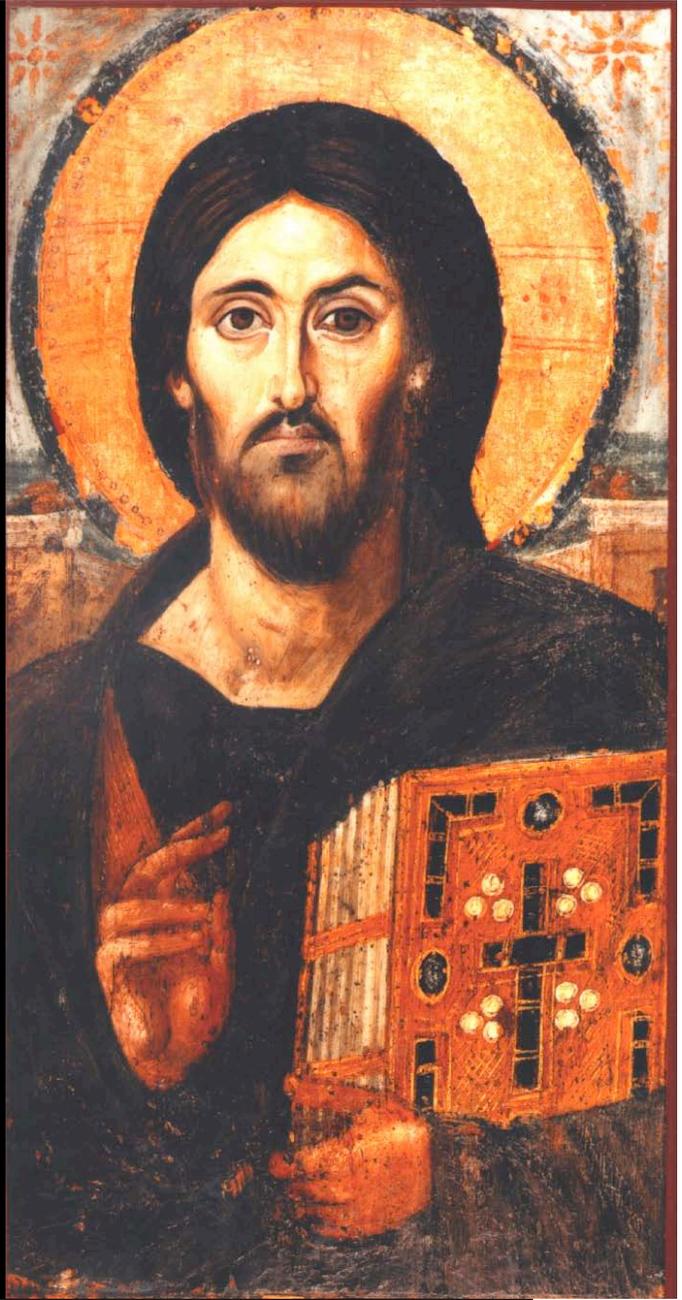


Experiencing
The
Apostles'
Creed



Comprehensive Companion Guide
For The Apostles' Creed Full Length Version DVD

Prepared by
Christian History Institute with
Langdon Palmer

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Companion Study Guide to accompany The Apostles'
Creed Full Length Version DVD series*

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Introduction to *Experiencing The Apostles' Creed*

A Global Project

As part of its 25th anniversary celebration, Christian History Institute teamed up with filmmaker T. N. Mohan to co-produce a comprehensive 17 part series on the Apostles Creed, a living link to our shared history. T. N. visited several Biblical, theological, and historical scholars and invited them to share their insights on the Creed. The Apostles' Creed is a Universal Creed for the Universal Church, so scholars from several different Christian traditions are included. Phrase by phrase and word by word, the scholars dig into the Creed's rich meaning, illuminating this ancient storehouse of Christian conviction. What they reveal is a living declaration of living faith that speaks to today's issues and is as relevant for modern believers as it was for the first Christians.

Two DVD Versions, Two Guide Versions

Each group or individual who studies the Creed will have unique goals in mind. Some prefer a more compact introduction to the Creed, while others wish to explore the material more fully. With this in mind, we have prepared two distinct versions of the DVD material and two versions of the companion guide. The *Full Length Version* of the DVD contains seventeen sessions (approximately thirty-minutes each), covering each line or phrase of the Creed in depth. This DVD contains many extra features, such as session introductions by Dr. Timothy George and hymns that can enhance the learning experience. This *Full Length Version* DVD can be viewed with or without the Dr. George commentary, depending on the needs of the viewer. Also available on the *Full Length Version* DVD is a sermon series by Pastor Langdon Palmer on the Apostles' Creed. The *Comprehensive Companion Guide* has been prepared to accompany these seventeen sessions.

The *Abridged Version* of the DVD contains four thirty-minute sessions that have been carefully edited from the longer series. To accompany these four sessions we have prepared a four-session companion guide, known as the *Abridged Version Companion Guide*. Since the *Abridged Version DVD* follows roughly the same order of topics as the *Full length Version* (but in less detail), some find that the longer *Comprehensive Version* of the study materials is useful with the *Abridged Version* of the DVD. For this approach, simply use the *Abridged Version* DVD, but pause at the end of each topic and select appropriate material from the seventeen-session *Comprehensive Guide*.

An Amazing Document and a Living Link

Those who explore this series will never again see the Creed as some dry statement of tired theology, but rather as a vibrant living expression of the heart of faith, linking them to the church of the ages and the church around the world. Groups that have used this series express appreciation for the useful summary of the basics of historic Christian doctrine. So many go on to add that they had no idea of the depth of the familiar phrases of the Creed, with their use of this confession being wonderfully enriched. Theology and history come to life as every study session includes an application section that shows how the teachings of the Creed apply to everyday life and faith.

Scholars Included in this Program

Rev. Richard Bewe - Former Rector, All Souls Church, London

Dr. Peter Contrell - Former Principal, London School of Theology

Dr. Timothy Dudley-Smith - Bishop of Salisbury

Mark Galli - Managing Editor, Christianity Today

Dr. William Johnson - Former Professor of New Testament, Andrews University

Dr. Tony Lane - Professor of Theology, London School of Theology

Dr. Martin Marty - Professor Emeritus, University of Chicago

Dr. Alistair McGrath - Principal, Wycliffe College, Oxford

Dr. Robert Mulholland - Professor of New Testament, Asbury Theological Seminary

Susan Schreiner - Associate Professor of the History of Christianity and Theology, The Divinity School, University of Chicago

Dr. Derek Tidball - Principal, London School of Theology

Dr. Kallistos Ware - Bishop of Diokleia, Oxford

Dr. N.T. Wright - Bishop of Durham

Hosted by **Dr. Timothy George**, Dean Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

The material in this study guide has been created with the help of Langdon Palmer, MDiv. Princeton Theological Seminary. Rev. Palmer is a pastor working in the Philadelphia area to connect a new generation to the faith of the ancient church.

Apostles' Creed Full Length Version DVD

Episode Titles, Lengths and Segment Breaks

1: "I believe"	Faith of Our Fathers Origin of the Creed Need for the Creed Creed as Defense Against Heresy A Baptismal Creed "I believe"/The Meaning of Belief The Personal Nature of Belief The Nature of Faith	[34:39]
2: "in God"	Blessed Trinity The Creed and the Triune God The Trinity in the Old Testament The Trinity in the New Testament The Relational Unity of the Trinity	[25:57]
3: "the Father"	Abba God God Our Father The Father of Jesus and Our Father	[28:39]
4: "Almighty"	Almighty Love Love is Almighty The Sovereignty of God and the Human Will The Sovereignty of God and Suffering	[36:30]
5: "Maker of Heaven and Earth"	The Maker and the Made The Source and Origin of All That Is The Creator of the Heavens Random Chance of Purposeful Creation? The Image of God The God of the Covenant The Origin of Evil	[24:22]

- 6: *"and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord* [39:17]
Savior of the World
 "Jesus"
 "Christ" / The Anointed One
 "His only Son"
 "Our Lord"
- 7: *"who was conceived by the Holy Spirit"* [36:06]
The Godman
 Incarnation
 Wings of a Dove
 "born of the virgin Mary" / The Virgin Birth
 Was Made Man
 The Sinless Second Adam
- 8: *"born of the virgin Mary"* **The Godbearer** [24:00]
 Jesus as a Liberator of Women
- 9: *"suffered under Pontius Pilate"* [41:28]
Acquainted With Grief
 Pilate and the Suffering Servant
- 10: *"was crucified, died"* **The Blood of His Cross** [34:31]
 Cross
 He Died So We Can Live
- 11: *"and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead."* [29:56]
The Last Enemy
 Defeated!!!
 The Silent Land
 "He descended into hell"
 "The third day He rose again
 from the dead" / He is Alive!!!
- 12: *"He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty"* [20:06]
The Ascent of Man
 Our Intercessor
- 13: *"From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead"* [36:22]
That Day
 The Blessed Hope of His Coming
 The Judgement

- 14: *"I believe in the Holy Spirit"* [35:34]
The Breath of God
The Comforting God
- 15: *"the holy catholic church"* The Whole Family [43:19]
of God
the communion of saints/cloud of Witnesses
- 16: *"the forgiveness of sins"* All That Debt [31:59]
- 17: *"the resurrection of the body and life everlasting"* [25:45]
The Great Retrieval

Bonus Features:

Hymns of Our Fathers

Sermon Series on the Creed

Suggestions for the Leader

~ Read the article *Introduction to the Apostles' Creed*, found on p. 9, as a good introduction to the Creed.

~ Preview each video session several times, taking notes if possible. Encourage your class participants to also take notes while viewing. Each session presents so much information in a short time, that without note taking, it is difficult to process and recall what was presented.

~ Review the Study materials and suggested discussion questions carefully. Each session includes the following: Opening, Explore, Scripture foundation, Application and Closing. Most classes will not have enough time to cover all of the material. An un-rushed, carefully edited meeting will be more rewarding for participants than a packed one where every question was completed. A lesson-planning sheet is included on p. 102. We have numbered each item in the lessons so you can easily cross out and re-order them as you see fit. For example, if you are leading a small group of people who don't know one another you may want to focus more on the opener, but if you are teaching an established adult education class you would be likely to spend more time in the Scripture foundation.

~ Use nametags to help group members get to know one another and to increase their comfort level. We strongly suggest that your group become a living model of the "Communion of Saints," where members know, care and support one another. You will find that the early sessions are "safe" and that as the course proceeds more opportunities for deeper sharing and intimacy are provided. The "Opener" exercises are designed to achieve two goals at the same time: Whet the appetite of the group to watch the video segment and help your group to know each other and share their life stories. To help create further sense of belonging, consider including a time of sharing. In later sessions you might add time for personal testimonies if the group is willing.

~ Work to create an open environment where attendees feel comfortable hearing and sharing opposing viewpoints. Given that the scholars who are interviewed on the DVD sometimes have opposing views, we need to allow for the same in a group setting.

~ If time permits, consider covering the DVD segments in shorter portions, thereby spending more time on each concept. Select appropriate teaching activities and questions accordingly.

~ The first "Reaction Question" in each session is intentionally the same. This question is designed to help the leader discover what topics are of particular interest to the class and need further discussion, allowing you to tailor your lesson on the spot.

~ End your sessions with prayer and by reciting the Creed together. In this way you will help participants to anchor what is learned in the session to the act of confessing the Creed.

INTRODUCTION TO THE APOSTLES' CREED

By Pastor Langdon Palmer

It has often been easy to ignore the Apostles' Creed – treating it much as one might treat an old piece of furniture sitting in the corner of the worship service.

In some churches, it is recited mechanically out of habit; in others, it is completely dismissed as an unhelpful religious relic. But recently, many have been rediscovering within the sparse, compact words of the Apostles' Creed a gateway that connects the great story of Scripture to the practical concerns of Christians living in today's complex, multicultural world.

Why a creed?

Some Christians ask, “Why do we need creeds when we have the Bible?” If the Word of God comes down to us through the Bible, why do we need anything else? The answer is found in Scripture itself. In I Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul writes:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, . . .

This quote is from one of the earliest epistles, written about AD 57, before many other New Testament books had been written and long before the New Testament canon was finally settled. If the New Testament as a whole did not exist when Paul wrote his letter, what “gospel” is he talking about? Apparently he had preached to them some standard summary of the Christian message, a message he had “received” just as they in turn “received it.” Later, in Romans 6:17 he says,

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them.

The word “teaching” can also be translated “doctrine.” These first Christians had doctrine or teaching prior to having a complete New Testament. What was this teaching or doctrine? It was a summary of the basics of the Christian message—of the good news of Jesus Christ. And already at the time of Paul's writing there were some who were distorting the words of the Old Testament Scriptures and the words of the apostles, leading people astray. The purpose of a creed or doctrine is to summarize the meaning of the many words of Scripture and apostolic teaching. Whenever we try to explain Christianity to someone else we partake in this same summarizing action. As we will see below, this summary of faith was used by the early church to 1) evangelize, 2) teach new converts, and 3) protect the church from distorted teaching. Christians today have the same three needs for a concise statement of the Christian faith.

How did the Creed arise?

According to “the great commission” found in Matthew 28:18-20, an important part of being a Christian in the early church was teaching others and baptizing them in the name of the Triune God. A concise summary of the Christian faith would help in both these tasks. In the table below, compare the version of the Apostles' Creed we have from AD 336 with the baptismal formula Hippolytus of Rome used with new converts by the year AD 215.

The word “creed” comes from the Latin “credo” which means “I believe.” As new converts were being baptized, Hippolytus would ask them, “Do you believe in God?” and they would answer “I believe in God, the Father Almighty...” “Do you believe in Jesus Christ?” and they would answer, “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God...,” working their way through the entire formula. Thus the roots of the Apostles' Creed are found in the declarations of faith made by converts at the time of their baptism. Although the actual copies of the Apostles' Creed that

we have date from the 300s, it is clear from this example that some version of this statement of faith was being used early in the church.

For example, we find Irenaeus of Lyons (AD 120 – AD 202) saying that the church “preserves this creed of ours,” and he summarized “this creed” in a way that sounds just like the Apostles’ Creed.

The key point is that Christians were doing this BEFORE the New Testament was finalized. So rather than the first creeds being tacked on AFTER the Bible was written, the evidence we have points toward basic creeds similar to the Apostles’ Creed existing in the earliest churches. The earliest local creeds we find from dispersed writers and churches use their own words to make the same basic theological points we find in the Apostles’ Creed today. We call it the Apostles’ Creed not because the apostles themselves wrote it, but rather because the early churches viewed it as an accurate summary of the apostles’ teaching.

By the year AD 64, Christians were often being persecuted for their faith. Converting from paganism to Christianity could cost a person his or her life. Thus, it really mattered whether you were in or you were out, whether you called yourself a Christian or not. What set of beliefs made one a Christian? Which beliefs were worth dying for? What was the heart of the Christian message they refused to deny? One clue is found in what new converts said at their baptism. That was the time when they publicly declared their faith in and loyalty to Jesus. And as we see from the chart, what they declared was basically the Apostles’ Creed. Tertullian (AD 200) says that the memorized creed or “Rule of Faith” acted as a symbol or password that allowed Christians to recognize each other in a dangerous world.

What does it teach?

The Creed’s short length made it easy to memorize. Its sparse wording sets out clear boundaries for the Christian faith while creating space for different interpretations within those boundaries. Every phrase can be supported by multiple references to Scripture. However, the creed only includes those aspects of faith that the early Christians viewed as the bare essentials—the aspects that set Christianity apart from other belief systems at the time. As can be seen above, its very shape reveals these priorities. It focuses on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with the majority of its words spent on Jesus. Like the tip of an iceberg, Jesus is the person of the Trinity above the water line—God entering their physical world and human history in a way that he could be seen and touched. It was the new revelation that Jesus was God that set the Christians apart from all other religious movements, and therefore many of the words of the creed are spent driving this point home. “Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,” declares that Christ is both God and Human. “Crucified under Pontius Pilate” anchors the crucifixion of Jesus to the history of the world—an actual historical event. “Dead and buried” declares that Jesus actually died. “On the third day he rose again” declares that the resurrection was also an actual historical event. The Creed ends by turning its attention to us. Just as Jesus had a bodily resurrection from the dead, so shall all of us at his second coming at the end of days. It also declares that while we are those who need to have our sins forgiven, we are also the saints—members of His universal church across the ages. The creed is thus a declaration of hope.

In some sense, the Apostles’ Creed is a “primitive creed” in that its first forms precede the creeds generated by church councils (such as the Nicene Creed of 325). For example, the role of the Holy Spirit is much less defined in the Apostles’ Creed than in later creeds. Thus it takes us that much closer to the first days of the early church where ordinary men and women struggled to understand the full implications of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It forms the broad, universal foundation upon which many different denominations and creeds have been built.

What can we conclude?

First, saying the Apostles' Creed was never meant to be some boring religious ritual! The first believers said it with tears in their eyes as they went down into the baptismal waters. It was personal, heartfelt, and precious. It was said at the moment they threw their hat in with the Christian community—at the moment they were saying “Yes” to the maker of heaven and earth and “No” to all the other powers that tried to lay claim on their lives.

Second, considering how much Christians argue and disagree with each other, it is nothing short of stunning that Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches around the world all embrace the teachings found in the Apostles' Creed. In the midst of a multicultural, shifting world, here is a solid core that defines Christians (regardless of our labels and our differences) while unapologetically declaring the unique claims of the Christian faith. It is a starting place for common ground.

Finally, the Creed remains an excellent teaching tool. Each phrase opens up profound theological vistas that impact how we think and act as Christians.

Session 1: Faith of Our Fathers

“I believe”

“The Creed gathers together the very fundamental facts of the Christian faith and expresses them very, very simply and crisply and clearly. So here is a good foundation and a syllabus for teaching and for the understanding of our faith. In other words, it says ‘look, here are the major themes of scripture; Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation.’ –Quote from DVD

OPENER The following will allow your group to begin thinking about the importance of the creed and also give you some indication of where each one is coming from spiritually.

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

- 2 Invite:** As people come in, introduce yourself and if it is likely that some people won’t know each other provide name tags for first names. Introduce the course, focusing on why you are enthusiastic about it. Take the important time to have each person introduce themselves, sharing their name, where they grew up, and whether they ever heard the Apostles’ Creed said in their childhood. *(Note: for some folks who learned the creed as a child this experience will give them a sense of familiarity, while others may associate the creed with dead religious ritual. Through this exercise, you will get a feel for the background of your group.)*
- 3 Say:** Imagine that a news crew is interviewing people on the street about their views on Faith. They approach you and ask you to state one of your own beliefs about God or Faith. They tell you to give one sentence about one thing you believe and the sentence has to start with “I believe that ...” What would you say? *(Have each person who is willing contribute a line, while you write down their answers.)*
- 4 Say:** The word “creed” comes from the Latin “credo” which means “I believe,” so in a way, the sentence you contributed is part of your own personal “creed.” If we were a group working together to come up with a set of beliefs that defined us as a community, we might start with a list much like this one. We would probably then refine it, limiting it to the absolute essentials – the parts we all agreed with. Now, imagine we are some of the first Christians in the early Church. Easter is over, Pentecost is over, and we are looking at each other and struggling with questions like: *What just happened? What is it that we all believe? What do I mean when I say I am a Christian? What do you mean when you say you are a Christian?* This course, based on the Apostles’ Creed, will give us a chance to think through what the early Christians believed, what some of today’s top scholars believe, and what each of us personally believes. We will see how what we believe about God and ourselves affects how we see, experience, and choose to live our everyday lives. Today we are going to start with the basic questions – “Why even have a creed?” and “What does it mean to Believe?”

Play DVD Episode 1: Faith of Our Fathers

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 5 Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think? *(It will be important from the start to create an environment where diverse and perhaps conflicting opinions can be expressed. Point out that even the scholars themselves sometimes voice different opinions in the DVD.)*
- 6 Ask:** What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a written statement of faith like a creed or a church doctrinal statement? How could it help faith? Could it hinder faith?
- 7 Ask:** What were the arguments you heard for why the Apostles' Creed was necessary? *(A concise way to explain what you believe to other people who ask about your faith; A way to teach new converts the essentials of the faith; A statement of faith to be declared by new converts during their baptism; A way to protect the original faith of the first Christians from distortions that were occurring from different interpretations of the Bible (heresy))*
- 8 Ask:** What do you make of the fact that with all the divisions and denominations in the church, the beliefs expressed in the Apostles' Creed are accepted by the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and virtually every Protestant denominational and non-denominational church? Is that a strength or a weakness? Why?
- 9 Ask:** What distinctions did the speakers make about the words *faith, belief, and trust*?
- 10 Ask:** The presenters describe faith as difficult. Why? Do you agree?
- 11 Ask:** Is there a difference between viewing the Apostles' Creed as a declaration of WHAT we believe (our points of doctrine), and viewing the Apostles' Creed as a way of standing up and declaring WHO we believe in? How could this change of viewpoint alter how you approach the Creed and even your faith?
- 12 Ask:** The presenters make a distinction between our experience of God and our belief or trust in God. How are these connected for you? Which came first for you, belief or experience?
- 13 Ask:** The truth is, we all have some sort of personal creed, some set of beliefs. How important is it that these beliefs match the creed of the local church, or the worldwide church down through the ages?

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

14 Say: Each week we will look at just a few of the scriptures that support each line of the Apostles' Creed. First, let's look at a scripture that touches on some of the need for a creed.

"... while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed...who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ...

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ... building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." - Jude 1:3-4,17,20-21

15 Ask: Why would it be so important to remember the words of the Apostles instead of just following their example and doing what they did? *(The Christian faith (as opposed to some other religions) is not just about doing "religious" acts. What we believe matters too. For Christianity is primarily about a relationship with God, and what we believe about someone affects our relationship with them. Certain beliefs or doctrines are necessary for any relationship but are meant to support the relationship, not replace it.)*

16 Ask: What connections do you see between this Scripture and the **need** for the Apostles' Creed?

- a) *Training and education are an important part of faith. Even though those reading the letter were already part of "our common salvation," they still needed to "contend earnestly for the faith," "build themselves up in the faith," and to "remember the words spoken beforehand." The Apostles' Creed serves as an excellent teaching tool on the basics of the Christian faith.*
- b) *We are to contend for a particular faith – the faith that has been "handed down to us" from the Apostles. The Apostles' Creed can help us to do that.*
- c) *Opposed to this faith were (and are) false teachers who were leading people astray. Think of heresy as similar to someone spreading lies about someone you love. Distorted images of God lead to a distorted relationships with God. Accurate belief is a part of our "common salvation" and helps us see clearly who God is. The Apostles' Creed helps us do this.*

17 Ask: What connections do you see between this Scripture and the **content** of the Apostles' Creed?

- a) *There are already hints of the Trinity in this Scripture with "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" mentioned together in Jude1:20-21.*
- b) *The primary focus is on God the Son, "our Lord Jesus Christ."*
- c) *The mention of eternal life because of Jesus Christ.*
- d) *The phrase "our common salvation" already hints at the idea of a universal church and a set of shared beliefs. The very act of writing a letter to the church and remembering the words of the apostles implies a type of "communion of the saints."*

18 Ask: Can you see the formation of something like the Apostles' Creed being a faithful response to this admonition in Jude? What is your own understanding of the relationship between Scripture and things like statements of faith, creeds and church doctrinal statements? Are you personally comfortable with reciting the Apostles' Creed in public worship? Why or why not?

19 Ask: How can you follow the four admonitions given in verses 20 and 21?

1. "building yourselves up on your most holy faith"
2. "praying in the Holy Spirit"
3. "keep yourselves in the love of God"
4. "waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life"

Which one is the hardest for you to do?

20 Say: Now let's examine some scripture that explores the concept of belief:

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-- but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." - Romans 4:1-3

21 Ask: What is the difference between saying "Abraham believed in God" and saying "Abraham believed God"?

22 Say: The phrase "it was credited to him" could be understood with two different images:

- a. as some sort of impersonal cosmic spreadsheet where a change in legal standing (like a mortgage balance being paid off) is recorded and checked off in the appropriate column.
- b. as two people sitting down at a table together when the one person reaches over the table and rips up the bill, forgiving the debt owed by the other.

How might these two images affect your understanding of the phrases "I believe in God... and in the forgiveness of sins"?

23 Say: This last passage will help us sum it all up:

6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down)

7 "or "Who will descend into the deep?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:

9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." - Romans 10:6-11

24 Ask: Rephrase verse 9 in your own words. Why do you think Paul gives these two ideas together?

25 Ask: How might the Apostles' Creed help someone live out verse 9? How could verse 9 help us to guard against using the creed as a dead ritual?

26 Ask: According to these verses, how would you summarize what it means to believe or have faith?

27 Ask: Look up the Old Testament Scripture referenced in Verse 11 (Isaiah 28:16). How does the image presented there strengthen your faith?

APPLICATION *Preserving Tradition versus Living Faith*

28 **Teach:** We have much to learn from the collective wisdom of those Christians who came before us. For 2000 years our elder brothers and sisters have thought long and hard about what beliefs are essential to the Christian faith. Consider the following scriptures:

Proverbs 22:28

Do not remove the ancient landmark that your ancestors set up....

1 Peter 5:5

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders...

At the same time, Christianity has always been a frontier religion – occurring at the edges of society, a living faith that is “new every morning.” We are always in need of reforming our faith because we are always tending to drift away from the living God to a God created in our own image. Consider how unstructured (from a human point of view) life was with Jesus. Consider the lack of structure and tradition we see in the book of Acts. The relationship between the development of the New Testament, the creeds, and church government is complicated. The authority of scripture, the church and the creeds was interrelated as the early church (under the authority of the Holy Spirit) struggled to discern which writings should be included in the New Testament and what those writings meant.

There is always a tension between two models of the church – the temple and the itinerant preacher. The temple represents the embrace of the traditions and convictions that come with any established community, while the itinerant preacher represents the voice of one crying in the wilderness. A revival held in a park where a non-ordained evangelist speaks spontaneously and asks people to stand if they want to accept Jesus might be a modern example of the itinerant preacher, while a highly liturgical church service that focuses on the Lord’s Supper using the standard words of institution might be a modern example of the temple orientation.

29 **Ask:** Which image of Christianity do you lean more towards – the itinerant preacher who preaches a new word, or the temple where the faith once given is faithfully handed down? Our own personality can strengthen or distort our understanding of the Christian faith, and our stance towards the Apostles’ Creed. Some of us like to “ride loose in the saddle”, open to what life may bring, deciding as we go. Others believe in the power of planning and organization and place an emphasis on living “in decency and in order.” These preferences can affect how we understand what it means to be a faithful Christian. Here’s the challenge:

- *If you lean toward the itinerant preacher model, take some time this week thinking about the importance of listening to the collective wisdom of the church. We might say we don’t like “organized religion,” but the moment two Christians agree to meet once a week at a particular place to study the Bible, haven’t they just given birth to “organized religion”? Ignorance has been defined as “When you don’t know what you don’t know.” Is it possible that some things that look archaic, ineffective, or as dead ritual in the church actually are valuable in ways we have not yet grasped? If you are bothered that the church seems so certain and assured about certain doctrines, stop and ask, “what is the history that led the church to this conclusion?” For example, see the confidence and continuity expressed in the book of Jude.*

- *If you lean toward the temple model, take some time this week thinking about how unsettled and messy and inconsistent life in the first churches were. The New Testament was not shrink wrapped and faxed complete from heaven. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, ordinary human beings had to do the hard work together of deciding what was faithful scripture and what was not. Imagine you and your community find yourselves standing in a field as Jesus ascends to heaven looking at each other and saying "Now what?" Is it possible that the very uncertainty and ambiguity of such an environment creates space for God to break through our man-made preconceptions? For example, see the uncertainty caused by Jesus in John 7.*

30 **Say:** Each phrase of the Apostles' Creed is meant to be a learning aid to point us to a number of important ideas in Christianity. Reflect on some of the implications we should remember the next time we hear the words "I BELIEVE" in the Apostles Creed.

- In the original baptisms of the early church, a new Christian's three fold affirmation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was preceded by a three fold renunciation of evil things. In other words they didn't just believe in God among a lot of other beliefs, they chose to turn away from one set of beliefs (loyalties) and turn towards a new set of beliefs (loyalties). In other words, when they stood up and said "I believe in God the Father..." it was in the context of saying, "Against all these other things I could believe in and be loyal to, I choose to believe and be loyal to God the Father..." In saying, "yes" to God, they were saying "no" to other things. **In our day, what are the things people put their trust, hope, loyalty in, rather than God? For you personally, what is the thing that vies most strongly with God for your trust and loyalty?**
- The Nicene Creed came along after the original rules of faith that formed the foundation of the Apostles' Creed. Rather than having roots in the baptismal formulas for new believers like the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed was drafted by a gathering of bishops called the first ecumenical council, held in Nicea in 325. It was revised and expanded into its present form at the second ecumenical council, which was held at Constantinople in 381. While the Apostles' Creed begins "I believe," the Nicene Creed begins "We believe." Why might both kinds of statements be important?

The Nicene Creed's opening with "We believe" is a sign of unity, a sign that churches in different parts of the known world can agree to a common faith despite their differences. The Apostles' Creed's "I believe" is a sign that ultimately each individual must choose or declare a personal belief in God. Each of us individually must decide if our hat is thrown in with God or not. We must decide where our trust and loyalty lie. There are many people who would like to have that kind of relationship with God, but would frankly say they have never experienced it. What would you say to such a person?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

31 **Say:** *"The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man--and the dogma is the drama. That drama is summarized quite clearly in the creeds of the Church, and if we think it dull it is because we either have never really read those amazing documents or have recited them so often and so mechanically as to have lost all sense of their meaning."* Dorothy Sayers in *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Reckless Rage for Life. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 2.*

32 **ASK:** Based on what we have discussed today, what is one thing you would like to remember or think about the next time you say the Apostles' Creed?

CLOSING PRAYER

33 **Say:** Lord, our prayer is that through this study we would gain a more profound understanding of You, the living God and your Gospel. Open our eyes in the coming weeks. Amaze us. Leave us speechless as we catch even a small glimpse of your majesty, your righteousness, your wisdom, your plan and your love for us.

2nd Timothy 1:12 says: I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

Lord, we want to know you better. We don't just want to believe in a set of propositions; we want to believe you, to know you, to trust you. I ask in the coming weeks you would use our group to help each of us fall deeply in love with you, to help us experience your presence and to be utterly amazed by who you are. And because of this, that we would come to a point where we can utterly trust you with every aspect of our lives. Amen

Session 2: Blessed Triunity

“in God”

“The creed itself derives its structure from those verses at the end of Matthew, when Jesus tells his disciples to go into all the world baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....Actually you can't read the New Testament at all without the Trinity ...So whether we are talking about God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, we are talking about the same reality ... a tri-unity that escapes Human cognition. We cannot comprehend it...because if we could understand the Trinity perfectly, we would be God, because we would have encompassed God within our human rationality.” – Various quotes from DVD.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today's topic

1 Ask: What words would you use to describe what God is like? (*write down the responses on the board.*) How would these descriptions compare to those used by people of other religions? What makes the Christian understanding of God unique?

2 Preface: Last session we looked at the first two words of the Apostles Creed “I believe...”, today we are looking at the next two words “in God...” But what God are we talking about? Today we are going to explore one of the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith – The Trinity. It is the very fact that Christians came to see God in a totally new way, as the Trinity, that set them apart, making the Creed necessary. Let's see how our scholars understand the role of the Trinity in the early church.

Play DVD Episode 2: Blessed Triunity

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

3 Ask: Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?

4 Say: We are now going to take a look at the shape or “structure” of the Apostles’ Creed and how that relates to the Trinity. *Hand out copies of the Apostles’ Creed (p. 104) and divide your class into three groups. Invite Group 1 to uncover which portions of the Creed are referring to the Father. Group 2 should look for the portions that refer to the Son and Group 3 should find those sections that refer to the Spirit. Give about 2 or 3 minutes for this exercise.*

5 Ask: In general terms, how much time is spent in the Creed on each part of the trinity? (*Jesus takes up most of the Creed*) Why do you think this might be true? *Jesus is the revelation of God as it says in Hebrews:*

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. (Hebrews 1:1-3)

6 Say: There is no subject deeper or more confusing than the Trinity – for after all, we are trying to describe the nature of God who is infinite. Here are some objects that are commonly used to help us understand the Trinity: a block of melting ice (ice, water, and steam are three forms of the same thing (H₂O)), a shamrock (three leaves, but one plant), and a triangle (three equal parts). (*Note: Bring in these objects for display if possible.*) **Ask:** Which of these seem most useful to you? What are some flaws you see with them?

7 Teach: It may be helpful when thinking about the persons of the trinity to imagine them by location and by role as shown in the table below:

PERSON	Location Analogy	Roles Analogy
Father	Above us	Creator
Son	Along side us	Redeemer
Holy Spirit	Within us	Sustainer

8 Teach: The early Christians identified three ways to distort the Trinity:

- Modalism – God is really one person that acts in three different ways.
- Polytheism – God is really three separate Gods.
- Subordinationism – there is a hierarchy in the Trinity, or a difference in the substance of their divinity. In these cases the Son was viewed as subordinate to the Father or the Holy Spirit as subordinate to both.

9 Ask: Thinking back to our trinity analogies (use the visuals if you’ve got them), how might they be susceptible to these distortions?

“One of the early Christian Fathers said that whenever we start talking about the Trinity, we must immediately think of the one God. And as soon as we think of the one God, we must immediately remember Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is a kind of a towing and flowing all the time in true Christian belief between the real statement God is one and the recognition he’s revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” – video quote

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

10 Teach: One video presenter points out:

"So the Trinity isn't just about working out theoretical formulations about the three persons and all the rest of things, although that has its place. But it is just about reading the New Testament and seeing who we meet there. The one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and that is there on almost every page of the New Testament."

Let's take a look now at some scriptures.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God [is] one Lord." -Deuteronomy 6:4

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me," --John 15:26

"When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." -Matthew 28:17-20

But being full of the Holy Spirit, [Stephen] gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." -Acts 7:55-56

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." -Jude 1:20-21

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. -2 Corinthians 13:14

11 Teach: The word "Trinity" does not appear in the Bible. Rather it came into use as Christians tried to wrestle with the implications of Scripture and their own experience of the risen Lord. Consider the verses above (in context if possible). For each verse, look for implications about the existence, nature, and equality of the three persons of the Trinity

APPLICATION

1 2 Teach: Write down each of the members of the Trinity on the white board. Then one at a time, erase each one and ask, "What part of God's full expression do we lose if we erase this aspect of God?"

1 3 Teach: Consider the religions of the world – some focus on a powerful remote creator, others on the teachings of a human sage and still others on intimate personal spirituality. Perhaps these three approaches represent genuine human needs and longing that can only be found in the triune God. If so, what implications would this have for evangelism and how to begin to talk to various non-Christians in our culture?

1 4 Teach: The Eastern Orthodox describe the Trinity as Perichoresis – to dance around – imaging the trinity not so much as a static triangle but as a dynamic dance of three partners. In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis says, "the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions is that in Christianity, God is not a static thing-but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance."

1 5 Ask: The Trinity can be seen as a beautiful model of a loving, caring relationship. What "love lessons" could you learn from the Trinity?

1 6 Teach: While no summation of the trinity is perfect, one commentator summed it up by saying:

- a) *We KNOW of God through the Father*
- b) *We SEE God through the Son*
- c) *We EXPERIENCE God through the Holy Spirit.*

Is one of these areas a weakness for you? Is there a part of the Trinity you need to get to know more fully? How can you do that?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. -Hebrews 1:1-3

1 7 Think ahead to the next time you will say the Apostles' Creed and come to the words "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Based on what we have discussed today, what is one thing you would like to remember or think about when you say the names of the Trinity?

CLOSING PRAYER

And now, may the grace of our lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each of us until we meet again.

(2nd Corinthians 13:14)

Session 3:

Abba God

"I believe in God the Father ..."

"The creed is reminding us that God is the one who brings us into being and more than that God as Father is one who cares for us, as for example an earthly father would care about his children. So the idea about God as father is immediately setting up this idea of a God who can not simply be trusted but a God who can be known in a personal way..."

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today's topic

- 1 **ASK:** Growing up, what mental picture did you have of God? Was God more like energy or more like a being? What was God like and what did God look like? Optional: Bring in a variety of nature photos and photos of people. Ask which one would best represent a child's image of God. *Record responses on a white board.*
- 2 **Ask:** Describe how your image of God has changed over time.
- 3 **Say:** Today we will be looking at the phrase in the Apostles' Creed "I believe in God the Father". There is an old saying that "God created man in his own image, and then man returned the compliment." Our images of people here on earth can both help and distort our image of God. Today we will be wrestling with the question "What is God really like?" What are God's qualities? What kind of person is God? Let's start by listening to the reflections of our New Testament scholars on this first sentence of the creed.

Play DVD Episode 3: Abba God

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

4 Ask: Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?

5 Ask: One of the scholars said:

"The Bible never tries to prove that there is a God. The Bible presupposes two things – there is a God, and God reveals himself ...This is the Biblical God. He is and he reveals himself...out of the silence God speaks to us."

Do you agree? Is this your experience? Why would the Bible spend so little time trying to prove God's existence? What implications would this have for how we share our faith? (*While logic and reason are important, we cannot reason our way to God, God must reveal himself to us.*)

6 Ask: What would be the benefits of thinking of God as our "Heavenly Father"?

- a) *God is a personal being.*
- b) *God nurtures, protects, provides for us.*

7 Ask: The Scriptures use many titles to describe God. What might be the drawback of referring to God solely by the term "Father"?

- a) *Using this term alone makes God sound male (God is beyond male and female – he created both in his image).*
- b) *People who had abusive fathers may find this term distorts their understanding of God.*
- c) *Scripture reveals God as having many traits that we might consider to be "female." If we refer to God only as Father we risk overlooking these traits.*

8 Explore: Using p. 27 as a guide, ask for several (or many) volunteers to look up Scriptures that give us other words to describe God. Distribute as many Scripture references as you like from the list. After a moment or two, ask for volunteers to share what name or word is used to describe God in the Scriptures they looked up.

9 Teach: No one human term can fully define God's character. Our words and images are finite, but God is infinite. So using the word "Father" alone does not fully capture God's character. Even so, why do you think the writers of the Creed chose "Father" as the very first and primary image to present in describing God?

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

10 Teach: Genesis 1:27 says:

"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

If both men and women are created in the image of God, then God is beyond maleness. God is spirit; God does not have a sex. In fact the scriptures themselves have used feminine imagery to describe God's relationship with us. Jesus himself says:

"How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling." (Matthew 23:37)

On the other hand, the word "Father" cannot be ignored. God is called "Father" 15 times in the entire Old Testament, and then usually as the Father of the nation Israel. However in the New Testament, in the gospels alone, Jesus calls God "Father" 170 times! The people of Jesus' time were surrounded by all kinds of female imagery for gods in the Greek religions. The Jews did not dare to call God their "Father" because it seemed too disrespectful. God was the great "I am," and not to be addressed in such a way. And yet Jesus calls God "Abba" or "Daddy." This was considered outrageous. Consider the reaction of the religious leaders in John 5:18 -

"For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

So, just as Jesus' terms for God might not have been socially acceptable in his day, they may not be in our day. But we must recognize that part of the new revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is this understanding of God as "our heavenly Father." Jesus uses this term not for the sake of male patriarchy but to allow us to understand how intimate God's love is for us. Using the word "Father" for God is a unique aspect of Jesus' teaching.

11 Ask: What is the difference between God as Father of Jesus and God as our Heavenly Father?

- a) *God the Father and God the Son are of the same nature and order. God the Son has always existed and been in relationship with God the Father (John 1:1-3).*
- b) *We have been adopted into God's family through Jesus (Ephesians 1:4-6).*

1 2 Say: Now let's look at one more Scripture to tie things together:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

1 3 Ask: The video talked about God as father in two ways, first as the Father of Jesus the son, and second as the heavenly father to all of us. How is God described in this scripture?

1 4 Ask: When you reflect upon your own thought life, how you imagine God looks at you and the things you have done or failed to do, does your view of God match the picture of God captured in this scripture?

1 5 Ask: What is the relationship between the comfort we receive from God and the comfort we give to others? According to this verse how would you describe the Christian life?

Biblical Titles and Descriptions of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

- **Abba** (daddy) – Romans 8:15
- **Advocate** - 1 John 2:1
- **Almighty** - Revelation 1:8
- **Alpha** - Revelation 1:8
- **Amen** - Revelation 3:14
- **Angel of the Lord** - Genesis 16:7
- **Anointed One** - Psalm 2:2
- **Apostle** - Hebrews 3:1
- **Author and Perfecter of our Faith** - Hebrews 12:2
- **Beginning** - Revelation 21:6
- **Bishop of Souls** - 1 Peter 2:25
- **Branch** - Zechariah 3:8
- **Bread of Life** - John 6:35,48
- **Bridegroom** - Matthew 9:15
- **Carpenter** - Mark 6:3
- **Chief Shepherd** - 1 Peter 5:4
- **The Christ** - Matthew 1:16
- **Comforter** - Jeremiah 8:18
- **Consolation of Israel** - Luke 2:25
- **Cornerstone** - Ephesians 2:20
- **Dayspring** - Luke 1:78
- **Day Star** - 2 Peter 1:19
- **Deliverer** - Romans 11:26
- **Desire of Nations** - Haggai 2:7
- **Emmanuel** – (God with us) Matthew 1:23
- **End** - Revelation 21:6
- **Everlasting Father** - Isaiah 9:6
- **Faithful and True Witness** - Revelation 3:14
- **First Fruits** - 1 Corinthians 15:23
- **Father** - (and heavenly father) Matthew 6:9
- **Foundation** - Isaiah 28:16
- **Fountain** - Zechariah 13:1
- **Friend of Sinners** - Matthew 11:19
- **Gate for the Sheep** - John 10:7
- **Gift of God** - 2 Corinthians 9:15
- **God** - John 1:1
- **The God who heals** - Exodus 15:22-26
- **The God who provides** - Genesis 22:9-14
- **The God of peace** - Judges 6:16-24
- **The God of strength** - Genesis 17:7,8
- **Glory of God** - Isaiah 60:1
- **Good Shepherd** - John 10:11
- **Governor** - Matthew 2:6
- **Great Shepherd** - Hebrews 13:20
- **Guide** - Psalm 48:14
- **Head of the Church** - Colossians 1:18
- **High Priest** - Hebrews 3:1
- **Holy One of Israel** - Isaiah 41:14
- **Horn of Salvation** - Luke 1:69
- **I Am** - Exodus 3:14
- **Jehovah** - Psalm 83:18
- **Jesus** - Matthew 1:21
- **King of Israel** - Matthew 27:42
- **King of Kings** - 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16
- **Lamb of God** - John 1:29
- **Last Adam** - 1 Corinthians 15:45
- **Life** - John 11:25
- **Light of the World** - John 8:12; John 9:5
- **Lion of the Tribe of Judah** - Revelation 5:5
- **Lord of Lords** - 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16
- **Master** - Matthew 23:8
- **Mediator** - 1 Timothy 2:5
- **Messiah** - John 1:41
- **Mighty God** - Isaiah 9:6
- **Morning Star** - Revelation 22:16
- **Nazarene** - Matthew 2:23
- **Omega** - Revelation 1:8
- **Passover Lamb** - 1 Corinthians 5:7
- **Physician** - Matthew 9:12
- **Potentate** - 1 Timothy 6:15
- **Priest** - Hebrews 4:15
- **Prince of Peace** - Isaiah 9:6
- **Prophet** - Acts 3:22
- **Propitiation** - 1 John 2:2
- **Purifier** - Malachi 3:3
- **Rabbi** - John 1:49
- **Ransom** - 1 Timothy 2:6
- **Redeemer** - Isaiah 41:14
- **Refiner** - Malachi 3:2
- **Refuge** - Isaiah 25:4
- **Resurrection** - John 11:25
- **Righteousness** - Jeremiah 23:6
- **Rock** - Deuteronomy 32:4
- **Root of David** - Revelation 22:16
- **Rose of Sharon** - Song of Solomon 2:1
- **Ruler of God's Creation** - Revelation 3:14
- **Sacrifice** - Ephesians 5:2
- **Savior** - 2 Samuel 22:47; Luke 1:47
- **Second Adam** - 1 Corinthians 15:47
- **Seed of Abraham** - Galatians 3:16
- **Seed of David** - 2 Timothy 2:8
- **Seed of the Woman** - Genesis 3:15
- **Servant** - Isaiah 42:1
- **Shepherd** - 1 Peter 2:25
- **Shiloh** - Genesis 49:10
- **Son of David** - Matthew 15:22
- **Son of God** - Luke 1:35
- **Son of Man** - Matthew 18:11
- **Son of Mary** - Mark 6:3
- **Son of the Most High** - Luke 1:32
- **Stone** - Isaiah 28:16
- **Sun of Righteousness** - Malachi 4:2
- **Teacher** - Matthew 26:18
- **Truth** - John 14:6
- **Way** - John 14:6
- **Wonderful Counselor** - Isaiah 9:6
- **Word** - John 1:1
- **Vine** - John 15:1

Since no one human word can completely describe God, we should consider the full counsel of scripture when trying to understand God's nature. This does not mean we should abandon the titles Jesus gave us of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“To the Father of all things, no name is assigned, because he is unbegotten... ‘Father’ and ‘God’ and ‘Creator’ and ‘Lord’ and ‘Master’ are not names but designations drawn from beneficent deeds and functions” – Justin Martyr, 2 Apology 6. If circa 155 A.D.

APPLICATION

16 Ask: When you imagine what God thinks about you when he looks at you, what images come to your mind? Hand out copies of "God as a Loving Father," the worksheet on p. 29 to your group. Once everyone has completed it individually, gather together and discuss it.

17 Ask: What difference does it make in daily life to know that:

- There is a God.
- This God is the ruler of all things.
- This God looks at you as a loving father would?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

18 Think ahead to the next time you will say the Apostles' Creed and come to the words "God the Father". Based on what we have discussed today, what is one thing you would like to remember or think about when you say this phrase?

CLOSING PRAYER

19 Say:

Let's close in prayer today using the prayer Jesus gave us that so clearly declares that God is our heavenly father:

Our Father, who is in heaven, Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

God as a Loving Father

Imagine that this was written for you:

***The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.
As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting.***
Psalm 103:8-17

Prior to all other theological considerations*, we must begin with God's original, primal stance towards those he has made. Can you honestly see your relationship to God as that of a young child to a good and loving parent? *Try this experiment. Fill in the blanks below with your first name and notice how you are feeling as you do it.*

"For God so loved _____ that He
gave _____ His only Son, so that if
_____ would believe in Him
_____ would not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world
to condemn _____, but in order that
_____ might be saved through Him.

Consider sharing with the group your own reaction to this exercise.

* Some might complain that this exercise is overly individualistic and that God cares deeply about the covenant community of faith. We agree but feel that a healthy community of faith is composed of those who understand how personally God cares for them and those around them.

Session 4: Almighty Love “Almighty”

“...He is Father before he is Almighty. God preeminently is love. God is love, and so His great power is always exercised in behalf and in the service of His love. He is almighty in His love...A love relationship requires that the beloved be free to say no to the relationship. God has created us for a love relationship.” Quotes from DVD.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

1 Ask: Today we will be looking at the phrase in the Apostles’ Creed “I believe in God the Father *almighty*”. The Bible and the creed claim that God is all loving AND all- powerful. When you look around the world today, what evidence do you see of God’s love? What evidence do you see of His power? (*Record responses on whiteboard.*) How would you complete the following question?

“If God is all powerful, then how come ...”
(*Write responses down on the whiteboard*)

2 Say: *Let’s look at how our New Testament scholars wrestle with what it means that God is almighty:*

Play DVD Episode 4: Almighty Love

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

3 Ask: Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?

4 Teach: Our all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God has chosen to give us free will. Why? How does our free will work in conjunction with God's will?

5 Ask: Let's look back at the questions we came up with at the beginning of class. Did the scholars help to answer any of our questions? (*How can God's will co-exist with our own free will?; How can a loving God allow suffering?; Are there limits to God's power?*)

6 Ask: What would an all-loving God who is not almighty be like? How about an almighty God who is not all-loving? How do God's love and power work together?

7 Teach: If God is almighty, does that mean he can do anything? Can God make a four-sided triangle or choose to stop existing? Saint Augustine replies that

"...there are many things that He cannot do, and yet He is almighty – indeed, He is almighty precisely because He cannot do these things. For if He could die, He would not be almighty, if to lie, to be deceived, to do unjustly, were possible for him, He would not be almighty... For our almighty Father, it is quite impossible to sin. He does whatever He wills: that is omnipotence. He does whatever He rightly wills, whatever he justly wills."¹

Because He is an all loving, all-powerful God, He chooses not to do anything that is inconsistent with his own nature. In a sense He "cannot do it" because it would mean being untrue to himself. It is as if He says "I cannot" as an act of the will. So the phrase "ruler of all things" may be more helpful than an abstract term like "omnipotent."

8 Teach: In many ancient cultures people believed the world was inhabited by many invisible unpredictable deities, both good and evil. It was easy to offend these deities and efforts were made to appease them. If you have ever been in a work situation where you didn't know what was expected of you and felt at the mercy of arbitrary powers greater than yourself, you can get a sense of the emotional experience of living within this world view. Ironically, in some modern New Age movements there is a new version of this view, with many cosmic forces that we need to discover and align ourselves with. Ultimately all such views put the responsibility of everything that happens to you in your own lap. When bad things happen, the thought comes "if only I had been better, worked harder, been in better alignment with the cosmic forces, then this wouldn't have happened."

In contrast, the idea that there is one all-powerful creator who rules all things leads us in a different direction. Stop and try to imagine how "big" God is. Imagine the size and complexity of the entire cosmos, all the brute force and mystery of the universe, all held in God's hands. He said let it be, and it was. This God is not part of the creation. Wherever we go we find the same rules at work, the universe acts consistently. Life and reality are not arbitrary. Things may still appear random to us, but at least we know that much of life is beyond our control – we are the created and God is the creator. We are responsible before a sovereign God for our choices, but we are not responsible for everything that happens to us. It is a sanity-building demotion!

¹ Augustine, De symbolo ad catechumenos 2

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

"I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God... That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these. ...I am the LORD... A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other." - Isaiah 45:5-7, 21-22

9 Ask: What is the primary message of this text? Why is it so important that people know this "from the rising to the setting of the sun"?

10 Ask: How do you understand the phrase "Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these"?

11 Teach on Free Will: We have already said that belief in the one almighty God implies that we humans are not in complete control. But do we have some control? Some argue that God predestines all things. Others argue that he gave humans the gift of free will. God's sovereignty and the human responsibility to choose run side by side through the scriptures. Certainly nothing can thwart the plans of God:

For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? – Isaiah 14:27

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails. – Proverbs 19:21

And yet, could not God be so great, so sovereign that all our choices though real, exist within the stream of his will? (See 2 Samuel 24:12) In other words, our choices matter and have real consequences because God in his sovereignty chooses freely to give us this ability to choose:

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." - Joshua 24:15

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" – Deuteronomy 30:19

"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?" - Ezekiel 18:23

Imagine a family in the car on vacation to a particular destination. The parent gives the child three choices of what music to listen to in the car. Their parent has a perfect will (the band they would most like to hear) and an allowable will (the range of bands they will put up with). The child has real choice, but whatever

they choose is not going to thwart the parent from getting the car to where it is supposed to go. In the same way, we have choices because God allows us to have choices, and nothing we choose will keep God from ending the story the way he has always planned. Humans sometimes use this gift of free will to turn from God and to cause others to suffer. Apparently God feels the value of this gift is worth the consequences when it is abused.

12 Teach on Human Suffering: Ask: If God is both all-powerful and all-loving, why does he allow suffering? We can see some value in certain kinds of trials, but what possible good comes from unthinkable human suffering? The famous verse Romans 8:28 states

"we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

As we noted above, God can work in all things (both good and evil) in that nothing will thwart his final plans. But this does not make evil or suffering "OK." When Jesus asks in his prayer in Matthew 6:10

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

The implication is that evil events are not part of God's perfect will:

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." Isaiah 5:20

It is possible for a person to go through suffering and find God and spiritual growth in the midst of it. But this may not happen. Sometimes suffering is silent blackness – we can make no sense of it from a human perspective. In fact, if this life is all there is, it would be possible to conclude that it is absurd, a cruel joke. If this life is all there is, then it would be possible to conclude that God is capricious or uncaring. It is no small matter that those who wrote the scriptures about God's love and faithfulness were well acquainted with suffering. Having none of the benefits of modern medicine and pain killers, they struggled with parasites, infections, the death of children, and many diseases, yet were confident that God is good. How? The basic Christian premise is this:

There are worse things than death and better things than life.

At the same time, the Bible shows us example after example of Godly people who, rather than acting like everything was OK were completely honest with God about their feelings and their suffering:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death... Psalm 13:1-3

We would do well to be as honest with God about our own suffering.

APPLICATION

- 13 Demonstration:** Use a large old paperback novel to demonstrate. **Say:** It has been said that life is a story written by a madman. But imagine that someone ripped a chapter out of the middle of a novel (*do so as you speak*) and handed the chapter to you saying, "Here, make sense of this." You might reply, "Well, I know who the characters are and what is happening in this section, but I have no idea what it all means. I need the rest of the story to understand."
- 14 Teach:** Our lives on this earth are a little piece of the larger work of God's plan. We see only a small part of the big picture (like looking at one chapter out of a complex novel). Our struggles and sufferings may make no sense at the present. It will only be at the end of days that we will fully understand the whole story. As we will see later in the creed, there is coming a day when all that we are suffering now will be ancient memories, when the present tense joy of living in the heavenly city will overwhelm past hurts. God's reality and plan is bigger and better than our current perception of it
- 15 Ask:** Are there places in your life where you need to stop insisting on your own will and submit to God's will?
- 16 Ask:** Think ahead to the next time you will say the Apostles Creed and come to the words "God ... Almighty". Based on what we have discussed today, what is one thing you would like to remember or think about when you say this phrase?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- 17 Say:** We have learned that almighty God's primary stance towards us is one of love, like a good and loving parent. He is almighty in his love. Because He is our creator and He is almighty, his laws are to be obeyed. Because He is good and merciful, it is right to do so.

CLOSING PRAYER

- 18 Say:** At the same time, we as creatures are called to be honest with our maker about our doubts, struggles, and fears. In this time of silent prayer name your own doubts, struggles, questions, and fears before God. Be honest with Him and I will close us in prayer. (*Pause for a time of silent prayer*) God, many of us know people who are suffering or are full of doubt. Some of us find ourselves in that very place, where answers are hard to come by. But we dare to believe this current chapter is not the final word and these present problems don't get the final say – You do. For you have promised to "complete the good work you began in us (Phil 1:6). You are almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, and yet you choose to dwell with the lowly, the humble, the contrite in spirit. You have promised that a bruised reed you shall not break. You are good. You are God and there is no other. We ask You to answer our prayers, to do a work in us, and to walk through these days with us. We ask in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Session 5:

The Maker and the Made

“Maker of Heaven and Earth”

“Here we find a very important statement, not simply about who God is and what God does, but who we are. It is reminding us that we are dealing with a God who brings everything into existence, including us ... We are not to imagine that God created some things and another power - the Evil One - created other things. Everything is created by God” - Quote from video.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

- 1 Explore:** Describe something you have made that you enjoyed making. It could be something as simple as a favorite dish or as complicated as a large construction project. It could be a school project from long ago or something you did recently. Tell us what raw materials you needed to create what you made.
- 2 Say:** In each of our examples, we made or created by taking some raw materials and manipulating them. Now try to imagine creating this very same thing without raw materials ... from nothing. We are creators in a secondary sense, but Christians believe God made everything not from raw materials, but from nothing, by saying, “Let it be.” Lets see how our scholars wrestle with the implications of the phrase “Maker of Heaven and Earth.”

Play DVD Episode 5: The Maker and the Made

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 3 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 4 **Ask:** How is a God who created everything different than a sun god or a river god?
- a) *He is not part of the created order (no pantheism).*
 - b) *If He made everything, then there can be no other gods (no polytheism).*
- 5 **Teach:** In the declaration that there is one God who is the maker of heaven and earth, the creed implicitly rejects some competing views of reality, including:
- a) **Polytheism** - *the idea of many gods. In contrast, the Christian view is that all things (including any other 'gods') are created by the one 'maker of heaven and earth.'*
 - b) **Pantheism** - *the idea that God is part of nature. In contrast, the Christian view is that God is distinct from the created order.*
 - c) **Metaphysical Idealism** - *the idea that we create reality, that ultimately, nothing is real except in relation to our perceiving it or thinking of it. In contrast, the Christian view is that reality exists regardless of our perception of it. Man is not the measure of all things; he is one small part of creation.*
- 6 **Ask:** If God made everything, where did evil originate? What did the scholars have to say about the creation or existence of evil? One said that it is not so important to know the source of evil, but it is far more important to simply know that evil exists. What did he mean by this?
- 7 **Teach:** C.S. Lewis promotes the premise that evil does not create anything, it only twists and distorts what already is. So Love becomes lust; delights become addictions; the will to act becomes the desire to rule, etc. This would imply that evil comes from those created beings that have the ability to choose (human beings and angels). If this were to be the end result of free will, why would God have included free will in His creation?
- Apparently God thought the gift of free will was worth the cost that some would use this freedom for evil. Therefore, evil is the choice to act in a way that is contrary to the perfect will of the creator. The ability to choose is a good gift given by a good God.

8 Explore: Creation vs. Evolution When thinking about what it means that God is the creator of Heaven and Earth, there is a wide spectrum of views that one must consider. The chart below is a simplification but demonstrates the range of views that are held by various groups.

Title	Young Earth Creation	Old Earth Creation	Intelligent Design	Theistic Evolution	Atheistic Evolution
View	The God of scripture created the world in seven literal days, and the age of the earth can be calculated from scripture passages to be thousands of years old.	The God of scripture allowed the physical world to develop over millions of years. Micro-evolution (such as changing dog breeds) is a fact, but macro-evolution (mammals, birds, reptiles, etc. all arising from a common ancestor) is not. Evolutionary theory over-reaches from incomplete scientific data.	There are a number of biological mechanisms which could not have arisen from small evolutionary steps because the mechanism is useless until all the parts are in place (irreducible complexity). Therefore life shows signs of an intelligent designer.	God in His sovereignty chose to use the natural processes described in evolution to bring about his plan for life on earth. The unfolding of nature in this way is a sign of his omnipotence. The term "Evolution" is limited to scientific descriptions of particular natural processes.	There is no meaning, purpose or design to the physical world. There is no intelligent creator. All of life can be explained as the result of nothing more than random, natural processes. The term "Evolution" is used not as description of particular natural process but as an overarching ideology.

9 Ask: Can belief in evolution and belief in the creation of the world by a sovereign God both be held at the same time?

It depends on how these words are used. If by evolution you mean that God in his sovereignty chose to use natural processes over time to bring about the world's current state, there is no conflict. If by evolution you mean that the world was created and came to its present state by random processes alone, that all of reality can be explained by nothing more than material processes, then there is a significant conflict. While the first statement embraces the scientific method, the second statement goes beyond the realm of science and says more than science can say. Thus if one claims to be absolutely sure there is no God, they are not making a scientific statement, but a religious statement (i.e. you can not use the scientific method to explain ultimate causes, only to describe physical processes). So we are forced to choose between two religious creation stories, one including a belief in God and one including a belief in no God.

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him-- though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being.'

Acts 17:24-28

10 Ask: According to this scripture, what did God do in the past, and what is God doing in the present?

11 Ask: If at this moment God is giving us breath, if at this moment we have our being in Him, did God create the world once, or is he continuing to create and sustain it in the present moment? *(The very fabric of reality only exists at this moment because God says "Let it be." God's creation is ongoing in that he is constantly sustaining reality, keeping the physical world existing by commanding it to be.)*

He sustains all things by his powerful word. – Hebrews 1:3

12 Ask: What would happen to the world if God suddenly stopped saying, "Let it be?"

13 Teach: God is not a watchmaker that wound the world up and walked away. He is intimately involved in the present tense. At this present moment "He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being."

APPLICATION

14 Teach: God is not just some abstract world creator – He is my creator. He put me here for a purpose that includes doing His will. Part of the Christian life is trying to discern what role my maker would have me play in this world.

15 Teach: Let's consider the characteristics of God. We'll take a few minutes and make a list of some of the qualities God has, beginning with "creativity."
Record the responses on the white board.

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. - Genesis 1:27

Ask: If we are made in the "image of God," why do we sometimes behave in a way that is not at all like God? What parts of the "image of God" would you like to see more of in your own life?

16 Ask: What should a Christian's stance be towards environmentalism?

- a) *If God created the world good, then it is precious and not to be wasted or abused.*
- b) *If we are called to be stewards in Genesis, then it is our responsibility to be good managers. We don't own the earth and are called to manage it wisely.*
- c) *There are some who reject the Christian view that humans alone are created in the image of God as "specist." This stance ignores the facts on the ground. An endangered plant has neither the moral responsibility nor the agency to be a steward of me. A wolf is personally indifferent to whether humans live or become extinct. Thus human beings do have a special position. It is true that humans don't know as much as we think we know. Our past ignorance and arrogance accounts for much of the destruction and pollution of the natural world. But by accepting our unique God-given role as stewards we find a moral framework for environmentalism. Christianity has deep roots in a profound love for the creation.*

17 Ask: What are the practical ways that we can be better stewards of the natural world?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

18 Say: Think ahead to the next time you will say the Apostles Creed and come to the words "Maker of Heaven and Earth." Based on what we have discussed today, what is one thing you would like to remember or think about when you say this phrase?

19 Sing: Have the group sing the familiar hymn *Morning has Broken* together.

CLOSING PRAYER

20 Say: It was God's idea that we would be physical creatures in a physical world instead of disembodied spirits. It is appropriate that we worship the maker of heaven and earth not only with our lips, but also with our whole bodies. The following prayer is derived from an ancient Celtic prayer and allows us to do that. As a way of declaring God rules over all that is, I am going to ask you to stand and face in different directions as I pray. I encourage you, once you have faced in a new direction to close your eyes and turn this prayer into your own personal prayer to God. We will begin by all facing east.

21 Pray (*Selected portions from the Seven-Fold Celtic Prayer*):

Facing East – *Praise God for daylight. Praise God for sunlight. Praise God for Christ's light. Praise God for our rising to life today. Praise God who keeps us in life.*

Facing South – *Blessed be God of noontday; blessed be God of this day; blessed be God of each day; blessed be God for the powers He gives us today.*

Facing West – *Blessed be God of the evening; Blessed be God in the darkness; blessed be God in our weakness; blessed be God in our doubt. Protect us from evil; protect us from all wickedness.*

Facing North – *Blessed be God in the unknown. Blessed be God giving light in the darkness. Protect all who are assailed in their faith; protect all who are mocked and scorned; protect all who are persecuted by others.*

Extending a hand toward the earth – *Blessed be the Creator of the earth. Blessed be the Lord of the Harvest. Bless to us this land that it may be fruitful. Bless to us the earth that we may use it as you see fit.*

Place your hand on your heart – *Blessed are you, Lord God, creator and preserver of all; maker of all, may we work for you; lover of all, may we love with you; giver of all, may we give like you; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Session 6: Savior of the World

“Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord”

“The real focus of the Creed is on Jesus. When you go through the Creed there are twenty-four statements of what I believe – and fourteen of those are concerned with Jesus ... [Thomas] confesses “my Lord and my God” ... in some way in encountering the risen Christ we are encountering someone who we have to recognize as none other than our Lord and our God, none other than God incarnate.” - Quotes from video

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

- 1 **Ask:** Can you think of a time when it turned out that your first impression of someone changed over time for better or worse? *(Be prepared with your own example of a time when you were wrong about a person’s character upon first meeting.)*
- 2 **Say:** In each of our examples, over time the person’s character was eventually revealed. At first we judged by appearances, but as we got to know the person, we came to see what they were really like - their true nature was revealed. Now think back to when you first began to learn about Jesus. Describe your first impressions of what Jesus is like. As you got to know Him, how did those notions develop and change?
- 3 **Say:** The creed claims that Jesus reveals what God is really like; He shows us God’s true nature. Of the twenty-four statements in the creed, fourteen are concerned with Jesus. Jesus is the focus of the creed because the idea that Jesus is the revelation of God is what sets Christianity apart from all other belief systems in the ancient world. So we come today to the phrase “Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord.” Who is this Jesus? Who did the first Christians think he was? Let’s see how our scholars understand each of these phrases: *Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord.*

Play DVD Episode 6: Savior of the World

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 4 Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 5 Ask:** Read Matthew 1:21. What should the name Jesus remind us of?
- Jesus was a common, everyday name. Therefore it reminds us that God humbled Himself and came down and lived among the everyday people, taking no special privilege upon Himself. He truly participated in our common human experience.*
 - The name Jesus means "The Salvation of the Lord." Therefore, His name should remind us He is not just a religious leader, but also our Savior.*
- 6 Ask:** What should the title Christ remind us of?
- Christ = Messiah = the Anointed One*
 - In the Old Testament this referred to one set apart by God, usually a king who would deliver the nation. It is God who anoints with the Holy Spirit.*
 - In Jesus this idea of the anointed king is expanded because this king is God himself who has come not just to save Israel, but the entire world.*
- 7 Ask:** What should the phrase "His only Son" remind us of?
- Jesus is God's child in a different way than we are.*
 - He is unique among all human beings.*
 - The idea that the Son of God is God was clear to the first Christians. (John 5:18)*
 - To God, Jesus is son; to us, he is Lord.*
 - The second member of the Trinity, the Son, came to earth as Jesus Christ. As God, the Son has always existed - there never was a time when the Son was not (see the discussion on the first chapter of John in "The Scripture Foundation).*
- 8 Ask:** What should the phrase "Our Lord" remind us of?
- Considering that the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh, was translated as "Lord" in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). Calling Jesus "Lord" is equating him to God.*
 - If Jesus is Lord, then the emperor or the government is not.*
- 9 Ask:** Think of the leaders or founders of other major religions. According to the video scholars, what sets Jesus apart?
- 10 Ask:** Some people believe you become a Christian by growing up in a Christian family; some people believe you become a Christian when you are baptized; some people believe you have to have a moment when you make a personal decision to ask Jesus Christ into your heart as your Lord and Savior; others believe it means being part of a church community and being on a spiritual Journey. How do you think a person becomes a Christian?
- 11 Ask:** However it happens, what does it mean personally to you to call Jesus your "Lord"? How does it affect your everyday life? In what ways is your life different from what it would be if you were not a Christian?

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

Isaiah 45:20-24	Philippians 2:5-10
20 ... They have no knowledge, Who carry about their wooden idol And pray to a god who cannot save... 21 Is it not I, the LORD ? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me 22 Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. 23 By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return:	5 ... Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, <i>and</i> being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,
"To me	10 so that at the name of Jesus
EVERY KNEE WILL BOW,	EVERY KNEE WILL BOW,
	of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that
EVERY TOUNGE SHALL SWEAR	EVERY TOUNGE WILL CONFESS
24 "They will say of Me, 'Only in the	that Jesus Christ is
LORD	LORD
are righteousness and strength.'	to the glory of God the Father.

1 2 Say: Compare the passage from Isaiah to the passage in Philippians above. In the Old Testament book of Isaiah, written long before Jesus was born, the word "LORD" was used for God. In Philippians, written after Jesus' resurrection, Paul intentionally uses the word LORD for Jesus. He quotes words that his audience would immediately realize as words pertaining to God ("Every Knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess") and applies those words to Jesus. Note also that God is called "Savior" in Isaiah. Jesus means "The Lord Saves," and elsewhere in Philippians Paul calls Jesus "our Lord and Savior."

1 3 Ask: What phrases in the Philippians passage point to Jesus being divine?

1 4 Ask: What does the image of bending your knee connote to you?

1 5 Ask: What does the image of confessing with your mouth connote to you?

1 6 Ask: If Jesus was a man, how could He exist eternally? How do you understand what is being said in Philippians 2:5-7?

17 Say: Let's look at the first verses of John to get an understanding of what early Christians believed about God the son:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:1-14

18 ASK: In these famous verses from John, who is the Word, and in what ways does each phrase imply that Jesus was more than a man?

19 ASK: The Apostles' Creed talks about "Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord." Where do you find echoes of these concepts in the passage in John above?

APPLICATION

20 Teach: The Creed refers to Jesus as “Jesus Christ, his Only Son, Our Lord.” Ron James says these phrases indicate that the early church believed four R’s about Jesus – he rescues, reveals, reflects, and rules.¹

Role	Creed Phrase	Classic Interpretation
Jesus Rescues	Jesus=God Saves	Jesus is our Savior – he rescues us from sin, death, and the devil
Jesus Rules	Christ	Jesus is the anointed King. Every Knee shall bow before him.
Jesus Reveals	God’s only Son	Jesus reveals God and God’s Kingdom
Jesus Reflects	Lord=Yahweh	Jesus reflects God’s very nature. He is God.

Many religions have the idea of someone being a messenger from God. But in the case of Jesus, he is the messenger, the message, and the message maker. He is the revealer, He is the revelation, and He is what is to be revealed.

21 Teach: If Jesus is the revelation of God, then we can know what God is like – by looking at Jesus. This is why studying the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is so important. They show us what Jesus is like and in turn He shows us what God is like in ways we humans can understand.

22 Ask: Imagine the absolute authority the emperor would have had in your life if you had lived in the time of Jesus. And yet, the early church said the Lordship of Jesus exceeded that of the emperor. We must ask ourselves, “Is Jesus really my Lord? Have I given Him absolute authority? Is he the king of my life?”

23 Ask: If you were to begin each day with the declaration to yourself that “Jesus Christ is Lord of this day” how might that change your day, your priorities, and your interactions with others?

¹ Ron James Creed and Christ – *A devotional approach to the Apostles’ Creed*, 28.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

24 Say: In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.' In other words, we need to be willing to ask him into our life. The Christian life is one where Jesus is Lord of the entire house. Is there some place in your life where Jesus is not Lord, some part of your life you have not given to him? Take a few minutes to think about this and then I will close us in prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

25 Pray: As I pray, if my words match the desire of your heart, please turn these words into your own personal prayer to God. (Pause after each sentence to give people time to make it their own prayer to God). ***Lord Jesus, you are the Christ, you are the Son of God. You are the rightful king of my life. Here and now (perhaps for the first time), I ask you to come into my life, into every area of my life, to be my Lord, to be my guide, to be my savior. Help me to follow you. Amen***

Session 7: The Godman

“Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary”

“He is going to have to come and take upon himself the humanness, which the human race has now caused itself to be. In other words, [take upon himself] this decaying and dying thing, in order to exhaust the power of that decay and death by taking it upon himself - in order to bring about new creation. So the great themes of Scripture, the great themes of all true Christian theology are creation and new creation and at the heart of that the problems within the old creation solved by the death and resurrection of the son. That’s why the incarnation matters.” - Quote from video.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

- 1 Ask:** Think of some process, machine, or device that you know about – one in which you don’t understand how it works on the inside, but you use it all the time and appreciate or benefit from the final result.
- 2 Say:** In each of our examples, we can’t explain the internal mechanism but that does not keep us from truly benefiting from the result. You don’t need to understand the incredibly sophisticated electronics of a cell phone to benefit from it in your everyday life. If things were only real on the basis of our ability to explain their inner mechanics, very few things would be real. On the other hand, misunderstanding and therefore misusing sophisticated machinery can lead to disastrous results. We need to understand enough of the mechanics to handle things properly.
- 3 Say:** Today in our study we come to the doctrine of the incarnation – Jesus being both a man and God. We are going to delve into the line of the creed that says Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary. How did this happen? How is this possible? Does it matter whether or not you believe in the Virgin birth? How did God become a man? Let’s see what our New Testament scholars have to say.

Play DVD Episode 7: The Godman

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 4 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 5 **Ask:** Why was it so important to the Creed writers to say Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit?
- 6 **Ask:** In the four gospels, the virgin birth is only mentioned explicitly in Matthew and Luke. Why was it so important for the Creed writers to say that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary? How important do you think the virgin birth is? Is belief in this doctrine crucial for one to be a Christian? Why, or why not?
- 7 **Ask:** Through history, Jesus has been seen as everything from an angelic being pretending to be human, to a man pretending to be divine. In our understanding of His identity, what is lost if the phrase "conceived by the Holy Spirit" is removed from the Creed? What is lost if the phrase "born of the Virgin Mary" were removed?
- 8 **Teach:** If you tried to plug your toaster directly into the power lines running by your house it would blow up. The toaster was not designed to handle the incredibly high voltage that runs through the power lines. The power needs to be transformed so that it can do useful work within your household appliances instead of destroying them. A transformer is a single device that has two wire coils on a common magnetic core. One coil is attached to the high voltage wires and the other is attached to house wiring. The two coils never actually touch; the power is mediated through the magnet from one to the other. The transformer stands in the gap between the power lines and your house, it has both the nature of the high power line and the nature of your house wiring. It is fully a power line device and fully a house-wiring device. In the same way Christ had both the nature of Almighty God and the nature of an ordinary human being. He is able to mediate God to us in a way we can handle, for he spoke human language and used human gestures. Of course, all such analogies over simplify and thus distort the truth to some degree. In the end *"all we can say is that it pleased God to let the mystery be real and become manifest in this shape and form..."*¹
- 9 **Discuss:** One of our video scholars said, "Jesus enters into our human world and into history in order to take us to His world." Can you put this into your own words?

¹ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 100.

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.
– Luke 1:26-38

10 Ask: What idea or phrase strikes you about this passage?

11 Ask: The early church saw this scripture as supporting the idea that Jesus has two natures – he is fully human and fully God. Do you buy this argument? Why or why not?

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
– Hebrews 4:14-16

12 Ask: There are a number of scriptures that highlight Jesus' divinity and others that highlight His humanity. What do you find in the scripture above that emphasizes either Jesus' humanity or Jesus' divinity?

13 Ask: What is the difference between being a superman and being the one who has the full nature of God and the full frailty of a human being? (*A star athlete is so much better than us that he does not inspire us to imitate him, rather the talent gap defeats us, as we know we could never be like him. But Jesus, being like us, gives us an example we can emulate.*)

APPLICATION

14 Ask: We all tend to drift away from Jesus as the God-man in one direction or another. Some tend toward viewing Jesus more as a human that God adopted as a His son, while others tend to view Jesus as a divine being masquerading as a human being. Which of those do you lean more toward? Why?

15 Ask: How would believing that Jesus actually is the God-Man affect our understanding of who God is, what He is like, and what He has done on our behalf?

16 Discuss: Imagine if Donald Trump gave away all of his material possessions and went to live in a garbage heap. It is almost un-thinkable, yet it is nothing compared to the riches Jesus left behind in heaven in order to come to live on earth. Can you think of a time when you willingly gave up a right, a comfort or a position for someone else? What situation do you care so deeply about that you would willingly reduce your lifestyle in order to offer assistance?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

17 Say: Listen to a part of a sermon by Melito of Sardis around the year 177 AD:

"On these accounts He came to us; on these accounts, though He was incorporeal, He formed for Himself a body after our fashion, appearing as a sheep, yet still remaining the Shepherd; being esteemed a servant, yet not renouncing the Sonship; being carried in the womb of Mary, yet arrayed in the nature of His Father; treading upon the earth, yet filling heaven; appearing as an infant, yet not discarding the eternity of His nature; being invested with a body, yet not circumscribing the unmixed simplicity of His Godhead; being esteemed poor, yet not divested of His riches; needing sustenance inasmuch as He was man, yet not ceasing to feed the entire world inasmuch as He is God; putting on the likeness of a servant, yet not impairing the likeness of His Father. He sustained every character belonging to Him in an immutable nature: He was standing before Pilate, and at the same time was sitting with His Father; He was nailed upon the tree, and yet was the Lord of all things."

CLOSING PRAYER

18 Read: Philippians 2:3-7 and **Pray:** Lord Jesus, you were willing to lay aside your glory in heaven and stoop down to be with us. You did not seek recognition or rub our faces in your superiority. Instead you came meek, humble, and lowly. You did not look down on us, you got down to our level and looked us in the eye and welcomed us to walk with you. If that is how you treated us, who are we to look down on others? In this silence we confess to you any one we have despised as having less worth [silence]. Holy spirit, continue to do a work in us, conforming our very hearts to be more like Jesus. For you have promised to complete the good work you began in us. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

Session 8: The Godbearer “The Virgin Mary”

*“She was willing to be radically available to God for whatever God wanted to do with her life. She had to lose herself for His sake. She was risking everything to be obedient to God ... We too are to make ourselves radically available to God for the sake of the world.” -
Quotes from DVD.*

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

- 1 Ask:** When you think about how the roles of women have changed over the last fifty years in our country, what comes to mind?
- 2 Ask:** What benefits and drawbacks have resulted from this shift? (*Record responses on a white board for all to see.*)
- 3 Say:** Today we are going to look at how the role of a very particular woman, Mary the mother of Jesus, has changed over time. As we watch this segment ask yourself, “Why was it so important to the ancient church to include Mary in the Creed?”

Play DVD Episode 8: The Godbearer

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 4 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 5 **Ask:** Having seen this DVD segment, how has your view of Mary changed? If some give Mary too much importance and others give her too little, what would you say is a valid, appropriate view of Mary in the life of a Christian?
- 6 **Ask:** Make a list of some of the traits Mary exemplifies. What do you most admire in this young woman? (*Devoted, humble, faithful, trusting, selfless*)
- 7 **Ask:** When you consider Mary's receptivity to God's will for her life, what specifically was the Lord asking her to give up in order to be a part of the plan of Salvation? In other words, what risks did Mary take in order to say, "Yes" to the angel?
- 8 **Ask:** Consider that Mary was probably a young teen at the time of her angelic visit. How can it be that this young Jewish woman seems to exhibit more mature faith than many Christian adults do?
- 9 **Ask:** What examples were shared of Jesus' interactions with women? (*Mary and Martha, Healing of Peter's mother-in-law on a Sabbath, women disciples*) In what ways did Jesus go against the standards of His day in relating to women?
- 10 **Ask:** What other marginalized members of society did Jesus treat in radical ways?
- 11 **Teach:** Protestants sometimes look at the views of the Catholic Church regarding Mary and become so wary that they run in the opposite direction and disregard her. The inclusion of Mary in a creed created in a highly patriarchal society is highly significant. She has been called the "ultimate disciple." Mary is not simply a passive receptor – she asks questions ("*How can this be?*"), and chooses by an act of the will to participate as a crucial part of God's redemptive plan ("*let it be unto me according to thy word.*") Consider what some of the great theologians have said about Mary:

Martin Luther: "*we can never honor her enough ... the veneration of Mary is inscribed in the very depths of the human heart*" and that we should "*wish that everyone know and respect her.*"

John Calvin: "*It cannot be denied that God in choosing and destining Mary to be the Mother of his Son, granted her the highest honor.*"

Ulrich Zwingli: "*I esteem immensely the Mother of God,*" and, "*The more the honor and love of Christ increases among men, so much the esteem and honor given to Mary should grow.*"

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. - Luke 1:26-38

1 2 Ask: How do you see Mary's understanding and faith progress from the beginning to the end? What do you learn about Mary's character or personality through this passage?

1 3 Ask: What do you imagine Mary is struggling with as she strives to be receptive to God's word? What is going through her mind?

1 4 Ask: In what ways do Mary's struggles seem like or unlike your own struggles?

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." - Matthew 28:1-10

15 Ask: In the first century, the word of a woman carried far less weight than the word of a man. Why would Jesus entrust the most important message of Christianity (“He is risen”) to a group of women?

16 Ask: How does the inclusion of this story in Matthew point to the reliability of Scripture? *(If you were trying to make up a new religion credible to 1st century Judaism, you would not have placed a woman so prominently in the narrative.)*

APPLICATION

17 Ask: Mary has been called the “ultimate disciple.” Her famous prayer “Be it unto me according to your word...” are the words of one who has fully given themselves to God. It anticipates Jesus’ later prayer “not my will but your will be done.” Is there a place in your life – a challenge or an opportunity - where you need to say, “Be it unto me according to your word”? What holds us back? What are we afraid of when God calls us to something difficult or apparently impossible?

18 Ask: Who are those in our own time that are living on the margins of society? Who do we treat as sub-standard and what can we do about it?

19 Ask: What is your own understanding of the role of women in leadership in the church?

CLOSING PRAYER

20 Pray: Our closing prayer today comes from a woman disciple of Jesus who lived in the 12th Century, Hildegard of Bingen:

Jesus Christ, the love that gives love,
You are higher than the highest star;
You are deeper than the deepest sea;
You cherish us as your own family;
You embrace us as your own spouse;
You rule over us as your own subjects;
You welcome us as your dearest friend.
Let all the world worship you.

Holy Spirit, the life that gives life,
You are the cause of all movement;
You are the breath of all creatures;
You are the salve that purifies our souls;
You are the ointment that heals our wounds;
You are the fire that warms our hearts;
You are the light that guides our feet.
Let all the world praise you.

Session 9:

Acquainted With Grief

“Suffered under Pontius Pilate”

“The Creed moves straight on from His birth of Mary to the fact that He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried... Pontius Pilate anchors this story very specifically in the history of first century Judea. One of the truly odd things about Christianity is that it focuses on the suffering of the central figure and his dying. Part of our human experience into which Christ enters is the experience of desolation, loneliness, and even despair.” – Quotes from the DVD

Leader’s Overview

This phrase of the creed touches on two crucial issues – the historicity of Christianity and the human experience of suffering. Because these two issues lead to important but divergent discussions, this study session is split in two – a DVD segment with discussion on Pontius Pilate (0:00-11:35 on the DVD) followed by a segment with discussion on suffering (11:36 to end).

In terms of history, why would the most sacred Creed in Christendom include the name of a brutal, petty Roman bureaucrat, Pontius Pilate? Rather than being some kind disembodied philosophy, Christianity is about actual events that happen to actual people in history. Including Pilate’s name anchors our faith to human history.

In terms of suffering, one may ask why does God allow suffering in general, and why did Jesus have to suffer in particular? Scripture makes it clear that suffering is a part of living in a fallen world, and that Christians will not be exempt from it. Scripture is also clear that Jesus’ suffering was real and for a purpose. Subsequent classes will cover what Jesus’ suffering accomplished. In the *Scripture Foundation* section of this session four scriptures are explored which touch on these four topics:

1. *The Messiah will suffer*
2. *The Messiah did suffer*
3. *Why does God allow suffering?*
4. *Christians will suffer*

OPENER (Session 9 Part A: History)

- 1 **Ask:** Who are some of the most important leaders in our world today? Now, think about Bible times. Who were the most important world leaders at that time? It is fascinating that the primary theological creed of Christianity includes the name of a middle management Roman official, Pontius Pilate.
- 2 **Say:** Today we will explore Jesus’ suffering at the hands of a middle-ranking Roman official, Pontius Pilate. Let’s see what our scholars have to say ...

Play DVD Episode 9: Acquainted With Grief (0:00-11:36)

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 3 Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 4 Ask:** What difference does it make that Pontius Pilate is mentioned in the creed?
- a) *Anchors Christianity in History – not a timeless principle, but actual events.*
 - b) *Shows that God is at work in the midst of ordinary (political) affairs, but rarely in a way that makes sense to the participants at the time.*
 - c) *Shows that first Christians were not anti-Semitic. They knew it was Jewish leaders who betrayed Jesus, yet they focus on the Roman official Pontius Pilate in the Creed.*
- 5 Teach:** Pontius Pilate is mentioned in all four Gospels, Acts, and 1 Timothy. There are several other references to Pilate, outside of Scripture, including the writings of Philo, Josephus, and Tacitus, along with an inscription in the ruins of an ancient amphitheater. He is depicted as cruel and arbitrary. The point is: Pilate is a very real historic figure.
- 6 Ask:** Why does it matter that the central event of Christianity happened at a particular place and time?



OPENER (Session 9 Part B: Suffering)

- 7 Discuss:** Today we will turn our attention towards human suffering and the classic question: *Why does God allow suffering, and why did Jesus have to suffer?* Let's begin thinking about that by listing some of the causes of human suffering. (*Lead group towards four main causes of human suffering: trials of life that can stretch and build us, affliction at the hands of other human beings, consequences of our own actions, affliction from random acts of nature*)
- 8 Ask:** In your experience, do trials and suffering build you up or tear you down?

Play the rest of DVD Episode 9: Acquainted With Grief (11:36 -> End)

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 9 **Ask:** Let's look back at our list of causes of human suffering. If God is all-loving and all-powerful, why does He allow us to suffer?
- a) *Suffering can be a catalyst towards our growth. Little personal growth is possible without trials and pain.*
 - b) *Much suffering is the result of the free will of human beings.*
 - c) *Some Christians understand Romans 8:18-22 to mean that even natural disasters are the result of the long-term impact of human sin upon the creation.*
- 10 **Ask:** Do you see suffering as a stumbling block to faith or a gateway to faith?
- 11 **Ask:** Consider the suffering of the Savior. Describe the emotional, physical, and spiritual pain Jesus endured. How can Jesus' experience of very real and very intense pain become a source of strength and comfort for you as you face various trials?
- 12 **Teach:** The Scriptures and the Creed teach that suffering is real, but suffering does not get the last word. The two poles of spirituality are cynicism and blind faith, but true faith knows it must live in the tension. Although it is not intellectually satisfying, perhaps the healthiest spiritual response for a Christian faced with the "why of affliction" is simply: *"I don't know the answers, but you know Lord."*
- 13 **Teach:** Doctors say patients suffer more from aloneness than from physical pain. Does this fit your experience? Have you ever felt abandoned by God?
- 14 **Discuss:** "Suffering and love are inseparable." What specific ways have you suffered because of your great love for someone else? How does today's video teaching help you to understand the immense cost of salvation?

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

15 The Messiah *will* suffer.

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. - Isaiah 53:3-6

Say: The first Christians looked backed to this text in the Old Testament and saw there the story of Jesus. Try to imagine what it would have felt like not just physically, but emotionally, to experience what is described here. Name some specific feelings someone would experience going through this.

16 The Messiah *did* suffer.

Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!"

And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"

When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves."

And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"

Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him.

They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him.

And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.

After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him. - Matthew 27:22-31

Say: Here we see a foundational scripture showing how Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. In addition to the crucifixion, what kinds of suffering do we find in these verses?

17 Why did he have to suffer?

You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."

And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given me."

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. - Hebrews 2:8-18

Say: Early Christians understood that Jesus needed to be fully man in order to enter into our predicament and fully God to be able to get us out. Suffering is part of what it means to be human. Jesus would not be fully one of us, truly human, unless he personally suffered.

18 The Christian life includes suffering.

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God - I Peter 3:13-18

Say: At the center of Christianity is the cross – a sign of suffering. Some claim that God can't be real because of the suffering they see in the world. Yet the Scriptures and the Apostles' Creed intentionally mention the reality of suffering - in fact a central theme of Christianity is that God himself chose to suffer! Eventually our questions need to develop from "Will we suffer?" and "Why do we suffer?" to "How do we handle our suffering?" and "Is it possible to grow through it?"

APPLICATION

19 Teach: James C. Howell argues *"If we can't talk about things political in church, we can't talk about the crucifixion of Jesus, which was all politics. Pilate's job was to keep the peace in part of the Middle East – no easier then than today. Order in the streets called for force, and Pilate never hesitated to deploy force, and we know when force is applied however judiciously, a few innocents are caught in the crossfire. Jesus, indeed was crushed on the gigantic gears of history, and to this day we utter the name of Pontius Pilate every Sunday – a reminder that Christianity happens in a steely world of politics."*¹

20 Ask: What is your own understanding of what the relationship between Christianity and politics should be? Where do you see Christians taking an active role in politics? When do these actions turn negative? Are Christians' responsibilities in the political arena different from others'?

21 Ask: Some people face monumental suffering and trials and seem to emerge stronger, more positive and faith-filled. Others stumble and get angry or sidetracked over little things. How do you personally handle trials and suffering? What might help you to build on your trials, rather than have your trials tear you down?

22 Ask: Have you ever felt abandoned by God? Is there anything you've learned today that will be a help the next time you feel this way?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

23 Say: There is a connection between sin and some kinds of suffering, but not all suffering. Jesus made it clear that a particular person's suffering was not due to his sin or his parents. We can look at some trials as a way to strengthen our faith. However, there are two kinds of suffering - that which makes one stronger and that which permanently cripples. Suffering is always personal and particular so we must be very slow to interpret the suffering of others. There is some suffering in this world that makes absolutely no sense from our vantage point. The scriptures and the creed teach that suffering is real, but suffering does not get the last word. The two poles of spirituality are cynicism and credulity, but true faith knows it must live in the tension. Although it is not satisfying intellectually, perhaps the healthiest spiritual response for a Christian faced with the why of affliction is simply to say "I don't know. But you know Lord."

We may well ask why God allows struggling and suffering, but experience proves to us the truth of the words of Helmut Thielicke: *"No [one] will ever come to the truth and thus to a trustworthy bridge over the abyss of Nothingness who has not faced doubt, despair and shipwreck...He who would know what faith is must also have stood beneath the baleful eye of that demonic power against which we fling our faith. Faith is either a struggle or it is nothing"*².

¹ James C. Howell *The Life We Claim - The Apostles Creed for preaching, teaching and worship*, 65.

² Helmut Thielicke *Nihilism: Its Origin and Nature – With a Christian Answer*, pp. 176-177

CLOSING PRAYER

24 Say: All of us know people or groups of people who are suffering. Some of you may be suffering right now. As you listen to this prayer woven together from the psalms, make it your own prayer to God. {Pause after you say each line for enough time to allow people to repeat the line silently in their heart}

Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
My eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.
My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning;
My strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.
I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery.
But I trust in you, O LORD;
My times are in your hands;
In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge
You are my God.
Let me not be put to shame
Deliver me.
Redeem me, O LORD, God of truth.
Into your hands I commit my spirit
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
This suffering will not get the final word
For you are God
And Jesus has conquered death
And you will complete the good work you began in me.
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever and ever and ever Amen.

Session 10:

The Blood of His Cross

“Was crucified, died”

“God is intercepting His own judgment in love and mercy at the cross so that the offense that we have been to Him can be taken away and we can know what forgiveness is and then be free to serve Him in the future.” - Quote from DVD

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

- 1 **Say:** A teenage boy was considering the claims of Christianity. He said to his Youth Pastor “Look, I know God is all powerful, so he could have saved us any way he wanted. So why did Jesus have to die for us? Why couldn’t he have lived for us instead?” **Ask:** What would you say to this teenager?
- 2 **Ask:** What is the most widely recognized, universal symbol of Christianity? (*The Cross*) Do you think displaying a cross is an effective way to show faith to the world? This highly recognizable symbol for has been used in a wide variety of ways in modern culture, from fashion accessory to political statement to artistic expression. In what ways have you seen the cross used, misused or abused in modern culture?
- 3 **Say:** Let’s take a look at how our scholars understand the death of Jesus.

Play DVD Episode 10: The Blood of His Cross

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 4 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 5 **Ask:** What do you remember about the description of crucifixion?
- 6 **Ask:** Crucifixion was a cruel death, reserved for the lowest of the low. Why then would the early Christians not try to cover up or gloss over the manner of death of their Savior?
- 7 **Ask:** Our scholars used several images and terms to describe what Jesus did for us on the cross. What terms do you remember? In other words, complete this sentence "Jesus died on the cross in order to ..."
- 8 **Ask:** Would a truly loving God kill his own innocent Son? Why didn't he suffer himself for us?
- 9 **Teach:** When we try to comprehend the Trinity we can veer off into error in two directions, one is to view God as a single person, and the other is to view Him as three separate Gods. It is crucial to view Jesus as God to grasp the meaning of the crucifixion. It is God himself who chooses to suffer, God himself who, out of love for us, goes to the cross. The idea that there is a demanding, unloving Father God who forces his Son to the cross to die in our place is a caricature of the reality. All three members of the Trinity were in union and working together in the atonement. As Karl Barth put it, Christ was "the Judge judged in our stead."¹

¹ Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics IV/1 59/2

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

(A full account of the actual crucifixion of Jesus can be found in all four gospels. Mark, chapter 15 gives a succinct account)

Hebrews 2:14-18

14 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil--*

15 *and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

16 *For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.*

17 *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

18 *Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Hebrews 9:11-15

11 *When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.*

12 *He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.*

13 *The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.*

14 *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God!*

15 *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

10 **Explore:** Write the following headings on the board: "As Victor," "As Rescuer," "As a Religious Sacrifice," and "As an example of how to live."

1 1 Ask: Hebrews 2:14-18 and 9:11-15 describe what Jesus accomplished on the cross in several very different ways. What phrases do you see that describes Jesus in one of the four ways listed on the board?

1. *Jesus is the victor who conquerors sin, death and the devil (especially verse 2:14)*

2. *Jesus is the rescuer who pays the ransom with his own blood and rescues those who have been trapped (especially verse 2:15 and 9:15).*

3. *Jesus provides the sacrifice for our sins before a Holy God (especially verses 2:17 and 9:12).*

4. *Jesus sets an example for us to follow (especially verse 2:18 and 9:14).*

1 2 Ask: We have seen that Jesus accomplished a number of things on our behalf in his life, death, and resurrection. What kind of distortions in understanding of God's nature and our need might occur if a church focused on only one of his roles as victor, rescuer, sacrifice, or example?

1 3 Teach: Jesus fully enters into the human experience so that:

We do not have a high priest, who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Because of what Jesus has done, the guilt of sin is forgiven, its power is broken and its stain is cleansed. In the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection he displays his love as creator, his authority as Lord and his ability as savior.

1 4 Teach: His death is central to Christian Faith. The early Christians did not look at the death of Jesus as an unfortunate political event or a small detail in the story – rather it was of “first importance.”

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1st Corinthians 15:3-4)

APPLICATION

15 **Say:** Consider the following quote from Alistair McGrath:

"Many Christians are confused and upset because they do not experience God as present and active in the world. If you feel this way, try to imagine what it was like for the disciples on the first Good Friday... There was no sign of God intervening to transform the situation... So thinking about the first Good Friday brings home to us how unreliable experience and feelings can be as guides to the presence of God. Those around the cross didn't experience the presence of God, so they concluded that he was absent from the scene. The resurrection overturned that judgment: God was present in a hidden manner, which experience mistook for his absence. Do you feel that God is absent from your life, or from certain difficult situations? Then think of the first Good Friday, when God also seemed to be absent, only to be shown to have been working in a hidden and mysterious way to transform it in a totally unexpected manner."

ASK: Based on the scriptures we've covered, as well what the scholars said about the crucifixion of Jesus, what would you say to someone who said Jesus didn't really die on the cross, he just fainted so it looked like he came back to life (the swoon theory)?

16 **Ask:** Imagine stopping the story right where we are in the creed – Jesus suffered and died. For two days following Jesus' death there was no sign of God, no sign of hope. The world looked cold, dead and empty. In our own lives, we always live in the middle of the story – we don't know what is going to happen next. How might this phrase of the creed help us when we are feeling despair and the absence of God?

17 **Ask:** Thinking back to our discussion on the cross, now that we've explored Jesus' death further, do you feel the cross is the best symbol for Christianity? What will you think of the next time you see a cross used as something other than an honest reflection of genuine faith? Is the cross a symbol you personally will use to reflect faith?

18 **Say:** Under the Old Testament Jewish law, sacrifice was required to cover sin. An animal's blood was shed to make atonement. In the case of Jesus, He willingly laid down His life to make atonement for the sins of mankind. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said in John 1:19, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Jesus offered Himself in the ultimate act of practical love. He calls us to "pick up your cross and follow me."

19 **ASK:** Is there a specific situation in your life right now where God might be calling you to give practical (and perhaps self-sacrificial) love to someone?

20 **Ask:** What do you want to remember the next time you say the phrase "was crucified, dead, and buried" in the creed?

CLOSING PRAYER

21 Say: I would like to ask you to pray in silence as I quote from an Easter sermon delivered sometime before the year 177 AD by Melito of Sardis. If you hear a phrase that really strikes you, focus on it, and turn it into your own personal prayer of praise to God (Pause after each phrase)

*"What new mystery, then, is this?
The Judge is judged, and holds his peace;
the Invisible One is seen, and is not ashamed;
the Incomprehensible is laid hold upon, and is not indignant;
the Illimitable is circumscribed, and doth not resist;
the Impossible suffereth, and doth not avenge;
the Immortal dieth, and answereth not a word;
the Celestial is laid in the grave, and endureth!
What new mystery is this?
"The whole creation, I say, was astonished; but
when our Lord arose from the place of the dead,
and trampled death under foot,
and bound the strong one,
and set man free,
then did the whole creation see clearly that
for man's sake the Judge was condemned,
and the Invisible was seen,
and the Illimitable was circumscribed,
and the Impossible suffered,
and the Immortal died,
and the Celestial was laid in the grave.
For our Lord, when He was born man,
was condemned in order that He might show mercy,
was bound in order that He might loose,
was seized in order that He might release,
suffered in order that He might feel compassion,
died in order that He might give life,
was laid in the grave that He might raise from the dead."¹*

Session 11:

The Last Enemy Defeated

“and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead.”

“We are to look on the crucifixion and the resurrection as a single event. We should not think of the crucifixion as a failure that is put right by the resurrection. They go together.”
– Quote from DVD

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

- 1 Ask:** How does your family celebrate Easter? What do you remember about Easter from your childhood?
- 2 Ask:** Each of us tends to focus on a particular part of the Christian story. What is most central to your faith – Jesus’ birth at Christmas, his teachings during his life, his suffering on the cross on Good Friday, or his resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday? Why?
- 3 Ask:** Growing up, did you have any concept or image of hell? If so, what was it?
- 4 Teach:** Consider the development of the Apostle’s Creed in the chart found on p. 103. Note that the phrase “Descended into Hell” appears later in the tradition. Thus, some people see the most recent ecumenical version which changes the phrase to “Descended to the Dead”, as watering down the Creed while others this a legitimate attempt to get back to the Creed’s original sense. Let’s see what our scholars find are the crucial ideas behind this phrase.

Play DVD Episode 11: The Last Enemy Defeated

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 5 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 6 **Ask:** Based on what you have heard, do you think the ecumenical phrase "Descended to the dead" or the traditional phrase "Descended into Hell" is more appropriate? Why?
- 7 **Say:** We tend to view Hell as a literal place separated from heaven and all that is good. The scholars presented Hell as a consequence of sin resulting in the agony of abandonment. Which view is more helpful for you in understanding God's plan of salvation?
- 8 **Ask:** One scholar describes death as a power that haunts. To what degree is this true for you?
- 9 **Ask:** Our scholars said that it was not as if the crucifixion was a mistake that was fixed by the resurrection, but rather they are two halves of the same active work of God. How do the crucifixion and the resurrection work together to form a whole?
- a) *The resurrection proves that the work on the Cross (including the atonement for sin) was successful & complete*
 - b) *The crucifixion represents what humanity can do; the resurrection represents what God can do.*
 - c) *It is in the act of the resurrection that Christ has conquered sin, death, and the devil.*
 - d) *The resurrection is the beginning of the raising of the Son of God, the true King to his rightful place – his vindication and the celebration of what he has accomplished.*
- 10 **Ask:** How is the resurrection of Jesus different from, for instance, the resurrection of Lazarus? See John chapter 11.
- 11 **Discuss:** Describe the disciples' reaction to the resurrection. Were they expecting Jesus to rise from the dead?

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

"For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God." - 1 Peter 4:6

12 Teach: Some understand this scripture as well as 1 Peter 3:18-20 to imply that Jesus visited the dead in Hell prior to his resurrection. But the Creed and the four gospels are silent on this point. Saturday, the day between the crucifixion and the resurrection is a day of silence. What the Creed does seem to point to is this: whatever death is like, wherever the dead go, Jesus has been there and experienced it. What is of first importance is summed up by Paul this way:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. - 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." - Luke 24:45-48

"We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." - Acts 10:39-43

13 Say: All three scriptures emphasize both that Jesus was raised on the third day and that it has accomplished the forgiveness of sins.

"and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins." - 1st Corinthians 15:17

14 ASK: Why is Paul being so hard on those in Corinth who questioned the future resurrection of their bodies? *Because the issue of the resurrection is not just about the future, but about the past and the present. Their present status as Christians, as well as the forgiveness of their past sins are all based upon the already accomplished bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

15 Say: Apparently for Paul, Luke and other scripture writers, the central historic event in the Christian story is the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the central accomplishment of this central event was the forgiveness of sins. **Ask:** Is this the center of the story for you? Is this the center of your faith and your understanding of Christianity? If not, what is?

APPLICATION

- 16 Ask:** What do you want to remember the next time you say “Was crucified, dead and buried”? What difference does it make to know that Christ has experienced Hell in its truest sense?
- 17 Say:** It is natural for humans to have a certain fear of death and a desire to prolong life and quality of life. Some people take extreme measures to be as healthy as possible or to extend life, while others seem cavalier and almost tempt fate with risky behavior. How would you know if you are veering into one extreme or another?
- 18 Ask:** Many people who take the resurrection seriously would say that they have experienced the risen Christ in their life. His story has become part of their story. What are the marks you see in individuals and congregations who are living out this kind of faith?
- 19 Ask:** How does belief or lack of belief in the resurrection affect the way a person lives their life?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- 20 Say:** We said that the crucifixion and the resurrection are two halves of the same redemptive act of God. We will again close with the ancient words of Melito of Sardis from about the year 170. As you listen, pay particular attention to those phrases that emphasize the resurrection. I would like this to be a very personal prayer. I will pray out loud and then pause in silence. If my prayer speaks to the convictions of your own heart, please make it your own prayer, praying each phrase silently in your heart.

CLOSING PRAYER

21 Pray:

“Triune God, I have come here today because I want to know you better...
I have often heard Jesus called our Lord and Savior. Jesus, thank you for being our Savior...
Thank you for coming to earth and showing us a way to live in this world...
Thank you for dying for me, taking my shame and my sins upon your cross so that I would not have to carry their eternal weight any more...
Thank you for giving me a clean slate, a new beginning each day...
Thank you for rising from the Dead proving you are the Lord of Life, the victor over death...
Thank you that you have created a way that I too might have eternal life...
And Lord, I know this is not just about what you did 2000 years ago, but how I should live for you today...
I don't want you to just be my savior, I want you to be my Lord... Here and Now...
I give you my life...
Take my life...
And let it be consecrated Lord to Thee.
I ask these things in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.”

Session 12: The Ascent of Man

“He ascended into Heaven, and
sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty”

“In the Bible the language of heaven and earth work in a very different way. Heaven and earth are the two interlocking overlapping spheres of God’s reality. Not upstairs/downstairs, but like a different dimension of present reality. Jesus ... has gone into God’s space. One day the two spheres of reality will come back together again.” – quote from DVD.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

1 Ask: The times in our lives when we have left a place, arrived at a place, or returned to a place often create some of our most vivid memories. Share with us a time from your life when you either left home or returned home, or a time you were reunited with someone you had not seen for a long time.

2 Say: There is a journey built into the words of the Apostles’ Creed, not only the journey that a believer will take, but also the Journey of Jesus Christ. In the incarnation he left his home in the heavenly realms and became flesh and lived among us. His physical journey led to Calvary. He went to the grave and then to the place of the dead. He returned to earth, dwelled with the apostles for a short time, and then the Creed brings us to his return Journey – he ascended into heaven. As a human being Jesus felt the same emotions of arriving, leaving and returning that we have felt about important places.

A popular praise song summarizes this journey:

*You came from heaven to earth to show the way
From the earth to the cross my debts to pay
From the cross to the grave,
From the grave to the Sky
Lord I lift your name on high*

Let’s see how our scholars understand the phrase “He ascended into Heaven”

Play DVD Episode 12: The Ascent of Man

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 3 Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 4 Ask:** Thinking back to our discussion on times of change, what feelings do you suppose Jesus might have experienced when He “ascended into heaven” and took His place at the right hand of God the Father? (*See Hebrews 12:2*)
- 5 Ask:** According to our scholars, where or what is Heaven? *We are not to see heaven and earth as upstairs downstairs. Heaven and Earth are the two interlocking overlapping spheres of present reality.*
- 6 Ask:** According to the video, why does Jesus sit at the Father’s right hand? *It is a position of honor and influence; He has resumed his rightful place; It is a sign that his atonement work is done - finished and complete.*
- 7 Say:** In Luke 24:49-53 we read of the ascent of Jesus into heaven:
- "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.***
- 8 Ask:** How much have you heard in churches about the idea of Jesus existing right now as a physical human being, yet in heaven? What is your reaction to this concept?
- 9 Discuss:** In coming to earth Jesus brought the exact representation of God to humanity. When He ascended into heaven, Jesus became our representative to God. How? What is Jesus’ role in heaven?
- 10 ASK:** Some religious people have been called too heavenly minded for any earthly good. From what you see in this scripture and what you know about the book of Acts, did the ascension of Jesus cause his disciples to become other-worldly, in the sense of passively sitting around waiting for Jesus to come back?

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

11 Teach: The ascended Lord takes his rightful place with power, authority and glory:

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. - Ephesians 1:16-23

12 Teach: The ascended Lord is actively at work in our behalf

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. - Hebrews 7:23-8:2

13 Ask: Jesus has risen, but for what purpose?

14 Ask: Verses 20 & 21 of Ephesians might paint a picture to some that Christ has gone to Heaven, and so He is now far away, uninvolved, leaving us alone. How might other parts of the Ephesians passage or the Hebrews passage be used to counter this idea? (*He is actively involved as the head of the church. The church is his body. He fills everything in every way, i.e. by the Triune God is everywhere present. He lives forever, and is able to save us now; He always lives to intercede for us*)

15 Ask: What does it mean that Jesus is the head of the church?

APPLICATION

- 16 Ask:** How might the understanding that Jesus is constantly interceding on your behalf, pleading your cause before the throne of God's righteousness impact the way you handle your guilt and shame over past mistakes and sins?
- 17 Ask:** What should we remember the next time we say, "He ascended into Heaven, and He is seated at the right hand of the God the Father Almighty"?
- 18 Read:** *Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:1-13.*
- 19 Ask:** Are there particular topics where you need to set your mind on the things above with Christ? What are some specific ways you can set your mind on things above?
- 20 Ask:** At the same time we see that the disciples were motivated to great and practical deeds here on earth after the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. They were to fulfill the great commission in Matthew 28:18-20 that we said formed a foundation for the creed. Is there some project or work you feel that Jesus as the head of the church may be calling you to do?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- 21 Say:** William Barclay says that the image of Christ ascending to heaven and sitting down at God's right hand is a declaration of "the vindication of Christ. The pain and humiliation and the rejection and the disloyalties are all at an end and there is what we might call the public vindication of the Son. The place that the Son holds in the heart of the Father is made evident to heaven and to earth...the right hand of God gives to the Son the right of judgment. He is no longer the judged, but the judge. He is no longer the condemned, but the one who metes out judgment. He is no longer on trial before men, the universe is on trial before him...Christ is entering upon his regal office as King of Kings and Lord of Lords."¹

CLOSING PRAYER

- 22 Pray:** The following prayer is adopted from the Gregorian Sacramentary commissioned by Charlemagne about 790 AD.

"Almighty and Everlasting God, King of Glory, Heavenly Father,
Just as your only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ
has ascended to sit at your right hand in Heaven,
grant that our hearts and minds might also ascend
That even now they might continually dwell with him who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever, Amen.

¹ Barclay, William "The Apostles Creed" 1998 Westminster John Knox Press, P 146
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Session 13:

That Day

“From thence He shall come to judge
the living and the dead”

“The judgment is not [a punitive retribution], but rather ... it is the revelation of our brokenness in the presence of that which is perfectly whole. ... We were created for Christ-likeness.” – quote from DVD.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today's topic

- 1 **Ask:** When you hear the word “Judgment”, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? *(write answers on whiteboard or newsprint)*
- 2 **Ask:** When you read in the Apostles' Creed, the creed of Christians, that “Jesus is coming back again to judge the living and the dead,” what kind of image do you see in your mind? *(write answers on whiteboard or newsprint. These responses will be used at the end of class.)*
- 3 **Ask:** Where have you seen Christians proclaiming judgment on the sins of others?
- 4 **Say:** “Let's take a look to see how our scholars understand the phrase “*And he will come to judge the living and the dead.*”

Play DVD Episode 13: That Day

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 5 Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 6 Ask:** In what way has the kingdom of God already arrived? In what way is the kingdom yet to come? Contrast the Jews waiting for the Messiah with the Christians waiting for Christ's return.
- 7 Ask:** Two images of judgment were presented. First, if I choose to step off a roof, gravity does not suddenly become wrathful, it just keeps on being gravity. Second, when a straight edge is brought into the presence of wavy lines it reveals (judges) just how wavy they are. In the first illustration, there is a natural consequence to "what is," and in the second we see perfection illuminating imperfection. Do you find these illustrations helpful? Do you feel God is wrathful (punishing in anger), or rather that our rejection of His love is experienced as wrath?
- 8 Ask:** God is Holy (just) and God is merciful (forgiving). Which of these is harder for you to accept?
- 9 Consider** John 3:16-18:

16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Ask: What is the relationship between God's justice and God's love?

- 10 Ask:** N.T. Wright pointed out that in Old Testament times, people cried out for a judge because the Judge would set things right. In other words, instead of anarchy and 'might makes right,' society would be ordered by the fair and consistent rulings of a wise judge. But even in the most just society, judgments and penalties will be necessary. What is lost if God does not judge at all? Is it equivalent to God judging unfairly? (*Fairness and mercy to the victim of a crime includes declaring that they are of worth, and what has been done to them is real and of consequence. In other words, the actions of the perpetrator must be judged.*)

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

Matthew 24:36-44

36 *But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.*

37 *For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.*

38 *For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,*

39 *and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

40 *Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.*

41 *Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.*

42 *Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.*

43 *But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.*

44 *For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.*

1 1 **Ask:** In every age, there have been those who claimed they knew when Jesus was coming back. How would you respond to someone who looks at a particular event as a sign of Jesus' imminent return?

ACTS 17:30-32

30 *Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,*

31 *because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.*

32 *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."*

1 2 **Ask:** What does this short scripture teach us about the character of God, the character of Jesus, and the character of people in every generation?

APPLICATION

- 13 Ask:** What should we remember the next time we say, "From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead"?
- 14 Ask:** Look at the words and images we came up with at the beginning of class in reference to the word "*judgment*." How would you now respond to someone who says, "Oh all you Christians are so judgmental. You worship an angry, judgmental God who sends people to Hell. I believe in tolerance and love for all people"?
- 15 Teach:** Justo L. Gonzalez argues that a just ruler will not only make sure that certain laws are obeyed but also that those laws are just, that they do not favor the rich or the powerful. Such justice is not contrary to love but actually a form of love. Love, on the other hand, is not expressed by simply allowing others to do as they please. When someone hurts us and we say "Oh, that's alright. What you did to me doesn't matter," our failure to confront the behavior may be in effect saying "That's alright. You don't matter." Love is truly concerned over the actions and the being of the beloved.¹
- 16 Ask:** First century Christians expected Jesus to return in their lifetime. Martin Luther said that he would plant a tree today if he knew Christ was returning tomorrow. Are you consciously anticipating Christ's return? Would you live differently if you fully expected Christ to return within the next ten years? How about in the next few days?
- 17 Say:** Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead. While he could come back tomorrow, all of the Christians that have come before us for the last two thousand years have died. This line in the creed should remind us not only of the final future of Christ's return but also the short-term future of our own mortality. We may end up joining those who did not witness Christ's return during their lifetime. Psalm 103:15 says "As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." No matter what we have accomplished in this life, at the end of the game all the toys go back into the box. We try to do things that will last forever here on earth, but nothing here lasts forever. We hold on to things as if we will live forever, but in truth, the final result of much of our toil is simply to determine what size dumpster our children will need to clean out our house once we die.
- 18 ASK:** How well do you think our culture does at admitting the reality of death? How well does our culture do at facing the certainty of old age, suffering and dying? Why do you think that is?
- 19 Ask:** This phrase in the creed points out two things: first that Jesus is coming back, and second that there will be a judgment at the end of days. As you look around the world, what are the things you would like to be set right? Is there a particular event, or type of oppression where you would wish to see the perpetrators held accountable, where you want God to act as judge? What are the situations in our world right now that most make you want to say "Come quickly Lord Jesus!"
- 20 Read:** Matthew 25:31-46. According to this passage, how will Jesus separate the sheep from the goats at the coming judgment? (*It is important to show what we believe by what we do, not by what we say. The best way to prepare for Christ's return is simply by obeying his commandments.*)

¹ Gonzalez, Justo L., *The Apostles' Creed for Today*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2007 p 67.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

21 History is full of suffering and evil, and there have been many times that seemed to herald the second coming of the Son of Man. But when it does happen it will be so startling and conspicuous, so glorious and great, that it will need no proclamation and no interpretation. There is a difference between signs that point to the end of time and the end of time itself. While the signs can be seen clearly, the actual date remains hidden. Consequently every generation since the time of Jesus has been confronted with the reality of signs pointing to the end. The information about the end times that has been given to us in scripture is intended not for its own sake, or to satisfy our curiosity about the future, or to enable us to relax until just before the event. Instead, what we can know, the signs that we *can* discern—everything that points to the apparent imminence of the end—all of this is meant to motivate us to appropriate conduct and faith in Christ in the present rather than speculations about the details of the future.¹ Jesus Christ is coming back to judge the world. "Some New Testament Scholars reckon that one verse in every thirteen speaks to this one ... divine event towards which the whole creation moves."² This thought is central to the New Testament. But when we stand before the judgment seat will not see some strange, cruel Judge. John Calvin said "we shall be brought before no other judgment seat than that of our redeemer, to whom we must look for our salvation"³

CLOSING PRAYER

22 **Say:** I want to end today with a short prayer that comes from the very last verses of the very last book of the bible, in Revelation Chapter 22:

PRAY: "Jesus, you said, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' And now we say, "Come, Lord Jesus!" May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you until he comes again. Amen.

¹ Hagner, Donald A.: *Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 14-28*. Dallas : Word, Incorporated, 2002 (Word Biblical Commentary 33B), S. 715

² Holmes, Roert Leslie, *The Creed – Life Principles for Today*, Ambassador-Emerald International, Belfast Ireland, 2002, p.138,

³ Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.18

Session 14:

The Breath of God

“I believe in the Holy Spirit”

“The images of the fire and the dove and son are necessary because the Holy Spirit is all about the coming of the new creation, the coming of God’s future purposes into the present. The Spirit is the one who makes Christ real to us. The Spirit is the one who makes God’s new world real to us. And that is why the Spirit is associated with prayer, with the sacraments, with love, with all sorts of aspects of our life. We couldn’t actually exist as Christians without constantly saying “Lord, fill me with your holy spirit.” – quote from DVD.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

1 Ask: Have you ever had the sense that you were being led in a certain situation? For example you were faced with a big decision, or you were in the middle of a difficult situation and had the sense that something bigger was going on, there was a larger plan at work, that you were being led in a particular direction? If so, share with us, in a few sentences, what that was like.

2 Say: In some of the experiences we just shared there is a degree of mystery - we have a vague sense of what is happening, but the powers at work are veiled, we sense they are real, but we can't see them. Today we will be looking at the phrase in the Apostles’ Creed “I believe in the Holy Spirit”. Christians have, from the beginning, believed that the Holy Spirit is at work in the present tense – here and now. It is often easy for us to imagine God the father, and to imagine Jesus the Son, but it is very difficult to imagine God the Holy Spirit, the unseen presence of God who is at work unseen, right here, right now in everyday life. Let’s see how our New Testament scholars understand this mysterious member of the Trinity...

Play DVD Episode 14: The Breath of God

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 3 Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 4 Ask:** Based on what we heard and what you have heard elsewhere, what words would you use to describe the Holy Spirit? (*Comforter, Healer, Advocate, Guide, Counselor, One who comes along side*)
- 5 Ask:** Is the Spirit at work in a non-believer? How? How does His work change once someone becomes a Christian?
- 6 Ask:** Why do you think the creed and the scholars we heard are so adamant to talk about the Holy Spirit as a person rather than a thing or force? Why does it matter?
(A force can be manipulated, a thing can be possessed. The Holy Spirit is a person who cannot be owned or controlled. As a person he can guide and comfort. An unseen force can be created in the image of the person proclaiming it. People claim all kinds of things about the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit, as a person, has a particular character in keeping with the Triune God.)
- 7 Ask:** How did the scholars distinguish between the Spirit's work as described in the Old Testament and the Spirit's work as presented in the New Testament? (*Old Testament references to the Holy Spirit tend to be limited more for an individual and a specific task. In the New Testament we see the Spirit's role in the entire faith community, as the community becomes the "body of Christ" in the world.*)
- 8 Ask:** The video describes the primary task of the Holy Spirit as to make us ever more Christ-like. How have you experienced this in your life?
- 9 Ask:** What is the difference between a holy person and the Holy Spirit? How are they related?
- 10 Compare:** Divide the class into three groups. Have each group discuss one of the following: "The *Work* of the Holy Spirit," "The *Fruit* of the Holy Spirit," and "The *Gifts* of the Holy Spirit." Reconvene to discuss and compare these three aspects of the Spirit's work among us. *Note: If your class has little exposure to these concepts, consider skipping this activity or doing it as a group together. Depending on the group's experience and comfort level, you may want to supplement with Scripture passages. The Scriptures included in the next section would be a great place to start.*
- 11 Demonstration:** Place a three-wicked candle in front of the class and light all three wicks. **Say:** We have now come to the point in the creed where we have covered all three persons of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is what sets Christian understanding apart from all other world views, yet we struggle to understand it. Any example we use to try to explain the Trinity breaks down for two reasons – First, no finite thing on earth could ever fully represent the infinite Triune God. Second, the Trinity are living persons not static objects, so diagrams and symbols are not sufficient. One limited symbol that conveys some aspects of the Trinity is this candle. We say there is one God but that God is three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is one candle but there are three wicks. Together these three living flames dance and give off one light. One candle, one light, yet three distinct flames

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

12 Jesus says that the spirit will come:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

- John 14:16-20

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. - JOHN 16:7-14

Ask: According to these scriptures, why is the Holy Spirit coming and what will the Spirit do? What signs do you see in these scriptures that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force?

13 The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"

Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome

(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

:

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. - Acts 2:1-38

Ask: Why do you think Peter links repentance and baptism with receiving the Holy Spirit?

14 The Gifts of the Spirit:

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. - 1st Corinthians 12:4-13

Ask: Do you believe that super natural gifts of the Holy Spirit like Healing, Prophecy, Speaking in Tongues, etc. happen today? Why or why not?

15 The Fruit of the Spirit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. - Galatians 5:22-25

Ask: What does Paul mean by saying there is a difference between living by the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit? What hinders believers from keeping in step with the Spirit?

APPLICATION

16 Ask: Based on today's discussion, what is one thing you want to remember the next time you say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit"?

17 Ask: What has been your experience with the Holy Spirit in day-to-day life? Have you sensed the Spirit nudging you in a given direction? How can Christians be sure it is the Holy Spirit they are sensing, not their own desires and whims?

18 Ask: If the primary work of the Spirit is to make us ever more Christ-like, how are you experiencing the Spirit's work in your life? What specific steps could you take to make yourself more cooperative with the Spirit's work in your life?

19 Teach: Imagine a boat that is resting calmly, moored safely at a dock. Its sails are furled. Life on this ship is predictable and safe. It could stay docked forever, but that is not what it is created for. It was created to go out into the open waters with sails full and open. In the open waters, life is unpredictable and can be truly dangerous. There are uncontrollable elements to deal with. Jesus describes the Holy Spirit like the wind. Our hearts are like sails – they are either furled so they won't catch the wind, or open so that they do. In your life right now, where is your sailboat?

In the Dock - Comfortable, Neat, under control

If so, this is not what a boat is designed for. Is there something you need to let go of – something that is keeping you tied down to the dock?

In Open Water - Catching the wind

If so, enjoy the ride and remember it's not your power. Keep your eyes wide open to where you are headed.

In Open Water - With no wind, you feel dead in the water

You have your sails wide open but there is not a whisper of wind. If so, you must wait. The scripture is full on verses that encourage us to "Wait upon the Lord." And what should you do while you are waiting? Worship the Lord.

In Open Water - but the wind is changing

You have got to turn (repent) to catch the wind. But how do you know when you are sensing the leading of the Spirit rather than feeling something because you had too much coffee this morning? Listen to the testimony of Scripture, prayer, the wise counsel of others, the testimony of past experiences, and the conviction of your heart.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

20 Say: Say: James C Howell writes, "The Holy Spirit is the shy member of the Trinity. The Spirit is everywhere and active, but not always right out in the open...The Spirit is shy and self-effacing. The Spirit draws attention, not to the Spirit, but to God the Father, to Jesus...The Spirit is personal, very personal, as personal as your next breath, and yet as elusive as the wind, as invisible as the wind, yet powerful, with noticeable effects...Too often we think of the Holy Spirit as involved in the inner, pious life, forgetting that the Spirit is the breath of life which causes all creation, all history, to flow together to its ultimate end, in the infinite ocean of God... Hildegard of Bingen wrote:

'The Holy Spirit is life-giving life,
Universal Mover and the root of all creation,
Refiner of all things from their dross,
brings forgiveness of guilt and oil for our wounds,
is radiance of life, most worthy of worship,
wakening and reawakening both earth and heaven.'"¹

CLOSING PRAYER

21 Pray: Holy Spirit, you are the Lord and Giver of life, and you are to be worshipped with the Father and the Son. You spoke through the prophets and you are at work this very day. I ask that you would fill this place, that you would fill our hearts, that you would do a supernatural work in us. Have your way with our church; have your way with us; have your way with me. This day I open the door to you, I yield to you, and I ask you to guide me in the way that I should go. Give me the courage to do what is right. Help me to grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and forever. Amen. (2nd Peter 3:18).

¹ Howell, James C., *The Life We Claim – The Apostles Creed for Preaching, Teaching, and Worship*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2005, pp103-104
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Session 15:

The Whole Family

“the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints”

“We are to think of the church in two ways: as the presence of Christ with us, but also as a community of sinful human beings who are seeking to come closer to the Lord.” ... “The church is where we gather to worship and be transformed and go and minister.” – Quotes from DVD.

Major Teaching themes:

- *The Church is not a building, but rather the collective body of believers, around the world and across the generations.*
- *The church is both holy (created by God) and flawed (made up of sinful people). In some sense, it is a “hospital for the spirit.”*
- *The church belongs to the Lord, but is also what we make it, as we give of our selves.*
- *When the organized church is functioning well, it is a beautiful and powerful vehicle for the work of the Kingdom of God.*

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

1 Ask: Today we will be looking at the phrase “I believe in the Holy Catholic Church”. I’d like to start by thinking about our particular church. Share with us how you came to be part of this church. How did you end up here? What factors were important to you in choosing a church? *(Note: if your group is from different churches, simply have members each share about their own church.)*

Play DVD Episode 15: The Whole Family

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

2 Ask: Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?

3 Ask: Based on what we've heard, let's define these words
(Write down answers on the whiteboard):

CHURCH:
CATHOLIC:
HOLY:
SAINT:

4 Ask: The day of Pentecost is described in Acts 2. Why do you think the phrase "I believe in the Holy Spirit" in the Apostles' Creed is immediately followed by the phrase "I believe in The Holy Catholic Church"?

5 Ask: What does the phrase "Communion of the Saints" mean?
(if the term Catholic implies that the church of Jesus cuts across denominations, geography, and culture, then Communion of the Saints is a living fellowship that cuts across time – we are part of a community that stretches all the way back to Jesus.)

6 Ask: Believing in God is one thing, but why would this early creed, written long before any monolithic church government, say it is necessary to believe in the church?

- a) *Because it is God who creates the church, not people. The church is not some ideal, nor is it merely an organization created by humans - rather it is drawn together of people chosen by God – it is part of his plan and will for the world.*
- b) *Because Christianity was never meant to be about the isolated life of an individual, but rather a shared faith, a community that God uses to build up each member as members of one body.*

7 Ask: What is the primary purpose of the church?
(Its primary purpose is communal worship of God. Out of this primary priority flows all its other purposes, including community and mission.)

8 Ask: If the church is defined in the pure sense as believers living in communion with one another, supporting one another, and exhorting one another, then what is the function of the organized, structured church?

9 Ask: Two common analogies for the church are "The Body of Christ" and "The Bride of Christ." Compare and contrast these two descriptors.

10 Ask: Is the church a voluntary gathering of individuals who choose to associate with each other or a fellowship specifically ordained by God? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of these images?

11 Say: Many people say they are "spiritual," but don't believe in organized religion and don't go to church. Can one live out authentic Christian faith without an active involvement in a local body of believers?

1 2 Say: In today's world there is a certain tension between home fellowships/small groups and the larger corporate worship of a formal institution.

Ask: Are both needed? Is one more important than the other? What strengths and weaknesses do you see in each?

1 3 Teach: There are currently two main forms of "small group meetings." The first are small groups that represent an arm of ministry from the larger church, such as care groups or study groups. The other form is the "House Church," which is a stand-alone church, not connected to any larger organization. Both of these Small Group Settings allow for greater intimacy in the form of sharing life's joys and trials together. The intimate setting encourages the deeper relationships and honesty that a large Sunday morning church worship experience often can not accommodate. It can provide a safe place of belonging and learning for many who feel alienated by the larger church structure. In addition, those whose church participation is limited to large Sunday gatherings can easily become anonymous spectators, consumers of religious experiences. In a small group setting, one is forced to get into the often-messy business of relationships and real life. The mutual accountability of small group worship requires time, transparency and commitment. On the other hand, autonomous small groups or churches can be susceptible to distortions of doctrine based on the feelings and views of the group leaders. Without the accountability of exposure to doctrines or responsibilities we don't like, small groups can tend to create church in our own image, made up of people who look and believe a lot like ourselves.

Being tied to the larger church, especially the historic church through the ages, gives us a stability and accountability in a culture increasingly characterized by low commitment and quick turnover. The historic church gives us vision, wisdom, and perspective we simply don't get when we focus only on the church of "now," created by ourselves. Further, the larger church forces us to deal with people who are not like us, which is one of the primary ways God uses to shape us. Through the institutional church we learn from our elders even as we are stretched by the insights and challenges of the next generation. When we sit willingly under the discipline of the historical, established church, our humility is rewarded with the benefit of the wisdom of long-standing doctrine and policy. We can see Paul clearly teaching the need for church discipline in the epistles. Institutional churches have seen where certain behaviors and doctrines end up in the long run and have established ways to deal with all sorts of messy situations.

What can we conclude? Small Groups can enhance the mission of the larger church, while the larger church can enhance the small group. Corporate and small group worship and study are both a part of a healthy Christian walk. In addition, both denominational and non-denominational approaches to church have strengths and weaknesses. The key is to be willing to be both taught by the historic church and to be open to what God is doing now; to realize the need both for corporate worship and intimate fellowship in the life of the Christian. By speaking of both the holy Catholic Church and the communion of Saints, the Apostles' Creed reminds us that healthy Christianity includes both intimacy of fellowship and connection to the larger church.

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

Acts 2:40-47

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

14 ASK: Do you think the Christian community described in this passage is possible or even desirable today? Was that community the same thing as a church? Was this a description of a norm for all time or of a special moment in the life of the church?

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

15 ASK: How closely does this description match your experience of Christian community? Why does Paul give this admonition? How would living this out change our life together as Christians?

1 Peter 2:1-10

1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,"

8 and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

16 Ask: As you think about the church, what does it mean in 1 Peter 2:10 "Once you were not a people but now you are the people of God"?

APPLICATION

- 17 Ask:** What should we remember the next time we say, "I believe in the Holy, Catholic Church?"
- 18 Ask:** Many people go to a church gathering on Sunday morning to get a spiritual boost for their week. It's a sort of vitamin pill for the soul. How does this mindset fit with the definition of church that we've been discussing?
- 19 Ask:** Do you find yourself going to church with an expectation of giving of yourself as part of the community of believers or with an expectation of getting something?
- 20 Say:** Like most volunteer organizations, churches are places where 20% of the people do 80% of the work. For some of us, stepping up to the plate and contributing more of our time and resources might be the next step for us spiritually. If you find yourself only thinking about your church community on Sundays, it may be a sign you need to find a way to get more involved in the life of the church. For others, actually cutting back on involvement in order to live a more balanced life might be the best thing to do for spiritual growth. Bitterness or resentment is often a sign you have taken too much upon yourself. How do you feel about your own current commitment level?
- 21 Ask:** Have you had times of disappointment or hurt that are related to church?
- 22 Say:** While the church is holy and God-ordained, it is also made up of sinful human beings. Therefore, the church is flawed even as it strives to do the work of the Lord. How can you love the church as holy, yet lovingly work towards a church that is more Christ-like?
- 23 Ask:** The Church is the community of those who are both holy chosen saints and are also fallen sinners in need of grace – we are both at the same time. Some churches focus more on the Holiness of God and His church and tend to emphasize formality. Other churches focus on extending a welcome to the un-churched who need to hear the good news, with an emphasis on casual worship. How do we strike a healthy balance?
- 24 Ask:** The early church as revealed in scripture had strengths and weaknesses just like today's churches. In what way would you like to see your local church be more like the early church?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- 25 Say:** Every Christian alive today could chart their spiritual family tree all the way back to Jesus. Friends telling friends, parents telling children, preachers speaking to crowds. One by one the good news has been passed through the ages, like a message passing down the wires from telephone pole to telephone pole across 2000 years. I don't want to be the one where the signal dies. I have a role to play in the communion of saints. And I am not alone. I am a part of the church across the ages.

CLOSING PRAYER

- 26 Pray:** Form a circle and invite each person to pray for one specific need related to your church or for the church of Jesus Christ around the world.

Session 16:

All That Debt

“the forgiveness of sins”

“The problem here is thinking of sin as actions, as deeds... The deeds are not the problem; it is being the kind of person that acts that way that is the problem. The purpose of God’s forgiveness is not to forget about what you did. The purpose of forgiveness is to transform us, so that we no longer do those things.” ... “If we think of sin as lost-ness, Christ’s work means He’s found us. If we think of sins as separation, fractured relationships, Christ’s work means welcome home! You belong here!” – Quotes from DVD.

Major Teaching themes:

- Sin is rebellion against God.
- Jesus paid the price for sin, once and for all.
- Forgiveness is not a license to go on sinning, but rather offers the power to transform our inner being so that we become ever more Christ-like.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic *Materials needed: stones about three inches big, permanent markers, and a heavy-duty backpack or duffle bag.*

- 1 Ask:** How would you define sin? *Write the definitions on the board.*
- 2 Demonstration:** Hand out one stone and a permanent marker to each person.
Say: Think of one sin that average people commit that really bugs you – every day wrongs that happen all the time. Write your answer clearly on your stone. **Say:** Now let’s place our stones in this backpack (or bag). As I walk around the room, place your stone in the bag and say the sin that you wrote on your stone loud enough so all can hear. *(Walk around to each person and collect the stones.)*
- 3 Teach:** We often think of financial debt as a weight or burden that can drag us down. When the load is too big to carry, we seek to have our debt “forgiven,” or wiped clean. Sin can also be described as a debt or weight. Jesus says “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Imagine that each time I sin, my debt to God gets greater. The accumulation of all the wrong things I have done over the course of my life is like a backpack full of rocks – it is a burden, a crushing burden. The truth is, that different people have different views about which sins are worse. We wrote different things on our rocks! The scriptures list many kinds of sin. But it is all sin – In other words each of these rocks is heavy. Each is a burden, no matter what is written on it. Today we are going to talk about the Christian concept of sin, the burden of sin, and the phrase in the creed “The Forgiveness of Sins.”

Play DVD Episode 16: All That Debt

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 4 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 5 **Ask:** Let's revisit our definition of sin on the whiteboard. Should we make any adjustments based on the DVD presentation?
- 6 **Ask:** Is the greatest need of a human being forgiveness of sins or something else?
- 7 **Ask:** Does the church make too much or too little of sin today? What would be a healthy view?
- 8 **Teach:** The scholars spent a lot of time explaining "Justification" and "Sanctification." How would you explain these concepts in your own words?
- 9 **Say:** A video presenter says *"The problem here is thinking of Sin as actions, as deeds... The deeds are not the problem; Being the kind of person that acts that way is the problem... The purpose of God's forgiveness is not to forget about what you did... the purpose of forgiveness is to transform us, so that we no longer do those things..."* **Ask:** How do you react to this view of the forgiveness of sins?
- 10 **Ask:** When you consider forgiveness between people, who do you think benefits more from the act of forgiveness - The one who has been wronged and now decides to forgive or the one who receives the gift of forgiveness? Why?
- 11 **SAY:** In James 5:16 we find, "Therefore, confess your **sins** to one **another**, and pray for one **another** so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." **ASK:** What do you think about confessing our sins to one another or to a religious leader? Do you think sharing your failures to another trusted Christian is important? How important is it to confess your sin to the person you sinned against?
- 12 **SAY:** Should we only ask God for forgiveness once for a particular sin? What are the benefits and/or drawbacks of taking a daily inventory of our sins? *(Daily review and confession of sins can make us more aware of our behavior, which may lead to change, and more awareness of how much we need God's grace. It is a way of being an intentional and reflective disciple. On the other hand, people who compulsively beat themselves up over their failures, who are constantly reciting their sins and viewing themselves as worthless, are actually living self-centered lives where the focus is on them instead of the grace and power of God.)*

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

Matthew 26:26-28

26 *While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."*

27 *And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;*

28 *for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.*

Luke 24:45-47

45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,

47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Act 10:43

43 "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Colossians 1:14

13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Romans 4:2-

2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

3 For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.

8 "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

I John 1:9-10

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Hebrews 2:14-18

14 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil--*

15 *and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

16 *For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.*

17 *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

18 *Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

13 Explore: *NOTE: The following activity was also recommended in Session 10. If you did it then, you may want to re-visit and discuss any new insights your group has uncovered through this session. Write the following headings on the board:*

- a) As Victor
- b) As Rescuer
- c) As a Holy Sacrifice
- d) As an example of how to live

ASK: In the verses above, Hebrews describes what Jesus accomplished on the cross in several very different ways. What phrases do you see in Hebrews that describes Jesus in one of these four ways? (Write down their answers)

14 Teach: So, to review:

1. Jesus is the victor who conquers sin, death and the devil (see especially verse 14)
2. Jesus is the rescuer who pays the ransom with his own blood and rescues those who have been trapped (see especially verse 15).
3. Jesus provides the sacrifice for our sins before a Holy God (see especially verse 17).
4. Jesus sets an example for those who are tempted to follow (see especially verse 18).
5. Jesus fully enters into the human experience so that

We do not have a high priest, who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Thus, because of what Jesus has done, the guilt of sin is forgiven, its power is broken and its stain is cleansed. In the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection He displays His love as creator, His authority as Lord and His ability as savior.

15 Ask: We have seen that Jesus accomplished a number of things on our behalf in His life, death, and resurrection. What kind of distortions in understanding of God's nature and our need might occur if a church focused on only one aspect of the atonement at the expense of the others (i.e. focused only on one of His roles as victor, rescuer, sacrifice, or example)?

APPLICATION

- 16 Ask:** Can a Christian truly declare they believe in the forgiveness of sins if they continue to mull over their sins of the past – refusing to forgive themselves of sins God has already forgiven?
- 17 Explore:** Think again about the terms “Justification” and “Sanctification.” On paper write a sentence describing your faith, using both of these words. Now write a sentence describing the next step for you in your journey towards maturity.
- 18 Ask:** Sanctification means becoming more and more like Christ. That includes the willingness to forgive the sins of others. Is there someone you need to forgive? If so, make a choice this week to forgive them and release them from their debt.
- 19 Teach:** (NOTE: As you say the following, remove the stones from your bag one at a time until the bag is empty.) Think about a time you actually had to forgive someone for a wrong done to you. Now think about a time when someone had to forgive you. Forgiveness is always personal, never theoretical, because it can only occur between persons. The forgiveness of sins is not like some impersonal spreadsheet where calculations are made and you receive a computer-generated anonymous statement saying your balance has been set to zero. It is like sitting across the table from someone to whom you owe a great debt – a debt you could never repay, and they look you in the eye and say, “I forgive everything you owe me.”

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- 20 Say:** It is one thing to consider the theoretical idea that Jesus came to offer forgiveness of sins, and quite another to look your own sins squarely in the face, then turn to God and ask him to forgive your particular, personal sins. Have you ever asked God personally to forgive your sins? Listen again to these words from I John 1:9-10: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”*

CLOSING PRAYER

- 21 Say:** I am about to read a modern adaptation of a very ancient prayer of the church. Imagine you are sitting across the table from God, looking at the backpack of your own sins and see if this prayer can become your own (Note: pause after each phrase so your listeners have time to make it their own prayer):

"Almighty and merciful father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against your holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done and we have done those things which we ought not to have done...Our backpack is full. But you have told us that we can approach your throne of grace with confidence, that you will spare us as we confess our faults, that we will receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need because of your promise declared in Jesus Christ our Lord. Because of him you remember our sins no more. Every day you give us a clean slate, an empty pack. By your spirit help us from this day forward to live lives pleasing to you. We ask all these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Session 17:

The Great Retrieval

“The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

“There will be a resurrection where we will be restored in an embodied existence in a renewed creation, a new heaven and a new earth.” “Creation is waiting for this restoration.” – Quotes from DVD

Major Teaching Themes

- The structure of the Creed mirrors that of the Scriptures, with both starting with God the creator and both ending with a description of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.
- The resurrection refers to a bodily resurrection, not just a spiritual resurrection.
- Death does not threaten our union with God, but rather marks a transition to a new life in God’s presence.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today’s topic

- 1 Ask:** What were the images you had of heaven while you were growing up?
(Have each person who is willing contribute a response, while you record them on the white board)
- 2 Alternate Activity:** Divide your class into smaller groups of about 4 or 5. Ask the groups to come up with an answer to this question: “What place would you describe as ‘heaven on earth’?” Allow a few minutes and then re-convene and have a few groups share what “heaven on earth” would look like to them.
- 3 Ask:** Is it reasonable to fear death? Why or why not?

Play DVD Episode 17: The Great Retrieval

EXPLORE THE MATERIAL

- 4 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 5 **Ask:** If we fully believe in the reality of an afterlife, how does that belief alter how we interpret events in our lives and ultimately how we live? (*This life is only part of the story. By itself it may look completely absurd and meaningless. When we realize there is a bigger story, it gives us hope, because this life becomes a chapter within the story – a story that ends well. If eternal life is real, then things of this world cannot be the ultimate measures and values by which we measure our life.*)
- 6 **Ask:** In the DVD Robert Mulholland stated that eternal life is not a matter of duration but a matter of relationship. What does that imply about when eternal life begins?
- 7 **Ask:** How is the concept of the resurrection taught in today's churches? How does this compare to the teachings of the Creed, where a bodily resurrection is emphasized? Why do you think that is?
- 8 **Teach:** We looked at the structure of the Creed in Session 2. Let's take one final look at the structure now. (*Hand out copies of the Creed, found on p. 104.*) Notice how each line is in the same order as the Christian understanding of the history of the world. The Creed opens with a declaration of belief in God as creator, mirroring the first verse of Scripture in Genesis 1:1. The center of the creed dwells on the work of Jesus: his birth, life, death, and resurrection. The creed ends in hope, declaring what will happen at the end of days to each of us personally. This mirrors the last book of the Bible, Revelation.
- 9 **Ask:** Looking at the lines of the creed that focus on Jesus, in which line does our hope for the forgiveness of sins most clearly lie? (*In his death on the cross*) Where does our hope for eternal life most clearly lie? (*In his resurrection*)
- 10 **Teach:** What we see in the resurrection of Christ is eternal life within time. The last two lines of the creed declare that Jesus was the pattern or pioneer of what is going to happen to us, or as 1st Corinthians 15:20 puts it:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

THE SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION

1st Corinthians 15:13-26 - the Bodily Resurrection is central to the Christian faith:

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

1 1 Say: Some argue that Christianity is meant to be solely a set of beliefs. Others argue is solely a set of morals for how to live and act in this life. But the scripture above implies that the center of the Christian faith is about what actually happens to real people. It is concerned with what happen to Jesus 2000 years ago and what will actually happen to us after we die.

1 2 Ask: Is it hard for you to believe in life after death? Why or why not?
Teach: The idea of resurrection is not hard to swallow just because we are 'modern' and 'scientific'. In Jesus' time it was just as hard. Consider Matthew 22:23:

On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him.

Yet both science and scripture say that our bodies are nothing more than organized stardust. We know we came from the dust and will return to the dust. We also know this dust can be organized in such a way that it forms a living being. In the beginning God said, "Let it be." We know that dust has been turned to life once already. Is it so hard to believe that at the end of days God will say, "Let it be" once more and simply reconstitute bodies for us from the dust? The scriptures go beyond current science to say not only are you made OF dust; you were made FOR heaven (i.e. eternal life in a resurrected body in the kingdom of God).

1 Corinthians 15:51-58 – The bodily resurrection gives us hope:

51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 3 Ask: How would you say this scripture connects the future hope of eternal life with practical living today?

APPLICATION

14 Ask: It is said that some people can be so "heavenly minded that they are no earthly good." What does this mean? Do you ever fall into this category?

15 Say: On the other hand, some people think of heaven very little or have nagging doubts that convince them that this world is all there is. Do you fall into this category?

16 Say: Let's think back to our discussion about "heaven on earth" at the start of class. Now that we've seen the DVD presentation, let's again define what "heaven on earth" might be like. *(Again record responses on the white board)*

17 Teach: The idea of Heaven on Earth is actually closer to the mark of what scriptures actually teach than the idea that Heaven is some place where bodiless souls float forever with harps. Listen to words from the final book of the bible, Revelation 21:

1 Then I saw a **new heaven** and a **new earth**, for the first **heaven** and the first **earth** had passed away...

2 I saw the Holy City, the **new Jerusalem**, coming down out of **heaven** from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything **new!**" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End

18 Ask: What can you do to begin living like one who knows there is a heaven and that one day you will go there? How can you begin to bring a bit of heaven to earth right now?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

19 Say: We began this series with a quote from Dorothy Sayers. As we come to the close of our study, see if you agree with her:

*"The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man--and the dogma is the drama. That drama is summarized quite clearly in the creeds of the Church, and if we think it dull it is because we either have never really read those amazing documents or have recited them so often and so mechanically as to have lost all sense of their meaning."*¹

CLOSING PRAYER

We close our series on the Apostles' Creed with this blessing from Jude 1:

20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

22 Be merciful to those who doubt;

23 snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--

25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

¹ Dorothy Sayers in Dorothy L. Sayers: A Reckless Rage for Life. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 2
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Lesson Plan Worksheet

(Copy this table and use to plan your teaching sessions)

Opener	
Video Explore	
Scripture Foundation	
Application Questions	
Closing	

Materials Needed: DVD, Video equipment, Class Handouts, Whiteboard or pad to write down responses, nametags, markers

Versions of the Creed

Hippolytus Baptismal Formula¹ (215 A.D.)	Apostles' Creed - Old Roman (by 140 AD ² - 390 AD ³)	Apostles' Creed - Received (460A.D. ⁴ - 753 A.D.)	Ecumenical Version
I believe in God, the Father Almighty	I believe in God The Father Almighty	I believe in God The Father Almighty Maker of heaven and earth	I believe in God, The Father almighty Creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God,	And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord	And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord	I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord,
who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,	Who was born by the Holy Ghost Of the virgin Mary	Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost Born of the virgin Mary	Who was conceived By the Holy Spirit Born of the Virgin Mary
and was crucified under Pontious Pilate, and was dead and buried,	Was crucified under Pontious Pilate And was buried	Suffered under Pontious Pilate Was crucified dead And buried He descended into Hell	Suffered under Pontious Pilate, Was crucified, died, And was buried; He descended to the dead.
and rose again the third day, alive from the dead,	The third day he rose from the dead	The third day he rose from the dead	On the third day he rose again;
and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father,	He ascended into heaven And sitteth on the right hand of the Father	He ascended into heaven; And sitteth on the right hand Of God the Father Almighty	He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand Of the Father
and will come to judge the living and the dead	From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead	From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	And he will come to judge The living and the dead.
I believe in Holy Spirit	And in the Holy Ghost	I believe in the Holy Ghost;	I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The Holy Church	The Holy Church	The Holy Catholic Church The communion of saints	The holy catholic Church the communion of saints,
(see note) ⁵	The forgiveness of sins;	The forgiveness of sins	The forgiveness of sins
And in the resurrection of the body	The resurrection of the body (flesh).	The resurrection of the body (flesh).	The resurrection of the body
		And the life everlasting.	And the life everlasting.

¹ This formula is derived from the baptismal questions posed in “*The Apostolic Tradition*”, written about 215 A.D. and attributed to Hippolytus of Rome.

² The Creedal statements mentioned by Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* (175-185 A.D.) and Tertullian are very close approximations of the Apostles Creed.

³ We have Latin & Greek copies from Rufinus in about 390 AD.

⁴ We have a very close example from Faustus of Reiz, about 460 AD, and a copy written by Pirminius prior to his death in 753 AD.

⁵ While the phrase “the forgiveness of sins” is missing here, the very act of baptism was meant to be the sign for the forgiveness of sins!

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker 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, died, and was buried.
He descended into Hell.
On the third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
And sits at the right hand
of God the Father Almighty,
From thence 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.

Experiencing the Apostles' Creed Resources

The Apostles' Creed Full Length Version DVD – An in-depth look at the Apostles' Creed featuring video interviews with some of the world's foremost New Testament scholars and theologians. This program contains seventeen sessions covering each line of the Creed with more than nine hours of material. The round-table style format is engaging, informative and thought provoking. This program is enhanced with commentary by Dr. Timothy George, as well as with hymns and artwork.

The Apostles' Creed Abridged Version DVD - The abridged version of the DVD features the same cast of scholars in four half hour segments. This is a wonderful introduction to the Creed for groups of any size.

Experiencing the Apostles' Creed Comprehensive

Companion Guide – A complete curriculum package to accompany the Full Length Version DVD. This teaching resource includes seventeen complete lesson plans and is appropriate for small or large groups who wish to study the Creed in depth. Lessons include activities, discussion questions, scripture foundations and application.

Experiencing the Apostles' Creed Abridged Version

Companion Guide – A four session teaching resource designed to accompany the Abridged Version DVD. This resource features four complete lesson plans and is suitable for small or large groups who desire an introduction to the Apostles' Creed.

Sermon Series by Pastor Langdon Palmer – A series of helpful sermons on the Apostles' Creed available on the Full-length version DVD and also at http://podpoint.net/South_Ridge.

www.christianhistoryinstitute.org

www.visionvideo.com