Do you have trouble concentrating?

Maybe you’re stuck on the first 15 pages of a book and you can’t seem to get any further.

Or, you are *so* engrossed in a book or Netflix series that you cannot focus on your work.

At school, you stare at the teacher but hear nothing of what they are saying.

In worship, you try to follow the sermon, but you just can’t follow along.

In the car or at night before bed, you try praying, but your mind wanders.

My friends, worry no longer. I introduce to you the “Trifecta Spinner.”

Hold its smooth surface with your index finger and thumb. Then, flip one of the three round edges and watch it spin. For 3 to 5 minutes, you can be hypnotized by the rotation. No more will you want to twirl your hair, bite your nails, squeeze a stress ball, or grind your teeth. At school, the spin focuses all that pent up energy. At the office, these fidget spinners are an absolute must-have, according to Forbes magazine, as they allow employees increased presence in their daily tasks.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Well I just had to see what all the rage is. On my way to church on Tuesday, I stopped into the Walgreens down the street. I asked the clerk if they had any fidget spinners in stock. She looked up at me with a smirk and replied, “I’m sorry, we don’t, but I hear the 711 right here has a bunch.” I felt like I was on a Black Friday hunt—searching stores for toys in demand. After searching 711 store to no luck, I approached the clerk and asked again, “Do you have those fidget spinners?” With a grand smile, he shoved a little box kept right by his side to me. They were full of spinners of all colors.

At church, I opened the package and set the toy by my computer, expecting I would barely touch it all. Friends, I must confess to you, I cannot stop playing with my new toy!

Now, I am certainly not the first to notice this, but my trifecta spinner reminds me of the Trinity. Three rounded edges of the same substance revolving in an eternal loop.

God, Three in One, dancing in the loop of love for all eternity.

Is the Trifecta Spinner an object containing divine truth?

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When he was a teenager, Patrick was abducted from 5th century Roman Britain and sold as a slave in Ireland. When he was released from his service, Patrick returned home where he heard in a dream the Irish calling: “We beseech you to come and walk among us once more.” Patrick traveled back to Ireland to preach and begin monasteries across the land. He preached the gospel to people who had never heard it and he needed a suitable object lesson to teach the truth. According to legend, Patrick found an everyday object that recalled the Trinitarian nature of God: the shamrock, a single three leaf plant. The shamrock is one leafy substance in three parts.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The problem with this analogy, as any stuffed-up seminary student will tell you, is that that God is three distinct persons in One, not three parts of the Godhead. The three leafs of the shamrock are three parts of the same sprig. God is not divided in parts, God exists in the unity of three Persons.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The same holds true with the Trifecta Spinner analogy. The three sides or bearings of the trifecta are three parts to the whole. Furthermore, if you really want to get technical, the spinner revolves around a distinct wheel. The triune God is not bound to a fourth substance. There is no found or made object that can perfectly contain Trinitarian truth.

I may have lost your focus there. Even if you all had fidget spinners to help you follow along, no degree of concentration will get us to a full apprehension of the Trinity. The Trinity is a mystery that calls for deep focused meditation. God calls for a faith that earnestly seeks understanding we will never have. That is because God the Trinity is best understood, not by theological reason, but in experience.

For example, I have the honor and privilege to guide our confirmands as they write faith statements. The first thing I ask them to do is write a paragraph about God as Trinity. The first couple sentences of these paragraphs are, pardon me for saying, as awkward as they should be. Every confirmand tries to say something about God Three-in-One and One-in-Three. And the struggle is evident. As I read, I can hear the students wrestling with how to talk about a God like this.

But some sentences later, something happens. They all begin to talk about God as love. Then the words start to flow. They know what they are talking about because they know the love of God. The confirmands write confidently about God’s triune Love because they have experienced it.

Another place I saw this in these faith statements was when the confirmands describe baptism. At first they use terms like “symbol,” “seal,” or “washing ritual,” which are all technically true. But I pressed them all to say what baptism really means to them. So they talked about what it means to be proclaimed a child of God in this congregation that nurtured them. Baptism names their experience of being loved and accepted by you, this congregation. We show the unconditional love and acceptance of God whenever we baptize.

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God and all God’s gifts are best understood as they are experienced. This is how the Bible talks of God—through human experience. Now, the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, but the experience of God as Trinity is attested throughout.

Our epistle lesson for this morning from Romans is the perfect example of this. Here, Paul explains how we experience the triune God in prayer. In prayer, Paul explains, we call out to God as children, sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ. We pray with Jesus. As we do this, the Holy Spirit confirms within us that we are—with Jesus—beloved children of God. We pray as children of God, joined by Jesus, and united in the Holy Spirit.

Paul is just trying to put words to an experience. He’s telling us that when we pray we participate in God’s triune love. Prayer is not so much an act of our own, but an act of God. So, prayer requires just enough concentration for us to call out: *Abba*, Father! Mother of us all! Maker of everything! And in this, the Spirit is saying everything you need to say, Jesus is echoing it, and God is listening.

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If you are frustrated in your prayer life, it is ok. If in the morning you try to pray but the days tasks overwhelm your mind and burden your heart, don’t sweat over a focused prayer. Just say God’s name and trust that what you really need for the day is being addressed. Or at night when you are tired and you fall asleep in prayer, be assured that all the day’s concerns are being absorbed in God’s grace.

If you believe Paul’s words even a little bit, you can no longer say, “I am no good at prayer” or “I don’t know how to pray.” Because even the most eloquent prayers are just elaborations on what is most important: simply naming God. Prayer is just reaching out to an already extended hand. It is not what you do in prayer that is important, it is what God is doing. So, we don’t have to worry about the right way to pray or the exact words to say. As Richard Rohr says, “It is first of all God’s prayer, and it’s only secondarily yours.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

That’s the funny thing about being a Christian. Our most intense focus, our best efforts will never get us to a better place than we already are. We are beloved children of God before and despite anything else.

This is why confirmation is so important in the life of the church. It is when our youth look back and remember when God claimed them as beloved in baptism and they affirm this identity as the central truth of their lives. It is when they claim that the congregation that has supported them is their own. It is when they promise to have a stake in this community of love.

As we make our Transformations pledges today to invest in a building more suited to God’s mission, these confirmands make a pledge to engage God’s mission in this place. We hope that our Transformations pledges today enable transformations for and by many confirmation classes to come.

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Confirmands, you have many choices about who or what you want to be. These choices are overwhelming. But know that your choice about who you are is secondary to God’s choice to be for you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Remember at the beginning of the year, when I asked you each to open confirmation class in prayer? You protested, “But I don’t know how! I don’t know what to say!” And I always said, “Yes, you do. There’s no such thing as a bad prayer.” You have prayed every confirmation class since. Now I ask that you pray even the simplest of prayers before everything you do, knowing that God’s already got you in prayer.

If you can’t concentrate, if you can’t always keep track with God, know that God always keeps loving attention on you. This goes for all of us. You may not be able to understand the Trinity, but in prayer God always understands you.

1. https://www.forbes.com/sites/jplafke/2016/12/23/fidget-spinners-are-the-must-have-office-toy-for-2017/#558d6e0618a4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This legend is told widely and variously. See Dowley’s *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, pg. 19 or http://catholichotdish.com/the-pastors-page/saint-patrick-the-shamrock-and-the-trinity/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a funny explanation of these ideas see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQLfgaUoQCw [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*, pg. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)