

The Apostles' Creed

TOGETHER WE BELIEVE

MATT CHANDLER

Bible study written by
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LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

Published by LifeWay Press® • © 2017 The Village Church

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ISBN 978-1-4300-5457-3 • Item 006103003

Dewey decimal classification: 238

Subject headings: APOSTLES' CREED / GOSPEL / DOCTRINAL THEOLOGY

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Printed in the United States of America

Groups Ministry Publishing • LifeWay Resources
One LifeWay Plaza • Nashville, TN 37234-0152

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I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit;
born of the virgin Mary;
Suffered under Pontius Pilate;
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended to hell; the third day
He rose again from the dead;
He ascended to heaven and sits on the
right hand of the Father Almighty,
From whence He shall come to
judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Introduction

It's easy for our culture of individuality and innovation to shape the way we think about the church. So what should we believe? Should Christians try to be more accepting of a postmodern worldview? With so many questions, opinions, and interpretations among people today—even within the church—what should we all agree on as essential to Christian faith?

Finding its genesis in the apostles' teachings, the Apostles' Creed contains essential Christian doctrines and beliefs that summarize the gospel and make up the foundation of our faith. The scriptural truths contained in the creed help us operate from good theology, with the knowledge that our faith is rooted in truth and a rich history that spans past, present, and future. The lines of the creed aren't mere words. They convey the essence of what we confess and believe as the body of Christ.

About the Author



MATT CHANDLER serves as the lead pastor of teaching at The Village Church in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. He came to The Village in December 2002 and describes his tenure as a replanting effort to change the theological and philosophical culture of the congregation. The church has witnessed a tremendous response, growing from 160 people to more than 11,000, including campuses in Flower

Mound, Dallas, Plano, and Fort Worth.

Alongside his current role as lead pastor, Matt is involved in church-planting efforts both locally and internationally through The Village, as well as in various strategic partnerships. Prior to accepting the pastorate at The Village, Matt had a vibrant itinerant ministry for more than 10 years that gave him the opportunity to speak to thousands of people in America and abroad about the glory of God and the beauty of Jesus.

Matt is the author of *To Live Is Christ, to Die Is Gain; Mingling of Souls*; and *The Explicit Gospel Bible Study* (LifeWay, 2012). He's also a coauthor of *Creature of the Word* (LifeWay, 2012).

Other than knowing Jesus, Matt's greatest joy is being married to Lauren and being the dad to their three children: Audrey, Reid, and Norah.

How to Use This Study

The Apostles' Creed provides a guided process for individuals and small groups to explore 12 core tenets of Christianity. This Bible study book includes 12 weeks of content, each divided into three main sections: "Group Study," "Family Discipleship," and "Personal Study." A leader guide is also provided to prepare those who are leading groups through this journey.

GROUP STUDY

Regardless of the day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with a group session. This group session is designed to last 90 minutes, with approximately 45 minutes dedicated to video teaching and another 45 minutes to group discussion. Meeting even longer than 90 minutes will allow more time for participants to interact with one another.

Each group study uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God's Word, and with the video teaching.

START

This section includes questions to get the conversation started, a review of the previous week's study to reinforce the content, and an introduction to the new content for the current week.

WATCH

This page includes key points from the video teaching, along with space for taking notes as participants watch the video.

DISCUSS

This page includes discussion questions that guide the group to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

The Apostles' Creed presents a great opportunity for families to consider the truths of the gospel together. The "Family Discipleship" section provides discussion, activities, and memorization opportunities that encourage families to engage with this material on a deeper level.

ENGAGE

This page will guide your family to consider the truths of the gospel by utilizing the following framework: "Time," "Moments," and "Milestones." Use this framework for family discipleship in your home and on the go.

MEMORIZE

Space is provided for participants who want to memorize the Apostles' Creed as a family. Use this page to write from memory the sections of the creed you've covered up to that point in the study.

PERSONAL STUDY

Three personal studies are provided each week to take individuals deeper into Scripture and to supplement the content introduced in the group study. With biblical teaching and interactive questions, these sections challenge individuals to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to make practical application to their lives.

LEADER GUIDE

On pages 154–59 at the back of this book you'll find a leader guide that will help you prepare each week. Use this guide to gain a broad understanding of the content for each week and to learn ways you can engage members at different levels of life-changing discussion.

The Apostles' Creed Grid

Throughout this study we'll examine and apply the doctrines outlined in the Apostles' Creed by using a four-part grid as a filter to draw out key truths. The personal study in week 2 will introduce the grid, and the personal study in weeks 3–12 will explore a specific phrase in the creed by examining it through each of the four areas of focus and application.

SYMMETRY: *The creed helps us develop better symmetry as Christians, giving us a more robust understanding of biblical teaching.*

As Christians, it's easy to stick with what we already know. Either we don't grow and remain immature with a minimal, two-dimensional faith, or even if we're growing, we become out of balance instead of developing a holistic, well-rounded faith. The creed helps us intentionally cover the doctrinal spectrum. Think of it like an exercise routine. Just as you don't need to work the same muscle group every day, neglecting the others, you need to broaden your understanding of the full scope of biblical truth. Believing Jesus is your Savior is vital, but it's also necessary to recognize that He's called you into a relationship with the church. A Christian who settles for believing in Jesus as Savior but never develops a love for the church is out of balance and ultimately unhealthy. We desire symmetry or balance to be well rounded in our doctrinal understanding as mature disciples.

CLARITY: *The creed helps us with clarity, making clear who God is.*

While symmetry applies to our overall knowledge of core biblical doctrines, clarity is a more specific focus on what we believe about God and the world. By and large, American evangelicals seem to be terribly confused about who God is, what He's up to, what He's like, and what He's about. Surveys reveal shocking misconceptions, many of which are similar to the heresies that the Apostles' Creed was intended to refute. For example, is the Holy Spirit a He or an It? Is Jesus both fully God and fully man? Did Jesus literally die? Did He have a physical body when resurrected? The Christian life isn't about our preferences or opinions or the latest cultural trends; it's about God. What you believe about God is the most important thing in your life; it shapes all your attitudes and actions.

COMMUNITY: *The creed informs our community, whom we belong to, and whom we're with.*

As Christians who believe the doctrines summarized in the Apostles' Creed, we're part of a people who have been around for thousands of years. We're part of a people who go back to the beginning of humankind, when God called first people to Himself. Throughout history God's people, those He has chosen and called to Himself, have thrived and worshiped the one true God. We're part of that tradition. We're a global people. People all over the earth will gather this weekend because they share the beliefs expressed in the creed. They'll rejoice in it, they'll be shaped by it, and massive numbers of them will recite the creed together. We've been woven into something much bigger than us. The fabric created by God makes us stronger than any of us can ever be on our own. It's diverse, it's beautiful, and it's global.

As Christianity in the United States, having enjoyed great favor the past 150 years, now starts to fall out of favor, any effort to define ourselves by secondary beliefs must also fade away. The creed shows us what's primary in the Christian faith. We're a creedal people, united by truth that supersedes any other differences in our culture and sets us apart as a distinct community of faith.

COUNSEL: *The creed informs the way we counsel ourselves and others.*

Counsel is essentially the point of application. How do symmetry, clarity, and community lead to a change in your perspective? How do you think and act differently? What do you tell yourself or others as a result of believing the doctrines in the creed? For example, if you believe Christ will return to judge the living and dead, that will affect the way you think about sin and the way you warn and encourage others in regard to personal holiness. Think of the ammunition that belief provides against sin. When you grow in your understanding of the person of God, the work of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, you'll think differently.

The four parts of this grid work together to form a cohesive framework to help us grow within the long tradition of orthodox Christian beliefs. Symmetry in our understanding of the Bible leads to more clarity about who God is. The better we understand God and the big picture of the Bible, the better we can counsel ourselves and one another in the community of faith. As we counsel one another in community, we grow in symmetry and clarity. The result should be an ever-deepening maturity and a closer walk of obedience with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Week One

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit;
born of the virgin Mary;
Suffered under Pontius Pilate;
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended to hell; the third day
He rose again from the dead;
He ascended to heaven and sits on the
right hand of the Father Almighty,
From whence He shall come to judge
the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Group Study

START

I BELIEVE IN

*Welcome everyone to week 1 of The Apostles' Creed.
Use this page to begin the group session.*

Let's begin by taking a few minutes to get to know one another.

Ask members of the group to introduce themselves by sharing their names, members of their immediate families, and where they grew up.

What was your favorite school song, team cheer, or student tradition?

Things like school songs, cheers, and traditions unite us with other like-minded people in the present and in the past. Gathering together and raising our voices in a unified declaration create a powerful sense of confidence, pride, and identity. Each of us desires to belong to something greater than ourselves. Even in today's society, which celebrates individuality and innovation, there's still nothing that compares to the energy, commitment, and reverence generated by a united community, group celebration, and proud tradition.

It's easy for our cultural values of individuality and innovation to undermine the unity that God intended for His church. For the next 12 weeks we'll consider the value of declaring our shared beliefs with one another and with the long line of Christians who came before us.

*Read the Apostles' Creed aloud as a group
before watching video session 1.*

WATCH

Use this viewer guide to follow along and take notes as you watch video session 1.

THE APOSTLES' CREED WILL HELP US WITH:

1. Symmetry—a robust understanding of the Bible
2. Clarity—who God is
3. Community—whom we belong to and whom we're with
4. Counsel—to ourselves and to others

Creeds do not hold any authority in and of themselves, but rather, they point outside themselves to the ultimate authority of the Word of God.

THE APOSTLE'S CREED HAS BEEN USED—

- to correct error;
- as a tool in the spiritual formation of God's people.

Believing leads to action, and knowing may or may not.

Belief is birthed in the heart.

The message of the Christian faith isn't that we have done anything, but rather, we have believed that Someone has.

We aren't chained to rote religious activity, but we have a Savior who has accomplished all that we desire for us.

The Apostles' Creed shows us what's primary.

When the early church recited this, it was simultaneously their greatest act of rebellion and their greatest act of allegiance.

This beautiful moment when the people of God recited this creed, they said, "We don't believe the story that our culture is telling."

DISCUSS

Discuss the video segment, using the following questions.

Before we watched the video, we read the Apostles' Creed as a group. What's the significance of reciting the Apostles' Creed together? Why is it significant that the first word of the creed is *I*?

Why is it important for Christians to articulate and agree on what we believe?

Why did Matt distinguish between the authority of Scripture and of a creed?

READ ROMANS 10:9-10.

How do belief and action relate to salvation, as described in these verses? What distinction did Matt make between knowing and believing?

In what specific ways do our historical Christian beliefs, as outlined in the Apostles' Creed, rebel against our present-day culture?

How does a Christian experience freedom in believing the gospel?

Because the Apostles' Creed is a faithful, truthful summary of Christian doctrine as revealed in the Bible, notice that no article of the creed can be removed without detracting from the gospel. Every point is essential.

Why is it important to preserve the full teaching of the gospel, not just the parts that are easier to believe?

What's your primary observation about the teaching on belief?

What remaining thoughts or questions do you have?

Encourage members to complete the following personal studies before the next group session.

Family Discipleship

ENGAGE

The Apostles' Creed presents a great opportunity for families to consider the truths of the gospel together by utilizing the following framework for family discipleship: time, moments, and milestones.

- **TIME.** Begin memorizing the Apostles' Creed as a family. This week should be fairly easy: "I believe." Explain what a creed is and the importance of knowing what we believe about God and why.

- **MOMENTS.** Look for opportunities to identify other belief systems or worldviews your family encounters. Point out that everything people do originates from their belief systems. How does the way we live point to our belief in God?

- **MILESTONES.** How will your family celebrate the occasions when your kids come to know the Lord? When your kids are baptized, what are some ways you could share with your unbelieving family and friends what God has done? Commemorate your own baptism by sharing your testimony with your family on the anniversary of your baptism.

MEMORIZE

*Use this page to practice writing
the Apostles' Creed from memory.*

Personal Study

DAY 1

The Apostles' Creed begins with the words "I believe in." When you recite the creed in your group each week, you're declaring to the world that you believe the Christian story is both good and true. God the Father is reconciling the world to Himself in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The creed is more than just an individual statement; it's both personal and corporate. You're "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1), and when you recite the creed, you publicly identify with the church—a group of people who believe in the work of the triune God.

In the early church, uttering the word *credo* ("I believe") meant identifying in the closest possible way with the gospel. Often new believers recited the Apostles' Creed during their baptismal ceremonies and were then welcomed into the fellowship of the saints. When believers said the creed, they were identifying themselves as citizens of a different kingdom—the kingdom of God. This meant, and still means today, that believers could face persecution, alienation, and even death. The creed is far more than a list of propositions; it's the summary of the apostolic faith that has been practiced throughout church history.

READ HEBREWS 11:1-2.

The beauty and tension of these Scripture verses come from the fact that based on what has happened in the past, Christians have assurance and conviction in placing their hope and belief in something they've never seen.

Though we believe in the existence of God since before time began and in His work that began human history with the creation of the world, a man named Abram was the first in a long tradition of people who put their belief in God.

READ GENESIS 12:1-4.

We learn more about Abram, later called Abraham, throughout the pages of Scripture in a beautiful account of a vibrant belief in action. His story is central in the historical record of faith that unfolds in Hebrews 11.

Why do you think details about Abram's age, family, and land were included in Genesis 12:1-4? What do they reveal about belief?

What experiences have challenged you to consider how seriously you believe something about God and/or His Word? How did those moments shape your perspective on life and what it means to live by faith?

Abram's belief in God affected his own life, the lives of his family members, and the lives of people around him. The same is true today. Your beliefs have been shaped by other people; your faith is a testimony that affects the people around you as well.

Identify specific people in your life who have been examples of living by faith. How did their actions shape your understanding of the Christian life?

Humans are made for community, and that's why the creed is confessed together by the entire believing community. However, even when a local congregation recites the creed in unison, the first word of each statement of the creed is *I*. Popular culture asserts that all people should have the opportunity, even the right, to define themselves. The Apostles' Creed reminds us that the truth isn't up for redefinition.

Prayer

Grant me faith, Father in heaven. Give me a faith that's focused on Your work, the work of Your Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the world. Even when I struggle to believe, sustain me by Your grace. Help me walk by faith, not by sight, and grow in my affection toward You as I learn more about Your mighty deeds. Help me not to depart from this apostolic faith You've given to all believers by Your providential and glorious mercy. Amen.

DAY 2

Whether or not people go to church and whether or not they know what the verse says, it's hard to go through life without seeing a reference to John 3:16.

Use this space to write John 3:16 from memory. If you don't have the verse memorized, look it up in your Bible and copy it here.

How would you explain the importance of belief, according to John 3:16?

Describe the moment when you first believed in Jesus. If you haven't had a moment like this in your life, record the name of your group leader and/or a trusted Christian friend whom you'll commit to ask questions about personal belief in Jesus.

This popular verse is part of a conversation Jesus had with a Jewish leader named Nicodemus (see John 3:1-21). Jesus' words boldly declared what it truly meant to believe in God. In that culture the majority of God's covenant people had grown to believe that their relationship and right standing before God were based on two things: observing Jewish religious traditions and being born into Jewish families. However, Jesus said anyone could have a relationship with God—if they truly believed in His Son for salvation.

A similar trap of mistaken belief in what makes people right with God exists today. If someone grew up in a Christian home or is a morally good person, it's easy to believe he or she is a Christian. The Bible is crystal clear, though, that merely believing correct things about God won't get anybody into heaven.

This point can't be overstated: cultural Christianity won't save you.

In which area(s) do you find yourself inclined to measure your relationship with God?

- Having a good family**
- Living a moral life**
- Going to church**
- Studying the Bible**
- Volunteering to serve**
- Giving money to a ministry**
- Being recognized as a leader**

What's the danger of basing the certainty of your salvation on external behaviors like the previous ones?

Pisteuō, the Greek word translated as *believes* in John 3:16, has a richer meaning than the simple understanding of facts. To believe in something means to commit and to give your trust. Of course, trust and commitment find expressions in external behavior, so belief isn't just a matter of head knowledge. It's a matter of the heart's devotion.

It's easy for John 3:16 to become so familiar that the gravity of the situation is lost. Don't let words like *love*, *life*, and *saved* distract you from *perish* and *condemned*. You need to wrestle with each of those realities until you come to grips with what's at stake here. Christian belief is infinitely more than an adherence to a moral code or a knowledge of religious facts. True belief—life-changing commitment and trust—is a matter of eternal life or death.

Prayer

Spend time reflecting on the fact that your relationship with God isn't based on who you are, where you were born, or what you know. Thank Him that you can live eternally as part of His family by truly believing in His only Son, Jesus. Commit yourself to trust Christ wholeheartedly.

DAY 3

Unlike Matthew and Luke, John didn't begin his Gospel account by providing a detailed record of Jesus' birth. Instead, the Book of John begins with a beautiful description of the divine personhood and redemptive purpose of Jesus' incarnation.

READ JOHN 1:11-13.

What's the result of belief in Christ, according to these verses?

From the very beginning of the book, John told his readers that Jesus came to change their lives forever if they believed in Him. The opening words revealed that through faith in Jesus, anyone could become a child of God. However, the people who should have recognized and believed in Jesus—the Jews—didn't receive Him.

The account of Nicodemus in John 3 illustrates the lack of understanding among God's people. Nicodemus was a religious expert who couldn't wrap his mind around the truth of salvation by faith in the Son of God. This Jewish leader couldn't understand how "whoever believes in" Jesus (v. 16) could be born again into God's eternal family.

The closing chapters of the Book of John lead us to an unmistakable conclusion about what it means to believe in Jesus.

READ JOHN 20:24-31.

Notice that Jesus didn't leave Thomas in a state of confusion and doubt. Jesus met this disciple in the midst of his struggle to believe. Thomas had been a devoted follower of Jesus. He had committed to literally follow Jesus every day for almost three years. He had put his trust in Jesus. But after the crucifixion Thomas didn't know what was true.

Put yourself in his position. It would have been difficult to trust your own judgment and hopes after such an unexpected traumatic experience. Everything you thought you knew seemed to have been wrong. Of course, you would have wanted to believe Jesus had been raised from the dead. But if it was true, why would you be the only person without the same experience as the other disciples?

What have you struggled to believe about the Christian faith?

How did you come to a point of belief, even if you still don't understand?

In what ways is it comforting to read that even one of Jesus' disciples struggled with whether he could believe what he was being told about Jesus?

What objections do people have about the validity of Christianity?

Whom do you know who has doubts about the Christian faith?

How can you help share the truth about your Lord and your God, the resurrected Jesus?

The Gospel of John comes full circle in the final words of the book. John clearly restated in unmistakable terms his desire for the church. As a believer, you're a part of this legacy.

Prayer

Thank God that in His grace He has come to you, speaking your name, so that you can believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. Take time to worship Him now as your personal Lord and Savior.