

## Smallgroup Study: The Apostles Creed - Introduction

### Some opening discussion starters:

- Have you been in churches that use the creeds a lot, a bit or not at all?
- Would you find it easy to sum up what Christians believe?
- Do you think that repeating things is helpful for faith or does it lead to mindless repetition?

(You might like to ask several people to read paragraphs from this article:)

### Neil Edlin, from Core Christianity Website

*Is it right to recite Christian creeds?*

*Some Christians think it isn't. Some will say that they have only one creed and that is the Bible. Others will say, "I have no creed but Christ." (Ironically this statement is a creed in and of itself).*

*The fact is, Christians have been reciting creeds since the birth of the Christian faith, and they should not shy away from continuing to do so today. Philip Schaff, writes this, "A Creed, or Rule of Faith, or Symbol, is a confession of faith for public use, or a form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of belief, which are regarded by the framers as necessary for salvation, or at least for the well-being of the Christian Church."*

*The early Jewish culture was an oral culture. Most of Jesus' followers were illiterate. Short memorable and repeatable sayings served to help Christians remember aspects of the faith. In fact, you are reading creeds and confessions many times when you open up your Bible.*

*Recall Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20a, when giving his disciples The Great Commission, said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (ESV) Not only did Jesus command that converts to Christianity were to be baptized, but those doing the baptizing were to use a specific formula to make the baptism conform to Christ's command.*

*Speaking of baptism, consider John the Baptist: "They were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." (Matthew 3:6, ESV) This tells us that there was a process one followed. You confessed your sins as you entered the water and receive baptism.*

*At the Last Supper, Jesus institutes a new command, which Churches all over the world repeat each Lord's Day at Communion. Jesus "took Bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my Body, which is given for you; Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise, after supper, he took the Cup; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins; Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me." This formula is from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, but notice it is a direct quote from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.*

*Here are a few more. These read more familiarly as creeds; Paul says that this is a confession or a creed: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: he was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." (1 Timothy 3:16, ESV)*

*Paul, again, in 2nd Timothy speaks of "the saying." What saying is that? The one Christians recite. "The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself." (2 Timothy 2:11-13, ESV)*

*Finally, here is a creed-like confession from Peter. When asked by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replies, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16 ESV)*

*It is clear from just these few examples that in the early Church, even before the Scriptures were complete, Christians were confessing Christ or the Christian faith in creed-like formulas or confessions.*

*Later the Church assembled more formally out of necessity to preserve the pure faith from heretical ideas that had crept in. The Church met in Nicaea in 325 AD and later in Constantinople in 381 AD to clarify specifically certain aspects of Christ's nature. In doing so, they searched the Scriptures and found in them certain facts about Christ.*

*They took these facts and laid them down in creed form. This later came to be known as the Nicene Creed, and Churches worldwide confess the Nicene Creed each Lord's Day.*

*Creedal formulas have served greatly as ways to convey and remember Christian truth. Though we are much more literate today, the Christian faith needs to be preserved. The Bible contains all things necessary for salvation. The creeds serve as memorable summaries of what we believe about that salvation.*

**Some follow-up questions:**

- Have you learnt anything new about the creeds from this article?
- Are you looking forward to using the creeds over the next few weeks?
- Do you think the creeds still have a role to play, or were they only useful in the oral culture?

# Week 1 - 'I believe in God the Father...'

## Introduction

(If you didn't meet last week, you might like to read the excerpt on the creed I included in those notes.)

Ask each other, 'what do you think of when you hear the word creed?'

## Getting into the Word

### I believe in God...

Does belief mean more than 'acknowledging God's existence' - where do trust and obedience fit in?

Does it make it clearer which God we believe in, if we use his revealed names such as YHWH?

Do you think some non-Christians have a belief in some sort of God?

### ...Father...

Read **Ephesians 1:3-6**

How does it feel to be adopted, chosen and loved by God?

How does the language of Father and Son help us understand the love within the Trinity?

How can we help those who struggle with the concept of God as Father (often for painful reasons)?

### ...Almighty...

Read **Psalms 93**

What sense is the Psalmist conveying about God's might and power?

Do you find that encouraging?

Should we have a bit more fear and awe for God sometimes?

Does the Bible also say that we have free will?

Can we hold those two things to both be true?

### ...Creator of heaven and earth

Read **Isaiah 45:11-12**

Do you enjoy the image of God stretching out the heavens?

Do you agree that the Bible's biggest creation emphasis is on who made it and why (more so than how?!)

Can Christians agree to differ on whether God created in 6 earth days or 6 time periods?

## Faith and Prayer

Why not say the first part of the creed together and then go into prayer, or use it as a response:

*'I believe in God, Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth'*

- Pray for more people to 'believe in God' - especially your friends, family, colleagues, neighbours.
- Pray for his almighty power to be at work in your lives and the world
- Pray for creation, that we might honour God in how we steward it

## Week 2 – ‘I Believe in God the Son’

### Introduction

If someone asked you, “So, who is Jesus?” What would you say?  
Could you give an answer in the time it takes to go a few floors in a lift?

### Getting into the Word

Glorious Titles: ‘Christ, Son, Lord’

Read **Colossians 1:15-20**

Do we sometimes forget that Christ is a title, not a surname?  
What is the significance of his Sonship not being about birth, but about his title?  
Why is it not enough to call Jesus wise teacher, a superior angel or even ‘a’ god?  
Is it easier to talk to people about faith in God or faith in Jesus - why?  
Which areas of life are the hardest to trust and obey Jesus as Lord?

Real History: ‘Conceived of the Spirit, born of Mary, suffered, died, buried, descended,  
Risen, ascended.’

Read **Philippians 2:5-11**

Why is the miracle of Jesus’ birth so important?  
Who decided that Jesus had to die?  
How do his death and resurrection make a difference to your life day to day?  
Can we believe that Jesus really died and rose again?  
Do you love the fact that Jesus is in heaven interceding for you?

Promised Future: ‘He will come again to judge the living and the dead’

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

How do you feel about Christ coming back?  
What don’t we know about Christ’s return?  
Why do some people struggle with the idea of Jesus as judge...  
...and how does the Bible help us see what he will be like?

### Faith and Prayer

You might like to play some worship music, or just have a time of quiet, and ask Jesus to speak to you from the Scripture you’ve read about who he is, what he’s done and all that is to come.

Then pray for one another for your walk with the Lord – for that close, daily knowledge of his love. Perhaps also pray that the name of Jesus would continue to go out and call many people to know, love and follow him.

# Week 3 – ‘I Believe in God the Holy Spirit’

## Introduction

There's a lot to discuss, so perhaps start this week with prayer and some quiet and ask the Spirit to lead your discussions. (If you would like an opening discussion, you could chat about why the creed includes so little detail on the Spirit?)

## Getting into the Word

The Spirit convicts of sin and recreates us in Christ

Read **Romans 8:11-16**

What's the connection between Jesus resurrection and our re-birth as Christians?

How does the Spirit help us live for Jesus?

Do you know that freedom and adoption the Spirit brings?

What does it look like to live that our day to day?

The Spirit grows godly fruit in Jesus' disciples

Read **Galatians 5:22-26**

Why do you think Paul uses the image of fruit for the Spirit transforming us?

Do you find it easier to recognise the Spirit at work in yourself or other people?

Are there one or more of these that you would appreciate prayer for?

The Spirit gifts the Church for the sake of God's Kingdom

Read **1 Corinthians 12:1-14**

How would you summarise the overall message from Paul in these verses?

How often do you see that worked out in yours and the Church's life?

Do you ever wish you had a gift that the Spirit hasn't given you (yet)?

Which is the key verse for understanding the purpose of the gifts?

## Faith and Prayer

It would be a good week to devote plenty of time to prayer. Perhaps even to pray for people one at a time rather than round the whole group. Are there particular things people would love the Holy Spirit to do in and through them?

# Week 4 – ‘I Believe in the holy catholic Church’

## Introduction

Has anyone in your group ever experienced church in different countries and cultures – can they share what it was like?

## Getting into the Word

The catholic (universal) church...

Read **Revelation 7:9-10**

How easy is it to forget that the church is all those around the whole world who believe in Jesus?

Are there ways we could make it easier for people from diverse backgrounds to belong?

How does using the creed remind us that we belong to a universal family?

...made up of forgiven people...

Read **Ephesians 4:25-32**

How should being forgiven by God affect our attitude towards others?

Is there a connection in this passage between forgiveness and another ‘picture’ of the church? (v25)

How does knowing we’re **all** forgiven sinners help our unity and love?

Can we help the world see that church is not for perfect people, but those who’ve found forgiveness?

...made holy by Christ Jesus

Read **Hebrews 10:5-14**

Is there a difference between being declared holy and growing in holiness?

Do we talk and teach about holiness enough?

If Christ has made us holy, can we just carry on living however we want?

When and where do you find it hardest to live out your holy status – why is that?

## Faith and Prayer

It would be great to spend time praying for our sisters and brothers around the world, especially in places of real persecution. Then to pray for us, that we might represent as much of the world that is found in Wick and our area.

There are some excellent resources to help with worldwide church prayer at:

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/prayer/>

<https://www.csw.org.uk/prayer.htm>

<https://barnabasfund.org/en/get-involved/pray>

You could maybe print some or look at them together as a group to pray.

# Week 5 – ‘The resurrection of the body and life everlasting’

## Introduction

Just a lighthearted opening discussion... If you could be any age again, what would you go for and why?

## Getting into the Word

### The resurrection of the body

Read **Philippians 3:20-21**

Do you picture eternity as real and bodily?

What do we know of Jesus' glorious body from his resurrection appearances at the end of the gospels?

Do you have that sense of freedom, knowing that this life isn't everything?

How does life change when we know that death is not the end?

### The life everlasting

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

Why is Paul so keen to show that we have hope in Jesus whether alive or dead?

What is the reason we can have confidence about our own resurrection?

How important is it to remember that our union with Christ includes assurance- once we belong to him, nothing can snatch us from his hand?

Do you feel 'encouraged by these words'?

## Faith and Prayer

It's a big subject, and it might be good to pray for those who've been praying for others to come to know the Lord. There might also be issues with our current bodies, illnesses etc, that it would be good to pray for!