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THE APOSTLES' CREED

When we talk about the Apostles we're talking about the original disciples (not including Judas) that walked with Jesus while He was here on earth, and Paul who became an apostle later (Acts 9).

A creed is simply a statement of belief. Christians have used the Apostles' Creed as a way to state their beliefs all the way back to the 4th century AD. Think about that, when you say the words of the Apostles' Creed you're speaking of your faith in the same way Christians have for nearly 1,600 years! In a very real sense the Apostles' Creed unites the Christian church across the ages.

Creed:
A statement of belief

The Apostles' Creed, however, was not written by the Apostles. It grew somewhat spontaneously as the church began to spread across the world. As the church grew it became necessary for Christians to be able to state, simply and clearly, what they believed. The Apostles' Creed takes the main teachings of the Apostles—teachings about who God is and what He and done and continues to do—and puts them into a simple but thorough statement of faith.

THE TRINITY

Trinity or Triune are words used to describe God as He has revealed Himself to us in the Bible. He reveals Himself as three distinct Persons in one Godhead. The doctrine (teaching) of the Trinity is one of those matters of faith that our human minds can't fully understand or explain. In the end it is something we have to take as true because God says it is true, not because we can grasp or explain it.

Sometimes the Trinity is compared to fire. Fire has three parts: flame, light, and heat. But it is only one thing: fire. Or as an apple which has skin, flesh and seeds, but is just one apple. These fall short though because each Person of the Trinity is fully God, not just one attribute of God. Again, we believe it because God says it is true. For a very thorough (and repetitive and somewhat confusing) explanation of the Trinity do an internet search for the Athanasian Creed.

In its three articles the Apostles' Creed describes each Person of the Trinity and their work:

God the Father, creation;

God the Son, redemption;

God the Holy Spirit, sanctification (keeping us in the true faith).

In the Apostles' Creed we confess that we believe in the one true God, the God of the Bible, not some vague notion or spiritual power, not some god of our own invention. We state our faith in God as He has revealed Himself to us.

REFLECT

Why is it important to have a simple, clear way to state our faith like we do in the Apostles' Creed?

Why is it important that we let the Bible and the Apostles' Creed explain who God is rather than just coming up with our own explanation?

WRITE

Write the Apostles' Creed in your own words.

THE FIRST ARTICLE:

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER..., part 1

In part one of the first article we're looking at God as the creator.

READ

The first article and its meaning in your catechism and Genesis 1:1 in your Bible.

Have you noticed that the Bible doesn't ever deal with the question of where God came from? It starts with a statement, "In the beginning God..." In that verse and the ones that follow we see a powerful God, able to cause things to come into existence by simply saying the words, "Let there be..." and we see a creative God who made incredible beauty and majesty, gigantic things and tiny things, simple organisms and complex systems.

Look up Genesis 2:7. Now we see the God who made us (mankind) in His own image. Not with words, but with His own hands. The God who gave us life by breathing His own breath into us. The God we call Father.

When we speak the Apostles' Creed we are saying that we believe that God is the creator of all things. Not a big bang, not even just an intelligent designer. We are saying, "In the beginning God..."

Understanding the world and our existence through this filter, that no one and nothing but God could do this creative work, sets up how we see ourselves and how we relate to God and the world around us.

REFLECT

What parts of God's creation amaze you the most? Why?

What does God's creation tell you about Him?

WRITE

Read Psalm 139:13-16 and put it in your own words.

What does it mean to say, "I believe God made *me*?"

RESPOND

Make two lists of ten items each. On one list your ten favorite things about God's created world. On the other list your ten favorite things about you.

THE FIRST ARTICLE:

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER..., part 2

In part two of the first article we're looking at God as our Father and the sustainer of life.

READ

The first article and its meaning in your catechism (yes, you already did that, but read it again...it helps it stick) and James 1:17 in your Bible.

Think back to how the Lord's Prayer begins... "Our Father who art in heaven." The Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed both begin by naming God as Father. It's pretty amazing if you think about it: God is almighty, as in ALL MIGHTY, He's the maker of heaven and earth and we get to call Him "Father."

Earthly fathers aren't perfect. You know that by now. But your heavenly Father is. The meaning of the first article says, "[God] richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends...and guards and protects me..."

God is not some divine clockmaker who made the world, wound it up and went away leaving the world to its own devices. Not at all. The Bible and the Creed describe God as deeply engaged with His creation like a father, looking after it, protecting it and providing creation and His creatures with everything needed.

REFLECT

Where have you noticed God protecting you and providing for you in your day-to-day life?

If you can't think of a time, is it possible you're not paying enough attention?

WRITE

Look up Matthew 6:25-34. After reading these verses how would you describe the way your heavenly Father looks after and provides for you?

Why, are we so quick to worry about things when we have a Father who cares for us the way God does?

RESPOND

Re-read your notes on the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer on pages 23 and 24 In the Confirmation Journal, part 1. What new insight into God as your Heavenly Father have you gained?

God the Father is a big subject. There is no way to say all that can be said about Him, His creation, His ongoing care for, and protection of all He created. You will spend the rest of your life learning and experiencing more of the depths of God's goodness.

THE SECOND ARTICLE:

AND IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD..., part 1

In part one of the second article we're looking at Jesus as true God and true man.

READ

The second article of the Apostles' Creed and its meaning in your catechism and John 1:14 in your Bible.

In the second article of the Apostles' Creed the Person and work of Jesus is described. In the meaning of this article we read that Jesus is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, *and also* true man.

So Jesus is fully God...100%. And He is fully man...100%. Isn't that 200% and therefore impossible? If we were talking about anyone else the answer would be yes. But we're talking about Jesus and where He is concerned the impossible is possible.

Because He is fully human, Jesus is very much like us. While He was on earth He ate and slept and cried and laughed. He skinned His knees and got dirty. He cleaned His room and washed the dishes. Jesus had to be fully human because His mission was that He would die for us and pay for our sins. He had to be human so that He could die.

Because He is fully God, Jesus is very unlike us. We are sinful, but He is perfect. We are fallen, but He is holy. We are weak, but He is almighty. Jesus had to be fully God because His death had to pay the price for our sins. Only the Son of God is worth enough to pay the price for the sins of the whole world.

In this article we also confess that Jesus is our Lord. Because He has saved us from sin, death and the power of the devil we acknowledge Him as Lord, as ruler of our lives.

REFLECT

What stories from the Bible can you remember that show that Jesus was human?

What stories can you remember that show that Jesus was God?

WRITE

Look up Hebrews 4:14-16. What do these verses tell us about Jesus?

What does it mean when it says we should approach God's throne with confidence?

RESPOND

If Jesus was only man, what would that mean for us today?

If Jesus was only God, and not also truly man, what would that mean for you today?

Knowing that He was both fully God and fully man, how does this help you connect to Him and His teaching in the Bible?

THE SECOND ARTICLE:

AND IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD..., part 2

In part two of the second article we're looking at Jesus as our redeemer.

READ

The second article of the Apostles' Creed and its meaning in your catechism and 1 Peter 1:18-19 in your Bible.

There are a lot of opinions about Jesus. Some say He was just a good teacher. Some say His mission was to show us how to love. Some say He wanted to make the world a place of justice. There's truth in each of those ideas, but here in the second article we see the whole truth of Jesus' purpose or mission. He came to find and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

The word is redeem. It means to buy back. Do you remember this saying: "God made it good. Sin made it broken. But God is making it good again"? We belonged to God as part of His good creation. But when sin broke everything it took hold of us and we were unable to break free. Sin owned us. But God (there's that line again), because He loves us so deeply, redeemed us, bought us back from sin.

Redeem: to buy back

How did He buy us back? With the most valuable thing of all, Jesus' holy and precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. This was Jesus' mission from the beginning. The ultimate act of God making it good again. And now, because we have been redeemed, we no longer belong to sin. We belong to God.

REFLECT

If you lost something you loved what would you do to get it back?

What would make God put His Son through all the pain of His suffering and death in order to redeem us?

WRITE

Look up 1 Timothy 1:15-16. According to verse 15, why did Jesus come?

According to verse 16, how does God want to use us?

RESPOND

How can you be an “example for those who would believe in [Jesus] and receive eternal life”?

THE SECOND ARTICLE:

AND IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD..., part 3

In part three of the second article we're looking at Jesus as our Lord and the purpose of our lives as His redeemed people.

READ

The second article of the Apostles' Creed and its meaning in your catechism and Galatians 2:20 in your Bible.

This part of the Apostles' Creed isn't just information. It comes with a call to action. The last paragraph of the explanation gives the "now what?" Now that I know that Jesus is true God and true man, now that I know that He has bought me back with His death and resurrection, now what? Simple: I live as *His* own not as *my* own. I serve *Him*, not myself, now and to eternity.

We confess that Jesus is both our Savior *and* our Lord. Following Jesus means surrendering to His will and His authority. It means asking what Jesus would have me do instead of just doing what I want to do. It means seeing the world through His eyes, not my own. Serving like He served, loving like He loved. Like the Galatians passage says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

REFLECT

If someone gave you a significant and valuable gift, how would you respond?

What response does God ask for from His redeemed people?

WRITE

Look up Philippians 3:7-8. (Go online and read these verses in several different translations to get a better understanding. The New Living Translation and the Message are good options.)

Write verses 7 and 8 in your own words.

Why does Paul (the author) consider all his accomplishments worthless?

What is the most valuable thing to him now? Why?

RESPOND

Self-Reflection: rate yourself along the continuum.

In my daily life, who is king in my life? Who am I serving? Who am I trying to please, honor, and glorify?

Myself

God

How can your life better reflect that Jesus is your Lord? What changes in your attitude or actions need to take place?

THE THIRD ARTICLE:

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT..., part 1

In part one of the third article we're looking at the Holy Spirit calling us by the Gospel.

READ

The third article of the Apostles' Creed and its meaning in your catechism and Ephesians 2:8-10 in your Bible.

Of the three persons of the Trinity the Holy Spirit is easily the most difficult to grasp. He has no physical presence like Jesus did and no human parallel like God the Father. But the Holy Spirit is constantly at work in the heart of believers in Jesus.

In John 11 we find the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. (Look it up, it's a quick read.) By the time Jesus gets to him, Lazarus has been dead for four days. But Jesus has the stone moved away from Lazarus' tomb and calls to him, "Lazarus, come out." And he did. This dead man, at Jesus' call, came back to life.

In the meaning of the third article we read that we cannot, on our own, believe in Jesus or come to Him. On our own we are spiritually dead, like Lazarus was physically dead. But we go on to read that the Holy Spirit "has called me by the Gospel." Just like Jesus' call to Lazarus raised him from the dead, the Holy Spirit's call to us by the Gospel raises us from spiritual death. The Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus by bringing the promise of the Gospel to us and by giving us faith in Jesus through that Gospel.

Flashback to lesson 2:
*Gospel is the good news
that Jesus died to save us
from our sin!*

REFLECT

Do you think Lazarus had a new perspective on life after being raised from the dead? What do you think was different for him?

The Holy Spirit calls you to new life, a life following Jesus as Lord and being in a right relationship with God through Jesus. What is the danger of ignoring the Holy Spirit's call in your life?

Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit is described with a variety of titles and descriptions. Look up these verses: John 14:16, John 16:13, Romans 8:26, John 14:26, Romans 8:16.

In which ways have you seen the Holy Spirit show up in your life?

WRITE

Look up and write Ephesians 2:1-2 and 4-5 in your own words.

RESPOND

The Holy Spirit is called a guide, teacher, faith-giver, and intercessor (person who prays on behalf of someone else) for us. He gives us courage to turn away from sin, confidence in Jesus' promises, and hope in really hard situations. Identify one area of your life where you've experienced the work of the Holy Spirit.

Pray that you will continue to see the work of the Holy Spirit around you and thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith.

THE THIRD ARTICLE:

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT..., part 2

In part two of the third article we're looking at the work the Holy Spirit is doing inside of a believer in Jesus.

READ

The third article of the Apostles' Creed and its meaning in your catechism and Romans 12:6-8 and Galatians 5:22-25 in your Bible.

Spiritual Gifts

Remember when you were little and Christmas or your birthday was coming? What kind of gifts did you want? Probably toys, right? Whatever toy had the best commercial on TV was the one you wanted? But as you've gotten older your wish list has probably changed some. Now you're asking for gifts that are more useful...a cellphone, a computer, a car. As we get older we seem to want things that help us do what we want to do (or need to do) better.

The Holy Spirit is a gift-giver. He doesn't give Easy Bake ovens, or fishing poles, or iPads. He gives spiritual gifts. In the Romans passage you read about different gifts the Holy Spirit gives. (There's also a list in 1 Corinthians 12.) Because God has made each of us unique, and has unique work for each of us to do He has given each of us a set of gifts. Romans describes the gifts like the parts of the body...each is its own part but they all work together to make the body able to do its job. The gifts of the Holy Spirit all work together, in each of us, to help the church do its job...sharing the Gospel with the world.

Fruit of the Spirit

How can you tell if a tree is an apple tree? By the apples growing on it. How can you tell if someone is living a life filled by the Spirit? By the spiritual fruit they produce. The Galatians passage you read lists nine fruits that the Holy Spirit produces in the life of a believer in Jesus. In the case of spiritual gifts, we each have a unique combination given to us by the Holy Spirit. But in the case of spiritual fruit He wants to produce all of them in each of us. A mark of spiritual maturity is how the fruits of the Spirit are showing in our lives.

REFLECT

When you read the list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12, do any of them sound like you?

When you look at the list of the fruits of the Spirit, which ones come easy for you? Which are more difficult?

WRITE

Ask someone close to you (a parent or trusted adult) what unique gifts they see in you. Write their response here.

Share with them the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-25 and ask them which ones they see in you. Write their responses here.

Do you agree with them?

RESPOND

What are some ways that you could work on the fruits of the spirit that are more difficult for you, and live out the spiritual gifts that sound like you from the above reflect questions?

How will you use your Holy Spirit given gifts to serve others?

THE THIRD ARTICLE:

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT..., part 3

In part three of the third article we're looking at the other items confessed at the end of the Creed.

READ

The third article of the Apostles' Creed and its meaning in your catechism. Read the Bible passages associated with each of the headings below.

The third article of the Apostles' Creed covers a lot of ground. While the first article talks about God the Father, the second about Jesus the Son, the third article covers the Holy Spirit, the church, saints, forgiveness, resurrection, and eternal life. Was this just a catch-all article? A place to add all the little bits and pieces of the faith before the Creed was finished?

Let's do some defining of the things listed in the third article:

I believe in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints...

Read Ephesians 2:19-22. This phrase is tricky because it uses two words, church and communion, in ways different from how we normally use them.

By church we most often mean a building. But the holy Christian Church is actually people. Everyone who shares faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior is a member of the holy Christian church.

By communion we usually mean the sacrament of the altar, taking the body and blood of Jesus during a worship service. But in this case communion means being joined in fellowship or a deep relationship.

So, on a huge scale, when we say we believe in the holy Christian church and the communion of saints we're really saying the same thing: we believe that we are joined together, by faith, with all those who believe

in Jesus. As of 2016 there are around 2.2 billion Christians in the world. That's a big church!

But also, on a smaller scale, we're saying that we believe that being a part of a local congregation is important. Worshiping regularly with other Christians, being connected with other believers in small groups...these are ways the Holy Spirit does His work of keeping us in the true faith.

...the forgiveness of sins...

Read 1 John 1:9. Pretty self-explanatory, but worth repeating: we believe that because of Jesus' death and resurrection God will not hold our sins against us. Our sins are forgiven!

...the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting...

Read Job 19:25-27. Remember this: Humans are humans and angels are angels. You will not become an angel when you get to heaven. That shouldn't be disappointing though, because we believe that our bodies will be resurrected, brought back to life, perfect and holy, free from sin, death and all evil in a new, immortal and glorified body (Large Catechism II, 58.). We will live the life God originally intended before sin made it broken.

How does this all connect with the Holy Spirit? He works through the church and the communion of saints to nurture and strengthen our faith. He works through the forgiveness of sins as He sanctifies us (makes us holy), and He does all this so that at the resurrection we can receive eternal life with Him and the Father and the Son.

REFLECT

How has your connection to Hosanna Lutheran affected your faith walk?

What other churches or faith families have been a part of your development as a Disciple of Jesus?

WRITE

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in each of these areas and how have you seen His work in your life?

Holy Christian Church, communion of saints

Forgiveness of sins

Resurrection of the body and the life everlasting

RESPOND

Make a list of people that the Holy Spirit has used in your life to teach you about the importance of God's church, forgiveness, resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Pray a prayer of thanks for their faithfulness.

Who is one person you could ask the Holy Spirit to help you to share these truths with?

THE APOSTLES' CREED:

REFLECTION

Now that you've worked through the Apostles' Creed piece by piece reflect a bit on it as a whole.

INTERVIEW

Talk to someone who has been confessing their faith with the Apostles' Creed for a long time (parents or grandparents are great options, but any follower of Jesus in your life will do). Ask them some of these questions:

When do you remember first saying the Apostles' Creed?

Why do you think Christians have been using the Apostles' Creed for all these centuries?

What part of the Apostles' Creed is most important to you or dear to your heart?

What does the Apostles' Creed tell you about God's character?

WRITE

How would you describe the work of each person of the Trinity?

God the Father:

God the Son:

God the Holy Spirit:

REFLECT

Which part of the Apostles' Creed is most important to *you*?

How has your understanding of God changed or deepened after working through these lessons?

RESPOND

Look up 1 Peter 3:15. Using the Apostles' Creed, write an "elevator speech," a short explanation of what you believe about God. Memorize it so that you're ready to give an answer for the hope that you have.

BAPTISM

READ

Look up Matthew 28:18-20. These are the last words that Matthew records Jesus speaking to His disciples. We call it the Great Commission. It's Jesus telling His disciples what to do after He goes back to heaven: make more disciples! And baptize them and teach them. So baptism isn't just a nice thing we do, it's a command of Jesus that we follow.

Commission: a command or instruction

In the Lutheran church baptism is a big deal. It's one of two acts we call sacraments.

The Lutheran definition of a sacrament is a sacred act that has...

- been instituted by the command of Jesus;
- in which Jesus joins His word of promise to a visible element (water in the case of baptism, bread and wine in the case of Communion); and
- by which He gives us the forgiveness of sins He earned by His suffering, death and resurrection.

So baptism isn't just a nice ceremony, it's sacred act where God comes to us and gives His gift of grace. In baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is a powerful gift!

Baptism is for all people of all ages. So when parents bring their infant to be baptized God gives the gift of faith, as He has promised, even to a baby who can't understand it yet. Just like that baby receives the love of their earthly parents without understanding it, they receive the grace of their heavenly Father.

And baptism isn't just something that happened once upon a time. Our baptism is something we carry with us daily, something that is true for us for our whole life. In our baptism we became a child of God and now we live every day as His child.

BAPTISM: GOD'S POWER AT WORK

READ

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism in your catechism and Titus 3:5-8a in your Bible.

Have you noticed how, all through the Bible, we read about how God uses plain, ordinary things to accomplish mighty, powerful works? He used a teenaged shepherd boy to kill the giant warrior, Goliath. He used another teenager, Mary, to give birth to the Savior, Jesus. He used fish and bread to feed over 5,000 people. He used mud to give a blind man back his sight. God seems to have a thing for using His power through everyday people and things.

“Baptism is not a work that we do but it is a treasure that God gives us and faith grasps” (Martin Luther, Large Catechism IV, 37).

He does the same thing in Baptism. Baptism is ordinary water (right from the faucet), poured over an ordinary person by an ordinary pastor in an ordinary church. But, when that water is combined with the word of God, that is, when the pastor says the words from Matthew 28:19, “I baptize you ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’” God’s power flows through that water delivering grace, the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation. God’s power makes baptism extraordinary!

Because we know that baptism is accomplished by God’s mighty power we can trust the promises He gives us. We can believe, without a doubt, that He is our God and we are His people. That we are forgiven and made right with Him. That we have been washed clean from our sins. That we have the gift of the Holy Spirit now and the promise of eternal life forever.

REFLECT

Why do you think God so often uses ordinary things to accomplish His powerful works?

Why is it important to remind ourselves that it's God's power that saves us, not anything we could do on our own?

WRITE

Your friend who you've known your whole life says to you, "I used to feel close to God and really knew that He loves me. But I've done some bad stuff lately and I haven't been praying or reading my Bible or going to church except on Wednesday nights. I don't know...what if I'm too far away from Him? I feel like I have to do something to get my faith back so I can be sure I'm saved. What should I do?"

What would you say to them? (Look back at Titus 3:5-8a for some ideas.)

RESPOND

How well do you do at trusting in God's power instead of your own?

How can remembering that through your baptism He has given you forgiveness, life, and salvation help you trust Him more?

BAPTISM: LIVING IT EVERY DAY

READ

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism in your catechism and Romans 6:1-4 in your Bible.

There's a paradox at work in the life of a Christian that we need to understand to be able to live our baptism out every day:

followers of Jesus are sinners and saints at the same time.

Because sin made it broken (remember that from way back at lesson 3?) we are stuck as sinners. We can't not sin, no matter how hard we try.

Paradox: a statement that contradicts itself but is true at the same time.

But at the same time we are forgiven and made right by Jesus, making us saints, holy and perfect. But we still sin. But Jesus forgives us. But we sin some more. But Jesus forgives us all over again. Sinners and saints at the same time.

Romans 6 gives us a pretty graphic picture of what happens in Baptism. We are joined with Jesus in His death *and* in His resurrection. Jesus' death did away with our sin and His resurrection gave us a new life. In our baptism our old, sinful self is put to death, and our new, righteous self is brought to life.

So how do the paradox of sinner/saint, Romans 6, and baptism work together? We take time every day to acknowledge our sin to God and ask His forgiveness. We remind ourselves that we have been baptized in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, saved with His mighty power and brought into His family. And we remind ourselves that His promise of forgiveness, life, and salvation is true.

Being a baptized Christian means we're able to be honest about being sinful. It means being able to be confident that we are forgiven and free.

Reflect

Why is it sometimes difficult to admit our sins to God?

Why is it important that we do it anyway?

WRITE

Galatians 2:20 talks about our death and resurrection in Jesus. Write it in your own words.

RESPOND

Make the sign of the cross over your forehead and over your heart and say, "I have been redeemed by Christ the crucified."** Do this every day for the next week (or longer).

**You might be thinking, "Hey, I did this same thing all the way back in the first lesson of this Confirmation journey." And you're right. That lesson was about how God justifies us or makes us right with Him by grace through faith. This lesson is about the same thing...baptism is a means or a way by which God gives us His grace. So remembering your baptism in this way helps you remember that you are right with God. See how it all works together?

BAPTISM:

REFLECTION

Now that you've worked through Baptism reflect a bit on it as a whole.

INTERVIEW

Talk to someone who was baptized a long time ago (parents or grandparents are great options, but any follower of Jesus in your life will do). Ask them some of these questions:

When and where were you baptized?

Why is baptism an important event in the life of a Christian?

What does it mean to you to be a baptized child of God?

REFLECT

When were you baptized? How old were you?

Where were you baptized?

Did you wear anything special?

Who are your sponsors or God-parents?

WRITE

What does *your* baptism mean to *you*?

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

READ

Look up 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. These words should sound familiar to you. The pastor says them or words very similar to them every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper (Communion) at church.

The roots of the Lord's Supper can be found all the way back in Exodus chapter 12, 1,450 years before Jesus was born. This is the story of the Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. God promised to send one final plague, the one where He would strike down the first born of every person and animal in Egypt. The only way to be saved from this plague was to put the blood of a three year-old, spotless male lamb on the doorframe of their house. God promised that He would pass over the houses with the lamb's blood on their door frame.

***The Sacrament of the
Altar,
Communion,
Holy Communion
The Lord's Supper,
The Eucharist...***

These all mean the same thing: taking the bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and

To celebrate God saving them from slavery in Egypt, God's people observed the Passover as a holy day from then on. Every year they would eat the same foods: unleavened bread (bread without yeast), lamb, wine, haroseth and bitter herbs, and tell the story again of God's saving power. They did this every year to remember what God had done for them.

Jesus and His disciples had been observing the Passover their whole lives. So on the night before Jesus was crucified, when they sat down to the familiar meal the disciples thought they knew how it would go. But Jesus changed things. When He passed around the bread He said, "Take and eat, this bread is my body." And when He passed around the wine He said, "Take and drink, this wine is my blood." And then He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

Jesus took the ritual of Passover and made it bigger and broader. Now it wasn't just about God freeing His people from slavery in Egypt, it was about God freeing His people from slavery to sin. He, Jesus, was the new Passover Lamb. Perfect, sinless, spotless. And His blood would save His

people from their sin. The original Passover had been just a glimpse of the bigger story of salvation that God was planning and that was now unfolding in front of the disciples' eyes.

From the very beginning of the church Christians have been celebrating the Lord's Supper. In the early church they celebrated the Lord's Supper as a part of a full meal that the people ate together. Later the Lord's Supper had its own part in the church's worship service and it became more like we celebrate it today.

But through the centuries, Jesus' followers have celebrated this meal just as Jesus shared it with His disciples, using bread and wine and the words, "This is my body...., this is my blood." We celebrate it to remember Him and His death and resurrection. And we celebrate it to receive the gifts and blessings that He gives us: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

REFLECT

When do you first remember paying attention to what was going on in Communion?

Do you remember what you thought about it?

What do you remember about taking Communion for the first time?

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR: TRULY PRESENT

READ

The Sacrament of the Altar in your catechism and Matthew 26:26-28 in your Bible.

Sometimes Jesus would use picture language to communicate with His followers. He would say, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed,” or “the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field.” He used these words to help His followers understand something that was beyond them. But when Jesus gave His disciples the Lord’s Supper He said, “This bread *is* my body. This wine *is* my blood.” He didn’t say it the bread was like His body, that the wine was like His blood. He said *is*.

As Lutheran Christians we take Jesus’ choice of words seriously. We believe that His body and His blood are actually present with the bread and the wine. In the same way that Jesus is God and man joined in a supernatural, incomprehensible but true way, the bread and His body, the wine and His blood are joined. We call this teaching the real presence.

Why is it so important? For one because we have to be careful to take Jesus at His word and not limit what He says is true to what we can understand with our human limitation. For another, we know that Jesus wants us to be deeply connected to Him. He says things like, “Remain in Me and I will remain in you. (John 15:4)” to show how deeply He wants us to be connected to Him. When we understand that in Communion we are taking Jesus’ very self into us we catch a glimpse of that deep connection. It’s mysterious, yes, but we take by faith what God says is true.

REFLECT

What is better...going to Disney or doing an internet search for Disney and looking at the pictures? Why?

What is better...having a best friend that you can be with, talk to, laugh and do things with or having a list of characteristics of a good friend? Why?

Why does understanding that Jesus is really present in Communion help us understand the deep connection He wants to have with us?

WRITE

How would you explain the mystery of Jesus' real presence in The Lord's Supper to someone who didn't understand it?

RESPOND

The next time you take Communion (and every time after that) pause and remember the real, true, and actual presence of Jesus' body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR: GOD'S POWER AT WORK

READ

The Sacrament of the Altar in your catechism and Mark 4:35-41 in your Bible.

If you flip back just a couple lessons you'll find one titled Baptism: God's Power at Work. Maybe you remember reading there about how God uses something as ordinary as water to do the extraordinary act of giving forgiveness of sins. In the Sacrament of the Altar He does it again. There's nothing special about the bread or the wine, the pastor giving it to you is just as sinful as you are. But, just like in baptism, when the ordinary elements are combined with God's powerful word the results are beyond imagination. In Communion we receive everything Jesus came to give: forgiveness of sins, strengthening of our faith now, and assurance of eternal life with Jesus. The power of Communion is in God's word. (Did you notice how powerful Jesus' words were in the Mark passage you just read?)

Because Communion is such a powerful gift we might be tempted to not want to take it when our faith feels weak. When we're feeling guilty and convicted of our sins we might think we're not worthy to take Jesus' body and blood. Wrong! This is exactly the time when we should take Communion. Do you remember way back to the lesson on Law and Gospel? When we're feeling the weight of the Law, the evidence that points to our failure to live like God's child...that's when we need the Gospel the most. And Communion is pure Gospel!

So, yes, we take the Lord's Supper seriously. We prepare ourselves to receive it by recognizing our sins and, in sorrow, confessing them to God. We ask for His help to live as new creations turning from sin and the devil. And then we receive Jesus' body and blood confident that He is our Savior and with faith in His words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

REFLECT

What are some places in the Bible where you can remember God's word doing powerful things?

Why is it important to remember that the power of Communion has nothing to do with us, but everything to do with God's word?

WRITE

Re-read Mark 4:35-41. How would you describe what happened there? What did the wind and waves do? Why did they do it? Why was Jesus' word able to quiet them?

RESPOND

What steps can you take, before you receive Communion, to remember your sinfulness and God's mighty, loving, forgiving power?

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR:

REFLECTION

Now that you've worked through the Sacrament of the Altar reflect a bit on it as a whole.

INTERVIEW

Talk to someone who has been taking Communion for a long time (parents or grandparents are great options, but any follower of Jesus in your life will do). Ask them some of these questions:

Do you remember your first Communion? When and where was it?
What do you remember about how you felt about it?

Has the Lord's Supper been an important part of your faith? Explain why.

How do you prepare your heart to receive the Lord's Supper?

What do you cherish most about the Lord's Supper?

REFLECT

What about the Lord's Supper is most important to *you*?

WRITE

Why is it important to believe in the real presence of Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper?

Why is it important to recognize that it is God's power at work in the Lord's Supper?

How has your understanding of Jesus love for you changed or deepened after working through these lessons?

RESPOND

Pray a prayer asking God to help you remember the sacrifice of Jesus for you and to receive Communion with joy.

FAITH PRACTICES

You have been working your way through these journals and through the Small Catechism for a while now. You've been reading, reflecting, and writing about a variety of doctrines or teachings of Christianity. In each lesson you've also been asked to respond to what you've learned. God wants to work in our heads...having us grow in knowledge, He wants to work in our hearts...shifting our attitudes and motivations to be in line with His, *and* He wants to work in our hands and feet and mouths...producing godly actions and activities in our lives.

For centuries Christians have been responding to God's love by taking part in faith practices that keep them connected to God and growing more and more like Jesus. We're going to look at three that can be done easily and at any time but also produce great growth in faith: Praying to confess sins, praying for guidance, and reading and reflecting on God's word.

Faith practices are sometimes seen as one more thing you have to do to be a good Christian, one more thing in a long list of dos and don'ts. Sometimes people talk about them in a way that feels a little like bragging... the person who talks about getting up at 4:30 every morning to read the Bible for an hour and pray for an hour and meditate for an hour before going to volunteer at the homeless shelter. Sometimes they make a Christian feel guilty, like they're not measuring up to an invisible line of holiness.

Please don't look at them like that. Think of faith practices like eating healthily, or brushing your teeth regularly, or getting exercise, or spending time with friends. **Faith practices are meant to enhance a relationship with Jesus that is developing and growing.** Like good habits help us live a healthy and happy life, faith practices help us stay connected to Jesus as our life moves and changes.

FAITH PRACTICES:

PRAYER CONFESSING SINS

READ

Confession in your catechism and 1 John 1:8-9 in your Bible.

It's not like confessing our sin to God gives Him any new information. God knows that we are sinful. The all-knowing God knows each of our sins, even the ones we don't know about or realize we've committed. There is no hiding our sin from God. So why is it important to confess our sin to Him?

When we confess our sins to God two things are happening. For one we quit faking it and come clean to Him, admitting and taking responsibility for our failures. Admitting our sin keeps our relationship with God in the correct perspective. We recognize that He is holy and we are not. That He is perfect and we are not. We humble ourselves to God and quit trying to be the masters of our own situation.

And, in faith, we claim the promise that God has made to forgive our sins and make us clean and whole again. We don't enter into this confession in fear of God's wrath, because we are confident of His love.

When should we pray to confess our sins?

In the morning when we wake up. At night before we go to sleep.

Before we take Communion. Whenever we remember our baptism.

Whenever we realize we've sinned. At other times when we realize we haven't been paying attention to whether or not we've sinned. All of that to say we should confess our sin often.

What should we confess?

Sin is every thought, word, desire and action that goes against God's will. So we confess the wrong we have done and the right we didn't do.

We confess the ways we've neglected and hurt others as well as the ways we've neglected and hurt God.

Will God forgive a sin that we haven't specifically confessed?

Yes. Is it okay if we just say, "God, you know all my sins anyway, so just take them away?" Probably not. Because God is serious about sin we should be too and should try to name the sins we can. But we can take comfort in knowing that God knows our heart and knows our sorrow for all of our sins.

REFLECT

Think back over how you've been living your life lately. When have you failed to love God with your whole heart and love others as yourself?

What have you done or left undone that you need to admit to God.

WRITE

Make a list of the sins you can remember. List any people you may have sinned against. Keeping a prayer journal of some kind is a great way to see and remember how God has been at work in your life. You can use this journal or another one, but try it. Write in code if you're worried someone will read it.

RESPOND

There's not just one way to pray a prayer confessing sins, but here's an example.

Pray something like, "Heavenly Father, I know I have sinned. I haven't lived as Your child following Your ways. *[Name the sins you can think of here.]* I am sorry for my sins and want to turn away from them, to stop doing them, and live as a new creation. Because of Jesus I ask for Your forgiveness and I trust that in Your mercy You will forgive me. Thank You, God, for making me clean and new again. Help me live as Your child, following Your ways. Amen.

If there are people you've sinned against make a point to go to them and ask for forgiveness, too, and see how you can make things right.

Use this prayer, or better yet, your own version of it as a regular way of confessing your sins to God.

FAITH PRACTICES:

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

READ JOHN 15:9-11 IN YOUR BIBLE.

Being a disciple of Jesus means becoming more and more like Him. Notice it's not "being like Jesus," no one can be exactly like Jesus, we're set up for failure if we believe we're not disciples unless we are equal to Jesus in every way. Becoming more like Jesus is a lifelong, ongoing process. Becoming acknowledges our shortcomings but also that we are being led along a path of growth. We're not what we were, but we're not what we will be either. We're becoming.

One characteristic of someone who is becoming more like Jesus is asking Him to guide and direct our thoughts, the things we say and the things we do. Jesus sets the example for us in the verses you read in John. He says, "Obey my commands just as I have obeyed my Father's commands." Even Jesus didn't put His will above God's. Throughout His ministry Jesus would take time to pray. He knew that going regularly to His Father and asking for wisdom, advice, and guidance was crucial for His ongoing work here on earth.

Remember lesson 10, Thy Will (not my will) be Done?

God cares deeply about you, about the big things in your life and the small. Remember, He wants to be your God, and have you as His person. So praying for guidance is music to God's ears. He promises to hear us and lead us.

For what kind of things should we pray for guidance? We can think in two big categories of decisions and relationships. Prayer about decisions might include life decisions like where to go to college or work. Or moral decisions like whether or not to participate in this or that activity. Or spiritual decisions like where to go next to become more like Jesus.

Prayer about relationships might include asking for guidance in mending a broken friendship, for help in forgiving someone who has hurt you, or praying for guidance about when and how to share your hope in Jesus with a friend. Those and other relationship needs can be brought to God.

So how do you pray for guidance? First...

REFLECT

What are the decisions or relationships that are on your heart today?

Where are you holding back from fully trusting God to guide you, wanting to do it your way rather than God's?

WRITE (OR THINK)

Here's an example of how to pray for guidance.

Look at Psalm 25:1-7 in the box in the margin. King David, who wrote this Psalm goes through several steps that we can follow.

1. TRUST. In verse 1-3 he states his confidence in God, basically saying, "God, I trust that You know and want the best for me." We confidently call on God's promise to be faithful.
2. SHOW/TEACH. In verse 4 he says, "I can't see everything and I don't know everything, but You can and you do. Show me and teach me." Here we ask God to open our eyes and speak to our hearts about our decisions and relationships. Here we list the specific needs we have and ask Him to show us those we haven't yet seen.
3. GUIDE. In verse 5 David says, "You've helped me see and know, now move my feet and my hands." Here we ask for courage, and motivation and strength to do what God has revealed to us.
4. REMEMBER/FORGET. In verses 6 and 7 David asks God to act toward him in love, forgiving and forgetting David's past sins. We humble ourselves and again claim God's promise of faithfulness.

This isn't the only way to pray for guidance, but patterns like this can be helpful in keeping our hearts focused on God rather than on just our needs.

RESPOND

Do it. Give the pattern a try this week and ask God to guide you.

¹ *In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.*

² *I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.*

³ *No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.*

⁴ *Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.*

⁵ *Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.*

⁶ *Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.*

⁷ *Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love*

FAITH PRACTICES:

READING AND REFLECTING ON GOD'S WORD

READ

Psalm 119:105 in your Bible.

We don't know for sure who wrote Psalm 119. King David wrote a lot of the Psalms, so there's a good chance that it was him, but we don't know. What we do know is the author of the Psalm loved God's word. In verse 11 he talks about hiding God's word in his heart. In verse 35 he says he finds delight in God's commands. In verse 81 he says he puts his hope in God's word. And in verse 119:105 he compares God's word to light from a lamp that helps him stay safely on the path. The author not only loves God's word but he recognizes that it's a gift to keep him walking with the Lord.

You can read the Bible for a lot of reasons. For information, for history, for doctrine and teachings, to see how God has worked in and through the lives of His people. Those are all good reasons and you should read the Bible for all those things. But an important part of being a disciple of Jesus is simply reading God's word and allowing it to work on you.

In 1 Samuel 3 there's a story of Samuel as a boy in the temple. He hears God's calling to him and says, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10 NIV) This is the kind of Bible reading we're talking about: where we read God's word with humble open hearts, in order to hear Him speak to us.

How do read and reflect on God's word. First, start with a passage or several verses in the Bible. We'll use Philippians 3:4-9 as an example. Pray the prayer that Samuel prayed, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening," and then...

READ*

Read the passage a couple times, slowly, carefully. Make a mental or written note of any words or phrases that stand out to you, maybe they're difficult to understand, or they have an interesting ring to them. Concentrate on hearing what God is saying to you, being careful not to read your own thoughts or

agenda into the passage. Try to capture the overall message of the passage as well as the small pieces that make it up. Then...

REFLECT*

Ask yourself questions about the passage. Where do I see my own shortcomings (the Law) in this passage?

Where do I see God's grace and promise in this passage (the Gospel)?

What is God saying to *me and my situation* in this passage? Then...

WRITE*

Keep a journal with you when you read and reflect on God's word. Write the answers to the questions you asked yourself. Write out the passage in your own words. Write any thoughts that come to mind. Then...

RESPOND*

Ask yourself, now that you've read and reflected on God's word, what is He inviting you to do with it. Maybe to live differently. Maybe to trust Him more deeply. Maybe to stop something or start something or talk to someone. Ask the "now what" question and go where you're led.

There are lots and lots of ways to do this. Devotion books and online reading plans abound. The important thing is to do it. Try one way for a while then try something new. Ask your small group leader or a trusted friend for ideas. But do something, and see what God will do!

*If you're thinking, "Read, Reflect, Write, Respond...wait a minute, has this whole journal been trying to teach me how to read and reflect on God's word on my own?" The answer is yes! By now it should be second nature to you!

FAITH PRACTICES: REFLECTION

Now that you've looked at a couple faith practices a little take some time to reflect on what you've learned...

INTERVIEW

Talk to someone who has been praying and reading God' word for a long time (parents or grandparents are great options, but any follower of Jesus in your life will do). Ask them some of these questions:

What do you cherish about prayer?

What kinds of things do you pray about?

What about reading and reflecting on God's word is important to you?

Describe your habit of Bible reading and reflection.

RESPOND

What is your plan for praying and reading the Bible?

CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY & TIPS ON TELLING YOUR STORY

The final piece of this Confirmation Journey is for you to think through, write and share your testimony with your small group. It's a big deal...it's you sharing how you've noticed Jesus changing you and growing your faith. These next pages will help you understand what a testimony is and help you plan how to write and share yours. Your small group leader is here for you, too. They can help you work on this and help you put into words what God has been doing.

A TESTIMONY CAN BE:

- your spiritual life-story
- your statement of faith
- a map of your spiritual journey
- an opportunity to reveal your thoughts about Jesus

WHY SHOULD I SHARE MY TESTIMONY?

First, and most important, you have something to share! God has been at work in your life in big and small ways, in ways that are unique to you and your circumstances. No matter how long you've been following Jesus you have something to share about His work in your life. It might be dramatic, a huge change that came over you in a powerful way. Or it might not. It might be how God worked in ordinary ways in your heart over a period of time. It doesn't matter. You have a story to tell and it should be told!

1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Working on and sharing your testimony will help you be prepared to give an answer for what you believe. Because you've thought it through, put it on paper and shared it with your group you'll be more prepared when someone at school or on your team asks why faith and church and Jesus are important to you.

A TESTIMONY IS MADE UP OF THREE STORIES:

MY STORY: WHERE I WAS, WHERE I AM

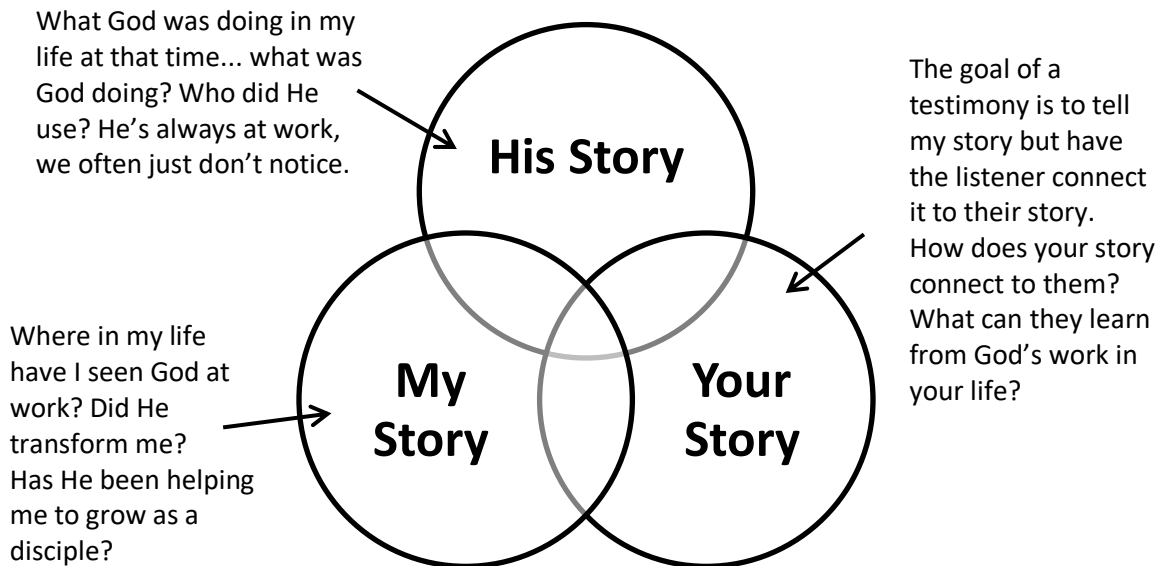
My Story tells your experience. In My Story there's usually a moment where you recognized that things needed to change or you recognized that things did change. My Story might be a transformation story or a growth story. More on that later.

HIS STORY: WHERE GOD HAS BEEN AT WORK IN MY STORY

His Story explains how God was working in the experiences you mentioned in My Story. It's you telling of how you recognize that God was at work. You may have noticed this during the events in My Story or later. His Story makes sure the focus of your testimony isn't on you but on God and what He has done.

YOUR STORY: WHERE CAN SOMEONE ELSE SEE THEMSELVES IN MY STORY/HIS STORY?

Your Story is how you connect My Story to the listener. Hopefully as they listen to you tell My Story and His Story they begin to see how God has been and is at work in their own circumstances. Your Story makes sure that your testimony is something others can relate to.



PLANNING MY TESTIMONY

What kind of story is My Story?

IS MY STORY A TRANSFORMATION STORY?

A transformation story, one that tells how God brought you to faith in Him, does several things:

- Gives hope to non-Christians (shows them God cares for everyone)
- Encourages Christians (reminds them of their own salvation)
- Reminds you of God's goodness (everyone needs a reminder of this)
- Gives the "big picture" of your life (includes your life before meeting Christ and after)

There is no formula for a transformation story, but if there was this one might look like this...

BEFORE + AFTER = MY TRANSFORMATION STORY

In this kind of story you might share what your life was before you met Jesus, or BEFORE you became committed to following Him. What issues did you wrestle with? What were your thoughts about faith, God, and church? What were you doing with your life? In what direction were you heading? How did you feel?

Then you would tell HOW Jesus stepped in. What was said? Who told you about Jesus? Where were you? What were you thinking? How were you feeling? What did you say or pray? This part is critical because non-believers need to know that it's simple to develop a relationship with Jesus. They need to realize that they don't have to have a church membership, or a perfect past or anything else in order to put their trust in Jesus.

Finally you want to tell what your life has been like AFTER trusting Jesus to be your Lord. Be honest! Don't think you have to make your life look neat and pretty. Even in the midst of your struggles, Jesus can teach you incredible things, so share what you've learned and where you hope to be as you follow Jesus every day.

IS MY STORY A GROWTH STORY?

A growth story, one that shares what God has been teaching you lately, does these things:

- Shows non-Christians that God is real and personal to you (He's alive and at work today)
- Motivates Christians (reminds them that God cares about all the details of life)
- Holds you accountable (encourages you to "walk the talk")
- Gives a "snapshot" of your life (this is what's happening now)
- Shows a realistic side to the Christian faith (reveals the bumps and bruises all Christians experience)

Again, no formula, but a growth story might lay out like this...

ISSUE + LESSON + RESPONSE = MY GROWTH STORY.

What ISSUE or QUESTION have you been struggling with? What's been going on in your life that God is using to challenge or stretch you? In what ways have you been stumbling in your walk with Christ?

What LESSON did you learn from your issue/question? What insight from the Bible did God give you? What friend encouraged you? What have you learned or in what way have you grown since the issue/question first presented itself?

What RESPONSE is God calling for? Or what RESPONSE do you need from your listeners? If there was a definite lesson God taught you, how does He want you to live now? If there hasn't been an answer yet, how do you want others to pray for you? Could your response challenge others to grow?

So, what kind of story is your "My Story"? Read through these prompts on the next page to help you think it through.

TRANSFORMATION STORY

BEFORE + HOW + AFTER = MY TRANSFORMATION STORY

BEFORE

- Tell how you thought, acted, and felt.
- Describe what you put your faith in or what you trusted for security (friends, money, dating relationships, school, activity, sex, sports, etc.).
- Share what you thought about God, the Bible, and Christians.
- Tell what hope you had for the future.

HOW

- Describe how you got to the point at which you knew you needed Jesus.
- Who told you about Jesus? Under what conditions?
- Share what changed that enabled you to trust Jesus.
- Write down the details of your immediate thoughts after putting your faith in Him.

AFTER

- Explain what your first days and months were like as a new Christian and what your life is like now.
- What questions have been answered for you? What questions remain?
- Have you reached out to anyone since becoming a Christian? How do you now feel about God, the Bible, church, and other Christians?
- What are the biggest differences in your life now that you're a Christian? Biggest joys? Biggest fears?

GROWTH STORY

ISSUE + LESSON + RESPONSE = MY GROWTH STORY

ISSUE

- Tell what question or life issue was nagging at you and why.
- Share how the issue/question affected you, your walk with God, other relationships, involvement in other activities, etc.

LESSON

- Tell about the process you went through to deal with the issue/question.
- Describe who helped you during that time (friend, family member, pastor, Bible, etc.).
- Describe the conclusion you came to.
- Share what you've learned through the process about yourself, God, others, the church, etc.

RESPONSE

- Share your current plan to continue moving forward in your walk with Christ.
- Share whether or not you feel equipped to help others with similar struggles/questions.
- Tell about your biggest surprise (good or bad) during the lesson.
- Tell how others might be able to care for you.

TIPS ON TELLING YOUR STORY

Here are some quick tips that may help your preparation and enhance your presentation.

PRAY

This is obvious but we can get so consumed in the task of writing and figuring out our testimony that we forget to do what is essential!

DO A HEART CHECK

Are you ready to publicly represent Jesus? Be sure your heart is right with God and others. Is there anyone you need to talk to? Apologize to?

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Remember, you're sharing this with your small group...people just like you, many who have shared or will be sharing their testimony, too. They are there to be supportive of you and to celebrate with you how God has been at work in your life. *And*, you have the chance to encourage them with your testimony. It's a win, win!

WRITE IT OUT

Not only will this help you get your thoughts together, but it will enable you to begin remembering your story. Plus, if you completely forget everything—including your name—it's right in front of you. Also, be sure to type it out in a large font so that it's easier to read. Turn a copy in to your small group leader before you share.

GET FEEDBACK

Before you present your story publicly, be sure to show it to your small group leader and anyone else you trust to get their thoughts and feelings. Be open to comments so your testimony can be as clear and effective as possible!

PRACTICE

Read it out loud AT LEAST 3 times. Do it!

KEEP IT SHORT: 3-5 MINUTES

You don't have to share every detail or go on and on. Keep it simple and clear.

IGNORE DOUBTS

Expect your mind to be filled with lots of doubts and messages like, “Who do you think you are to share your story? You’re such a hypocrite. God can’t use you.” This is a strategy of Satan. Fortunately, as a Christian, you don’t have to be perfect to share your story (no one is perfect!). But you do need to know that God is with you and is cheering you on. And so are the people who are praying for you.

KEEP YOUR FOCUS ON GOD

Remember, it’s God who has given you a story to tell. Be excited about your story, but be sure to give God the credit He deserves.

HAVE FUN!

You are loved by God and your friends no matter how you do, so relax and enjoy the privilege of telling others about the incredible relationship you have (and they can have) with Jesus.

NOW WHAT?

1. WRITE IT OUT.

After you’ve decided what kind of testimony (transformation story or growth story) you’d like to give, you can use one of the outlines on the following pages to help you prepare.

2. SHOW IT TO YOUR SMALL GROUP LEADER.

Get some feedback. Does it make sense? What ideas might be helpful? Be quick to listen, but don’t feel like you need to include suggestions. Remember, it’s your story.

3. SHARE IT.

Remember the tips listed above, especially to have fun!

OUTLINES

TRANSFORMATION STORY OUTLINE

BEFORE + HOW + AFTER = MY TRANSFORMATION STORY

A. BEFORE (MY STORY)

B. HOW (HIS STORY)

C. AFTER

D. IMPORTANT SCRIPTURE PASSAGES — WHAT SCRIPTURE PASSAGES SUPPORT MY LEARNINGS?

E. CONNECTING MY EXPERIENCE AND NEEDS TO THAT OF OTHERS (YOUR STORY).

F. CONCLUSION — WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO AS YOU CONTINUE TO GROW AS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS.

GROWTH STORY OUTLINE

ISSUE + LESSON + RESPONSE = MY GROWTH STORY

A. ISSUE (MY STORY)

B. LESSON (HIS STORY)

C. RESPONSE

D. IMPORTANT SCRIPTURE PASSAGES — WHAT SCRIPTURE PASSAGES SUPPORT MY LEARNINGS?

E. CONNECTING MY EXPERIENCE AND NEEDS TO THAT OF OTHERS (YOUR STORY).

F. CONCLUSION — WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO AS YOU CONTINUE TO GROW AS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS.

CHECKLIST FOR TESTIMONIES

- _____ 1. Does my testimony tell something about what Jesus has done? Do I share the Good News of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection?
- _____ 2. Does my testimony use one or more Bible passages?
- _____ 3. Can other people relate to my story? Does it reach them where they live? In other words, is my experience one that others can and do have?
- _____ 4. Do I share a specific need that Jesus meets? In other words, can people hear in my testimony a real difference Jesus can make in their lives?
- _____ 5. Does my testimony invite people to know and connect with Jesus – in worship, in the Bible, in Baptism, in a group of Christians?
- _____ 6. Is my testimony authentic? Is it realistic and truthful?
- _____ 7. Is my testimony more about Jesus than about me?

Have a parent or your small group leader read through your testimony to help you edit. Share a copy of your testimony with Heather prior to sharing it with your small group.

CONFIRMATION VERSE

Each Confirmation Journey participant gets to select a verse as your confirmation verse. This verse or passage should be one that is significant to you and your relationship with Jesus. One that encourages you in your faith and inspires you to trust the Lord.

Use this space to write down ideas that you've found. **Circle the verse you select.**

Why did you choose this verse?

In what ways does this verse remind you about Jesus' character and what He's done for you?

How does this verse inspire you to continue to be a disciple of Jesus?

CONFIRMATION STOLE PREPARATIONS

You will be decorating a confirmation stole for your Confirmation weekend. A stole symbolizes being tied with Christ in all aspects of life. Your stole also is a great reminder of your Confirmation weekend and process.

Decorating your stole is a great opportunity for you to express the faith that has been affirmed over your life as you've grown as a disciple of Jesus

How do I know which symbols to use? Sometimes that is the hardest part.

For the personal symbols, think about what you like. Make a list here:
We've seen pets, sports, shopping bags, phones, instruments, computers, food. If you love it, it's perfect for your stole.

Which Christian symbols do I pick? Again it's up to you. Make a list here:
When you think about your relationship with Jesus, what could represent milestones of where you've grown in your faith. You can also search the internet. Search "crismons" or "Christian monograms" and see what you get. You could also Try to represent your Confirmation verse in an image.

CONCLUSION

You did it! You worked through all these pages and all these lessons. You've read, reflected, written, and responded. You've spent time in God's word, in your catechism, and talking with people who have followed Jesus for a while. And here you are. Please turn in your completed Journal to Heather Dimmel at Hosanna Main.

So what?

So what did you learn? Are you more aware of God's activity in your life than you were before? Are you more aware of His incredible love for you? Of the value of the gift of Jesus? Do you love Him more?

Are you different than you were before? Did thinking and learning about all of this change you inside? Do you see the world differently? Do you see your relationships with other people differently? Your relationship with Jesus?

We sure hope so. We hope and pray that you haven't just put in time in this journal. That you haven't just scribbled down words in a hurry to get it done. We hope that you've encountered the living, loving, almighty, saving God as you've done this work. And we hope that you're different because of it.

So, now what?

What's next? You'll take part in the Rite of Confirmation and publically share what you believe with our faith family and that's awesome! Then what? How will this journey and your confirmation live out in your day-to-day life? Don't let this be something that was just a moment in time. Let this be another step in a lifelong journey of following and becoming more like Jesus. Let confirming your faith be something you do every day. Let every think you do be rooted in who you are as a loved, forgiven, chosen, child of God.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

- Colossians 2:6-7