

Last month, news broke that rock singer Chris Cornell had committed suicide in the middle of a Soundgarden tour. The news shook our culture, in part because Mr. Cornell seemed so happy. He had a wife and three children, and by all accounts was happily married. He gave no outward indication that he was struggling with depression.

I wrote a post on Facebook, reacting to the tragedy. The thrust of my post was that if even someone like Chris Cornell can struggle with depression, then if you are struggling too, it doesn't make you weird or broken or a freak. It makes you pretty normal.

I put a plea at the end of my post - if anyone reading was considering doing something similar, would they please talk to someone first? I told them they could contact me if they wanted.

I didn't expect what happened next - the post went viral. It was shared over 800 times, and over the next couple of days, I received a handful of private messages from people I'd never met who wanted to know if I was serious that they could reach out to me.

Over the next week or so, I had conversations with several people who were at various stages of considering suicide. Again and again, they said the same things.

"I don't matter. No one cares about it. No one will miss me."

I don't matter.

There's no point.

This sentiment is becoming more and more widespread in our culture. It's nothing new. There's a story our culture has been telling for at least the last 100 years. We find it in philosophers like Nietzsche, who said "our existence has no meaning." We find it in writers like H. P. Lovecraft who suggest that if there are gods, they are cruel and distant and couldn't care less about humanity. We find it in scientists like Neil Degrasse Tyson, who tell us that the universe doesn't have a purpose, but also suggests that the universe is trying hard to kill us.

It has become more and more difficult for our culture to believe that life *has* a purpose, that we are more than smart monkeys that are terrified of our own impending death.

Which is why we need to confess God as Creator. To say, "I believe in God the creator" is to announce that we believe life has meaning, that we have a purpose, that every single one of us matters.

Our confession pushes back the darkness in our lives and in our world.

This summer, we're working our way through the Apostle's Creed, one of the earliest statements of what Christians believe. Christians all over the world say this creed together. We began last week with

the simple statement, "I believe..." We saw that 'belief' is more than just an intellectual exercise. Belief has to be something we can see. It has to matter in the real world for it to matter at all.

So today, we dive into the first phrase:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth.**

What does it mean to confess God is the creator of Heaven and Earth? First, let's be clear what it is not. The Creed is not interested in drawing a line in the sand between Faith and Science. I know in churches, to bring up the word 'creator' can quickly start fights about the age of the Earth and evolution and all that.

The Creed is not having that debate. Neither, for that matter, are the creation stories in the Bible.

So before we dive in, let me make something very clear: Christianity is not anti-science. You can be a brilliant scientist and be a person of faith. You can also be a brilliant theologian and a person of science.

You can believe the universe is 13 billion years old and be a Christian. You can accept Evolution as an explanation for human origins and be a Christian. Neither the Creed nor our denomination, the Church of the Nazarene, prohibits this. We don't take a hard stand on the HOW of creation. We insist that God is the creator, but the mechanism of creation - whether it was in six literal days or over billions of years - isn't a question that needs to be settled for us to have a relationship with God.

That's because to say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth" is not a scientific statement. It's not addressing *how* everything came to be.

Believing in God as the creator is about *why* everything came to be. We're talking about *purpose* today.

**[Scripture Slide]** Turn with me to Genesis 1. The first chapter of Genesis is a poem that tells the story of God creating the world. We're pretty sure it was written down after the Exile, when God's people had been conquered by Babylon and were living as captives in Babylon.

Babylon had a creation story. In their story, the world was created after a war among their gods. Marduk, the chief Babylonian deity, killed Tiamat, the goddess of the seas and chaos. He cut her body in half and then made the world as a temple for the other Babylonian gods to live in.

Pretty quickly, the gods got tired of working, so they complained to Marduk. His solution was to create humans as slaves. We did all the work (including making sacrifices) so the gods didn't have to.

You can imagine the kind of society this story created. The king and the priests - the representatives of the gods - lived well, while everyone else lived as slaves.

Even most Babylonians were oppressed. For the Jews, a people conquered by Babylon, they had no value. They had no meaning. They existed only to make the lives of the Babylonians easier.

Imagine how demoralizing living as a Jew in Babylon was. To wake up every day in a world that didn't care about you, under the rule of people who only wanted to use and exploit you.

But the Jews knew a better story. The Jews knew a better god than Marduk. So they told their story, the story of their god, as a direct challenge to the Babylonians.

Genesis 1 bears some striking similarities to the Babylonian creation story. That's on purpose. The Jews were subverting the story of their captors. They were telling a better story of the world - because they knew the world belonged not to Marduk, but Yahweh.

Here's how that story goes:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day. -- Genesis 1:1-5

The Genesis story opens with God and the earth. But the earth is "formless and void" - the Hebrew words here are 'tohu va vohu'. Chaotic. Purposeless. Devoid of meaning. (Sounds a lot like Nietzsche and Tyson.)

Marduk fought and killed the seas to create. But Yahweh, the God of Israel, speaks.

Let there be light!

And there was light.

Each successive day of creation goes like this. God speaks. God invites the world to take shape. On the second day, God separates the waters and creates a space, a sky, a firmament. On the third day, God gathers the waters below to create land.

The formless is taking shape under Yahweh's loving command.

Now it's time to fill the empty. So on Day Four, God makes the sun, moon and stars to fill the light and dark. On day five, God makes birds and fish to fill the skies and the seas. And on day six, God makes animals to fill the land.

You get the sense this whole story is going somewhere. The *tohu va vohu* is becoming a world. The formless takes shape under God's loving instruction. The empty is filled by God's creative words. You can feel the *tohu va vohu* going somewhere, like a big arrow is dragging you forward through the story toward... something.

That 'something' comes at the end of the sixth day:

Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.” -- Genesis 1:26-28

Humans are created as God's image, to rule the earth. God installs us as viceroys, to rule as God rules. Quite different from the Babylonian story, that teaches humans are nothing but slaves.

In Babylon, chaos is an enemy, an equal of Marduk. But for Israel, even chaos and darkness are subject to God's creative invitation to life.

To stand in Babylon and insist that Yahweh, not Marduk, is the creator, is to insist that the world has a better purpose than Babylon can imagine.

The Babylonian story taught that meaning is found only in war, that Israel deserved to be conquered, that humans exist only to slave away for the gods.

Israel insisted the world exists not because of combat, but because of loving creativity. Israel proclaimed that every single human bears the image of God, not just the religious elite.

Israel's story declares that the world has a purpose and it's unquestionably *better* than the Babylonian story.

Our culture needs a better creation story. We have become increasingly convinced that our world is formless and empty, that life has no meaning, that we have no purpose.

We're increasingly wondering if any of us actually matters.

Which is why our world needs a church that stands up and says, "I believe in God the Father, creator of Heaven and Earth."

To say this is to say, "The world is not *tohu va vohu*, formless and empty of meaning."

To confess we believe God is the creator is to confess that every single person matters because we *all* bear the creator God's image. We are not divided into kings and slaves. Haves and have-nots. Special and disposable.

We are the church that forms and fills. The church that follows the creative trajectory of God out of *tohu va vohu* into formed and filled. Formed as God's people, bearing God's image in the world. Filled by the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead

What specifically does it look like to jump into the creative flow of God's love that makes formless and empty into formed and filled? What does our *belief* that God is the creator *look like*? (After all, like we talked about last week, beliefs only matter if we can see them.

To confess God is the creator is to confess that we all matter. That there is a purpose to creation, that our lives are going somewhere and we're going there together. Catalyst is a place where everyone matters. Where everyone is worth a personal AND a divine investment. We are the people of God, where everyone has something to offer.

If you're a kid on summer break, enjoying a brief freedom from school, you matter. You are worth our time, our love, our attention, our emotional energy. And you have purpose -- you have something to contribute.

If you're a teen and trying to figure out what you want to be when you "grow up" or maybe you don't understand why the adults can't see you already are grown up, you matter. You have a purpose here

If you're young and married and you don't have kids, you matter. You have a purpose here.

If you have kids and they keep you so busy you can't remember what day it is without checking your phone calendar, you matter. You have a purpose here.

If you're single and you're not sure where there's a space for you, you matter. There's space for you here and you have a purpose here.

If you are a stay at home parent, longing for some adult conversation, you are doing important work. You matter. You have a purpose here.

If you're retired, you matter. You're not irrelevant. You have a purpose here.

If your job is not your passion, but simply a means to feed your family and sometimes it seems to drain the life from you, you are not alone. Your ideas and thoughts have value. You are more than your job. You matter. You have a purpose here.

If your life isn't exactly what you thought it would be when you were younger (or if it isn't even close), you matter. You have a purpose here.

If you've got so many skeletons in your closet you were pretty sure the building was going to catch fire when you walked in today, look. We're okay. You matter and you have something to contribute.

If you're still not sure you even believe in God, let alone that God is the creator of Heaven and Earth, you matter. You have a purpose here.

If you're convinced you don't matter, that no one cares, you belong here. You matter. And you have a purpose here.

To confess God is the creator is to insist that every single one of us matters. Every single one of us bears God's image. Every single one of us is called by God.

We're all moving from *tohu va vohu* to life and love. We're all

We believe in God, the Father almighty. Creator of heaven and earth.

### **Communion**

[Communion Slide] We meet God most fully in the person of Jesus (more on that next week).

### **Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

**Assignment/Blessing**

We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. We believe life has meaning and purpose. We believe that every single person matters.

You matter here, at Catalyst. You can find your purpose, how you fit into the larger framework of God's world here.

Psalm 8 Lectio assignment