

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.
I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, WHO WAS CONCEIVED
BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY, SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS
PILATE, WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED, AND WAS BURIED. HE DESCENDED TO THE
DEAD. ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN, ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, HE
IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER, AND HE WILL COME TO
JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD. I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE HOLY
CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS,
THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING. AMEN.

the apostles' creed

This Reading Guide has been designed for use during Part I of the "Apostles' Creed" message series at South Ridge Church: January - April 2020

A Note from Pastor Justin:

Your beliefs are at the very core of who you are. They determine the decisions you make, how you will act or respond to different people or situations, and ultimately shape you into the person you're becoming. Your beliefs shape your entire worldview. In short, what you believe matters. A lot.

The Apostles' Creed, which was likely written and in use by 390 AD, provided a set of core Christian beliefs individuals could easily memorize and recite. Though much has changed over the past 1,600 years, many church denominations today - Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, and more - recite the Apostles' Creed regularly.

Today, the Apostles' Creed is broken down into 12 separate statements, or *Articles*. Over the next 9 weeks, SRC will be delving into each of these Articles, focusing on some of the core teachings of Christianity.

As we begin this series, let me encourage you to take a few important steps:

- (1) Write out the Apostles' Creed on your own (this exercise is part of Day 1 of this Reading Guide). As you write it out, ask yourself, *Is this really what I believe?* Also take the opportunity to write down any questions you may have about the Apostles' Creed or the Christian faith.
- (2) Commit to joining us every week of this series.
- (3) Commit to reading through this Reading Guide, reflecting and journaling through the questions provided within each daily reading.
- (4) Use a good Study Bible and/or other resources as you read through this Reading Guide. Refer to <https://southridgeblog.com/study-bible-info> for more information on many excellent Study Bibles available today. Some suggestions include:
 - NLT (or NIV) Life Application Study Bible, Third Edition
 - NIV Zondervan Study Bible
 - ESV Study Bible
- (5) Write down questions you have about what you're reading, and take opportunities to seek out answers to those questions.

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY, AS BURIED: HE DESCENDED TO SEATED AT THE HEAVEN, HE IS THE LIVING AND THE DEAD. I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF SAINTS, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING. AMEN.

Week 1:

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

DAY 1: I Believe...

The Apostle's Creed opens with the words, *I believe*. Why were these words used to begin the Apostles' Creed?

First, these words are important because what follows after is at the core of who we are as followers of Jesus. Our beliefs make us who we are.

Additionally, these opening words brought unity to Christians in the early church. When the Apostles' Creed was first written, many Christians were not well educated, and copies of the Scriptures weren't nearly as common as they are today. As such, the Apostles' Creed was a way for Christians to memorize some core beliefs of the faith on their own, and was also a way for them to, in unity, declare with one voice what they believe. It didn't matter if they were Jewish, Roman, or Greek, rich or poor, educated or illiterate. It was an opportunity for the early Church to be united, living out Jesus' prayer in John 17 in which He prayed, "*I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one.*"

READING & JOURNALING:

JOHN 1:12

Today, take the opportunity to write out the Apostles' Creed on your own. Space is provided on the previous page of this Reading Guide, or you may use your own journal.

Are there any specific words or phrases within the Apostles' Creed that stick out to you?

As you write it out, consider the question: *Is this really what I believe?*

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, while I *think* I know what I believe, I recognize I may have some doubts or fears about how to respond to questions about what I believe. Help me grow in confidence that I may be ready to share my beliefs when any opportunity arises to do so. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 2 Samuel 1:1-2:7

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 2: What you do vs. What you Believe

In his song titled *Creed*, songwriter Rich Mullins writes, "I believe what I believe. It's what makes me what I am. I did not make it, no it is making me. It is the very truth of God and not the invention of any man." In other words, Mullins rightly points out that it's our *beliefs* that make us who we are.

So think about it: What is the first question you ask somebody when you meet them for the first time? Chances are, you ask them something like, "What do you do for a living?"

But how would you respond if somebody you just met for the first time said, "So tell me who you are?" If you're not sure how you would respond, take some time today to journal it out. At the top of the page, simply write out, "Who is (your name)?"

If your response is to naturally go to what you do for a living, it's important to remember this is simply what you *do*, but it's not a reflection of who you *are*. If your response is to identify as a husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, or friend, this is simply a reflection of how others may see you, but it may not be who you really are. If your beliefs define who you really are, then...who are you?

READING & JOURNALING:

ROMANS 5:11, JOHN 1:12

How would you respond to the question, "Who are you?"

What Scripture verses would you use in your response?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, the question *Who are you?* is a really big question, and I'm not exactly sure how to respond to it. I know that the Scriptures declare that I'm Your child and Your friend. But I believe there's more You want me to know about who You've created me to be. As I engage with Your Word, the Bible, throughout the rest of this week, I pray that my eyes would be open to the wonders of who You are, and how You see me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 2 Samuel 3:1, 5:1-25, Psalm 23

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 3: I Believe in God the Father Almighty

In his book *Atomic Habits*, author and researcher James Clear discusses the importance of making decisions based on one's identity (who they believe they are), as opposed to making decisions based on what they hope to accomplish.

He writes, "Imagine two people resisting a cigarette. When offered a smoke, the first person says, "No thanks. I'm trying to quit." It sounds like a reasonable response, but this person still believes they are a smoker who is trying to be something else. They are hoping their behavior will change while carrying around the same beliefs. The second person declines by saying, "No thanks. I'm not a smoker." It's a small difference, but this statement signals a shift in identity. Smoking was part of their former life, not their current one. They no longer identify as someone who smokes."

This same logic applies to our relationship with God. Imagine two people wanting to know God on a deeper level. One may say, "I hope to know God better one day," while the other says, "I believe in God and I'm getting to know Him better every day." One identifies as somebody *hoping* to know God, while the other identifies as somebody who *does* know God.

DAY 4: Maker of Heaven and Earth

The Bible is filled with vast amounts of information. There's history of ancient peoples. Geography of distant lands. And wisdom about God and His people.

Another core teaching of the Scriptures is that they provide information on the very beginning of all things. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," is one of the most memorized verses in all of the Bible. Everything that happens after Genesis 1:1 hinges on whether or not this is true. If God didn't create or make all things, then everything else the Bible says about God and what He has done can be questioned. But if God *did* create all things, then everything that happens after Genesis 1:1 provides us more information on who He really is - His very nature.

To be sure, this is a core teaching of the Scriptures. The Bible does not set out to describe how old the earth may be, just as it doesn't set out to describe how fast light travels, or the physics of black holes. It simply begins by saying that we have an eternal God who started it all, and He wants us to know Him.

DAY 5: REVIEW

What was your biggest takeaway from this week's teaching — "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?"

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 2 Samuel 11 & 12

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

READING & JOURNALING:

JOHN 17:3

Are you more likely to identify as somebody who *desires* to know God, or as somebody who *does* know God and is getting to know Him better every day? Explain your answer.

What is at least one significant life experience you've had that has led you to question what you believe about God?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess there are days in which I would say I want to know You better, instead of saying I *am* knowing You better and better every day. Continue to do a transformational work within me so that I am one who truly *is* knowing You better and better each and every day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 2 Samuel 6 & 7

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

READING & JOURNALING:

GENESIS 1:1, PSALM 8

Why do you think it's important to believe that God is the maker of heaven and earth? Explain your answer.

What verse in Psalm 8 sticks out to you the most? What thoughts or feelings does it lead you to have?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, it's easy for me to see the ocean, a sunrise or sunset, or the colors of Autumn and to fall in love with nature. But more than this, I simply want to fall more deeply in love with You, the One who created it all. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Psalm 18 & 2 Samuel 9

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

I BELIEVE...

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY, AS BURIED: HE DESCENDED TO HEAVEN, HE IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER, LIVING AND THE KINGDOM OF SAINTS, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING. AMEN.

Week 2:

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary...

DAY 1: I Believe in Jesus Christ

If you were to ask scholars in history, archaeology, and even the sciences what happened on the night Jesus was born, or the days he was crucified and resurrected, nearly all would agree that *something* happened. It's likely these scholars would have some differing thoughts on exactly what it was that happened, but they would be in agreement that *something* happened.

Fortunately, we have the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as well as eye-witness accounts from Peter, Paul, and many women to fill in the blanks. Each was either an eye-witness to Jesus' ministry, or they interviewed dozens of eye-witnesses. They weren't uneducated nomads who simply happened to be wandering through the area. Luke was a trained doctor. Matthew was a government employee for the Roman Empire. John was well-educated in Greek philosophy. Paul, too, was an extremely well-educated scholar.

With so many eye-witnesses, it's easy to see why scholars of all fields today would agree that sometime around 2,000 years ago, *something* happened. Something so significant, it changed everything.

DAY 2: God's Only Begotten Son, Our Lord

The term *begotten* isn't one we use as a regular part of our vocabulary. It's included in the Apostles' Creed, however, to show that Jesus was a physically born Son of God. While He did come from heaven down to earth, He did so in a way that was completely unexpected. He was...begotten. Fathered by God Himself. Conceived by the Holy Spirit. And born of the virgin Mary.

But here in this Article of the Apostles' Creed, there are two other words that are seemingly out of place — *our Lord*. Up until now, the Creed has focused on what the person saying it believes, "I believe..." But now there's a sudden turn in direction, bringing unity to all who are saying the Apostles' Creed aloud. "I believe in Jesus Christ...*our Lord*."

More than anything, this shows that Jesus is at the very center of the Christian faith. In other words, it's not possible for somebody to say, "I believe in Jesus, but he's not my Lord." Instead, *anybody* who says, "I believe in Jesus," must be able to follow it up with, "...our Lord." He is Lord not only of one person, but of all people who have professed faith in Him.

READING & JOURNALING:

MATTHEW 16:13-20

What is the very first memory you have of hearing the name *Jesus*?

When did you first profess your faith (belief) in Jesus Christ? How have your beliefs about Jesus grown through the years?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, it's perplexing to think that there are so many eye-witnesses to Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection, yet so many who don't believe. Today, I simply offer myself, my life, and my ministry, to be used by You to help others recognize that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Psalm 51

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

READING & JOURNALING:

ROMANS 5:1-11

Why do you think the words "Our Lord" are used in this part of the Apostles' Creed?

On a scale of 1-10, how difficult is it for you to sing, pray, and worship with those who profess faith in Jesus, but who have different political beliefs (or other different convictions) than you do? Why do you think that is?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, forgive me for struggling to worship You when I am with others who live or think differently than me. This struggle proves that I put other issues ahead of You. May I continue to grow so that You and You alone are my Lord and King, and the most important person in my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 2 Samuel 24, Psalm 24

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 3: He was conceived by the Holy Spirit

Another core teaching of the Bible is that of the trinity - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the Scriptures never use the term *trinity*. Each 'person' in the Godhead is mentioned at different times and in different ways. And there are other moments, such as Jesus' baptism, in which all three are present.

Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit is yet another core teaching of the Christian faith. Jesus' mother, Mary, was a virgin. As a young woman — whom scholars would agree was likely between the ages of 12-14 years old — she had not yet slept with a man. Instead, an angel from heaven appeared to Mary to inform her she had conceived a child through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Being of Jewish faith, Mary would have had a lot of knowledge about the work of the Holy Spirit through the writings of the Old Testament. But to have an angel appear and tell her she was with child through the power of the Holy Spirit would have been a tremendous shock to her, her family, and the man to whom she was betrothed. Yet Mary responded by saying, *"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*

DAY 4: Born of the Virgin Mary

The story of Jesus' conception by the power of the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth is a foundational teaching of the Christian faith. While there aren't any scripture passages that speak of praying to Mary, it's clear that Mary had a significant role in the birth and upbringing of Jesus. In fact, Jesus wanted to ensure his mother was well cared for after his death (see John 19:26). So, who was Mary? And what lessons do we learn from her life?

According to notes in the Life Application Study Bible's we can note the following **strengths and accomplishments of her life**:

- *The mother of Jesus, the Messiah*
- *Willing to be available to God*
- *Knew and applied Old Testament scriptures.*

Additionally, we learn the following **lessons from her life**:

- *God's servants are often ordinary people who make themselves available to Him.*
- *A person's character is revealed by his or her response to the unexpected.*

DAY 5: REVIEW

What was your biggest takeaway from this week's teaching — *"I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary?"*

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Psalm 119:49-128

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

READING & JOURNALING:

LUKE 1:26-38

Why do you think Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit was made part of the Apostles' Creed?

What do you find most remarkable about Mary's response to the angel in Luke 1:38?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today I recognize that the story of Jesus' conception and birth may seem radical, yet the evidence of the Holy Spirit in my own life cannot be denied. Today, I commit to listening to Your voice so that I may better experience the life You have for me and live it to the full. In Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Psalm 1, Psalm 19

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

READING & JOURNALING:

LUKE 2:1-52

What do you think about the note from the Life Application Study Bible that, "God's servants are often ordinary people who make themselves available to Him?"

Be honest, how much do you make yourself available to God? What would it look like to make yourself fully available to Him today?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, while I like to think I regularly make myself available to You, I know there are times every single day when I am living for myself and my own desires. Your Word affirms that Your servants are often ordinary people who make themselves available to You. May I make myself wholly available today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Psalm 103 & Psalm 119:1-48

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

I BELIEVE...

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY, AS BURIED; HE DESCENDED TO HEAVEN, HE IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER, HE IS LIVING AND THE KING OF KINGS. I BELIEVE IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING. AMEN.

Week 3:

suffered under Pontius Pilate; [He] was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead...

DAY 1: Under Pontius Pilate, He was crucified

A careful reading of the Apostles' Creed will show that the only names mentioned include God (God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit) and two others, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Pontius Pilate.

Pilate was a political governor whose job was to oversee the the area in and around Jerusalem. As such, nobody could be sentenced to death without the governor's approval. The Jewish leaders could find lawbreakers to be guilty, but they could only offer punishment to a certain extent. Serious punishment had to be agreed-upon by the proper authorities.

For his part, Pontius Pilate was not Jewish, nor did he know much about Jesus. In fact, there were three separate occasions in which Pilate declared he could find no fault in Jesus, and certainly nothing that would make Him punishable by death.

But the Jewish leaders refused to back down and continued to press their case. Not only that, they declared allegiance to the Roman Empire and warned Pilate they would inform the emperor that he refused to eliminate a rebel against the empire. Pilate knew what was right, but made a decision based on fear.

DAY 2: [He] died, and was Buried.

There's a lot about Jesus' life and ministry between His birth and crucifixion that the Apostles' Creed doesn't mention. (Feel free to read Matthew 1-25, Mark 1-14, Luke 1-22, and John 1-17 for a thorough review.) But from what we do know about His life and ministry, there is *a lot* that was written about the day He was crucified, dead, and buried.

First, we know that Jesus was beaten, and the measure to which He was beaten would cause just about anybody to look away in horror. He was repeatedly whipped with sharp stones tied to the ends of the leather straps. It was a severe beating.

Second, we know that Jesus was crucified on a cross. This was a common form of execution in the Roman Empire.

Third, we know that Jesus died, and that He died without any broken bones. Soldiers responsible for crucifixions would often break the legs of those hanging on a cross in order to force their lungs to collapse in on themselves. But Jesus had been so badly beaten that He died before His legs were broken.

Finally, we know that Jesus was buried, as a tomb was provided for Him by a righteous man named Joseph.

READING & JOURNALING:

LUKE 23:1-25

Read through today's reading carefully. What sticks out to you most from today's reading?

Write about a time when you (1) Made a decision based on fear, like Pilate, (2) Mocked somebody or something you didn't fully understand, like Herod, and (3) Experienced suffering at the hands of others, like Jesus?

PRAYER:

Today, write out your own prayer to God based on the your response to the above question.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Psalm 119:127-176 & Psalm 137

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

READING & JOURNALING:

LUKE 23:26-55, JOHN 19:16-42

What does Jesus' crucifixion tell you about what God thinks of your sin?

What does Jesus' crucifixion tell you about how much God loves you and wants the best for you?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I know there are some today who don't like to think or talk about the subject of sin, yet Your Word is clear in showing how much of an impact it has in my life. Help me to see my own sins for what they are - a deep violation against You. Help me to see my sins as You do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Psalm 148, 149, & 150

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 3: He Descended into Hell...

The Apostles' Creed has been regularly used since around 390 AD. During the first 1,000-1,500 years, there wasn't much controversy surrounding the Creed or any of its Articles.

But this has all changed over the past couple hundred years or so, as the line "He descended into hell..." has been scrutinized by many biblical scholars. One theologian, Wayne Grudem, wrote an article in 1991 titled, "He Did Not Descend into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture Instead of the Apostles' Creed."

Other scholars, however, note that the intention of the phrase was to say that Jesus descended to the dead and the Creed was written using the vernacular of its time. For example, in his book titled, "He Descended to the Dead," Matthew Emerson argues that Jesus couldn't be raised from the dead if he didn't first descend to the dead.

Is this just semantics, or does it really matter? Here are a couple things to keep in mind:

- What you believe *does* matter, and it's good to think about what you believe and where those beliefs come from.
- This statement in the Apostles' Creed is interesting, but is not an essential belief for salvation.

DAY 4: On the Third Day He rose from the Dead

Without a doubt, the entirety of the Christian faith rests on Jesus' resurrection. And while the New Testament is filled with passages on the importance of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, there are two major themes that are foundational for the Christian faith.

First, the resurrection shows that Jesus is the true Son of God. While His disciples and countless others had thought Jesus was the Son of God, his resurrection left no doubt. As such, every knee will bow at the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:10-11). One day, all will know who Jesus really is, as He will judge the world in justice (Acts 17:30-31).

Second, Jesus' resurrection shows that Christians are now justified through our faith in Him (Romans 4:24-25). The New Bible Dictionary notes that the word *justified* is a legal term meaning "to acquit, to declare righteous, or the opposite of condemn." All who have truly professed faith in Jesus and believed in Him are justified before God. He sees us pure, holy, righteous, and without blemish. He sees us as His beloved daughters and sons.

DAY 5: REVIEW

What was your biggest takeaway from this week's teaching — "[He] suffered under Pontius Pilate; [He] was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead?"

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 1 Kings 8:1-9:9

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

READING & JOURNALING:

1 Peter 3:18-22

The Life Application Study Bible notes on this passage: "... While some Bible passages, such as this one, may remain unclear, we can discover certain truths from them along with the context of the rest of Scripture. In this passage, we discover that: (1) God speaks. While we puzzle over what, where, and how, we can see that God is communicating to the world. (2) God triumphs. Christ victoriously preached, indicating his power, control, and transcendence over all creation. (3) God saves. God exerts himself to rescue those who desire him. This mysterious passage tells us at least this much—and that is much indeed.

Why do you think it may be a good idea to wrestle with the meaning of hard-to-understand Scripture passages such as this one?

PRAYER: Today, write out your own prayer to God.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 1 Kings 2

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

READING & JOURNALING:

LUKE 24, JOHN 20, 2 CORINTHIANS 6:16-18,

Some are able to grasp that, "Jesus died for the whole world," but struggle to accept that, "Jesus died for me." Do you struggle to accept that you are worthy of God's love?

For all who have professed faith in Christ, answer the following question by writing out your response in a minimum of 3-5 sentences: What thoughts come to mind as you ponder that God sees you as His beloved daughter or son?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today I'm tremendously thankful that You see me as Your beloved daughter or son. May I rest in this truth each and every day, knowing that You have declared me worthy of Your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 1 Kings 3 & 6

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

I BELIEVE...

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY, AS BURIED: HE DESCENDED TO SEATED AT THE HEAVEN, HE IS THE KING OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD. I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF SAINTS, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING. AMEN.

Week 4:

He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty...

DAY 1: Engage with God's Word - Part I

For some, reading through the Bible on a regular basis is normal. They wake up, grab a cup of coffee, and engage with God's Word for 15-30 minutes and then spend some time journaling before entering into the rest of the day.

For others, reading through the Bible on a regular basis is challenging. Some of the responses I (Pastor Justin) regularly hear from others about the things getting in the way of engaging with the Scriptures regularly include:

- "I don't have enough time."
- "It doesn't make sense."
- "I don't even know where to start."
- "It's not relevant to my life."

What's interesting is that the majority of those who *do* engage with the Scriptures on a regular basis started out with the same kinds of thoughts. But as they began to engage with the Bible regularly, they began to see that they do have time for the things most important to them. And while they weren't sure where to start, the more they read, the more God spoke to them, the more the Bible began to make sense, and the more they were able to see how relevant it is to their life.

DAY 2: Engage with God's Word - Part II

Think about this: What kind of questions do professional journalists who review movies, books, or music albums try to answer in their review? *How does it compare to other movies, books, or albums? What emotions did it bring to mind? What were some of the common themes throughout the movie, book, or album?*

Those who have been in the industry for several years have likely narrowed their focus to one or two questions. Others likely watch a movie, read a book, or listen to an album at least three times as they wrestle with their thoughts.

This principle of watching, reading, or listening to something three times is helpful for Bible study as well. Specifically, reading through a book of the Bible at least three times while wrestling with your thoughts will provide greater retention, understanding, and meaning from the text.

If Christianity fully hinges on Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection, the Gospels are a great starting point when it comes to reading the Bible. And reading through each of the Gospels at least three times will help anybody to better grasp the significance of Jesus Christ.

READING & JOURNALING:

HEBREWS 4:12, 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17, JAMES 1:22

On a scale of 1-10, how well do you engage with God's Word? (This means not just reading it, but dwelling on it, talking about it with others, journaling your thoughts, memorizing it, etc.)

What, if anything, is currently getting in the way of you being able (or willing) to engage with the Scriptures regularly?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that I often make weak excuses for not spending time in Your Word. Like all people, I know that I have time for the things in which I make time. When I choose not to make time for You, it's because I'm putting something else ahead of You. This week, I commit to engage with Your Word for at least (3, 4, 5, or more) days. As I do so, I pray that You reveal something new to me each day. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Proverbs 1 & 2

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

READING & JOURNALING:

PSALM 33:4, COLOSSIANS 3:16-17

Have you ever taken the opportunity to read through a book in the Bible at least three times to get a better understanding of the meaning of the text? If so, what was this experience like for you? (If not, consider doing so with a short book like Philippians, Colossians, or James, or commit to the the reading challenge outlined below.)

Reading Challenge: Take some time to write out a plan to read through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John three times each over the next month, 3 months, or 6 months and to take notes on Jesus' life, ministry, and teachings.

PRAYER:

Today, write out your own prayer to God.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Proverbs 3 & 4

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 3: He Ascended Into Heaven...

Acts 1:8-9 reads, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

There is a tremendous amount of Christian literature on the topic of Jesus, His birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection. For these topics to be part of the Apostles' Creed makes sense, as Christ is literally the bedrock of the Christian faith.

However, what happens after Jesus' resurrection? There aren't nearly as many books or messages that focus on Jesus' ascension into heaven. But this event still found a way into the Apostles' Creed.

His ascension is important because:

- Jesus provides responsibilities to His followers.
- It confirms Jesus' authority to give these responsibilities to His followers.
- It provides hope for all Christians, as we can regularly be thinking about what's to come.

READING & JOURNALING:

MARK 16:19-20, LUKE 24:51-53, ACTS 1:8-9, MATTHEW 22:36-40 & 28:19-20.

Break it down as simply as possible: What would you say are the main responsibilities Jesus gave his disciples?

On a scale of 1-10, at what level would you say you live and make decisions in order to fulfill these responsibilities?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that there are times when I read the Scriptures and recognize that You gave Your disciples some important responsibilities, yet I don't always see them as *my* responsibilities to fulfill. Today, I'm grateful for the reminder that You entrust me at the same level You entrusted them. Help me to fulfill these commands well. In Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Proverbs 16, 17, & 18

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 4: He is Seated at the Right Hand of the Father

There are two primary responsibilities Jesus gave His followers. First, the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) says to love God, and love others. Second, the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8-9) says to be Jesus' witnesses and to make disciples of all nations. Everything about being a Christian is summarized in these two commandments. Love God. Love others. Make disciples of all nations.

These commands are foundational for everybody who has professed faith in Jesus Christ. And for nearly 2,000 years, Christians around the world have been asking questions such as: *What must we do to fulfill these responsibilities well?*

Fortunately, God has provided us with the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and direct us as we set out to love God, love others, and make disciples. Because of the Holy Spirit, we have everything we need to fulfill these responsibilities well. And as we continue to rely on wisdom from God's Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit, each and every one of us will be more and more like Christ. We will grow in our love for God, our love for others, and will naturally want to help others grow as well.

READING & JOURNALING:

HEBREWS 7:23-28(?), ROMANS 8:9-17

Think back to when you first professed faith in Christ (whether it's 3, 5, 10, or 20+ years). In what ways have *you* grown in your love for God, love for others, and in making disciples of all nations? (Consider asking a trusted friend or family member for examples of how they have seen you grow through the years.)

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I know that because of my time in Your Word, in prayer, and in fellowship with other Christians, I have grown through the years. Yet there are still times when I doubt myself, and wonder why You've entrusted me to fulfill these commands. Today I simply pray that You will help me to see myself as You do. Significant. Worthy. Accepted. Secure. In Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Proverbs 31

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 5: REVIEW

What was your biggest takeaway from this week's teaching — *"He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty?"*

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 1 Kings 11 & 12

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

I BELIEVE...

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY, AS BURIED: HE DESCENDED TO SEATED AT THE HEAVEN, HE IS THE KING OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD. I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF SAINTS, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING. AMEN.

Week 5:

From there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

DAY 1: How do You View God?

What thoughts come to mind when you think about God? Do your thoughts generally turn to seeing God as gracious and merciful? Or do your thoughts generally turn to seeing God as just and full of wrath?

For the most part, your view of God will have a tremendous impact on your life, your daily decisions, and your ability to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission well. Your view of God also impacts the way you see yourself, and the way you see others.

In a book titled, *"How People Grow,"* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend, the authors note that the biggest barrier to people growing in their relationship with God is their view of God. If somebody sees God primarily as a God of grace, they will grow and come to understand God's justice and wrath. But if somebody sees God primarily as a God of wrath, they struggle to fully understand His grace. The authors write, *"People must discover that God is for them and not against them...In fact, one of Jesus' main emphases was to show people how their concept of God was way out of whack."*

READING & JOURNALING:

2 PETER 3:9, 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-6

How regularly do you pause to consider whether your concept of God is "out of whack?"

What is [at least] one thought or question you have about the nature or character of God?

What will you do this week to challenge any misconceptions you may have about the character and nature of God?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I know that when I hear something about You it may not truly reflect who You are. Nevertheless, I'm sure I have some misconceptions about You, and these misconceptions likely impact every single part of my life. This week, I simply pray that You will help me to see You and know You as You really are. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 1 Kings 16:29-17:24

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 2: God Wants You to Live

Ezekiel 33:11 reads, *As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live.*

This is one of many passages throughout the Scriptures that speaks into God's desire for His people. In the Old Testament, Ezekiel was a prophet who did his best to communicate God's words to His people. For much of the book, the people of God did not want to face their sins and accept that they held any responsibility for their circumstances. When they did come to accept responsibility, they experienced tremendous guilt and shame for previously rebelling against God. So on the one hand, they didn't want to accept what they had done, and on the other hand, they finally accepted it but then couldn't see how God could forgive them for it.

Ezekiel patiently reminded them that God takes no pleasure in the death of wicked people, but instead wants people to truly live the life God has for them.

This lesson is equally important today. You may think God is unable to forgive you for something you've done. But He already has, and what He most desires is for you to truly live.

READING & JOURNALING:

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5, EZEKIEL 33:11

In what ways does your view of God impact the way you see yourself, and see others?

Do you currently struggle to believe that God will (or already has) forgiven you for any sins you've committed against God or others? If so, why do you think that is?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, while I do desire to grow in my knowledge of who You are, I also desire to live the life You have called me to live. I recognize this means living life to the full, and not being overwhelmed by my past. While my past sins cannot be denied, they are not a reflection of how You see me, and I'm eternally grateful for that! I praise you today. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 1 Kings 18 & 19

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 3: Jesus Will Return...

After Jesus' resurrection, He was sure to teach His followers that He will one day return. As you can imagine, many of His disciples expected it to happen any day. They lived their lives by preaching the Gospel and doing their very best to fulfill Jesus' commands to love God, love others, and to make disciples. Some were imprisoned, beaten, exiled, or even executed. Yet they all continued to believe that Jesus was going to return any day.

Centuries later, the Apostles' Creed affirmed that a key teaching of the Christian faith is that Jesus will one day return. If Christians really do believe that Jesus is God, that He did die for our sins, that He did rise from the grave, and that He did ascend into heaven, it makes complete sense that we would continue to believe that He is going to return.

While we may not know when it will happen or what it may look like, it's important to continue to hold onto hope that Jesus will return, and His return will be far greater than anything we can imagine.

READING & JOURNALING:

HEBREWS 9:27-28, REVELATION 1:4-8

What does Hebrews 9:27-28 say is the purpose of Jesus' life and ministry? Similarly, what does it say is the purpose of His second coming?

Would you live any differently if you knew for sure that Jesus would return sometime over the next week, month, or year? If so, why do you think that is?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today's reading has helped me realize that I probably would live differently if I knew for certain Jesus would return sometime soon. But deep down I know that I should be living the life You have called me to live, and the timing of Jesus' return ought not impact how I live. May I live each day as it may be my last. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 1 Kings 21 & 22

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 4: ...And Judge the Living and the Dead

Earlier this week we looked into the importance of seeing God as a God of grace, and the biblical truth that God is for us, not against us. Fully understanding these aspects of God's nature is extremely important before studying out other passages that speak into the coming judgment of all people.

In Matthew 25, Jesus provides three teaching examples with some common themes. First, He teaches what it means to be reading for His return. Second, He teaches how we are to live until He does.

The Life Application Study Bible notes some additional themes that are a present in Matthew 25. These include:

- *Matthew 25:1-13 teaches that we are responsible for our own individual spiritual condition.*
- *Matt 25:14-30 shows the necessity of using well what God has entrusted to us.*
- *Matt 25:31-46 stresses the importance of serving others in need.*

No parable by itself completely describes our preparation. Instead, each paints one part of the whole picture.

READING & JOURNALING:

MATTHEW 25:1-13, MATTHEW 25:14-30, MATTHEW 25:31-46

Do you notice any additional themes present in any of the parables in Matthew 25?

Re-read the first bullet note from the Life Application Study Bible from today's devotional. What thoughts come to mind as you meditate on that?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess there are times when I feel that others bear the primary responsibility for my spiritual condition, and today has been an excellent reminder that I must take the initiative to grow in my walk with You. May my life be a reflection that I take this responsibility seriously. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 2 Kings 2

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

DAY 5: REVIEW

What was your biggest takeaway from this week's teaching — "From there He shall come to judge the living and the dead?"

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: 2 Kings 5:1-6:23

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

I BELIEVE...

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY, DESCENDED TO SEATED AT THE DEAD. I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING. AMEN.

Journal: Dig Deeper into God's Word

Read the F260 passages for the day, and then **Reflect** and **Respond** to the passage by answering the questions provided below.

7 ARROWS of BIBLE READING

What does this passage say?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What does this passage tell us about man?



What does this passage demand of me?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



What does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

