

PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

With Arms Wide Open: Grounding Gen Z in the Gospel by Expounding the Apostles' Creed

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Gospel Leadership

Recent research indicates that Gen Z is leaving the church in significant numbers. Additionally, those from this generation who remain involved in the church hold beliefs that are contrary to orthodox Christianity, denying the exclusivity and deity of Christ, as well as God's omniscience. Based on the evidence, one reason Gen Zers are leaving the church and not holding to orthodoxy is the lack of catechesis on the doctrines of the faith as exemplified in the Church's creeds. As such, this article contends that one of the best ways to help Gen Z churchgoers stay grounded in the Christian gospel is to incorporate the Apostles' Creed into their catechesis, as the creed has been a time-tested method of discipleship throughout church history and can serve as a springboard to the Scriptures to help answer Gen Z's deepest questions about life and faith.

INTRODUCTION

Recent research indicates that Gen Z is departing from the church in significant numbers. In 2019, Lifeway Research found that 66% of regular church-attending teens left the church after graduating high school. In 2024, Barna Research showed that only 16% of Gen Z attend church weekly, while 14% attend monthly. Given the consistency of this departure rate over the last seven years, the Pinetops Foundation estimates that by 2050, 35 million youth raised in the church will disaffiliate from Christianity.

The problem is not simply the number of Gen Zers leaving the church. It is also that those who remain hold beliefs that do not align with historic creedal Christianity. According to the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, 67% of practicing Christians believe that if a person is generally good and does good deeds, they will get to heaven.¹ In 2025, the Ligonier State of Theology reported that among evangelicals aged 18 to 34, 62% believe God accepts worship from all religions, 56% believe he learns from and adapts to different situations, and 52% believe that Jesus was a great moral teacher but not God.²

1 Cultural Research Center, "American Worldview Inventory 2020 – At a Glance," *Arizona Christian University*. https://web.arizonachristian.edu/CRC/2020/CRC-AWVI-2020-Release-04_God-is-Absent-from-Views-of-Purpose-and-Success.pdf

2 Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research, "2025 State of American Theology Study," Lifeway Research. <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Ligonier-State-of-Theology-2025-Report.pdf>

Assuming these statistics are connected, this suggests that one reason many Gen Zers are leaving the church is because they have not been taught the historic doctrines of the faith found in the Scriptures and reiterated in the church's Creeds.

In light of this situation, my contention in this article is that one of the best ways to help Gen Z churchgoers stay grounded in the Christian gospel is to incorporate the Apostles' Creed into their catechesis. After introducing Gen Z and discussing the current challenges and opportunities they face, I argue that using the Apostles' Creed as a tool for discipleship has two advantages. The first is that the church has used it for centuries to help believers stay grounded in the gospel. It thus has a track record of proven effectiveness. The second is that the Apostles' Creed can serve as a springboard for applying the Scriptures to the core concerns of Gen Z, answering their seven most profound questions about life and faith.³ This will help Gen Z believers connect to the Scriptures, to the historic roots of their faith, be conformed to Christ's image in holiness, and be better equipped to confront the multitude of cultural heresies that have existed since the time of the apostles.

WHO IS GENERATION Z?

Barna Research defines Generation Z as anyone born between 1999 and 2015. Thus, there are essentially two segments of Gen Z: one group consists of individuals aged 13 to 17, labeled "Teens," and the other consists of individuals aged 18 to 24, called "Young Adults."⁴ Barna Research identifies five trends that define Gen Z and shape how they view the world.⁵ First, they are screenagers who connect with others digitally. Over half of Gen Z spend 4 to 8+ hours on screen media each day. Second, their worldview is post-Christian. Only four percent of Gen Z have a biblical worldview. Third, the desire for "safe spaces" is common. Growing up after 9/11 and experiencing the Great Recession in 2008, Gen Z has developed an awareness that the world is unsafe and that no one can be fully trusted. Fourth, Gen Z is diverse. The Census Bureau found that 48% of them are non-Caucasian, and the "kindergartners who started school in 2016 were the first American class in which minority ethnicities made up a majority of students."⁶ Fifth, Gen Z's parents are often straddling extremes. They may be overly involved in some ways and too detached in others. In *The Anxious Generation*, Jonathan

3 Tanita Tualla Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God: Seven Questions About Life and Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2025).

4 Barna Group, *Gen Z Volume 3: Tracking the Changing Beliefs, Values & Attitudes of a Generation Coming of Age* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2024), 11.

5 Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z Volume 1: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 15–36.

6 Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: Vol. 1*, 34.

Haidt argues that parents are under-protective in the digital world and over-protective in the physical world, leading kids to face more threats and harms online than in real life.⁷

Lack of Theological Depth

The lack of theological depth is, in part, due to a scarcity in catechesis, which has led Gen Z to a mass exit from the church. J.I. Packer and Gary Parrett argue that catechetical practices waned in the Western church after the Puritan era (late 18th century) due to a turn away from external authority and resistance to authoritative instruction within the church.⁸ Instead of having pastors catechize their congregants, many evangelical churches adopted the Sunday School Model, a lay-driven ministry that focused on teaching Bible stories devoid of doctrinal application and instead emphasized moral lessons.⁹ Packer and Parrett directly connect the health of the church with the diet of catechesis: “Where wise catechesis has flourished, the church has flourished. Where it has been neglected, the church has floundered.”¹⁰ Going back into the 1990’s, Michael Horton lamented the results of a neglect in doctrinal teaching that led students to leave the church upon graduating high school:

The church’s equivalent of granny dumping in theological terms is its ignorance or outright rejection of creeds and confessions, in an effort to create the First Church of Youth. Its equivalent of child abuse is its failure to catechize and instruct the children in the great truths of Scripture, preferring to spend the majority of the time competing with video games and rock concerts. According to Gallup, one of the reasons many young people give for leaving the church is its failure to provide profound answers to their deepest questions in its headlong pursuit of marketing success. They have MTV already. What they need is a church that answers their questions.¹¹

Unfortunately, the trend Horton described in the 90’s Youth movement is continuing in Gen Z today. The worldview of most Gen Zers does not align with biblical teaching, nor do they generally affirm most core doctrines of the Christian faith as outlined in the Apostles’ Creed. When examining their beliefs about the triune God, only half of Gen Z believes that God the Father is the all-powerful, all-knowing, and the perfect creator who rules the universe

⁷ Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024), 9.

⁸ J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 68.

⁹ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 71–72.

¹⁰ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 184.

¹¹ Michael S. Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom: Relating to God and Others through the Ten Commandments* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1993), 145.

today. Concerning Jesus the Son, more than half of Gen Z is uncertain if he is fully divine, with 35% strongly believing he is not.¹² Regarding the Holy Spirit, 52% of Gen Z view him as a force rather than a distinct divine person, and an additional 20% are unsure of who or what the Holy Spirit is.¹³ A primary reason for this lack of theological clarity is the limited biblical literacy and dwindling church involvement. According to the American Bible Society's 2025 State of the Bible study, only 36% of Gen Z engage with the Bible at least three times a year.¹⁴ Concerning church participation, a 2023 survey by the Springtide Research Center found that 40% of Gen Zers have never attended a religious service. Additionally, many leave the faith they were raised in at a younger age than previous generations. The Survey Center on American Life reports that 48% of those who left religion did so between ages 13 and 17, and 26% between ages 18 and 29.¹⁵

This doctrinal deficiency, due to a dearth of catechesis, has also affected Gen Z's ability to submit to the authority of Scripture and apply the gospel in every facet of their lives. In a 2025 survey from LifeWay research, Aaron Earls found that Gen Z "are among the most likely to say reading and studying the Bible has not made a significant difference in the way they live their life (43%) and among the least likely to say they want to learn and be reminded of truths in the Bible (79%)."¹⁶ Gen Zers are also more likely than any other generation to doubt God's love, provision (46%), and involvement (47%) during difficult circumstances.¹⁷ Concerning Biblical authority, Gen Zers are least likely compared to other generations to say they take steps to fix their attitude when they realize it does not please God (74%), believe the Bible is the written Word of God and is totally accurate in all that it teaches (69%), and that the Bible has authority over every area of their lives (62%). Jesus taught that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). Hence, Gen Z is struggling to live out the gospel because their hearts have not been conformed to its truths through catechesis.

Current Opportunities

Although these statistics may seem grim, recent research reveals a strong desire in Gen Z for spiritual realities. In 2024, Barna Research found that, since the pandemic, 34% of Gen Z is more eager for God. This surpasses other generations. A desire for a personal relationship with God is also clear,

¹² Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research, "2025 State of American Theology Study," 10.

¹³ Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research, "2025 State of American Theology Study," 12.

¹⁴ American Bible Society, *State of the Bible: USA 2025* (Philadelphia: American Bible Society, August 2025), 5.

¹⁵ Daniel A. Cox, "Generation Z and the Future of Faith in America," Survey Center on American Life, March 24, 2022, <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/generation-z-future-of-faith/>.

¹⁶ Aaron Earls, "Gen Z Churchgoers Attend More but Often Lag in Application, According to Lifeway Research's State of Discipleship," Lifeway Newsroom, June 23, 2026, <https://news.lifeway.com/2026/06/23/gen-z-churchgoers-attend-more-but-often-lag-in-application-according-to-lifeway-researchs-state-of-discipleship/>.

¹⁷ Earls, "Gen Z Churchgoers Attend More."

with 64% of Gen Z reporting praying in the past week. Furthermore, Gen Zers who identify as Christian value praying and learning how to pray more than any other spiritual activity (71%). Finally, a study by Barna Research in September 2025 showed that “Millennials and Gen Z Christians are attending church more often than before and more frequently than older generations. The typical Gen Z churchgoer now attends 1.9 weekends per month, while Millennials average 1.8 times, a steady increase since the lows during the pandemic.”¹⁸

These numbers should excite evangelicals and burden us with a desire to capitalize on this opportunity. The fields are indeed ripe for harvest, especially among Gen Z. They are standing with arms wide open to know, love, worship, and obey God, and to serve him with his church. How then can we help them stay rooted in “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” for the rest of their lives? One way, I believe, is to teach them the Apostles’ Creed.

CATECHESIS: BUILDING DISCIPLES THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

The first reason why evangelical churches should use the Apostles’ Creed to help Gen Z remain rooted in biblical Christianity is that it has proven effective as a catechetical tool throughout church history.

The word catechesis, from the Greek *katecheō*, means to “share a communication that one receives” or “to teach or instruct.” In short, catechesis is teaching a message one has received. J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett define Christian catechesis as “The church’s ministry of grounding and growing God’s people in the Gospel and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight.”¹⁹ Following the Great Commission, the church has sought to teach new disciples all that Christ has commanded (Matt 28:19–20). These commands can be summarized in two directives: love God and love others. Therefore, the process of catechesis takes these two commands and teaches them in three categories.

First, disciples are taught to love God and love others through learning Christian doctrine. This section of teaching is the “head” portion, focusing on what we need to think and believe about God. Predominantly, the church has utilized credal statements found in Scripture, as well as the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, to teach Christian doctrine. Christian formation is the second category that catechesis uses to help Christians grow in godly desires and affections for God. This is the “heart” portion of catechesis, and the church has utilized the Lord’s Prayer as one of the

¹⁸ “New Barna Data: Young Adults Lead a Resurgence in Church Attendance,” Barna Group, September 2, 2025, <https://www.barna.com/research/young-adults-lead-resurgence-in-church-attendance/>.

¹⁹ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 29.

essential tools to help believers grow in communion with God. Christian living is the third catechetical category, focusing on how Christians should live in obedience to God. This category is described as the “hands” of catechesis. Here the church has often used the Ten Commandments to instruct Christians in how to live an obedient life that brings glory to God.

Although all three catechetical categories are designed to ground disciples in the gospel, in what follows, I will focus solely on the Christian doctrine portion of the Apostles' Creed. This is because what Christians know and believe about God will influence how they love him and others. For this reason, the Apostles' Creed can also help develop a growing relationship with God through prayer and offer guidance on how to live, as I will explain in the next section. But to conclude this section, I want to offer a brief history of how the Apostles' Creed was created and how the early church used it in the discipleship process.

The Early Church's Utilization of The Apostle's Creed for Discipleship

The Apostles' Creed is one of the most authoritative summaries of Christian belief in Western Christianity and serves as the “highlight reel” of the core teachings of Scripture. Although many attribute it to the twelve apostles, critical scholarship has shown that it developed gradually over the first few centuries of the church's history, evolving from early baptismal statements into a formal confession. The earliest roots of the Apostles' Creed are found in baptismal interrogations, where catechumens were instructed by pastors through daily exposition of the Creed. Postbaptismal catechesis would continue through ethical teaching using the Ten Commandments and the Lord's prayer.²⁰ Early converts were asked three questions to confess their faith in what they believed about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which followed the three-fold formula of the Creed.²¹

The earliest known form of the Creed (Old Roman Creed) was developed by the largest and wealthiest church in Rome as their doctrinal statement and catechetical confession in the second century.²² The earliest written form is dated to 341 AD in a letter that Marcellus of Ancyra wrote in Greek to Julius, Bishop of Rome.²³ Additionally, the Creed was used in catechetical preaching by the early church to ground members in the fundamental truths

20 John Jefferson Davis, *Practicing Ministry in the Presence of God: Theological Reflections on Ministry and the Christian Life* (New York: Cascade Books, 2015), 2–5.

21 Ben Myers, *The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 1–2.

22 Norman V. Hope, “Christian Creeds and Confessions,” in *Baker's Dictionary of Practical Theology*, ed. Ralph G. Turnbull (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), 278.

23 Elliot Ritzema and John D. Barry, “Apostles' Creed,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Bible Software.

and norms of the Christian faith. This practice dates to the *Didache* (c. 90 CE) and is also evident in the sermons of Cyril of Jerusalem (313–86 CE), John Chrysostom (347–407 CE), and Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE).²⁴

One of the key reasons the Creed was developed was to combat common heresies surrounding the person and work of Jesus Christ to produce sound doctrine amongst the church's converts. In the early second century (107 AD), Ignatius of Antioch wrote a letter to the Trallians to speak against the heresy of Docetism, which denied Christ's full humanity.²⁵ In chapter nine of the letter, Ignatius quotes the Christological section of the Creed to defend Jesus' full humanity and deity:

Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and [truly] died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.²⁶

Later in the second and third centuries, Irenaeus and Tertullian both implemented aspects of the Creed to promote orthodox doctrine against other heresies such as Gnosticism²⁷ and Modalism.²⁸ Nate Pickowicz argues that “The early ecumenical church councils that produced the Nicene Creed and the Definition of Chalcedon were responding to serious doctrinal errors that threatened Christianity.”²⁹ Thus, the church's Creeds provided a clear line between heresy and orthodoxy, allowing the church to flourish in the first few centuries.

Between the third and sixth centuries, the Creed underwent gradual development as local churches expanded and clarified their baptismal formulas.³⁰ Theological controversy, particularly surrounding Gnosticism, led

²⁴ Joel R. Beeke, *Reformed Puritan Theology: Historical, Experiential, and Practical Studies for the Whole of Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023), 563.

²⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *The Epistles of St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch*, trans. J. H. Srawley (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1910), 71.

²⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 69–70.

²⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Five Books of S. Irenaeus against Heresies*, trans. John Keble (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1872), 33.

²⁸ Tertullian, “Against Praxeas,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, vol. 3 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 597.

²⁹ Nate Pickowicz, *Christ and Creed: The Early Church Creeds and Their Value for Today*, (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2023), 17.

³⁰ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2 of *The Greek and Latin Creeds* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 45–50.

the church to clarify Jesus' personhood as both fully divine and fully human, and to confess that God is "the Father Almighty," two statements Gnosticism rejected.³¹ Over the next three centuries, additions were added, such as Christ's descent into hell, the communion of saints, and the life everlasting to further clarify the work of Christ and its benefits for the Church.³²

The designation *Symbolum Apostolorum* ("Apostles' Creed") first appeared in the fourth century, when Tyrannius Rufinus wrote a Latin commentary on the Creed and attributed it to a confession the twelve disciples wrote together after Pentecost. Even though Rufinus' story is a legend and lacks a historical basis, it demonstrates how he, along with Ambrose, acknowledged that the Creed reflected the beliefs and teachings of the Apostles.³³ By the early eighth century, the Creed was in its final form and was documented in the Latin tract *De singulis libris canonicis scarapsus* by the monk Priminus.³⁴

During the Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin relied heavily on the Creed to formulate their catechisms, which helped parents train their children in Christian orthodoxy. As in the early church, the Reformers instituted catechisms to provide clear, authoritative doctrinal statements that would keep the church from error. The Creed, along with the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, were instrumental in the development of Luther's large and small catechisms, the Genevan catechism, the Heidelberg catechism, and the Westminster catechism. These catechisms helped transform the Apostles' Creed from a pre-baptismal formula into a lifelong discipleship tool for training the next generation in orthodox doctrine, usable in the church and the home. The Creed has been used at key moments in church history to prevent heresy (in the second to fourth centuries) and to deepen understanding of Christian doctrine by returning to its roots (Reformation). Therefore, the evangelical church has every reason to continue using this proven method of discipleship with Gen Z.

Catechesis in Community

One of the central aspects of catechesis when catechumens were taught the Creed was the relational aspect of discipleship. Catechists would sit with the catechumen, maintain eye contact, and recite the doctrinal truths of the Creed. The catechumen would then recite these truths back to the catechist from memory. There was no process of writing anything down, but doctrinal truths were passed down and recited from memory through interpersonal and relational interaction. Packer and Parrett comment on the importance of

31 Hope, "Christian Creeds and Confessions," 278.

32 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 134–36.

33 Ambrose also associates the Creed with the apostles in AD 390 in one of his letters. Ritzema and Barry, "Apostles' Creed."

34 Ritzema and Barry, "Apostles' Creed."

the relational process of catechesis in saying, “We recall that in the ancient church the basic ingredients of the catechism was never to be written down. This meant a full engagement of the mind was essential. It meant too that the relational dynamics between instructor and instructed could not be neglected. . . There were sponsors as well, members of the faithful with whom candidates could rehearse and discuss what they were learning.”³⁵

The emphasis on community in catechesis demonstrates a strong connection to what Gen Z is yearning for to grow in their faith in Christ. Today, Chuck Peters, head of LifeWay Students, says, the best way to disciple and help Gen Z follow Jesus is through relational discipleship in the local church. Peters says, “We need to reach them in relationship, lead them to discover their new identity in Christ and teach them the fundamental, foundational doctrines of faith through trustworthy teaching and deep discipleship to better form resilient, rooted and resolute followers of Jesus who see life through a biblical lens and live unashamedly for God. . . This can’t happen in isolation. It can only be communicated in the context of connection.”³⁶

Thus, the intentionality of discipleship occurring within relationships and community in the church is a strong reason why teaching the Apostle’s Creed to Gen Z will help them stay rooted in historic Christianity.

THE APOSTLE’S CREED ANSWERS GEN Z’S QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE AND FAITH

The second reason the evangelical church should teach the Apostles’ Creed to Gen Z is that it provides a way of bringing the Scriptures to bear on its most pressing questions. In 2021, Kara Powell and Brad Griffin wrote *Three Big Questions That Change Every Teenager*.³⁷ The book was based on research into Gen Z’s greatest longings and the major questions surrounding them. Powell and Griffin concluded that Gen Z’s main desires can be summarized in three words: Identity (Who am I?), Belonging (Where do I fit?), and Purpose (What difference can I make?). Pursuing a similar goal, in 2025, Tanita Tualla Maddox’s *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God* explored the seven most important and common questions Gen Z is asking about life and faith.³⁸ Not surprisingly, Powell and Griffin’s three questions are woven into Maddox’s seven. Since these are the key questions Gen Z is seeking to answer, I will use Maddox’s seven questions to show how the Apostles’ Creed highlights biblical truths and answers each of them.

³⁵ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 70.

³⁶ Earls, “Gen Z Churchgoers Attend More.”

³⁷ Kara Powell and Brad M. Griffin, *3 Big Questions That Change Every Teenager: Making the Most of Your Conversations and Connections* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021).

³⁸ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*.

Question 1: Is God Good?

A 2023 Springtide Research study found that most of the questions Gen Z asks about God can, in fact, be summarized in one question: Is God *always* good? However, what do Gen Zers mean by the term “good?” Maddox says that “Good is often defined by Gen Z as what makes one happy, satisfied, secure, accepted, and well-liked, has only good outcomes, and is safe.”³⁹ Even though there is some truth to this definition, it has things badly back to front. The Bible defines goodness in terms of God himself. Moreover, as he never stops being who he is, his goodness is constant. Likewise, he never ceases to do good for his people. How might the Creed help us teach these truths to Gen Zers?

God’s goodness is seen in three places in the Apostles’ Creed. First, **“I believe in God the Father Almighty”** expresses the close, personal relationship we have with him as his adopted children. His goodness is seen in how, as our Father, he perfectly provides, protects, preserves, and has pity on us. Also, the word “Almighty” is a broad term that reflects all of God’s qualities. Albert Mohler says, “All God’s attributes – omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, self-existence, and immutability – are summed up in this one word, Almighty. Only the God who possesses the fullness of perfection and infinite majesty can truly be almighty and sovereign over creation.”⁴⁰ Therefore, believing that God the Father is *Almighty* means believing that he is not only *always willing* to help us but *always able* to help us.

Second, **“I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord”** not only alerts us to the doctrine of the incarnation—that the Son of God became fully human—but to the fact that as the Father’s “only Son,” he shares the very same divine nature as God the Father and now, as our risen Lord, reigns over all things. Moreover, since he is fully human, he can sympathize with our weaknesses, having been tempted like us (yet without sin) and, having suffered for us, can help us in our times of need. In Jesus’s incarnation, then, God not only dwelt among us but became one of us so that he might enter into a relationship with us. His goodness is further magnified by Jesus’s death and resurrection in which he righteously dealt with our sins so that we can be forgiven.

Third, **“I believe in the Holy Spirit”** introduces us to the third person of the Trinity, who is always with us and lives inside us. He is the one who opens our eyes to Jesus, regenerates us, enables us to trust in Christ, and begins to change us into his image. He is also our comforter and counsellor

³⁹ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 35.

⁴⁰ Albert R. Mohler, *The Apostles’ Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits* (Nashville, TN: Moody Publishers, 2019), 10–11.

and the one who provides us with peace and assurance that we are God's children—especially when we struggle with doubting God's goodness and love during times of temptation and suffering.

Therefore, by learning and understanding the sovereign and loving nature of our Triune God as outlined in the Apostles' Creed and explained in detail in the Scriptures, Gen Z believers can realise that God is always good because he never changes, is always with them, and even uses their suffering for their good and his glory. Such an understanding will greatly assist Gen Zers to follow Christ and dedicate their lives to him.⁴¹

Question 2: Am I Enough?

As screenagers, Gen Zers are constantly playing the comparison game and trying to “measure up” to prove their worth to friends, parents, and followers. Maddox says, “On average, four out of ten Gen Zers globally are not confident they are worthy of being loved, and they are bringing that into adulthood.”⁴² There is no room for error in today's cancel culture. Therefore, Gen Zers often define their identity through their performance. If they must prove their value to others, how can they measure up to be worthy of being loved by a holy God? Yet Maddox rightly states that “It is not what we do that makes us worthy of God's love; it is God's love that gives us value. In other words, we do not earn God's love by proving our worth, but we are valuable because God loves us.”⁴³

Through teaching the Apostles' Creed, Gen Z can be helped to see their God-given worth and value in several ways. First, ***“I believe in God ..., Creator of heaven and earth”*** teaches them that they are not accidents; God made, loves them, and has a purpose for them. Second, ***“I believe in God the Father”*** highlights the gospel truth that those who trust in Christ are not simply God's children by creation but have been adopted into his eternal family as his beloved sons and daughters (Col. 3:12). Third, Jesus shows Gen Zers that they are precious to him because it was in their place that he ***“suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.”*** He endured these things because he loved them—even while they were sinners—and so that he might freely offer them ***“the forgiveness of sins.”*** Studying the Apostles' Creed will help Gen Zers to realize that they, like the rest of us, can contribute nothing to their salvation. Instead, it is God alone who declares them righteous and acceptable through the death

⁴¹ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 44.

⁴² Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 47.

⁴³ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 55.

and resurrection of his Son. Knowing this truth will empower Gen Zers to love their enemies and forgive those who have wronged them, just as Christ has done for them.⁴⁴

Question 3: Will You Accept Me?

Not only does Gen Z value acceptance, but it prides itself on being more accepting of others than previous generations. Maddox says that acceptance for Gen Z involves three key aspects: belonging, agreement, and not asking someone to change.⁴⁵ Therefore, one challenge Gen Zers face in embracing Christianity is that following Christ will require them to change who they are and call others to make similar changes. However, in the Scriptures, we see that God both accepts us as we are and also transforms us, shaping us to be like Christ, in whom we discover and become our true selves.

Three phrases in the Creed help Gen Z understand that God *both* accepts them in Christ *and* empowers them to show neighbor love and acceptance to others. First, Jesus ***“suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was crucified, dead, and buried.”*** As we have seen, these are not simply historical facts: Jesus’s death for us while we were still sinners proves that God loves Gen Zers and accepts them just the way they are. Yet, the second phrase ***“the holy catholic church”*** teaches that God, in his love, calls Gen Zers to be part of his holy and set-apart people. Because he has ***“forgiven us of our sins,”*** Gen Z has been made new and transformed by the gospel so that they can be who he originally made them to be. Third, the ***“communion of saints”*** stresses the unbreakable bond shared by all believers—living and dead—in Jesus Christ. This reality provides Gen Z not only with acceptance from God but with a sense of belonging to God’s people. Being called and transformed by the gospel, Gen Zers have a place in Christ’s church. This enables them to offer neighborly love and acceptance to others outside the church, inviting them to find belonging in God’s family through faith in Jesus.⁴⁶

Question 4: Do All People Matter to God?

Most Gen Z students grew up during a time when social justice was gaining momentum. Following COVID-19, the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other significant events, Gen Z felt a need to seek justice in society and support those who were marginalized or mistreated. This raises the question of whether all people matter to God and the church. One reason why Gen Z has been disengaged from the church is that they do not see the

⁴⁴ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 64.

⁴⁵ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 69–73.

⁴⁶ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 83.

body of Christ caring for the oppressed and vulnerable.⁴⁷ However, contrary to what Gen Z assumes, the ministry of Jesus clearly shows that all people matter to God, and that he desires everyone to be redeemed and restored.

The Creed expresses this truth in three statements. First, because God is the **“Maker of heaven and earth,”** all people matter to him. He created each person in his image for a relationship with him. Therefore, everyone has equal dignity and worth in his eyes. Consequently, he not only desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4-5), but is grieved by oppression, discrimination, and exploitation in human relationships. Second, the Creed affirms that Jesus will **“come again to judge the living and the dead,”** ensuring that every act of injustice toward the mistreated will be addressed with perfect righteousness. Third, **“the holy catholic church”** teaches Generation Z that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world and people of all nations will gather before his throne to worship him forever. The word “catholic” signifies that the gospel is inclusive and for everyone. The universal church comprises males and females of every age, from every race and ethnicity, and all socio-economic backgrounds who trust in Jesus alone. Therefore, these creedal statements, rightly understood, will motivate Generation Z to be God’s prophets, speaking out against injustice where they find it and serving others with what God has given them.⁴⁸

Question 5: Can I Trust You?

Many Gen Zers struggle with trust because they live in a “hide-and-seek” world, unsure whether others are being honest and genuine. This is why the “BeReal” app became so popular among Gen Z: it helped friends be truthful about their lives and not put on a façade. However, even TikTok, which Gen Zers describe as the most “authentic” source of information, is still viewed as “fake, toxic, and unreliable.”⁴⁹ Maddox states that “Church hurt” is also a reason why Gen Z finds it challenging to trust God and organized religion.⁵⁰ A 2023 study by the Springtide Research Institute found that only 28% of those aged 13-25 have a high level of trust in organized religion.⁵¹ So how does the Creed speak to this question from Gen Z and show that the triune God of the Bible is worthy of trust?

First, the fact that Jesus was **“born of the virgin Mary”** demonstrates God’s “authenticity.” He has taken on a real human nature and, in that sense, become just like Gen Z, except without sin. Gen Zers can trust Jesus because he cares for them and understands how they feel, for he **“descended into**

⁴⁷ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 85–91.

⁴⁸ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 103.

⁴⁹ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 110.

⁵⁰ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 112.

⁵¹ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 113.

hell” for them. He can also sympathize with their weaknesses and share in solidarity with them, even in death. Second, since Jesus “*was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day rose again from the dead,*” and these events fulfilled all the promises of God in the Old Testament, it proves that God is faithful to his promises. Since he is also “*Almighty,*” he can never be forced to go back on his word. For these reasons, Gen Zers can trust God and respond in heartfelt worship by daily laying down their lives as living sacrifices, fully trusting him with their hopes, dreams, and desires.⁵²

Question 6: What Is True?

Gen Zers question objective truth because they believe that it does not always lead to freedom and can be used as a weapon. Since they care about others, if the truth of Christianity is perceived to harm or excludes people, they cannot accept its truth claims because they do not want to oppress others. Gen Zers also believe that their own truth gives them freedom. This truth is based on personal experiences, what they have witnessed and how they feel. However, the Bible teaches that God himself is the source of truth, not our feelings.⁵³ Moreover, because God’s truth is revealed through the Bible, rejecting what the Bible teaches for the sake of what we think is freedom is actually living under the control of sin. Paradoxically, obeying God’s truth is the real way to be truly free.

What is truly remarkable about God is that he meets us where we are and reveals his truth in personal and sometimes tangible ways. As we hear and believe the gospel, the Spirit of God opens our hearts and we experience new life in Christ.⁵⁴ We are then brought into a body of fellow believers, brothers and sisters in Christ, so that we might speak the truth to one another in love. So, how does the Creed talk about these wonderful gifts in a way that might help Gen Zers?

First, “*I believe in the Holy Spirit*” directs us to the third person of the Trinity, who brings the Scriptures to life for Gen Zers and helps them to believe the gospel of Christ and understand the mind of God (1 Pet. 1:12; 2 Cor. 2:11-12). He does this by regenerating sinful hearts and instilling in them a desire to know, love, and serve God. Additionally, he testifies to Gen Zers’ hearts that they are God’s beloved children and have been adopted into his family. Therefore, through the Spirit’s work, Gen Zers can experience God and taste and see that he is good as they read and study the Scriptures. The witness of the Spirit encourages them to be bold witnesses for Jesus and to testify of all he has personally done for them and is doing in them.

⁵² Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 123.

⁵³ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 133.

⁵⁴ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 143.

Second, becoming part of **“the holy catholic Church”** gives Gen Zers the experience of seeing Christ in action through his people. Likewise, **“the communion of saints”** highlights the love, unity, and fellowship that can be known by God’s family. By becoming part of a local church, Gen Zers will be able to see and feel Christ’s love through covenanting and gathering with other members of his body. Through participation in the life and ministry of the church, they will be reminded of the genuine transformation Christ brings to their lives and to the lives of others. Seeing Christ’s presence in his people will inspire believing Gen Zers to be faithful followers of Jesus and to share with others what they have personally seen and heard.⁵⁵

Question 7: Am I Safe?

From birth, Gen Z has been taught that the world is unsafe. Jonathan Haidt explains: “It was a world in which adults, schools, and other institutions worked together to teach children that the world is dangerous, and to prevent them from experiencing ... risks, conflicts, and thrills.”⁵⁶ Therefore, the questions “Am I safe?” and “Is God safe?” are very important to Gen Z.

Maddox states that Gen Z defines “safe” as being protected from physical harm, shame, or vulnerability.⁵⁷ However, as the character of Mr. Beaver points out in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, God’s idea of safe does not always match ours. He says, God is not safe, but he is good because he is the King. In other words, God is not safe in a worldly sense, but he is safe because he is good and trustworthy.⁵⁸ So, we must help Gen Zers see that God is the only one who can truly keep them safe, because, in his goodness, he is utterly committed to what is truly best for them.⁵⁹

This is why the Creed ends by reminding believers of our ultimate end: **“the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.”** True safety is knowing that death will not have the final word. Therefore, by confessing and believing in Christ’s resurrection, Gen Zers can be assured they are safe in the arms of their savior because not even death will not be able to hold them, just as it was not able to hold him. **“Life everlasting”** not only refers to eternal life in the world to come but also to the promise of a fulfilling life on earth (John 10:10). This doesn’t mean a life free of trials, sufferings, or hardships, but it does mean a joy-filled life as Gen Zers learn to walk in the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2).

⁵⁵ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 143.

⁵⁶ Haidt, *The Anxious Generation*, 88.

⁵⁷ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 147–49.

⁵⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (Zondervan, 1994), 80; quoted in Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 151.

⁵⁹ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 151.

Second, confessing that Jesus has ***“ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty”*** provides Gen Z believers with a sense of safety because the Son is daily interceding and advocating for them before the Father. Since Jesus’s high-priestly ministry is permanent and the salvation he provides is complete (Heb. 7:25), Gen Zers can rest in Christ, knowing they are secure and that no one can pluck them out of the Father’s hand (John 10:28-39).

Third, confessing belief in ***“the Holy Spirit”*** reminds Gen Z that they are safe with God because God is always present with them through his Spirit who dwells in them. However, as Maddox clarifies, “True safety is not safety from difficulty or hardship; true safety is that God is with us in the difficulty and hardship.”⁶⁰ The Holy Spirit is thus the comforter who strengthens us in our weakness so that we can comfort others when they experience times of suffering. Therefore, through understanding and confessing these statements in the Creed, Gen Z believers will be empowered by the Spirit to become intercessors and advocates for others as they are encouraged and comforted by the indwelling Spirit himself.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

Gen Z is a unique generation. It is among the largest group to leave the church at a young age and often lacks a deep understanding of Christian theology. However, Gen Z is also one of the most open and eager generations for God in the past century. In this article, I have attempted to show why teaching the Apostles’ Creed can point Gen Z to the Scriptures and help them stay rooted in historic Christianity. This is due both to its proven track record in church history and to its ability to address the specific questions Gen Zers are asking about life and faith. Now is the time to take advantage of the ripe harvest among Gen Z and, through the Creed, to teach them sound theology rooted in the Scriptures. As Mike McGarry says, “we must give Gen Z a faith, not that they can grow out of, but one they can grow into, for youth ministry is theological ministry.”⁶²

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⁶⁰ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 152.

⁶¹ Maddox, *What Gen Z Really Wants to Know About God*, 162.

⁶² Mike McGarry, *Lead Them to Jesus: A Handbook for Youth Workers* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 191; idem., *A Biblical Theology for Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2019); *Discover: Questioning Your Way to Faith* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2023); *Iconic: Being God's Image in Your World* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2025).