

AN ANCIENT FAITH
FOR A MODERN AGE

What Do
We Believe?

A Rule of Faith



WOODMARK
CHURCH

A Pastoral Word

Why a Rule of Faith?

At Woodmark, our church family represents more than forty nationalities and a wide range of Christian traditions. We come from different cultures, denominations, and theological backgrounds. We value that diversity as a reflection of the global church.

But diversity does not mean aimlessness. We want to be rooted in the beliefs Christians have historically confessed together.

That is why we are calling this series A Rule of Faith.

The phrase comes from the early church. Christians used the language of a rule of faith to describe the shared beliefs that gave shape to the biblical story and united the church around the gospel.

We want to recover that spirit for our own day.

Rather than creating our own statement around our particular theological preferences, we are rooting this series in one of Christianity's oldest and most enduring summaries of faith: the Apostles' Creed. It begins with two simple words: "I believe."

The creed is not Scripture, nor does it replace Scripture. It is a concise summary of the biblical story. It gives us shared language for naming the God revealed in Scripture and the gospel Christians have confessed across generations, cultures, and traditions.

How to Use This Companion Guide

This guide is designed to help you carry the conversation beyond Sunday.

Each week corresponds to a line or theme from the Apostles' Creed and includes a short theological overview, a central idea, selected Scripture readings, reflection questions, historic Christian voices, additional reading, and simple practices for individuals and families.

Use the guide as a companion rather than an assignment. Read the Scripture passages slowly. Carry one of the questions with you through the week. Return to a quotation that arrests your attention. Talk about the ideas around the dinner table. Pray the prayers. Write in the margins.

Most importantly, allow these ancient words to send you back into Scripture and deeper into the life of God.

Our hope is not simply that, by the end of twelve weeks, we will know the Apostles' Creed better.

Our hope is that we will become a people more deeply rooted in the faith we have received, more united around the essentials of the gospel, and more prepared to live faithfully within the world God has placed us in.

Table of Contents

01	What Do We Believe? EVERYONE HAS A CREED	06	07	Who Has The Power? A THEOLOGY OF POWER	66
02	Who Is God? A THEOLOGY OF GOD	16	08	How Is Judgment Good News? A THEOLOGY OF JUDGMENT	76
03	What Did He Make? A THEOLOGY OF CREATION	26	09	How Is God Present In The World? A THEOLOGY OF THE SPIRIT	86
04	Who Is Jesus? A THEOLOGY OF JESUS	36	10	Who Are God's People? A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH	96
05	Who Are We? A THEOLOGY OF THE BODY	46	11	What's So Amazing About Grace? A THEOLOGY OF GRACE	106
06	What's Wrong With The World? A THEOLOGY OF SIN AND SALVATION	56	12	What Happens In The End? A THEOLOGY OF RESURRECTION HOPE	116

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

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

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

On the third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven and is seated at
the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Amen





What Do We Believe?

EVERYONE HAS A CREED

“I believe.”

Overview

Every person lives from a set of beliefs about God, ourselves, the world, and what makes life worth living. The Christian faith gives those convictions a shape, a story and words to confess together.

BIG IDEA

Everyone lives by a creed. Christian discipleship begins by learning to believe, confess, and live inside the story Christians have received. The goal is not merely to know the creed. It is to become the kind of people whose lives can truthfully say: “This I believe.”

We believe

“I believe.”

Those first two words are more significant than they appear. The creed begins with a personal confession. Christianity is not merely something we inherit, admire, or understand. It is a faith we learn to confess as our own.



Four texts that teach us how to believe

- 01** DEUTERONOMY 6:4–9
A faith we learn to rehearse
- 02** MATTHEW 16:13–17
A faith we must confess
- 03** 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–8
A faith we receive
- 04** JUDE 3
A faith we are called to guard



Read slowly. Look for names, attributes, actions, and images. Let Scripture revise your imagination of God.

Questions to carry through the week

01 What do I actually believe?

What assumptions about God, myself, and the good life are shaping the way I live?

02 Where did those beliefs come from?

Which convictions have been formed by Scripture and the Christian faith, and which have simply been absorbed from the culture around me?

03 Does my life reflect what I say I believe?

Where is there distance between my confession and my habits, fears, ambitions, or desires?

Words worth carrying

“Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map. But that map is based on the experience of hundreds of people who really were in touch with God.”

C. S. LEWIS

“Although I’m indeed an old doctor, I never move on from the childish doctrine of the Ten Commandments and the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer.”

MARTIN LUTHER

“You will always desire, love, trust, believe, fear, obey, long for, value, pursue, hope, and serve something.”

DAVID POWLISON



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

The Apostles’ Creed

Ben Myers

Short, thoughtful, and accessible. Myers walks slowly through each phrase of the creed and shows how these ancient words summarize the Christian story.

ALSO WORTH READING

The Gospel Way Catechism: 50 Truths That Take On the World

Trevin Wax

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: What is a creed?

A: A creed is a short summary of what Christians believe. It helps us remember God's story, say it together, and live by it.

TALK ABOUT IT

How can you tell what someone believes by the way they live?

How would your life be different if you really believed that every day?

SHORT PRAYER

Father, thank you for giving us the good news of Jesus. Teach us to know what we believe, to trust what is true, and to live what we confess.

Help our family follow you with faithful hearts.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Teach the opening line of the Apostles' Creed.

Say it together once each day this week.

Explain that Christians throughout the world have said these words for generations.

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

God of truth, teach us to trust what you have revealed, to hold fast to the faith we have received, and to live what we confess. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

CONFESSION

Lord, we confess that our lives do not always reflect what we say we believe. Forgive us for trusting lesser stories and letting other voices shape us. Renew our minds, strengthen our faith, and make us faithful to the gospel.

BLESSING

May the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ ground you in truth. May the Spirit guard the faith entrusted to you. And may the words you confess become the life you live.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE? / EVERYONE HAS A CREED



Who Is God?

A THEOLOGY OF GOD

“I believe in God, the Father almighty.”

Overview

The Christian confession does not begin with a vague spirituality or a distant force. It begins with the living God who speaks, creates, covenants, judges, shows mercy, and makes himself known.

The question is not whether people are religious, but which God they imagine and whether that vision has been shaped by divine revelation.

BIG IDEA

God is not a projection of our desires. He is the eternal, holy, loving, and incomparable One revealed in Scripture and made known in Jesus Christ.

We believe

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.”

The creed does not merely tell us that God exists. It tells us who he is: **Father, almighty, Creator**. Christians are not free to invent God according to cultural mood, personal preference, or spiritual sentiment.



Four windows into the character of God

01 EXODUS 3:1–15

**The God who
names himself**

02 EXODUS 34:4–9

**The God who
reveals his character**

03 ISAIAH 40:12–31

**The God who
has no equal**

04 JOHN 1:1–18

**The God made
known in Jesus**



Read slowly. Look for names, attributes, actions, and images. Let Scripture revise your imagination of God.

Questions to carry through the week

01 What picture of God do I carry with me most often?

Where did that picture come from, and how has it shaped the way I trust, fear, worship, or relate to him?

02 Which attribute of God do I find easiest to believe, and which do I find hardest?

What might that reveal about my experience, assumptions, or spiritual formation?

03 What would change in my life if I lived this week with a deeper awareness of who God is?

Think about anxiety, prayer, decisions, relationships, and worship.

Words worth carrying

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

A. W. TOZER

“The glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of man consists in beholding God.”

IRENÆUS

“God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt.”

ROBERT W. JENSON



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

Delighting in the Trinity

Michael Reeves

Warm, lucid, and deeply worshipful. A compelling introduction to the Christian understanding of God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

ALSO WORTH READING

The Knowledge of the Holy

A. W. Tozer

God Has a Name

John Mark Comer

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: Who is the Center of Everything?

A: God is the center of everything. He made everything and keeps it all going. There's no one like him.

TALK ABOUT IT

When you hear the word God, what comes to mind first? Who or what has most significantly shaped your view of God?

SHORT PRAYER

Father in heaven, help us know you as you truly are. Teach us to trust your goodness and worship you with all our hearts. Amen.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Choose one name or attribute of God this week. Talk about where your family saw that truth in Scripture or daily life.

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

Holy and merciful God, we praise you because you are not hidden forever. You have spoken, acted, and revealed yourself. Give us minds that delight in truth and hearts that tremble with wonder.

CONFESSION

Lord God, we confess that we often reshape you in our own image. Forgive our distorted thoughts, our shallow worship, and our resistance to your holiness.

BLESSING

May the Father who created you, the Son who makes the Father known, and the Spirit who leads us into truth grant you a deeper knowledge of God. Amen.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHO IS GOD? / A THEOLOGY OF GOD



What Did He Make?

A THEOLOGY OF CREATION

“I believe in the creator of heaven and earth.”

Overview

The Christian faith begins with a simple confession: the world is created.

Everything that exists owes its life to God. Creation is not an accident, an illusion, or something to escape. **It is the good work of a good Creator.**

To confess God as Creator changes how we see everything. The world becomes gift. Our bodies have meaning. Ordinary life matters. And creation itself becomes a place where the goodness and glory of God can be received with wonder.

BIG IDEA

The world is God's good creation, made through Christ and for Christ. To believe in the Creator is to learn to receive creation as gift, live within it with gratitude, and care for what God has made.

We believe

“I believe in the creator of heaven and earth.”

The creed begins the Christian story with creation. Before there was sin, there was **goodness**. Before there was brokenness, there was **beauty**. Before anything belonged to us, everything belonged to **God**.

Christians believe that the material world matters because God made it. Trees and oceans, bodies and meals, work and rest, art and friendship all belong within a world God called good.



Four windows into the goodness of creation

01 GENESIS 1:1–2

**A world given
by God**

02 PSALM 104:24–30

**A world filled with
God's wisdom**

03 JOHN 1:1–3

**A world made
through Christ**

04 COLOSSIANS 1:16

**A world made
for Christ**



As you read, ask: What do these passages reveal about where creation comes from, what it is for, and how we are meant to live within it?

Questions to carry through the week

01 What changes when I begin to see the world around me as gift rather than possession?

What have I started to take for granted that I could receive again with gratitude?

02 Where have familiarity and hurry made me blind to the goodness of creation?

What might I notice if I slowed down and paid attention this week?

03 If all things were created through Christ and for Christ, how should that shape the way I treat my body, my possessions, other people, and the earth?

What is one area of my life that needs to be brought back under the care and purposes of Christ?

Words worth carrying

“Creation was the greatest of all Revolutions. It was for that, as the ancient poet said, that the morning stars sang together.”

G. K. CHESTERTON

“He indeed, the greater and chiefest Good, hath created these lesser goods; still both Creator and created, all are good.”

AUGUSTINE

“Creation exhibits so many bright lamps lighted up to show forth the glory of its Author.”

JOHN CALVIN



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

God's Image: Why Creation Still Matters

Carmen Joy Imes

A rich exploration of what it means to be human creatures made in the image of God and how that calling shapes our relationship with God, one another, and the world.

ALSO WORTH READING

Creation: An Introduction

Tyler R. Wittman

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: Why did God make the world?

A: God made the world out of his goodness and for his glory.

TALK ABOUT IT

Look around your table and name a few things that ultimately come from God's creation.

Food. Wood. Water. Plants. People.

Ask: What is one thing God made that you are especially glad exists? Why?

SHORT PRAYER

Creator God, thank you for making a world filled with life and beauty. Give us eyes to notice your gifts, hearts that are grateful for them, and hands that care for what you have made.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Sometime this week, ask everyone in the family to find three things God made that they normally walk past without noticing; a tree, a bird, a flower, the clouds, another person. Stop for a moment and simply say: "Thank you, God, for making this."

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

Creator of heaven and earth, you spoke and there was light. You filled the earth with life. You made us from the dust and gave us breath. Teach us to receive this world as your gift.

CONFESSION

We confess that we often move through your world without wonder. We consume without gratitude. We possess without remembering that everything belongs to you. Forgive us.

BLESSING

May the God who made heaven and earth give you eyes to see his goodness.
May Christ, through whom all things were made, teach you to receive the world as gift.
And may the Spirit who gives life to creation fill you with wonder, gratitude, and joy.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHAT DID HE MAKE? / A THEOLOGY OF CREATION



Who Is Jesus?

A THEOLOGY OF JESUS

“I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.”

Overview

At the center of the Christian faith is not an idea, a philosophy, or a set of principles, but a person.

Jesus of Nazareth is the one through whom God has made himself known. He is truly human and truly divine, the promised Messiah, the eternal Son of God, and the Lord of all.

To ask “**Who is Jesus?**” is to ask the question at the heart of Christianity.

BIG IDEA

Jesus is the eternal Son of God who became truly human, reveals the Father, and reigns as Lord over all.

We believe

“I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.”

The creed teaches us to name Jesus rightly. He is Jesus, the man from Nazareth who entered our history.

He is the **Christ**, God’s promised and anointed King. He is the only **Son**, sharing the very life of the Father. And he is our **Lord**, worthy of our trust, worship, allegiance, and obedience.

Christian faith does not simply admire Jesus. It confesses who he is.



Four portraits of the Son

01 ISAIAH 52:13–53:12

**The Servant who
bears our wounds**

02 JOHN 1:1–18

**The Word who
became flesh**

03 DANIEL 7:9–14

**The Son of Man who
receives the kingdom**

04 REVELATION 5:1–14

**The Lamb who was
slain and reigns**



Read slowly. Pay attention to what each passage reveals about Jesus' identity, character, mission, and authority.

Questions to carry through the week

01 What picture of Jesus have I inherited, and where does Scripture deepen or correct it?

Where might my understanding of Jesus be shaped more by culture, personality, or familiarity than by the biblical witness?

02 If Jesus makes the Father known, what do I learn about God by watching Jesus?

What do his words, actions, compassion, authority, suffering, and love reveal about the character of God?

03 Where am I comfortable receiving Jesus as Savior but hesitant to follow him as Lord?

What area of my life is most resistant to his authority?

Words worth carrying

“Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries. If it were possible, with some sort of super magnet, to pull up out of that history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of his name, how much would be left?”

JAROSLAV PELIKAN

“He became what we are that he might make us what he is.”

ATHANASIUS



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

Who Is This Man?

John Ortberg

John Ortberg traces the remarkable influence of Jesus on history and culture, showing how his life and teaching reshaped the way we think about dignity, compassion, humility, and what it means to be human.

ALSO WORTH READING

The Challenge of Jesus

N. T. Wright

The Jesus Creed

Scot McKnight

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: Who is Jesus?

A: Jesus is the Son of God who became human to save us and reign as Lord.

Q: What does Jesus show us?

A: Jesus shows us what God is like and what it means to be truly human.

TALK ABOUT IT

If someone asked you, “Who is Jesus?” what would you tell them? After everyone answers, read John 1:14–18 together and ask: What does this passage add to our answer?

SHORT PRAYER

Jesus, Son of God, help us to know you, trust you, and follow you. Show us what God is like and teach us to live in your way.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Choose one story from the Gospels and read it together. Afterward, have everyone answer one question: “What does this story show us about who Jesus is?”

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and Lord of all, open our eyes to see you clearly. Teach us to trust your words, follow your way, and receive your grace. Form in us a deeper love for you and a greater faithfulness to your kingdom.

CONFESSION

Lord Jesus, we confess that we often make you smaller than you are. We admire you without obeying you, seek your help without surrendering to your lordship, and shape you around our preferences. Forgive us and teach us to receive you as you truly are.

BLESSING

May Jesus Christ, the suffering servant, the Word made flesh, the Son of Man, and the Lamb who reigns, deepen your faith, strengthen your hope, and lead you in his way.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHO IS JESUS? / A THEOLOGY OF JESUS



Who Are We?

A THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

“I believe he was born of the Virgin Mary.”

Overview

Christianity begins with a remarkable claim about what it means to be human. God made us as embodied creatures, and when God came to rescue us, the Son did not merely appear human. He became flesh. Jesus was conceived, born, grew, ate, slept, suffered, died, and was raised bodily. The incarnation reveals both who God is and the dignity of what God has made us to be.

Our bodies are not accidents to overcome or raw material to reinvent. They are part of God's good creation, taken up by Christ and destined for resurrection.

BIG IDEA

To be human is to be embodied. In Jesus, God takes on our humanity, restores what sin has distorted, and shows us what humanity was always meant to become.

We believe

“I believe he was born of the Virgin Mary.”

The creed does not allow us to speak about Jesus only in spiritual terms. He was born of the Virgin Mary. The eternal Son entered the physical world he created. He received a human body, a human history, and a human life.

The incarnation is God’s great affirmation of embodied human life.



Four texts for a theology of the body

01 GENESIS 1:26–31

The body as gift

02 PSALM 139:13–18

The body as known

03 JOHN 1:14–18

The body God took on

04 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12–20

The body that belongs to Christ



As you read: Trace the movement through these four passages. How might this change the way you understand and inhabit your body?

Questions to carry through the week

- 01 Do I experience my body primarily as a gift to receive, a problem to solve, or something to control?**

What makes it difficult for me to receive my body with gratitude?

- 02 How has the world around me taught me to think about my body, identity, appearance, sexuality, aging, and limitations?**

Which of those messages have shaped me most deeply?

- 03 What does the incarnation reveal about the dignity and goodness of embodied human life?**

How might Jesus becoming flesh change the way I see my own body and the bodies of others?

Words worth carrying

“I would rather be what God chose to make me than the most glorious creature that I could think of; for to have been thought about, born in God’s thought, and then made by God, is the dearest, grandest and most precious thing in all thinking.”

GEORGE MACDONALD

“Yes, in our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.”

C. S. LEWIS

“God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man.”

IRENÆUS



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

On the Incarnation

St. Athanasius

One of Christianity's classic works on why the Son of God became human. Athanasius presents the incarnation as God entering our mortal condition in order to restore his image in humanity and overcome death.

ALSO WORTH READING

The Gift of Being Yourself

David G. Benner

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: Who made you?

A: God made me.

Q: How did God make you?

A: God made me in his image, with a body that is good.

TALK ABOUT IT

What is one thing your body lets you do that you are thankful for?

SHORT PRAYER

Creator God, thank you for making us. Thank you that Jesus became human like us. Teach us to receive our bodies as your gift, to care for them with gratitude, and to use them to love you and love others.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

At bedtime, have each person name one thing their body allowed them to experience or do that day.

“I’m thankful for my eyes because...”

Finish together: “Thank you, God, for making us.”

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

God our Creator, you formed us in your image and called your creation good. Teach us to receive our bodies as gifts, to honor the bodies of others, and to follow Jesus with our whole selves.

CONFESSION

God of grace, we confess that we often reject, misuse, or obsess over the bodies you have given us. We measure ourselves by the standards of the world and forget that we belong to you. Forgive us and restore in us gratitude for your good creation.

BLESSING

May the God who created you, the Son who took on flesh, and the Spirit who dwells within you teach you to receive your body with gratitude, honor others with dignity, and glorify God with your whole life.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHO ARE WE? / A THEOLOGY OF THE BODY



What's Wrong With The World?

A THEOLOGY OF SIN AND SALVATION

“I believe he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was
crucified, died, and was buried.”

Overview

Christianity takes the brokenness of the world seriously. Something has gone wrong, not only around us, but within us. Scripture calls this sin. **Sin is more than bad behavior.** It is our refusal to trust God, our turning inward upon ourselves, and the disorder that follows when creation is separated from its Creator.

The gospel announces that God has acted within this broken world to rescue and restore it.

BIG IDEA

The deepest problem with the world is sin, and God's answer is not merely better advice, but the saving work of Jesus. Salvation means more than escaping judgment. It is the work of God to forgive us, heal what sin has distorted, reconcile us to himself, and make us new.

We believe

“I believe he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.”

The creed does not rush past the cross.

Jesus truly suffered. He truly died. He entered the darkest consequences of human sin and evil.

At the center of the Christian faith stands a **crucified Savior**. The cross reveals both the seriousness of what is wrong with the world and the depth of God’s love for it.



Four movements from sin to salvation

01 GENESIS 3:1–19

The world we broke

02 ROMANS 3:9–26

The grace we cannot earn

03 ISAIAH 52:13–53:12

The servant who bears our sin

04 LUKE 23:32–49

The savior who gives himself



Read slowly. Across these four passages, watch the movement of the biblical story: What do these passages reveal about the depth of our problem and the depth of God's rescue?

Questions to carry through the week

01 Where am I most tempted to think of sin as something “out there” rather than something that also runs through my own heart?

What patterns of distrust, pride, fear, resentment, or self-protection do I need to name honestly?

02 What does the cross tell me about how seriously God takes both sin and suffering?

Where have I minimized one or the other?

03 When I think about salvation, do I mostly imagine forgiveness, or do I also imagine transformation?

What part of my life is Christ seeking to make new?

Words worth carrying

“From beginning to end, the Holy Scriptures testify that the predicament of fallen humanity is so serious, so grave, so irremediable from within, that nothing short of divine intervention can rectify it.”

FLEMING RUTLEDGE

“The doctrine of sin means believers are never as good as our true worldview should make us. And the doctrine of common grace means unbelievers are never as flawed as their false worldview should make them.”

TIMOTHY KELLER



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

Gentle and Lowly

Dane Ortlund

A meditation on the heart of Jesus toward sinners and sufferers. Particularly helpful for understanding that repentance brings us toward a Savior who is merciful, patient, and willing to receive us.

ALSO WORTH READING

What Is Wrong with the World?

Timothy Keller

Eternity Is Now in Session

John Ortberg

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: What is sin?

A: Sin is turning away from God and his good ways.

Q: What does sin do?

A: Sin hurts our relationship with God, with others, and with the world God made.

TALK ABOUT IT

When something goes wrong, what is your first instinct: hide it, blame someone, fix it yourself, or ask for help? Why?

SHORT PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for loving us even when we do what is wrong. Thank you for forgiving us and helping us begin again. Teach our family to tell the truth, ask for forgiveness, and show grace to one another.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Practice saying “I’m sorry.”

Once this week, create space as a family to name something you need to make right.

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

Merciful God, search my heart and show me where sin has taken root. Teach me to stop hiding, excusing, and defending myself. Help me to trust the mercy of Christ, who gave himself for me, and to receive the new life only you can give.

CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that we have turned from you and chosen our own way. We have hidden, blamed, resisted, and wounded others. Forgive us for the sake of Christ, who bore our sin and gave himself for us.

BLESSING

May the Jesus who bore your sin, carried your shame, and conquered death fill you with the assurance of his mercy. Go in the freedom of forgiveness, the power of grace, and the hope of a life being made new.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD? / A THEOLOGY OF SIN AND SALVATION



Who Has The Power?

A THEOLOGY OF POWER

“I believe on the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.”

Overview

Power is unavoidable. It shapes families, institutions, nations, relationships, and even the stories we tell about ourselves. The Christian faith makes a startling claim about where ultimate power now resides. The crucified Jesus has been raised, exalted, and seated at the right hand of the Father.

The resurrection and ascension declare that Jesus is not merely alive.

Jesus reigns. His rule also redefines power itself. In Jesus, power is not grasped, hoarded, or used to dominate. It is received from the Father and exercised for the good of others.

BIG IDEA

Jesus has been raised and enthroned as Lord. Christian power begins by living under his rule and learning to use whatever power we have in the shape of his kingdom.

We believe

“I believe on the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.”

The creed moves from the humiliation of Jesus to his exaltation. The one who was crucified now reigns. To confess that Jesus is seated at the Father’s right hand is to say that history is not finally governed by presidents, markets, armies, corporations, algorithms, or our own ability to control our lives. **Jesus Christ is Lord.**



Four pictures of power in the kingdom

01 MATTHEW 28:1–20

The power of the risen King

02 ACTS 1:1–11

The King who ascends

03 EPHESIANS 1:15–23

The King above every power

04 MARK 10:35–45

The power that serves



Read slowly. What do these passages reveal about who truly holds power, what Jesus does with that power, and how his followers are called to use power differently?

Questions to carry through the week

- 01 What powers most often make me anxious, afraid, or tempted to believe they have the final word?**

Where do I need to remember that Jesus is Lord?

- 02 Where has God entrusted me with power, influence, authority, resources, or responsibility?**

Who is affected by the way I use that power?

- 03 What would change in my daily life if I genuinely believed that the risen Jesus is reigning now?**

What could I release, trust, or do differently?

Words worth carrying

“Our use of power will always be disordered and destructive – will result in idolatry and injustice – unless we find a way to a restored relationship with the Giver of power.”

ANDY CROUCH

“When you went to bed last night Jesus was at work subduing his enemies. While you slept he was continuing to rule over the world. He was still at it when you woke up this morning and even now as you read this. That is the outrageous claim of the ascension.”

TIM CHESTER

A man with a beard and glasses stands behind a woman with long dark hair who is sitting on a wooden chair. They are both looking off to the side against a plain brown background.

Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

Playing God

Andy Crouch

A thoughtful exploration of power as a good gift from God that can be corrupted by domination and idolatry. Crouch asks what it would look like for Christians to use power creatively, fruitfully, and for the flourishing of others.

ALSO WORTH READING

The Ascension of Christ

Patrick Schreiner

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: Who is the King over everything?

A: Jesus is the King over everything.

Q: Where is Jesus now?

A: Jesus is risen and reigns with the Father.

TALK ABOUT IT

If you were given the power to change one thing in the world, what would you change and why?

Follow up by asking: What does Jesus show us about how power should be used?

SHORT PRAYER

Jesus, our risen King, thank you that you are with us and that you are in charge. Help our family trust you when we are afraid. Teach us to use our strength, words, and choices to serve one another.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Ask everyone in the family to identify one kind of “power” they already possess.

At the end of the week ask: “How did you use what God gave you to help someone else?”

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

Risen and reigning Jesus, you have conquered death and are seated at the right hand of the Father. Teach us to trust your rule, follow your way, and use what you have given us to serve others.

CONFESSION

Lord Jesus, we confess that we often fear the powers around us and grasp for power of our own. We use influence for ourselves instead of for the good of others. Forgive us, and teach us the way of your kingdom.

BLESSING

May the risen Christ, who reigns above every power, give you courage when you are afraid, humility when you are given influence, and grace to use your strength in service of others. Go in the peace of Christ our King.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHO HAS THE POWER? / A THEOLOGY OF POWER



How Is Judgment Good News?

A THEOLOGY OF JUDGMENT

“I believe he will come to judge
the living and the dead.”

Overview

The promise of judgment can sound threatening because we often imagine judgment only as punishment. **Scripture gives us a larger vision.**

God judges because he loves what he has made. He sees what has been hidden, hears the cry of the oppressed, exposes evil, defends what is good, and refuses to allow violence and injustice to have the final word.

When Christians confess that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead, we are confessing that history is moving toward justice. Every evil will be named. Every wrong will be answered. Every life will be brought into the light of Christ.

BIG IDEA

God's judgment is good news because evil will not last forever. Jesus will come again to expose what is wrong, vindicate what is good, and put the world right.

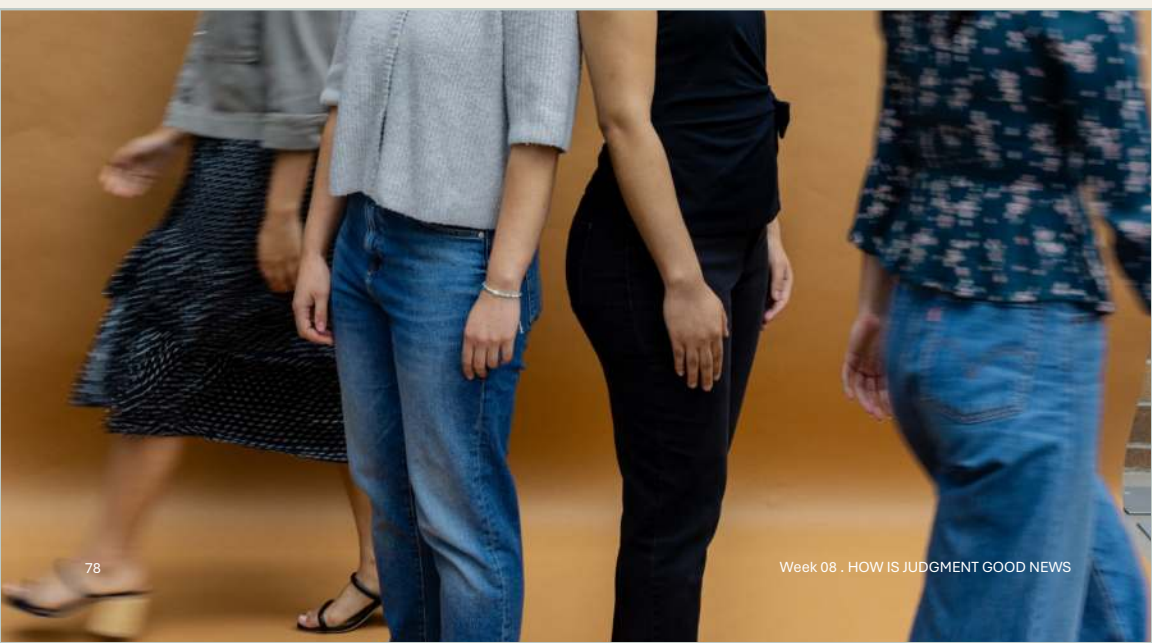
We believe

“I believe he will come to judge the living and the dead.”

Jesus is not absent from the future of the world. The risen and ascended Christ will return.

The creed reminds us that history has a destination.

Our lives matter. Our choices matter. Justice matters. And the final verdict over creation belongs neither to governments, cultures, nor the powerful, but to Jesus Christ. For those who belong to Christ, the coming judgment is not a reason to live in terror. It is a summons to hope, repentance, courage, and faithfulness.



Four windows into the justice of God

01 PSALM 96:10–13

**The Judge who comes
to set the world right**

02 AMOS 5:21–24

**The God who refuses
worship without justice**

03 MATTHEW 25:31–46

**The King who takes
our treatment of
others personally**

04 REVELATION 21:1–5

**The Judge who makes
all things new**



As you read, ask: How does God's judgment reveal what he loves, what he opposes, and what he intends to make right?

Questions to carry through the week

- 01 What changes when I begin to see God's judgment as the promise that evil will not have the final word?**

What fear, anger, or burden can I entrust to God?

- 02 Where have I become comfortable with things God calls unjust, destructive, or wrong?**

What might repentance look like this week?

- 03 If Jesus will one day bring everything into the light, what would it look like for me to live more truthfully before him today?**

Is there anything I am hiding, excusing, or avoiding?

Words worth carrying

“Gross injustice demonstrates a basic premise: in our world, something is terribly wrong and cries out to be put right.”

FLEMING RUTLEDGE

“If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make the final end to violence, God would not be worthy of our worship.”

MIROSLAV VOLF

“The biblical doctrine of judgment is the best news there can be for a world in which there is no justice.”

N. T. WRIGHT



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

Evil and the Justice of God

N. T. Wright

Wright traces the biblical story from Israel through the cross and resurrection and argues that God's answer to evil reaches its climax in Jesus and will finally culminate in the renewal of creation.

ALSO WORTH READING

What If Jesus Was Serious about Justice?

Skye Jethani

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: Why will Jesus judge the world?

A: Because Jesus loves what is good and will make everything right.

TALK ABOUT IT

If you could make one unfair thing in the world right, what would you choose? Why?

SHORT PRAYER

Jesus our King, thank you that you see every wrong and promise to make all things right. Teach our family to love what is good, care for those who are hurting, and show mercy to others. Help us trust you when life feels unfair.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Once this week, notice something unfair, unkind, or broken around you. Instead of only talking about it, ask: “What is one small thing we can do that reflects the justice and kindness of Jesus?”

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

God of justice and mercy, teach us to love what is good, stand against what is wrong, and trust you to make all things right.

CONFESSION

Righteous God, we confess that we ignore injustice, excuse what is wrong, and judge others more quickly than ourselves. Forgive us and make us faithful.

BLESSING

May Jesus Christ, the righteous Judge and merciful King, give you courage to do what is right, hope when evil seems strong, and confidence that he will make all things new.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

HOW IS JUDGMENT GOOD NEWS? / A THEOLOGY OF JUDGMENT



How Is God Present In The World?

A THEOLOGY OF THE SPIRIT

“I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

Overview

God has not left his people alone.

The Holy Spirit is **God's empowering presence**, dwelling within his people and at work in the world. The Spirit gives life, makes Christ present to us, transforms us into his likeness, and empowers us to participate in the work of God.

To believe in the Holy Spirit is to believe that God is not merely above us or around us. **God has come to dwell within us.**

BIG IDEA

The Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence, dwelling in us and working through us so that the life of Jesus becomes visible in the world.

We believe

“I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

The Spirit is not an impersonal force or spiritual energy. He is the Spirit of God, given to the people of God. Through the Spirit, the presence of God that once filled the tabernacle and temple now dwells within his people.

The Spirit makes Jesus known, gives life to what is dead, forms Christ in us, and gives ordinary people power to participate in God’s extraordinary work. Christianity is not simply learning to live like Jesus. **It is learning to live by the Spirit of Jesus.**



Four ways the Spirit breathes life

01 GENESIS 1:1–2

The Spirit who gives life

02 LUKE 4:14–21

The Spirit who empowers Jesus

03 JOHN 14:15–27

The Spirit who dwells within us

04 ACTS 2:1–21

The Spirit who sends us



As you read, what do these passages reveal about how the Holy Spirit makes God's presence known and active in the world?

Questions to carry through the week

01 Do I tend to think of the Holy Spirit as a person to know, or primarily as a doctrine to understand?

What has shaped that view?

02 Where might I be attempting to live the Christian life through my own strength rather than depending upon the Spirit?

What would dependence look like there?

03 If the Spirit of God really dwells within me, how should that change the way I enter ordinary moments of my day?

Where could I become more attentive to his presence?

Words worth carrying

“God’s Spirit means the presence of God himself.”

GORDON D. FEE

“The scandal is the power of God dwelling in and operating through wounded, ordinary people.”

TYLER STATON

“Without God's Spirit, there is nothing we can do that will count for God's kingdom. Without God's Spirit, the church simply can't be the church.”

N. T. WRIGHT



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

The Familiar Stranger

Tyler Staton

An accessible introduction to the person, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit. Staton particularly addresses the gap between what Christians confess about the Spirit and what many actually experience in everyday discipleship.

ALSO WORTH READING

Baptism and Fullness

John Stott

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: Who is the Holy Spirit?

A: The Holy Spirit is God with us and in us.

Q: What does the Holy Spirit do?

A: He helps us know Jesus, become like Jesus, and live like Jesus.

TALK ABOUT IT

If you could have someone with you everywhere you went this week, when would you most want them there?

Then read Jesus' promise in John 14:16–17 that God gives us his Spirit to be with us.

SHORT PRAYER

Holy Spirit, thank you for being present with us. Help us hear your voice, become more like Jesus, and join you in what you are doing.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Before leaving the house each morning, pause together for ten seconds. Open your hands and pray: “Holy Spirit, help us notice where you are at work today.”

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit. Breathe life into what has grown tired within us. Make Jesus real to us. Form his character within us. Give us eyes to see where you are already at work. Give us courage to follow where you lead.

CONFESSION

We confess that we often attempt to follow Jesus without depending upon the Spirit of Jesus. We rely upon our strength. We trust our plans. We resist your leading. Forgive us for living as though we have been left on our own. Teach us again to walk by the Spirit.

BLESSING

May the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead give life to you. May the Spirit who rested upon Jesus empower you. May the Spirit who has made his home within you form Christ in you.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

HOW IS GOD PRESENT IN THE WORLD? / A THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



Who Are God's People?

A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

“I believe in the holy catholic church, the
communion of saints.”

Overview

The church is the community created by Jesus and gathered by the Spirit to embody the life of God's kingdom in the world.

From Abraham onward, God's purpose has been to form a people through whom his blessing would reach the nations. **In Jesus, that story comes to its fulfillment.** Jew and Gentile are gathered into one family, reconciled to God and one another, and sent into the world as a sign of God's coming new creation.

BIG IDEA

The church is God's new-creation people. A community gathered around Jesus, formed by the Spirit, and sent into the world as a sign of what God intends to do with all things.

We believe

“I believe in the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints.”

To confess belief in the church is not to claim that the church is always faithful, healthy, or worthy of our confidence.

It is to confess that **Jesus has chosen to have a people.**

The word catholic means universal. The church stretches across cultures, nations, generations, languages, and traditions. Wherever people belong to Jesus, they belong to one another.

To belong to Jesus is to belong to a people.



Four pictures of the people of God

01 GENESIS 12:1–3

A People Blessed to Bless

02 ACTS 2:42–47

A People Sharing a Common Life

03 EPHESIANS 2:11–22

A People Reconciled into One Family

04 REVELATION 7:9–12

A People from Every Nation



As you read, ask: What do these passages reveal about who God is gathering, how they are called to live, and what their life together is meant to show the world?

Questions to carry through the week

- 01 Do I think of church primarily as something I attend, or as a people to whom I belong?**

Where has consumer culture shaped the way I think about church?

- 02 If the church is meant to be a preview of God's new creation, what should become visible in our life together?**

Where should reconciliation, generosity, holiness, and hope become tangible?

- 03 Who is God asking me to move toward rather than simply coexist with?**

What might deeper belonging require of me?

Words worth carrying

“The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.”

WILLIAM TEMPLE

“Enemy-occupied territory. That is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful King has landed... and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to church you are really listening-in to the secret wireless from our friends: that is why the enemy is so anxious to prevent us from going.”

C. S. LEWIS



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

What If Jesus Was Serious about the Church?

Skye Jethani

A highly accessible
exploration of Jesus' vision for
Christian community and the
practices that make it visible.

ALSO WORTH READING

When the Church Was a Family

Joseph Hellerman

A Fellowship of Differents

Scot McKnight

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: What is the church?

A: The church is the family of everyone who belongs to Jesus.

Q: Why did Jesus give us the church?

A: So we can worship God, love one another, and show the world what Jesus is like.

TALK ABOUT IT

What could our family do to help someone feel that they belong?

SHORT PRAYER

Father, thank you that your church is bigger than our home, our city, and our country. Help us notice people who feel left out, share what we have, and make room at our table.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

As a family, choose one person or family you do not normally spend time with.

Invite them for a meal, bring them something, sit with them at church, or simply make time for a conversation.

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

God of all peoples, thank you for calling us into your family. Teach us to love one another, make room for others, and live together as a sign of your kingdom.

CONFESSION

Lord Jesus, we confess that we often make your church about ourselves. Forgive our division, pride, and indifference. Make us one people shaped by your love.

BLESSING

May the Father who gathers, the Son who reconciles, and the Spirit who unites make you a faithful member of Christ's people and a visible sign of his kingdom.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHO ARE GOD'S PEOPLE? / A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH



What's So Amazing About Grace?

A THEOLOGY OF GRACE

“I believe in the forgiveness of sins.”

Overview

Grace is at the heart of the Christian story. It is God's love given to people who cannot earn it, deserve it, or repay it.

The gospel announces that forgiveness is not something we achieve through enough regret, religious effort, or moral improvement. **In Jesus, God moves toward sinners first.**

Grace means our failures can be named without destroying us. Forgiveness means our past no longer has the final word.

Grace tells us that we are more sinful than we want to admit, yet in Christ we are more loved and accepted than we dared to hope.

BIG IDEA

Grace is God giving us what we could never earn: forgiveness, welcome, and a new beginning in Christ.

We believe

“I believe in the forgiveness of sins.”

To confess belief in the forgiveness of sins is to confess that sin is real, guilt is real, and mercy is greater.

Christians do not believe that God simply overlooks evil. **At the cross, God deals with it.** Forgiveness is costly because grace is costly. Yet the cost is borne by God himself.

Because we have been forgiven, we become a people learning to forgive.



Four glimpses of God's grace

01 PSALM 103:8–14

**The God who
removes our sins**

02 LUKE 15:11–32

**The Father who
welcomes sinners
home**

03 JOHN 8:1–11

**Jesus and the
woman who cannot
defend herself**

04 EPHESIANS 2:1–10

Saved by grace



Read slowly. As you read these passages, pay attention to the movement of grace.

Who moves first? What does forgiveness cost? What kind of person does grace create?

Questions to carry through the week

- 01 Where am I still trying to earn what God has already offered me as a gift?**

What would receiving grace look like there?

- 02 Which failure or regret still has too much power over the way I see myself?**

What would it mean to bring it honestly into the forgiveness of Christ?

- 03 Does my life make grace believable to the people around me?**

Where could I become less demanding, less condemning, and more generous?

Words worth carrying

“The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn’t have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don’t be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It’s for you I created the universe. I love you.”

FREDERICK BUECHNER

“If you were a hundred times worse than you are, your sins would be no match for his mercy.”

TIMOTHY KELLER



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

The Ragamuffin Gospel

Brennan Manning

A deeply pastoral invitation to stop pretending before God and receive the love of Christ as people who are needy, inconsistent, and entirely dependent upon grace.

ALSO WORTH READING

The Prodigal God

Timothy Keller

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: What is grace?

A: Grace is God's love and kindness given to us as a gift.

TALK ABOUT IT

What is one gift you received that you could never have earned for yourself? Then ask: How might God's forgiveness be like that kind of gift?

SHORT PRAYER

Jesus, thank you that we do not have to earn your love. Thank you for forgiving our sins and welcoming us home. Help us receive your grace and give that same grace to others.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Invite each child to share one time this week when a parent said or did something that hurt them. Listen without defending or explaining. Then simply say: "I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?"

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

Gracious God, thank you for the mercy you give so freely. Teach us to receive your forgiveness and live from the freedom of your grace.

CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that we hide our failures, justify ourselves, and withhold forgiveness from others.
Forgive us, and make us people of grace.

BLESSING

May the grace of Christ free you from shame, teach you to forgive as you have been forgiven, and make your life a witness to the mercy of God.

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHAT'S SO AMAZING ABOUT GRACE? / A THEOLOGY OF GRACE



What Happens In The End?

A THEOLOGY OF RESURRECTION HOPE

“I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the
life everlasting. Amen.”

Overview

Christian hope is bigger than the promise that we will “go to heaven when we die.”

The biblical story ends with **resurrection, renewal, and God dwelling with his people in a restored creation**. What God did for Jesus on Easter morning, he intends one day to do for all who belong to Christ. Our bodies will be raised. Creation will be renewed. Death will be defeated.

This means Christian hope is neither escape from the world nor optimism about human progress. It is confidence that the God who raised Jesus from the dead will finish what he began.

BIG IDEA

Christian hope is not that we escape the world, but that God will raise the dead, renew creation, and dwell with his people forever.

We believe

“I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

To confess the resurrection of the body is to say that **death does not get the final word over anything God loves**. The God who created bodies will raise bodies. The God who called creation good will renew creation. And the life everlasting is not simply endless existence. It is life healed and whole in the presence of God, when everything fractured by sin and death has finally been made new.



Four promises of resurrection hope

01 ISAIAH 65:17–25

The promise of a new heavens and a new earth

02 JOHN 11:17–27

The promise of the Resurrection and the Life

03 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–28, 35–58

The promise that death will be defeated

04 REVELATION 21:1–5; 22:1–5

The promise that God will make all things new



As you read, what do these passages reveal about what God intends to do with our bodies, his creation, and death itself?

Questions to carry through the week

- 01 When I imagine the Christian future, have I pictured escape from creation or the resurrection and renewal of creation?**

How might Scripture reshape that picture?

- 02 If God intends to raise my body and renew this world, how should that change the way I live in my body and care for God's creation now?**

Where could resurrection hope become a way of life?

- 03 Where does death, loss, or disappointment currently feel like it has the final word?**

What would it mean to bring that place under the promise, “I am making everything new”?

Words worth carrying

“God's plan is not to abandon this world, the world which he said was ‘very good.’ Rather, he intends to remake it. And when he does he will raise all his people to new bodily life to live in it. That is the promise of the Christian gospel.”

N. T. WRIGHT

“Eternal life is not something we simply receive through a transaction that arranges for our future destination. It's something we experience now through becoming Jesus' disciples, which death is then unable to stop.”

JOHN ORTBERG



Go deeper without getting lost

PRIMARY READING

Surprised by Hope

N. T. Wright

A foundational exploration of resurrection, heaven, and new creation. Wright challenges common Christian ideas about “going to heaven” and recovers the New Testament hope of bodily resurrection and the renewal of creation.

ALSO WORTH READING

Hope in Times of Fear

Timothy Keller

Talking about God at home

CATECHISM FOR KIDS

Q: What will God do at the end of the story?

A: God will raise his people from the dead and make all things new.

TALK ABOUT IT

If Jesus is going to make everything new, what is one thing in the world you especially hope he will make right?

SHORT PRAYER

Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life. And when we are afraid, remind us that one day you will wipe away every tear and we will live with you forever. Thank you that death does not have the final word.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Take a walk together sometime this week. Look for something growing, healing, being repaired, or becoming beautiful. When you find something, say together: “Jesus is making all things new.”

Teach us to know you rightly



PRAYER

God of life, thank you for raising Jesus from the dead. Fill us with hope as we wait for the day when you will make all things new.

CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that we often live as though death, loss, and brokenness have the final word. Forgive our fear and renew our hope in the risen Christ.

BLESSING

May the God who raised Jesus from the dead fill you with resurrection hope, strengthen you to live faithfully today, and keep your eyes fixed on the day when all things will be made new. Come Lord Jesus!

Questions • Observations • Prayers

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE END? / A THEOLOGY OF RESURRECTION HOPE

