

**MATT CHANDLER**

# The Apostles' Creed

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TOGETHER WE BELIEVE

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



# Introduction

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We live in a culture that is constantly telling students that they can believe whatever they want and live however they want. The only invalid belief in our culture is to believe that someone else is wrong. This sort of thinking is not only found outside the church but also within. In our day and age of so many different beliefs and worldviews, even in the church, it can be difficult to get to the bottom of what is true and essential to the Christian faith.

The Apostles' Creed is rooted in the apostles' teachings and contains essential Christian doctrines and beliefs that summarize the gospel and make up the foundation of our faith. The scriptural truths contained in the creed help us operate from good theology, with the knowledge that our faith is rooted in truth and a rich history that spans past, present and future. The lines of the creed aren't mere words. They are the essence of what we confess and believe as the body of Christ. In an anything goes culture, the Apostles' Creed gives us the foundation we need to know the truth of the gospel so that it might set us free!

## Author

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

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

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

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

# How to Use This Study

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*Apostles' Creed* provides a guided process for individuals and small groups to explore 12 core tenants of Christianity. This Bible study book includes 12 weeks of content, each divided into 2 main sections: Video Guide, Group Study, and Personal Study. We've also developed a Leader Guide to help prepare those leading a group through this journey.

## GROUP STUDY

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### START

Regardless of the day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins by watching the video. Each video is 10-15 minutes long and the Watch section is designed to help you engage directly with the content of the video. Encourage the members of your group to follow along as they watch the video and write their answers to its questions. This will prepare them to engage more deeply in the group study.

### WATCH

Each group study is designed to last 30-45 minutes. The goal is to dig deeper into the content and implications of the creed and to help students apply its gospel truths to their daily lives. The format is designed to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God's Word, and with the video teaching.

### DISCUSS

This page includes discussion questions that guide the group to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages. In this section you will challenge students to interact directly with the content of the Creed by looking to the Scriptures that provide the foundation to the truth of the Creed. Students will not only dig into the text but also wrestle with how the truths of the creed should be applied in their daily lives and in their church and student groups.

## PERSONAL STUDY

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

## LEADER GUIDE

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On pages 130–142 at the back of this book you'll find a Leader Guide that will help you prepare each week. Use this guide to gain a broad understanding of the content for each week and for suggestions of ways to engage members at different levels of life-changing discussion.

### PREPARE

This section outlines everything you need to do to be ready to lead your group through each session, including tips for being spiritually prepared as well as anything you will need to bring.

### ENGAGE

This section includes an optional opening activity, illustration, or discussion to introduce each session's theme.

### WATCH

Play the video and encourage students to follow along in the video guide. Use the discussion questions as you talk through the video with your students.

### BRING IT HOME

This section equips leaders with application challenges, questions, or activities to close out their group time.

Each leader guide concludes with a prayer directive that helps leaders guide their students in praying through each section of the Apostles' Creed.

# Apostles' Creed Grid

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

**SYMMETRY:** *The creed helps us develop a deeper, more knowledgeable faith—to know what we believe and why.*

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

# Week One

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

# Group Study

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## START

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### I BELIEVE IN

*Welcome to session 1 of The Apostles' Creed.*

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

**Introduce yourself by sharing your name and favorite sport or activity.**

**Have you ever been to a concert of a popular band or big sporting event? What was the atmosphere like?**

Few things today bring people together today more than big concerts and sporting events. Stadiums are, in many ways, the temples of worship of our culture. The excitement and fervor with which people gather together and cheer at such events creates a powerful sense of confidence, pride, and identity. We all desire to belong to something greater than ourselves. Such concerts and games are some of the few places left in our individualistic and divided culture where diverse people unite around a common purpose.

The Apostles' Creed is a simple yet profound document that Christians have relied upon for over 1,600 years to root themselves in common belief and purpose. We live in a culture that does not have a firm foundation—one that is constantly telling us that we can believe whatever we want and live however we want. As we study the Apostles Creed, we will seek to recover the core truths that have provided a firm foundation and directed the lives of Christians for centuries.

*Read the following Scripture  
before watching the video for session 1:*

*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not  
seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.*

**HEBREWS 11:1-2**

## WATCH

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

The Apostles' Creed will help us with:

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

A creed is a document that lays out the essential beliefs of a religion. Creeds do not hold any authority in and of themselves, but rather, they point outside themselves to the ultimate authority of the Word of God.

The Apostles' Creed has been used—

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

Believing is different than knowing. Believing leads to action, and knowing may or may not.

Belief is birthed in the heart.

As we look at the Apostles' Creed, we will see that the message of Christianity is not “do this or that,” but rather about what our God has done. That does not mean that the Creed does not demand anything of us—the Creed demands everything from us—it asks us to believe.

The Apostles' Creed shows us what is primary.

The message of the Christian faith isn't that we have done anything, but rather that we have believed that Someone else has. This is the primary difference between the gospel and every other religion.

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



## DISCUSS

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*Discuss this week's video using the following questions.*

From now on we'll begin each session by reciting the Apostles' Creed together as a group. Let's pause now to read it aloud. You can find it on page 10.

**Why do you think Christians have recited the words of this creed for centuries together in churches?**

**What is significant about the first word of the Apostles' Creed?**

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

**Why did Matt distinguish between the authority of Scripture and of a creed? How is the authority of Scripture greater?**

### READ ROMANS 10:9-10.

**How do belief and action relate to salvation? What distinction did Matt make between knowing and believing?**

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

**How does a Christian experience freedom in believing the gospel?**

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

**What's your primary takeaway in response to Matt's teaching on belief?**

*Make time this week to complete the following personal studies before the next group session.*

# Personal Study

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## DAY 1

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

The creed is more than just a statement of individual belief. It articulates what has been and should be most important to every member of Christ's church. You're "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) and publicly identifying with the church—a group of people who believe in the triune God.

In the early church, uttering the word *credo* ("I believe") meant identifying in the closest possible way with Christ. Often a new believer recited the Apostles' Creed during his baptism and was then welcomed into the membership of the church. When someone said the creed, he was identifying himself as a citizen of a different kingdom—the kingdom of God. This world in its present state is not our home—we belong to a greater king and a greater kingdom and this reality changes everything for us. The creed is more than just a list of important information—it's filled with truth that gives us ultimate hope and shapes our ultimate purpose in life.

### READ HEBREWS 11:1-2.

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

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

### READ GENESIS 12:1-4.

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

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

**What experiences have challenged you to consider how seriously you believe something about God and/or His Word? How might we be sure that we genuinely believe?**

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

**Who is someone you admire for their faith. How does their faith stand out? What have you learned from their example?**

We are made for community, and that's why the creed is meant to be confessed together with other believers. However, even when the creed is recited in unison by a local congregation, the first word of each statement of the creed is *I*. Popular culture asserts that all people should have the opportunity, even the right, to define themselves. The Apostles' Creed reminds us that the truth isn't up for redefinition. The creed reminds us that Christ defines who we are as individuals and calls us to live in community, helping one another live out our identity in Him.

## Prayer

Grant me faith, Father in heaven. Give me a faith that's focused on Your work, the work of Your Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the world. Even when I struggle to believe, strengthen me by Your grace. Help me walk by faith, not by sight, and grow my love for You as I learn more about Your mighty deeds. Help me stay true to the faith that was handed down to me, help me see myself as you see me—redeemed to live for your kingdom. Amen.

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## DAY 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

**THIS POINT CAN'T BE OVERSTATED:  
YOUR GOOD WORKS WON'T SAVE YOU.**



**In which area(s) do you find yourself inclined to measure your relationship with God? By which criteria do you evaluate other people?**

- **Being obedient to teachers and parents**
- **Following the rules**
- **Going to church**
- **Studying the Bible**
- **Volunteering to serve**
- **Making good grades**
- **Being recognized as a leader**

**What's the danger of basing the certainty of your salvation on external behaviors like those above?**

*Pisteuō*, the Greek word translated as *believes* in John 3:16, has a richer meaning than the simple understanding of facts. To believe in something means to commit and to give your trust. When you truly believe something, you act on it. Belief isn't just a matter of head knowledge. It's a matter of the heart's devotion.

It's easy for John 3:16 to become so familiar that the gravity of the situation is lost. Don't let words like *love*, *life*, and *saved* distract you from *perish* and *condemned*. You need to wrestle with each of those realities until you come to grips with what's at stake here. Belief that is nothing more than an adherence to rules or knowledge of religious facts is not true belief. True belief is a life-changing commitment and trust—it is a matter of eternal life or death.

## Prayer

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

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## DAY 3

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

### **READ JOHN 1:11-13.**

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

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

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

As John concluded his book, he brought an unmistakable conclusion to everything he had written about what it means to believe in Jesus.

### **READ JOHN 20:24-31.**

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

Try to imagine yourself in his position. It would have been difficult to trust your own judgment and hopes after such a traumatic experience. The person you respected and loved the most died! Of course, you would have wanted to believe Jesus had been raised from the dead, but no one in history has ever risen from the dead.

**What have you struggled to believe about the Christian faith?**

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

**What objections do people have about Christianity?**

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

**How might we help our friends and family work through their doubts and objections?**

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

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

## Prayer

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