



# Introduction

**M**embers of liturgical churches grew up with the Apostles' Creed. Like the Lord's Prayer, the creed was memorized and recited in church every Sunday. It was like learning to say "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" as a small child at bedtime or the Pledge of Allegiance as an elementary school student. But the problem with learning things by heart is that often the heart disengages. It can be easy to say the words without thinking about their meaning, without feeling what the first speakers of those words experienced. It's easy to say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth..." while thinking about what you want for lunch.

For this reason, churches that emphasize the heart's centrality in faith and worship have often criticized and avoided the use of creeds and memorized prayers, and they have had good reasons for insisting on spontaneity, exuberance, and personal experience ... even though, if we're honest, we'll admit we can be thinking about lunch while singing praise choruses and raising up our hands as well.

But although memorization and ritual wrongly and thoughtlessly used can land us in a dusty pit, we should not commit the equally serious error of rejecting Christian

traditions for no reason other than their age. Like an elderly neighbor, they may have things to teach us that we need to know. And we followers of Jesus, whose time on earth was a while ago, humanly speaking, should never commit the error of what C. S. Lewis called "chronological snobbery," thinking the new must be better only because it's new.

You can't get much older than the Apostles' Creed as a summary statement of Christian belief. Ancient tradition held that each of the Apostles contributed part of it on the Day of Pentecost while under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Even though it may not be quite that old, versions similar to the one we use today (except that they were in Latin, of course) appeared in the writings of Tertullian and Irenaeus in the second century.

But you probably aren't here for a history lesson, and that's not what we're planning in this edition of Faith Café. And you probably aren't interested in worshipping in a medieval church made of cold gray stone with high rafters and chanting with old guys in robes. That's not what this study proposes, either.

Faith Café is always about examining our faith with receptive eyes and minds, and that includes opening up to what may have been around for a while and ignored for a while. Such is the reason for our decision to tackle the statements of the Apostles' Creed. You may be familiar with them or not, but we hope that after experiencing this quarter of Faith Café, you will both appreciate them and realize this old affirmation is still as fresh as your first cup of morning coffee.

## ENTER

In our gatherings we do not want you just to sit back and listen. Faith Café invites you to enter into an environment where it is safe to ask for and seek answers. Phrases lure your mind toward deeper paths; quotes dare you to stare into your real self; questions give you a chance to talk to yourself and your friends about what is relevant in your lives.

## DRINK

This segment highlights portions of Scripture to help you gain a better understanding of truth, while friends beside you voice their own reflections about how the biblical story inspires them to believe in new ways. Your soul can be refreshed by drinking in the living water of God's Word.

## SAVOR

You will savor the stories of the struggles, musings, and triumphs of imperfect people like us who are journeying into a deeper relationship with Jesus. You will get a taste of ancient reality as it touches our fast-paced culture. And these bites of life will help to guide, challenge, and focus you.

## EXPERIENCE

Faith Café also offers statistics to investigate, books to read, video clips to watch, websites to peruse, and thoughts to

ponder. The discussions of our society today will provoke groups to enter and experience lessons together. You'll create community and in doing so, learn more about yourself.

## WALK

As we examine society's trends and scrutinize Christianity's core beliefs, we choose not to leave it there. We offer suggestions to walk out with the truth you've explored and straightforward strategies for declaring doctrine daily to those around you. Actions such as writing letters, serving meals, or visiting hospitals will allow you to take your faith and share the delight with desperate people.

Every session includes an invitation to experience the truth you're studying on a regular basis. Spiritual disciplines such as intercession, silence, worship, study, and journaling help move you toward transformation. Your heavenly Father can guide and change you as you evaluate your habits and lifestyle.

You are invited to taste and see, to drink and be refreshed. By reflecting and exploring, by examining and investigating, by meditating and applying, you just might discover a way to know God more and to get closer to the person he created you to be. We have no doubt you'll be glad you decided to sit, sip, and talk about life at Faith Café.



# A Word for Leaders

**T**hanks to cell phones and the Internet, communication has never been easier, yet many people suffer from spiritual loneliness. But what if a small group created real community? What if the group's members confessed their worries, hurts, and fears in an environment where hope stays alive? What if friends sat beside friends seeking ways to develop deep, real, alive relationships with their maker? What if people joined together and began a journey of Christian spiritual formation?

Faith Café curriculum was designed for the person seeking this kind of experience. Real growth with real community. Authentic souls seeking to serve others.

Paul encouraged the church at Ephesus saying, "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching. . . . Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:14, 15). Just like the Ephesians, we were never meant to receive Christ's salvation and then sit back and do nothing. We were meant to know Jesus and, as a result of getting to know him, to be changed. We believe that Faith Café will help you and your group to grow up in Christ together.

## FAITH CAFÉ FEATURES

Faith Café has been designed with leaders in mind. Though we've called this a Leader's Guide, we know that you will want to be a part of this group, not just a face on the other side of a podium. To that end, we provide you with tools

to facilitate honest connections and encourage lively, thoughtful discussions. Here's some of what you'll find useful in the five parts that make up each Faith Café episode: ENTER, DRINK, SAVOR, EXPERIENCE, and WALK.

### *Quotes to think about*

Especially in the ENTER section, but also in other parts of each episode, quotes are provided from a variety of writers, performers, and thinkers. In the **Consider it** box, you'll find a quotation that was selected in particular to allow the group to reflect on an aspect of that episode's message or to engage in debate about a meaningful topic.

### *Scripture support*

Though each episode in your leader's guide handily contains all the text that exists in the participant's guide, we've also added some material to be beneficial to you as you walk others through the Bible passages. In GO DEEPER, you'll find insightful information that could help answer questions about or provide context for that episode's Scripture. This section may also contain discussion questions to help you and the members of your group flesh out the message in God's Word.

### *Facilitating ideas*

Besides the Scripture supporting information, each episode is packed with illustrations, activities, media elements, and discussion options that will help to engage every sort of learning style. A **Look into it** box offers Web sites, books, and other suggestions for

further research. And there are no rigid rules or regulations in Faith Café: you may feel free to pick and choose from among the offerings, use none, or use them all!

### *Adaptable design*

We've provided you with some fuel and flavor, but the particular experience is yours to create. Faith Café curriculum is written in a way that allows you to adapt the episode to your own group's unique tastes. Maybe you'll want to start with a bite of life from the SAVOR section one week, and end with a refreshing DRINK from the living Word the next. Or maybe you'll want to follow the order on the page. You and your group can decide what best suits your appetite.

### *Strategies for service*

We don't want your Faith Café experience to end inside the walls of your meeting room. We provide you with simple actions and strategies for taking what you've learned to go—hoping you will make a difference in your community each week and by doing so, stretch and grow in your faith. Spiritual disciplines are also suggested, offering each group member yet another way to care for their souls throughout the week.

## SETTING THE SCENE

You may be wondering, *OK, I've got the tools, now where do I start?* We believe that creating a certain kind of environment is an important part of this experience. Think about your favorite coffeehouse or café. What descriptive words do you think of? *Inviting. Relaxing. Warm.* Now imagine how you could recreate that setting for your group. It may be as simple as bringing in a couple

of lamps for softer lighting, or arranging the seats in a circle so everyone can see each other. What resources does your group have available? Maybe you can find comfortable chairs and cozy couches at your local thrift store. Will you have a large group? Maybe you can use a tall stool to speak from instead of standing. Make it a multi-sensory experience. Have music playing as group members arrive. Don't forget the necessary equipment for playing the Faith Café DVD clips! And finally, think about bringing snacks, drinks, and of course, coffee, to complete the scene. See [www.standardpub.com/faithcafe](http://www.standardpub.com/faithcafe) for more ideas on creating a Faith Café space in your church.

It's important to remember that community will happen only in a trusting and authentic atmosphere. This may take a few weeks to cultivate, but know that people are hungry for a place where they can truly be known and know others. Be willing to share your own struggles, doubts, or dreams with the group to demonstrate the importance of honest dialogue. Be sensitive to the questions or pains that others share by taking time to talk through issues and pray, even if it means leaving out a portion of the lesson. Be patient with those who are quiet or shy by giving them time to get comfortable in this new environment.

Finally, pray. Pray that God will bring about dramatic transformation. Pray that he will build relationships that go deep and stand strong. As you can see, Faith Café is more than a topical curriculum that happens once a week. It's a place to create a community that can change lives. If you're interested in designing a space in your church, Faith Café is for you. You're invited to taste and see, to drink and be refreshed. Come on in—everyone is welcome.



# I Believe

## SUPPLIES NEEDED


Faith Café DVD

Water bottles or cups of water

## ENTER

Do you know what you believe? If so, think about how you would summarize your beliefs in a way that is concise yet biblically and theologically correct. That may not be an easy task. Fortunately, it has been done for us. Our historical church leaders summarized our beliefs in the Apostles' Creed.

Many churches and people repeat the Creed every week, but over the next 13 episodes we will dig deep, study its meaning, and allow it to invade our souls.

 Play the Episode 14 clip from the Faith Café DVD. At the conclusion of the segment continue your introduction of today's topic with the following questions.

- Is it important to understand and articulately communicate what we believe? Why or why not?
- How might studying the Apostles' Creed help you understand and communicate what you believe?
- What thoughts and emotions do you associate with the Apostles' Creed?
- Do any parts of this creed confuse you? If so, which ones?
- Is it okay to tell God we believe while also asking him to help our unbelief?

Have your group recite or read the Apostles' Creed together. It is provided for you below in **Consider it**. It may be helpful to start off each week's session this way and challenge your group to memorize this foundational statement of faith.

## Consider it

The Apostles' Creed

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 into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come again 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.

## DRINK

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,*

*he leads me beside quiet waters,*

*he restores my soul.*

*He guides me in paths of righteousness*

*for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*

*I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my  
enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days  
of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

—Psalm 23

## GO DEEPER

How many times have you heard, read, or prayed the 23rd Psalm? Like the Apostles' Creed, it can be repeated without sincerity, quoted without understanding, recited without grasping its original purpose. However, also like the creed, we can revisit Psalm 23 with our minds open for a fresh and deeper experience.

Initial versions of the Apostles' Creed date to around 200 A.D. Early followers of Christ voiced affiliation with those "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ," expressed agreement with the Lordship of Christ, or declared their commitment by praying "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (see Acts 2:38; 8:12, 16; 10:48; 19:5; Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:11). But over the years, church leaders found it imperative to highlight the crucial elements of doctrine and focused on unchangeable core beliefs. Thus, the creeds were created. From the Latin word *credo* (*I believe*), the creed summarizes those essential elements and serves to explain and declare such beliefs without attempting to cover all theological issues. During the fourth century, most of what we know as the Apostles' Creed was put in place, though in the West the creed was recited only in Latin for over 1,000 years.<sup>1</sup>

Since we seek not only to recite the Creed but to learn and apply more of our beliefs,

the oft-quoted Psalm 23 can remind us how studying something familiar can strengthen our relationship with and faith in our Father.

As a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), David had a spiritual connection devout Christians have admired for centuries. David's beliefs were personal and fundamental; we see them in the intensity of his passion for Yahweh. He imagined God as a character he knew: a shepherd. With God as his Shepherd, David would need nothing. His Leader could give him all he needed: rest, nourishment, cleansing, restoration, and protection. David trusted God to guide his steps to places of fresh empowerment, peaceful rest, and spiritual restoration, just as David guided his sheep. As he guarded the paths through which his animals would walk, he credited God with the task of keeping him from venturing into dangerous regions himself. However, if and when David traveled through those dark valleys, he did not need to fear; his Father-Shepherd-God-Creator would not only direct him, but also protect him.

While protecting David's dangerous travels through life, God was also planning David's future; a table was set and ready when he arrived. David did not need to fear; a rod and staff brought comfort, oil anointed his head, goodness and love followed him, and he had a permanent residence with the Great Shepherd.

Studying and reciting the Apostles' Creed reminds us of the value of revisiting ancient prayers like King David's. This giant-killer, poet, musician, and king was also a sinner. He lusted and lied. But he confessed his beliefs, reminding himself and his nation about the God he loved, without whom he could not live. Although it is not Scripture, confessing the Apostles' Creed can also help us live what we believe and remind us of what matters most.

As we seek truth in Psalm 23 and the Apostles' Creed, our beliefs in such a

God-Father-Shepherd can be revitalized. Confessions about our Father remind us that he is the almighty Creator. They reinforce Christ as the second person in the Trinity, declaring who we believe Jesus to be and his role he in salvation. Like a shepherd risking his life for the safety of his sheep, our Savior came and gave all to guide us toward the table of feast and celebration. We could never get there on our own. The Creed highlights that we aren't the only sheep; as the catholic (i.e., universal) church, we are traveling together in a flock led by the Shepherd. Both Psalm 23 and this creed emphasize the good we receive and the life everlasting we crave.

"In the tradition of the times, a guest was anointed with aromatic oils (verse 5) and the drinking cup was continuously filled to overflowing. That word picture is one of contentment and peace. The psalmist is so filled with the joyous presence of God that he knows that all the days ahead shall be as idyllic as this one." —David G. Mobberley

Provide bottles or cups of water for participants. Ask them to sip water after each recitation to follow, and encourage them to concentrate on the refreshing nature of the water. Parallel this illustration with a comment about the spiritual refreshing we receive from our Shepherd. Recite both confessions: Psalm 23 and the Apostles' Creed. Spend the next few minutes praying one-sentence prayers aloud.



## SAVOR

I declared the Apostles' Creed in my early years of church attendance. The words meant little to me. We rushed through the memorized repetition, but I wasn't sure of those beliefs or the people beside me, who would have driven the pastor out of town if he

failed to include their sacred creed on Sunday. As Methodists, the members had their method. Our congregation seemed to love the service order and declaring the creed more than we loved the Truth it described.

So I gave it up. Not for Lent, but for my own rebellion, I stopped quoting the Creed.

Now, after years of pastoring and writing, I realize I've missed much by failing to recite this ancient confession. What felt boring in the past now reminds me of the depth of my beliefs. What I hardly understood as a child now alerts me that I am still a child—a child of God living in a large family that spans many places and many centuries. By hoping to avoid habitual repetition with little personal meaning, I had missed reminding myself of our faith. I had missed the mingling with martyrs, risk-takers, rich and poor sinners saved by grace. I had missed stating my beliefs with them—like a holy song sung in harmony through time and personal experience. I needed to sit beside those my eyes could not see. So I've returned to the confession. I've returned to stating, declaring, studying, and reviewing the Creed.

These days, I keep the Creed in my pocket PC. I can repeat the words in a group gathering; I can read the words slowly as I board a plane; I can add a little rhythm in my attempt at singing the Creed while in the shower; I can attend a congregation where the truths are recited in a language I don't know; I can visit another country and listen as they confess our common declaration. By doing so, the "I" becomes a "we," the "me" becomes an "us." Together we believe. Together in Christ. Through time and miles and styles and customs, together in Christ, we believe.

Take time to discuss the story. **Ask:**

- Does it inspire you to know that as we repeat confessions like the Apostles' Creed, we unite with believers throughout time and the world? Explain your response.

- Does studying the Apostles' Creed bother you? If so, why?
- How might it benefit you to become more knowledgeable about and familiar with our tradition's creeds?

## EXPERIENCE

“When I recite the Apostles' Creed I am declaring myself part of that countless multitude throughout the centuries who have found their identity in the same gospels and the same community of believers of which I am now a part—a multitude that includes martyrs, saints, missionaries, and great theologians, but where in the final analysis all are nothing but redeemed sinners, just as I am.”

—Justo L. Gonzalez

## Look into it

- Marcia Ford, *Traditions of the Ancients: Vintage Faith Practices for the 21st Century*
- Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Apostles' Creed for Today*
- W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*
- [mb-soft.com/believe/txc/apostles.htm](http://mb-soft.com/believe/txc/apostles.htm)
- Alister E. McGrath, *I Believe: Exploring the Apostles' Creed*
- [www.christianodyssey.com/history/apostles.htm](http://www.christianodyssey.com/history/apostles.htm)
- [www.crcna.org/pages/apostles\\_creed.cfm](http://www.crcna.org/pages/apostles_creed.cfm)

## WALK

As we study the Apostles' Creed and Psalm 23, we may forget how blessed we are to be able to read. Not everyone has that ability, though, so to walk out our beliefs this week, let's find ways to help those who cannot read:

- Volunteer at the local library. You may be surprised by how much help it needs.
- Ask local schools about how you can help tutor students who struggle with reading.
- Find out if your community has an adult literacy program for which you could volunteer.
- Large numbers of people do not know English. Help them learn by offering your time and abilities with local groups that are teaching English.
- Visit an elderly care center and read to the residents.

## This week's spiritual discipline is sacred reading:

This week's lesson introduces us to a creed often repeated without being read, but the spiritual discipline of sacred reading can enhance understanding and experience of our topic over the next 13 weeks. First, find a quiet place. Slowly read a short, familiar passage of Scripture several times. Focus your mind on one verse or phrase from the Scripture for a few minutes. Pray it back to God, allowing the words to interact with anything that is on your mind or going on in your life. Concentrate as you give God time to speak to you. This week practice sacred reading with Psalm 23 and the Apostles' Creed.

Conclude the group time by quoting Psalm 23. After going through it once, go through it again and have participants speak aloud their personal confessions about who God is to them. For example, in addition to the Lord's being our Shepherd, some may call him Father, Friend, King, Savior, Mentor, etc. Pause again when you read the other phrases of the Psalm, giving the students an opportunity to make it personal again. Conclude by stating these words together: “We believe.”

## Endnote

1. Alister E McGrath, *I Believe, Exploring the Apostle's Creed*, InterVarsity Press, 1998, pp. 9-13.