



*The Apostles' Creed
and Bibletelling:
A Discipleship Methodology*

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Bibletelling and the Apostles' Creed
A disciple making tool for Children's Ministry.

Background/Philosophy: For more years that we would like to admit, the local church has been trying to redeem the “Schooling” model of education for Christian discipleship-making with children and youth. It has not been effective. In 1976, John Westerhoff wrote in *“Will Our Children Have Faith”* that using the traditional schooling-instructional model for imparting the Christian faith, will probably simply produced educated atheists. The local church will not survive if we continue using this schooling-instructional model as the only way to make disciples. We will continue to have what we have now, educated atheists moved and swayed by the culture we live in, no longer finding truth in the Biblical texts. Instead it is time to help our children, youth and adults actually know the Biblical texts, holding to a Biblical world-view so that we all are so filled with the knowledge of God, through being able to tell and re-tell God’s Word, that lives of faith impact others and bring people into the Kingdom.

If one is simply interested in teaching *about* the Apostles’ Creed (or the Nicene Creed) there are plenty of ways to do that: i.e. fill in the blanks, divide the Creed into sections and match it to Bible verses, memorize it to win prizes, break into groups and share what they think it means, write a personal Creed, check off boxes as to what part of the Creed to which they agree or disagree (links to these “lessons” are easily found on-line). However, these methods tend to teach ABOUT the Creeds instead of help one come to understand what the Creeds mean and how they can become a basis for a Biblical world-view, a starting point for Scripture from which all else of what they know and do is informed.

IF our goal is the *“Bring people of all ages to a maturity of Christian faith that is demonstrated in their actions”* then we need to do more than merely teach the Creeds (or any Biblical topic) as simply a four week lesson, covered and forgotten. Rather, the Biblical texts, Creeds, Faith history, etc. should be incorporated into the fabric of the Sunday morning or evening church experiences, whether that is called Sunday School, Youth Group or Family Worship.

So what actually IS faith maturity? Over 25 years ago The Search Institute (Minneapolis, MN) studied various denominations to test whether the goals which Church educators, pastor and theologians had for their congregants (becoming mature Christians) was actually being reached. Theologians and

pastors agreed upon the Eight Dimensions of Faith Maturity so that a quantitative research study could be attempted. These dimensions are as follows:

1. Trusts in God's saving grace and believes firmly in humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ
2. Experiences a sense of personal well-being, security and peace
3. Integrates faith and life- seeing work, family, social, political life as part of one's religious life
4. Seeks spiritual growth through study, prayer, discussion and reflection
5. Seeks to part of a community of believers
6. Holds life-affirming values
7. Advocates social and global change to bring about justice
8. Serves humankind consistently and passionately through acts of love and justice

After devising questions that encouraged answers from faithful congregation members to share what they truly believed and how they lived out their faith the results were amazingly sad. Hoping for "integration" between faith and life/saying and doing it was discovered that only a minority of church people demonstrated maturity. The breakdown by denomination was as follows:

Disciples of Christ	31%
Evangelical Lutheran Church	24%
Presbyterian Church USA	34%
Southern Baptist Convention	49%
United Church of Christ	29%
United Methodist Church	34%

And as can be expected, teenage boys demonstrated the poorest level of faith maturity.

Since 1990, many other studies (Barna Research, Sticky Faith, etc.) have shown the gap between knowledge and action. Much has also been written about the importance of modeling by parents and other adults in the church for the formulating of faith maturity in our teens and yet, little, if any change in methodology for passing on the faith has been instituted. If church effectiveness is this poor, producing generally less than 34% mature church people, than is it any wonder that we are hardly reaching the un-churched world for Jesus?

The Power of the Biblical Text as Narrative: Hebrews 4:12 tells us that Scripture is alive and active, more powerful than a two-edged sword. If we truly believe this, than it is important for us to know the Biblical narratives not just know *about* the text. In our discipleship-making, we should tell the stories of the Biblical text naturally in and throughout our conversations. We are still an “oral” culture. Who doesn’t love it when someone says “That reminds me of a story.”?

God wrote the Bible as narrative. 75% of the text is in story form. Easy to learn and to tell. 15% of the Bible is poetry and song. Easy to sing and repeat. Only 10% of the Biblical text is of didactic teaching or basic theology and even still that 10% is wrapped in a narrative. God gave us Story. Not in a “once upon a time” fairy tale, but a historical narrative outlining God’s work on earth with humankind, leaving nothing out concerning human frailty, failure, and disobedience. But it is also the true story of God’s saving grace, overriding love and God’s amazing rescue plan. When speaking of the Bible I often say to the children and youth that the Bible is totally true but it’s not always happy and the people don’t always do the right things, but God loves us and the stories show us how God worked to fix everything that people ruined. In this way, I am trying to circumvent doubts that may come from future conversations these children will have with their peers who say things like “How can you believe the Bible when it shows people doing such bad things?” Or “How can you believe in a God who let those things happen?” The Bible is a historical record and, like the story of when my daughter was about to be born and we were in a car accident, it’s not always a happy story – it’s just true.

Therefore this material will use Bibletelling¹ as the main method for learning the Biblical text as we not only tell the story but encourage the students to retell it often using different activities to help in the retelling along with “Wonder Questions” for reflection. Two lessons for Children’s Ministry using this methodology are included.

¹ www.bibletelling.org

For Teens – How to Use Creeds to help with forming a Biblical Worldview: When working with teens most of the same principles of Bibletelling, retelling through activities and allowing for Wonder apply, but one will want to also spend more time relating the Creeds to the five basic questions² that help to form one’s world-view.

1. Where did I come from?
2. What is my purpose is life?
3. Why do things go so horribly wrong in the world?
4. Is there any hope?
5. What happens when I die?

Relating the Creeds to how these questions are answered and comparing them with other than Biblical World-views (Atheism, Pantheism, Postmodernism, Secular Humanism, Polytheism and Agnosticism) should be an on-going discipleship strategy using Biblical narratives as the main text.

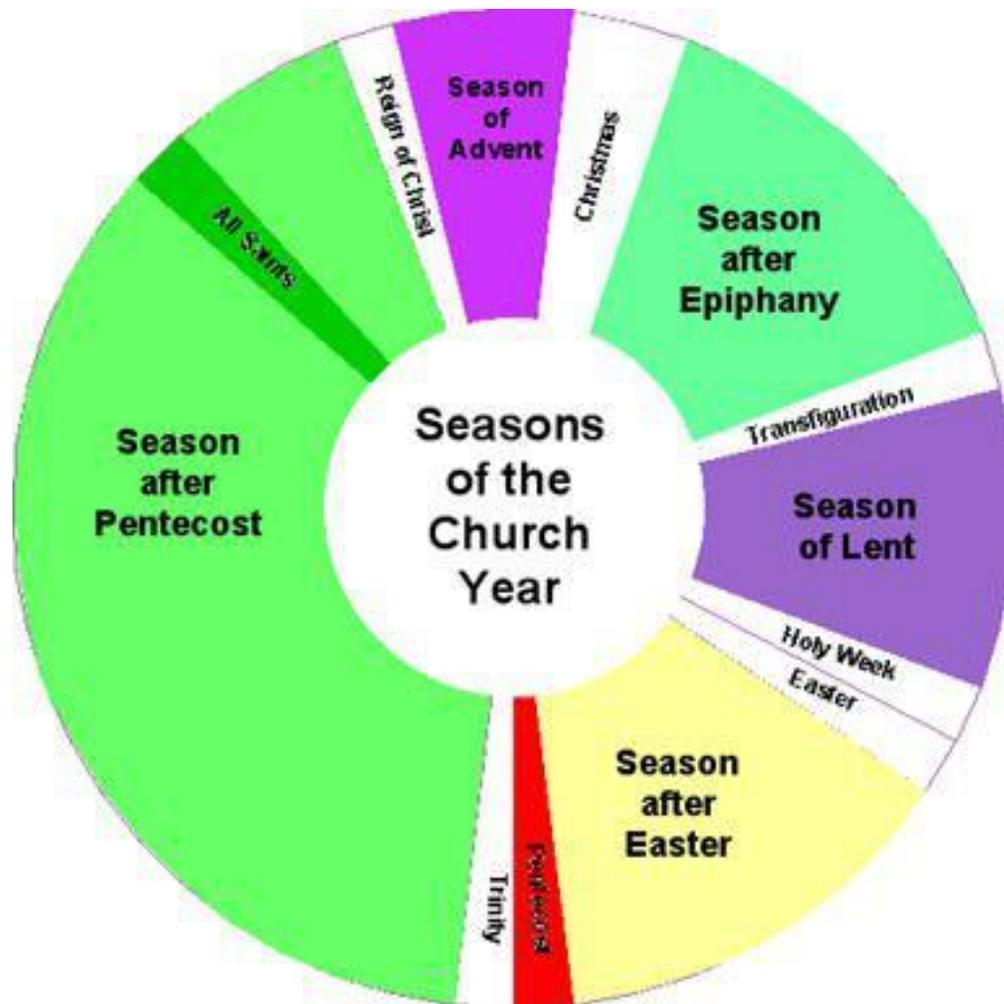
With this in mind, here is what is being suggested in this document for incorporating the Creeds into Biblical teaching for effective church discipleship-making:

1. Use the Creeds as part of a ritual and routine within the teaching ministry or Youth group, similar to sharing fellowship, praying, singing praise, taking offering and reading Scripture/telling the story.
2. Find ways to link every Biblical story back to a section of the Creed(s) throughout the year
3. Divide the Creeds into sections that correspond with the Church calendar year as one unfolds the stories of the Old Testament (not just Creation), Advent, Life of Christ, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Epistles, etc.
4. Talk about “World-views” and how the Creeds can help us develop and maintain a Biblical one.

On the following pages I will outline how to do this with the Apostles’ Creed using two Biblical Narrative Lessons.

² www.anchorsaway.org

First Find a Liturgical Calendar that you can refer to each week: (sample below)



The Routine: This can be done in a large group before children go into small groups or it can be done in individual classrooms depending on your church's style. This routine is for elementary age classes.

Children do best with routine and ritual so make use of the following ritual each time you meet. Each time you gather, start the Children's discipleship time with a large group time. I use PowerPoint to put up the various aspects of the morning ritual, including the picture of the Church Seasons (see above), Doxology, Apostles' Creed, 10 Commandments and sometimes illustrations that go with the Bible story.

Have a small table at the front of the room with a tablecloth with the appropriate church year season's color. Have a large candle and an offering basket on the sides of the table leaving room for a Bible to be placed in the center.

Have a Bible at the back of the room that will be carried forward.

Say "What's the first thing we do every week?" and wait for them to tell you that the Bible needs to come to the table.

Tell the children to be very quiet as you ask an older child to get the Bible and bring it forward. Once the Bible is placed on the table the child turns to the group and says *“Let us Worship God”* and sits down.

Say: *“What is the next thing we do?”* and wait for someone to say we need to light the Christ Candle.

Pick a volunteer who then lights the candle and says *“This is the Light of Christ”*.

We then take the offering, and I ask the students to tell me what the offering is used for and why we give. Don’t teach this, just encourage their answers.

Next have the children stand and sing the Doxology.

Take time each week to take a phrase of the Doxology and ask the children what they think the words mean. Do not belabor the point. Do not teach it, let them tell you what they think and steer their thoughts.

Next say *“Who knows what a world-view is?”* Give them time to think up something. My fourth graders had no trouble coming up with ideas. Stay away from gimmicks like colored glasses or telescopes as these “object lessons” are not beneficial to children and only tend to confuse them.

Again, steer the conversation and pick up where they go, bringing them back to the point of starting to recite the Apostles’ Creed (and once they know this one move to the Nicene Creed). Put the Apostles’ Creed up visually (PowerPoint) and read the entire Creed together out loud.

Then tell the story of the day. Use visuals and the narratives as crafted from the text (the ones here are from www.bibletelling.org but I do often use the Contemporary English Version). Use your open Bible. Don’t memorize the story, tell it without verbal embellishments. I like to use art work from classic paintings so that the visuals are not cartoons or caricatures as this diminishes the truthfulness of the Biblical text. Children should learn that the stories of Scripture were real within time and space in history. Since we believe that the Word is “alive and active” try to stay true to “The Word” and let God speak through it. *(If ever supplementing with DVDs please only use Nest Entertainment Animated Bible Stories as these are true to the text and the animation is historically realistic. Once and a while I use portions from “What’s in the Bible with Buck Denver” but usually this is for special occasions when our classes stay together and eat popcorn ☺)*

Once the story has been told have the children go into their small groups for activity and Wonder Question time with their small group leader.

Using The Apostles' Creed

1. I believe
2. In God the Father
3. Almighty
4. Maker of Heaven and Earth
5. And in the Lord Jesus Christ
6. His only Son
7. Our Lord
8. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
9. Born of the Virgin Mary
10. Suffered under Pontius Pilate
11. Was crucified, dead and buried
12. He descended into Hell
13. The third day he rose again from the dead
14. He ascended into heaven
15. And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty
16. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead
17. I believe in the Holy Catholic church
18. The communion of saints
19. The forgiveness of sins
20. The resurrection of the body
21. And the life everlasting.

The lesson example #1 we will be using will be taking into consideration the first four lines of the creed. (See sample Lesson 1 on next page)

Wonder questions will refer to the story as well as to the places where the story connects to the Apostles' Creed.

Don't hesitate to recite the entire Creed once and then just go back to the lines that you will be focusing on in the lesson.

We spend the entire Fall on these first four lines moving to line 5 during Advent. I stop again after line 8 circling back to lines 5, 6 and 7 during Epiphany Season when we tell the stories of Jesus' life and work (showing him as "Son" and "Lord").

Lent is when we move to lines 10-12 with emphasis on 12 during Good Friday

Easter Sunday is of course 13

We don't move to 14-16 until after Easter

Pentecost is when we begin to talk about lines 17-21

From this pattern you can see how the Church Season's Calendar Wheel is helpful.

The Second Sample lesson is two stories of Miracles from Jesus' life: feeding the 5,000 and Peter Walking on Water. Generally this story would be told in the spring sometime in Epiphany/Lent Season and we would have discussed lines 8 and 9 but I would circle back to 1-7 with this story.

Bibletelling – The Story of Creation: *Genesis 1 – 2:4*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was lifeless, empty, and dark. Then the Spirit of God moved across the vast emptiness. He said, “Let there be light.” Suddenly light shone around the entire sphere of the earth! God looked at the light, and said, “That’s good.”

He then divided the light from the darkness. He looked at the light and said, “I’ll call you day.” Turning to the darkness, He said, “And I’ll call you night.” So, with the day and the night, that was the first day.

On the second day, God looked at the waters and said, “Be divided!” Immediately, the waters started to separate. Some went up and the rest stayed down. God looked at the waters that were above, and he looked at the waters that were beneath. Then he looked at the space that was in between the two and said, “I’ll call you Sky.”

On the third day, God focused on the waters that were below the sky. He said, “Be gathered together into seas, rivers and lakes. Let dry land appear.” Suddenly land rose up from the waters. Rivers flowed off the land separating the hills and causing valleys. Lakes and seas were everywhere. God looked at the dry land and he looked at the seas and said, “That’s good.”

Then He said to the land, “Bring forth vegetation! Let there be grasses, vegetables, herbs, and trees. All of them will have seeds, so that life may continue on.” Immediately plants started growing across the entire earth. There were grasses, flowers, and vegetables. There were trees of many different kinds. Some would become tall, while other would remain close to the ground.

Some of the trees would produce different kinds of fruit. All this vegetation grew from that day forward, and they all had seeds so life could continue on.

On the fourth day, God looked into the heavens and said, “Let there be lights – a greater light to rule over the day, and a lesser light to dominate the night. They’ll divide the day and the night, and be for signs and

seasons, days and years.” Immediately the sun started moving across the sky, giving light and warmth to the earth. The moon and stars filled the night with splendor and brilliance. God looked at the sun, the moon, and the stars and said, “That’s good.”

On the fifth day, God looked at the sky and the waters that were below it. He said, “Bring forth life! Let there be birds in the skies, and fish and sea creatures in the water.”

Immediately sea creatures started moving in the seas, lakes, and rivers. Some were large and others were very small. There were fish of all different sizes, shapes, and colors. Birds appeared in the skies. Some flew high up in the air, while others stayed close to the ground. They had different shapes, colors, and sounds.

God looked at the sea creatures, the fish, and birds. He said, “That’s good.” He blessed them and told them to multiply and fill the seas and skies.”

On the sixth day, God said to the earth, “Bring forth living creatures. Let there be wild animals and others that can be tamed.” Immediately, animals started walking across the earth. Some were huge, and others were very small. God looked at them and said, “That’s good.”

Then God said, “Let’s make people. We’ll make them to be like us. They’ll rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the animals that move across the land.”

So God made a man and a woman and he blessed them and told them to multiply and fill the earth with people. He told them to rule over all he had made. He then gave them fruit, grains, vegetables, and green plants to eat.

Then God looked at all he had made, and he said, “It is all very, very good!”

On the seventh day, God rested from all that he had done. He blessed the seventh day and made it special.

This is how God created the heavens and the earth, and brought forth life in the first week of time.

Sample Lesson 1 for small group time
After the telling of the story - follow this format

Ask two questions:

What was your favorite part of the story?
Why?

Give each child time to answer these two questions. The flow of conversation will bring up other thoughts and observations, as well as more wonder questions. We believe that God's Word is powerful and speaks for itself. Guide the discussion, listen respectfully and keep the kids focused. Use the Wonder Questions on the back of the story to help you ask probing questions.

Choose an activity:

Decide which of these three things you might want to do with your group. If time permits do more than on

DRAWING: Hand out the story board pages and have the children draw out the story in "scenes" in the boxes. (See Story Board pages attached)
Start by saying: *"How does the story begin?"* and then follow that up with *"And then what happened?"* or *"What happened next?"*
Once they have finished their storyboard have them tell their stories to each other

ACTING: Help the children act out the story. Start by saying: *"How does the story begin?"* and then follow that up with *"And then what happened?"* or *"What happened next?"*
Have the children pretend to be the different parts of creation. Use costumes, and puppets if available.

WONDER: Use Clay and have the children retell the story while they change the shape of the clay into the different things that God created.
Begin by asking them to hold the clay in their hands and see if they can speak the clay into a different shape or to come alive.
Use the Wonder Questions below.

Younger classes also have activity pages (download these from www.bibleactivities.com it is worth the subscription)

Wonder Questions:

1. What does it mean to believe? How does believing in God help us understand how the world got started?
2. Who made everything? Why do you think God made it?
3. How does God show what being "Almighty" means?
4. Does the Bible tell us exactly how God made everything?
5. Why couldn't you make the clay come alive but God could breathe into dust and it did?
6. What does this story tell us about God?

Close your class time with prayer requests and repeat together the first four lines of the Apostles' Creed.

STORY BOARD TEMPLATE

Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 3
Scene 4	Scene 5	Scene 6

USE THIS PAGE TO HELP CHILDREN RE-TELL THE STORY BY DRAWING THE SCENES IN ORDER

A Meal and A Walk

John 6:1-10, Matthew 14:14-33

Jesus went up a mountain where he taught his disciples. A large crowd went with them so they could hear him teach.

Soon it became apparent that they were hungry, and there was no food. Jesus knew what he was going to do, but still he asked Philip, "Where can we get food for these people?"

"Lord, even eight months' salary couldn't buy enough food for all these people." The other disciples said, "Send them into the villages so they can buy food for themselves."

Jesus said, "No, I want you to feed them."

"Lord, we have enough money to feed such a large crowd."

Jesus said, "Go and see how much food we have."

Andrew came back with a young boy. "Lord, this lad has five barley loaves and two small fish. But how can that help us with such a large crowd?"

Jesus said, "Give them to me."

He took the bread and fish, and blessed them. He then divided them among the disciples and said, "Give this to the people and tell them they can have as much as they want."

They served the food to the people, who ate until they were satisfied. There were over 5,000 people there. Then Jesus said, "Go and pick up the remains." When they did, they had twelve baskets full of bread and fish.

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The people said, "This is the one the Scripture talks about – 'the great prophet like Moses.'" They started talking among themselves about making him king.

Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he sent them away and told his disciples to go back by way of the sea. And he went up the mountain and prayed.

While Jesus was praying, a storm moved over the sea. Huge waves pushed the ship out toward the middle. The men rowed hard to get back to shore, but the wind was too strong for them.

At three o'clock in the morning, Jesus walked across the sea on top of the water. The men looked out and saw someone walking among the waves. They screamed because they thought it was a spirit.

Jesus said, "Don't be afraid. It's me."

Peter said, "Lord if it's you, ask me to come to you."

"Come."

So Peter got out of the boat and started walking toward Jesus. Suddenly he looked at the waves and the wind. He became afraid, and started to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me."

The Lord reached out and grabbed him. He said, "Oh Peter, where's your faith?"

The two of them walked back, and got into the boat. Suddenly the storm stopped. The disciples knelt down and worshiped Jesus. They said, "It is true. You are the Son of God."

Sample Lesson 2 for small group time **After the telling of the story - follow this format**

Ask two questions:

*What was your favorite part of the story?
Why?*

Give each child time to answer these two questions. The flow of conversation will bring up other thoughts and observations, as well as more wonder questions. We believe that God's Word is powerful and speaks for itself. Guide the discussion, listen respectfully and keep the kids focused. Use the Wonder Questions on the back of the story to help you ask probing questions.

Choose an activity: This time there are two parts to this story so combine some of these activities as students re-tell each part.

DRAWING: Hand out the story board pages and have the children draw out the story in "scenes" in the boxes. (See Story Board pages attached)
Start by saying: *"How does the story begin?"* and then follow that up with *"And then what happened?"* or *"What happened next?"*
Once they have finished their storyboard have them tell their stories to each other

ACTING: Help the children act out the story. There are two parts this time. Create a space in your small group for a boat. Use tape to create a boat shape on the floor etc . Retell the story while holding a bowl of water, trying to think of ways to walk on water and why it's not possible. Pass the water bowl around as each student takes a turn at part of the story.

COOKING
Use pita bread or tortillas and tuna fish to use while retelling the feeding of the 5,000.
I've used sardines and get a great response from the kids – it's so different and "Fish-like"
Try to divide the food to feed 100 people.

Use the Wonder Questions below.

Younger classes also have activity pages (download these from www.bibleactivities.com it is worth the subscription)

Wonder Questions:

1. What part of the Apostles' Creed does this story remind you of?
2. What does this story tell us about God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?
3. How do you think the boy felt when Jesus took his food?
4. Does the Bible tell us why Jesus used a boy's food for this miracle?
5. Why do you think Peter wanted to walk on water in the first place?
6. What do you think Peter was thinking? Why did he sink?
7. What does this story tell you about Jesus?

Close your class time with prayer requests and repeat together the lines of the Apostles' Creed

DEVOTIONS USING THE APOSTLE'S CREED:

These daily devotions are developed off of short phrases of the Apostles' Creed. Read one each day and then Wonder together as a family about what it might mean and what you believe.

DAY ONE: Introduce the Creed "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, . . ." Do you recognize it? Yep, it's the first few words of the Apostles' Creed. During the next few days we will unpack this amazing creed phrase by phrase. Although it was not written by the Apostles'. In its oldest form, this Creed goes back to at least 140 A.D. Many of the early church leaders summed up their beliefs as they had an opportunity to stand for their faith. While

the Apostles' Creed is not Scripture, it is a simple list of the great doctrines of the faith. And like anything that we recite repetitively, we can easily forget the power of the words and the incredible import to our faith. So, let's start to reflect on this Creed. Do you know it well enough to use as a defense for your own faith if someone were to ask you what you believe? If someone asked you why you believe these things, could you share why? Do you know where these words match Biblical theology? If you profess to be a Christian then you should be able to.

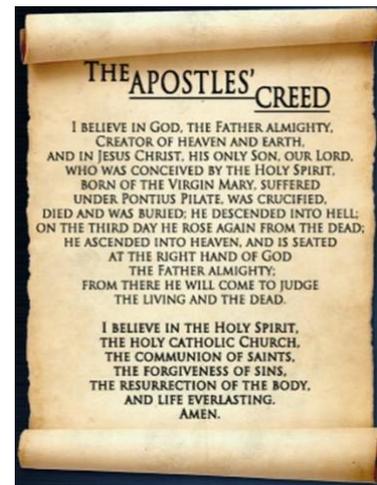
*So, in whom do we actually say we believe? **God the Father, Almighty.***

Right from the start we are professing our faith in an ALMIGHTY GOD. Mentioning God, the Father, we are identifying the first person of the Triune God. What does "almighty" mean? Why do you think this is important as the first part of this Creed? God is not just "kinda mighty" or "occasionally mighty." No, we believe God is ALL Mighty. The greatest mighty. All powerful. One of God's attributes is *Omniscience* - *and that means having all the power!* Think about what this means.

DAY TWO: "...maker of Heaven and earth." In this part of the creed we are acknowledging WHO created everything, but not HOW. At the start of the Apostles' Creed we proclaim belief in God, the Father, Almighty, which means we belief in the ALL Mighty power of God, not just that God is "kinda" mighty. Then to prove the complete, full-orbed MIGHTY-ness of God, (omniscience) we proclaim that God is the MAKER of ALL that exists.

The "WHO" of creation is the only thing that is worth proclaiming, not the HOW, because God could use any manner of means to make Heaven and earth. As Christians our focus is always on WHO God is and that God is ALL-Mighty. Notice Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning, GOD. . ."

I always think it's goofy to fight over HOW the world came into being. NO ONE WAS THERE except GOD, Father, Son, and Spirit. So, let's just praise the Lord and acknowledge God's Almighty-ness, which should send us to our knees!! In your prayers for your family today, proclaim WHO you believe in and then trust that GOD, the Father, WHO is the maker of all things, and that God has your best in mind. Then listen for what God is saying to you today.



DAY THREE: “...and [I believe] in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord...” Remember the first words are “I believe.” Let’s unpack that a bit. In this context, believing isn’t just acknowledging, or stating a fact. It’s not just head knowledge.

We know from Scripture that even the demons “believe and shudder” so that kind of “believe” isn’t what we are talking about. The word here means a complete commitment to, trust in, to “have full faith in,” so much so that you decide that you will be a disciple of Jesus fully. Some people say they are FDF which means a “Fully Devoted Follower” What do you think it means to be FULLY DEVOTED? Are you fully devoted to your family? To your favorite sports team? Do the sport or hobby you have? Sometimes we are more devoted to other things than we are to God.

When we say the Apostles’ Creed we are actually saying that Jesus is OUR LORD. That is where this phrase ends “...our Lord.” So, who is Lord in your life? Who is Lord of “your family?” As you pray for your family today, say this first part of the Creed over and over **“I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our (my) Lord”** Reflect honestly on whether or not you have truly made Him Lord of your life, or are you still holding on to the lie that Satan gave Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden that “...you will be like God.” What kind of belief do you have: Head? Or heart and life?

DAY FOUR: “who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary...”

WOW! This, my dear friends, is a statement of fact that is one of the many Old Testament Prophecies about the Messiah. And like all the prophecies in the Bible, it came true. This proclamation of historical truth is absolutely RADICAL. A woman who did not have sexual relations with a man actually conceived and delivered a child? Inconceivable.

Mary herself wondered how it could be when the Angel Gabriel told her she was going to have a baby. Gabriel said that God, the Holy Spirit, would put the seed in her womb, not the seed of ‘man’ but of God. Then Gabriel said, “Nothing is impossible with God!”

Notice that the angel uses the word “WITH” and not the word “for.” We all know God can do anything, but this time Mary was being asked to cooperate WITH God.

As you pray for your family remind yourself of what you say you believe via The Apostle’s Creed. And then grab ahold of the idea that “Nothing is impossible WITH God. As a Christian, we are invited to cooperate WITH God to bring the Good News of Jesus to your neighborhood and the world. Are you ready to do your part like Mary did? Think about this and pray, expect a miracle.

DAY FIVE: “...suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried...” In this part of the Creed we move passed the fact of Christ’s Incarnation, to the **reason** The Messiah came. He came to die. God, who is perfect, cannot be near that which is imperfect. Like a bird that would fly into the sun and be totally disintegrated, in our sinful condition we cannot be near God. God’s perfect power would disintegrate us. *Poof!*

Someone *perfect* had to die in our place, making a clear path for a relationship with God to be possible. So, God himself became that perfect sacrifice. The Messiah, Emmanuel (meaning God **with** Us) came to earth and suffered all the punishment for our sin. Scripture says “He who knew no sin BECAME sin for us ...” For those who have accepted Christ as Savior and Lord, we are actually covered in Christ’s righteousness. So, that means that when God looks at us, He sees Christ’s perfection and not our sin. Then we are ABLE to approach God, have a relation with God, we are fully forgiven, and have assurance of our eternal destination. We have all this

because Jesus suffered and died in our place. He traded his perfection for our sin. This is the amazing thing about Christmas.

Every time we recite the Apostles' Creed we are proclaiming that we BELIEVE this. Do you? Have you fully accepted Christ? As you pray for your family, what does believing this get you excited about telling others about Jesus?

DAY SIX: ..."he descended into hell...". Now this may seem like a weird part of the creed, but it's really rather significant. Let's not get overly theological on this. There's really a very simple reason why these words are in here. Previously we attested to the words "crucified, dead, and buried..." so why add "descended into hell"? These words are not in the earliest renditions of the creed, but were first found in 390AD, and more regularly included after 600AD.

Some take this phrase to mean that Christ suffered the pains of hell while on the cross. Calvin takes this approach, as does the Heidelberg Catechism.

Others have understood it to mean that Christ continued in the "state of death" until his resurrection. The Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 50 takes this approach: "Christ's humiliation after his death consisted in his being buried, and continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day; which hath been otherwise expressed in these words, He descended into hell."

One explanation for the inclusion of these words is that they were added to do away with the idea that Jesus just "fainted" having only appeared to "die" but had awakened and escaped the tomb. NO! This Creed seems to scream the confession that Jesus had died, was buried, and was really truly DEAD - completely.

There are many goofy theories that have developed over the centuries that try to do away with the authenticity of Christ's death, so as to dilute the power of His Resurrection. This Creed takes a very strong stand on the truth of Christ's death as a preamble to the truth of His Resurrection. I love repeating this Creed, don't you?

As you pray for your family, think about how believing in Christ's sacrificial death, his real physical death for us, can radically transform what it means for us to be a Christian Family and be part of the church.

DAY SEVEN: "...On the third day he rose again from the dead..." Brothers and sisters, this is an essential belief central to our faith. Without the physical resurrection of The Messiah there is no hope of eternal life, no chance of having a relationship with God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), and no Hope of having the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. Jesus died. He traded his perfection for our sin. And he was really dead - three days in the tomb solidified this as FACT. BUT!! Jesus didn't stay dead. WOOHOO 🎉 His Resurrection proves that He had the power to defeat the permanence of death that is the natural consequence of sin. We couldn't do it on our own. Only God has that power (remember? ALMIGHTY/Omniscient). God loves us so much He didn't leave us in our sinful state. Jesus' death paid the price for us and His Resurrection proves His power over death completely!

This is a Hope beyond measure. This is the greatest illustration of Love.

As we recite this Creed, recognize that we are proclaiming a belief in the miraculous. We are testifying to this miracle and we live in its truth. The Resurrected Christ, God the Son, is the Head of the Church. As you pray for your family today, ask the Lord, your resurrected Savior, to show us the miracle He wants for His people and for your life.

DAY EIGHT: ". . . and ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. . ." The Ascension of Christ is a much over looked aspect of what the Lord did for us. We observe Advent and Christmas to celebrate His birth. We have Lent to commemorate Christ's road to the Cross. We have Holy Week to emphasize Christ's final week of suffering and his death. We have Easter Sunday to celebrate the triumph of Christ's Resurrection (and the defeat of death!), but where is our celebration of His Ascension?

There are two things to notice about this part of the Creed. First - there is this incredible, miraculous ASCENSION to Heaven. Harkening back to the way Elijah was swept up into heaven without an earthly death first, Jesus, in the presence of his Disciples was lifted up out of their sight. He said he couldn't stay with them for he now needed to "return to the Father" so that the Holy Spirit could come to bring them (and us) the power needed to do God's work.

Second - Jesus is now SITTING at the right hand of God the Father. This means that Christ's mission, His work on earth is COMPLETE. No one SITS in the presence of a King unless they have completed their task. And to sit at the RIGHT HAND means Christ has the highest position of Honor next to the Father. The work of salvation that God the Son was sent to do is DONE.

Remember when He cried out on the cross "It is finished!"? Well, Salvation became fully available at that moment. There is no need for anything else to be done for any one of us to receive this great gift of salvation except to accept Christ as our Savior! We cannot add anything to what Jesus has already done. We cannot earn salvation. Nope, Jesus paid it all, and all to Him I owe. The only thing necessary is to believe in Jesus, accept the gift, consider the cost of being a disciple of Christ, and decide to put your trust in Him.

So, without the Ascension, the Holy Spirit wouldn't be here with us, empowering us and teaching us the incredible truths of Scripture and of who Jesus really is.

So, I say - let's find a way to really celebrate Ascension! Next time you talk about what you believe about Jesus, mention his Miraculous Birth, His Miracles of Ministry, His Miraculous Sacrificial Death, His Miraculous Resurrection, AND His Miraculous Ascension. Isn't it amazing how this Creed is so full of Powerful Truth?

As you pray for your family tonight and all the rest of this week, think about these things. Have you ever realized how important Christ's Ascension is? Have you ever realized where Jesus really is right now? Jesus, God the Son, is sitting next to God the Father in heaven. It is God the Holy Spirit, who is here with us on earth. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to be with us in a special way this Sunday, because Jesus had Ascended to Heaven so that the Holy Spirit could be here.

DAY NINE: "...from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead." Ahhh! Christ is coming back from "thence" or "there" which is heaven. This is in accordance with what the Scripture says in Acts 1. Remember that? The disciples are all standing around watching Jesus lifted up and disappear into a cloud. Just imagine them with their heads tilted back looking up into the sky when there are two other people standing with them who say "What are you looking up there for? This same Jesus will one day return in the same manner in which he has left."

Yep, the Apostles' Creed reminds us that we attest to and affirm in the truth that Jesus is coming back. Scripture tells us that when he does, ALL EYES WILL BEHOLD HIM! Oh my goodness! I can hardly wait.

Whenever I look up into the sky and wonder about the cloud formations, whether it's a stormy sky or a sunny sky, I think to myself "is it today Lord??" Someday it will happen and I want to be ready.

Notice that no one will escape Christ's judgement moment. Living or dead. Scripture says "it is appointed unto people, once to die and then the judgement." But what will we be judged on? Not our good works, not our happy attitude, not how often we attend church, or anything like that. Nope, it's whether or not, when God (Father, Son, Spirit) looks at you, God sees you wrapped in the robe of Christ's righteousness. And the only way that's possible is if you confess your sin, ask for God's forgiveness through believing in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension which allows you to be called "a child of God." If you've done that you don't need to fear this judgement that will happen when Christ returns.

These words in this Creed are words that hold deep meaning and spiritual significance. What if today is the day the Lord returns? Will He be pleased with what we are doing? Our relationships with our family? Our work? Our ability to be "The Church?" Imagine that? Even if the Lord doesn't return, we still need him to be pleased with what we are doing. Right? Let's keep praying for the future for however long it will last. Look to the sky knowing Jesus will come again, and then do what you need to do to prepare for it!

DAY TEN: "I believe in the Holy Spirit..." I love this part of the Creed because we get to affirm our belief in our Triune God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Let's be clear. The Trinity is not a hierarchy. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the three PERSONS of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is not some "force" like the wind or something. NO! The Holy Spirit is one of the persons of the Triune God. And believing in Him (not "It") is an essential aspect of the Christian faith.

With Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of the Father, the Holy Spirit was sent to indwell believers, empowering them to carry out the work that Jesus commissioned believers to do. "Go into all the world and make disciples..." As we pray for your family and consider the future, consider how the Holy Spirit is here, willing, able, and available to you if you believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is here to help us do what God wants us to do, which is to make disciples. Have we been doing that? Do we really "Believe in the Holy Spirit"?

DAY. ELEVEN: "...[I believe] in the Holy catholic Church..." Okay, let's look at this phrase. Some people misunderstand the use of the word "catholic" here. It is NOT referencing Catholicism as opposed to Protestantism. No. The word "catholic" (small letter 'c') is an adjective which means "universal" or "comprehensive." It is meant to refer to the historic Christian Church (believers not buildings) in continuity throughout all time. It means the Church from her inception at Pentecost to the present day and beyond. It is a reference to all those who believe in Jesus Christ. We make up the "Church universal."

Now please don't get confused, this is not a belief in "Universalism" either. That is a sect that does not believe Jesus is God but rather, he is just another prophet or a good moral teacher. They do not believe in Christ's physical resurrection. They believe that salvation is not because of faith in Christ's death on the cross.

When we recite the words of the Apostles' Creed, we are affirming our historical Christian connection to all those who have ever and will ever profess faith in the crucified, risen and ascended Christ who will one day return. And it has nothing to do with Catholicism or Protestantism. So, next time you go to church with your family, will you be able to recite this Creed with conviction and understanding? Isn't it exciting to think that your faith in Christ and Christ alone has an historic comprehensive connection to believers ~ past, present and future?

DAY TWELVE: "[I believe in]...the communion of saints," When you go to church on Sunday, you get to experience a gathering of "saints" all focused on learning together, sharing their ideas with one another, maybe speaking words in unison praying the Lord's Prayer, and maybe even reciting the Apostles Creed. Some Sundays we share the Lord's Supper, the meal that believers the world over share together as a sign of our shared common belief. These are things we cannot do all by ourselves. We NEED to be in community with one another.

If, as we recite this Creed, we say that we believe in the communion of saints, we are saying we believe that being with other Christians is central to our faith. *Communing* (or being) with each other is important to our spiritual growth. One of the benefits of this "communion of saints" is learning from each other. Another benefit is the energy we feel when we are together. It's like the dinner table at home. When everyone is there eating at the same time, we are close to one another. We talk with each other. We laugh together, we are surprised together, and we share stories of life with each other. The same thing happens at Church. We are hearing each other singing. It is a Communion Experience even before we share the Communion meal. God's Word tells us to NOT forsake the gathering of ourselves together. We need to be together. And as Christians, we are already "saints."

Yep, Saints. Once we become a Christian we join with all believers past and present, and welcome all those who become believers yet in the future. We are saints because of Jesus. Please continue to pray for your family and be willing to set aside your private preferences and join with the community of believers in new worship experiences to help you grow. We need one another.

DAY THIRTEEN: "[I believe...] in the forgiveness of sin," I know that we repeat this in our Creed, but sometimes I wonder if we really BELIEVE it. The thing to remember here is that if we believe in the need for forgiveness of sin, we are admitting that IS such a thing as SIN. Woa... do we really recognize ourselves as sinners? Well, we are. All of us. Scripture says "For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

So, there it is. You and I are sinners and therefore we need forgiveness of our sin, so that we can have a relationship with God. Jesus paid the price for our sin on the cross. Therefore, we can now receive this incredible forgiveness. If we really understand what this forgiveness means for us, we should be shouting from the rooftops! Living with the JOY of Forgiveness should be so evident to others that they should be begging us for the secret of this JOY.

Let us JOYfully forgive those who have hurt us (remember the Lord's Prayer). Let us tell others this incredible forgiveness is so readily available to them through confession and a profession of faith in Jesus. Wow - I believe in the forgiveness of sin. Do you? How do you show it? Praise the Lord. I'm forgiven!

DAY FOURTEEN: "[I believe..in..]...the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Well, there it is. The final phrase of the Apostles' Creed. Oh my goodness! Did you read that? Do you really believe this? As a believer in Jesus, I will die from this earth, but I am going to resurrect too, not because I'm perfect, but because Jesus' death paid the price for my sin - he died in my place so that when my time on this earth is up, I will be resurrected and will get to live forever with the Lord and with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is like knowing the end of a scary novel, or a mystery movie. If I've already read the end of a novel because I peeked. . . when I read the middle of the book I'm not as nervous about what is happening to the main characters since I know how it ends.

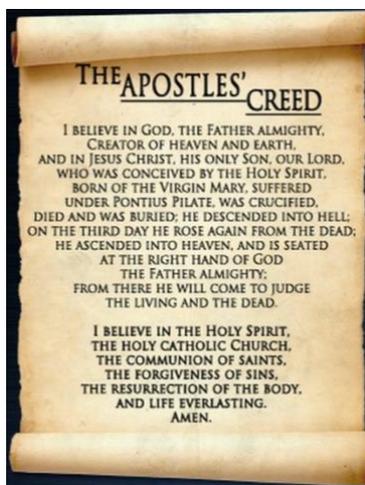
The same should be true of us in our lives. No matter what happens to me now, because I love Jesus, I already know how it's eventually going to end. I WIN!! I don't stay dead. I get to live forever. I come back to life - a life in heaven. Do you understand how incredibly amazing this is? So, when we recite this Creed, we should actually be excited to say these words. We should recite these words each morning of our lives as a way of reminding ourselves of the truth of our salvation; The truth of what God's Love for us is all about; The truth of what the Bible speaks of.

It should encourage us to share this incredible truth with others who might not know what God has provided for them if only they would just accept Christ. A Christian who says he/she believes in what this Creed professes WILL BE AN EVANGELIST. You just won't be able to help it. Jesus, who is God the Son, told his disciples (and us) to GO into all the world and make disciples teaching them to obey all that Jesus has taught them/us. If you want to recite this Creed each week at Church, it means you also want to be a disciple-maker; that you want to share your faith openly.

Paul encouraged his disciple Timothy with these words:

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."

Our "Ministry" as Christians, is to share the Good News of our salvation with the world. And if we really believe what we recite - we will. One of the reasons some denominations don't recite the Apostles' Creed every week is because they understand the power of its import and they do not want it to be recited without meaning. Repetitive recitation can often diminish the words, like a rote repetition that becomes vacuous and dull. I am praying that explaining the Apostles' Creed in these devotions will help you understand how important it is and that you will also respect it's recitation whenever you speak the words.



Please don't let it become a meaningless repetition. Don't let attending Church become a meaningless repetitive activity either. Come with joy, hope, love, and peace so that you can GO into the world and make disciples.

Use this devotional guide to teach your children, teens, and adults in Sunday School classes, Small group settings, Prayer groups, and worship services.

You know the end of the story. **Get excited!**