – who saves us. God gives us faith as a gift to open our eyes to the truth of who he is – and who we are, as his beloved children.

God's eternal and almighty word of love and inclusion for you will never be silenced ([Romans 8:32, 38-39](#)). You belong to him, and nothing in heaven or earth can ever change that.

Endnotes

¹ James Packer, *God's Words* (Baker, 1998), 44.

² Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Eerdmans, 1998), 9.

³ Other theological terms that describe this inner communion of the Father, Son and Spirit are *coinherence*, each existing within the other) and *circumincessio* (the Latin equivalent of *perichoresis*).

⁴ Michael Jinkins, *Invitation to Theology* (InterVarsity, 2001), 92.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Collier, 1962), chapter 8, page 127).

⁶ Robert Farrar Capon, *The Mystery of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1993), 10.

For further reading

Now that you've had an introduction to God, wouldn't you like to know him better? We get to know God in several ways: through nature, through our experience with the Holy Spirit, through the Scriptures, through spiritual disciplines and through the words of other believers.

To learn more about God, read the Bible, especially the New Testament. Try a modern translation such as *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson, or *The New Living Translation*, published by Tyndale. For evidence of God's existence, we recommend the following (easiest listed first):

- Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe*
- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*
- Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*
- C. Stephen Evans, *Why Believe?*
- James Sire, *Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All?*
- William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*
- C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*
- Alister McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths*

For discussions of the attributes of God:

Max Anders, *God: Knowing Our Creator*

Paul Little, *Know What You Believe*, chap. 2

Gilbert Bilezekian, *Christianity 101*, chap. 2

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

Millard Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, chapters 8-15

Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty*

Recommended theology books:

Invitation to Theology, by Michael Jinkins

The Mediation of Christ, by Thomas F. Torrance

Dogmatics in Outline, by Karl Barth

Worship, Community and The Triune God of Grace, by James Torrance

The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons, by Thomas F. Torrance

The Trinitarian Faith, by Thomas F. Torrance

Theology, Death and Dying and Judas and Jesus: Amazing

Grace for the Wounded Soul, by Ray S. Anderson

On the Incarnation, by St. Athanasius

The Christian Foundations Series, by Donald Bloesch (seven books)

Author: Joseph Tkach

The One, the Three, and the Many, by Colin Gunton

Across All Worlds and The Great Dance, by C. Baxter Kruger

The Promise of Trinitarian Theology, by Elmer Colyer

How To Read Thomas F. Torrance, by Elmer Colyer

The Humanity of God, by Karl Barth

Mere Christianity, by C.S. Lewis

The Great Divorce, by C.S. Lewis

Experiencing the Trinity, by Darrell Johnson

The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes

Everything, by Fred Sanders

GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—www.gci.org, www.worshiphim.ca, www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton; For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website. *Contact Information: Pastor's contact information: email—evautour47@outlook.com*