

SUMMER 2022

FACILITATOR GUIDE

UALC Small Group Resource

The Apostles' Creed

Weekly Guide Topics:

7: He will come again to judge the living and the dead

8: I believe in the Holy Spirit

9: the holy catholic church, the communion of saints

10: The forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

11: Amen.

The Apostles' Creed Series

Welcome to one of Christianity's ancient treasures: The Apostles' Creed.

The word "creed" comes from an old word that means "I believe." Christians have spoken the creed in many different circumstances, but especially at the baptism of new Christians, for thousands of years because it provides a **short and potent summary of Christian belief.**

Whether you are new to Christian faith or have been following Jesus for many years, this series is an opportunity to develop core strength and to go deeper in the defining truths of Christianity.

Summary is one important purpose of the Creed, but not the only one. **The Apostles' Creed also supports the unity of the Christian church.** One of the great gifts of the Christian faith is that none of us gets to make it up. We don't invent our truth or custom order it; we receive it from the long train of generations who have tested it and trusted it before us and passed it down to us. And now all of us can receive and affirm this truth together.

But even so, Christianity isn't mostly about knowing the right truths. It's about knowing God, or even better: being known by God. I invite you to engage with this series as an opportunity engage with God, to experience God, and to know God better.

With you in Christ,
Pastor Steve

“HE WILL COME AGAIN TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD” MATTHEW 25:31-46

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 7

Today’s passage will speak of the necessity of Jesus to set the things in our broken world right again; to restore justice and *shalom* to the world. In our discussion we will have the opportunity to discuss the Day of the Lord and explore how the prophets spoke about the Day of the Lord in several passages. You might consider looking up these passages ahead of time and bookmarking them or even printing them out to save your group time spent locating them.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

We are in week 7 of our Apostles’ Creed series. The Creed is a series of confessions about what we believe. This Creed unifies Christians in our beliefs, summarizes several central features of our shared faith. Today’s passage explores the confession “He [Jesus] will come again to judge the living and the dead.”

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What is the silliest or most absurd rule you’ve ever encountered?
- Share with us a pet peeve.

In this discussion, we’re going to explore our belief that Jesus will return to judge the whole world, the living and the dead. But before we read, let’s pray.

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Jesus, thank you for being the good and trustworthy Judge. As we discuss this passage, reveal yourself and your will to us. We hope to encounter you and know you more. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Our passage today comes directly after two of Jesus’ parables. The first is a parable about 10 virgins waiting on a bridegroom; 5 wise enough to prepare for the coming of the groom, 5 foolishly were unprepared. The parable concludes with the foolish 5 arriving to the banquet but locked out. They reply “Lord, lord, open the door for us.” But he responds “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.” The parable’s concluded with the admonition, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or hour.” The next parable tells of a man who goes on a journey and leaves multiple bags of gold with three servants. Two of them use the gold to increase the treasury, but the third

buries the gold in the ground for fear of the master's hardness. The master orders that the gold be taken from this man and has him thrown out into the darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus then continues in Matthew 25:31-46.

Have someone read Matthew 25:31-46. Remember to thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

In Matthew 25, Jesus uses three illustrations, each of them in pairs, to distinguish one type of person from another. Wise and foolish virgins who either conserved or ran out of lamp oil, the trustworthy and "wicked, lazy" servants who grew or hid away their master's gold, and the sheep and goats who are separated by the shepherd.

- Imagine you were someone who had heard rumors of this traveling teacher who was said to speak with the authority of a prophet of God and you heard these parables and this passage. What do you imagine you might be thinking or feeling? What questions would you have for Jesus?
 - One of the reasons Jesus told parables is that it invited his listeners to ponder what he meant, to "lean into" his words and meditate on them with fellow disciples, and Jesus himself. Encourage the curiosity and variety of responses in your group.
 - If any questions come up, you can choose to tease them out together, or you can simply affirm "That is a good question."
 - If you can, delay your group from interpreting the parables in this first question.
- What event is this passage speaking about?
 - The long prophesied and awaited Day of the Lord, where Jesus will return to earth and draw everyone, dead and alive, together to his throne for judgement.

There are several prophecies throughout Scripture, particularly in the prophets, that speak about the Day of the Lord. Consider having your group read a few or all of these passages about the Day of the Lord. Jeremiah 30:7-8; Jeremiah 46:10; Joel 3:12-14; Joel 2:23-28; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Isaiah 24:21-22; Zechariah 9:16-17

- What do you notice about how the Day of the Lord is described by these prophets?
 - Why do you think that some of these prophecies make the Day of the Lord sound like a welcomed promise and others like a day to be feared?
 - When God's kingdom comes the first will be last, the lowly will be raised up and the lofty lowered; sinfulness will be exposed and defeated, and righteousness will replace it. Consider with your group the various ways the world will be turned upside down and how that will be welcome or unwelcome in our world.

It seems that Jesus is relating banquet preparedness, the faithful multiplication of gifted riches, and the feeding, clothing, and care of those in need to the separating of sheep from goats, the righteous from the unrighteous.

- How do you see these various illustrations and activities working together? How do they relate to righteousness and wickedness?
 - There are several connections to be made in this chapter. Attending to those in need is likely a key to interpreting the parable of the traveling man's gold; multiplying his riches is related to multiplying the blessings we've been given by giving to those in need of them. The preparedness of the virgins has to do with the unpredictability of the Day of the Lord, and the admonition to be consistently in step with Jesus.

- Do you think Jesus is directing all Christians to practice feeding, clothing, welcoming in strangers, visiting prisoners, and caring for the sick in vv. 37-46? How are these things related to Jesus' judgement?
 - These are all practical expressions of love, and love is at the center of God's entire law, loving God and loving one another. As often as these types of love are withheld we've chosen sin rather than God's will. Jesus' judgement exposes all sinfulness and destroys it. As often as we act in love, we are acting like the "good and faithful servant" described in parable about the gold-giving master (v.23)
 - Note that we may be tempted to think that these acts of love earn us a place in the Kingdom. The full witness of the Bible tells us we cannot earn our place in the Kingdom. Love is the benefit and evidence of Christ's work for, in, and through us. Loving one another is part of our inheritance as God's children, not a prerequisite.

- How is Jesus' judgement over the world good news?
 - There are a lot of reasons we have to be thankful that our entirely good and just God has the power to set things right again. As much as we may prefer our sinfulness to remain unnoticed or ignored, most of us would be miserable in a world where evil, cruel things were done to us and others without any form of prevention, recompense, or reconciliation.
 - It can often seem like evil people flourish and righteous people suffer. This can be in true for a time; but we can have faith that all these things will come to light and evil will not be remain hidden or unredeemed.

This passage describes Jesus as a judge. When we think about judges, we're likely to think of judges in a courtroom, and to think of Jesus' justice like justice in our courtrooms.

- In what ways do you think Jesus might be like the type of judge we're familiar with? In what ways might Jesus be unlike our notions of judges?
 - This is a question open to interpretation, inviting your group to reconsider how our perceptions of judges influence how we think about Jesus as judge.
 - You might want to consider some of the ways Jesus saved people throughout the Gospels, often speaking forgiveness of sins over them (whether they ask for it or not) and healing them of physical illness. Likewise, we see Jesus admonishing leaders for their self-righteousness, exploitation, and exclusivity. Jesus was accused of being the friend of sinners and he forgave his executioners from the cross they hung him on. Is it possible that Jesus' healing, restoration, and forgiveness are activities of Jesus' way of being a judge?

- Why is it important for the Shepherd to separate the goats from the sheep, or the Bridegroom to send away the unprepared from the banquet?
 - This chapter shows us that there will be those that choose to forego the inheritance of the Kingdom prepared at the creation of the world. God’s Kingdom, if it is to be as perfect as promised, relies on God’s kingship, and this requires our full agreement with his will, without resistance. We’re told to be prepared for this all the time, because the day is both unpredictable and imminent.
 - Why is the confession that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead a part of the Apostles’ Creed?
 - Consider together how our belief in Jesus’ return and final, global judgement shape us—our mind, heart, body, and soul—as Christians?
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PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Today’s passage points out a few specific ways we can show our love to one another. Have your group prayerfully ask the Lord to speak to them about these acts of love; feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, invite in the stranger, clothe those in need, visit the prisoner, or care for the sick. Do any of these acts of love stand out as particularly energizing to you? Do you think any of these would be particularly difficult for you?

Share your answers with each other (as you’re comfortable) and spend time praying for one another that God will continue to grow your heart in practical love for others. You might also pray that the Lord would give you an opportunity to practice these kinds of love.

“I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT”

LUKE 11:5-13 & GALATIANS 5:13-26

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 8

Our discussion this week is split between 2 passages, Luke 11:9-13 and Galatians 5:13-26. If you would like to discuss both passages in this lesson, plan to make time for the Galatians passage and the subsequent discussion. Choose ahead of time which questions you would most like to ask and be prepared to skip others to cover what you think is best.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Welcome to week 8 in our series on the Apostles’ Creed. Today we’re discussing the Holy Spirit and how, both in and through us, the Spirit develops and influences the character of the church.

OPENING QUESTION:

- Outside of your family, who would you say knows you the most?
- Share something about yourself that your group probably doesn’t know about you. (Maybe a hidden talent or an unusual story from your life.)

Today we’re discussing our confession that we believe in the Holy Spirit—the present person of the Triune God.

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Lord it is our pleasure to be with one another and with you today. Lead us in this time we’re sharing together and reveal yourself to us. As we consider the gift of your presence, the Holy Spirit, build our faith and lead us to rest in you. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Our first passage today is from the Gospel of Luke. We will read a portion from chapter 11, the first twelve verses of which are on the subject of prayer. First, the *importance* of prayer is illustrated in the disciples’ request from Jesus to teach them to pray. Then Jesus models for us the *substance* of prayer. Next Jesus gives a series of parables about prayer; first a parable on the *practice* of prayer, and then two more mini-parables on the *basis* of prayer. Keeping that in mind, let’s read together.

Have someone read Luke 11:5-13. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

In this passage, Jesus is illustrating the *practice* and *basis* of prayer. Jesus begins with a parable about a hungry person going to their friend's house at night and audaciously asking for food.

- Why do you think Jesus begins with this parable? Why might we be reluctant to prayerfully ask God for something?
 - We can convince ourselves that God, because of his loftiness, his majesty, or the because of the weight of others' needs, that our requests are small, petty, or even unwelcome. Jesus will go on to tell us that our prayers are important to the Father, but I suspect many of us have convinced ourselves that our prayers are unimportant or perhaps too big or audacious—especially when we're praying with others.
- What do you think causes us to be reluctant to pray our requests to the Father?

vv. 11-13 demonstrate the *basis* of prayer, or God's part in it. In these verses, we see that a father will naturally not give his son a bad gift, like not giving a scorpion when asked for an egg. But rather, the Father is too eager to give the best of gifts.

- Do you see this kind of fatherly love in God, or do you struggle accepting this illustration?
- Some of us may struggle to believe this truth about the Father because we have asked the Father for things we felt were unheard, unanswered, or delayed. How can we believe that this passage is true and also recognize that God doesn't always give us what we ask for the way we ask for it?
 - There is a degree to which this is a mystery. We live in an already and not yet period where the Lord sometimes heals us, provides for us, blesses us the way we ask to be blessed, and sometimes our bodies aren't healed, we don't receive what we need or want when we need or want them.
 - That said, Jesus shares in this passage that our great Lord is also our heavenly Father who meets our seeking with his giving. He is not a father who responds to our needs with cynical disregard. We believe that Father knows what is best for us, is generous in his love for us, and will sometimes act on his own timing or in a better way than we would anticipate. We'll discuss later that the one thing the Father does not withhold us is his presence in the person of the Holy Spirit.

In the Lord's prayer modeled at the beginning of chapter 11, Jesus instructs prays for God's forgiveness as we've forgiven others. When asked about the greatest commandment Jesus directs us to love God and one another.

- What may be barriers to us being able to respond to others with the abundant grace and generosity God demonstrates toward us and our requests?
 - Our fleshly hearts are prone to greed, self-interest and apathy. The Holy Spirit convicts and transforms us to respond to the Father's generosity and love by loving and giving ourselves to others.

These parables offer us an opportunity to enter into them and experience for ourselves what they are describing. Consider leading your group in an imaginative reading exercise to appreciate their evocative features. Instruct your group to close their eyes and listen carefully to these parables again. Read vv. 5-10 again, slowly, and invite them to look with their minds' eye at the details. Give them a minute or two to contemplate and imagine the passages, and then ask them to share what they saw, felt, heard, or sensed. You may want to share first to set the tone for their responses.

- What did you experience in this passage? Where did your imagination lead you?
- Were you the one at the door, or were you picturing someone else at the door? Did you see, hear, smell, or sense anything in particular? Did you envision God on the other side? Were you too timid to knock? If so, why? Was it shame, fear, or another sensation holding you back? Did the door swing wide open, creak open slowly, only budge an inch? Was it a glorious, magnificent looking door, or a thick, wooden, dilapidated door barely on its hinges?
- How are the parables like or different from the way you approach prayer?
- v. 13 concludes our passage saying that the generous Father gives us the Holy Spirit. How is the gift of the Holy Spirit the best answer to prayer we can receive?
 - The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God. The Spirit gives us new, resurrected life, transforms us, convicts us, heals us, and joins us in our joy and sorrow. The Spirit groans what we cannot speak, advocates to the Godhead on our behalf. God's self is the best treasure we can have, and all our other desires, though important, are never more important than the Lord.

Have someone read Galatians 5:13-26.

Paul is explicit when describing what Christian freedom is *not*. For example, it is not indulging our fleshly desires, nor exploiting our neighbors, neither is it to disregard the law.

- Do you find any of these situations difficult to not succumb to? How do you combat that temptation?
 - Receive all answers. Our faith is not about willful behavior modification. The "working out of our salvation" is a consequence and result of Jesus' death, resurrection, and imparting of the Spirit. Therefore, we are not to stand in judgment towards ourselves or others thinking "just do better at that particular challenging behavior."
- Given that being a Christian isn't about willful behavior modification, can you share with us how one might go about growing in any of the fruit of the spirit?
 - Receive all answers. Share the following if they were not mentioned: Pray for the fruit by *asking* for them; Meditate on the fruit and their application in your life; Practice identifying/observing the fruit in others; Reflect on people in your life and identify the fruit in them; then reflect on yourself: what fruit would you like to grow? Ask God for it. What fruit are you gifted with in abundance? Praise God for this.

Our call to freedom is freedom in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. This freedom brings us peace with God, a cleansed guilty conscience, mercy without merit, and the joy of forgiveness, acceptance, and access/sonship to God.

- How does this freedom make you feel? Do you have difficulty accepting any aspect of this freedom to which you've been called?

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

In today's passages, we've reflected on how we've been taught the practice and basis of prayer, and we've looked deeper at our Christian freedom. We're now going to take a few minutes quietly praying – listening to God. Allow the Lord to bring things to your mind, and journal if you like.

Share with each other what you heard or what came to mind. Pray a blessing that the Spirit would continue to work in and through the lives of your group.

“THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS”

REVELATION 7:9-17 & EPHESIANS 4:1-6

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 9

Primary focus: This is a great teaching opportunity on the meaning of the word ‘catholic’ and why the word matters. We confess this in celebration and hope for the unity of the whole church; pursuing and embracing mutual care and concern across all kinds of lines that otherwise divide us, including the line of life and death that seems to divide us from other generations of Christians.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

We are now in week 9 Apostles’ Creed series. This collection of shared Christian beliefs confesses the truth about the Triune God whom we love, trust, and serve. The church, throughout centuries and across the world, has professed these truths together. Today we’re exploring the belief in one, holy catholic church and the communion of saints.

OPENING QUESTION:

- Share with us about one Christian, living or dead, someone you’ve known or simply know of, who stands out to you as someone who imitated Christ well.
- Can you share with us a time when you’ve been attended a worship service as a guest? Would stood out to you about worshipping with that church?

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this *Good and Gracious Lord, it is a gift to come before you today, to join with brothers and sisters in the faith as we unite to study your Word and draw closer to one another and to you. We ask that you would make yourself known to us throughout this time.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Revelation 7:9-17. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

In the Apostles' Creed we say, "the holy catholic church..." and our response is often "Wait a minute! I'm not Catholic, I'm Lutheran!"

- What do we mean when we confess that we believe in "the holy catholic church?"
 - This is one of those phrases that can really throw people for a loop! Some will breeze right through it; the word "catholic" doesn't register in a significant way, but for others it can be quite unsettling.
 - In the phrase "the holy catholic church," the word "catholic" – with a little 'c'—simply means the church universal. The church exists throughout the world, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed. All believers are part of that universal church. And we are part of that church!
- How do you respond to the phrasing "holy catholic church? Do you find describing to the church as "catholic" helpful or unhelpful? Would a different word be more useful?
 - It's worth noting that often when the Creed is written out in Protestant churches this phrase will have an asterisk that clarifies the meaning, and in newer versions of the Creed, the phrase is replaced with "the holy Christian church."
 - Consider with your group if there is value in using the more Greek-like word (katholikos; universal, general). Especially as protestants, might there be some value in relating the word catholic with the unity shared between all Christians? Referring to the church as catholic may remind us that what unifies Christians supersedes things that might divide us.

In this portion of Revelation, we hear of God's ancient promise to Abraham come to fulfillment as people of every nation, tongue, and tribe come together to stand before God which they can do because they have been redeemed by the Lamb's blood. This is the universal church fully realized.

Take a few moments to imagine the scene in these passages. (Consider re-reading a portion of all of vv. 9-17).

- What does that look like to you? How do you envision that scene? What details stand out?

In vv. 13-14, John is asked by one of the elders about the white robes the multitude was wearing.

- What is the significance of the white robes described in this passage?
 - Robes are a significant piece of clothing in the Bible – the prodigal son was given a robe symbolizing his restored place in the family and here the believers wear robes that have been made white in the blood of the Lamb. When individuals were baptized in the early church they would remove their old clothes as they entered the water and after their baptism they would put on a new robe. The blood of the Lamb purifies us and frees us from the death of our sinfulness.
 - Many of us might relate to feeling corrupted, unworthy, slavishly bound to our sins and mistakes. But Christ's death and resurrection invites us to put our sins to death and enter a brand new, eternal, abundant life filled with the Spirit.

- Have you ever had an experience that gave you a glimpse of the scene described in Revelation 7?
 - Invite people to share what they imagine that will be like someday. There are no right or wrong answers, just a chance to talk through the possibilities. This kind of sharing can spark and invite all kinds of interaction.
 - For instance, I attended a worship conference a few years ago. The attendees came from around the world. During opening worship one morning, the leader said that we were going to pray the Lord's Prayer out loud and invited everyone to pray it in their native tongue. It was a moment I will never forget – I was moved to tears as I heard so many different voices and languages around me saying the words of that prayer. It was a glimpse of what it will be like when the universal church, 'the holy catholic Church,' gathers in heaven someday.

Ask someone to read Ephesians 4:1-6.

For many of us, I suspect this picture of the whole church entirely unified is beautifully heavenly, but also hard to imagine given the profound divisions in our world, even among Christians.

- Why do you think we struggle to enjoy unity with the whole global church?
 - Unfortunately there are countless ways we find to disagree with one another. And, the truth is, there are legitimate disagreements to be had and reasonable people can come to rational, heartfelt beliefs that conflict with others'. But we all have opportunities to emphasize and embrace what unites us and deemphasize or lovingly navigate through what divides us.
- How can we unite with one another, through our differences?
 - As often as you can, steer the conversation towards how individuals in the group can be peacemakers, bridge-builders, and unifiers.
 - We are called to unity. To be humble, gentle, patient, love one another, keep the unity of the Spirit through peace. To cross the lines that divide us and unite in our faith.
- Can you share with us a time when you experienced a fellow Christian being humble, gentle, patient, loving, or peaceful that made you feel connected to them?
 - Facilitator, consider sharing an example of this for yourself; especially if you can think of an instance where you connected with someone with a different point of view.

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Much of today's conversation has to do with "heart" topics: the universal church – there may be hundreds of denominations in the world, but ultimately there is *one* church of believers, and we are called to love and care for one another as the communion of saints. We have shared some of the benefits and challenges of being humble, gentle, patient, and loving with those we may not completely agree with.

Invite your group to prayerfully ask "Is there a person in my life, a fellow believer with whom I struggle to live with in this way?" Take a moment to allow God to bring someone, or a type of person, to mind. Ask the Lord to help you in that situation, to help you to live "a life worthy of the calling you have received."

This would also be an opportunity to ask a member of your group to continue praying for you in this area and to serve as an accountability partner.

We also had the chance to envision what the 'holy catholic Church' – the universal Church – will be like when we are all gathered together, not just the believers we worship with, but ALL believers. Ask the Lord to remind you of this incredible picture as you move into this next week. Let that image be your encouragement to live out Ephesians 4:1-6. Pray a blessing asking God to lead each of you in this way.

“THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING”

JOHN 5:1-29

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 10

Today we wrap up the body of the Apostles’ Creed (“Amen” is next week, which should prove to be a rich dive into this affirmation of the creed) by focusing on “the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” Our text for this week focuses first on the latter two and drawing them back to how the forgiveness of sins is inextricably related to them. You will have an opportunity to explore together the notion of “bodily resurrection.” You may want to read 1 Corinthians 15:34-58 if you think this might be an unfamiliar idea for your group, or if you’d like to explore it more for yourself.

This clause of the Creed falls under the section where we confess our belief in the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness, resurrection, and eternal life, within the structure of the Creed, are linked to the activities of the Holy Spirit. It’s God’s living Spirit in and among the church that convicts of our sin and enables us to remind each other of our pardon. (James 5:16) The Spirit of God raised Christ from the dead and will participate in the resurrection ahead. And it is the Holy Spirit that transforms Christians so that we will be fitted for eternity in the Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today we will be exploring together some of the final words of the Apostles’ Creed. By now, the Apostles’ Creed may be familiar to us, and yet at the same time some of these words get glossed over too quickly; we may not even comprehend what we mean when we say them. We’re going to dig into some of what we mean by these rather “Christianese” phrases. There is much to unpack here, so it’s likely we’ll have unanswered questions at the end of our time together, and that’s perfectly fine!

OPENING QUESTION:

- If you could choose any historical figure to bring back to life and have lunch with, who would you choose and why?
- What comes to mind for you when you think of heaven? Of eternal life?

We’re going to dive into John 5 to further unpack this idea of everlasting life. But before we do that, let’s pray.

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Lord God, we thank you for the opportunity we to gather, to read your word, and to wonder together at the mystery of life with you. Prepare our hearts by your Holy Spirit to receive your eternal truth about eternal life, and allow it to sink into our souls. We pray this in the name of the one who is the Resurrection and the Life. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have one or two people read John 5:1-29. Be sure to thank them for reading!

DISCUSSION:

- What stood out to you from the encounter between Jesus and the man at the pool?
 - Receive all answers.
 - The man in need of healing has been given a new **quality** of life; he is not just promised “life after death” as we so often think of eternal life—he is given a new, redeemed life **now**. Those who believe in Jesus and receive his good news and forgiveness are given spiritual life presently. The eternal, abundant life we have in Jesus does not wait until after death.
- What do you think Jesus means in v. 24 when he says that those who believe in him have “crossed over from death to life?”
 - This phrase emphasizes a distinct change of status from one destiny to another; a radically different destiny full of unending life (as it was always meant to be). Note that this “crossing over” has future and immediate implications (as is the case of the man healed in this passage).
 - In John 3, Jesus, speaking to Nicodemus, relates himself to the bronze serpent Yahweh had Moses put on a pole that, when those bitten by a poisonous snake looked upon it, healed them. Just as the God used that bronze serpent to erase the certain demise of those marked by deaths’ sting, so Jesus rewrites the certain demise of those who believe in him.
- What do you think it means in v.25 that “the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God”?
 - This verse, coupled with 3 or 4 verses immediately following our passage, points to the resurrection of the dead—the bodily resurrection for humans.
 - For some people in your group, this may be a relatively new concept, or perhaps even unheard of. We explore this more below.

Have someone skip ahead to John 20:24-29 and read aloud for the group (and remember to thank them).

- What might we learn from the fact that Jesus inhabited a resurrected body?

- We can rest in the promise of resurrection too. Jesus demonstrated a physical resurrection when he appeared to his disciples in his post-resurrection body. This is a promise with evidence.
- **If we are destined to have new, resurrected bodies, what do you think that means for our current bodies? Does it matter what we do with or to our bodies now?**
 - Paul, especially in his letters to the Corinthian church, emphasizes a physical, heavenly body resurrection. Some early Christians, like those in the church at Corinth, reasoned that since we have already been saved and promised new bodies, what we do with our earthly bodies does not matter, which led them to hedonistic activities like promiscuous sex and gluttony. Paul emphatically corrects this heresy, saying “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’” (1 Cor 15:54). If you’d like to explore this notion further, consider having your group read 1 Corinthians 15:35-44 (or to the end of the chapter if for even more description).
 - Perhaps Jesus’ scarred hands, even after resurrection, give us some illustrative insight into what Paul is responding to: that, to some extent, what we do at this moment, at this point in our eternal life, with these earthly bodies, has some relationship with our physically resurrected bodies.
 - Note: It’s probably wise to lean into the mysterious nature of this (following Jesus’ and Paul’s lead), and not try to guess to what extent or in what ways our earthly bodies influence our heavenly bodies, but it is safe and important to recognize that what we do with our bodies presently matters.

We read in John 5:25 that “those who *hear* will live.” In other passages (like 3:16) John uses the word “believe” as the mark of those promised abundant, resurrected life.

- **We likely recognize that hearing the Gospel is key to believing in Jesus. How might the opposite be true? Can believing in Jesus, or devoting our life allegiance to Jesus, help us hear and respond to the Gospel?**
 - You might use this as an opportunity to discuss with your group the implications of what it means to hear or believe in this context—that these words mean more than simply receiving or agreeing with a statement but responding with our whole lives as part of our confession. In the same way, when we recite the “I believe”s in the Creed, we’re not simply speaking about what our minds agree with, but we’re committing ourselves to be shaped and guided by these confessions.

In v. 14, Jesus runs into the man he’d healed at the temple, and Jesus tells him, “*See, you are well again. Don’t sin anymore so that nothing worse happens to you.*” In the Creed, we confess we believe in the forgiveness of sins along with resurrection and eternal life.

- **How does the forgiveness of sins relate to new life this man was given? How does forgiveness relate to our resurrection life?**
 - It’s interesting that the man’s sinfulness isn’t mentioned prior to his healing, but sin clearly does relate to his restoration and his on-going healed life.
 - Sin has broken our world and illness, hurt, and death are results of the brokenness. Jesus, in giving us life, has paid the “wages” of sin (Romans 6:23) and provided the gift of God, which is this eternal life.

- In what ways do we see death being waged by sin?
 - Not only is sin responsible for the death in the broad, human destiny sense, but many sins contribute to the misery and death in our world. When we withhold the love, kindness, generosity, and care of Christ from each other, or when we pursue the sinful “fruit of the flesh” we contribute to misery and death in the world. Consider some specific sins and their consequences (like greed, cruelty, dishonesty, or gluttony).
- How does the forgiveness of sins, paired with Jesus’ instruction to flee from sin, influence the abundant, eternal, resurrected life?
 - When sin disrupts God’s will in the world and our relationship with God, the Lord’s forgiveness repairs the relational brokenness between us and God and sets things to right again.
 - Pursuing God’s Kingdom on earth, loving one another, participating in the restoration of God’s peace (shalom) in the world are life-giving activities.
- What common themes do you see throughout the Gospel of John?
 - John’s Gospel uses a lot of binary themes—in particular, light/darkness, and death/life. The Gospel writer threads these themes through, and particularly highlights that true and everlasting *life* is found in Jesus.
- What questions does our reading and discussion bring up for you that we might want to discuss in the future?
 - Consider making note of questions your group members have, and feel free to reach out to Dan Kidd or one of our pastors for resources or equipping on leading your group through the exploration of these questions.

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Break into small groups and consider this question together: Where are you seeing the fruit of the eternal kind of life in your life? Let’s spend some time thanking the Lord for those specific gifts that are evidence of life in his name.

Consider that there may be some in the group who have not yet responded to the Spirit’s work in their lives to put their faith in Jesus. If today is the first time for one of your group members to say, “I believe”, spend some time praying with that person.

Consider also that this discussion may have left some unsettled. Be sensitive to that and spend time ministering to—and praying for—group members to this end as appropriate.

“AMEN”

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 11

This week our prayer and ministry time invites you to listen to a worship song together. We've suggested a couple of songs to choose from. If you'd like to use one of these songs, be sure to leave time for them at the end. Or, if you'd like you can choose an "Amen" song of your own to share.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

We have come to the final sermon in our series on the Apostles Creed, where we have looked, line by line, at this ancient creed. The Apostles' Creed identifies and states the most essential points of Christian doctrine. Summarizing the Apostles' teachings, the Apostles' Creed professes what Christians believe about the persons and work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Every major Christian denomination uses the Apostles' Creed in their worship.

The Apostles Creed fittingly ends with the familiar punctuation "Amen."

OPENING QUESTION:

- Who is your favorite tv dad? What makes him your favorite?
- What kind of relationship do you have your father?
 - Facilitator, this might be a hard or messy question. Consider your familiarity you have with your group and be prepared for potentially uncomfortable answers.

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Father, thank you for the opportunity for us to be with one another and encounter you in this beautiful passage from Paul to his beloved friends. Help us be encouraged and empowered by you today, and use our discussion to draw us near to you.*

SCRIPTURE:

Before we read our passage, share with us what you know about the book of Ephesians. Who wrote it? Who were the Ephesians? Why was it written? When was it written?

If it would help, have your group skim through the book or read the summary/introduction in a study Bible.

- Written by Paul, probably in the early AD 60s
- Written from prison at about the same time as Colossians and Philemon.
- Half of the verses in Ephesians are found in the book of Colossians.
- Broken into six chapters (in the 1500s AD)
- Paul is describing the new social order – what the world can be like with Jesus on the throne.

Now let's read our passage, Ephesians 3:14-21

Have someone read the passage and thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

Imagine you are part of the church in Ephesus, hearing the closing of this letter from Paul.

- What stands out to you about this closing passage? Is there anything that is particularly encouraging to you in this letter?
 - Paul ends this letter with a remarkably kind and encouraging blessing over this church. I suspect many of us would have our spirits lifted and our hearts warmed to hear Paul's love and care for us.

This passage starts with Paul expressing that he was kneeling before the Father.

- What is the significance of kneeling?
 - Kneeling is a longstanding posture of reverence, worship, or even submission. Some of the oldest artistic illustrations we have depict subjects kneeling before kings. Even now, kneeling is part of many marriage proposals.
- Do you ever kneel when you pray? If so, when? Do you have a special place to pray?
 - Receive all answers. Consider sharing with the group to open up the conversation.
- What is Paul asking God to do?
 - That out of his glorious riches he would strengthen them with the Spirit's power, in their inner being, so that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith. That they would have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp width, length, heights and depth of Christ's love, and know for themselves the love that surpasses knowledge. That would be filled to the brim with "the fullness of God."
- How can a prayer like Paul's be answered? How does God strengthen you with power through his Spirit?
 - Facilitator, be prepared to share an example of God's strength, power, or presence.
- Can you share with us about a time that you've experienced God's love? What was the occasion?
 - Receive all answers.

In verse 18, Paul writes that he's praying they would "have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."

- **What does it mean to have power 'together with all the Lord's holy people?'**
 - This is an opportunity to talk about how Christians can encourage one another – in our small group, through prayer, supporting one another as we walk through hard times – recognizing that God's power is what unites us.
- **Would you share with us a time when someone prayed for you and you felt particularly encouraged, loved, or felt God's presence?**
 - Receive all answers.
- **Has there been a time when you have been 'filled to the measure of all the fullness of God?'**
 - Encourage your group to share and describe their experience if they've had one. If not, invite them to share what they think it would be like. Consider how we might notice and appreciate being filled with fullness of God."

vv. 20-21 could stand alone as a prayer of the church – to challenge us both individually and corporately. It's clear that Paul fully anticipates that God, "who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" will answer our prayers.

- **Given how Paul describes God here, do you think we ask God for as much as we could? Why might we consider to pray for even more?**
 - Paul is rather confident in God's ability and willingness to hear and answer our prayers. While we are wise not to treat God like a vending machine, or expect that he will answer every prayer the way we want when we want, Jesus explicitly invites us to pray boldly to our generous Father who loves us and cares for us.
 - Whatever we ask for, it is healthy for us to express the desires of our heart to God.
- **What is the result of trusting God with our prayers?**
- **Do you think our prayers impact future generations? How so?**
 - Paul wrote out this prayer to the Ephesian church nearly 2000 years ago, and we still find hope and encouragement in it today. How many prayers, poems, and hymns have been written over the centuries that continue to shape us, guide us in worship, and help us experience God? How have the prayers of grandparents, parents, family friends, and our children been heard and answered on our behalf?

Verse 21 ends with "Amen." Amen simply means "So be it." There are 123 uses of Amen in the New Testament. When Jesus says "verily I say to you," this is the word "amen."

- **Why do you think we continue to close most prayers with this ancient word?**
 - This is our way of expressing our agreement with the prayer, our shared belief and anticipation that God will hear and answer our prayer. Consider with your group why "amen" is an appropriate

punctuation to the Apostles' Creed.

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Consider entering prayer and ministry with a worship song that focuses on Amen. Some examples include:

The Lord Bless You and Keep You - Lutkin - performed live by Octarium (1:59)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QB2FVlaPM-o>

The Blessing – Elevation Worship (11:04)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZ55mDL7dAO>

The Blessing Song

Invite individuals to share how you can pray for each other this week. How do you need to experience God's love, the love that surpasses knowledge? What do you need from the Lord this week?