

Leader's Guide



The Anchor Course
Exploring Christianity Together



"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul"
Hebrews 6:19

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Introduction

The Anchor Course is an 8-week study designed to bring seekers and believers together to discuss the basics of the Christian faith.

There are people in your community—and maybe even in your church services—who are asking, “What do Christians believe about God and his relationship to us? Why is the Bible so important to believers? Who is Jesus? What is his vision for the world and how can we make that vision a reality? What about heaven and hell? And why does the cross stand as central symbol of Christianity?”

I have no doubt that these subjects are covered in your church’s sermons and Bible studies, but the Anchor Course gives people a chance to gain an overview of Christian “basics” in a setting where they feel safe to ask their questions or raise their objections.

Here are some quotes from those who have already experienced the Course:

From a believer struggling with doubts: “If you have any kind of curiosity in your life about your relationship to God or with God (or your lack thereof), I’d say try going to this class. I’ve never been in a setting until this one where people—me included—could openly talk about Christianity. It was a wonderful experience for me.”

From a believer who has tried to share his faith: “It seems that each and every time the Gospel comes up in conversation, every person has an opinion on things. I’ve always felt a little timid stepping into the conversation with both feet, mainly due to a lack of self confidence around some of the issues. This book has provided me with valuable information that can be incorporated into the witnessing process.”

From a small-group leader at a Baptist church: “We just finished our first Anchor Course. Your illustrations are of tremendous help in conveying the message. The message presentation in whole and part is very non-threatening for Christian and seeker alike. This should be considered for all new converts and new church members. We will encourage our church to offer this periodically as the message will not grow old.”

From a small-group leader at a Presbyterian church: “Many folks in the class have commented on how helpful the examples relating to movies, books, or shows of ‘today’ are to them. The DVDs are wonderful.”

From a small-group leader in a prison aftercare ministry: “I have had the privilege of leading a small group through the Anchor Course and watched God use it to break the chains of unbelief.”

From a Jewish participant: “Coming from another faith, I wanted to explore what Christianity means. The history, the context, and the message. The Anchor Course was a wonderful, intelligent, and safe place to explore, learn, and understand. If you are seeking knowledge for your heart, your life, your soul, or just your curiosity, this is the right place to be.”

One of my greatest joys as a pastor is to gather seekers and believers together to discuss the Christian faith. The Anchor Course will help you lead these conversations in your own community, and this Leader's Guide will show you how. Contact me if you need further help (tomisanchored@gmail.com).

—Tom Goodman

Chapter 1

Why Run the Anchor Course?

Your church should have two groups of people in attendance: seekers who want to discover the Christian faith, and believers who want to develop their understanding of it. The Anchor Course is a tool to help you serve these two groups of people. Why should you use the Anchor Course?

First, by hosting this Course, you will offer people a faith that can anchor their lives.

Hebrews 6:19 says of the Christian faith: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” Maybe that’s what Bono was thinking about when he was asked about his Christian faith. The front man for the band U2 said, “I’m the sort of character who’s got to have an anchor. I want to be around immovable objects.”

There is so much that is temporary and uncertain about life. People need to be able to hook into something solid that will hold fast.

The Bible often speaks of our lives as little boats on a big sea—little boats that need to be anchored so that they do not crash on the rocks or drift away lost. This image shows up a lot in the Bible. First Timothy 1:19 speaks of those who have “shipwrecked their faith.” Hebrews 2:1 says, “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” In Ephesians 4:13-14, Paul says that we are to “reach unity in the faith” so that we won’t be “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.”

As God begins to draw people to himself, they become more and more aware of that need for a spiritual and moral anchor. Lee Strobel described the typical unchurched person as “morally adrift, but he secretly wants an anchor” (Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*). And Gary Collins and Timothy Clinton wrote:

Millions of people feel like they are drifting, with no absolute values or beliefs to which they can anchor their lives. Many feel empty inside, without firm standards of right and wrong, and with no valid guidelines for raising children, maintaining a marriage, building careers, doing business, or finding God. . . . They are looking for

truth, identity, and something to believe in that will give their lives a real center (*Baby Boomer Blues*, page 39).

It's interesting that both of these books use that image: spiritual seekers want an anchor. Through hosting an Anchor Course, you will offer people the stable faith that they are seeking.

Second, by hosting this Course, you enable people to explore Christianity together.

Note the subtitle of our course. The title of the book is "The Anchor Course." The subtitle of the book is "Exploring Christianity Together." But you might be asking, "Is this really something that can be done together? Won't we either *confuse* nonbelievers or *slow down* believers if we have them all in the same class discussing Christianity together?"

In the Bible, *finding* Jesus and *following* Jesus always involved a relationship with people. Think about those Bible stories of people who found Jesus. In Acts 8 we see an Ethiopian official in a chariot, studying Scripture, but he couldn't understand what he was reading until Philip came along and explained the faith to him. In Acts 9, Saul met Jesus in a blinding flash of light on the Damascus Road, but the whole experience only confused him until Ananias showed up to explain things to him. In the Gospels, Andrew brought his brother Peter to Jesus, and Phillip brought his friend Nathaniel, and the woman at the well told everyone in her town about Jesus, and Matthew even threw a party so his irreligious friends could meet Jesus.

It's true today too. There's only so far spiritual seekers can go on their spiritual search alone. They need to interact with others: with those who believe in Jesus and with others like themselves who are asking questions about him.

There's a saying in churches that are effective at reaching seekers: "Belonging comes before believing." People are more likely to come to faith in a setting where they have built relationships, where they have watched the Christian faith lived and not just taught, and where their honest questions have been welcomed.

So, finding Jesus involves discussing things and interacting with others. Following Jesus involves the same things: we still need interaction with others in order to grow in him. It's not something we do by ourselves. Over and over again the Bible uses the little phrase "each other" or "one another" to speak about the Christian life. You can't fulfill those phrases sitting alone in your living room watching religious programming. You can't fulfill those phrases sitting alone in the library reading religious books. You can't fulfill those phrases sitting alone in your computer room reading religious websites on the Internet. Spiritual growth is a group project.

Bill Hybels said that every major step or decision he has made was inspired and encouraged by someone 3 feet from him and not in a crowd of a thousand people. "Truth applied across the table" has been a key to his own personal growth. As you host an Anchor Course, you will be providing a setting where believers and seekers can come together—some to *discover* faith and some to *develop* the faith they have.

Third, by hosting this Course, you will introduce people to your church.

The Anchor Course is only eight weeks long. At the end, as participants either continue their spiritual search or grow in their relationship with Christ, they will need the ongoing fellowship and ministry of a church. After participating in a Course inside your church's facility and with the people who attend your church, it will be easier for them to make the transition into your other church activities.

Fourth, by hosting this Course, you are providing people with the basics they need to make up their mind.

When it comes to getting a handle on Christian belief, people need an *overview* but they do not need to be *overwhelmed*. The Anchor Course is designed with this need in mind. Take the subject of Christ's return, for example: Our aim in the Course is to explain why Christians find Christ's promise to return so meaningful, not to provide a detailed sequence of end-times events. Or consider the subject of biblical inspiration: Our aim is to express our conviction in a divinely-inspired Bible without getting into the various theories of how God inspired the authors.

In short, we want seekers to finish the Course with answers to such fundamental questions like: What do Christians believe about God and his relationship to us? Why is the Bible so important to believers? Who is Jesus? What was his vision for the church, and how must believers make that vision a reality? What about heaven and hell? Why does the cross stand as the most recognizable symbol of the Christian faith?

In order to provide this overview, the Anchor Course is organized around an ancient statement of faith called the Apostles' Creed. You'll find an introduction to this Creed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Why Does the Course Use The Apostles' Creed?

*“Truth is always bigger than our understanding of it.
To say the Apostles' Creed is to be like a child dressing up in her mother's clothes.
They don't fit, they're way too big, but she can grow into them.
In playing dress-up, she does more than she knows she does.”*

Ben Patterson
(from “Truer Than I Knew,” quoted in
Leadership Winter 2005, pp. 105-108)

When I've talked with seekers who want to discover the Christian faith and believers who want to develop their understanding of it, I've found an ancient tool to help both groups: The Apostles' Creed. This Creed serves as the outline for the Anchor Course. Millions of believers around the world and down through the centuries have recited it every week:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
and descended into Hades.
The third day he rose again 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 believe in the Holy Spirit;
the one holy church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.
Amen.*

Here we have a summary of what was taught by those Christ chose to be the first apostles. In fact, this is why it is called the *Apostles' Creed*. They did not write it, despite the old legend that the Apostles each contributed a point before they dispersed throughout the known world carrying the Creed. Few ever took that legend seriously; instead, the Creed dates back to the second century and it was used as a confession new believers recited before baptism.

We call it the *Apostles' Creed*, then, not because the Apostles wrote it but because it summarizes what we find in the Apostles' inspired writings. Every line in the Creed can be defended by reference to apostolic Scripture—in fact, most lines of the Creed are echoes or even quotes of Scripture.

I've found it a helpful tool in my work with both seekers and believers. As for helping believers, I'm not the first to see the benefits of the ancient statement as a training tool. When John Calvin wrote his 1536 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which is still in use by pastors and professors today, he used the articles of the Apostles' Creed as the outline for his work.

In addition to helping believers understand key Christian concepts, however, I've found that I can use the Creed in my work with people on a spiritual search. A study through the Apostles' Creed gives them an overview of our beliefs.

What is it about these 1800 year-old words that resonate with both believers and seekers today?

First, the Creed has the authority of that which has prevailed from antiquity. I've found that people are impressed with words that have been recited around the world for sixteen centuries. The late Christian musician, Rich Mullins, put the statement of faith to music in his number-one hit "Creed." The bold commitment to the Creed in the song's chorus connected with many listeners:

"I did not make it.
No, it is making me."

Of course, even as I use the Creed, I emphasize that the statement is not the *basis* of truth but rather a *summary* of the truth found in the Bible. The Creed, like any teaching tool, is useful only to the extent that it gets believers and seekers into God's Word. In the Anchor Course, we use the Creed as simply an ancient outline for a Bible study of key Christian beliefs.

Second, the Creed transcends denominational divisions to summarize what all Christians believe. I think the Creed "speaks" to those in the Anchor Course not only because it is ancient but also because it is universal. The statement of faith is a brief overview of what all believers hold in common.

Believers need a grasp of the "basics," of course, but I've found this to be especially attractive to seekers. The spiritually curious do not find the fine-points of denominational differences interesting. They simply want the key concepts explained to them so they can draw

some conclusions about Christianity. In my talks with seekers, I've compared their understanding of Christian belief to puzzle pieces in a shoebox. Each time they attend a church or try to read the Bible, they toss another puzzle piece into that shoebox and shove the box back under their bed. Occasionally, they may pull that shoebox out and work on the puzzle, but they haven't been able to put all the pieces together and make a decision about Christianity. I've told them that in our study together, we would set out what they are being invited to believe.

The points of the Creed become touchstones for good Bible study. The eight parts to the Anchor Course follow the flow of the Creed:

- “I Believe”—In Part One of the Anchor Course we'll look at the benefits and barriers to belief, and the role the Bible plays in Christian faith.
- “I believe in God”—In Part Two, we'll look at the evidences for God and the three most important things to know about who he is: He is my Maker, my Ruler, and my Father.
- “I believe in Jesus”— In Part Three, we'll look at the claims Jesus made about himself and his promise to return.
- “I believe in the Holy Spirit”— In Part Four, we'll look at the active role God plays in our world today. He works upon nonbelievers and believers alike.
- “I believe in the church”— In this section, we'll look at Christ's vision for the gathering of believers he called his church. Neither our spiritual search nor our spiritual growth can be conducted alone; we need each other. By the way, most people are more familiar with the version of the Apostles' Creed using the line, “I believe in the holy catholic church.” The Greek word translated “catholic,” *katholikos*, means “universal,” and refers to the universal oneness of all believers. Today, though, most people understand the word “catholic” to refer to a specific branch of Christianity: the Roman Catholic Church. Since a word that once referred to the oneness of all Christians is now identified with only a segment of the Christian body, I prefer to simply speak of the church as one instead of as catholic.
- “I believe in the forgiveness of sins”—After we've tried unsuccessfully to deal with our failures through denials and excuses, we need to turn to the divine forgiveness available through the cross of Christ. In Part Six, we'll look at this great truth.
- “I believe in eternal life”—In this section we'll explore the Christian conviction that life is a dressing room for eternity. We'll look at what Christ-followers believe about the resurrection, heaven, and hell.
- “Amen”—The word “amen” is a Hebrew word that means, “It is so . . . this is true . . . I buy that.” In this last section, we'll look at the things that make people hesitate at

the edge of Christian commitment, and the steps they need to take to cross the line into faith.

Third, the Creed helps us address the concerns people have. Considering how brief and how ancient this statement is, I've been surprised at how clearly the Creed addresses twenty-first century concerns.

For example, consider the article about the church: "I believe in the one holy church" and "the communion of saints." Seekers frequently tell me that Christians and churches have been the biggest source of disillusionment in their spiritual search. When seekers look at the vision Jesus cast for the church, though, they can see a vision worth pursuing. The church is to be "one," "holy," and "a communion."

Think about this vision. Some seekers complain about churches filled with bickering and divisiveness, but Jesus had a vision for unity among his followers—we are to be "one" with others who believe the biblical teachings. Some nonbelievers tell stories about hypocritical and judgmental Christians, but Jesus expected his people to encourage each other as we learn to leave behind all that used to enslave us—we are to be "holy." And some seekers see Christian groups as self-centered, cold and business-like, but Jesus expected his people to support and care for each other—we are to be a "communion."

So, as believers and pre-believers study this line together in my course, one of the strongest objections against Christianity fades away. People discover that Christ's vision of a church that is "one," "holy," and "a communion," is worth pursuing, despite how some have failed to fulfill that vision.

Credo—I Believe

According to Acts 2:42, one of the characteristics of the early church was that "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." We need to devote ourselves to the apostles' scriptural teaching, too. One tool I've found to accomplish this is the Apostles' Creed. "It has the fragrance of antiquity and the inestimable weight of universal consent," Philip Schaff wrote, "It is a bond of union between all ages and sections of Christendom" (*The Creeds of Christendom*).

The points of the Creed become touchstones for life-changing Bible study over the fundamentals of the faith. The word "creed" comes from the Latin word *credo*, and it means, "I believe." When we boldly assert what we believe, Christians will grow and seekers will find what they're looking for.

Chapter 3

Steps to a Successful Anchor Course

I've found the following guidelines to be helpful in planning and conducting the Anchor Course. If you have any suggestions or questions, please contact me. My contact information is at the back of this guide.

Before the Course

First, set the dates. If you are hosting the Course at your church building, be sure to reserve a room for nine weekly meetings. You will need one meeting time for the "Get Anchored" Dinner (described below), and eight meeting times for the Anchor Course class. Try to find eight *consecutive* weeks for the class if you can, and choose a room that will be easy for unchurched people to find. (Tip: Since our church already has a weekly Wednesday evening meal, we usually schedule our "Get Anchored" Dinner and all eight Anchor Course classes on Wednesday evenings.)

Second, order materials. Be sure to order your books in enough time so you will be able to distribute the books at the "Get Anchored" Dinner.

Go online at <http://www.lulu.com/anchorcourse>.

Third, enlist help. You will need to fill the following positions. Depending on the size of your Anchor Course ministry, you may be able to handle some of these positions on your own:

- **Hospitality Team.** Every Anchor Course class should begin with a social time. We recommend that you build this social time around a simple meal, but at least provide snacks and drinks. Enlist a Hospitality Team to prepare these weekly meals or snacks, and to clean up.
- **Presenter.** There is a 15-minute lesson after the meal and prior to the discussion. You can use my lessons on the leader's DVD, or you can choose to have your own presenter teach the 15-minute lesson. The script for each DVD lesson will be found

in the leader's materials. If you're not using the DVD lessons, the presenter can adapt this script for a live presentation.

- **Table Hosts.** If your Anchor Course class is no more than 8-10 participants, you can serve as the Table Host. If you expect more participation, however, enlist an additional Table Host for every table of 8-10 participants. Table Hosts build relationships with the participants and guide the discussion time during Anchor Course classes. Chapter 4 of this leader's guide will provide guidance on leading small-group discussions. Be sure take your Table Hosts through this Leader's Guide, especially Chapter Four.

Fourth, recruit for your course. At least four weeks before the "Get Anchored" Dinner, start promoting the Anchor Course. Advertise within your church materials (Sunday bulletins, newsletters, hallway posters), but don't stop there: you will need to do some personal recruiting yourself. Recruit from the relationships you have been building. Recruit new Christians. Recruit college students who are in a time of examination. Ask those who have already gone through the course to bring someone with them to the next course. Ask for referrals from your church members who have been building relationships with seekers, and then contact these referrals.

The "Get Anchored" Dinner

All your recruiting and advertising should point people to a "Get Anchored" Dinner, one week before the 8-week course begins. It is much easier to enlist someone to come to a single dinner than to enlist them to commit to an 8-week class.

As people arrive for the dinner, we suggest you have a registration table where participants can complete a registration form and a name tag for the evening. Have a CD of instrumental music playing in the background, and have a table with information about the Anchor Course, including the textbooks, *The Anchor Course: Exploring Christianity Together*.

The dinner will offer some time for people to socialize, followed by an introduction to the Anchor Course. The teaching DVD includes a talk that can be shown during the "Get Anchored" Dinner. (Alternately, you can enlist a presenter to lead a live presentation, using the script for this lesson in your leader's materials.) As you introduce the DVD or the presenter, hand out a listening guide to every participant. The listening guide is provided with the leader's materials.

Following the DVD or presenter's segment, use the questions on the back of the listening guide to lead a brief discussion. If you have more than 8-10 participants, break the group into smaller groups and have your Table Hosts lead the discussion in each group.

At the end of the evening, those who register for the course should receive a copy of the textbook, *The Anchor Course: Exploring Christianity Together*. Tell participants that they should read Part One (the first four chapters) by the next meeting.

It is up to you to decide whether to charge for the textbooks. At our church, those who sign up for the 8-week course receive the textbook at no charge.

We recommend that you have e-mail addresses on every participant so you can communicate with them through the class semester. We have found it helpful to send weekly encouraging reminders about the reading assignments and the next class meeting. Having an e-mail address will also enable you to send notices should you have to make any changes or cancellations as the semester progresses.

The Anchor Course Sessions

The Anchor Course experience involves four parts: some *personal* time, some *social* time, some *study* time, and some *discussion* time. The first element takes place before class; the other three elements take place in class.

Personal time. Each participant should have a copy of the textbook, *The Anchor Course: Exploring Christianity Together*. Couples may share a copy. Before they come to class, they should read the section you are planning to discuss in the next class. We recommend that you take every opportunity to remind participants about the importance of reading their textbook. We have found that as the semester progresses, participants begin to slack off in their commitment to the reading. At the end of each class, you should remind them about the next week's reading assignment, and we have found it helpful to send weekly e-mails to the participants 2 or 3 days before the next class, reminding them about the assignment. As you promote the readings at the end of every session and through the emails, you may want to share with them what you found significant about the weekly chapters you're asking them to read. This will pique their curiosity about the readings. You will find that the discussion time is much more meaningful when the participants have spent time on their own reflecting on the subjects you will be discussing.

Social time. Each week, you should start off with an informal time where participants can catch up on each other's lives. We recommend that you build this social time around a simple meal, but at least provide snacks and drinks. Try to avoid discussions over the Course material at this time. The aim is to simply enjoy each other and catch up on how life is going. We want people to relax and realize that we are interested in them. Ask questions about their jobs, their families, and their interests. Feel free to share about your own life as well.

Study time. After half an hour, start the DVD lesson or have your own presenter teach the 15-minute lesson. People can finish their meal during this lesson if they need to. Pens should be available for everyone. The leader's material for the Anchor Course includes listening guides in PDF format for each meeting. Print enough copies of the listening guide and hand them out. You may need to occasionally remind participants that they should not let the 15-minute lesson be a substitute for their reading. They will get a lot more out of the weekly meetings if they commit to reading the textbook before coming to class. The 15-minute lesson is simply designed get their mind focused on the topic your group will discuss together.

Discussion time. Now, this is where it gets fun! After the 15-minute lesson, be prepared to spend the last 45-60 minutes leading a discussion over the material:

- Arrange chairs in a circle. If you need to, break the room into smaller groups so that there is a Table Host for every 8-10 participants.
- Call attention to the discussion questions on the back of the listening guide and take the group through the questions. You should familiarize yourself with these questions before the class. This will give you time to adapt the discussion questions to your own group if you need to.
- Have copies of the Bible available, and whenever you refer to a passage of Scripture, refer to the page number in the Bible you provide. Don't assume that everyone knows where a book is found in the Bible. In fact, some of your participants may need to know what is meant by a "chapter" number and a "verse" number. Despite these challenges, I've found it helpful for them to actually work with a printed Bible during the discussion times instead of simply handing out sheets containing the verses we'll discuss.
- Conclude the discussion one hour after you begin. It's important to assure the participants that you will end at the time you promised. I have found it helpful to state up front that we will end the discussion—no matter how lively or unresolved—at the appointed time. I promise to continue the discussion for anyone who wants to stay. This provides a gracious "out" for those who have to leave while also providing time to finish the conversation for those who can stay.
- End the discussion in enough time to take prayer requests and lead in prayer. I have found that even those who aren't sure there's a God to pray to will add a prayer request to the list and they appreciate my offer to pray for them.
- As a parting word to the group, remind them about the next week's reading assignment, which will be found at the bottom of the discussion questions on the listening guide.

Remember: The discussion time is exactly that: discussion. Pay attention to the suggestions for leading discussions found in the next chapter, and be sure your other Table Hosts are well-trained at leading a group discussion, too.

I advise that the group be "closed" to new people after Week Two. While it's always difficult to turn away someone who expresses interest in this material after the course begins, you won't be able to get your group to a point of cohesion and mutual trust if you're continually introducing new people to it. When I've met people who expressed interest in the Anchor Course after the program has already begun, I tell them the date that the next course begins, I get their name on the contact list I maintain for the course so I can enlist them for

it, and I may even give them a copy of the book and try to meet with them personally to discuss it with them.

As the Course Concludes

The Anchor Course should be an ongoing resource for your church's interaction with spiritual seekers. I've found that the best people to help me recruit for future courses are those who have completed a course. So, as a semester of the Anchor Course concludes, I challenge the participants to recruit someone to join them for the next course. On the last night of the course, I announce the date of the next "Get Anchored" Dinner and ask the participants to suggest names of friends and family members who could benefit from the course.

Four weeks before the next "Get Anchored" Dinner, I contact the participants from the last course and encourage them to bring someone with them to the introductory dinner. At our church, we encourage all "graduates" of the Anchor Course to attend the "Get Anchored" Dinner even if they don't plan to enroll in the next course. In this way, they can catch up with their group's participants and so they can answer questions from others who are considering enrolling in the new course.

Don't decide whether the Anchor Course is a useful tool for your church after only one semester. Try to see if you can get some "traction" in your setting across two or three semesters before deciding whether the Anchor Course "works" in your setting. Now that we have been running the Anchor Course for a few years at our church, members look upon it as a significant tool in their work with friends and family members who are asking spiritual questions. They note the start of new semesters and forward the date and information about the Anchor Course to friends. For ideas on creating this kind of environment at your church, read the last chapter of this leader's guide for ways to make your church an "incubator" for evangelistic conversations.

Chapter 4

How to Lead Small-Group Discussions

The subtitle of the Anchor Course is “Exploring Christianity Together.” For people to explore Christianity together, you need to provide two things in your program: *information* about Christianity and *conversation* about the questions and struggles people have with Christianity. The information is provided through the weekly at-home readings and the 15-minute lesson. The conversation is provided through the discussion time following the lesson.

Here are some ways to lead a small-group through the discussion time.

First, on your own before class, you should be familiar with the at-home reading you’ll be discussing. You should also view the 15-minute lesson from the DVD (or read the presenter’s lesson if your Anchor Course leader plans to use a live presenter). Get a copy of the discussion guide and think through the questions you’ll be asking. By doing this before class, you’ll have time to adapt the questions to your unique group, if needed. Pray for the participants in your small group by name before you finish your preparation for the class.

Second, on the night your Anchor Course class is held, make sure to participate in the social time that is scheduled at the start of the class (see Chapter 3: Steps to a Successful Anchor Course). This informal time is an important opportunity to build trust and develop relationships. Also, pay attention to the 15-minute lesson, no matter how familiar you are with it. Your attention signals its importance to the other participants.

Third, as you lead the discussion, use the discussion guide provided in the leader’s material. This will allow everyone to review the question you’ve asked verbally, enabling them to feel more confident that they’ve understood the question before attempting to answer it. It will also enable the participants to see how many questions you intend to cover, and I’ve found this helps a group self-regulate how long they want to spend on the earlier questions in the list.

Fourth, you'll find the following tips helpful as you move through the discussion:

- Listen with your eyes and not just your ears. In other words, give them your full attention and don't "read ahead" on the discussion guide while they're talking.
- Watch your body language. Folded arms, for example, can signal defensiveness, and tapping fingers can signal impatience. Make sure your body as well as your words are communicating that you're enjoying your conversation with the group, even their objections and questions of points of Christian truth that are so dear to you.
- Don't be afraid of silence. I've found this is one of the biggest fears that discussion leaders have. After you've asked a question, give some time for the group to decide who's going to answer first. You can repeat or even restate the question. Humor can also help: Sometimes when no one answers my question, I've said with a grin, "I can wait." You can also suggest a range of answers by saying, "You know, when hearing this question, some people would say ___ while others would say ___ and I've even heard some people say ___." Do any of those thoughts sound like something you'd say?" Trust me: Someone will eventually break the silence.
- Encourage people verbally by comments such as, "That makes sense," or "You've got a point" or "Can you tell us more" or "So what I hear you saying is...."
- Don't let anyone monopolize the discussion. If you find someone dominating the time, express appreciation for their participation and ask others for their input. You could say, "Thanks so much for that answer. Does anyone else have a thought on that?" On a related note, break up any game of "ping-pong." If two participants get into a back and forth discussion ignoring the rest of the group, gently intercede to include others, by asking a question like, "Mary, what do you think about this?"
- Remember that your role is to lead them to talk about how they are processing the information about the Christian faith from the readings and lessons. Resist the temptation (or the fear!) of being the "Bible Answer Man" (or Woman). Of course, being a discussion *leader* doesn't mean you can't participate in the discussion you're leading. Share your stories and reactions to the readings and the 15-minute lessons along with the rest of the group. Just make sure you're creating a setting where people feel free to share how they are thinking through the material themselves.
- Leading a group through a set of questions is "more art than science," as the saying goes. Don't cut short a lively and meaningful discussion over a question in order to simply complete your list of questions on the discussion guide. But keep the conversation moving, because sometimes the last questions on the guide are the most important.
- Try to keep the conversation from veering off the topic. While the discussion leader must be sensitive to the times that the group needs to take the conversation in a direction that you have not planned, normally you should try to keep the conversation

on the subject of the discussion questions for the night. When the discussion wanders from the topic, get the group back on track by saying, “What we’re discussing is interesting, but we’ve left our topic. Perhaps we could discuss this in greater depth at a different time.” Then re-state the question or the topic you started with.

- Remind people to keep confidences. When someone has shared something personal, thank them for their trust and reassure them that it will stay within the group. This is a tactful indirect way of reminding the group of the importance of confidentiality.
- If someone says something that is incorrect, look for ways to affirm without shutting down the conversation. “How interesting” is a neutral statement, or you could say, “Thanks for that observation. Does anyone else have some thoughts on that matter?”
- Spotlight important points from the readings and the 15-minute lessons. As you re-view the material before the meeting, identify the key points. In the readings there are usually 4 or 5 things I list, in numerical order, that I want people to know about a subject. Be ready to include the key points in the discussion and re-emphasize them as appropriate by saying things like, “I remember what Tom said in the video,” or “In his book, here’s a point Tom made about this scripture we’re looking at.”

Always find ways to express appreciation for your group. Thank them for the time they spend working through the book, thank them for their efforts to show up at the meetings, and thank them for the input they provide and the friendships they are building. You should express your genuine and heartfelt gratitude that they have joined you in this Course.

Chapter 5

Is Your Church an Incubator?

The Anchor Course works best within a church community that is committed to engaging with non-believers. Our churches become “incubators” for new life when the members build relationships with non-believers in their daily lives, and when they bring those non-believers into a congregation that warmly welcomes them.

Believers need to challenge each other with the encouragement found in 1 Chronicles 13:2—“Let us invite them to come and join us.” I want to suggest a six-step process to invite non-believers to experience life with Christ. Feel free to adapt this process for your own church.

Of course, someone might ask, “Six steps? Is evangelism really that simple?”

I believe we make evangelism and outreach too difficult. Have you ever seen those shows on TV where stuntmen do amazing feats and the announcer says, “Don’t try this at home, kids! This is for professionals only!” That’s what we’ve turned evangelism and outreach into: something for professionals only.

Did you read about the man who caught the state record for channel catfish in North Carolina on a pink Barbie fishing rod?

David Hayes was fishing with his granddaughter one afternoon. She had a little pink Barbie fishing rod that she had received for Christmas. And she just asked her grandfather to hold her Barbie rod and reel while she went inside to the bathroom. He did. Within seconds he felt a yank on the line and pulled in a 21 pound-1 ounce catfish—the state record. The fish was 32 inches long, making it 2 inches longer than the toy rod-and-reel it was caught with.

Those of you who are married to fishermen, you might want to tell them that story the next time they want to spend \$300 on new fishing gear! (Or maybe not!)

Now, Jesus said to a group of fishermen one time, “Follow me and I will show you how to fish for people.” And yet sometimes we think that fishing for people involves all kinds of training, all kinds of sophisticated techniques, and all the right conditions aligned.

Let me introduce you to a simple 6-step process for catching people for Jesus. At the church I serve, we call it the INVITE Strategy. Each letter in the word INVITE stands for an activity that will help you explain Jesus to those you know.

IDENTIFY

The first step is to Identify—identify the people in your life who need Jesus. In John 4:35 (NLT), Jesus said, “Look around you! Vast fields are ripening all around us and are ready now for the harvest.” That’s the first thing you have to do if you’re going to be effective: You have to IDENTIFY that there are fields ripening around you and ready for the harvest. At our church, we tell our people that everything starts when you “identify your THEMs.”

The poor grammar is deliberate! I am convinced that the word “them” is the most important word in the Great Commission. The Great Commission is the title Christians give to the last marching orders Jesus gave his followers in Matthew 28 (CEV): “Go and make them my disciples, baptizing them and teaching them . . .” Who are the THEMs Jesus was talking about? People in your world: coworkers, neighbors, relatives, longtime friends, and so on. The first step you take if you want to make a difference in your world: identify the people who need Jesus. Everything starts here.

NURTURE

Next step: Nurture—nurture authentic relationships with your THEMs. I’m inspired by 1 Thessalonians 2:8—“We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.”

Paul said he and his companions were delighted to share two things—not one thing but two things—with the Philippians: “the gospel of God,” and “our lives.”

Paul said he shared the gospel with them. He wanted them to know Jesus, to know Jesus’ forgiveness and guidance and power for living. But Paul said he shared not only the gospel with them but also his life. The Greek word there literally means, “soul.” In other words, he shared his very self: his time, his energy, his heart. He was enthusiastically connected with them.

So, let’s follow the strategy Paul laid out for us: share the gospel, but share your life as well. Nurture an authentic relationship with the people around you: no-strings-attached, no expectations, no pressure.

VERIFY

Next word: Verify—verify your friend’s spiritual condition. We need to know where they are spiritually. Are they cynical and hardened to spiritual things? Have they been burned by a former church or a former relationship with a Christian? Do they have honest questions about the faith that no one has taken the time to answer?

What do you do at this stage? Just ask questions and get to know them. At the “nurture” stage, you’ve learned about their passion for golf or their pride in their grandkids or their love for gardening or whatever. But what about their spiritual side? Get to know them well enough that you can verify where they are spiritually. Encourage them to keep thinking about spiritual things. Get them resources that can help them answer their questions.

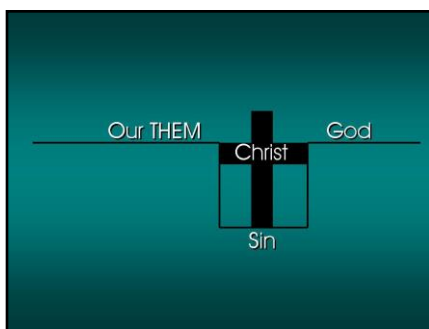
So, your job is to build relationships with the people around you and in the natural course of those relationships, determine where they are spiritually.

INVOLVE

The next letter in the “I.N.V.I.T.E.” acronym stands for “Involve—involve THEM with your church family.” We learn from 1 Corinthians 14 that in the very first New Testament churches, when God’s people gathered for worship, seekers were in their midst. The early Christians had neighbors and coworkers and friends and family who were coming in to the worship gatherings even though they were not believers. And Paul said, “Be sensitive to them. Adjust yourself to them. Do things that will be understandable to them.”

There is a slogan that effective churches have caught on to: “Belonging comes before believing.” In this case, “belong” does not refer to formal church membership. I’m talking about connection and camaraderie and encouragement. A lot of people will come to belief in a place where they feel they belong.

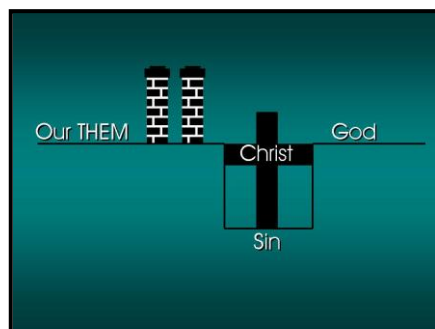
Let me show you why this is so important. Here is an illustration a lot of us have used as we share the gospel:



Life with God is illustrated on the right, with the nonbeliever on the left, and in between is this big chasm called sin. Sin separates us from God, now and forever. But, as the image shows, Jesus took our sin away on the cross. The cross became a bridge over that chasm so that we can be united to God.

It’s a very simple way to tell people about the gospel, but in our culture today, it’s not just a chasm that separates them from God . . .

... but barriers that separate them from even considering the gospel:



There are at least two barriers. First, they have the idea that Christians are strange: Judgmental, narrow-minded, we don't have any fun, all churches want is your money, we put our minds on a shelf, and so on.

Second, they have the idea that the Bible is irrelevant. They think, "What could a two-thousand year-old book say to me?"

When some Christians share the gospel story of the chasm and the cross and no one responds, they just write off the people around them. Instead, we need to work on these barriers that keep people from even considering the gospel story. We do that by introducing our THEMs to our church family. As our seeking friends start getting involved with us in a congregation that warmly welcomes them, the barriers come down. They find out that Christians are pretty normal—most of us anyway! And they find out that the Bible really does have a lot of things to say about life.

So, involve your THEMs with your church family. Don't wait until after you've shared the gospel with your friend. In many cases, belonging comes before believing.

TELL

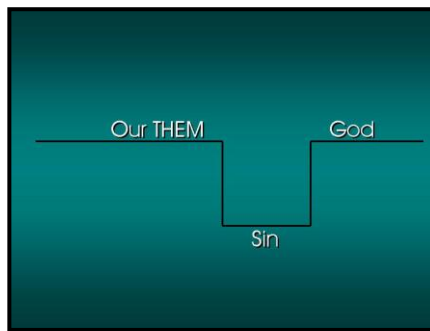
The letter "T" in the acronym "I.N.V.I.T.E." stands for "Tell—tell THEM your stories." In Acts 4:20, the apostles said, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." When you're trying to connect someone to Jesus, there's nothing more powerful than talking about the difference Christ has made in your life personally.

You have stories to tell about how Jesus changed your life: you moved from fear to peace, or you moved from addiction to freedom, or you moved from conflict with others to reconciliation.

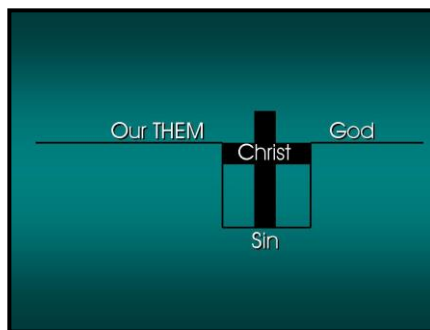
What has a relationship with Jesus done for you? If you can answer that question, you can complete the fifth step in the INVITE strategy.

ENCOURAGE

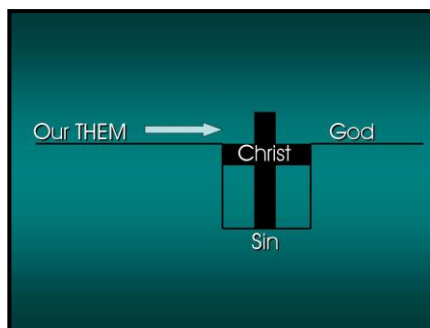
The last step is to “Encourage—encourage THEM to cross the line of faith.” You need to let them know the basics of the Gospel. First, let them know that God created us to be with him forever. We were meant for fellowship, relationship. But sin separated us from God. And there is now this great chasm that we cannot cross. You can even illustrate it with a simple drawing:



Second, let them know that Jesus died to bridge that gap for us. His death cancels our death:



Third, tell them that we need to put our faith in him and cross that bridge to eternal life with God:



You might even ask them, “Would you like to cross that bridge?” If so, lead them in a prayer to commit to Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Jesus said, “Follow me and I’ll show you how to fish for people.” You might have a lot of sophisticated equipment to accomplish that: Bible knowledge, evangelism training, or even a position of church leadership. Or maybe you feel that when it comes to fishing for people, all you have is a little pink Barbie toy fishing rod. You’re new to faith, not sure where to look things up in the Bible, and you’re intimidated that someone may ask you a question you can’t answer.

Either way, you can still catch people for Jesus. We can be effective at communicating the gospel to our world if we’ll follow these six steps:

- I—Identify your THEMs
- N—Nurture an authentic relationship with THEM
- V—Verify their spiritual condition
- I—Involve THEM with your church family
- T—Tell THEM your faith story, and
- E—Encourage THEM to cross the line into faith

Chapter 6

Weekly Leader's Talks

Each week before the discussion time, take 15 minutes to get class members focused on the night's subject. You can use the DVD, or adapt the transcripts below for your own talks. It's important to periodically remind class members that the 15-minute talks cannot replace the weekly reading assignments.

The listening guides for each talk will be provided in the next section.

The Get-Anchored Dinner

I'm glad you're considering going through the Anchor Course with me. You know, right at the start, you might be wondering why we're calling it the Anchor Course.

Hebrews 6:19 says of the Christian faith: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."

Maybe that's what Bono was thinking about when he was asked about his Christian faith. The front man for the band U2 said, "I'm the sort of character who's got to have an anchor. I want to be around immovable objects."

Have you discovered the value of an anchored life? There is so much that is temporary about life, so much that is uncertain. You need to be able to hook into something solid that will hold fast.

The Bible often speaks of your life as a little boat on a big sea--a little boat that needs to be anchored so that it does not crash on the rocks or drift away lost. This image shows up a lot in the Bible. First Timothy 1:19 speaks of those who have "shipwrecked their faith." Hebrews 2:1 says, "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." In Ephesians 4:13-14, Paul says that we are to "reach unity in the faith" so that we won't be "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching."

Over the next several weeks, I want to give you something to anchor to. Right now, though, I want to spend some time talking about how to make the most of our time together the

next eight weeks. There are three things you need to do to get the full benefit of the Anchor Course. See if you can discover those three things as we read Acts 17:10-12 (TEV) –

“As soon as night came, the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived, they went to the synagogue. The people there were more open-minded than the people in Thessalonica. They listened to the message with great eagerness, and every day they studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true. Many of them believed; and many Greek women of high social standing and many Greek men also believed.”

Now, Paul and Silas were teachers who would show up in a town to explain Christian truth and to encourage people to become followers of Christ. Earlier in Acts 17, the Bible says that they tried to teach in Thessalonica, but they got run out of town because no one wanted to hear what they had to say. So verse 10 says that they traveled 60 miles southwest to the town of Berea. And the Bible says the Bereans were more open-minded than the Thessalonians. Here's why -- verse 11: “They listened to the message with great eagerness, and every day they studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true.”

There are some things we can learn from the Bereans: three things that they did that you need to do to make sure that you get the most out of our eight-week study.

Here's the first thing:

I will make this a group project.

Circle the word “they” in verse 11: “*They* listened to the message . . . *they* studied the Scriptures.” In that day, no one had their own personal copy of the Bible. There were no printing presses or laser printers. The local synagogue probably had one precious copy of the Bible. And after hearing what Paul had to say about Jesus, they gathered around that copy and read it together and discussed it together. It was a group project.

Have you noticed how often in the Bible finding Jesus and following Jesus was done together? It always involved a relationship with people. In Acts 8 we see an Ethiopian official in a chariot, studying Scripture, but he couldn't understand what he was reading until Philip came along and explained the faith to him. In Acts 9, Saul met Jesus in a blinding flash of light on the Damascus Road, but the whole experience only confused him until Ananias showed up to explain things to him. It's true today too. There's only so far you can go on your spiritual search alone. You need to interact with others: with those who believe in Jesus and with others like you who are asking questions about him.

So, finding Jesus involves discussing things and interacting with others. And following Jesus involves the same things: we still need interaction with others in order to grow in him. It's not something we do by ourselves. Over and over again the Bible uses the little phrase “each other” or “one another” to speak about the Christian life. You can't fulfill those phrases sitting alone in your living room watching religious programming. You can't fulfill those phrases sitting alone in the library reading religious books. You can't fulfill those phrases sitting alone in your computer room reading religious websites on the Internet. Spiritual growth is a group project.

Note the subtitle of our course. The title of the book is "The Anchor Course." The subtitle of the book is "Exploring Christianity Together." So that's the first way to make the most of the next several weeks: make it a group project.

Make this second commitment: I will take time to read the Bible.

You'll get a lot more out of this study if you do what the Berean Christians did in Acts 17. It says, "They studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true." This week as you read Part One in the book, you'll see the value of Scripture and why we can count on it to give us truth about God.

Most of you who are spiritual seekers have a lot of curiosity about the Bible, and a lot of respect for it. So here's a chance to dig into it in a systematic way, maybe for the first time.

Even if you're not convinced at this point that the Bible is the Word of God, let me encourage you to dig into it and take the time to examine it. You can't really say that you've examined Christianity until you examine the source documents of Christianity. Doesn't that make sense?

Of course, if you're a believer you should know why it's important to dig into God's Word. First Timothy 4:6 speaks of being "constantly nourished on the words of the faith and sound doctrine." That's what we want to do across the next several weeks: draw *nourishment* from the words of the faith and sound doctrine.

So, to get the most out of the Anchor Course, here's what you need to do: make it a group project and see what the Bible says about God and life with him. If we want to follow the pattern of the Berean Christians, here's a third commitment to make:

I will put my heart into it.

Circle that phrase "great eagerness" in verse 11: "They listened to the message with great eagerness." There needs to be an emotional commitment, an enthusiasm for this.

Now, why should you get excited about this study? Let me give you three reasons to look forward to it. The first is especially for those of you who are believers, the second is especially for those of you who are seekers, and the third is for all of us.

First, if you're a believer, this one is important: A study of our beliefs will help me become a person of spiritual influence. Did you know that knowing what you believe is essential if you're going to serve in the church? In 1st Timothy 3:9, Paul says of deacons: "they must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience"? Why? Because if you're in positions of influence in the church, you need a good grip on Christian beliefs so you can help others get a handle on those things.

Knowing what you believe is important for parents, too. Parents are expected to teach the faith to their kids. Deuteronomy 6 uses the word "impress"-- parents are to "impress" the

knowledge of God and his will upon their children. So, if you're a mom or a dad, you need this study series so you can do your job. You need to know the faith so you will know what you're supposed to pass on to your kids.

So, the Bible used the word "eagerness" to describe the attitude of the Bereans to the study that Paul brought them. And you can get excited about the Anchor Course if you're a believer because of a study of our beliefs will help you become a person of spiritual influence.

Second, if you're a seeker, here's a good reason to be excited about the study: It will help you make up your mind about Christianity.

Gary Collins and Timothy Clinton wrote: "Millions of people feel like they are drifting, with no absolute values or beliefs to which they can anchor their lives. Many feel empty inside, without firm standards of right and wrong, and with no valid guidelines for raising children, maintaining a marriage, building careers, doing business, or finding God. . . . They are looking for truth, identity, and something to believe in that will give their lives a real center." Let me read that first line again: Millions of people "feel like they are drifting, with no absolute values or beliefs to which they can anchor their lives." Lee Strobel said the same thing in one of his books. Drawing from his own experience as a formerly unchurched nonbeliever, he said of the typical unchurched person: "he secretly wants an anchor."

It's interesting that both of these books use that image: spiritual seekers want an anchor. And Hebrews 6:19 says of the Christian faith, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul."

Third, a study of our beliefs helps us all love God. According to Jesus, the most *spiritual* thing you can do is use your *mind* to understand God. In Mark 12:30, when Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, he said that we must love the Lord our God with all our heart and will all our soul, yes. But he didn't stop there. He also said that we are to love God with all our *mind*.

So, there are reasons to look forward to this series. It will help you wield a spiritual influence, it will help you make up your mind about Christianity, and it will help you love God.

The people in the little town of Berea set the example for us. Acts 17:11 says, "They listened to the message with great eagerness, and every day they studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true." So, make this a group project, take time to study the Bible, and enter into this study excited about what you're going to experience.

In short, what you get out of the next few weeks depends on what you're willing to put in to it. Commitment is spelled T-I-M-E. It involves some private time, some social time, some study time, and some discussion time. You really don't want to leave any one of these four things out of your experience with the Anchor Course.

First, private time. You're going to receive a book called "The Anchor Course." And on your own, before you come to class, you'll need to read the section we're planning to discuss in the next class.

Second, social time. Each week, your Anchor Course group will start off with some social time. Some Anchor Course groups share a meal each week together. Others just have snacks and drinks. But don't skip the social time and think you can just show up for the discussion. This is much a part of the study as the rest of it. I think an Anchor Course group is a great place to make new friends.

Third, study time. Each week I will teach a 15-minute lesson through this DVD. Now, don't let it substitute for your reading. You will get a lot more out of your weekly meeting with your group if you commit to reading the chapters in the Anchor Course book before coming to class. But the 15-minute study time will get your mind focused on the topic your group will discuss together.

So, first, private time: read your book before you come to class. Second: social time: build friendship with others at the start of the class. Third: study time: there will be a 15-minute lesson from me each week. And fourth: discussion time.

Now, this is where it gets fun! I'll provide you with some questions to talk about. The questions will cover both the book readings and my lesson. Now, don't worry about these questions: they are very open-ended, and you're not expected to be an expert on the material. You *are* expected to be an expert on how you're reacting to the material. Whether you're a believer or you're checking out the Christian faith, I think you will be pleased to find how quickly you're accepted by the rest of the group.

I'm so glad to be part of your Anchor Course experience through this DVD. Read Part One in the book, and I'll see you next week!

Week 1: I Believe

The Apostles Creed begins with two important words: "I believe." In fact, that's where we get our English word "creed"—from the Latin *credo*, which means, "I believe." To take your stand and say "I believe,"—I put my trust in this, I'm founding my life on this—that's the first step in a great adventure.

But how do you begin believing? The Anchor Course is designed for those who need to *discover* the faith and those who need to *develop* in the faith. In other words, it's for both believers and for those on a spiritual search. But right now I want to speak specifically to those on a spiritual search. I want to look at the second half of Acts 17, and I want to suggest a practical seven-step process to begin believing.

First,

1. Pay attention to the spiritual dimension to your life.

In Acts 17 we meet Paul. After his conversion at the age of 33, he spent his days traveling around the known world sharing the gospel and establishing churches. When we see him in Acts 17, he was in Athens waiting for his companions to catch up with him. Verse 16 says,

“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.”

Even today Athens, Greece, is still known as the birthplace of Western democracy, the wellspring of Western philosophy, and the cradle of Western culture. It was the intellectual center of the Roman empire in Paul's day. And yet these great intellectuals were deeply spiritual. As Paul walked around the city, he noted it was “full of idols”—the Greek text could be translated it was “under” idols, it was overwhelmed with them, overrun with them. When Paul got his chance to address the philosophers, in v. 22 he thought of all the shrines and said, “I see that you are very religious.” Now, he's going to point out that they have fulfilled their religious impulses in the wrong way, but he acknowledges their spiritual hunger as a starting point for what he wants to say.

So, the intellectual center of the ancient world was also a deeply spiritual place. They had an integrated view of life. They did not separate matters of the spirit from matters of the mind—they acknowledged the spiritual dimension to life. That's the first step in your search for God—let's call it *the step of INTEGRATION*.

Some of us aren't integrated in our approach to life. Some of us have a philosophy that says, “He who dies with the most toys, wins.” Our approach to life is dominated by material success. Some of us have a philosophy that says, “Eat, drink, find happiness because it all ends at the grave.” Our approach to life is dominated by personal pleasure. Some of us have a philosophy that says, “The only things we can really know come only by scientific investigation,” and so the only things we trust are statements from secular scientists.

The good news is that more and more people are trying to live an *integrated* life in which they pay attention to the spiritual dimension of life. Surveys show that most people want to *integrate* the spiritual dimension into their lives. Not all of them are fulfilling their spiritual hunger in the right way, but they're acknowledging the hunger, and that's the first step.

Here's the second step:

2. Be willing to search.

Not everyone who's taken the first step is ready for the second step. Though the people of Athens were deeply religious, not all of them were open to what Paul had to say. In verse 18, as Paul talked with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, they reacted in two ways. Some of them insulted him—“What is this babblers trying to say?”

But others showed interest, and so they brought him to the Areopagus—which means Mars Hill. It was here that a Council of intellectuals gathered to hear and weigh out philosophies taught in their town. At this stage, it wasn't any more than that: interest, openness. They weren't going to dismiss what they heard without weighing it out.

That's the step of OPENNESS. That's where some of you are. That's one reason you're here, to investigate.

So, take the step of OPENNESS. Be willing to search. Third,

3. Admit the insufficiency of your spiritual answers.

For some, it's the dissatisfaction with the state of their spiritual life that sends them on a search. For others, it's only after they examine the Christian faith that they find the insufficiency of the way they used to solve their spiritual hunger. But we have to admit the insufficiency of our spiritual answers. We have to get honest with ourselves and admit that what we *have been* doing to solve our spiritual hunger is insufficient.

In verse 23, when Paul is given a chance to speak to the Areopagus, the Council, he says, "As I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you."

In the midst of all their shrines, he finds an admission of mystery, a confession of ignorance: someone had set up a shrine with the title, "To an unknown God." This isn't as far-fetched as you might first think. Pausanias was a kind of ancient writer of travel guides. He traveled extensively in A.D. 175 and wrote a popular book called *Tour of Greece*. He began his travelogue in Athens and he said he found near the harbor a number of temples, together with "altars of the gods named Unknown."

So, Paul takes hold of this admission of mystery and unanswered questions as his starting point for sharing the gospel.

This is the step we'll label HONESTY. It's where we admit that we've come up against unanswered questions, where we admit that our previous solutions haven't solved our search, where previous spiritual efforts have not satisfied. We have to take this third step: *the step of HONESTY*. Then we're ready for the fourth step:

4. Discover the reason God made you: to have a relationship with you.

Look at verses 26-27: Here Paul explains to the philosophers the reason why God created us. "From one man he made every nation of men . . . and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."

A lot of people are surprised to discover that this is the Christian answer to why there is something and not nothing, the answer to why we exist: "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him." God made you to love you.

This is a unique message among the world's religions. Some religions give us rules to follow, or rituals to practice, or recitations to chant. But Christianity announces a relationship to enter into: God made us to love us. That's the step of DISCOVERY.

The fifth step:

5. Become dissatisfied with your God-substitutes.

In verses 29-30, Paul tells his listeners that they need to reach a point of discontentment with their idols. In verse 30, Paul said, “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

Now, there aren't many shrines that we bow before in the modern world, but there are a lot of substitutes for God. The French philosopher and mathematician, Blaise Pascal, was the one who first observed that we have a God-shaped void that we try to fill with a lot of things before we turn to God. What have you been filling the void with?

If those things don't fill the God-shaped void, we have to stop giving them top-billing in our lives. Let's call this *the step of DISCONTENT*,

And that leads to the question of what we put in that void. That leads me to step #6:
6. Come to terms with Jesus and especially his death, resurrection, and return.

In verses 31-32, Paul brings his talk home to Jesus. He said, “For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

It would be interesting to know what more he wanted to say about Jesus, but upon hearing about a dead man walking, this immediately caused a reaction.

It always does. You can talk all day with people about Jesus the great moral teacher—but talk about his cross, his resurrection, or his return, and there will be *immediate rejection* or *immediate interest*. Look at verse 32: “When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’”

This is the step we'll call *DIVISION*. You have to come to terms with what Jesus said about himself, what Jesus said his death would accomplish, what Jesus said about his resurrection after his crucifixion, and what Jesus said about his return. We have to come to terms with Jesus, and what we conclude about him will divide us forever. And that leads me to the last step a seeker needs to take as I see the steps in Acts 17.

7. Your evaluation should result in action.

The passage begins with this comment in verse 21: “All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.” I love that line: “doing nothing but talking about the latest ideas.” Sounds like some people I know. For them, truth isn't something you search for but a game you play. Something to talk about. But the passage ends with this in verse 34: “A few men became followers of Paul and believed.”

This is *the step of DECISION*. We ought to study and explore and examine, but there is no question that the gospel calls for a decision. Jesus said, “If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24, NIV). Jesus didn't consider this a game. There is an RSVP attached to the end of every day we live.

The step of DECISION. This is the step where changes start taking place, because when you look at Jesus's cross, his resurrection, and the promise of his return, and in reply you say, "I believe" changes start taking place, and life becomes an adventure.

Seven steps from skepticism to belief:

- the step of INTEGRATION
- the step of OPENNESS
- the step of HONESTY
- the step of DISCOVERY
- the step of DISCONTENT
- the step of DIVISION
- the step of DECISION

That's how to begin believing. And when you take your stand and say "I believe," get ready for an adventure. Those are the first two words of the Apostles' Creed. To take your stand and say "Here's what I believe,"—I put my trust in this, I'm founding my life on this—it makes all the difference.

Week 2: I Believe in God

Welcome to The Anchor Course. We're using the ancient words of the Apostles' Creed as an outline to examine what Christians believe.

Last week we looked at the importance of that little two-word phrase that starts off the Creed: "I believe." We looked at how to begin believing. Today we'll start looking at exactly what Christians believe. Here's the first statement from the Apostles Creed:

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

In 2006, Baylor University released the findings of a major new study. The researchers found that your view of God was a better predictor of your moral and political behavior than simply identifying your denominational background. As one research leader said, "If I know your image of God, I can tell all kinds of things about you."

He's absolutely right.

If I bought an admission ticket into the art gallery of your mind, what portrait of God would I find hanging there? The Apostles Creed summarizes the biblical teaching of God with this phrase: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." In other words God is my father, God is my ruler, and God is my maker.

Let's quickly take a look at the implications of those three things. Let's start with the last one first:

Since God is my Maker, I will align with his purpose.

Proverbs 16:4 (NASB) says, "*The Lord has made everything for His own purpose.*" Circle that phrase: "for his own purpose."

We are not here by chance, we are not here by accident. God designed this world, and God designed us to play our part in it. So, what's the part you're supposed to play?

There are two ways to answer that question: Discover your calling, and develop your character.

Discover your calling: what has God called you to do? What career has he called you into? More specifically, what task has he called you to fulfill at this stage in your life? Maybe your task right now is to finish school. Maybe God's call upon your life right now is to take care of a sick family member.

How do you figure out your career? How do you decide whether you need to switch jobs? How do you determine the way to invest your free time? Doesn't it make sense to ask the one who made you? Proverbs 16:4 (NASB) says, "*The Lord has made everything for His own purpose.*" So we need to ask God what he intends for our life.

Develop your character: We fulfill God's purpose in our character, not just our calling. The Bible says we were made in the image of God. That means that we are to be reflections of him, little representations of him. We are to say to the universe, "Look at me, and I'll show you what God looks like." God designed us to bring glory to him, and we fulfill that purpose in the way we live our lives. In the promises we keep, and the way we raise our kids, and the kindness we show, and the discipline we maintain, and in the 100 seemingly insignificant decisions we make every day -- our purpose is to honor God. Our purpose is to reflect who he is.

Ephesians 5:17 (Msg) says, "Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants." So, since God is my Maker, I will align with his purpose.

Second:

Since God is my Ruler, I will rest in his plan.

The Apostles Creed uses the word "Almighty" to describe God. It's the Bible's favorite word to describe God, too. The word "Almighty" shows up about 330 times in the Old and New Testament.

I remember when my oldest son was around 3 and I was pushing him on a little swing and he was singing: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." And he stopped for a moment and started the line again, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Again he stopped. And then he said, "Daddy, how does that song go?" And I sang it for him,

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. We are weak but he is strong." And he smiled at me like he had caught me in an error and he said, "Daddy, you can't sing 'we are weak but he is strong.' You're not weak. You're big and strong." And I said, "Well, compared to Jesus I'm weak." He thought about that for a bit and said, "Yeah. I guess that's true. Because you can't make rainbows."

You know what? That three-year-old was right. I can't make rainbows. And you know something else? Neither can you. But God can, because he is Almighty.

Isaiah 64:8 says, "We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." Job 12:10 (TEV) says, "It is God who directs the lives of his creatures; everyone's life is in his power."

And since God is Almighty, we can rest in his plan. God is in control, and this is true when we don't get the job as well as when we get it. This is true when the doctor's report is bad news as well as when it's good news. God is in control, and we have to rest in the fact that he has a plan he's working out.

Romans 8:28 says, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." I cannot always see what God is doing, especially in the darkness of some crisis. But being unable to understand what God is doing does not mean that there is no plan. God is always at work, even in miserable events. In Revelation 15:3, John hears this song:

Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.
Just and true are your ways,
King of the ages.

When I rest in that truth, I rest. I wish I could say I rest more often! The Baptist theologian, E.Y. Mullins, said, "*In hours of weakness and sorrow and defeat, [God's] sovereignty is the rock foundation of my hopes. There are so many things which seem to control the world, it is the thought of God's control which saves me from despair.*" (quoted in Erickson, The Father Almighty, 195-96.)

So, God is my Maker, and I have to find out why he made me and align with that purpose. And God is my Ruler, and I have to rest in his plan, knowing that God's on the job, causing all things to work together for my good.

Third:

Since God is my Father, I will depend on his provision. In the words of the Creed, God is "maker of heaven and earth," God is "Almighty," and God is the Father. That was Jesus is favorite title for God: father.

Some have suggested that this picture of God as Father isn't helpful today because many people have known abusive or neglectful fathers. A bad experience with an earthly father, they say, could cause some to think of a heavenly Father with revulsion instead of reverence.

It's true that our earliest impression of God is shaped on the anvil of our relationship with an earthly father. That's why fathers are so important in our lives. But, while I don't want to belittle the concern, I think it falls short. To think of God as "Father" does not mean we should see God as fathers *are* but rather as fathers *ought to be*. God relates to us as earthly fathers should.

There is a universal expectation of behavior which earthly fathers try to meet. Earthly fathers ought to be protectors, nurturers, and responsive to the basic needs of their children. God perfectly fulfills that image of the responsive, protective, nurturing father.

Matthew 7:11, "As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give good things to people who ask."

Since he is my Father, and I can depend on his provision. I can express my needs to him, I can confess my fears to him, I can bring the brokenness of my life to him like a child brings a broken toy to his father, and I can say, "Please fix it, Daddy."

So, because he is my Maker I will align with his purpose. Because he is my Ruler I will rest in his plan. Because he is my Father I will depend on his provision. Think about it: our entire life is just a laboratory where we learn to practice those three things.

Now, how do you get to the point where you can say, "I believe in God." Not simply, "I believe in the existence of God -- I believe that there is a God." No, but you say, "I'm putting my trust in him. I'm going to align with his purpose because he is my Maker. I'm going to rest in his plan because he is my Ruler. I'm going to trust in his provision because he is my Father."

How do you get to the point where you can say that?

Here's what you need to do. I learned this from someone who was in a 12-step recovery group. People who work through the 12 Steps made famous by Alcoholics Anonymous get to the first step and they say, "We came to realize that our lives were unmanageable, out of control." But then they get to the second step and they say, "we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

Think of how that second step is worded: "we came to believe." Those words contain everything you need to know about starting a relationship with God: we came, we came to, and we came to believe.

First, "We came." Those in recovery groups would say that the first step to recovery is to attend a group. It's true in coming to faith in God, too. Those of us who believe in God as I have described him today would say that it all started when we attended a church service, or we read a book about faith that a friend loaned us, or we joined a Bible study. We began to see how faith in God was lived out by people we knew. We came.

Second, "we came to"--that is, we woke up to spiritual reality. As if coming out of a daze we woke up to the fact that life didn't have to be lived the way we were living it.

And then, third, "we came to believe"--that is, we decided that this God-talk made sense and we accepted it.

That's my invitation to you today: come to believe in the power greater than yourself. And I give you this reassurance from Acts 10:35 (Msg), "*It makes no difference who you are or where you're from – if you want God and are ready to do as He says, the door is open.*"

It's time you took your stand and said, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

Week 3: I Believe in Jesus

Welcome to the Anchor Course. In Matthew 16, you'll find one of the most important questions in the Bible. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

It wasn't asked in ignorance, because he knew the hearts of his men. Neither was it asked in insecurity. Sometimes we feel we need to ask our marriage partners, "Do you still love me?" Or if we're a leader we're sometimes tempted to ask, "What are people saying about me?" But Jesus had none of this insecurity. He asked them that question because the answer to that question makes all the difference in the world. It was Simon Peter who spoke for the group: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Who do you say that Jesus is? I suppose there are a lot of complicated ways to explain what we believe about Jesus, but I want to use a simple image: Jesus was the ultimate freediver.

A freediver's only equipment is a mask and perhaps a wetsuit. She draws one breath of air and sees how far down that one breath will take her. The world record in freediving is held by Tanya Streeter. On August 17, 2002, she held her breath, plunged 525 feet deep, and rose to the surface again. Sports Illustrated named her "The World's Most Perfect Athlete" in 2002. Born in the Cayman Islands, Tanya Streeter now lives in Austin.

Now, today freediving is an extreme sport designed to test the limits. But it came from more practical uses: for thousands of years, pearl divers would draw in one breath of air and plunge to the sea bed. In Tahiti they were known to dive as deep as 100-130 feet. And from there they would bring back treasures to the surface.

Jesus is the ultimate freediver: he plunged down from heaven to the human experience, even to the depths of death itself, and then he rose up, bringing what he treasures with him. Notice how the Apostles Creed puts it. We begin at the heights:

I believe . . . in Jesus Christ [God's] only Son our Lord;

Then comes the descent to the depths of human experience. Down and further down the words take us:

*who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.*

Then comes the ascent back to the courts of heaven again:

*The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.*

These phrases speak of the divinity of Jesus, the virgin birth of Jesus, the conscious existence of Jesus in death, the resurrection of Jesus, and living presence of Jesus in heaven. These concepts cause our head to spin. But remember, what we want to do is simply see the movement of the freediver: Jesus left the heights of heaven, plunged down into the experiences of humanity even into human death, and then rose back up to the heights of heaven this time carrying treasure in his hand. Treasure: namely you and me.

Imagine Jesus standing here asking you what he asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" How would you answer?

First, "Jesus is everything it means to be God."

Imagine one of those pearl divers at the surface, preparing for her deep plunge. Her experience is very different on the surface than the experience she's about to have down below. Above, she breathes air, feels the wind and hears the words of encouragement from her friends, she squints at the bright sunlight in a blue sky. All of that will be left behind when she descends for her prize below.

That's the image I get when I read about the heights from which Jesus came to live our kind of life on this earth. We confess that Jesus is Christ, God's only Son, and our Lord. All of those phrases speak of the unique nature of Jesus. He was and is much more than another prophet or a great moral teacher: he is everything it means to be God.

In John 1:1 we read (NKJV), "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

But let's ask a practical question: why should that matter? Is the divinity of Jesus nothing more than a dry theological fact? No. Write down two reasons why it matters.

First, Because Jesus is everything it means to be God, **Jesus is the best qualified to teach us about God.** Here's how your Bible puts it in Hebrews 1 (vv.1-2, TEV): "In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son." In John 14:9 Jesus said (NIV), "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

Jesus wasn't simply a man who was filled with the presence of God: Jesus was the presence of God. And so if you want to know what makes God smile, look at what made Jesus smile. If you want to know what captures the attention of God, see what captured the attention of Jesus. If you want to know what enrages God, look at what made Jesus angry. It wasn't that the prophets before Jesus were inaccurate: what they had to say was completely true, it's just that what they had to say wasn't truly complete. Jesus came to complete the picture. The prophets gave us principles about God; Jesus gave us the person of God! And so any claim about who God is and what God likes must be measured by the words and life of the man who was God-in-the-flesh: Jesus Christ.

Second, Because Jesus is everything it means to be God, **the sacrifice of Jesus was God paying our penalty himself.** From cover to cover the Bible shows us that in order to be saved our sins have to be paid for. But the wonderful truth of the gospel is that God came to do that job himself. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says (NASB), "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them." The astonishing claim of the gospel is that the man hanging upon the cross was the creator himself giving himself up to save his prized creation.

If Jesus was here to ask you, "Who do you say that I am?" after looking at all these Bible passages, you should be able to say, "Jesus, you are everything it means to be God."

Here's a second truth about Jesus: Jesus is everything it means to be human.

Imagine again one of those pearl divers. On the surface she breathes air, feels the wind and hears the words of encouragement and squints at the bright sunlight in a blue sky. But then suddenly she plunges below the surface into a very different world. Deeper and deeper she goes until colors fade, then light fades, warmer surface water gives way to the black and cold, further down she goes until she's at the oyster bed, digging her hands into the muck and ooze to pull out the gnarled shells of oysters.

That's the image I get when I read about what we call the incarnation: the act of God becoming man. Jesus is everything it means to be human. Look at the first chapter of John again. Not only does verse 1 say (NKJV) "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" but verse 14 goes on to say, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." In the Apostles' Creed we read a moment ago, it says that Jesus Christ, God's only Son and our Lord, was conceived, born, suffered, and died. In other words, our creator visited his creation in person—he experienced everything it means to be human.

His conception was remarkable, of course: conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin. But his birth involved all the blood and pain and exhaustion of any other birth, and he grew up facing all the experiences of any other man. As a carpenter, when he hit his thumb it would throb and a black bruise would rise. When he walked, his feet blistered. He sneezed at pollen, his stomach grumbled at dinnertime. He laughed at a good joke, enjoyed parties, cried at funerals . . . and he suffered and died like any other human would under the same circumstances.

Interesting thing about the Apostle's Creed: though the Creed is supposed to be a short summary of Christian belief, the Creed spends a lot of time belaboring the point that Jesus experienced everything it means to be human. We say he suffered, and specifically he suffered under a named man: Pontius Pilate. In other words, the story of Jesus isn't one of those fables that begins "Long, long ago in a land far, far away." Instead, the God of the universe suffered injustice and torture in a specific place and time. When we recited part of the Apostles' Creed, we said rhythmically "crucified, dead, buried." Jesus experienced everything it means to be human, not only up to the point of death but into the experience of death itself.

Now, Christians believe that Jesus is everything it means to be human, but why should that matter? Let's write down two reasons why it matters.

First, Because Jesus is everything it means to be human, **he is our example**. First Peter 2:21 says (NIV), "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Several times in the New Testament we're told that Christ's suffering is a standard, a benchmark, that we hold up against our own faithfulness through suffering. In other words, the way Jesus handled mistreatment is the way we ought to act when we're mistreated. The patience and refusal to retaliate, the forgiveness, the undying trust in Father God: all that Jesus did when he suffered is how we ought to act. That principle extends throughout all of life.

Second, write this one down: Because Jesus is everything it means to be human, **he is our encourager**. Aren't you glad Hebrews 4:15-16 is in the Bible? It's one of my favorite passages and I've included it in your outline (NIV): "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Sometimes we want to pray, "Lord, I'm tempted" or "Jesus, I'm struggling down here," or "Lord, life just hasn't been fair to me recently." It's good to know that we can bring those things to a Lord who can say, "I know what you mean, but hang in there!"

Who is Jesus? He's everything it means to be God and at the same time everything it means to be human. **Here's a third truth about Jesus: Jesus lives to bring our needs to the Father's attention.**

Imagine the pearl diver again. At the surface she breathed fresh air, felt the wind and heard the words of encouragement and squinted at the bright sunlight in a blue sky. But then she plunged below the surface, deeper and deeper until colors faded, light faded, warmer surface water gave way to black and cold water, and yet she continued until was able to dig her hands into the muck and ooze to pull out the gnarled shells of oysters. But then comes the ascent. With her treasures in hand, she begins to rise, eyes to the surface, lungs bursting, finally breaking the surface and with a smile of triumph to those in the boat she holds up her prizes—oysters filled with pearls.

That's what Jesus did for us. He descended to our depths so that he might bring us up to his heights! We are the treasures he descended to get! We are the reason he made the dive down into the human experience in the first place! That ought to tell you how special you are to the God who created you!

When we recite the Creed we're saying: "He rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

And what is he doing there? The Bible says he's bringing our needs to the Father's attention. I want you to notice two passages from the Bible that I've included in your outline. The first one is Hebrews 7:25 (NIV): "He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Romans 8:34 says the same thing (NIV): "Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

I love to meditate on that thought. I've prayed for people in my office or in the hospital or on the phone and afterward they say, "Thank you, pastor. I feel a bit better, I feel stronger already." If we draw comfort from the prayer of a common pastor, imagine the Lord Jesus himself praying for you! He is praying for your marriage right now. He is praying for your success in school right now. He sees your discouragement and prays for fresh hope; he sees your fear and prays for courage; he sees you weakening to a temptation and he prays for strength. And when we fail, Jesus says, "Father, remember my death for him, for her, and forgive."

You are his treasure. Jesus dove down from the heights of heaven, descending into even the deepest, darkest experiences of human life, and rising back up to heaven with our lives in his hands.

In Matthew 16:15 Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" He asked his disciples that question because the answer to that question makes all the difference in the world. It was Simon Peter who spoke for the group: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

So, what's *your* answer?

Week 4: I Believe in the Holy Spirit

Welcome to the Anchor Course. We're walking through the key concepts of an ancient summary of Christian truth called the Apostles Creed. In the past few weeks we've looked at that first statement—"I believe in God the Father"—and we've looked the second statement—"I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord." Now we come to the third statement: "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

In John 14:16-17, Jesus promised that since he was going away he would ask the Father to send the Spirit to be with those who believe. We'll spend most of our time in these two verses, because they tell us who the Holy Spirit *is* and what the Holy Spirit *does*:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

So, Christians say with the Creed, “I believe in God the Father,” “I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,” and “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” The Father above us, the Son beside us, and the Spirit within us—this is the Christians experience with God.

One of the most popular songs Bette Midler ever recorded was a Nanci Griffith song with the line, “God is watching us from a distance.” That’s the way a lot of people think of God, but he’s doing much more than sitting up in the grandstands watching us from a distance. He’s beside us to encourage us in this race of life, and he’s even within us to empower us. The Father above us, the Son beside us, and the Spirit within us.

In the Sunday morning series, we’ve already looked at the Father who is above us, and we’ve already looked at the Son who is beside us. Today I want to talk about the Spirit who lives within those who believe. In John 14:16-17, Jesus promised to *ask* the Father, the Father would *send* the Spirit, and the Spirit would *come* to be with us and in us.

In these two short verses, Jesus explained who the Holy Spirit is, and what the Holy Spirit does.

First, verse 16 speaks of who the Holy Spirit is. Here’s the short answer: The Holy Spirit is how we experience God. The Spirit is not some “influence” or “force,” but the presence of God himself. The Bible says in 2 Cor. 3:17, “The Lord is the Spirit.”

Notice that when Jesus taught us about the Holy Spirit whom he would ask his Father to send us, Jesus understood the Spirit to be a person, not a force. First of all, you notice he called the Spirit “another Counselor.” Electricity is a force, but I don’t think of an electric current is being a Counselor. Second, Jesus used the personal pronoun “he” in his references to the Holy Spirit. On your outline, circle the five times the personal pronoun “him” or “he” shows up in verse 17 –

"the world cannot accept *him*
because it neither sees *him*
nor knows *him*.
But you know *him*
because *he* lives with you."

Now, this isn’t just some fine point of theology. Jesus promised to send us the Spirit who will be with us and in us. What a great assurance to know that the One who is with us and in us is not some electric current, not some wispy vapor, but God himself. We experience God in the present tense by having the Holy Spirit with us and in us.

So, who is the Holy Spirit? He is how we experience God. What does the Holy Spirit do? Well, it depends on what your relationship to Jesus is. If you haven't surrendered to Jesus as your Forgiver and Leader, the Spirit works *upon* you. If you believe in Jesus, the Spirit works *within* you.

Look first at the work he does upon those who do not believe. Two things: first, The Spirit works upon nonbelievers to *convict* them.

In John 14:17, Jesus said that the world cannot know the Spirit like believers can. "The world cannot accept him; it neither sees him nor knows him."

But this doesn't mean that the Spirit isn't doing anything with nonbelievers. A few verses later, in John 16:8 (NCV), Jesus said the Spirit "will prove to the people of the world [non-believers] the truth about sin, about being right with God, and about judgment."

According to Jesus the Spirit is at work to prove the truth about three things: sin, being right with God, and judgment.

Did you notice the three things Jesus said the Spirit is doing with those who don't believe?

First, he proves the truth about sin. People need to squarely face the attitudes and choices they've made and they need to draw some conclusions about their true selves in light of it all.

Second, he proves the truth about being right with God. It's one thing to admit that we sin and another thing to understand the seriousness of it and what to do about it. How do we set things right with God? In Titus 3:5 (NLT) Paul said, "He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy." It's the Spirit who awakens nonbelievers to this truth.

Third, people need to be convinced of the reality of judgment. According to Jesus, the Spirit is actively reminding people that history is moving toward a time when life will be audited. The Spirit uses the circumstances of life to remind people that life is limited and the clock is counting down on their spiritual search. They need to draw some conclusions about God before God draws some conclusions about them.

So, in John 16:8 (NCV), Jesus said the Spirit "will prove to the people of the world [non-believers] the truth about sin, about being right with God, and about judgment."

And, in the lives of some, that spiritual *conviction* leads to spiritual *conversion*. That's the second thing the Spirit does with nonbelievers: he convicts, and he converts.

You know, I call people "seekers" when I find them looking for answers to spiritual questions. But the truth is that when those of you who are seeking God find him, you will find out that he has been seeking you all along. God is the Seeker. I want you to know that any stirring you feel toward him is only because of the Spirit's work. He calls, he pulls, he persuades, he awakens, he opens spiritually-blind eyes.

That's what Jesus taught. He said when we cross into faith, that's the Spirit's work upon our lives (John 3:5-8). God is not up in the bleachers dispassionately observing us compete in the game of life. God is part of our process of returning to him. That is the heart of what believers teach about the Holy Spirit: God is passionately, intimately involved with our lives.

Now, that's what he does with nonbelievers. But while the Holy Spirit works *upon* nonbelievers, he works *within* believers. Look at John 14:17 – Underline the phrase: “in you” -- “The Spirit . . . will be in you.” Jesus gave this remarkable promise to those who follow him. Ephesians 2:22 says that believers have become “a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Now, what does a Spirit-saturated life look like? Scripture reveals four things that the Holy Spirit does within believers. See if you need any of these four things:

First, he empowers us when we're weak. In Ephesians 3:16 Paul said, “I pray that out of [the Father's] glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”

God is not some detached observer in the stands as we engage in this Olympic-level contest for victory. The Lord is the Spirit who empowers us from within to win over our weaknesses. Christians who have experienced this power talk about how, with the help of the Spirit, they have broken harmful habits, they have changed patterns of relating to others, and they have re-aligned attitudes.

Second, he enlightens us when we're confused. In Ephesians 1:17, Paul said, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” God wants to enlighten those who need wisdom.

Third, he equips us when we're inadequate. The Bible talks about how God's Spirit enables us in things like administration, teaching, hospitality, generosity, and so on.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit encourages us when we're anxious. Paul wrote, “If the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace” (Romans 8:6 NLT). When we remember that the Spirit is how we experience God, what a comfort to know that there is no time that we are without the presence of God. In the hospital waiting room, he is with us. In that lawyer's office with legal proceedings, he is with us. In that first night alone after the divorce or the death, he is with us. On that late night when the car breaks down on a deserted road, he is with us. Sitting at the kitchen table with your checkbook with no idea how you are going to pay the rest of the month's bills, he is with us.

So, God is not some remote, distant being, up the grandstands watching us run the race of life from a distance. His Spirit works *upon* nonbelievers to convict and to convert. And he works *within* believers so we have all we need in life.

Do you remember the name Derek Redmond from Olympic history? Redmond arrived at the 1992 Olympic Summer Games in Barcelona determined to win a medal in the 400.

Derek's father Jim had accompanied him to Barcelona, and as race time approached for the semifinal 400 heat, Jim headed up to his seat at the top of Olympic Stadium, not far from where the Olympic torch was lit just a few days earlier. The stadium was packed with 65,000 fans, bracing themselves for one of sport's greatest and most exciting spectacles.

The race began and Redmond broke from the pack, quickly seizing the lead. But in the backstretch, only 175 meters away from finishing, suddenly Derek felt—and heard—a pop in his right hamstring. He pulled up lame, as if he had been shot.

Redmond kept going for a while, hopping on one leg, then he slowed down and fell to the track. At the same time, his dad Jim raced down from the top row of the stands, and in a moment that will live forever in the minds of millions, Jim Redmond ran out to his son, with two security people chasing after him. Jim reached his son wrapped his arm around his waist.

"I'm here, son," Jim said softly. "We'll finish together."

Sixty-five thousand people cheered and clapped and cried as father and son arm in arm completed the race.

God isn't up in the grandstands watching us from a distance. He's down on the track with us, running with us, assisting us, helping us, holding us. Jesus said when he left he would ask the Father to send us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is how we experience God.

In Luke 11:13, Jesus said, "God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." So . . . what are you waiting for?

Week 5: I Believe in the Church

Welcome to the Anchor Course. In the past few weeks we've looked at the first three statements of the Apostles Creed: "I believe in God the Father," "I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord" and "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Today we come to the fourth statement: "I believe in the only holy church, the communion of saints."

It's interesting that even though the Creed leads us to confess our belief in such miraculous things as a virgin birth and a resurrected Lord, for some of us the hardest thing to say is, "I believe in the church." For them, church has left them either bored or beaten-up, and they just don't see how involvement with an imperfect group of people has anything to do with spirituality. As a result, here's what most people think of spiritual growth: They say, "It's something I do for myself: alone, independent of others, unconnected to others. I am not responsible for others or accountable to anyone else. I love Jesus, but I don't need the church."

But Jesus has not given us that option. We cannot say we love Jesus unless we're passionate about the things that make him passionate. And Jesus is passionate about his church. **Ephesians 5:25 (NIV)** says, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." We cannot say we have become imitators of Christ until we also love the church and give ourselves up for her.

Now, what do we mean when we speak of the church? The church is not a building you go to but a group you belong to.

In the Creed we confess, "I believe in the one holy church, the communion of saints." There are three words there that capture the vision Jesus has for that gathering of people known as the church. His church is to be *one*, *holy*, and a *communion*. Let's look at each of those three descriptors of the church and let me show you the practical way those things impact your life if you're a believer.

First, since the body you belong to is *one*, make sure to nurture unity among other believers. In the Creed on your outline, circle the word "one." When we recite the Creed we say "I believe in the *one* holy church, the communion of saints." Now, instead of the word "one," most versions of the Apostles' Creed use the word "catholic"—"I believe in the holy catholic church." That's a transliteration of the Greek word *katholikos* and simply means "universal," or "boundless." But these days when people think of the "catholic church" they don't think of the one universal church but a specific branch of Christianity: Roman Catholicism. And that always confuses people who aren't Roman Catholics to say, "I believe in the catholic church." So in the version of the Creed we've been reciting, I translate *katholikos* by using the word "one"—I believe in the *one* church.

We believe God's church is one church. Down through the ages and around the world, God's church transcends cultures, generations, languages, and governments. Wherever you go around the world, when you walk into one of God's churches, despite different styles of worship, different styles of music, different rituals and routine—still you will find at the core the same things being taught. There is a oneness to God's people because their message does not change from generation to generation or from passport to passport.

Because we believe in the *oneness* of God's church across the ages and around the world, here's the practical things we should do if we're going to follow Christ: *we must nurture unity*.

Now, unity in what form? Unity between all Bible-believing churches AND unity within a specific church. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, we read, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy" but then he added, "together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." That ought to be our attitude. Our commitment ought to be to a specific church we identify as our church home, even as we have a consideration for "all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We work together with other believers in supporting causes and mission trips and area evangelistic crusades and such. We pray for other church and their leaders. But by working

with all Christians everywhere, that doesn't mean we don't have a priority to work with a specific congregation of believers. The universal church of all God's people around the world and across the ages is made real to you in one congregation that you call your church home. There is no contradiction in committing to unity with all Christians everywhere and at the same time committing to one specific congregation.

Well, then, the body you belong to is one. Second, **the body you belong to is *holy*, so if you're going to follow Christ, promote the purity of other believers**. In the Creed, circle that word "holy"—"I believe in the one *holy* church, the communion of saints." Now, for many people, the word *holy* "conjures up the images of esoteric monks drifting silently through the halls of ancient monasteries. At its worst, it can carry the image of artificial spirituality and phony piety."

But to be "holy" means to be "set apart," and that is God's intent for the church. In Ephesians 5:25-27 (NLT), we read, "He gave up his life for her *to make her holy and clean*, washed by baptism and God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a *glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish*. Instead, she will be *holy and without fault*."

Now, it's interesting: holiness is what the church *is* AND what the church is *called to be*. Because we are different, we are called to remember that in everything we do. Following Christ means we make a commitment to pray for other believers, encourage them, and if necessary challenge them so that our actions as God's people match our status as God's people.

Third, **The body you belong to is a *communion*, so if you're going to follow Jesus, improve the connections between other believers**. In the Creed, circle that word "communion"—"I believe in the one holy church, the *communion* of saints. Now, what is a saint? We sometimes use the word "saint" to speak of a particularly special or revered Christian, but the Bible uses the word "saint" as simply another word for Christian. The word comes from a Greek word that means "holy one," and that's what you are because of the cross. Christ has made you holy.

And together, God's people are a *communion* of saints. It's no accident that the word "communion" and "community" sound the same. You could say with the Creed, "I believe in the one holy church, the *community* of saints.

Now, what's the purpose of a believing community? It's for fellowship and for partnership.

First, it's for *fellowship*. In Acts 2:42, the first gathering of believers was described with these words: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

The Christian life isn't just about having a relationship with Christ. It also includes building a relationship with fellow believers in Christ. People who believe in this communion of saints will improve their fellowship with other believers.

So, what's the purpose of a believing community? Why is that part of following Jesus? First, it's for fellowship. Second, it's for *partnership*.

In Phil. 1:4-5 Paul wrote: "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your *partnership* in the gospel." Paul wrote to the Philippian church with deep fondness because they understood the importance of *working* together and not just assembling together.

In addition to thinking of our community of believers as a "fellowship" it's also important to remember we are a "partnership." The church I'm a part of is a fellowship, and that reminds me to look *inward* at the life we should share together. And the church I'm a part of is a partnership, and that reminds me to look *outward* at the work we should do together.

Without both considerations, a community of believers becomes imbalanced. Without a sense of *fellowship*, all we would do is tackle our projects, complete our assignments, and finish our work. In such settings a person's moral choices would never be challenged, his beliefs would never be refined, and his needs would never be addressed. Because that's the work of fellowship.

On the other hand, without a sense of *partnership*, a congregation quickly becomes introverted. Soon, the only factor that is addressed in deciding what to do is simply that which pleases the current participants. No, we are supposed to be a fellowship that meets each other's needs *and* a partnership that mobilizes people for meaningful action.

So, if we're going to commit to Jesus, understand that it's a group project. A lot of us have been impacted by the world's idea of spiritual growth: I develop my soul alone, by myself, neither responsible for nor accountable to anyone else. But a follower of Christ says, "I believe in the church, the communion of saints." We have to commit to building a united holy community with other believers.

Now, these are some high standards for God's church: we are one, we are holy, and we are a community. God's church doesn't always live up to those high standards. But I'm reminded of a story of the composer Igor Stravinsky, who "once wrote a new piece that contained a difficult violin passage. After several weeks of rehearsal the solo violinist came to Stravinsky and said that he could not play it. He had given it his best effort but found the passage too difficult, even unplayable. Stravinsky replied, 'I understand that. What I am after is the sound of someone *trying* to play it.'" (p. 99 Philip Yancey, *Church: Why Bother?*)

Maybe that's what God had in mind for the church, too. To speak of the oneness of the church, the holiness of the church, and the deep relationship between members of the church--maybe what he's after is the sound of his people trying to play that beautiful music. And maybe it's time you joined the band.

Week 6: I Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins

Welcome to history class! For some of you, it's been a long time since you sat in a history class. Today's history lesson is about your life. The interesting thing is, this history lesson is also about my life and the life of the person sitting next to you. This is a history lesson of our life with God—past, present and future.

The professor leading today's history class is named Paul the Apostle, and his lesson is found in Colossians 1. Verses 21-23 can be found on the notes in your bulletin. Here's what he wrote 2,000 years ago about your history with God:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

Now, these verses help us understand one of the most important parts of Christianity. A few weeks ago we began to look at the basics of Christianity. Over the last several weeks we've looked at what the Bible says about God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Last week we looked at Christ's vision for his church.

But I've been looking forward to today's study since we began the series. I can't think of a better job in the world than this one: I get to tell you about grace. I get to tell you about second chances. I get to be the one to tell you that what you've broken can be fixed. I'm the one who gets to tell you about the forgiveness of sins. In the Apostles Creed we read, "I believe in God the Father . . . and in Jesus Christ. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the church. And then we get to this line: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

That's what we read about in vv. 21-23 of Colossians 1. These verses give me a brief history of my life as a believer. Paul describes what I was, what I am, and what I will be.

The first thing he focuses on is our PAST (v. 21). Write this down: I was alienated from God.

Verse 21 says, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior."

Now, admittedly, these are strong words. Professor Paul is actually saying that before we begin a relationship with Christ, we are alienated from our Creator, hostile in our attitude toward him, and evil in the way we conduct our lives.

This is tough to hear. If you have not begun a relationship with Christ, you might say, "That doesn't describe me." Some *believers* might want to say the same thing: "Those words are too strong to describe what my life was like before Christ."

You know, Jesus encountered people who were reluctant to admit their need of God's mercy. And so in Luke 18:10f, Jesus told a parable with only two characters:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Tax collection was a very corrupt and corrupting business in Christ's day. It often involved extortion of the community as well as collaboration with the hated Roman occupiers. The tax collector in Christ's story, however, admitted the truth about himself and asked for divine forgiveness. The other listed off his merits and said, “God, you're lucky to have me around.”

Jesus wanted us to see ourselves in this story, and he gave us only two roles to choose between: we can be like the man who denied his need for God's forgiveness, or we can be like the man who cried out for it. Before we can take any step toward God, we have to admit the truth about our dark side. Jesus said, “Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough” (Mark 2:17, NLT).

People in recovery figure this out more quickly than anyone else. Those who work the Twelve Steps hit this one right at the start: We have to admit we are powerless—that our lives have become unmanageable.

So, if you're *wanting* a relationship with God, you have to recognize the truth about your dark side. And if you *have* a relationship with God through Christ, it's good to remember this truth, too.

So, the Bible says believers need to remember what we've been saved *from*. But the history lesson continues. Paul spoke of a believer's PRESENT as well as the past. Write this down: I am reconciled to God. Paul wrote: “Once you were alienated from God. . . . But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.” I *was* alienated *from* God; I *am* reconciled *to* God. And specifically, I am reconciled to God by what happened on the cross.

Of my mother's nine siblings, 2 of her sisters are deaf, and each one has married men who are hearing impaired. It always fascinated me to watch the hand signs that my mother used to communicate with her 2 sisters. You probably know that deaf people do not spell out each letter of each word with the basic finger alphabet of sign language. Simple hand actions can convey entire concepts in the world of the hearing impaired. My mother would make her hands into fists and rotate the right fist over the left fist, and then point to one of

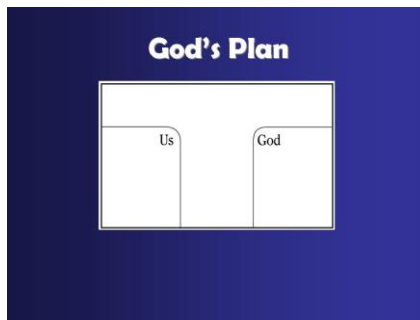
my aunts with a quiritive look, and that meant "Would you like some coffee?" By a simple action that simulated the cranking of an old coffee bean grinder, an entire question was asked without words. A thumb placed on a certain part of the face can mean "man," a rocking action of the arms can mean "baby" --each concept is conveyed simply and powerfully without a single word being spoken.

One of the most powerful signs in hand language is the sign for "Jesus." If you have ever been in a church that had an interpreter for the deaf during the worship services, you have seen this sign used over and over again. The communicator touches the middle finger of the right hand to the open palm of the left hand, and then places the middle finger of the left hand on the open palm of the right hand. When a communicator wants to talk about Jesus in the language of the deaf, he points to the places where the nails went into Jesus's hands upon the cross. With all the words we have at our command in the hearing world, many of us have missed the central act of the life of Christ. But without any words at all, when the deaf communicate Jesus, they rivet attention to the cross.

The central act of the life of Christ was the death of Christ. The main reason Christ saw for his living was for his dying upon the cross. The hearing-impaired bring us to the first and foremost fact about Jesus: his death on the cross.

The Bible says that the cross was God's way of establishing peace with us. Let me explain how the cross reconnects us to God. *[Draw the following illustration as you explain]*

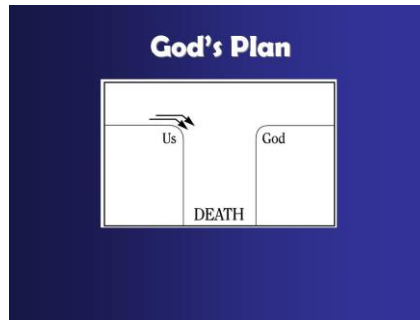
Here's a way to imagine our relationship with God. We don't have one! Our sin has created this huge gap that separates us from God:



We may try to bridge that gap with good works and religious rituals, but it always fails:



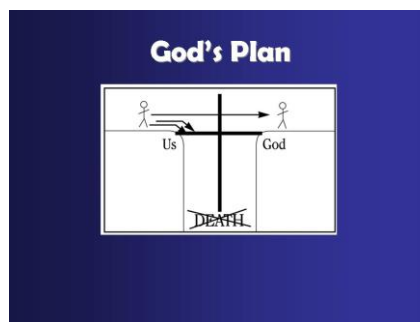
As a result, our efforts at self-salvation end in death:



But Jesus died on the cross to bridge that gap. His death canceled out our death:



We have to respond in gratitude, thanking Jesus for his gracious sacrifice, asking him to be our Forgiver and Leader. And when that happens, we cross over from death to life:



Now, I've got one more point on your notes. But let me just stop here a moment and ask you: have you crossed that bridge to God called the cross? Have you personally asked Jesus to be your forgiver and your leader? I want to give you a chance to do that right now. If you want to cross the bridge, pray these words:

“Dear Jesus, thank you for loving me, even when I've ignored you and gone my own way. I realize I need you in my life and I'm sorry for my sins. I ask you to forgive me. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. Please help me to understand it more. As much as I know how, I want to follow you from now on. Please come into my life and make me a new person inside. I accept your gift of salvation. Please help me to grow now as a Christian.”

Now, I want you to look down at your notes again. You've written two things so far: "I *was* alienated from God" and "I *am* reconciled to God." Guess what: because you prayed and asked Jesus into your life, that has now become your history too. You *were* alienated from God but now you *are* reconciled to God. Isn't that good news?

Now write this down: "I *will be presented* before God." Back to Colossians 1. Paul wrote: "[He has reconciled you] to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation if you continue in your faith."

Paul mixes the images of a temple and a courtroom here to help us understand our future. He says that there will come a day when we are "presented" to God—that's a courtroom image. He says that on that day, because of the reconciling work of Christ, we will be "holy" in God's sight and "without blemish." Those were temple images that described the kind of OT sacrifices that pleased God. And then he returns to the idea of the courtroom again and says on the day we're presented to God we'll be free from accusation.

How is all this possible? How is it that we could actually think we could stand before God and be regarded as holy and clean and blameless? Because of the cross. Jesus carried away our sin into death, so that won't be on the record books when we stand before him.

The only thing for you to do to make this history lesson *your* story is to place your faith in it. Notice the last line: "if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel." Salvation is a work of God: our part is to simply trust that he knows what he's doing. Placing your faith in him and continuing in that faith is the way you make this history lesson *your* story.

So, this is History 101: a brief overview of your life: you *were* alienated from God, you *are* reconciled to God, you *will be* presented before God. As that great line from the Creed puts it: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins!"

Week 7: I Believe in Eternal Life

Welcome to the Anchor Course. This is a course for both seekers and believers. We're going through the lines of the Apostles Creed to see what Christians believe. Over the last several weeks we've looked what it means to say "I believe in God," and "I believe in Jesus," and "I believe in the Holy Spirit." We've looked at Christ's vision for his church and we've discovered that the crucifixion of Christ was God's way to forgive the sins of those who would believe in him.

Today we'll focus on the last phrase: "I believe in the resurrection and the life everlasting." Ecclesiastes 7:4 says (NLT), "A wise person thinks a lot about death." So, if you've been wondering about this issue, the Bible says you're wise to do so.

What happens after you die? Let me mention a couple of things from Scripture about this great truth.

First, **After I die, my soul will continue.**

Now, most people in our culture believe this even if they've never read a Bible. What reverberates throughout our culture is the hope that we live on beyond death. Go to your favorite gift shop to get a sympathy card for someone in grief and you'll find that belief. Go to your favorite bookstore and you'll find it in bestsellers such as *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. Go to your favorite video store and you'll find it in films like *Ghost*, *Defending Your Life*, *What Dreams May Come*, and *City of Angels*. These books and films don't track with the Bible at every point, of course, but they reveal a firm conviction in our culture that the soul survives beyond death.

Now, the Bible tells us that the soul lives on. But for those who follow Christ, it's not just survival beyond death that captures our heart. It's who we'll be with.

2 Corinthians 5:8 (NCV) says, "We really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord." Underline that phrase: "with the Lord." That verse makes it clear that to be "away from this body" is to be "*at home with the Lord*."

Philippians 1:22 (The Message) says, "The desire to break camp here and be with Christ is powerful. Some days I can think of nothing better." Underline the phrase: "be with Christ." Notice that he says to leave this life means to be with Christ.

In **Luke 23:43 (NLT)**, Jesus assured the thief dying on the cross next to him, "*Today you will be with me in paradise*." Underline that phrase: "with me."

Two things those verses consistently tell us: first, when death separates my soul from my body, I will still be conscious, aware, and experiencing things. But, second, when the mist that separates this life from the next life clears, the first face I'll see is the face of my Savior. That's why those who have a relationship with Christ in this life don't have to be afraid of the next life.

Before this year is out, some of you listening to me will bury a beloved believer. Before this decade is out, some of you listening to me will face your own death. Isn't it a comfort to know from the Bible that when believers die they immediately begin to experience the joys of heaven?

In one of Catherine Marshall's books, she tells a story of a young terminally ill boy who asked his mother what death was like.

"Kenneth," she said, "you remember when you were a tiny boy how you used to play so hard all day that when night came you would be too tired even to undress, and you would tumble into mother's bed and fall asleep?"

"That was not your bed -- it was not where you belonged."

"And you would only stay there a little while. In the morning, much to your surprise, you would wake up and find yourself in your own bed in your own room.

"You were there because someone had loved you and taken care of you. Your father had come -- with big strong arms -- and carried you away. Kenneth, death is just like that. We just wake up some morning to find ourselves in the other room -- our own room where we belong -- because the Lord Jesus loved us."

But as comforting as that picture is, you need to know a second thing. The first thing I need to know about the future is: When I die, my soul will continue. But the second thing to know is this:

When Christ returns, my body will be resurrected.

As a Christ-follower, I'll begin to enjoy heaven at the moment of my death, but it will always remain an incomplete experience as long as I am a soul without a body.

2 Corinthians 5:4 (NLT) says, "Our dying bodies make us groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and have no bodies at all. We're not happy with these bodies that break down and die, but that doesn't mean we want to be a soul without a body."

He then goes on to say that what we really want is to be alive at Christ's return, to skip out on death and immediately move from this life to the next life.

You see, the very idea that some of us have of the afterlife was considered absurd by the writers of the Bible. Too many of us picture death as time when the soul is finally set free from the prison house of the body.

But the Bible teaches that our wonderful God created a wonderful world. And when he finished, he didn't say, "Oops." Genesis 1 tells us he created the world, stepped back and said, "It is good!" It was after this good creation that human sin warped or twisted the physical creation. The deterioration of our bodies, the pain we experience in our bodies, the death that eventually comes to our bodies—all of that came about because of sin, not because God made a mistake in creating this place.

And so that means that God's victory over sin isn't finished until God restores all that sin messed up. That's the biblical picture: this world isn't a poorly-built house we have to abandon but a damaged house that God wants to renovate.

That's why some of the strongest language that Jesus used was used against people who did not believe in the resurrection of the body. In **Mark 12 (NLT)**, a group of religious leaders called the Sadducees came up to Jesus. They were the liberals of that day—they rejected the reality of the resurrection. They asked Jesus a riddle meant to trap Jesus in what they saw as the absurdity and ridiculousness of the whole concept of the resurrection. And in verse 24, Jesus begins his answer not by answering the riddle but by attacking the heart of their problem. He used some of the strongest language in the Bible. He said, "Your problem is

that you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God." Then after he concludes his explanation, he says again in v.27, "You have made a serious error."

Too many of us have an incomplete picture of God's plan. It's true that those who believe and have died are experiencing the joys of heaven, but that's not the end of the story. Jesus told us that God's eternal plan for us is not complete until the soul and body separated at death are reunited at the resurrection.

I will not enjoy everything God has designed for me in heaven until the resurrection of my body. That's why it's so important to declare that line from the Apostles Creed: "I believe in the resurrection of the body." God's plan isn't to abandon a poorly-created world; God's plan is to return us and return this world to the original condition.

In **Isaiah 26:19 (NLT)** we read: "Yet we have this assurance: Those who belong to God will live; *their bodies will rise again!* Those who sleep in the earth will rise up and sing for joy!"

We find this not only in the OT but in the NT. **Philippians 3:21 (NIV)** says, "Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Across my years of pastoring, I have watched people I love supported by machines, or grow thin with chemotherapy, or shake uncontrollably with Parkinson's disease, or pant painfully for just one more breath. And then I have sat in the homes of fools who say that this life is all there is. That's not true! It does not all end here! At Christ's return the trumpet blast and the archangel's shout will be loud enough to wake the dead. And from the body that has been there will spring up the body that will be!

Now, what can you do *before* you die so you can be ready to face what comes *after* you die?

Two things: Faith and faithfulness.

First, faith. Trust in Jesus. The Bible says that he died for us so that we might live together with him. If you want to face death with confidence, put your hope and trust in the one who defeated death. 2 Tim. 1:10 (CEV), "Christ our Savior defeated death and brought us the good news. It shines like a light and offers life that never ends."

So, how do you get ready for death? Faith. Trust in Jesus.

Second, faithfulness. Live a life that pleases God. Over and over again, whenever Jesus and his apostles taught about the future resurrection and eternal life, they always ended with a call to be faithful *now*. In other words, what you think about the future should impact your life now. What we do in our bodies here will be rewarded hereafter.

So, it's *faith* and *faithfulness* that we need to have as we think about the life to come. We need to put our trust in Christ and we need to follow him.

I read about a woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. As she was getting her things "in order," she contacted her pastor and

had him come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes. She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. The woman also requested to be buried with her favourite Bible.

Everything was in order and the pastor was preparing to leave when the woman suddenly remembered something very important to her.

"There's one more thing," she said excitedly.

"What's that?" came the pastor's reply.

"This is very important," the woman continued.. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand."

The pastor stood looking at the woman, not knowing quite what to say.. "That surprises you, doesn't it?" the woman asked.

"Well, to be honest, I'm puzzled by the request," said the pastor.

The woman explained. "In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, "keep your fork." It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming..like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. Something wonderful, and with substance! So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder 'What's with the fork?' Then I want you to tell them: "Keep Your Fork..The best is yet to come"

First Corinthians 2:9 (NLT) says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." So, keep your fork.

Week 8: Amen

Welcome to the last study in the Anchor Course. Across these weeks together we've looked what it means to say "I believe in God," and "I believe in Jesus," and "I believe in the Holy Spirit." We've looked at Christ's vision for his church and we've discovered that the crucifixion of Christ was God's way to forgive the sins of those who would believe in him. Last week we focused on the last phrase: "I believe in eternal life."

But notice the last word of the Apostles Creed: "Amen." Now, why does the Creed end with that word? Many of us think of the word "Amen" as simply a formal way to end a prayer. We know the guy who's leading the prayer is finished when he says, "Amen." Then we know we can open our eyes and look up. But the word "Amen" is more than just a formal way to stop praying.

The word is actually from the Hebrew language, and it means “this is true.” So, to say “Amen” means, “I agree with this, I’m committing myself to this.” On many of our formal documents today, after we’ve read the terms of the contract, we sign it at the bottom. It’s a way of formally saying, “I’ve read this, I agree with it, I will live by its terms.” When you get to the end of this list of things Christians believe, you say “Amen” as a way of formally saying, “I’ve read this, I agree with it, I will live by its terms.”

What does it take to get to the point where you can say “Amen” to the things we’ve been studying? Write down three things:

First, “I will *give assent* to these things.”

You need to say, “I’ve looked in to these things and they resonate with me. I’ve investigated these things and they make sense to me.”

Sometimes people think that to become a follower of Christ they have to set their mind on a shelf, but that’s not true. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, here’s how he replied in Matthew 22:37 (NIV): “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

So, how can you bring your mind into this decision so that you can reach the point where you give assent to Christian truth? It involves an investigation of three things. During your time in the Anchor Course, you’ve had a chance to investigate these these things.

First, **investigate the Bible.**

Why would anyone think he knew enough about Christian truth to accept it or reject it until he has studied the source documents of Christianity? You’ve had a chance to do this in our study together. We’ve looked at a lot of Scripture.

Second, **investigate the lives of Christians you respect.**

Maybe you’re close to someone who has become a follower of Christ and it’s made you curious. Or maybe you’ve become friends with someone in your Anchor Course group who is a believer. You see in them a new patience in the face of frustration, a new strength, a sense of purpose and direction. Maybe you see a greater capacity for kindness and compassion. Maybe you’ve seen how a commitment to Christ led someone to victory over addiction or it led to healing for a troubled marriage. Of course, no human being is perfect, and any follower of Christ you investigate will have flaws and make mistakes. But when you see characteristics developing and things happening in someone else’s life that you want in your life, maybe you should treat those things as evidence worth investigating.

Third, **investigate reliable books.**

I imagine that when you get ready to travel to a new place, you read up on the culture and customs of the place so you can anticipate what to expect. In fact, we would think of someone as naïve at best or arrogant at worst if they thought they already knew everything about

a place where they had never traveled before. And yet, I find that attitude in lots of people when it comes to the claims of Christianity. They've never investigated the Christian message, but they think they know enough about it to render a verdict.

Don't be like that! Just like there are reliable travel guides to prepare you for a trip to another country, there are reliable books that can help you understand what Christianity is all about. I wrote *The Anchor Course* because I wanted to give people a tour guide for Christianity: I wanted you to have the highlights, the essentials, things you don't want to miss while you're examining the faith. And at the back of the book, I've suggested some additional books you might want to check out if you're still exploring.

By the way, let me encourage you to think about others who would benefit from this tour of the Christian faith called *The Anchor Course*. Your group leader can tell you when he or she is launching the next course, and you can invite some people to it. You might even want to go through the Course again as your friend goes through it for the first time. Or you can get additional books yourself or even start your own *Anchor Course*. This will give others the chance to investigate the things that you've been able to examine in our time together.

But now, write down a second thing. To say, "Amen" in response to Christian truth means "I will put my trust in these things."

You know, while some people think you have to put your mind on a shelf to become a believer, for other people, examining the Christian faith doesn't go any further than the mind. But there's a big difference between understanding something and experiencing it.

It reminds me a story that comes out of Albert Einstein's life. As he and a geologist were walking across a college campus in Southern California, they were deeply engrossed in a conversation about seismology—the branch of science that studies earthquakes and how to predict them. Suddenly students began to rush out of the buildings all around them. Einstein asked a student what was going on and the young man said, "What? You didn't feel that? We had to get out of the buildings because we just had an earthquake!" Imagine that: Einstein and his friend had been so engrossed in their conversation about earthquakes that they had ignored the experience of an earthquake right under their feet.

I've met people who want to have all kinds of intellectual conversations about Jesus but all along they end up missing a personal relationship with Jesus. Don't let that happen to you. There comes a time in your investigation of the claims of Christ that you have to cross the line. You'll know when that time is upon you: there will come a time when you realize that any further investigation is just a personal delaying tactic. Maybe some of you are at that point right now, and you know its time to put your trust in Christ.

If that's the case, listen to what Romans 10:11 (*The Message*) says: "Scripture reassures us, 'No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it.'"

Faith is the point you reach when you decide that God is not just some topic to explore but God is a personal and loving Lord to commit to. Elton Trueblood said, “Faith is not belief without proof but it is trust without reservation.”

And that leads naturally to the third thing we need to say. After I’ve investigated the claims of Christ and changed my mind on the subject, after I’ve put my trust in Christ, the third thing I need to say is,

“I will walk the walk because these things are true.”

In Matthew 7:21 (NCV), Jesus says, “Not all those who say that I am their Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. The only people who will enter the kingdom of heaven are those who do what my Father in heaven wants.”

What Jesus is telling us is that if you commit your life to Christ, it will start making a difference in the way you live your life. And, on the other hand, if there is no real difference in your integrity at work, or how you treat people, or the way you handle your money, the way you stick to your contracts and so on, then Jesus says it really doesn’t matter how often you attended church or how many religious rituals you performed or even how respectfully you speak of Jesus. At the end of the day, the only thing that will count is that, one, you investigated the claims of Christ, two, you found him worthy of your trust, three, you began a growing relationship with him and let him be Lord of the way you lived your life.

But that’s precisely where some hesitate to become a follower of Christ. Maybe that’s where you’re at. Maybe you’re saying, “I can’t live up to it. What if I start following Christ and I can’t keep up with him?”

But understand that a relationship with Christ doesn’t result from living a good life; a relationship with Christ results in living a good life. And as you follow Christ, you’re going to fail from time to time. But I like what Benjamin Franklin said. He wasn’t speaking about following Christ, but the words apply. He said, “The man who does things makes many mistakes, but he never makes the biggest mistake of all—doing nothing.”

Way back at the start, we began our study by looking at the most important words of the Creed: the first two words—“I believe,” which is a translation from the Latin *credo*. In fact, that’s where we get our English word “creed”—from the Latin *credo*, “I believe.” Now, these nine studies later, we conclude the series with an equally important word, “Amen.” So, wrapped around the Christian truth are the words “Credo” and “Amen” which both mean “I put my trust in this, I’m founding my life on this.”

Now, before we conclude, go back to your notes again. There are three words that you need to write down.

Next to the first point, write the word “Mind.” When you say, “Amen,” you’re saying, “I give assent to these things”—you are agreeing with the convictions with you mind.

Next to the second point, write the word “Heart.” When you say, “Amen,” you’re saying, “I put my trust in these things”—you putting your heart into it.

And next to the third, point, write the word “Will.” When you say, “Amen,” you’re saying, “I’m going to walk the walk, I’m going to align my decision-making and behavior with the worldview expressed in these things.”

So, it’s with your mind and your heart and your will that you respond to God.

Do you know what it means to “stake a claim”? It comes from the days when the American West was being settled. In the late 1800s, the United States government wanted people to settle the territory that is now Oklahoma. The land was granted to settlers on a first-come, first-served basis in an event called the “Land Run.” Between 50,000 and 75,000 people participated in the Land Run. Once the event began, people dashed to the plot of land they wanted and then they planted a stake into the ground. Today, we use the phrase “to stake a claim” when speaking of making a decisive and public commitment to something.

Maybe that’s what you need to do with Jesus: If so, I hope you’ll stake your claim in him during the discussion time that follows this talk. Thanks for spending time with me over these last few weeks! Let me know how this course has impacted your life.

Chapter 7

Weekly Discussion Guides

Print out the discussion guides on the following pages, fold them, and distribute them each week before the talk. The inside of the guide provides a fill-in-the-blank outline of the talk. The back of the guide lists questions to discuss.

Discussion Questions

The first commitment is: “I will make this a group project.” Let’s get to know each other. Tell us

- Your name
- How long you’ve been in this city?
- When did God become more than just a name to you?
- If you could ask God one question and you knew he would answer, what would it be?

The second commitment is: “I will take time to study the Bible.” The Bible describes a believer’s hope in forgiveness and eternal life as “an anchor for the soul” (Hebrews 6:19). How can faith be like an “anchor”?

When Bono was asked about his Christian faith, the front man for the band U2 said, “I’m the sort of character who’s got to have an anchor. I want to be around immovable objects.” Does that resonate with you?

The third commitment is: “I will put my heart into it.” I mentioned three reasons why this Course is valuable: it helps me be a person of godly influence; it helps me make up my mind about the faith, it helps me love God. What are you hoping to get out of the Course?

Welcome to the “Get Anchored” Introduction



How to Find an Anchor For Your Life

Acts 17:10-12 (TEV)

¹⁰As soon as night came, the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived, they went to the synagogue. ¹¹The people there were more open-minded than the people in Thessalonica. They listened to the message with great eagerness, and every day they studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true. ¹²Many of them believed; and many Greek women of high social standing and many Greek men also believed.

First, I will make this a _____ project.

“They listened to the message with great eagerness, and . . . they studied the Scriptures.”

Second, I will take time to read _____.

“They studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true.”

1 Timothy 4:6 (NASB), “You will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”

Third, I will put my _____ into it.

“They listened to the message with great eagerness. . . .”

Here are three reasons to participate
“with great eagerness”—

Especially for the Believer:

A study of our beliefs helps me become a person of _____.

1 Timothy 3:9, Deacons “must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.”

Acts 16:5, “the churches were strengthened in the faith.”

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Especially for the Seeker:

A study of our beliefs helps me _____.

Hebrews 6:19, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul.”

For all of us:

A study of our beliefs helps us _____.

Mark 12:30 (NASB), “and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

This Week’s Assignment

Read Chapters 1-4 in *The Anchor Course*

Discussion Questions

Is there a spiritual “hunger” in our community and culture? How do people express it?

In Chapter One, Tom listed four advantages to faith. What are they? Which one seemed most attractive to you?

The Apostle John wrote, “What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life [Jesus] . . . we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us.” (1 John 1:1-3, NASB, emphasis added). The purpose of our Bibles, then, is that we might have a share in the experiences of those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus. However, it is fashionable in some circles to say that the Bible was written long after the events took place. As discussed in Chapter 3, the evidence shows that the Bible was actually written within the generation that would have seen these events. How can that strengthen our confidence in the Bible as a reliable guide to the actions and words of Jesus?

Have you ever tried to read the Bible? Did you find it frustrating? If so, why? What is your favorite book of the Bible and why?

French mathematician Blaise Pascal said, we have a “God-shaped void” in our soul. List “God-substitutes” people use to try to fill that void.

Mark your position on the road to “I believe. . .”

INTEGRATION—Aware of the spiritual dimension of life.

OPENNESS—Willing to listen and consider Christianity.

HONESTY – Admitting unanswered questions.

DISCOVERY – Knowing why I exist.

DISCONTENT – Turning away from God substitutes.

DIVISION – Turning toward a loving God.

DECISION – Taking action to trust in Jesus alone.

The Anchor Course



“I Believe”

This Week's Assignment

Read Chapters 5-6 in *The Anchor Course*

How to Begin Believing

A Seven-Step Search from Acts 17:16-34

Step One: Pay attention to the _____ dimension to your life.

Verse 22: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.”

This is the step of INTEGRATION

Step Two: Be willing to _____.

Verses 19-20: “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.”

This is the step of OPENNESS

Step Three: Admit the insufficiency of _____.

Verse 23: “I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”

This is the step of HONESTY

Step Four: Discover the reason God made you: _____.

Verses 26-27: “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.”

This is the step of DISCOVERY

Step Five: Become dissatisfied with your _____.

Verse 30: “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

This is the step of DISCONTENT

Step Six: Come to terms with _____.

Verses 31-32: “When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’”

This is the step of DIVISION

Step Seven: Your evaluation should result in _____.

Verse 34: “A few men became followers of Paul and believed.”

This is the step of DECISION

Discussion Questions

The words of Isaiah 40:21-31 describe the practical benefits of knowing God as “Father,” “Almighty,” and “Maker of heaven and earth.” Have someone read these verses aloud. Identify the phrases that speak of God as “Father,” “Almighty,” and “Maker.”

“God is my Maker”

Since God is “Maker of heaven and earth,” is there a particular place in creation that you find yourself aware of God’s presence?

If we didn’t have access to the Bible, what could we know about God by observing the world around us?

“God is my Father”

What comes to mind when you think of God as Father? How can our relationship with an earthly father or stepfather impact our view of God? If you know someone with negative memories of their earthly father, how could you help them appreciate the fatherhood of God?

“God is my Ruler”

When you pray, how can the thought of God as both “Father” and “Almighty” help you?

When the tough times come, how can the thought of God as both “Father” and “Almighty” help you?

This Week’s Assignment
Read Chapters 7-10 in *The Anchor Course*

The Anchor Course



“I Believe in God”

What You Need to Know About God

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

Since God is my Maker, I will align with his p_____.

Proverbs 16:4 (NASB), "The Lord has made everything for His own purpose."

Discover your c_____.

Develop your c_____.

Ephesians 5:17 (Msg), "Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants."

Since God is my Ruler, I will rest in his p_____.

Isaiah 64:8 "We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."

Job 12:10 (TEV), "It is God who directs the lives of his creatures; everyone's life is in his power."

Romans 8:28, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

Revelation 15:3—

Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.
Just and true are your ways,
King of the ages.

"In hours of weakness and sorrow and defeat, [God's] sovereignty is the rock foundation of my hopes. There are so many things which seem to control the world, it is the thought of God's control which saves me from despair."

— E.Y. Mullins

Since God is my Father, I will depend on his p_____.

Matthew 7:11, "As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give good things to people who ask."

Acts 10:35 (Msg), "It makes no difference who you are or where you're from – if you want God and are ready to do as He says, the door is open."

Discussion Questions

Tom compared Jesus to a pearl diver who (1) left the heights of heaven, (2) descended to the depths of human experience, and (3) returned to heaven with treasure in his hand. Have someone read Philippians 2:5-11. for the group. Identify the words that describe (1) Christ's divinity and heavenly existence, (2) Christ's humanity and earthly experience, and (3) Christ's triumphant return to reign in heaven.

What did you think of C.S. Lewis's comments that are quoted on page 65? He said you don't have the option of calling Jesus a great moral teacher and ignoring his claims of being the God who made us and the God who deserves our worship. Lewis said that our only options when considering Jesus' claims was that he was insane (and therefore no great moral teacher) or he was who he claimed to be. What is your reaction to Lewis' options?

God the Son suffered pain, encountered temptation and did not give in to it, experienced rejection, and even endured torture and death. Does this awareness help you deal with the trials in your own life? If so, how?

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 15:12-20. to the group. Paul said that if we take away Christ's resurrection, we take away the very foundation of Christianity. Why is Christ's resurrection so important to faith?

Have someone read Hebrews 7:25. and Romans 8:34 to the group. The Bible reveals that Jesus is now at "the right hand" of the Father where he prays for us. What do you think Jesus is asking the father on your behalf at this period in your life?

This Week's Assignment

Read Chapters 11-13 in *The Anchor Course*

The Anchor Course



“I Believe in Jesus”

Answering Jesus

“Who do you say that I am?”
Matthew 16

Jesus is everything it means to be _____.

John 1:1 (NKJV), “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

Jesus is everything it means to be God. Why does that matter?

First, Jesus is the best qualified to _____ us about God.

Hebrews 1:1-2 (TEV), “In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son.”

John 14:9 (NIV), “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

Second, the sacrifice of Jesus was God paying our _____ himself.

Jesus is everything it means to be _____.

John 1:14 (NKJV), “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Jesus is everything it means to be human. Why does that matter?

First, he is our e_____.

1 Peter 2:21 (NIV), “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”

Second, he is our e_____.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV), “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Jesus lives to bring our _____
to the Father’s attention.

Hebrews 7:25 (NIV), “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because *he always lives to intercede for them.*” Romans 8:34 (NIV), “Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also *interceding for us.*”

“Who do you say that I am?”
“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”
Matthew 16

Discussion Questions

Have someone read John 16:1-8 to the group. Jesus said the Spirit would convict “the world” regarding three things. In this context, Jesus uses the phrase “the world” to describe anyone who has not committed to him. What were the three “convictions” Jesus said the Spirit would bring to the world? Review and summarize Tom’s explanation of those three things from Chapter 11.

From Chapter 12, review and summarize the four things Tom said the Spirit does with those who have put their faith in Christ.

Have someone read 2 Corinthians 3:17 to the group. Notice that the Bible says, “The Lord is the Spirit.” Now that your group has reviewed what the Spirit does with nonbelievers and believers, how does it make you feel to know that these things are the actions of the Lord himself? Do you feel valued that God would take such a personal interest in your life, or do you feel uneasy that God is so close to everything you experience?

Have someone read Galatians 5:25 to the group. This verse urges us to “keep in step with the Spirit” (NIV). What can you do in your daily life to follow the Spirit’s leading throughout your day?

Have someone read Galatians 5:22-23 to the group. This passage lists “fruit” (or “results”) of giving control of your life to God’s Spirit. Of the nine traits, which one is your strongest at this point in your life? Which one is your weakest? Would you be willing for the group to pray that your life would bear more of the fruit that is listed in this passage?

This Week’s Assignment

Read Chapters 14-16 in *The Anchor Course*

The Anchor Course



“I Believe in
the Holy Spirit”

The Holy Spirit

John 14:16-17

Jesus said: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

First, verse 16 speaks of who the Holy Spirit is.

“And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Counselor
to be with you forever—the Spirit of Truth.”

John 14:17

“The world cannot accept him,
because it neither sees him
nor knows him.
But you know him,
for he lives with you and will be in you.”

Second, verse 17 speaks of what the Holy Spirit does.

He works *upon* nonbelievers
“The world cannot accept him,
because it neither sees him nor knows him.”

He works *within* believers
“But you know him,
for he lives with you and will be in you.”

The Spirit works *upon* nonbelievers . . .

. . . to conv _____ us.

John 14:17, “The world cannot accept him; it neither sees him nor knows him.”

John 16:8 (NCV), Jesus said the Spirit “will prove to the people of the world [non-believers] the truth about sin, about being right with God, and about judgment.”

. . . to conv _____ us.

The Spirit works *within* believers . . .

. . . to e _____ us.

Ephesians 3:16, “I pray that out of [the Father’s] glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”

. . . to e _____ us.

Ephesians 1:17, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.”

. . . to e _____ us.

. . . to e _____ us.

Romans 8:6 (NLT) “If the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace.”

Luke 11:13

“God will give the Holy Spirit
to those who ask him.”

Discussion Questions

Why is it so hard for some people to say, “I believe in the church?” If you’ve had personal experiences with Christians or churches that have disillusioned you, feel free to share them.

Christ’s vision for his church is captured in the three words of the Creed: “one,” “holy,” and “communion.” In other words, we are to be a united righteous community. The truth is, when it comes to this vision, we can tell plenty of stories of exemplary Christians and embarrassing Christians. Why do you think that is so and what should be done about it?

In Chapter 15, Tom wrote about a man once who was active in a church until he saw behavior in the leadership that disillusioned him. The man simply left the church. Tom wrote, “It never occurred to him that he was expected to work with others to find a remedy for the situation. For him, the church was merely an institution under someone else’s responsibility, not his. He drew benefit from it until the institution no longer pleased him. The man did not understand that Christ expects his followers to actually pursue Christ’s vision for a church that is *one*, *holy*, and a *communion*.” What would you say to this man? What could he have done differently at that church?

Have someone read Ephesians 5:25-27 to the group. What earthly relationship does Paul use to compare Christ’s relationship to his church? Though Christ “gave himself up” for the church (NIV), many people who say they believe in Christ have no meaningful involvement in a specific church. Can you love Christ and yet have no love for what he loves? Just as Christ’s love led to sacrifice, what might we have to “give up” out of love for the church?

Although Christ’s followers “believe in the church,” is it ever right to leave a specific church?

Discuss what you think a person should look for when choosing a church.

This Week’s Assignment

Read Chapters 17-19 in *The Anchor Course*

The Anchor Course



“I Believe in the Church”

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

Ephesians 5:25 (NIV)

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

Since the body you belong to is *one*, make sure to nurture _____ among other believers.

1 Corinthians 1:2,

“To the church of God in Corinth
together with all those everywhere
who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Since the body you belong to is *holy*, make sure to promote the _____ of other believers.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NLT)

“He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.”

Since the body you belong to is a *communion*, make sure to improve the _____ between other believers.

What’s the purpose of a Christian community?

First, it’s for _____ ship.

Acts 2:42, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the *fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Second, it’s for _____ ship.

Philippians 1:4-5, “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your *partnership* in the gospel.”

Discussion Questions

Make a list of the different symbols for the world's major religions: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism/Taoism, and so on. Why is the cross the symbol that most associate with Christianity?

Though most people are willing to say, "I'm not perfect," few are willing to accept that such imperfections separate them from God. Why?

In our modern world, what has taken the place of "sin" in our vocabulary and thinking? What is the result?

Designate someone in the group as a reader and have him or her find Isaiah 53:6 in the Bible. Have everyone else in the group extend their left hand, palm up, and have them place an object in the open palm. Explain that the left hand in this exercise represents our life and the object represents the sin that we carry. Have the members of the group extend their right hand, palm up, and explain that the right hand will represent Jesus in this exercise. Have the designated reader read Isaiah 53:6. When the reader gets to the line, "and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all," have everyone transfer the "sin" from their left hand to their right hand. When the object is in their right hand, they should return their left hand to the original position, palm open and empty.

In Chapter 19, Tom wrote that, because Christ carried away the sin of those who belong to him, God can release us, restore us, and receive us. Review that chapter and answer these questions: From what can God release us? To what can God restore us? Where can God receive us?

Most believers have a story of the life-events that led them to place their trust in Christ. Ask the believers in the group if they are willing to tell their story.

This Week's Assignment

Read Chapters 20-22 in *The Anchor Course*

The Anchor Course



“I Believe in the
Forgiveness of Sins”

Your Life: A Brief History

Colossians 1:21-23(NIV)

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

PAST: “I was _____ from God.”

Verse 21, “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.”

Luke 18:10f—

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Mark 2:17 (NLT), “Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough”

PRESENT: “I am _____ to God.”

Verse 22, “. . . but now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.”

FUTURE: “I will be _____ before God.”

Verses 22-23, “. . . to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation if you continue in your faith.”

Discussion Questions

Have someone read 1 Peter 3:15 to the group. Do your attitudes about death make people want to ask you about the hope you have?

Have someone read Philippians 3:20-21 to the group. In Chapter 20, Tom explained why the Bible teaches that eternal life is more than merely continuing to exist after death. The Bible teaches that body and soul will be reunited at the resurrection. While most of our world believes in some sort of life beyond this life, the resurrection is a teaching unique to the Bible. From what you read in Chapter 20, recall why the resurrection is an important part of God's plan.

Have someone read Jesus' words in John 14:2-3 to the group. Tom described seven characteristics about heaven in Chapter 21. Were any of the characteristics surprising? Which characteristic most makes you look forward to heaven?

Have someone read Jesus' words in John 3:16 to the group. In Chapter 22, Tom wrote, "For some, the thought of hell calls into question God's justice, God's love, and God's grace. Hell does not eliminate these things, however. It illuminates them." Briefly describe how hell illuminates these three things, using Tom's comments from Chapter 22.

This Week's Assignment

Read Chapters 23-25 in *The Anchor Course*

The Anchor Course



“I Believe in Eternal Life”

What Happens After I Die?

Ecclesiastes 7:4 (NLT)

“A wise person thinks a lot about death.”

After I die,
my soul will c_____.

2 Corinthians 5:8 (NCV), “We really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord.”

Philippians 1:22 (The Message), “The desire to break camp here and be with Christ is powerful. Some days I can think of nothing better.”

Luke 23:43 (NLT), “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

When Christ returns,
my body will be r_____.

2 Corinthians 5:4 (NLT), “Our dying bodies make us groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and have no bodies at all.”

Isaiah 26:19 (NLT), “Yet we have this assurance: Those who belong to God will live; their bodies will rise again! Those who sleep in the earth will rise up and sing for joy!”

Philippians 3:21 (NIV) “Christ . . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

How can I prepare for this?

F_____

2 Tim. 1:10 (CEV), “Christ our Savior defeated death and brought us the good news. It shines like a light and offers life that never ends.”

F_____

Discussion Questions

Have someone read Luke 12:16-21 to the group. In this story, Jesus described a man who enjoyed the benefits of this life as if it would go on forever. He gave no thought of his accountability to God. Have the group suggest a one-sentence “moral of the story” from this passage.

Jesus expected us to commit to him, not just study him. In Chapter 23, Tom pointed out four reasons people will study Jesus but then hesitate when it comes to committing to him. If you are a Christ-follower, share with the group which of these four reasons caused you to hesitate before committing to Christ. If you are examining the claims of Christ, share with the group which of these four reasons may be behind your own hesitation to put your faith in him.

Have someone read Luke 18:9-14 to the group. In Chapter 24, Tom said, “Jesus wanted us to see ourselves in this story, and he gave us only two roles to choose between: we can be like the man who denied his need for God’s forgiveness, or we can be like the man who cried out for it.” Based on this story, would Jesus agree with the popular notion that “God accepts all people”? What disappointed Jesus about the Pharisee: the man’s good works or the man’s attitude toward his good works? Why? How can this story help us in our own relationship with God?

Summarize the “A-B-C’s” of a commitment to Christ that Tom described in Chapter 24. If you have made a commitment to Christ during this study, share your decision with the group if you feel comfortable in doing so.

In Chapter 25, Tom pointed out that a commitment to Christ is the beginning of a lifelong climb toward spiritual maturity. Summarize the “H.I.L.L.” acronym Tom used in Chapter 25 to explain why a believer follows Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 in the Living Bible says, “Test everything that is said to be sure it is true, and if it is, then accept it.” If you are still considering a commitment to Christ, what remains to be tested? In other words, what questions or issues remain unresolved?

Looking back over these past weeks of reading and group discussion, what has been the most helpful thing you have learned or experienced in this study?

Who else should be part of a study like this? Would some members of your study group be willing to enlist these additional people into a new study of this material?

The Anchor Course



“Amen”
Getting to “Amen”

Psalm 106:48 (NIV),
“Let all the people say, ‘Amen!’”

What does it take to get to the point where you can say “Amen” to the Christian message?

“I will _____ to these things.”

Matthew 22:37 (NIV): “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Investigate three things:

- _____
- The lives of _____ you respect
- _____

“I will _____ in these things.”

Romans 10:11 (The Message): “Scripture reassures us, ‘No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it.’”

*“Faith is not belief without proof
but trust without reservation”*

Elton Trueblood

“I will _____ because these things are true.”

Matthew 7:21 (NCV): “Not all those who say that I am their Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. The only people who will enter the kingdom of heaven are those who do what my Father in heaven wants.”



Find more information online

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