



May/June 2022

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

THE BIBLE:
A STORY OF
Beauty

ALSO: THE APOSTLES' CREED

Friends:

Since the early centuries of the church, many Christians around the world have used the Apostles' Creed as a confession of faith summarizing the Bible's teaching about God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. For the month of May, I had the privilege of writing devotions centered on the Apostles' Creed. My prayer is that as we reflect on the creed this month, we will be renewed in our love and service for the holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



In June, Pastor Rebecca Jordan Heys focuses on the theme of beauty in the Bible. Though God made us and the world “very good,” our rebellion against him has marred the beauty of our relationship with him, with each other, with our selves, and with the world around us. Through his Son, Jesus, however, God is restoring us and his world. These meditations share the Bible's perspective on beauty now and look forward to the day of Christ's return, when God's vision of beauty will be complete and we will enjoy full life forever with him.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed as you reflect on God's Word!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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“The Apostles’ Creed”
Kurt Selles



**“The Bible: A Story of
Beauty”**
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TODAY (USPS 185-140),
Volume 72, Number 3,
published bimonthly by
ReFrame Ministries, formerly
Back to God Ministries
International, at 1700 28th
Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI
49508-1407. Periodicals postage
paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan,
and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes
to Today, 1700 28th Street SE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407.

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Cover photo: Saffu/Unsplash



**ReFrame
Ministries**

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

may

The Apostles' Creed

Kurt Selles

This month, let's look at the Bible's teaching through the Apostles' Creed. This brief statement of faith covers the main themes of the Bible's teaching, all of which point to God's gift of forgiveness and new life forever through Jesus Christ:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will 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.

Kurt Selles is the director of ReFrame Ministries, which publishes these devotions. Kurt has served as a missionary in Taiwan and China and as director of the Global Center at Beeson Divinity School, where he also taught missions. Kurt and his wife, Vicki, have three adult children.

A SUMMARY OF THE TRUTH

I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. —Jude 3

Some people object to creeds in the church, saying, "I believe in God, but I only accept the truth of the Bible." Though the Apostle's Creed isn't printed in the Bible, it faithfully summarizes the Bible's teaching.

Jude's short letter reveals the need for a summary of the truth. In his day there was an urgent need to defend the truth about Jesus Christ. In some ways like us today, people in the first century faced a swirling clash of ideas and claims about truth and religion, and it was easy to be misled by false teachings. Jude, an early church leader who was also a brother of Jesus, saw that false teaching threatened to mislead the church. He urged believers to hold on to the truth entrusted to them.

God the Holy Spirit, using the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' apostles, forged the truth that

we find in the New Testament. Then, from the days of the early church through the next few centuries, leaders and teachers summarized the main points of that truth as they taught new believers who were preparing for baptism. And by around the fourth century, a general statement emerged that has become known as the Apostles' Creed.

Our grasp of God's truth can still be threatened today. When we say the Apostles' Creed, we are reciting God's eternal truth to help us stand firm in our faith in Christ, and we do so with believers down through the centuries and around the world.

Lord, may your eternal truth shape us today as we share it with the world. Amen.

MAKING DISCIPLES AND BAPTIZING

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

—Matthew 28:19

The Apostles' Creed summarizes the truth about God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit revealed in the Bible. Following Jesus' command to “go and make disciples” and to baptize them, the early church developed this brief “I believe” (*Credo*) statement as a guide in teaching new believers about the Christian faith.

For example, it became a tradition for new believers to learn about the faith and be baptized when the church celebrated Easter in springtime. In the weeks leading up to Easter, new believers studied the Apostles' Creed. On Easter eve, they confessed it together, and then on Easter morning they were baptized and broke bread together, celebrating their first Lord's Supper as members of the church.

Of course, it was important to keep learning by reading and meditating on God's Word, but not everyone had access to the Scriptures. So the Apostles' Creed, in its simple, straightforward way, helped people immensely. It gave everyone a clear statement of the Christian faith.

The creed is still helpful today as the church continues to make disciples and baptize them. We can depend on the bedrock truths of this creed; these are words to stand on as we trust and serve our loving God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in any situation.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we worship you. Help us to grow in your knowledge and grace as we serve you today. Amen.

I BELIEVE IN GOD

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
—Hebrews 11:6

When we say the Apostles' Creed, we begin with the words "I believe in God . . ." And what do we mean by this?

Sometimes we use the words *I believe* to say that we agree with certain facts. For example, we might say, "I believe that the earth is round." But belief goes deeper than agreeing with facts.

With the words, "I believe in God," we are saying much more than that we agree with facts about God. Sure, we are accepting the basic biblical truths about God's existence. But when we say, "I believe in God," our hearts are involved as well. Our belief means trusting in God, committing ourselves to God and his teaching for our lives, and following and obeying God in what he says and where he leads. With the opening words of the Apostles'

Creed, we affirm that we believe *and* trust in God himself.

Many believers throughout the centuries have memorized the Apostles' Creed—often by saying it again and again in worship services. Sadly, though, our minds can wander when we repeat the creed that way. So it's important to think about the words we are saying. The next time you say the creed, be sure to say it as an expression of the truth and as a commitment to following God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with all of your heart!

Dear God, we believe in you. Help us to trust and serve you with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Amen.

THE FATHER

You are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has also made you an heir. —Galatians 4:7

Sometimes people say, “We are all God’s children.” And it’s true that God made us all. That’s why we call God our Father.

But it’s important to clarify what it means to be God’s children. First, Jesus, who is the second person of the Trinity, is God’s “one and only Son” (see John 1:14; 3:16). This underscores Jesus’ unique relationship with God the Father. But through Jesus, and by belief in God’s power to save us through him, we too are God’s children (see John 1:12-13). As the apostle Paul explains in Galatians 4, “God sent his Son”—that is, Jesus—to save us because we were cut off from God. We were separated from God because of our sin. But now, through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we can be adopted as God’s children. And we can enjoy all the rights

and privileges of belonging to God the Father as his heirs.

Confessing “I believe in God the Father” should flood our hearts with praise and thanksgiving as we remember this. God, in his great mercy, has forgiven all our sins and made us his children. This should also give us great comfort. Surely God, who did not spare his only Son, will spare nothing to watch over and keep us, his children.

In turn, let us also love the people around us and call them to trust in God as their Father too.

Our Father in heaven, thank you for making us your children. Help us to share your fatherly love in a world that desperately needs to know you. Through Jesus, Amen.

THE FATHER ALMIGHTY

"How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"
—Matthew 7:11

When my children were small, they looked up to me because I was such a big person in their lives. As they grew older and bigger, though, they realized that I have imperfections and limitations. I am painfully aware that I sometimes let them down, as all fathers have done at times to their children.

But although our fathers may let us down, we can always depend on our heavenly Father.

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel called God their "Father." They also used many other titles and descriptions to identify God. For example, they called God their "rock," their "fortress," and their "shield." In many passages he is also called "God Almighty" (*El-Shaddai*) in recognition of his awesome power and dependability. In the New Testament, Jesus emphasizes his relationship with God as his Father, and he

teaches us to trust God as our Father in heaven.

With the Apostles' Creed, we rightly call God our "Father almighty." Unlike our earthly fathers, our heavenly Father is perfect and unlimited in his power. Our earthly fathers may sometimes make promises they can't keep. Our heavenly Father not only makes promises but also keeps them all—because of his almighty power and enduring love and faithfulness.

God also hears and answers our prayers. Knowing what's best for us, our Father will always provide what we need.

Father almighty, we rely on your love and faithfulness, trusting that you will never let us down. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

—Psalm 33:9

Though my father wasn't a carpenter by trade, he loved to work with wood. He enjoyed taking a piece of wood and transforming it into something useful and pleasing. As creatures made in the image of God, we all have an inborn desire to make things useful and lovely. In this we imitate God, who created the heavens and the earth.

Psalm 33 recalls God's almighty power in creating everything around us: the sky, the sun, the stars, the mountains, the oceans. God not only created all that we see; he also created good things we can't see—like air, gravity, and sound, as well as love, goodness, and justice. God did this, as the psalm says, through the power of his spoken word.

When we say, with the Apostle's Creed, that God is the "creator of heaven and

earth," we are declaring that the same God who made the mountains, forests, and oceans made each one of us too. What's more, we are declaring that this God hasn't stepped back from what he has made; no, he still delights in sustaining it.

We can take great comfort in knowing that the all-powerful creator and sustainer, God Almighty, is the one that we also call our heavenly Father. God cares for us; he knows what we need; and he will never let us slip from his tender care.

May your unfailing love be with us, Almighty God. Guide us to put our hope in you. Amen.

OUR FATHER'S WORLD

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

—Romans 8:28

Have you stood outside on a dark, clear night, looked up at the stars, and felt small in the vastness of the universe? In such moments when we feel small and vulnerable, we can take comfort in knowing that our Father in heaven created the sun, the moon, and stars, as well as all of the earth—including each one of us.

Closely linked to God's creating power are his sustaining and governing powers over the entire cosmos he has made. Nothing in creation is insignificant in God's hands—not because he's a "control freak" but because God cares for all he has made. God even knows the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30).

Knowing that God has the whole world and every one of us in his hands, we can live with great confidence—no

matter where life's paths take us. In times of health and prosperity, we can give thanks for God's many blessings and in turn share those blessings with others. And when we encounter difficulties and hardships, we can also give thanks. For in times like that, we grow in trust and in patience as we lean on our Father, who cares for us and will always provide for us.

God, our heavenly Father and sustainer, we have nothing to dread or fear when we lean on you, our refuge and strength. Amen.

JESUS, THE SAVIOR

"You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."
—Matthew 1:21

Have you ever wondered why your parents chose your name? Maybe they named you after a family member. Perhaps they named you after a person in the Bible. Or maybe they chose your name because they liked the way it sounded.

When Mary was about to give birth, she and Joseph didn't have a choice. Through an angel, God *commanded* them to name the child Jesus.

The name *Jesus* is Greek for the Hebrew name *Joshua*, whom God chose to lead Israel into the promised land (Joshua 1). The Hebrew name *Joshua* means "God is deliverance," and that was a fitting name for the man who led Israel out of their wandering in the wilderness and into the land God had promised them. And in God's great story, the life of Joshua points toward an even greater figure.

When we say, with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in Jesus," we affirm that God's Son, Jesus, is our salvation. God's own Son rescues us from the dark pit of our sin into the light and spacious peace of knowing and resting in God.

So many things promise deliverance in this life. Yet the Bible states clearly that there is only one way to know God—and that is through his Son, Jesus (John 14:6). Do you believe in him? Do you trust in him? His name means "Savior," or "the Lord saves," revealing that Jesus is God's deliverance.

Jesus, name above all names, you have washed away our sins and made us right with God. Help us to follow and serve you in all we do. Amen.

CHRIST, THE ANOINTED ONE

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news. . . ."
—Luke 4:18

Have you ever spilled olive oil or some other kind of oil? Oil can be messy to work with and hard to clean up. Our experience with that may make it hard to grasp the biblical beauty of being "anointed" with oil.

In the Old Testament, people who were anointed with oil were set apart for special service to God for his people. When the Israelites anointed someone, they took olive oil and blended it with expensive spices (Exodus 30:22-25). Then they rubbed, smeared, or poured the concoction on the head of the person being appointed. Priests and prophets were anointed with this oil. Kings were anointed with it too.

The most important anointing in the Bible doesn't involve oil, however. When Jesus returned to his hometown synagogue, he opened God's Word and

declared that he had been anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God himself anointed Jesus to proclaim the good news of salvation.

As we confess with the Apostles' Creed, God anointed his Son, the long-expected Messiah, "the Anointed One," the Christ, to be our Prophet, Priest, and King. With his word, he guides us. With his sacrifice, he redeems us. And as our King, he guides and protects us.

Jesus was anointed for us. And he anoints us with his Spirit to serve him in this world.

Jesus, you are the Christ, the Anointed One, our Savior. Help us, your anointed servants, to share your love with the world. Amen.

GOD'S ONLY SON

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.
—John 1:18

Can you imagine having an argument at the supermarket about whether Jesus Christ is God? Today, Christians everywhere accept the fact that Jesus, God's Son, is fully God. But in the early church, Christians argued vehemently about whether Jesus could be God if he was God's only Son.

When we call someone a son, we naturally conclude that the father came first and the son came second. So when we refer to Jesus in the Apostles' Creed as God's "only Son," are we somehow putting him in second place?

No. Since the fourth century the church has officially upheld what the Holy Spirit inspired John to write in our passage for today: "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is

in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."

We can't fully comprehend the mysterious relationship of God the Father and his only Son. But by faith we believe that Jesus is God's Son. By faith we believe, with John, that through God's only Son all of creation was made (John 1:1-3). By faith we also believe that only God's own Son, through his death, could bring us into a new life filled with everlasting peace and joy.

As we live in the love of God and his Son each day, we can look for ways, wherever we are, to share that love with others.

Jesus, we believe you are God's only Son. Help us to share your love wherever we are. Amen.

OUR LORD

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

—Romans 10:13

After making a weighty statement, it's good to pause and let the meaning of the words settle in. In a sense, that's what happens after we say, with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord." This is a lot to take in.

The word for "lord" in the New Testament comes from the Greek word *kyrios*. In the Mediterranean world, someone with power and authority over others was called a "lord" or "master." In the New Testament, Jesus is addressed or referred to as "Lord" more than 700 times.

Jesus is addressed as "Lord" in two ways. First, he is called "Lord" in the same way as he is often called "Rabbi" or "Teacher" when someone asks him a question or requests healing. After Jesus' death and resurrection, however, calling him "Lord" takes on much

greater meaning. It signifies that Jesus is God himself. It signifies that God the Father has given Jesus all authority over heaven and earth. And, ultimately, it looks ahead to the day when "every tongue [will] acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11).

We rightly pause when we call Jesus "our Lord." We confess both his true identity and our just response. Then in awe and gratitude we ask and seek out how to serve him.

Jesus, Lord of lords and King of kings, help us to honor and serve you as we await the day when all creation will bow and worship you. Amen.

A MYSTERIOUS BIRTH

“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”
—Luke 1:35

Maybe, like me, you enjoy mystery novels. Many people like mysteries because they are like puzzles that need to be solved. The story of Jesus’ birth is one of the most mysterious events in human history, and some parts of the puzzle remain unknown.

With the Apostles’ Creed, we confess that Jesus “was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.” This statement summarizes a profound truth about Jesus, our Savior. The Bible teaches that Jesus is fully God and fully human. Jesus, the creator of the universe, was born in the same way each of us was born, from our mother’s womb. But the seed planted in Mary’s womb was not from Joseph, who was pledged to be her husband. The seed in Mary was planted by God the Holy Spirit.

Why did Jesus need to be fully God and fully human? The answer is that only a Savior who was both fully God and fully human could heal the breach opened by our rebellion in our sin against God.

The how of the virgin birth remains a mystery. Through the ages some people have rejected it as impossible. Human logic will never solve the puzzle of how the Son of God became fully human. Yet the deeply satisfying truth of this story remains: Jesus, fully God and fully human, solved the problem of our separation from God. Praise be to God!

Thank you, Jesus, for becoming one of us in order to save us and restore us to full life with God. Amen.

SUFFERING SAVIOR

With loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand.
—Luke 23:23-24

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, is a pitiful figure in history. Though he was conflicted about sentencing Jesus to death, Pilate gave in to the mob calling for Jesus to be crucified.

Why does the Apostles' Creed note that Jesus suffered "under Pontius Pilate"? This statement points out the historical fact that Jesus was condemned to suffer and die by the governing authority of that day. Pilate represented the Roman government, and his judgment made Jesus' sentencing and suffering an official event in history, even though Jesus was totally innocent and without sin.

We all need a Savior because we are guilty of sin and deserving of punishment. And in his mysterious wisdom, God used the government of

Rome, flawed as it was, in the process of bringing salvation for our sake. By suffering "under Pontius Pilate," Jesus took on himself the condemnation we deserve. And through his suffering Jesus has extended God's grace to us, covering us with his own righteousness and granting us peace and the blessings of fellowship with God forever.

Through his weak and wrongful judgment, Pilate served Jesus a hideous sentence. But God, through his power and wisdom, used Jesus' suffering to redeem us. What amazing grace and love!

What love is this, Father, that caused you to send your Son to suffer and die for us? Thank you for your amazing love and grace. Amen.

CRUCIFIED

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."
—Galatians 3:13*

The cross of Jesus is often featured in jewelry, sculpture, posters, logos, and other kinds of art. This symbol has become so common that we hardly ever think of its horror. In ancient times, though, crucifixion, or being hung on a pole, was a terrifying sentence of death for murderers, idol worshippers, sorcerers, and other convicted criminals. The guilty died a slow, agonizing death in public, and they were considered cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:23).

Why does the Apostles' Creed emphasize that Jesus died in this wretched way? Because the Bible teaches that Jesus' death on the cross means he took on the curse of God for our sake. Jesus shouldered that burden for us.

In Galatians 3 the apostle Paul explains that people who try to live by the law (as given in

the Old Testament) and fail to keep it are guilty. And of course no one except Jesus could keep the law perfectly. As Paul notes in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

We are all guilty before God, and we all deserve God's judgment. But the good news is that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" through his death on a cross.

Next time you see a cross, wherever it may be, pause and think about the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Jesus, our Lord and Savior, you took on the dreadful curse of sin for us and set us free. Help us to live for your praise and glory. Amen.

DEAD AND BURIED

Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. —John 19: 42

Maybe you have heard the expression “Nothing is certain except death and taxes.” And although some people may cheat on their taxes, no one can ultimately cheat death. We are all mortal, so eventually we will all die.

As we would expect after the statement about Jesus’ being crucified, the Apostles’ Creed says that Jesus “died, and was buried.” Jesus’ lifeless, cold corpse was laid to rest in a grave, just as our bodies too will one day die and be buried.

We don’t like to talk about death. But every time a dear family member or a friend dies, we are forced to remember our own eventual, inevitable death. In a letter to the early church, the apostle Paul fittingly calls death the “enemy” (1 Corinthians 15:26).

No words can completely salve the fear and dread we have of death. But we can take comfort in the fact that Jesus himself died. He was like us in every way, the Bible teaches (see Hebrews 2:17; 4:15). He ate breakfast, enjoyed beautiful days, got tired and needed sleep, and sometimes stubbed his toes. He also died and was buried.

We can also take comfort in knowing that our Savior, who died for us and also rose again, is with us as we grieve the loss of loved ones and face our own, inevitable death.

Jesus, you suffered and died on the cross for us. As we face up to the reality that we too will die someday, we take comfort in knowing that you are with us always. Amen.

DESCENDED TO HELL

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. . . . He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.
—Isaiah 53:8

The Bible teaches about a place called “hell” that is reserved for God’s enemies. The New Testament mentions hell 162 times, and Jesus himself mentions it over 70 times.

People have found it puzzling, though, that the Apostles’ Creed says Jesus “descended to hell.” Appearing in some versions of the creed from the fourth century, this phrase may be based partly on some statements by the apostle Peter, who wrote that Jesus “went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits” (1 Peter 3:19-20; 4:6). Some people have taken this to mean that after he died, Jesus descended to hell to free ancient sinners. Others have said that “descended to hell” refers to the depths of Christ’s anguished suffering throughout his life, crucifixion, death, and burial for our sake.

Whatever the full meaning is, this phrase should not distract from the bedrock teachings about Jesus and the Christian faith. At the very least, the phrase captures in a condensed way Isaiah’s prophecy of the suffering servant—our Savior, Jesus, who suffered and died for us. This teaching assures us in our own moments of fear and temptation that Jesus, through his sacrifice for us, suffered in a way that we, by grace, will never have to suffer.

Because of your suffering and death, Lord Jesus, hell has no power over us. Thank you for making sure that nothing can separate us from you. Amen.

ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
—1 Corinthians 15:20

Why do we say that Jesus rose “on the third day”? Some people might argue that the number of days he lay in the grave would confirm that he had died. Others point out that this fulfills a prophecy about Jesus’ death (Matthew 16:21; 1 Corinthians 15:4). But the mention of “the third day” isn’t the main point of the creed’s declaration saying, “The third day he rose again from the dead.”

The main point is that at a specific moment in time *Jesus rose again from the dead!*

Jesus’ resurrection not only stands at the center of the Apostles’ Creed; it stands firmly at the center of the Bible’s teaching. Indeed, Christ’s resurrection is the foundation on which our Christian faith rests. For, as the apostle Paul emphasizes, if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, all who hope in

him should be the most pitied of all people. For if Jesus didn’t rise, we are all still shackled by the chains of sin and doomed to death forever.

But by his resurrection, Jesus has conquered death, washed away our sins, and covered us with his own righteousness. By his resurrection, Jesus has made us his own and raised us to a new life of walking with him. By his resurrection, Jesus also assures us that one day we too will be raised from the dead.

Alleluia! He is risen indeed!

Jesus, you rose from the grave in triumph over sin and death! We thank you and praise you! Now help us to live for you. In your name we pray. Amen.

ASCENDED TO HEAVEN

While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.
—Luke 24:51

Saying goodbye can be hard. In fact, grieving loss is one of the hardest things we must do in life. Jesus' disciples surely felt grief and sorrow as they watched him being taken up to heaven.

With the Apostles' Creed we say that Jesus "ascended to heaven." This happened forty days after his resurrection (see Acts 1:1-11). But this does not mean Jesus abandoned his disciples or us. No, Jesus went to heaven *for* us.

While the Bible isn't very clear about where heaven is or what it looks like, it plainly teaches that heaven means being in the presence of God. In God's presence, Jesus serves as our advocate, continuously interceding with God the Father for our every need (Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1-2). Jesus' presence with God also assures us that one day we will be with him

in God's presence as well (John 14:1-3). And from heaven Jesus sends his Holy Spirit as a guarantee and a reminder that he is always with us (Matthew 28:20).

Knowing that Jesus is in heaven for us now gives us tremendous comfort and strength as we wait for his promised return. In the meantime, as he lives in our hearts through his Spirit, Jesus calls us to share his love with a world full of sorrow and grief.

Thank you for being in heaven for us, Lord Jesus. As we wait for your return, help us to continue your work here on earth. Amen.

SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

[In] his incomparably great power [God] . . . raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. . . .
—Ephesians 1:19-20

After declaring that Jesus ascended to heaven, we say, with the Apostles' Creed, that he is now "seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty."

How do you picture Jesus seated in heaven? Do you imagine him lounging in an easy chair, resting from his hard labors on earth? Not a chance.

In heaven Jesus sits on a splendid throne at the Father's right hand, the very highest place of honor. Sitting there is a sure demonstration that he is one with God the Father and deserving the same honor and respect. God the Father has placed all that exists under Jesus Christ's power and authority.

Moreover, as the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians, God appointed Jesus as "the head over everything *for* the church,

which is his body." In heaven, as on earth, Jesus continues his ministry. As the head of the church, made up of his followers throughout the world, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus blesses each member with gifts to be used in humble service. And with his divine power and authority, Jesus protects his church from the many forces seeking to destroy it.

Just as Jesus isn't resting in heaven, so too we are earnestly and diligently continuing his work on earth.

Jesus, thank you for your tireless work for the church, your body here on earth. Help us to trust you in all situations and to use your gifts to build your church. Amen.

COMING TO JUDGE

“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.”
—Mark 13:26

The details about Jesus' second coming are mysterious, and there are differing interpretations of some of the Bible's statements about end times and the return of Christ. But in teaching about Christ's return, the Apostles' Creed simply states this bold biblical truth: “He will come to judge the living and the dead.”

Someday Jesus will return from heaven. He didn't say when this will be, but he did say that he will return “with great power and glory” for all to see.

Jesus' coming again will be a day of great joy for all his followers, who have been redeemed through his sacrifice on the cross. For them the whole curse of death and hell has been removed (Romans 8).

But Jesus' return will also be a day of great trembling because, as the Bible warns, he

will judge once and for all the people who have rejected him.

Though believers in Christ may not agree on all the details of his return, we certainly can agree on how we should live for him. Jesus calls us to follow him faithfully, dying daily to ourselves so that we can walk in step with his Spirit, using our gifts for God's glory and bearing fruit in his name (John 15:1-17; Galatians 5:22-26). This involves showing God's love to everyone and sharing his desire that everyone believe in him.

Lord Jesus, we long for your return, when all will be made new. While we wait, help us to serve and love others for your sake in this world. Amen.

AN ANCIENT, CREED-LIKE HYMN

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.
—Philippians 2:5

In worship services it is common to sing songs of praise and hymns to God our Savior.

In many ways, the Apostles' Creed is like a hymn, and many songs have been composed from the words of this creed.

The Bible includes many song texts as well, and our reading from Philippians 2 includes one of them. This text in verses 6-11 appears to be a hymn (or part of one) that was recited and sung by early Christians in the first century. And the apostle Paul uses it to summarize a number of important teachings as he urges readers to "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." In some ways like the Apostles' Creed, this ancient hymn tells us who Jesus is, what he did for us, and what will happen when he comes again.

Imagine yourself in a worship service 2,000 years ago, sur-

rounded by sisters and brothers in the Lord and singing these words together. Then reread (or sing) this ancient hymn that has echoed down through the centuries. Reflect and meditate on the deep, life-changing truths we can celebrate because of "Jesus, Christ, God's only Son, our Lord."

This hymn in Scripture, like the Apostle's Creed, allows God's Word to settle into our hearts. And it calls us to humble ourselves like Jesus in all our relationships as we seek to live for God by loving and serving each other.

Jesus, out of love, you poured out your life for us; now help us, out of love, to pour out our lives for each other. In your name, Amen.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
—Genesis 1:2

After stating, with the Apostles' Creed, that we believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, we now follow up with a declaration about the third person of the Trinity: "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

The Apostles' Creed doesn't elaborate on the person or work of the Holy Spirit, but that doesn't mean he's somehow less important than the Father or the Son. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach that the Holy Spirit is God. The Bible's opening verses, in fact, picture the Holy Spirit hovering over the chaos of unformed matter before creation. So the Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, was there in the beginning, giving shape to the cosmos.

In addition, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and

rebellion against God. The Spirit breathes life into our hearts and removes our spiritual blindness, giving us eyes of faith. The Spirit is the one who helps us see and understand that Jesus is the Savior who has shown us the grace and love of the Father. And throughout our lives the Spirit continues to work in our hearts, gradually making us more like Jesus and prompting us to serve him in the world.

Holy Spirit, you formed the world and breathed new life into our hearts. Help us to follow your promptings to love and serve Jesus. Amen.

GUARANTEE

[God has] set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

—2 Corinthians 1:22

When we buy electronics, cars, and many other things, they often come with a warranty. This is sort of a guarantee, a promise that the item can be repaired or replaced if it doesn't work right.

When we say, with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we assert that the Holy Spirit is our guarantee.

The Bible declares that God will keep every promise he has ever made. Most importantly, God has promised that he has forgiven our sins through his Son, Jesus. God has also promised that he hears and answers our prayers and that that he will never reject or abandon us.

These are wonderful promises. Yet we can sometimes have doubts. Do you ever doubt what the Bible teaches? Do you ever wonder if you're really saved? Do you wonder if

God really hears and answers your prayers?

God's children have an eternal guarantee, and it's been purchased for us through the blood of Jesus. After ascending to heaven, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be our living guarantee. Now the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts, assuring us in all circumstances that we belong to God.

Doubts and temptations will come. When they do, listen for the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit in your heart. The Spirit is our unshakable guarantee that God loves us. Listen and follow him.

Holy Spirit, thank you for living in our hearts. Assure us of God's love, and lead us in following and serving Jesus. Amen.

ADVOCATE, COUNSELOR

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth."

—John 14:16-17

Sharing a last meal with his disciples just hours before his betrayal and death, Jesus drops a bombshell. He tells his disciples that he will soon be leaving them. Jesus assures his followers, though, that he will give them an "advocate to help" and counsel and comfort them.

The original Greek word here for "advocate" (*parakletos*) refers to someone like a lawyer who provides counsel in legal matters. Our Bibles today translate this word using "advocate," "counselor," "comforter," and other terms. When we say, with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we are taking comfort that the Spirit is our advocate and counselor.

Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit offers us great comfort. We are not alone. Though he

is not physically present with us, Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to counsel and comfort us, leading us into truth. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to live in us, helping us to serve the Lord each day. Jesus provides the Holy Spirit to his followers, saying, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. . . ."

Are you obeying the teaching of Jesus? If not, repent and turn to him, and the Holy Spirit will comfort and guide you. Lean on him, rest in him, and be guided by him in your walk with Jesus.

Lord Jesus, thank you for sending the Holy Spirit. May he work in our lives as our counselor and comforter, as we seek to follow you today and always. Amen.

AUTHOR OF SCRIPTURE

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16-17

Paul's words to Timothy here offer practical advice for godly living.

From an early age, Timothy had learned the truth found in the Scriptures. And here Paul encourages him to continue to read, learn from, and trust in God's Word, which helps every believer focus on living God's way for full, meaningful life. God's Word can be trusted because it is not the mere words of imperfect human beings; it is the truth of the eternal God himself.

When we confess, with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we affirm that the Holy Spirit worked in and through the people who wrote down the words of Scripture to reveal God's design and purpose for us. Paul describes the Spirit's work as "God-

breathed." Just as the Holy Spirit breathed life into the first human being (Genesis 2:7), so the Holy Spirit breathed into the work of the Bible's human authors, making the Scriptures full of life and giving all that we need for faithful living.

Do you want to know how to live for God today? Look no further than the inspired and infallible words of the Bible. The Holy Spirit gave it to us so that we can glorify God and serve him.

Holy Spirit, author of the Scriptures and provider of new life, breathe into our hearts today, that we may glorify God and serve him in the world. Amen.

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.
—Revelation 7:9

The Christian faith is deeply personal. At the same time, it is also deeply communal. When we say, with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in . . . the holy catholic church," we are declaring that the church, the body of Christ, includes all who belong to the people of God throughout history.

Let's be clear, though, that this statement does not single out or promote a particular church within the body of all who believe in Christ. The word "catholic" here means "universal," indicating that the church of Christ includes all of God's people from all times in history. The breathtaking vision in Revelation captures the scope of Christ's church gathered "from every nation, tribe, people and language." Can you imagine a more awe-inspiring sight?

And what unites this astonishing multitude of people from every time and place? Since the early centuries of the church, the teaching of statements like the Apostles' Creed has played a central role in uniting Christians around the true faith anchored in Scripture and inspired by the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

May the truth and witness of the universal church comfort, encourage, and challenge you to love and serve the God whom countless believers have served through the ages.

Lord, we are humbled and grateful to belong to your church, and we look forward to praising and serving you forever. Amen.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
—Romans 12:5

Many years ago I heard someone say, “I believe in the *communication* of the saints.” While good communication is essential in all kinds of relationships, our connectedness in Christ goes beyond communicating well with each another.

When we say, with the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in . . . the communion of saints,” we are saying that through Jesus’ blood we not only belong to him but also to each other. Our blood relationship in Jesus transcends even the real blood we share with our own family members.

And our communion with each other is more than just a statement of fact. Paul goes on to explain that belonging to one another has a crucial function. Each of us has been given gifts by the Holy Spirit. Though our gifts vary, the purpose for them is the same: to build one

another up in service to the Lord and for the benefit of all. Using our gifts leads to all kinds of ways in which we can show God’s love to one another and to all the people around us.

The gifts we have may include preaching (prophesying—bringing God’s Word to people), teaching, leading, serving, giving, or a number of other abilities. Jesus wants us to use these gifts with thanksgiving and love to strengthen his body so that all can join in the communion of saints.

Lord Jesus, just as we belong to you, we belong to each other. Help us to use our gifts faithfully to build up your body and share your love with everyone. Amen.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases. . . .

—Psalm 103:2-3

We don't always like to bring up the topic of sin. But in our life of faith it's necessary to face up to our desperate predicament. Sadly, none of us acts the way we should toward God, others, ourselves, and God's creation. We persistently *choose* to disregard our maker, contend with others, deceive and harm ourselves, and mistreat creation. Our sin not only leads to trouble and misery but also shows that we rightfully deserve punishment.

So with great relief and joy we confess, with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in . . . the forgiveness of sins." The heart of the creed's teaching emphasizes our need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Through his atoning sacrifice, Jesus washed away our sin. Even though we still continue to struggle with sin, Jesus assures us that God will not judge us as we deserve

because we have been forgiven.

The forgiveness of sins stands at the core of following Jesus. Because we have been forgiven, we can, through the power and help of the Holy Spirit, strive each day to faithfully serve Jesus.

As he gave himself for us, out of thanksgiving we can live for him.

Lord Jesus, you gave yourself so that we can be forgiven. Now help us to give ourselves to you in loving gratitude and service to others. In your name we pray. Amen.

RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

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."

—1 Corinthians 15:54

While we are alive, our spirits are united with our bodies. When we die, our spirits depart, and our lifeless bodies return to the earth. Is that the final destiny for our bodies?

Some religions welcome death as a release from the "prison" of the body. But, according to the Bible, God made us to have both souls *and* bodies; moreover, he made our bodies good (Psalm 139:14). So when the two are separated by death, we cease to be as God made us. For that reason, we say, with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

How can that be? Our bodies are vulnerable and frail. They break down and eventually just give out. Yet our bodies remain integral to who we are as God has made us. Without our bodies, we are no longer fully ourselves.

For all of us who believe in Christ, we can take great comfort that when we die, our souls will immediately be with Jesus. And when Jesus returns, our bodies and souls will be reunited. Then we will again be fully ourselves.

On that day, though, our bodies will no longer be frail and mortal. Death will be conquered, and we will have "glorified" bodies, just like Jesus' body at his resurrection.

Lord Jesus, thank you for our bodies, fearfully and wonderfully made. Help us to treat them with care and respect while we wait to share with you the fullness of resurrection life. Amen.

LIFE EVERLASTING

We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

—2 Corinthians 4:18

Maybe you have had some great times with family and friends, with delicious food to enjoy, and perhaps even a sunny, blue sky overhead, a soft breeze blowing, and the world radiating God's glory in creation.

Times like that can give us a peek at what we mean when we say, with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in . . . the life everlasting."

Even so, our fleeting moments of joy in this life pale in comparison to the eternal joy we can look forward to in Christ.

Yet this we know with certainty: one day, we will stand before God's throne with Jesus, surrounded by countless sisters and brothers from around the world, completely freed from all fears, and filled with perfect peace and joy (Revelation 7). There we will be fully doing

what we were created for: "to glorify God and enjoy him forever" (Westminster Catechism).

Until that time, we may have only fleeting glimpses of our ultimate destiny—and those moments may come in the midst of struggles, challenges, and sometimes even utter defeat. But we are encouraged not to despair in the midst of hard times but to wait with hope for the day when Jesus will be all and all, when his kingdom will come in power and glory.

Lord Jesus, we look forward to being with you forever. Until that day, help us serve you wherever we are with deeds of love in your name. Amen.

AMEN ('SO BE IT')

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. —Ephesians 3:21

As we come to the end of our month-long focus on the Apostles' Creed, it's appropriate to wrap up with the closing word "Amen."

There's nothing magical about the creed as a statement of the Christian faith. It's not an incantation or a mantra to be said again and again for protection or for gaining some benefit. Based on the Bible's teaching shared with us by Christ's apostles, the creed's clear yet eloquent statements help us remember the truths that Christians have learned and said together for nearly 2,000 years. So in that respect, it's worthwhile to say the creed again and again.

Further, the Apostles' Creed does not directly teach us in how to live out our faith every day. But this short summary provides an unshakable foundation for building

vibrant churches and shaping godly lives that center on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These truths help to shape and guide our thoughts and actions so that we faithfully proclaim who God is and who we are as his people serving him in the world.

As Paul closes his prayer of praise in Ephesians with "Amen"—the little Hebrew word meaning "So be it"—so the Apostles' Creed ends on the same note. At the conclusion of this confession about God we appropriately say together, "Amen ('So be it')."

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, grant us wisdom, strength, and courage to live faithfully and to proclaim your goodness to all the earth until Jesus comes again. Amen.

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