

Discussion Questions

Lesson One: Gathered in Unity

1. Christian practice has varied with statements of the creed; sometimes the creeds have read "I believe" and sometimes "We believe." What are the advantages and disadvantages to each way of reciting the creed? Which do you prefer?
2. Every thoughtful Christian will struggle with parts of their faith at times. How does saying a creed help or hinder our struggle with faith?
3. Look at the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed below and on pages 96 and 358 in The Book of Common Prayer. What differences do you notice between the two creeds? Which creed do you prefer, and why?

Lesson Two: Written For Our Learning

1. Have you ever sat down and read all or big portions of the Bible on your own? If so, what was that like? If not, why not?
2. Who is your favorite character from the Bible, and why is that person your favorite?
3. In response to the biblical readings in worship, we proclaim "The Word of the Lord...Thanks be to God." Because we understand the truth of scripture to be contained in the entirety of the Bible, we say this even when the readings are difficult or upsetting. How can we see difficult texts or texts that challenge us as God's Word?

Lesson Three: Continually Given to Good Works

1. In the Episcopal Church, we don't often hear sermons about sin and salvation; it's not language that we use comfortably. Why do you think this might be?
2. Scott discussed being saved from some things and being saved for some things. What have you been saved from? What have you been saved for?
3. There are two aspects of grace that can be hard to accept. One is to actually believe that God loves us completely, no matter what. The other is that God loves everybody else too, completely, no matter what. How do you wrestle with these difficult aspects of grace?

Lesson Four: Accept and Fulfill Our Petitions

1. The Book of Common Prayer identifies seven different types of prayer: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, petition, and intercession. Name an example of each type of prayer. Which do you find most challenging? Most comfortable?
2. Melody talks about prayer as a "conversation that takes place in relationship." Does that definition change how you think about prayer? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Identify one particular spiritual discipline -- an approach to prayer like the Daily Office; a way of studying the Bible; any regular practice that has helped you build your spiritual life. Tell what it involves, and explain why it works in your life.

The Takeaway

Lesson One: Gathered in Unity

Every Sunday, we say a creed. They are summaries of our faith. They don't cover things about how we live or moral/ethical/theological questions. They're mainly concerned with how we think of/pray to the triune God. We have 2 major creeds: The Nicene Creed and The Apostles' Creed. We use the latter when we want to remember baptism especially. Both creeds are divided according to the trinity. Do we have to believe everything that we say in the creeds? Maybe a better way to think of it could be this: Creeds are collective statements of the church's beliefs. They are our inherited faith. We hope we believe it, but it's natural to have doubts because we think about these things. A great thing about being in a Christian community: we can borrow faith from one another. The creeds aren't just abstract ideas. They're rooted in time. They came to be during particular times in church history. The Apostles' Creed is thought to be older than the Nicene (but people disagree on its timeline). The Nicene Creed began in the fourth century. The other way that the creeds are rooted in time: They mention the name of historic figures in historical times (Jesus and Pilate). They keep Jesus from being a myth or a legend. The creeds remind us that God was present in our world at a particular time in history, can be present in our time, and will be present in the future.

Lesson Two: Written For Our Learning

The Episcopal Church focuses heavily on the Bible. The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) is over 70% quotations from scripture. We read most of the Bible together when we worship as a community. We are saturated in the words of the Bible. How do Episcopalians read the Bible? Do we read the Bible literally? No – because no-one reads the Bible literally. There are a lot of metaphors in the Bible, for example, and they require interpretation. We engage the entire Bible as the word of God. Every person who is ordained signs a document that says that they believe the Bible is the word of God and that it contains all things necessary for salvation. We read the entirety of the Bible and understand that we need to understand each section in context of the other Biblical materials. At the same time, we understand that the Bible is composed of separate parts. It's a library of 66 books written at different times and places by different people. Some are history, some poetry, some prophesy, some letters. We read the Bible respecting those different kinds of literature because that helps us to understand them better. God speaks to us through the many works of the Bible today. The Bible is one book with many parts, but all of those books teach us about God and God's work in our lives. The most important thing about the Bible is that we read it and interact with it so that we can discover God speaking to us there.

Lesson Three: Continually Given to Good Works

Salvation is translated from Greek word *sozo* – to be made well, to be made whole; to be completed and redeemed. It's a complex idea. It's not a matter of getting a ticket punched so we can get into heaven; it's a participation in the eternal life in Jesus Christ. How are we saved? We don't "earn" our salvation. Salvation is a free gift of God. It's grace: the free gift of God's love for us. The concept is countercultural because it's not fair. It's free. It applies to anyone who wants it. So if salvation is a gift and grace is free, why should we do good things? We do good things in response to God's grace rather than to earn it. We want to give something back to God; to do right; to share that gift with others. We hear about how we're saved *from* things (death, temptation, sin). **Continued on reverse side.**

The Takeaway (Continued)

Lesson three continued. But we're also saved for something. We overflow with God's love; we have to share it with a world in need because we're overflowing. So – we're saved – but it's not a simple, one-time event. We work it out with fear and trembling over and over again, day in and day out. We try to live into this calling of Jesus to follow him and share his love with others. Good works are the fruit of faith – our redemption in Jesus Christ.

Lesson Four: Accept and Fulfill Our Petitions

Christians are called to be people of prayer continually. What exactly is prayer? BCP: Prayer is responding to God, by thoughts or deeds, with or without words. It's anything we do that's a response to God. There are many metaphors for prayer. Here's one: Prayer is the kind of interaction that we might have with a spouse. Sometimes we talk to each other. Sometimes we hang out quietly. Sometimes we thank each other; Sometimes we ask for things from each other. Sometimes we give. Sometimes we take. Our relationship with God, like a good relationship with a spouse, needs all of these forms of communication. We tend to reduce prayer in a couple of ways. One is to think of God as a vending machine. We pray to get specific results. Another way is to think of prayer as leaving God a voicemail. We leave a message for God and wait for a response. Neither of these is the best way to think about prayer. If we think about prayer as a conversation that takes place in relationship, we can think many more aspects of prayer. Prayer is one of many spiritual practices that build our relationship with God. Others include, for example, reading/studying the Bible and tithing. These kinds of spiritual practice aren't always easy. Like exercise, we get better with practice. It's important to start somewhere with trying to pray, read the Bible, to give and be generous. Look for starting points.

Walk in Love 3: Basic Beliefs With Scott Gunn and Melody Shobe Participant's Guide

Welcome!

What makes Episcopalians unique among other Christians?

The basics may be similar, scripture, tradition, practice, etc., but there are certain nuances that make Anglican Christians different. Episcopal priests Scott Gunn and Melody Shobe unpack them in these four insightful video presentations:

- Gathered in Unity (The Creeds)
- Written for Our Learning (The Bible)
- Continually Given to Good Works (Salvation and Grace)
- Accept and Fulfill our Petitions (Prayer)

This course is ideal for those who are new to the Episcopal faith as well as veterans looking to brush up on their knowledge.

©ChurchNext 2105

CHURCHNext