

## Welcome to BNEXT

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. As we study Scripture, we see an unfolding revelation of who God is, the nature of Jesus, and how we can become stronger in our walk with Christ. It is important that we study Scripture for ourselves — allowing the Holy Spirit to enlighten us (Acts 17:11).

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the top-right side of the masthead of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you to dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

We have also included a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT study, I hope you will consider leading others through this material — whether it is a group of friends, your church, or as a ministry outreach. (See the Leader's Guide at the end of this study for more information.)

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Handwritten signature of William P. Campbell in blue ink.

**William P. Campbell**

Founder & President | Scripture Awakening

## BNEXT Participant's Guide

Thank you for choosing BNEXT Bible study curriculum. To help you get the most out of your study, please take a few minutes to read this information before you begin. Studying the Bible is much like going on a journey — it takes us to new places in our understanding and our walk with God. The Word of God is transformative — it's living and active, can build up our faith, and call us to move beyond where we are.

Using this curriculum, you may journey alone, or travel with others in a small group, or even engage as an entire congregation (with small groups as part of the program). Groups gather once a week to review what was read, to share answers to discussion questions, and to deepen their understanding.

## About This Study

This electronic version of the Participant's Guide contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and insert a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

## Things to Know

These studies are designed to be used in many different settings— individuals, congregations (separating into small groups), Sunday school classes, prison ministries, military, business groups— virtually anywhere a small group can be formed. Experience has shown that participants find the small group experience to be greatly beneficial. The input and interaction with others will broaden your perspective and stimulate your thinking about Scripture.

The lessons are designed to be done throughout the week. Each lesson contains a few pages of commentary, followed by study questions. There are three types of questions: Devotion (Personal Questions), Discussion (Small Group), and Digging Deeper (Further Study). While participants may use any Bible translation they prefer, all of the Biblical quotations in BNEXT studies are from the New International Version (NIV).

Plan your daily reading. The Scripture readings are located on the right side of the masthead of each lesson. Some lessons may cover a few chapters of a book (such as Genesis 1-11 in the series, *In the Beginning*). Longer readings may be broken down into more manageable daily readings, which may take some thoughtful planning. Some readings are as short as a few verses and will not present any difficulties. Some topical studies do not have assigned Scripture readings.

If you are meeting in a small group, be sure to first read and complete the lesson before the gathering. Once a week, your group will meet to spend time (about an hour) discussing the lesson and sharing personal insights.

More of our resources and study aids can be found at [ScriptureAwakening.com](http://ScriptureAwakening.com). Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments at [info@scriptureawakening.com](mailto:info@scriptureawakening.com).



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

## The Apostles' Creed

### Introduction

The Apostles' Creed is known as a confession of faith. In other words, it is a public declaration of what the Church believes proclaimed before God and all the world.

Since its earliest days, the Christian Church has been a confessional church. As the Church spread throughout the Roman Empire, local congregations developed their own "rules of faith." These were used at the time of baptism to instruct new Christians in the basics of the faith and to combat heresy. The Apostles' Creed was developed to combat heresies (such as Gnosticism and Arianism) which denied the deity and humanity of Jesus. It has some roots in shorter Old Roman Creed (3rd century or earlier), a baptismal creed that developed during the Church's struggle against Arianism.

There is a legend that The Apostles' Creed was written by the twelve Apostles. However, the name is derived from its core teachings, which can be traced back to the apostolic period (AD 33-90, with additions in the sixth and seventh centuries). It is brief, easily memorized, and has been widely accepted by both Protestants and Roman Catholics.

### God The Father

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." The primary purpose of the creed is to defend the person and work of Christ. It begins, however, as should any statement of Christian doctrine, with the person of God the Father. "God is Spirit..." Jesus tells us in John 4:24, and has no gender. Why, then do we usually refer to God in masculine terms? Simply because most of what we know of God is limited to what is revealed in Scripture. While the Bible shows evidence of God's maternal qualities, primarily in some of the Psalms, the overall picture is that of God the Father. Jesus addresses Him as, "My Father" and because of Jesus' sacrifice for us, we have the same privilege (Galatians 4:4-6). Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2 when we pray to say, "Our Father..."

### Almighty

He is also God Almighty (*Adonai*). The root word in Hebrew means "to judge" or "to rule." This is one of the many names of God revealed in Scripture and actually predates *Yahweh* (I Am). The term *Yahweh* was considered so holy that it was forbidden to say or even to write it. *Adonai* was often written in its place. The word conveys the idea of God as the Almighty Ruler of everything that is. Before we can know Him as the God of grace and mercy, we must first know Him as the sovereign Lord of the universe. He is all-knowing and all-powerful; He is autonomous; He is self-existent; and He is holy and righteous.

What would be our plight if God were not Almighty? We would have no basis for believing that God answers our prayers. We could have no confidence that God provides salvation for those who call on him. We would have no hope for the future. For God not to be above all and over all suggests that He is, in fact, not God at all. So then, how should we respond to the realization

In the beginning God  
created the heavens and  
the earth.

Genesis 1:1

that God is Almighty? We should live in the joyous assurance that God is for us and that with God “all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

A young boy tried to move his dresser to retrieve a favorite toy. His friend taunted, “You’ll never move that thing.” “Sure I will,” replied the boy with confidence. “Oh, yeah,” chided his buddy, “How?”

“I’ll just call my father,” responded the boy. “With his help it’ll be a cinch.”

Maker of Heaven and Earth

The controversy over how the earth came into existence has been debated for generations and will probably continue until the end of time. The Apostles’ Creed succinctly states that Christians believe God is the Maker of heaven and earth. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe because He is the Creator of all that is (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-3).

Sir Isaac Newton once made a working model of our solar system. There was a large golden ball representing the sun and revolving around the sun were the various planets—very intricately displayed.

A friend, who did not believe in the Biblical account of creation, was visiting Newton and was overwhelmed by this magnificent model.

“Sir Isaac, this is exquisite! Who made it?”

Without even looking up, Newton replied, “Nobody.”

“Nobody?” the friend replied.

“That’s right!” Newton responded. “These bolts and balls and gears—all just happened to come together in my laboratory, and aligned themselves up perfectly, and here we have a perfect model.”

The skeptic got the message!

The Bible is not intended to be a scientific or historical document.

It does, however, contain a historical record of God’s people, and statements about the nature of God’s creation (science). Theology is a science, indeed the king of the sciences, although in the last century it has fallen on hard times. We live in an ordered universe. All matter in the universe is subject to physical laws, laws that we call the laws of physics or the laws of science.

Scientists generally agree that the universe has a beginning and will someday have an end. How it began and how it will end are matters of dispute. But for it to have a beginning, something or someone had to exist before it.

Christians believe in a **Someone**, an eternal Being who created all that is not eternal. That Be-

God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.

Genesis 1:31a

ing is a person with the characteristics of personhood (logic, intelligence). Because a person of logic and intelligence created the universe, and because it runs by His laws, it can therefore be studied and to a great extent understood. It is no surprise that some of the greatest scientists of the past have also been solidly grounded Christians (Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal). The purpose of this lesson is not to expound on the Biblical doctrine of creation, but to focus on the nature of God. He is the creator and maker of heaven and earth.

Christians also believe that God, who created the universe and established the laws by which it runs, can, if He chooses, override those laws. When He does so, we call that a miracle. Miracles are rare and occur for a specific purpose. Many miracles are documented and recorded in Scripture. For this reason, theologians define us, along with the writers of the Apostles' Creed, as Theists.

Deists, on the other hand, will admit that God created the universe and established the laws by which it runs, but they believe that God left the universe alone to function by those laws. Deists also deny the possibility of miracles occurring.

### Final Thoughts

The Apostles' Creed begins with the words, "I believe." We should not meaninglessly recite the words of the Creed with the thought that there is any intrinsic merit to be gained in doing so. The Apostles' Creed is a statement of fact. The words "I believe," followed by a series of declarative phrases, is exactly what we believe.

Unfortunately far too many people simply repeat the words by rote without seriously thinking about what it is they are affirming. When you stand up in church and repeat the words of the Creed, you are standing before God and your fellow Christians and stating that you DO believe what it says. Can you honestly say that you believe everything that is contained in this statement of faith? Do you live according to the certainty that God is The Almighty? Think seriously next time as you recite the Apostles' Creed.

### Spending Time With God

This study series, "Know What You Believe," is based on the Apostles' Creed. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. The term "Father" is found over 600 times in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the term "Father" is rarely used in referring to God. In the New Testament, it is used primarily as a personal noun for God. Think for a minute and record why this change might have occurred through time, in God's providence.

2. Read the following Scripture texts and next to each, answer with a sentence or phrase this question: What does this text teach me about God as my Father and how I should relate to Him?

a. Matthew 7:11

b. Matthew 18:10-14

c. Matthew 24:36

### Discussion (Small Group Study)

3. From the above personal study questions or commentary reading, what insights were especially encouraging or challenging to you?

4. How might you encourage someone to trust their heavenly Father if their earthly father had been abusive or irresponsible?



5. The Apostles' Creed describes God as "Maker of heaven and earth." Read out loud the following Scriptures and discuss the involvement of each person of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in the creation of the world. a. Hebrews 11:3

7. Read the following and discuss the reasons we can praise God for His creation and worship Him as Creator.

a. Acts 17:24-31

b. Colossians 1:15-16

b. Romans 1:19-20

c. Genesis 1:1-2

c. 2 Corinthians 4:6

6. Suppose someone remarked, "Wow, look at that beautiful sunset. Didn't Mother Nature do a good job?" How would you respond?

d. Does this somehow change your view of God?



SERIES

KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE | THE APOSTLES' CREED

LESSON 1

The Almighty God

### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

8. Refer to question 3. With the help of a concordance, see if you can locate other references in the New Testament where God is referred to as Father. Record your insights here. (Be sure to write down the references.) Pray about this new insight and ask God to help you to trust Him more as your heavenly Father.

9. The Apostles' Creed reminds us that we believe in the Father "Almighty.

a." What comes to your mind when you hear the term "Almighty"?

b. Discuss the implications of the word "Almighty" as it relates to God.

10. Read the following Scriptures and discuss the implications that God, truly, is Almighty.

a. Psalm 62:11-12

b. Matthew 19:26

c. 1 Samuel 14:6

#### Scripture for Meditation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1



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

## The Apostles' Creed

### Introduction

The primary purpose of the Apostles' Creed is to affirm the deity and humanity of Christ. The main body of the Creed is about Him. The person and purpose of Christ are essential truths of the Christian faith. Those who change what the Scriptures teach about Christ promote a false Christianity, devoid of true salvation.

In order to recognize counterfeit money, Canadian banks at one time required their employees to study genuine currency exclusively for several months. At the end of the training, when the bank clerks were allowed to handle both genuine and counterfeit money, they recognized the counterfeit money immediately. The same is true with believers. We need to primarily study the real, the genuine Christ, then false teachings about Him will be easy to recognize. We need to focus on Jesus and know beyond a shadow of a doubt who He is and who He said he was.

### Jesus Christ

The name *Jesus* is the Greek name for Joshua which means “God is Savior.” This was Jesus’ proper name, which identified Him as Mary’s son, a carpenter from Nazareth. We say the words “Jesus Christ” so often that it seems as though Christ is His last name. Christ is not His last name. *Christ* means “anointed one.”

Christ is the title that acknowledges the fact that Jesus fulfilled three ministries for which special people were anointed—that of prophet, priest, and king.

He is our **PROPHET**...calling us to repentance

He is our **PRIEST**...making atonement for our sins

He is our **KING**...our protector and guide

The long awaited Christ was the one sent by God to rescue His chosen people from their oppression. The Jews were looking for (and still are) a Messiah who would immediately restore glory to the nation of Israel. Our Lord’s own disciples were not immune to this misconception even though the Old Testament prophets clearly stated that such was not to be the case (Hosea 1:7; Isaiah 53). The Creed, however, was not developed primarily to counter Jewish misconceptions about the Messiah, but to counter the teaching of those who professed to be Christian while denying the deity and humanity of Christ.

### God’s Only Son

Jesus was not just a God-inspired man. He was not just a great prophet. J. I. Packer states, “Jesus was and remains, God’s only Son, as truly and fully God as his Father is.” Jesus referred to Himself not as a son but the Son (Matthew 11:27). Throughout history people have argued against the notion that Jesus is the unique and divine Son of God. From the days of the early Church through the centuries in which the Apostles’ Creed was developed and revised and to this very

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:1

day, many deny the deity of Christ. Tragically, some of these people believe they are Christians.

St. Augustine said, "If you believe what you like about the gospel and reject what you don't like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself."

Most of the cults today deny the deity of Christ. Their followers tell you they believe Jesus is the Son of God but deny that He is God the Son. To come to that conclusion one would need to remove major portions from the Bible. In the first chapter of Hebrews, for example, we read, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word..." (Hebrews 1:1-3a). This points to the completeness of God's revelation in the person of His Son and to the Son's work in creation. There can be no doubt—Jesus the Son of God, is God the Son.

### Our Lord

The Greek word for *Lord* suggests "sovereign" or "king." It has often been stated, "Jesus Christ is either Lord of all or He is not Lord at all." As Christians we confess that Jesus is our Savior but is He also our Lord? In the early Church, for a person to acknowledge their allegiance to Jesus Christ, they sometimes had to stand before opposing government officials and declare, "Jesus is Lord." By doing so many forfeited their lives. This one statement had tremendous consequences. This person was declaring that Jesus was not just their Lord but He was also Lord of the government and Lord of the universe. In other words, Jesus was Lord of ALL.

Protestants believe that salvation comes by faith. However, it is not faith, in and of itself, that saves us. It is Jesus Christ, the object of our faith, that brings salvation. If Christ were merely human even a superior human, we could not be redeemed by our faith in Him. Jesus spoke of Himself, not just as teacher, an example and a leader but most importantly as our Savior and Lord. He presented Himself not only as an example of faith, but also as the object of faith—the way to heaven and king over all (John 14:6).

Paul and James both refer to themselves as "a servant (slave) of Christ" (Romans 1:1; James 1:1). Our western culture is uncomfortable with the concept of servitude—in fact, we don't even like the concept of monarchy. But the kingdom of God is not a democracy, it is a monarchy and Jesus reigns. He is our king, and He is our owner. As such, He has delivered us from a cruel taskmaster (sin) that will only destroy us. What a joy and privilege to remember that while He has bought us, He has also adopted us and made us heirs with Him of His kingdom (Romans 8:15-17)!

If you were in a church at the end of the service, and the pastor gave each individual an opportunity to stand and declare his/her allegiance, could or would you stand and declare that, "Jesus is Lord"? Whether we say it or not, He is! The next time you repeat the Apostles' Creed think about these words, "...and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord."



Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

John 14:9a

### Final Thoughts

There are those who will tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Jews of Jesus’ day knew exactly what He was claiming. This is why they wanted to kill Him. He went to the cross under accusation of blasphemy— He said that He was God. If He is not God, they were justified in what they did; in fact under Jewish law they could do no less. If He is not God, then for us to worship Him is just as blasphemous as was His claim. We worship Him, however, as Jesus Christ our Lord. We have good reason to do so. There is substantial reason to believe Jesus is who He claimed to be. The next lesson will deal with some of these reasons as presented in the Creed.

Let us learn to tell difference between the counterfeits and the real thing by studying the real thing.

### Spending Time With God

This five-week study titled, “Know What You Believe,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



### Devotion – (Personal Study)

1. The Apostles' Creed is a concise statement of our core beliefs. See James 2:19. Is it enough to believe the right doctrines about God without surrendering one's life to God? Why or why not?

2. What are some of the great benefits of personal faith and trust in God according to the following verses?

a. Romans 10:9-10

b. Matthew 9:22

c. 1 John 5:15

d. Hebrews 11:1-2

Pray for God to help you grow stronger in your knowledge of who He is and in your level of trust in Him.

### Discussion – (Small Group Study)

3. What insights did you draw from the personal study questions or commentary reading? Which were especially encouraging or challenging to you?

4. In the Apostles' Creed, we affirm belief in Jesus Christ. Not only is He the divine Christ but He also is the human Jesus.

a. As a group, read Hebrews 4:15. How would you respond to someone who told you, "Jesus couldn't have been tempted as we are, for He had a divine nature and could not sin."?



b. From Hebrews 4:16, why should we be especially grateful that Jesus has God's divine nature?

6. In the Apostles' Creed, we state belief in "Jesus Christ, His only Son." We too are called sons and daughters of God in 2 Corinthians 6:18. Is our status as God's children different from that of Christ? Explain.

c. Complete this sentence: "I could more fully appropriate the promise of Hebrews 4:16 in my life by..."

7. List your blessings as a child of God from the following passages:

a. Romans 8:15-18

d. In what way do you especially need God's mercy or grace today? (Share with the group if you are comfortable doing so.)

b. Ephesians 1:5-14

5. Read Matthew 4:1-11. Do you agree with the following statement: "Jesus faced temptations we will never face or understand because He was the Christ, God's Divine Son." Why or why not?

c. Hebrews 12:5-13



SERIES

KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE | THE APOSTLES' CREED

LESSON 2

Jesus Christ our Lord

d. 1 John 3:1-3

9. What do you think this statement means: "I am not truly free until I am God's committed servant?"

e. others:

10. Are you completely submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Pray for God's help to enable you to absolutely surrender to His Lordship. Write out a prayer of commitment if you are willing for Him to have complete authority over your life.

Take time to pray, thanking God for his goodness and asking for the ability to recognize more fully the benefits and responsibilities that are yours as a child of God.

### Digging Deeper - (Further Study)

8. In the Apostles' Creed we proclaim our belief in "Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord." What do we mean when we call Christ "Lord?" What are the implications of this title? (If helpful, look up the following scriptures: John 6:68; 13:13-14; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:9-11.)

### Scripture for Meditation

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9 -11



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

## The Apostles' Creed

### Introduction

Christians believe that Jesus is fully God, co-eternal with the Father. When He came to earth as a man (the incarnation), He did not give up His deity, but also took on a human nature. The truth of the incarnation is astonishing. We accept it on faith but not blind faith. Our faith is based on proclamations about Christ that give strong evidence that our faith is true. If these proclamations are not true, Christianity is a false religion and we are without hope. Let us consider some of these proclamations.

### Conceived and Born

The virgin birth boggles the mind. Many who profess to be Christians teach that such an occurrence is impossible. Humanly speaking, it is. Yet impossible as the virgin birth may seem, this is an essential tenet of the Christian faith. Because of the Fall (as we read in Genesis), all who are descended from Adam inherit his sin and his sin nature. A sinful man could not atone (cleanse, pardon) for our sins because he would have to find atonement for his own sins. Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 that Immanuel (God with us) would be conceived and born of a virgin. The virgin birth means that Jesus is not descended from Adam and, therefore, did not inherit his sin.

Protestants sometimes overreact to the adulation given Mary by Roman Catholics and, as a result, fail to give her proper respect. She, of all the women of the earth, was chosen by the Father to bear His Son. Her election as the mother of our Savior does not imply that she had any more merit than any other person, but it did call her to a life of pain and trials. Consider what this choice meant for her. She bore a child out of wedlock—a great scandal in that day. When near to giving birth, Mary was compelled to make an arduous journey to Bethlehem. There she gave birth to the Son of God, not in a clean and comfortable house, but in a filthy stable. Later while Jesus was still an infant, the family was forced to flee to Egypt. They lived in poverty and exile. Many scholars believe Joseph died at a young age, leaving Mary to raise the family on her own. During His lifetime, Jesus' siblings did not believe in or recognize His deity. We can only imagine the difficulties this may have brought into the life of the family. It is hard to realize the heartbreak Mary endured as she watched her Son die on a cross! We can echo the words of her relative Elizabeth, "Blessed are you among women..." (Luke 1:42).

### Suffered, Crucified, Dead, and Buried

Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Pilate is perhaps one of the most enigmatic people in history. Was he a villain or was he caught in events he did not understand and could not control? Through the annals of history, his cruelty is documented, but he was a man of his time no better, no worse than most other government officials. With the trial of Jesus, he was clearly in over his head. His relationship with the Jews was troubled and he hated them, but he also feared they would complain of his cruelty to Rome. He could find no fault with Jesus, yet for fear of the Jews, he could not summon up the courage to release Him. Pilate allowed the soldiers to beat Jesus beyond the normal allowance of prisoners. Turning a deaf ear to his wife's protests and

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When He had said this, He breathed his last.

Luke 23:46

despite his own misgivings, he condemned Jesus to be crucified. It is interesting to note that our Savior's manner and dignity seemed to impress the Roman governor, for Mark's gospel tells us that Pilate "was amazed" at Jesus' silence (Mark 15:1-5).

There are those who dispute the Biblical accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection. Some state that He never really died on the cross but merely passed out, recovered in the tomb, and escaped. Belief in such fantasy requires more faith than belief in the truth.

For:

- Jesus endured beatings.
- Spikes were driven through his hands and feet.
- He hung for six hours on a Roman cross.
- A spear was thrust into His side to confirm that he was indeed dead.
- His body was placed in a tomb that was covered with a heavy stone and sealed.
- Roman guards were posted at the tomb. If He were alive, escape would have been impossible.

The phrase "He descended into hell" is probably the most controversial part of the Creed. It was not found in the earliest Greek versions but appeared in the Latin versions in AD 340. The Latin term *inferno* generally referred to "the depths" or the "lower parts" (Ephesians 4:9; 1 Peter 3:18-19). It could be translated "Hades" or "Sheol," generally the waiting place of the dead. This is likely what the term hell meant when originally inserted in the creed. It was used to assert that Jesus truly died and rose. Since the seventeenth century, however, the English word hell has come to mean the place of final retribution for the wicked. Nowhere does Scripture support that Jesus was punished by the devil, or other speculations that people sometimes concoct related to His death. In the words of J. I. Packer, "What the Creed means, however, is that... he [Jesus] really died, and that it was from a genuine death, not a simulated one, that he rose."

### **He Rose and Ascended**

When the disciples returned to Jesus' grave after the feast of the Passover (on the third day), they found the stone rolled away and an empty tomb. The resurrection of Jesus is better documented than is the battle of Waterloo, yet, it must be continually defended. God has, in His wisdom, provided us with ample evidence. What happened at His grave that Sunday morning so terrified the Roman guards that they "...became like dead men"(Matthew 28:4). They subsequently had to be bribed to keep silent about what they had witnessed (Matthew 28:11-15). Jesus was resurrected bodily. This was no ghost. This was no apparition. Paul tells us that He was seen by over 500 people. He has been changing lives ever since. The truth is verified by evidence. It takes a lot of words and scheming to perpetuate a lie—the TRUTH JUST IS HE IS RISEN!



When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had driven seven demons.

Mark 16:9

Forty days after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus ascended and was “exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:33). Not even the angels were allowed to sit in this place of honor (Hebrews 1:13). He is ever there making intercession for us. His redemptive work on earth was finished but His commission continues (Matthew 28:18-19).

Jesus came the first time as Savior. When he returns, He will come as Judge. Many people are uncomfortable with this aspect of the Creed. While, as Christians, we will be spared the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), we will still have to stand before Him and account for our lives. The good news is that He is not only our judge but also our advocate.

### Summary

“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see  
Hail the Incarnate Diety,  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus our Emanuel!”

How often have we sung these words from *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing* at Christmas without seriously thinking about their meaning? God became human! To support the circumstances surrounding the birth, life, ministry, and death of Jesus we have eyewitness accounts that would stand up in any court of law. We have the historical records of both the Jews and the Romans. Knowledge of the facts does not constitute saving faith, yet, knowledge enriches our faith.

### Spending Time with God

This five-week study titled, “Know What You Believe,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the

questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him.

Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



SERIES

KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE | THE APOSTLES' CREED

LESSON 3

A Life and Death Situation

### Devotion – (Personal Study)

1. After reading the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight that was especially meaningful to you.

3. In light of your answers above and considering the power of God, is it illogical to think that God's Spirit could conceive a human being? Why do you think the virgin birth was important in the plan of God?

2. The Apostles' Creed describes Jesus as one "conceived by the Holy Spirit." Read the following verses and note what was conceived or brought into being by the Holy Spirit of God.

4. Look up the following and give at least two reasons that God's Son had to become human.

Hebrews 2:14-18, Hebrews 9:22, Acts 20:28

a. Genesis 1:2

5. Review all of your above answers and write down one or two questions that you have about the incarnation or the virgin birth. Take a moment to pray, asking that God continue to teach you and help you grow in understanding. Consider bringing your questions to others for discussion.

b. John 3:5-8



SERIES

KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE | THE APOSTLES' CREED

LESSON 3

A Life and Death Situation

### Discussion – (Small Group Study)

6. What insights did you draw from the personal study questions or commentary reading which were especially encouraging or challenging for you?

7. In the Apostles' Creed we read that Jesus "suffered...was crucified, dead and buried." He not only knew the trials of life but He met death in its cruelest form. What is your greatest fear in life or death?

8. When Jesus suffered before His final crucifixion, He was mocked, tortured, and made to experience indescribable pain. Read Hebrews 12:2-3, as well as the broader context of those verses. Tell of a time when Jesus' example of suffering has helped you personally in your own trials and tribulations.

9. Jesus "rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven." Why do you think Christ ascended and didn't simply choose to depart by vanishing from the midst of the disciples?

10. Will we ascend? Will all believers ascend? What do you believe we will experience when 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 comes to pass?

11. If all the creeds of the Church were discarded and we were left with no records of the historic councils regarding the work and person of Jesus Christ, would we need to write new creeds again? Do you think creeds are a thing of the past? Explain.



SERIES

KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE | THE APOSTLES' CREED

LESSON 3

A Life and Death Situation

### Digging Deeper – (Further Study)

12. While we cannot understand all that Christ endured when He died for us, we can be assured that we are saved from suffering of hell if we entrust our lives to Him. Read the following passages and describe hell: Matthew 13:40-43; Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 20:15.

13. What cautions are given to us about hell (Matthew 5:29-30; 10:28)?

14. How can we be sure we are saved from hell (John 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:4-10; 1 Peter 2:24)? Take a moment to express your praise to God for his mercy and goodness.

15. Jesus sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. The right hand is a position of privilege, authority and power. Read Ephesians 1:17-23.

a. Describe the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:19-21).

b. Why is Jesus there now (Ephesians 1:22-23)?

c. What does Paul pray for the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:17-18)? Take time to pray the same for yourself and others.

#### Scripture for Meditation

Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Romans 8:34b



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

## The Apostles' Creed

### Introduction

The Christian faith is founded on the Bible. Scripture is the source of our knowledge about God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the world God created, and our relationship to Him. Why, then, are we studying an ancient creed? Because creeds bring together the teachings of Scripture in such a way that we can read them, understand them, and say, “This is what I believe.”

Most creeds are ancient, dating back to the early days of the Church. Generally, they have remained the same from century to century, from church to church. However, adjustments are sometimes made to accommodate the evolution of languages. Perhaps some of us recall affirming, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.” Over the past two generations the word “ghost” has taken on a scary presence. Now, we say “Spirit,” for we need never fear Him nor view Him as something scary. He is holy, set apart for our salvation, protection, comfort, and help. This lesson will help us understand more about the Holy Spirit and His role in our lives.

### The Holy Spirit

The word *spirit* in the Bible can literally mean “breath” or “wind.” Jesus described the new life offered by God’s Spirit when he spoke to Nicodemus: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

The wind is an unseen force, gently rustling the grass in a meadow or violently ripping trees from the ground. Jesus emphasized that, though we cannot see the Holy Spirit, He is very real. He is present. He is powerful. We tend to believe in things we can see or touch, but Jesus taught that the unseen spiritual world is eternal, unchanging, and reliable. The Holy Spirit is God’s presence with us daily. God the Father sent the Son for our salvation and the Spirit to make that salvation a reality in our everyday lives. The word *holy* means “set apart” or “distinct.” The Holy Spirit is God Himself. He is of the same substance with the Father and Son. His love is perfect. He is all knowing. He is never changing. He is without sin or error. We can trust Him as no other.

The Nicene Creed deals more extensively with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit than does the Apostles’ Creed. It states, “And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.” Here we learn that the Holy Spirit is both a person and God.

From its inception, the Church has recognized the Holy Spirit as a unique personage, part of the eternal godhead. While the word “Trinity” does not appear in Scripture, the concept of the triune God is taught throughout. The Apostles’ Creed helps us to understand the Trinity—one God, revealing Himself in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And I will ask the Father,  
and He will give you  
another Counselor to be  
with you forever - the  
Spirit of truth.

John 14:16-17a

### **A Person**

The Greek word for Spirit is *pneuma* which is feminine. Why then, do we refer to the Spirit as “He”? We do not mean to imply “He” has gender for He is Spirit. We take our lead from Jesus, in John 14, 15, and 16, where he spoke of the Spirit as “He.” The Bible never refers to the Holy Spirit as “it.”

Scripture teaches us that the Holy Spirit has intellect, emotions, and will.

- He speaks: Acts 13:2; Revelation 2:7.
- He intercedes: Romans 8:26.
- He testifies: John 15:26.
- He seals: Ephesians 1:13.
- He enlightens: Ephesians 1:18.
- He gives gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.
- He leads: Acts 8:29; Romans 8:14.
- He commands: Acts 16:6-7.
- He guides: John 16:13.
- He appoints: Acts 20:28.
- He can be lied to: Acts 5:3-4.
- He can be insulted: Hebrews 10:29.
- He can be blasphemed: Matthew 12:31-32.
- He can be grieved: Ephesians 4:30.

All of the above describe the characteristics of personhood not those of an impersonal force. It is easy to think of Jesus as a person because He became human and walked among us. We can relate to God the Father as a person because the Bible describes Him in human terms. The Holy Spirit is perhaps more difficult to perceive as a person. The Bible, however, calls him our Comforter, Teacher, and Helper. These are attributes of a person not an “it.” As difficult as it may seem, we believe that Scripture undisputedly teaches that the Holy Spirit is a person—the third person of the trinity.

### **God**

The Holy Spirit is also God. His attributes, as described in Scripture, are the attributes of God

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

1 Corinthians 6:19

Himself.

- He is eternal: Hebrews 9:14.
- He is all powerful: Luke 1:35.
- He is omnipresent: Psalm 139:7.
- He is omniscient: 1 Corinthians 2:10-11.
- He is called God: Acts 5:3-4; 2 Corinthians 3:18.
- He was present/active at creation: Genesis 1:2.

The Bible begins with the statement: “In the beginning God (*Elohim*) created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). In the Hebrew language there are three renderings for a noun—singular (one), dual (two), and plural (more than two). *Elohim* is plural. There are other indications in the Old Testament of more than one Person in the Godhead.

- “Let us make man in our image...” Genesis 1:26.
- “The man has now become like one of us...” Genesis 3:22.
- “Come let us go down there and confuse their language...” Genesis 11:7.
- “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Isaiah 6:8.
- Yet Christianity is monotheistic and not polytheistic; it is not Unitarian but Trinitarian.

The fact that the Holy Spirit is generally mentioned last when the three persons of the Godhead are listed does not imply inferiority. He is fully God just as the Son is fully God. The Holy Spirit's role is to make Christ known.

### Final Thoughts

What does it mean to believe in the Holy Spirit? Is it enough to believe that He is God—all powerful, all knowing, present everywhere? No, we must also believe that He is a person, actively involved in our lives!

From his book, *The Apostles' Creed*, J. I. Packer writes: “So when I say, as a Christian, ‘I believe in the Holy Spirit,’ my meaning should be, first, that I believe personal fellowship, across space and time, with the living Christ of the New Testament to be a reality, which through the Spirit I have found; second, that I am open to be led by the Spirit, who now indwells me, into Christian knowledge, obedience and service, and I expect to be so led each day; and third, that I bless him as the author of my assurance that I am a son and heir of God. Truly, it is a glorious thing to believe in the Holy Spirit!”



### Spending Time With God

This five-week study titled, "Know What You Believe," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

### Devotional – (Personal Study)

1. After reading the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight that was especially meaningful to you.

2. The Apostles' Creed states, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." We sometimes think of the Holy Spirit as a gift for Christians and the Church but forget that God's Spirit was at work through the ages of the Old Testament. Read the following references and briefly describe how God's Spirit was operative.

a. Job 33:4

b. Judges 14:6

c. 1 Samuel 16:13

d. 1 Peter 1:10 -11

3. While we know that the Spirit of God is at work in our lives today, it can be refreshing to consider how He is at work. Read the following references, in context, and briefly describe the role of the Holy Spirit in your life today.

a. John 14:26

b. John 15:26

c. Acts 9:31



d. Romans 15:13

b. Acts 10:19-20

4. Write a brief prayer of thanks to God for the work of the Holy Spirit throughout history and in your life today. Recommit yourself to being led by the Holy Spirit, taught by the Spirit, and submitted to the Spirit.

c. Acts 13:2-3

### Discussion – (Small Group Study)

5. What insights did you draw from the personal study questions or commentary reading which were especially encouraging or challenging to you?

7. Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-16. Discuss what you think it means to have “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

6. Read out loud one or more of the following Scripture references, noticing their broader context. After reading, discuss whether the Holy Spirit is available to lead us today in the same way He led Christians in the book of Acts.

8. Read Ephesians 4:23-32. From these verses, give several examples of how we can grieve the Holy Spirit.

a. Acts 8:29



9. What are some practical steps we might take to avoid grieving God's Spirit?

10. Sometimes when Christians talk about the gifts of the Holy Spirit of God, who is the very source of our unity, they become divided. Why is that? Is there something believers can do to rectify the confusion and division?

11. Read Ephesians 5:18-21. What are some of the evidences that we are "filled with the Holy Spirit"? Take time to pray for one another that these verses might become more a reality in our lives.

### Digging Deeper – (Further Study)

12. In this lesson so far, we have largely considered the work of God's Spirit in our lives as believers. Read John 15:26-27 and John 16:8-11.

a. What is the role of the Holy Spirit for unbelievers?

b. As we witness for Christ, in what way should we count on the Holy Spirit's work in the heart of the unbeliever?

c. Think about your own conversion experience. Do you recall a sense of the work the Holy Spirit of God played in that process?

### Scripture for Meditation

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

John 14:16-17



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

## The Apostles' Creed

### Introduction

The late Richard Halverson, Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, noted: In the beginning the Church was a fellowship of men and women centering on the living Christ. Then the Church moved to Greece where it became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome where it became an institution. Next, it moved to Europe where it became a culture. And, finally, it moved to America where it became an enterprise.

What is the Church to you? The last section of the Apostles' Creed tells us that the Church is first on God's priority list. The Church should be our number one priority also. In John 17:1-2, Christ prayed, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him." God, the Father, gave the Church to God, the Son, "as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). In this lesson, we will examine the awesome blessings that are ours, as members of God's Church.

### The Holy Catholic Church

In the eleventh century, a great split divided the European church into eastern (Greek) and western (Latin) parts. The eastern part became Orthodox and the western part became Roman Catholic. As this schism developed over a long period of time, both sides were contributors to the Apostles' Creed.

One significant addition is the word *catholic* which means "universal." This term was first used by the eastern churches near the end of the second century. Until the fifth century, the version used by the church of Rome and other western churches simply read, "the holy church." 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..."

We Christians recite Sunday after Sunday, "I believe in the holy catholic church." What are we saying? Are we saying that we believe in the Catholic Church down the street? Is this the Catholic Church listed in the yellow pages of the telephone directory? Hardly, but we are saying that we believe in the unity of the believers in Christ who make up His Church. His Church is not confined to a church building or to one nation but is universal and found throughout the world wherever Christians assemble or congregate.

Paul states that the Church is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22-23). God uses the Church to carry out Jesus' commission to share the Good News with the world. Scripture tells us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He is not here on this earth bodily; but we, His people, are. We are His body. His hands are not here, but He will use our hands. His feet are not here, but He will use our feet. His voice is not here, but He will use our voices. We are His workmanship called to lead others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. You and I may be the only Bible some people will ever read. What are they reading?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

### The Communion of Saints

The word *saint*, simply means those who are “set apart” for God’s purpose. Saints are not those who are sinless but rather those who are forgiven. The term saint includes all who believe in God’s forgiving grace through Jesus Christ. To such, God gives new life and they become a reflection of God’s light.

A young boy and his family once toured a great cathedral in Europe. While standing inside this glorious structure the crowd peered up at the many stained glass windows. The guide explained that these windows were representations of great saints throughout history. Someone in the crowd asked the guide, “Just what does the word ‘saint’ mean, anyway?” Before the group’s leader could respond, the young boy said, “I know, mister. A saint is somebody that the light shines through!” The guide smiled and nodded with satisfaction.

The term saint includes not only special people throughout history whom we hold up as great believers of faith, but it also includes you and me. It includes those who have gone before us and those who are yet to believe. We have communion and true fellowship with one another, and we will enjoy such unity forever with all believers.

### The Forgiveness of Sins

Our being part of the holy catholic Church and our communion as saints is dependent on one great and yet simple concept: the forgiveness of sins. Paul writes, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God” (Romans 3:10-11). The Bible is God’s plan of redemption. Although we have no righteousness of our own, the righteousness of Christ has been imputed (a legal term meaning “pronounced righteous”) to those who are His. We can say, with David, “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1-2). Forgiveness is restoration, not probation. 1 John 1:9 encourages us, as believers, to confess (acknowledge, name) our sins and by faith accept Christ’s forgiveness and cleansing. This forgiveness also includes our forgiving others as He has forgiven us. Jesus taught the disciples to pray in Luke 11:2-4, “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”

### Resurrection and Life

Just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too will be resurrected. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul teaches extensively about the resurrection of the body. We are body and soul together. After Jesus arose, He appeared in His body. Philippians 3:21 promises that one day we shall have bodies “like His glorious body.”

Another addition to this marvelous creed is the phrase, “and the life everlasting. Amen.” Christ does not only give us joy and purpose for our lives on earth but also the promise of eternal joy. “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

2 Corinthians 5:1

to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

John Bunyan's Mr. Stand-fast, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, states it so poignantly: "I have formerly lived by hearsay and faith, but now I go where I shall live by sight, and shall be with him, in whose company I delight myself."

The Book of Revelation is filled with the wonder and excitement of seeing Jesus in all His glory! "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne...In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'" (Revelation 5:11-12). With finite minds, it's impossible to understand infinite joy...but one day we will!

When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we first begun.

### Final Thoughts

The Church is God's family, Christ's bride, believers of all ages, set apart as uniquely His. They are the ones who claim the forgiveness of sins and who look forward to the day of resurrection. This is what we affirm when we recite the last part of the Apostles' Creed.

It is hoped that during this five-week study, we have deepened our understanding of the Apostles' Creed. It's a glorious creed but alas, it is an empty creed without the sincere and passionate response of a life yielded in service to Him. Will we merely recite it again this Sunday as usual, or will we savor each word and each phrase with integrity of heart? Let's mean it when we say it!

### Spending Time With God

This study series, "Know What You Believe," is based on the Apostles' Creed. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Thus far, we have studied a variety of important Biblical doctrines and teachings. For this particular section, let us focus on the “forgiveness of sin.” Read the following and explain why it is essential that we forgive the sins of others against us.

a. Matthew 6:12-15

b. Matthew 18:23-35

c. 1 John 1:8-10

2. One of the greatest incentives for right living is a fine example. Read the following texts. How does the Lord's example motivate us to forgive others?

a. Luke 23:34

b. Ephesians 4:32

c. Colossians 3:13

3. Take a few minutes to search your heart for ways in which you have been harboring any unforgiveness toward others. Jot these down. Read and pray through Psalm 51, claiming God's forgiving grace.

### Discussion (small group Study)

4. What insights did you draw from the commentary or personal study which were especially encouraging or challenging to you?

5. Read the following examples of how God's people through history have chosen to forgive others. How might these examples affect you personally?

a. Joseph (Genesis 50:20, 21)

b. Stephen (Acts 7:60)



c. Paul (2Timothy 4:16)

b. Ephesians 5:25

6. When I hear the word "church" my first thought is...

9. How would you respond to someone who said, "I don't think the church should be given higher priority than my job or the Rotary Club (or some other organization)"?

7. The Apostles' Creed states, "I believe in...the holy catholic Church." How do you feel about this part of the creed? What does the term *catholic* mean in this context? Would you be able to explain this to a visitor who is not familiar with reciting the Apostles' Creed? What would you say to them?

10. Read Colossians 1:24. Notice Paul's willingness to give himself freely for the sake of the Church.

a. Was Christ's suffering for the Church somehow deficient? If not, why did Paul feel a need to sacrifice his own life for the same cause?

8. Read the following references which refer to the Church universal (or catholic). How much did Christ need to give of Himself to give birth to the Church?

b. Do you have a heart to sacrifice freely and fully for the sake of the Church? Why or why not?

a. Acts 20:28



### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Read Ephesians 1:18-23

a. What does Paul pray for the Ephesian believers?

b. How will this occur?

c. How does Paul describe the church?

12. Consider the phrase in the Apostles' Creed, "the communion of saints." Read Hebrews 12:1. In light of Hebrews 11, are you inspired with the thought that we are united with believers through the ages? Why or Why not?

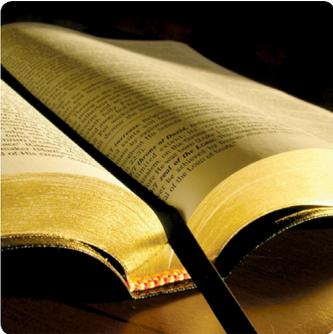
13. Read Hebrews 13:3. How can our recognition of our communion with saints in parts of the world in which persecution is a part of life, serve to inspire us in our journey of faith?

14. The Apostles' Creed ends with the phrase, "and the life everlasting." Someone once said that even if he did not have the promise of eternal life he would still want to be a Christian because the Christian life is the best life. Do you agree or disagree? Would you still live for Christ even if there were no promise of life everlasting? Explain.

#### Scripture for Meditation

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28



## **BNEXT Small Group Leader's Guide**

This BNEXT Leader's Guide is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others but of aiding them along the way. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. (Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.)

### **MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE**

- Either the electronic version or a printed copy for each participant. (The electronic version of this BNEXT Study can be printed. When printed, the blue boxes that were visible in the electronic version will print as blank spaces for participants to record their answers.)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

### **ABOUT THIS STUDY**

This BNEXT study series is versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

These lessons are designed for the individual to read the Scripture passages, read the three pages of commentary, and answer the questions throughout the week. The participants then attend a weekly meeting with the small group to share insights and discuss the material. Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1 ½ hours in length. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to present highlights from each group, and for closing words of encouragement and prayer. The other approach is to begin together as a larger group for a welcome and then split into smaller groups for the remainder of the time/lesson.

## ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

**Group Size:** Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

**Group Leaders:** Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

## ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

These lessons are designed to easily be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- a hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word,
- a commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end,
- the ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach, and
- a willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Leader's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson (you should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class) and be thinking about how to present the questions to the group. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions — Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions — before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facil-

itator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

## BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion." Or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com), [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), and [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org).

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our *Bible*

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

## LEADING THE CLASS (Suggested Lesson Plans)

### First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at [ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/](http://ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/). (If the study is being done by the entire congregation, recruit facilitators for each group and have one facilitator designated to lead the closing session when all come back together.)

Be sure that every participant has downloaded the electronic version or has a printed copy of the study at least one week prior to the first small group meeting. Have everyone complete the first lesson's reading and answer the questions in preparation for the first gathering of the group(s).

The first class is unique in that a little more time is spent on introductions and explanations of how the classes will function.

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (13 minutes)
 

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

  - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: "Tell us something unique about yourself." Or perhaps, "What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?"
  - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Give an overview of the class and expectations (7 minutes)
  - a. Inform the class of how many weeks it will take to cover the study and the date of the last class.
  - b. Discuss the format of the BNEXT study and ask if

there are any questions.

- c. Review the "Rules of Engagement" which are located at the end of this Leader's Guide.
3. Discuss lesson questions (35 minutes)
    - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that anyone would like to discuss with the group.
    - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are provided to promote dialogue and conversation.
    - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.
 

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes to allow for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share a highlight of their small group discussion.)
  4. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
    - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
    - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
  5. If you are providing printed copies of lessons to participants, distribute the lesson for next week
  6. Dismissal

### Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (10 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

- a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).
- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are studying "The Ten

Commandments – Exodus 20,” you may ask, “Why do you think Exodus or the Ten Commandments are important?” Or, “How do the Ten Commandments relate to the cross of Jesus Christ?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.

- c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” at the end of this Guide.

## 2. Discuss lesson questions (45 minutes)

- a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss.
- b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote dialogue and conversation.
- c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share an insight of their small group discussion.)

## 3. Closing prayer (5 minutes)

- a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
- b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.

## 5. Dismissal

### SMALL GROUP RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

It is important to treat one another in Christian love. These “Rules of Engagement” will be helpful, so read them aloud during the first class; thereafter, refer to them as needed by the group.

1. Begin each reading/study session with prayer, expecting God to speak to you through His Word.

2. Come prepared for each week's session by completing the reading and the study questions.
3. Your small group will have a facilitator. Please be respectful of the facilitator's leadership.
4. The facilitator's responsibility is to guide or shepherd the discussions. Do not expect your facilitator to be an expert on Scripture — each group member should seek the answers from Scripture on his/her own.
5. Each group member is invited to join the discussion but should not feel required to do so. If called upon, it is okay to say, “Thank you, but I would prefer to pass on answering that question.”
6. Alternatively, do not dominate a discussion. Time is limited, so please be sensitive to everyone in the group to help ensure that each person has the opportunity to participate.
7. Respect everyone's answers and views on Scripture. However, let Scripture interpret Scripture and expect the Holy Spirit to speak/teach through His written Word.
8. In preparation for each lesson, you are not expected to do extra study or research. If you wish to dig deeper, then here are a few helpful resources:
  - Go to [ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/](http://ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/) for key tips and guidelines for best use of BNEXT study series in your small group or whole church.
  - The internet contains a wealth of information (and sometimes disinformation). Some useful Bible study sites include: [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com), [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), and [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org).
  - *The Essential Bible Study Companion* (hard copy), by John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).