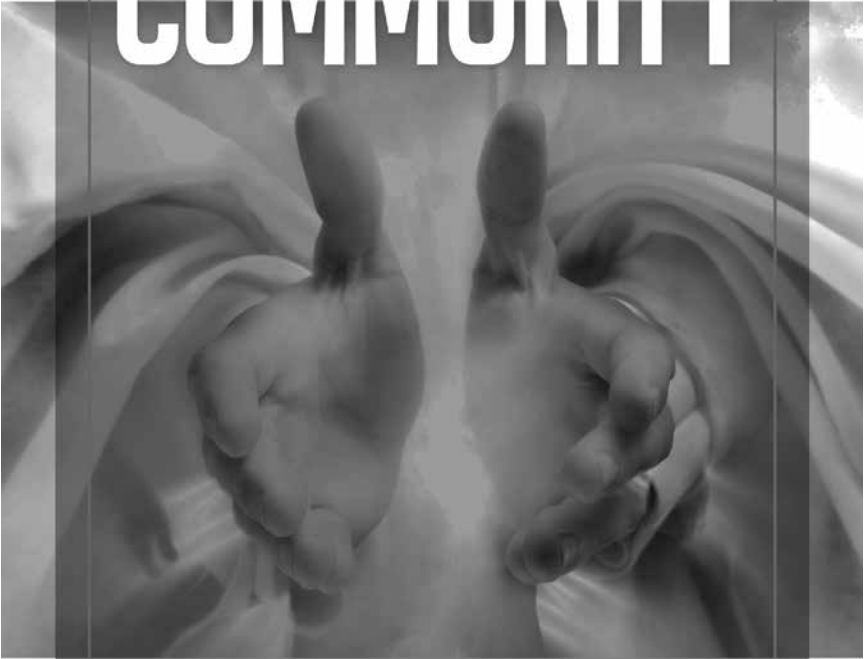


Discovering Why God  
Wants Us to Care for Each Other.

# COMMUNITY



TROY FITZGERALD



**Pacific Press**<sup>®</sup>  
Publishing Association

Nampa, Idaho | [www.pacificpress.com](http://www.pacificpress.com)

# 1. ALL

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God,  
the LORD is one.*

—Deuteronomy 6:4

Some teachers are straightforward and simply tell their students, “Read all of the questions on the test before you answer.” If you are in a hurry to complete the test or if you think you already know what to do, you might miss that one key fact. On a test of forty questions, the thirty-fifth question asks, “Approximately how much does an adult female wombat weigh? The answer to this question and all the others on this test are on the wall in the hallway. Feel free to leave the room and take your test to the hallway.”

You say to the teacher, “I don’t understand what to do.” Perhaps you forgot the process, or maybe you are being obtuse—intentionally or otherwise!

The response your teacher gives you is, “Did you read the instructions?”

When you don’t know what to do, read the instructions. You should not be surprised to find that many will not read the instructions before starting.

If the conversation about community is going to be enduring, the starting point is in the complex nature of the Creator who created everything.

Before the concept of community ever became a “thing” to create or develop, there was God. Describing what life should be like, the Creator reveals that His nature is one of companionship—in the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Bible reveals the truth that “the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). If you are going to see the nature of God as an equation, your math will fail and your logic will surely become confused. An equation is a problem to solve or a concept to explain, but a truth is a statement of reality. So, if you come up with a great idea to try to convince your math teachers that one is not only one but is actually many, you might have a starting point, but you won’t have a way to finish.

Count yourself blessed to be in a relationship that is greater than the

parameters of your mind! For when you are at the place where you can explain the categorical reality of life accurately and completely, you have arrived! However, if you are frustrated, uneasy, stirring, wondering, thinking, hoping, imagining, and wrestling, you are at the starting point to either worship God with humility or to dive deeper into a world where you are god.

When you start trying to number the aspects of God, don't start with only one, or three, but go straight to infinity. Infinity. What do you think of when you think of the infinite God?

- God is all-knowing (omniscient)
- God is all-powerful (omnipotent)
- God is all-present (omnipresent)

When a mother looks at her baby at birth, the overwhelming response is love. Not all babies are cute—but don't tell that to a mother (seriously, don't). Love is the appropriate response. Even though we can't always explain a mother's love externally, the reality of a mother's love for her baby is obvious. In the same way, we may have difficulty explaining the infinite God to finite minds, but the evidence of His existence and nature is obvious to all who seek Him.

If you want to connect the dots or solve your conundrums about the universe, return to the passage for this reading and read all of the instructions—*carefully*.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts” (Deuteronomy 6:4–6; emphasis added).

If you want to get a handle on the nature of the Almighty, start by loving Him, reading His Word, and claiming His promises.

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:6–9).

The starting point is reading the instructions in the Bible. There are, and will be, unanswered questions and mysteries that will boggle your mind—after all, the Creator is infinite. Even so, He still longs for a relationship with you!

## INSIDE OUT

- When you think of God's attributes, which do you connect with the most?
  - God is all-knowing (omniscient)
  - God is all-powerful (omnipotent)
  - God is all-present (omnipresent)
- What part of God's nature do you think about when you pray?
- What does it mean to love with all your heart, soul, and strength?
- Consider the following texts:
  - We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).
  - And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them (1 John 4:16).
  - Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 John 4:7, 8).

## 2. LET US

*Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”*

*—Genesis 1:26; emphasis added*

**U**s, *our*, *we*. Much like little words such as *if* and *but*, pronouns make a giant difference in a message. Typically, pronouns refer to people, and the appropriate use of a word tends to clarify the nature of the participants. When you choose words such as *I*, *me*, and *my*, the pronouns in the first person define the subject succinctly. Now, *you* is a little confusing. The audience might be *you* and *you* only, or it may refer to others present in the plural. But *us* and *our* and *we* can be used as “overgeneralizing” words.

Consider a few scenarios where *we* is not accurate. When a student makes a clever but inappropriate comment in class, the teacher might respond by saying, “We are not amused.” In fact, several are amused, but they probably shouldn’t be. A nurse or a doctor may ask a patient, “How are we feeling today?” At funerals, weddings, and graduations, the officiant or speaker often greets the audience by saying, “We are gathered here today . . .” Is the assumption that everyone is “on board” or in “one accord” about the reason for attendance?

Some people try to press their point with more authority by using the phrase, “We know from our study . . .” When they say “we,” it often means *some* of the people agree with their findings.

Did people in the wild west actually say to newcomers, “We don’t like strangers ’round here”? Even if someone did say those specific words, it was probably the town bully speaking. I am sure the sentiments were not unanimous. If you have ever lived in a small town, you know that newcomers are near celebrities for a while.

Even teachers and parents say, “We need to clean up the mess and put away the toys.” Lies! They don’t mean “we” collectively. They mean, “You are supposed to clean up this mess.”

For our purposes, it is important to be aware of the misunderstandings caused by pronoun usage. Of all of the personal pronouns, by far, the biggest troublemaker is *we*. And yet, in the Creation story, “us” and “our” are used to reveal God’s nature in creation.

“Let us make mankind in our image, in *our* likeness” (Genesis 1:26; emphasis added).

There are at least two ways to look at this phrase. First, the use of the phrase “Let us” implies dialogue and a choice. And second, the phrase “Let us” indicates that the whole Creation endeavor is a product of God’s complete being. Consider that some of the most important things to do in life are not commanded but are the result of an intrinsic urging:

- Dear friends, *let us* love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7; emphasis added).
- Come, *let us* sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song (Psalm 95:1, 2; emphasis added).
- *Let us* draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. *Let us* hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:22–24; emphasis added).
- *Let us* then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16; emphasis added).
- *Let us* discern for ourselves what is right;  
let us learn together what is good (Job 34:4; emphasis added).
- *Let us* not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:9, 10; emphasis added).

Everyone should respond to “let us.”

## INSIDE OUT

- How do you approach collaborative projects? Do you prefer to work with others or alone? Why?
- Consider the following texts:
  - In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (Hebrews 1:1-3).
  - Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:8-11).
  - Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth (3 John 1:5-8).