THE DAILY BREAD

The Creed of the Apostles



The Creed

What We Stand On

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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INTRODUCTION

The Words You Say Without Weighing

Every Sunday, standing in the pew, a man says the Creed. He has said it thousands of times, so many times that the words come out on their own, requiring no thought, a familiar recitation he could perform half-asleep. I believe in one God, the Father almighty, and on through the articles to the life of the world to come, Amen. The words roll out, worn smooth by repetition, and the man says them without weighing a single one, the way he might recite an oath he took so long ago he has forgotten it was ever a solemn thing.

But stop, for a moment, and consider what those words actually are. They are not a poem, not a hymn, not a pious sentiment. They are a declaration of everything a man stands on, a public profession of the deepest convictions a human being can hold, a statement of what he believes to be true about God, about the world, about himself, about his eternal destiny. Each line was fought for, hammered out, sometimes at the cost of blood, to state precisely what is true and to exclude what is false. And each time a man says the Creed, he is standing up, in public, and declaring that this, all of this, is what he believes and what he is prepared to stake his life on. It is one of the most consequential things a man ever says, and most men say it without weighing it at all.

I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received. — 1 Corinthians 15:3

This book, and the whole program it opens, is about learning to weigh the words a man has been saying without thought. Acts of the Apostles set your heart on fire; it made you hungry for God and awakened your appetite for the faith. But fire needs a hearth, or it burns the house down, and the Creed is the hearth: the doctrinal structure that gives your faith staying power, that lets it hold when the feelings fade and the questions come and someone you love asks you, point blank, what do you actually believe, and why? A man who cannot say what he believes cannot defend it, cannot share it, and eventually cannot sustain it. The Creed program exists to build that structure, and this first book lays its foundation by asking the most basic question of all: what is this Creed you have been saying, and what are you actually committing to when you say it?

We will look at what a creed is and why the Church has them. We will see where the great creeds came from and what they were written to protect. We will draw the crucial distinction between believing that something is true and believing in someone, between intellectual assent and personal commitment. We will see the Creed as the covenant of

your baptism, renewed every time you say it. And we will trace its three-part structure, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is the very structure of this whole program. This is the opening of the Creed of the Apostles, and its aim is that you never again say the Creed without weighing it, but stand and declare it as what it is: the statement of everything you stand on.

The aim is that you come to know what you believe, and why, so that the words you have said ten thousand times without weighing them become, at last, the deliberate and costly declaration they were always meant to be.

CHAPTER ONE

Why Have a Creed at All?

The Point of a Common Confession

Before examining what the Creed says, ask why the Church has a creed at all. Some object to creeds on principle, holding that faith should be a personal relationship, not a formula, and that fixed statements of belief are cold, institutional, even a betrayal of living faith. This objection deserves an answer, because answering it reveals what creeds are actually for.

Faith Has Content

The first thing to see is that faith has content; it is not merely a feeling or a vague spiritual orientation but the acceptance of certain things as true. To be a Christian is not simply to have warm feelings toward God or a general sense of the spiritual; it is to believe specific things: that God is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that the Son became man, died, and rose; that there is judgment, and heaven, and the forgiveness of sins. These are claims, assertions about what is real, and Christianity stands or falls on whether they are true. A faith with no content, that believes nothing in particular, is not Christianity but a mood. And because faith has content, that content can be stated, and needs to be, so that everyone knows what the faith actually is. The creed is simply the statement of the content of the faith, the putting into words of what Christians actually believe, and far from being a betrayal of living faith, it is the necessary articulation of what that living faith is about.

Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. — 1 Peter 3:15

A Common Standard

A creed also serves as a common standard, a shared statement of the faith that unites believers across the whole Church and guards against distortion. Without a fixed creed, the faith would splinter into as many versions as there are believers, each holding his own private idea of what Christianity is, with no way to tell genuine faith from counterfeit. The creed prevents this by stating, publicly and authoritatively, what the faith is, so that all who profess it are professing the same thing, united in a common confession, and so that any distortion can be measured against the standard and recognized as a departure. This is why the creed is prayed in common, aloud, by the whole assembly: because it is the shared confession of the one faith, the standard that unites all Christians in believing the same truth. Far from being cold and institutional, the common creed is what allows the faith to remain one faith across the centuries and the continents, the same truth confessed by all, rather than dissolving into a thousand private religions.

Words Worth Fighting For

There is a deeper reason still, which the history of the creeds makes plain: creeds exist to protect the truth against error. Every line of the great creeds was written to state precisely what is true and to exclude a specific falsehood that had arisen and threatened to corrupt the faith. The creeds are not abstract theology spun in a vacuum; they are the Church's hard-won responses to real crises, moments when someone taught something false about God or Christ, and the Church had to state, exactly, what the truth was, to protect the faith from the error. Behind the calm lines a man recites on Sunday lie fierce struggles for the truth, councils convened, arguments waged, the faith defended against distortions that would have destroyed it. Each phrase was fought for, chosen with care to affirm the truth and exclude the lie. To say the Creed is to stand with all who fought to preserve these truths, to profess the faith they defended, to hold the line they held. The creed is not a dry formula but a battle standard, the hard-won statement of the truth, worth fighting for then and worth professing now.

A Costly Word

There is one more thing the history of the creeds reveals, and it is sobering: for many Christians, professing the Creed has been genuinely costly, even unto death. In times of persecution, to profess the faith of the Creed was to mark oneself as a Christian and to risk everything, and countless believers have died rather than deny the faith the Creed professes, choosing death over the renunciation of a single article. The word a man says so easily on Sunday has been, for many, a word worth dying for, professed at the cost of

their lives rather than betrayed. This should give a man pause as he recites the familiar words, for he is professing the faith that martyrs died to keep, staking his allegiance, as they staked theirs, on the truth the Creed declares. To say the Creed is to join the great company of those who have professed it across the centuries, including those who professed it at the cost of everything, and it should be said with the seriousness of a word that has cost, and may yet cost, so much. The Creed is not cheap. It never was. And a man who grasps what it has cost others to profess will not say it cheaply himself.

CHAPTER TWO

Where the Creed Came From

The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed

The two creeds a Catholic man is most likely to pray, the Apostles′ Creed and the Nicene Creed, each has a history worth knowing, because knowing where they came from deepens the weight of saying them and reveals what they were written to protect.

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles′ Creed is the older and simpler of the two in its form, an ancient statement of the faith rooted in the profession made at baptism from the earliest centuries of the Church. Its name reflects the traditional understanding that it faithfully summarizes the faith the apostles handed down, the essential content of what they preached, gathered into a brief profession. Structured in three parts around the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it states the core of the Christian faith in a form simple enough to be memorized and professed by every believer, and it has served, across the centuries, as the baptismal creed, the profession of faith made at the font. When a man prays the Apostles′ Creed, he is professing the ancient baptismal faith of the Church, the essential Gospel handed down from the apostles, in words that Christians have used to declare their faith for a very long time.

Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me. — 2 Timothy 1:13

The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed, the one usually prayed at Sunday Mass, is fuller and more precise, and it arose from one of the great crises of the early Church. In the early centuries, a serious error spread that denied the full divinity of Christ, holding that the Son was not truly God but a creature, however exalted. This struck at the very heart of the faith, for if Christ is

not God, the whole Gospel collapses. The Church responded by gathering her bishops in council, and out of that council came the creed we now call the Nicene Creed, which states, with hard-won precision, that the Son is truly God, of the same divine substance as the Father, begotten not made, God from God, light from light, true God from true God. Those careful phrases, which a man recites on Sunday, were forged in the fire of that crisis, chosen exactly to affirm the full divinity of Christ against the error that denied it. The Nicene Creed is thus a monument to a great battle for the truth, its precise language the Church's considered defense of who Christ truly is, and to pray it is to profess, in the very words hammered out to defend it, the full divinity of the Son.

The Whole Faith in Miniature

One of the marvels of the Creed is how much it holds in so few words. In the space of a single paragraph a man can recite in under a minute, the Creed states the whole essential faith: the Trinity, creation, the Incarnation, the virgin birth, the passion and death, the resurrection and ascension, the second coming, the Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life. The entire Gospel, the whole sweep of the faith from the origin of all things to the life of the world to come, is compressed into this brief profession, so that a man carries, in the Creed he has memorized, the whole faith in miniature, available to him at any moment. This is a great gift, for it means a man always has the essential faith at hand, able to profess it, to pray it, to hand it to another in a form brief enough to remember and complete enough to contain the whole. The Creed is the faith in miniature, the whole Gospel in a form a man can carry in his heart and profess in a minute, and this compression is part of its genius and its usefulness, a complete map of the faith small enough to keep always with him.

Why the Precision Matters

A man might wonder why such precision was necessary, why the faith could not rest in simpler and vaguer terms. The answer is that vagueness cannot protect the truth. When a specific error arises, denying something essential, only a precise statement can exclude it; a vague profession leaves the door open to the very falsehood that threatens the faith. The precision of the creeds, which can seem excessive to a man who does not know the errors they exclude, is exactly what protects the truth, stating it so exactly that the falsehood cannot slip through. Every carefully chosen phrase excludes a specific lie and affirms a specific truth, and the precision is not academic hairsplitting but the necessary guarding of the faith against real distortions. This is worth understanding, because it teaches something about doctrine in general, which this whole program will develop: that precise doctrine is not the enemy of living faith but its protector, stating the truth exactly

so that it cannot be lost or corrupted. The precision of the Creed is a gift, the careful guarding of the truth a man stands on.

CHAPTER THREE

Believing That, Believing In

Two Kinds of Belief

At the heart of what it means to say the Creed lies a distinction that transforms the whole act: the difference between believing that something is true and believing in someone. The Creed involves both, and understanding the difference is essential to saying it rightly.

Believing That

To believe that something is true is to give intellectual assent to a claim, to accept it as a fact. A man believes that the earth orbits the sun, that a certain event occurred in history, that a mathematical proposition is correct. This is real belief, the acceptance of something as true, and the Creed certainly involves it: to say the Creed is, in part, to affirm that these things are true, that God really is a Trinity, that Christ really did rise, that there really is a judgment to come. This intellectual assent matters, and the whole doctrinal program of the Creed is largely concerned with it, with understanding and affirming the truths of the faith. A man should believe that the articles of the Creed are true, should understand them, should be able to say why he holds them; this is the foundation, and it is real belief. But it is not the whole of what the Creed asks.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder. — James 2:19

Believing In

That verse from James cuts to the heart of it: even the demons believe that God exists, that the truths about him are true; they have perfect intellectual assent, and it saves them not at all, because they do not believe in God, do not trust him, love him, give themselves to him. To believe in someone is more than to accept facts about him; it is to trust him, to commit oneself to him, to stake one's life on him. And this is what the Creed most deeply asks. When a man says I believe in one God, he is not merely affirming that God exists; he is declaring that he trusts God, commits himself to God, gives himself to God, stakes everything on God. The Creed is not only a list of truths a man affirms but a personal act of trust and self-commitment, a declaration that he does not merely believe these things

are true but entrusts himself to the God they reveal. This is the difference between the faith that saves and the faith of the demons: not the content believed, which may be the same, but whether a man merely accepts the facts or actually gives himself, in trust and love, to the God the facts reveal.

The Creed Asks Both

The Creed, then, asks both kinds of belief, and a man says it rightly only when he offers both. He affirms that the articles are true, giving his intellectual assent to the content of the faith, understanding and holding the truths professed. And he declares that he believes in the God these truths reveal, entrusting himself to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, committing his life to them, staking everything on them. The intellectual assent without the personal trust is the dead faith of the demons; the personal trust without the intellectual content is a blind sentiment with no object. Together they are living faith: the whole man, mind and will, affirming the truth and giving himself to the God who is the truth. This whole program will build the first, the understanding and affirming of the doctrine, but always in service of the second, the deeper trust and self-gift, so that a man comes to believe both that the faith is true and in the God it reveals, with his whole self. To say the Creed rightly is to do both at once: to affirm the truth and to give yourself to the One it proclaims.

Faith Seeking Understanding

There is a classic phrase in the tradition that captures how these two beliefs work together and grow: faith seeking understanding. It names the movement of a living faith, which begins by trusting and giving itself to God, and then, from within that trust, seeks to understand more deeply what it believes. A man does not first understand everything and then decide to believe; he trusts God, gives himself to God, and then, from within that relationship of trust, seeks to understand the faith he has embraced, and the understanding deepens the trust, which seeks further understanding, in a lifelong spiral. This is exactly the movement of the trilogy: Acts began the trust, the giving of oneself to God in encounter; Creed now seeks the understanding, the grasping of what the faith actually holds; and the understanding will deepen the trust and equip the man for mission. Faith seeking understanding is the healthy pattern of a growing faith, neither a blind trust that refuses to understand nor a cold understanding that never trusts, but a living trust that seeks always to understand more of the God it loves. The Creed program is faith seeking understanding, the trust of Acts now seeking to grasp, in depth, the truth of the God it has embraced.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Covenant of Your Baptism

What You Pledged, and What It Means to Live It

The Creed is not, in its origin, a hymn or a summary added later to the faith; it is the covenant of baptism, the profession made at the font, and understanding it as a baptismal covenant reveals what a man is doing every time he renews it.

Professed at the Font

From the earliest centuries, the creed was the profession of faith made at baptism. The one to be baptized, or the parents and godparents in the case of an infant, professed the faith, declaring belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and on that profession the person was baptized into the faith professed. The creed was the baptismal profession, the statement of the faith into which a man was baptized, the covenant he entered at the font. This means that the Creed is not merely a summary of doctrine but the very profession by which a man became a Christian, the covenant of his baptism, in which he pledged himself to the faith and was received into it. For most Catholic men, this profession was made on their behalf as infants, by parents and godparents, and then made their own at Confirmation and renewed ever after; but its character remains the same: the Creed is the baptismal covenant, the faith a man pledged at the font and pledges anew each time he professes it.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. — Matthew 28:19

Renewed Every Time You Say It

Because the Creed is the baptismal covenant, every time a man says it he is renewing that covenant, reaffirming the faith he pledged at his baptism, restating his commitment to the God to whom he was given. This transforms the act of saying the Creed. It is not merely the recitation of a summary but the renewal of the deepest covenant of a man's life, the reaffirmation, again and again, of his baptismal pledge, his belonging to the God into whom he was baptized. Each Sunday, when a man stands and professes the Creed, he is renewing his baptism, restating the covenant, declaring anew that he belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and stakes his life on them. Understood this way, the Creed is one of the most significant things a man says all week, the renewal of the covenant on which his whole life and eternity rest, and it deserves to be said with the weight of a man renewing the deepest vow he has ever taken.

Living the Covenant as an Adult

A covenant made on a man's behalf as an infant must, at some point, become his own, chosen deliberately and lived as an adult, and this is part of what the Creed program is for. Many men are living, at best, an inherited faith, the covenant made for them at the font but never fully claimed as their own, professed by habit rather than by deliberate adult conviction. The Creed of the Apostles calls a man to claim the covenant, to make the baptismal faith genuinely his own, understood and chosen and lived with adult conviction rather than merely inherited and recited. This is the difference between a man who says the Creed because it is what one says at Mass and a man who says it because he has weighed it, understood it, and deliberately staked his life on it. The whole program aims at this: the transformation of an inherited profession into a deliberate adult covenant, so that a man says the Creed not as a childhood habit but as the considered declaration of a man who knows what he believes and has chosen to stand on it.

For most Catholic men, there was a moment when the covenant made for them as infants was meant to become their own: Confirmation, in which the baptized, now old enough to choose, ratified for himself the faith professed at his baptism and received the strengthening of the Holy Spirit to live it as an adult. But for many men, Confirmation passed as a formality, a rite of passage endured in adolescence without real understanding or deliberate choice, so that the covenant was never genuinely claimed. The Creed program offers a man the chance to do now, with adult understanding and deliberate will, what may have passed him by at Confirmation: to claim the covenant of his baptism as his own, to profess the faith not because it was chosen for him but because he has weighed it and chosen it himself. It is never too late to make the inherited faith genuinely one's own, to move from a covenant merely received to a covenant deliberately embraced, and a man who does this, who claims as an adult the faith pledged for him as an infant, finds his whole relationship to the Creed transformed, from the recitation of an inherited formula to the deliberate profession of a covenant he has made his own.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Three-Part Structure

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The Creed is not a random list of beliefs but a structured profession, organized in three parts around the three Persons of the Trinity, and this three-part structure is not only the shape of the Creed but the shape of the entire program it opens.

The Trinitarian Shape

The Creed is structured in three parts, corresponding to the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. The first part professes belief in the Father, the almighty Creator of heaven and earth. The second and longest part professes belief in the Son, Jesus Christ, and the great mysteries of his Incarnation, death, and resurrection. The third part professes belief in the Holy Spirit, and, flowing from him, the Church, the forgiveness of sins, and the life to come. This Trinitarian structure is not incidental; it reflects the fundamental truth of the Christian faith, that God is one God in three Persons, and it organizes the whole profession around the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To pray the Creed is to move through the three Persons of the Trinity and the work proper to each, professing the whole faith in its Trinitarian shape, which is the shape of God himself.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. — 2 Corinthians 13:14

Creation, Redemption, Sanctification

The three parts correspond, in a broad and beautiful way, to the three great works of God: creation, redemption, and sanctification. The Father is professed as Creator, the origin of all things, from whom everything comes. The Son is professed as Redeemer, who became man and died and rose to save us, through whom we are redeemed. The Holy Spirit is professed as Sanctifier, who makes us holy, dwelling in the Church, forgiving sins, and bringing us to eternal life. Creation, redemption, sanctification: the work of the Father who made us, the Son who saved us, the Spirit who makes us holy, the whole sweep of God's action from the origin of all things to our final glory. The Creed traces this whole sweep, professing the God who created, redeemed, and sanctifies, so that in saying it a man rehearses the entire story of God's dealing with the world, from creation to the life of the world to come.

The Structure of This Program

This three-part structure is also the structure of the Creed of the Apostles program and, indeed, of the whole formation trilogy. The program will move through the great doctrines in a way that reflects this Trinitarian and creation-redemption-sanctification shape, taking up the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Church, the human condition and grace, sin and virtue and conscience, the sacraments and the Last Things, building out the full content of the faith the Creed professes. And the trilogy as a whole reflects the pattern: Acts opened the heart to encounter, Creed builds the mind's conviction, and Mission will send the hands into witness. So the three-part Creed is a kind of map of the whole journey, the structure of the faith a man professes and the structure of his formation in it.

As the program unfolds, each doctrine will fill out one part of what the Creed declares, until a man can say the whole Creed knowing, in depth, what each article means and why he holds it.

I Believe, and We Believe

It is worth noticing that the Creed is professed both in the first person singular, I believe, and, in its communal setting, as the faith of the whole we, the entire Church professing together. Both are true and both matter. The Creed is intensely personal: each man professes it for himself, staking his own life on it, so that it is genuinely I believe, my own act of faith and commitment. And yet it is never merely private, for a man professes the one faith of the whole Church, the same faith held by all believers everywhere and across the centuries, so that his I believe joins the great we believe of the entire Body of Christ. When a man professes the Creed, he is making a deeply personal act of faith and at the same time joining the vast communal profession of the whole Church, his single voice added to the great chorus that has professed this one faith across the ages. This holds together the personal and the communal in the right way: the faith is genuinely a man's own, staked on personally, and yet it is not a private invention but the shared faith of the whole Church, professed in union with all believers. A man believes for himself, and he believes with the whole Church, and both are essential to saying the Creed rightly.

CHAPTER SIX

Why Doctrine Is Not Cold

The Objection This Program Must Answer

Since the Creed of the Apostles is the doctrinal program, teaching the content of the faith, it must answer at the outset a suspicion many men carry: that doctrine is cold, academic, the enemy of living faith, and that focusing on it will dry up the fire that Acts kindled. This suspicion is understandable and entirely mistaken, and answering it frames the whole program.

Doctrine Serves the Fire

The fear is that doctrine will quench the fire, that turning from the warmth of encounter to the precision of doctrine will replace a living relationship with a dry system. But doctrine does not quench the fire; it is the hearth that lets the fire burn without destroying the house. Acts kindled a fire, a real encounter with the living God, and that fire is precious. But fire without a hearth, a structure to contain and direct it, either burns

out or burns the house down. Doctrine is the hearth: the structure that gives the fire of encounter a place to burn steadily, that keeps it from flickering out when feelings fade or flaring into error when it lacks direction. Far from being the enemy of the fire, doctrine is what allows it to endure, giving the living encounter of Acts the structure it needs to become a lasting, durable faith. The doctrine serves the fire; it does not quench it. And a man who fears that building the doctrinal hearth will cool his fire has it exactly backward: the hearth is what will keep his fire burning for a lifetime.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. — John 17:17

Truth About Someone You Love

There is a deeper answer still. Doctrine is not abstract information; it is the truth about Someone a man loves. When a man loves someone, he wants to know the truth about them, everything true about them, and this knowledge does not cool his love but deepens it, giving it substance and depth. So it is with the doctrine of the faith: it is the truth about God, whom a man has come to love in the encounter of Acts, and knowing this truth does not cool his love but deepens it, giving him more of the God he loves to love. To learn the doctrine of the Trinity is to know more truly the God a man loves; to understand the Incarnation is to grasp more deeply what God did for love of him; to learn the Last Things is to see more clearly the destiny to which his Beloved calls him. Doctrine is the truth about the Beloved, and knowing it deepens rather than cools the love, giving a man more of God to love and love more truly. This is why the doctrinal program is not a departure from the fire of Acts but its deepening: it gives a man more of the God he has come to love, known more truly, which is exactly what love desires.

Anchored in Real Life

Finally, the doctrine of this program is never taught in the abstract, as if in a classroom, but always anchored in real life, in a man′s actual struggles, relationships, and mission. Every doctrine will be shown to matter, to bear on how a man lives, to change something in his actual life, so that the teaching is never mere information but always formation, the truth that transforms. The doctrine of grace will bear on a man′s daily struggle with sin; the doctrine of the Last Things will bear on how he lives today; the doctrine of the Church will bear on his belonging and his mission. This program teaches doctrine, but it teaches it as formation, anchored in life, aimed at transforming a man and not merely informing him, so that the fear of a cold, academic faith is answered not only in principle but in the actual character of the teaching, which is always warm, personal, and aimed at the whole man. Doctrine, taught this way, is not cold at all, but the very fuel of a living, durable, transforming faith.

The Danger of Fire Without Doctrine

If some men fear that doctrine will quench the fire, the opposite danger is just as real and less often noticed: fire without doctrine, encounter without understanding, which cannot last and easily goes astray. A man who has had a genuine encounter with God but never builds the doctrinal understanding to make sense of it is vulnerable in several ways. When the feelings of the encounter fade, as they will, he has nothing solid to stand on and his faith may collapse, having rested on emotion rather than truth. When hard questions come, from a skeptical friend or his own doubting mind, he has no answers and may be argued out of a faith he never understood. And lacking the guardrails of sound doctrine, his fervor can drift into error, into distorted ideas of God, into spiritual enthusiasms untethered from the truth. The fire of encounter is precious, but fire without the hearth of doctrine burns out or burns wrong. This is precisely why Acts must be followed by Creed, why the encounter must be followed by the understanding: because a fire without a hearth cannot last, and a man who has met God must go on to understand him, or risk losing, when the feelings fade, the very thing the encounter gave him. The doctrinal program is not optional refinement but necessary protection, the building of the hearth that will keep the fire of encounter burning true and steady for a lifetime.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Standing to Profess It

Saying the Creed as What It Is

Having seen what the Creed is, a man can return to the act of saying it and do it, at last, as what it truly is. The whole point of this opening book is that a man never again say the Creed without weighing it, and here is what saying it rightly looks like.

Say It Deliberately

The first change is simply to say the Creed deliberately, with attention, weighing the words rather than reciting them on autopilot. This means slowing down internally as the Creed begins, recalling what it is, attending to the words as they are spoken, meaning each article as a deliberate profession rather than letting the familiar words roll out unweighed. It may help, at least at first, to focus on one part of the Creed each week, attending especially to the profession of the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, letting one article sink in with full attention. However a man does it, the point is to break the autopilot, to say the Creed as a deliberate and attentive profession of what he actually believes, rather than as a familiar recitation performed without thought. Say it

deliberately, weighing the words, and the Creed becomes again what it always was: the considered declaration of a man's deepest convictions.

> *With the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* — Romans 10:10

Say It as Trust, Not Only Assent

The second change is to say the Creed as an act of trust and self-commitment, not only as intellectual assent to a list of truths. As the man professes belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, he does not merely affirm that they exist and that the truths about them are correct; he entrusts himself to them, commits his life to them, stakes everything on them. I believe in one God is not only I affirm that God exists but I trust God, I give myself to God, I stake my life on God. Saying the Creed as this act of personal trust and self-commitment, and not only as intellectual assent, is what makes it a living profession rather than a dead recitation of correct beliefs. Let the Creed be, each time, a renewed act of trust and self-gift, a staking of everything on the God professed, and it becomes the living covenant it was always meant to be.

Say It as One Who Will Be Asked

Finally, a man does well to say the Creed as one who knows he will be asked to give an account of it, to explain and defend and share what he professes. The day will come, in a man's family, his work, his friendships, when someone asks him what he actually believes and why, and in that moment his ability to answer will depend on whether he has weighed the faith he professes or merely recited it. So a man says the Creed as one preparing to give an account of it, attending to what he professes because he knows he will be asked to explain it, letting the weekly profession be also a preparation for the witness he will be called to give. This connects the Creed directly to the Mission that will follow: a man builds, in the deliberate profession of the Creed, the conviction he will need to articulate and defend and share the faith when he is asked. Say the Creed, then, as a man who knows what he believes, trusts the God he professes, and stands ready to give an account of the faith to anyone who asks. That is to say the Creed as what it is, and it is the foundation of everything this program will build.

CONCLUSION

The Ground Beneath Your Feet

Return to the man in the pew, saying the Creed without weighing it, the familiar words rolling out unattended. This book has tried to change that man forever, to make it impossible for him to say the Creed again without knowing what he is doing. For the Creed is not a poem or a pious formula but the declaration of everything he stands on, the statement of his deepest convictions, the covenant of his baptism renewed, the hard-won truth guarded across the centuries, professed anew each time he says it.

We have seen why the Church has a creed at all: because faith has content, needs a common standard, and must guard the truth against error. We have seen where the great creeds came from, the ancient baptismal profession of the Apostles′ Creed and the hard-won precision of the Nicene Creed, forged to defend the divinity of Christ. We have drawn the crucial distinction between believing that the faith is true and believing in the God it reveals, and seen that the Creed asks both. We have seen the Creed as the covenant of baptism, renewed every time it is said, meant to be claimed as an adult′s own. We have traced its three-part structure, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, creation, redemption, and sanctification, which is the structure of this whole program. And we have answered the fear that doctrine is cold, seeing that it is the hearth that keeps the fire burning, the truth about the Beloved that deepens love, the formation that transforms a man′s life.

This is the foundation on which the whole Creed of the Apostles will build. In the books to come, each part of what the Creed professes will be opened and deepened: the Son and his great mysteries, the Holy Spirit and his gifts, the Church, the human condition and grace, sin and virtue and conscience, the sacraments and the Last Things. Article by article, the content of the faith a man professes will be built out, until he can say the whole Creed knowing, in depth, what each phrase means and why he holds it, and can give an account of it to anyone who asks.

So the next time you stand to say the Creed, do not let the words roll out unweighed. Stand, and know what you are doing: renewing the covenant of your baptism, professing the hard-won truth, affirming that the faith is true and entrusting yourself to the God it reveals, declaring the ground beneath your feet, everything you stand on. You know what you believe, or you are beginning to. Now learn it, deeply, and stand on it, and prepare to give it away. That is the road this program will walk, and it begins with the words you have said ten thousand times and are only now beginning to weigh: I believe.

The fire has been lit. Now comes the hearth. Let the Creed of the Apostles build in you the structure that will hold the fire for a lifetime, so that you know not only that your heart has burned, but what you believe, and why, and can hand it, solid and whole, to everyone God sends you. Begin.

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The Creed: What We Stand On is part of The Daily Bread Library.

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