

CREED

A SEVEN-WEEK REFLECTION GUIDE
ON THE APOSTLES' CREED



J. D. WALT

CREED

A SEVEN-WEEK REFLECTION GUIDE
ON THE APOSTLES' CREED



J. D. WALT



Copyright 2012 by Seedbed Publishing

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other— except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Printed in the United States of America

16 15 14 13 12 1 2 3 4 5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012946253

ISBN: 978-1-62824-000-9

ePub ISBN: 978-1-62824-002-3

Mobi ISBN: 978-1-62824-001-6

uPDF ISBN: 978-1-62824-003-0

Cover and page design by Haley Hill

SEEDBED PUBLISHING
Sowing for a Great Awakening
204 N. Lexington Avenue, Wilmore, Kentucky 40390
www.seedbed.com

Contents

Christian Symbols	ix
Introduction	xiii

Week 1:

I Believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth

<i>Day 1: In the Beginning</i>	3
<i>Day 2: And They Felt No Shame</i>	8
<i>Day 3: By Him We Cry, “Abba, Father”</i>	12
<i>Day 4: Who Is This King of Glory?</i>	15
<i>Day 5: The Skies Proclaim the Work of His Hands</i>	18
<i>Day 6: Now the Serpent</i>	22

Week 2:

I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord

<i>Day 1: The Word Became Flesh</i>	27
<i>Day 2: The Radiance of God’s Glory</i>	30
<i>Day 3: For God Was Pleased</i>	32
<i>Day 4: That You May Know Him Better</i>	34
<i>Day 5: I Am</i>	36
<i>Day 6: Whoever Believes</i>	40

Contents

Week 3:

**Who Was Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was Crucified, Died and Was Buried**

<i>Day 1: In the Sixth Month.....</i>	43
<i>Day 2: Caesar Augustus Issued a Decree.....</i>	46
<i>Day 3: What Shall I Do, Then, with Jesus?.....</i>	49
<i>Day 4: And Darkness Came Over the Whole Land.....</i>	51
<i>Day 5: There Came a Rich Man from Arimathea.....</i>	54
<i>Day 6: By This Gospel You Are Saved.....</i>	57

Week 4:

**He Descended to the Dead. The Third Day He Arose from the Dead. He
Ascended into Heaven and Sits at the Right Hand of God the Father
Almighty. From There, He Shall Come to Judge the Living and the Dead**

<i>Day 1: He Went and Preached to the Spirits in Prison.....</i>	61
<i>Day 2: He is Not Here—He Is Risen.....</i>	64
<i>Day 3: He Was Taken Up.....</i>	67
<i>Day 4: I See Heaven Open.....</i>	69
<i>Day 5: He Will Appear a Second Time.....</i>	72
<i>Day 6: Jesus Christ Is Lord.....</i>	75

Week 5:

I Believe in the Holy Spirit

<i>Day 1: I Will Put My Spirit In You.....</i>	79
<i>Day 2: What Does This Mean?.....</i>	82

Contents

Day 3: No Branch Can Bear Fruit by Itself..... 85
Day 4: So I Say, Walk by the Spirit 88
Day 5: For the Common Good 90
Day 6: But the Greatest of These Is Love 93

Week 6:

The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints

Day 1: I Will Build My Church..... 97
Day 2: A People Belonging to God 100
Day 3: It Seemed Good to the Holy Spirit and to Us..... 103
Day 4: You Are All One in Christ Jesus 106
Day 5: A Great Multitude No One Could Count..... 109
Day 6: Let Us Run with Perseverance..... 111

Week 7:

**The Forgiveness of Sins, the Resurrection of the Body,
and the Life Everlasting**

Day 1: The Law Is Only a Shadow 115
Day 2: As We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors 120
Day 3: Then the End Will Come 122
Day 4: Sown In Weakness—Raised In Power 125
Day 5: Now This Is Eternal Life..... 128
Day 6: I Am Making Everything New 131

About the Author..... 134

Christian Symbols



Alpha and Omega

In Revelation 1:8, the Lord said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega; who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” This symbol captures the comprehensive nature of the reign of Jesus Christ.



Descending Dove

The descending dove symbolizes the descent of the Holy Spirit at the baptism of Jesus as described in all four Gospels. It also often references the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.



Ichthus

In Greek, *ichthus* (ΙΧΘΥΣ), the word for fish, serves also as an acronym “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.” Early Christians, fearful of persecution, identified themselves to one another with this secret symbol from the late second century.



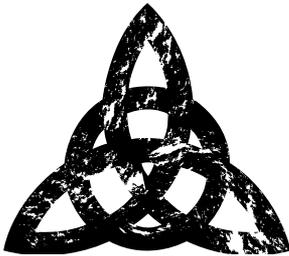
INRI

INRI is the Latin inscription over the cross. The letters stand for “Jesus of Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum,” which translates to “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”



Agnus Dei

The Lamb of God, carrying the Banner of Victory. The banner itself is sometimes called the Easter or Resurrection Banner, symbolizing Christ's victory over death. The three-rayed halo signifies divinity. In John 1:29, we read that when John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God." This is the most ancient symbol used to represent the Son of God.



Triquetra

In Latin, *triquetra* means three-cornered. The symbol demonstrates the simultaneous distinction and unity of the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; three persons in one God.



Chi Rho

In Greek, chi and rho are the first two letters of Christ superimposed upon one another. The Chi Rho was one of the first Christograms (a combination of letters that form an abbreviation for the name of Jesus Christ). Another popular Christogram is IHS (a monogram of the Holy Name), derived from the Greek word IHΣΟΥΣ (ΙΗΣΟΥΣ) for Jesus, or referring to *Iesus Hominum Salvator*, Jesus saviour of mankind, representing the Holy Name.

Introduction

Creeds matter. They make us who we are.

From retail outlets to political candidates to national governments, everyone vies to sow their creed into the seedbed of our hearts and minds these days. They all want us to believe what they believe, carefully crafting their creeds with the hope of gaining our affirmation.

The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America contains this creedal affirmation:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

At the heart of America's pledge of allegiance we find this creedal claim:

One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Every branch of the military lives by a creed. Consider the Rifleman's Creed written by Maj. Gen. William H. Rupertus, United States Marine, following the attack on Pearl Harbor.

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine.

My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life.

Introduction

My rifle, without me, is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than my enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will . . .

My rifle and myself know that what counts in this war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, or the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count. We will hit . . .

My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strength, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will ever guard it against the ravages of weather and damage as I will ever guard my legs, my arms, my eyes and my heart against damage. I will keep my rifle clean and ready. We will become part of each other. We will . . .

Before God, I swear this creed. My rifle and myself are the defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.

So be it, until victory is America's and there is no enemy, but peace!

Even our children's video games revolve around creeds. Interestingly, one of the more popular games uses the word "creed" in its title. *Assassin's Creed* centers around affirmations like these:

Never kill an innocent person. Always be discreet. Never compromise the brotherhood.

In Nazi Germany, two small words pressed themselves into the credal affirmation at the heart of the extermination of six million Jews, "Hail Hitler!"

Then there's the world of commerce and retail. Littered with phrases one might call mottos or taglines or buzzwords, they hold credal dynamics.

“Save money. Live better. Walmart.”

“Think Different.” (Apple)

“You're in good hands with Allstate.”

They become so familiar through their ubiquitous presence we can complete the slogans ourselves. It's proof of the way creeds shape us even when we don't realize they are shaping us.

There are creeds, and then there are *creeds*. The Bible offers a number of credal affirmations. The creed of ancient Israel, known as the Shema, reads, “Hear O Israel, The Lord is our God. The Lord is one” (Deut. 4:6). The first creed of the Church consists of three words and comes straight from Scripture, “Jesus is Lord!” (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:9).

In the early centuries after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the faith of the Church began to crystallize its deepest core beliefs into creeds. The faith delivered to them from the first followers of Jesus came under attack by false teachers with heretical ideas. The leaders of the Church gathered themselves for dialogue, debate, and discernment. Stories are told that many of these leaders limped or were missing limbs as a result of the torturous persecutions they suffered at the hands of the enemies of the Church. As they sought the Holy Spirit on the nature of the true faith, clarity emerged around core affirmations. What emerged from these “councils” are what we today call the ecumenical creeds. By that we mean this is the faith proclaimed by all Christians, in all places, and at all times.

These ancient creeds, spoken by billions worldwide, hold the capacity to focus, protect, connect, unite, remind, instruct, and form

us into the very people of God. In our distracted culture today, the challenge is to prevent the morph into mindless weekly recitations at church. It's so easy to casually repeat these creeds—all the while losing sight of the powerful words. John Wesley himself warned that we would one day maintain a form of faith while denying its power. For believers, these creeds offer a lifelong curriculum for faith and formation. With respect to our beliefs, the Apostles' Creed is both bottom line and battle cry.

The guide in your hands or on your screen is an effort to bring particular focus to the Apostles' Creed. In the pages ahead you will be invited to a daily practice of reading Scripture, meditating or dwelling on the text, and reflecting on the teachings of some of the Church's earliest leaders. You will be invited to ask your questions, even the seemingly unaskable ones. It has been said that the heart cannot rejoice in what the mind rejects. The Christian faith has for centuries stood thoughtfully firm amid the most formidable intellectual challenges imaginable.

It's important to also recognize that sometimes our questions mask deeper issues, providing a protection against dealing with them. For example, some will not acknowledge God as "Father," contending this name is rooted in ancient patriarchal cultures and so reflects the spirit of the age rather than a revealed theological truth. All the while, this same person grew up in a home with an abusive father. The unhealed wounds serve to keep them at bay from the healing love of the Father, as they cloak themselves in philosophical meanderings.

The seven weeks ahead offer ample opportunity to delve deep into the biblical world of this great creed seeking instruction, correction, understanding, healing, revelation, and transformation.

Introduction

Give yourself to this season of exploration that you might more deeply possess your faith; be more deeply possessed by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and become more deeply united to fellow believers.

Near the end of his brief life, Rich Mullins put the Apostles' Creed to music. The refrain captures the essence of a study like this.

I believe, yes, I believe. It's what makes me who 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.

Creeds matter. They make us who we are.

CREED



Week I

*I Believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Creator of Heaven and Earth*

Day 1: *In the Beginning*

READ

Genesis 1:1–2:2

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and the

gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

Day 1

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning—the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

MEDITATE

Underline the recurring phrases throughout this opening passage of Scripture. (hint: “And God said,” “And God saw,” etc.) List the phrases below.

For a moment, suspend any propensity to read Genesis 1 from a scientific method or worldview and ponder these phrases: “God said. And it was so. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning . . .” Repeat the phrases aloud over and over so your ears can hear. Mull the words over in your mind so your eyes can see. Ponder them in your heart and behold the awesome God of such creative power, sovereign order, and unparalleled beauty.

REFLECT

I believe in God the Father. Notice how quickly it’s said, and how much it’s worth. He’s God, and he’s Father; God in power, Father in goodness. How lucky we are to have discovered that our God is our Father! So let us believe in him and promise ourselves everything from his kindness and mercy, because he is almighty. That’s why we believe in God the Father almighty.

Nobody must say, “He can’t forgive me my sins.”

“How can’t he, being almighty?”

And I say, “But he’s almighty.”

And you: “I’ve committed such sins as I can’t possibly be cleansed and delivered from.”

I reply, “But he’s almighty.”

Notice what you sing to him in the psalm: “Bless the Lord, my soul,” it says, “and do not forget his recompenses, who shows himself gracious to all your iniquities, who heals all your weaknesses” (Ps. 103:2–3). That’s what we need him to be almighty for.

The whole of creation needs this, of course, in order to be created; he is almighty for making heavenly things and earthly things, almighty for making immortal things and mortal things, almighty for making spiritual things and material things, almighty for making visible things and invisible

things; great in the great things, and not small in the least things; in a word, he is almighty for making whatever he has wished to make.

I mean, let me tell you how many things he can't do. He can't die, he can't sin, he can't lie, he can't be deceived or mistaken; so many things he can't do, and if he could do them he wouldn't be almighty. So believe in him and confess him; For with the heart one believes unto justice, but with the mouth one makes confession unto salvation (Rom. 10:10). That's why, once you have believed, you must confess, when you give back the Symbol. So receive now what you are to retain, and afterward to give back, and never to forget.

—From a sermon on the Creed
St. Augustine of Hippo, 5th century

ASK

Express your questions, doubts, curiosities, and conundrums.

AFFIRM

Write any fresh affirmation stirring in your heart and mind from today.

Now affirm the Apostles' Creed aloud:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . .

Day 2: *And They Felt No Shame*

READ

Genesis 2:4–25

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground—the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. *And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”*

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Day 2

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

*The man said,
"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."*

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

MEDITATE

As you read through the text, perhaps a verse or phrase stood out to you. Copy that phrase down here in a slow, deliberative fashion. If not, then choose one of the bolded verses from the passage and copy it in your handwriting. As a way of meditating, write the verse or phrase you selected five times, slowly, one after the other. Then rewrite the text or rephrase it in your own words (i. e., God gave the man a job: to care for the garden). As you did this exercise, did any insight or epiphany come forth? Note it here.

REFLECT

If you want to know why we call our God Father, listen to Moses: “Is he not your Father who created you, who made you and established you?” (Deut. 32:6).

Listen too to Isaiah: “O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand” (Isa. 64:8). Under prophetic inspiration Isaiah speaks plainly. God is our Father, not by nature, but by grace and by adoption. Paul too was a father: father of the Christians in Corinth. Not because he had begotten them according to the flesh, but because he had regenerated them according to the Spirit.

Christ when his body was fastened to the cross saw Mary, his mother according to the flesh, and John, the disciple most dear to him, and said to John: “Behold your mother,” and to Mary: “Behold your son.” Christ called Mary John’s mother, not because she had begotten him, but because she loved him (John 19:26–27).

Joseph too was called father of Christ, not as procreator in a physical sense, but as his guardian: he was to nourish and protect him.

With greater reason God calls himself Father of human beings and wants to be called Father by us. What unspeakable generosity! He dwells in the heavens; we live on the earth. He has created the ages; we live in time. He holds the world in his hand; we are but grasshoppers on the face of the earth.

—From *God is Father*
Cyril of Jerusalem, 4th century

ASK

Express your questions, doubts, curiosities, and conundrums.

AFFIRM

Write any fresh affirmation stirring in your heart and mind from today.

Now affirm the Apostles' Creed aloud:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . .

Day 3: By Him We Cry, “Abba, Father”

READ

Romans 8:15–17

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Galatians 4:1–7

What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

MEDITATE

Invite the Holy Spirit to aid you in addressing God as “Abba, Father.” Speak this most intimate name of affection a child would use for their “Daddy,” over and over. Did you find this difficult? Awkward? Forced or natural? If you feel resistance to this way of addressing God, ask yourself where the

resistance comes from. What makes it difficult for you to conceive of and believe in God as a good Father? So often the failure of our earthly fathers makes it very challenging to approach and believe in God as a good and loving Father. Invite the Holy Spirit to begin or deepen a process of healing in your life. Pray for the healing and restoration of your vision of God as loving Father. It will take time.

REFLECT

This relationship also involves *love*. If God be my Father, he loves me. And oh, how he loves me! When God is a Husband he is the best of husbands. Widows, somehow or other, are always well cared for. When God is a Friend, he is the best of friends, and sticketh closer than a brother; and when he is a Father he is the best of fathers. O fathers! perhaps ye do not know how much ye love your children. When they are sick ye find it out, for ye stand by their couches and ye pity them, as their little frames are writhing in pain. Well, “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” Ye know how ye love your children too, when they grieve you by their sin; anger arises, and you are ready to chasten them, but no sooner is the tear in their eye, than your hand is heavy, and you feel that you had rather smite yourself than smite them; and every time you smite them you seem to cry, “Oh that I should have thus to afflict my child for his sin! Oh that I could suffer in his stead!” And God, even our Father, “doth not afflict willingly.” Is not that a sweet thing? He is, as it were, compelled to it; even the Eternal arm is not willing to do it; it is only his great love and deep wisdom that brings down the blow.

—From “The Fatherhood of God”
Charles Spurgeon

ASK

Express your questions, doubts, curiosities, and conundrums.

AFFIRM

Write any fresh affirmation stirring in your heart and mind from today.

Now affirm the Apostles' Creed aloud:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . .

Day 4: Who Is This King of Glory?

READ

Psalm 24

*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the waters.*

*Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy place?*

*He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to an idol
or swear by what is false.*

*He will receive blessing from the Lord
and vindication from God his Savior.*

*Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, O God of Jacob. Selah*

*Lift up your heads, O you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*

*Who is this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.*

*Lift up your heads, O you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*

*Who is he, this King of glory?
The Lord Almighty—
he is the King of glory. Selah*

MEDITATE

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps. 24:1). Meditate on this phrase as an affirmation of faith. Let your mind swell with the expansive content of “everything in it.” Imagine now the Lord coming to his Creation, standing at the gates and preparing to enter as the King of glory. Imagine now this God knocking on the gate of your life. Declare to the gates of your heart, “Lift up your heads, O you gates . . . that the King of glory may come in” (Ps. 24:7).

Do you know the song “Clean Hands” by Charlie Hall? If not, do a quick search online and listen to the lyrics. Sing the song as an act of meditative prayer.

REFLECT

I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator . . . One blade of grass or one speck of dust is enough to occupy your entire mind in beholding the art with which it has been made.

—From *The Germination of the Earth*
Basil the Great

ASK

Express your questions, doubts, curiosities, and conundrums.

AFFIRM

Write any fresh affirmation stirring in your heart and mind from today.

Now affirm the Apostles' Creed aloud:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . .

Day 5: *The Skies Proclaim the Work of His Hands*

READ

Psalm 19

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,
which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is hidden from its heat.
The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.*

*The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.
The ordinances of the Lord are sure
and altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.
By them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
Who can discern his errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then will I be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.
May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

MEDITATE

Psalm 19 captures what many have called the two books of revelation: the Creation itself and the Torah (the law or Word of God). Everything God creates points back to God. Every word God speaks reveals more of his nature. Tonight, go outdoors where you might catch a glimpse of the moon and the stars. While there, recite aloud, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” Meditate on how they speak of the glory of God through their speechlessness. In the morning, wake

early enough to catch the sunrise, and behold the sun springing forth from its pavilion like a champion rejoicing to race across the sky and with every move to shout glory through its brilliant silence. Consider that a degree closer and we would burn up; a degree further away and we would freeze to death. This sun is not a god as so many in history have supposed. No, it points to the God who created it.

Learn to read the book of Creation and to receive its revelation with an ever awakening freshness. Meditate and think on these things. God has ordered our days, weeks, months, and seasons in rhythmic patterns that reveal his brilliant reality.

REFLECT

Let the truth of God sink into your soul to be its foundation stone. God is One, without beginning and without change. There was no one before him who caused him to be, and he will not have anyone after him. He has not had a beginning and he will not ever have an end. He is good and just.

God is One and he has created souls and bodies, heaven and earth.

He is the maker of everything, yet the Father of an only Son before time began: our Lord Jesus Christ through whom he has made all things visible and invisible. God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not restricted to any one place: not even the heavens can contain him. On the contrary, the heavens are the work of his fingers and it is he who holds the universe in his hands. He is in everything and yet also beyond everything.

Do not imagine that the sun can shine more brightly than he or be as great as he. It was God who created the sun and therefore he is proportionately more magnificent and more brilliant.

He knows what will happen in the future. He is more powerful than anyone. He knows everything and does everything in accordance with his

own will. He is not subject to the vicissitudes of time; he does not depend on others; he is not the victim of destiny. He is perfect in everything and possesses all the virtues in their fullness. He it is who has prepared a crown for the righteous.

—From *The Foundation Stone of the Soul*
Cyril of Jerusalem, 4th century

ASK

Express your questions, doubts, curiosities, and conundrums.

AFFIRM

Write any fresh affirmation stirring in your heart and mind from today.

Now affirm the Apostles' Creed aloud:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . .

Day 6: Now the Serpent

READ

Genesis 3:1–24

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Day 6

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

*"Cursed are you above all the livestock
and all the wild animals!*

You will crawl on your belly

*and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.*

And I will put enmity

*between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;*

*he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."*

To the woman he said,

*"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children.*

*Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you."*

*To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree
about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'*

*"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.*

*It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.*

By the sweat of your brow

*you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;*

*for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”*

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

MEDITATE

Did any particular phrase or verse capture your attention in the reading? If so, pay attention. The Holy Spirit may be bringing this to mind for a particular reason. If not, consider the bolded text. Meditate on what it would be like to walk with the Lord God in the cool of the day through beautiful gardens. Now roll these words around in your mind, “And they hid from the Lord God.” Speak these words of God aloud as though God were speaking them to you, “Where are you?” Locate your present condition of life and faith on the continuum below:

Walking with God ————— Hiding from God

REFLECT

I believe that God created me, along with all creatures. God gave to me: body and soul, eyes, ears and all the other parts of my body, my mind and all my senses and preserves them as well. God gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and land, spouse and children, fields, animals, and all I own. Every day God abundantly provides everything I need to nourish this body and life. God protects me against all danger, shields and defends me from all evil. God does all this because of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, not because I've earned it or deserved it. For all of this, I must thank, praise, serve, and obey God. Yes, this is true!

—From *The Small Catechism*
Martin Luther

ASK

Express your questions, doubts, curiosities, and conundrums.

AFFIRM

Write any fresh affirmation stirring in your heart and mind from today.

Now affirm the Apostles' Creed aloud:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . .