



# THE FAITH WE SHARE

## A STUDY OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

### Week One: "I Believe..."

#### **Hebrews 11:1-16**

*Note to Leaders: You will need a copy of the Apostles' Creed accessible for every person each week. Stop by Campus Ministries for printed bookmarks, or print the handout of the Creed posted to the Calvin website and bring it each week.*

**Opening Question:** Spend a few minutes on introductions (name, major, etc..) and outline the basic structure for Bible study this semester (1 hour studies, different ways to engage the Word, open to everyone!!). Today we will talk about the word "believe." What is one thing outside your life of faith that you really believe? (can be serious or light!!)

#### **SETTING THE STAGE**

Our study over the next 8-weeks will be guided by the Apostles' Creed. "Wait!"- you might be saying. "I thought I was in a Bible study, not a church history group!!" You are right that the Apostles' Creed is not in Scripture. But what the Creed does- in a very brief but brilliant way- is point us to some of the most foundational and important truths about God as revealed in Scripture. And more than almost any other faith document in history, the Apostles' Creed helps believers across hundreds of centuries, geographical regions, languages, and cultures to look together at God's word and say, in unison, "Yes! These are the things that really hold. These are the truths that define the core of who God is and who we are." In this way, the Apostles' Creed is like a giant banquet table, where every person who has followed God throughout history and every person who is seeking to follow God today pulls up a chair. Where we get to gaze at the God of the Trinity and marvel at what He has done and is doing. And where we get to say together- in all our beautiful diversity and unity- "We believe..."

#### **CONTEXT**

Spend a few minutes reading the **Apostles' Creed** together. Then talk through the questions below:

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.

#### **Does anything stand out, surprise, or draw your curiosity in the Creed?**

#### **What do you notice about the structure of the Creed?**

The Creed is structured around the Trinity (the three persons of God). We can expect to learn important characteristics about each aspect of God through the guidance of the Creed. Each section is rooted by the same words- "I believe..."

#### **This is called the Apostles' Creed. Did the Apostles' write it?**

The Creed was not written by the Apostles (the early disciples of Jesus who wrote parts of the New Testament and are highlighted in the gospels), but it is called the Apostles' Creed because it is based on their biblical writings and witness as outlined in the New Testament.

#### **How long has this Creed been around?**

The Creed was close to its current form already in the **mid-300's** (yes- that is a VERY long time ago!!) The very last item was added around **700 A.D.** (fun fact- this last edition was the line "he descended into hell" which caused quite a bit of controversy in its day!!)

## **Why was the Creed developed in the first place?**

The early church took very seriously Jesus' call to "go make disciples of all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). But as the church grew and spread, it found that it needed common language and a simple way to instruct people as they began to explore a life of faith. The Apostles' Creed was developed first as a **teaching** tool for new believers, but also became a way to **unify believers**, to give them language for **worship**, to help **guard against false teaching**, and to help guide people to a **faithful reading of Scripture**.

### **CONTENT**

The creed starts with 2 incredibly important words- "I believe..." We are going to use a passage from Hebrews to explore this idea of belief. The word used in the passage is "faith", which is the same Greek word that translates to "believe". Read **Hebrews 11: 1-16**. Then talk through the following questions:

1. Most of this passage describes the faith of well-known people from the Old Testament. But verses 1-3 have a different subject. Who has faith in these verses? About what? What is the essence of faith? Why are these verses important for all the stories that follow? Why might they be important for our own "I believe..." beginnings?
2. In what ways does the author of Hebrews have us/the characters looking backwards? In what ways does he have us/the characters looking forward? What does this backward and forward looking have to do with faith and belief?
3. Vs 13 says, "All these people... did not receive the things promised." What does this mean? In what ways do we have a different story than them? In what ways might we share this story of waiting "for things promised"?

### **APPLICATION**

**How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion. Choose one or several.**

- Imagine someone asks you to describe the core of who you are in 4-5 short sentences. Think of what you would say and share it with the group. How does this exercise help you understand what the writers of the Creed chose to include? What does it teach you about the limits of the Creed?
- The story of Abraham and Sarah shows that belief involves looking backwards at God's work and forward at God's promises. These two trusted God in the unknown because their interactions *in the past* led them to "consider Him faithful who had made the promise." But Abraham also had his eyes gazing *way into the future*, towards "a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."
  - Think about this backward and forward looking in your own life. What is one way you have experienced God's faithfulness in a specific season or situation **in your past**? What is one promise or **future hope** of God that matters to you right now? Or what is something currently outside your vision that you want to claim God's faithfulness over?
- How is faith/belief different than knowledge?

### **PRAYER**

**Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below**

- Use words/images/themes from the overview to guide your prayer.
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer:

*Father, Son, and Spirit-*

*When we say, "We believe..." we know that we are taking a risk. Because belief means placing our lives in your hands. Stepping off the ledge from what we think we know, think we see, think we control, into the unknown landscape of faith, where we hear the absurd invitation to be "certain of what we do not see." But none of this seems so absurd when we remember again that the hands receiving us are the same hands that formed everything out of nothing. The same hands that have faithfully held generations of believers and carried them through their own "unseen things" to steady ground. The same hands that were wounded to seal our belief. The same hands that are preparing that "future city" where we will all join around the same table and finally know we are home. This is why even today, we come together in our own small corners of the world and have the courage to say- alongside generations of faithful ones who went before us- "We believe." God, sustain and strengthen us in that belief.*

*We pray this in the name of Christ- Amen*

