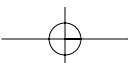
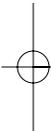
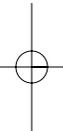


T R A I N I N G  
H E A R T S

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T E A C H I N G  
M I N D S



T R A I N I N G  
H E A R T S

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T E A C H I N G  
M I N D S

*Family Devotions*  
*Based on the Shorter Catechism*

STARR MEADE



P U B L I S H I N G  
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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# INTRODUCTION

In the first manual of pastoral practice ever written, the apostle Paul defined the church as “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). For many of today’s churchgoers, a pillar and support of truth is not necessarily what they seek when they look for a church. The first concern may be the warmth of the welcome, the style of a church’s music, or the number of weekly activities from which to choose. Faithfulness to biblical doctrine is becoming increasingly rare as the first thing people seek in a church.

The supreme test of a church, however, at least from the perspective of the New Testament writers, is this: Is the church the pillar and support of the truth? Is it thoroughly acquainted with the truth of the gospel as given in the Scriptures? Does it exalt God’s Word, giving it the place of preeminence in all its worship and in all its activities? Does it defend the truth at whatever cost, proclaiming it without compromise in a world of confusion and falsehood? Does it call its people to *know* God’s Word for the purpose of faithfully *living* by God’s Word?

## THE CHURCH’S TASK

In each generation, the church’s most critical task is to uphold and proclaim the truth as it was delivered to her by her Lord. One important aspect of this task is the diligent preparation of the church’s children to continue to be the support and pillar of the truth in the generation to come. God calls the church of each generation to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). When our children replace us as contenders for the faith, will they have a clear grasp of the faith they must defend? When they replace us as supporters of the truth, will they know the truth well enough to articulate it clearly and to recognize counterfeits?

Wise and godly men of another day understood the need for standards of truth and Christian doctrine. They saw the value such standards would have in presenting the fundamental teachings of

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Scripture in a concise and systematic manner and in providing a grid through which to sift all teaching and all ideas. With great care and much prayer, they worked together to formulate creeds and confessions to define the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Aware of the importance of passing these doctrines on to their children, they also prepared catechisms for the instruction of the young.

A catechism is simply an instructional guide. It is a handbook of questions and answers designed to teach principles of religion. To “catechize” children is to teach them to memorize the answers found in a catechism, so that when the catechism questions are asked, the children can reply with the correct responses. Because a good catechism is at the same time concise and thorough, when children have learned it well, their understanding of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith can be tested and found to be complete. One excellent catechism is the Westminster Shorter Catechism. In concise fashion, it gives children key biblical teachings about God, Scripture, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer.

Once, catechisms were used routinely. Church and family worked together to provide the most effective teaching possible for children growing up in Christian circles. Parents would work with their children at home, requiring them to memorize the answers to the catechism (and memorizing the answers themselves, as well). Families would discuss together the meaning of the questions and answers. Pastors would preach on topics addressed in the catechism and would systematically visit each church family, asking the questions to see how well family members had learned the answers.

Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter made it his practice to visit each of the eight hundred families in his church in a year, centering his visits on the instruction given in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Besides examining children and adults to see how well they knew the catechism, he would ask additional questions to see if the answers had been understood. He would then go on to encourage all the members of the family to live in the light of the truth of each memorized answer. Baxter claimed to have more outward signs of success in demolishing the kingdom of darkness among his church

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members through this practice than through all his public preaching to them.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, the practice of catechizing children has fallen out of favor, both in families and in churches. One reason for this is a fascination with new educational techniques that stress experience, student participation, and choice. Rote memorization has fallen out of favor. Yet, the things I remember best from my childhood are the things I memorized. The “ABC” song we all sing when we have items to alphabetize, the multiplication tables, common nursery rhymes, even lines from Shakespeare that I memorized just because they were beautiful, long before I understood what they meant—all these are indelibly fixed in my memory. I can call them up any time I need them, confident that they will be there to serve me.

It is said that if we require our children to memorize by rote, they will only memorize meaningless sounds and words without understanding them. Certainly we do a disservice to our children if we insist that they memorize words they do not understand, while we fail to take the time to discuss, teach, and explain the meanings to them. The solution, however, is not to discard memorization as a teaching method, but to faithfully supply meaning by discussing and explaining.

## THE CHURCH’S FAILURE

There is, however, another, graver reason catechisms have fallen out of favor. It is that doctrinal instruction in general, for anyone and especially for children, has become unpopular. In an attempt to attract nonbelievers, the church has occupied herself with providing the things the world finds attractive. In doing so, she has lost sight of her true purpose of being the pillar and support of the truth.

From the pulpit, comfort, inspiration, and “spirituality” are acceptable; doctrine is not. In a misguided attempt to maintain unity at any cost, doctrinal teaching is shunned because “doctrine divides.” Churchgoers criticize sermons stressing doctrine as not be-

1 J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 45.

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ing practical enough, without understanding that a truly changed life flows from a truly changed mind. Eager to meet people's demands, more and more churches offer warm, inspiring messages that never clearly define the gospel at all. In a growing number of worship services and church programs, entertainment is replacing the substantive teaching of Christian doctrine.

Nowhere are these things more apparent than in the children's and youth departments of the average American church. In my decade of service as Director of Children's Ministries for a local church, I sampled many curriculums and received numerous advertisements for others. Commonly, the colorful, glossy promotional materials promised "better games, new crafts, fun experiences your children will really enjoy." Certainly, there is nothing wrong with "games, crafts, and fun experiences" for children. Those of us who love children want them to enjoy learning. However, when page after page of promotional material describes the fun, while the curriculum's content is only hinted at in an obscure corner of a brochure, priorities are clearly misplaced.

Advertisers appeal to what research tells them people want. What are the church's priorities for its children? The advertising for children's curriculum makes the answer all too clear. That the children are entertained and that they have fun—these are the primary goals to which everything else seems to be subservient.

Even where teaching the Bible to children is a priority, teaching Bible *doctrine* seldom is. Children hear the same Bible stories repeatedly, almost always as moral lessons on how to behave. Typical Sunday school lessons reduce Bible stories to moral tales much like Aesop's fables. The focus is on the human being in the story, who becomes its main character. So the teacher comes to the end and concludes, "And you must be like David and God will bless you," or "You must not act as Ahab did or you will find trouble."

When Bible stories are used in this way, God sits on the periphery of the narrative, like the genie in a fairy tale, blessing human actors for good behavior or cursing them for failures. Children seldom learn to see that God Himself is the main character of every Bible story. They do not learn to ask about each account they read, "What does this story tell me about God?" They never learn to read all the biblical narratives in the light of God's overall purpose to redeem a people for Himself. All they learn is: Be good and God

## INTRODUCTION

bleses; be bad, and He does not. Not only is this a faulty representation of the gospel, it is not the gospel at all! What a tragedy!

God in His grace and condescension loaded Scripture with stories, concrete illustrations of abstract truth. But we must use the Bible stories as God intended them to be used. He gave them to us for the same reason He gave us all of Scripture—that we might know what He, the only true God, is like, and that we might understand the salvation He has provided for His people through His Son. Bible stories illustrate Bible doctrines. We who work with children should be grateful for that and should use the Bible narratives to help our children understand the doctrines of our faith. We waste Bible stories when we only use them to moralize or to equip our children to win Bible trivia contests.

Is the church equipping its children to be the support and pillar of the truth in the next generation? Several years ago, I heard a radio broadcast featuring on-the-spot interviews with Christian authors and publishers at a large Christian convention. Interviewers repeatedly asked attendees two key questions: “What is justification?” and “What is the gospel?” Most of those interviewed proved deplorably incapable of giving a lucid, biblical response to these questions. Yet Christianity *is* the gospel. The central issue of our faith is that of sinners being justified before a holy God. These things are essential to an understanding of the Christian faith.

If those being interviewed had been taught the Westminster Shorter Catechism, they would have had this response ready: “Justification is the act of God’s free grace by which He pardons all our sins and declares us righteous in His sight. He does so only because He counts the righteousness of Christ as ours. Justification is received by faith alone.” How simple and yet how thorough! Is there any reason people must wait until they go to Bible college or seminary to learn such a simple definition, one so basic to our faith?

Today, we are often content with “God” words and with warm feelings about Him. In a society rife with faulty ideas of God, we fail to give a definition to the word when we use it. Eager to include and to think the best of everyone, we rejoice when we hear those “God” words, assuming the person using them is one of us. When we combine this failure to discriminate with our natural sympathies toward children, we are even quicker to assume children are Christians when, in reality, they have no idea at all what it is to be one.

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One summer, at a Christian camp for children from troubled homes, a counselor reported to me a conversation she had with a ten-year-old camper. “I asked him if he had ever asked Jesus into his heart and he said he did that when he was six,” she said. She went on to tell me that they were thumbing through his new Bible together when he saw a picture of the three crosses on Calvary. “What is that story about?” the boy asked, curiously. The result of the discussion with the child was comfort for the counselor, who was convinced that the boy was “saved” because of whatever he had done when he was six. Evidently, however, it never occurred to her that whatever “decision” children may have made, if they have absolutely no knowledge of the crucifixion of Christ, it is not safe to assume they are believers.

## A PROPOSED SOLUTION

Those of us who care about passing on the baton of historic Christian truth must awaken to the importance of faithfully imparting its doctrines to our children. We cannot depend on haphazard, hit-or-miss Bible stories and memory verses, hoping that somehow our children will distill from them Christianity’s important teachings. Rather, we must provide careful, systematic instruction in doctrine. Children need a grid through which to sift all that they see and hear. We must provide this for our children while they are still young. Doctrine cannot wait until children are teens, because adolescents are making major life decisions. The theological framework on which to base those decisions, the biblical worldview, must already be in place.

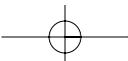
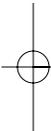
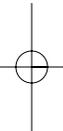
The purpose of this book is to provide a tool for Christian parents and churches who take seriously this task of imparting doctrinal instruction to their children. Questions and answers come from *The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English*, but the older version of the catechism may be used if preferred. Each question and answer of the catechism has six days’ worth of devotional readings for families to share together. The readings are simply written, with elementary and junior-high children in mind. They are brief, out of consideration for children’s short attention spans and for the busy schedules of contemporary families.

Each reading gives biblical support and simple explanations for

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the catechism answers. Every day for a week, the same question should be asked and the answer recited several times, followed by the reading provided. By the end of the week, the answer will be memorized. Prizes of some kind can be decided upon in advance, to be awarded after a certain number of questions and answers have been successfully learned. If one answer is memorized weekly, the entire catechism will be finished in two years. Because it contains such a wealth of information and because we remember best what we review repeatedly, I recommend taking children through the entire catechism more than once.

The apostle Paul called Timothy his “true child in the faith.” He instructed Timothy thoroughly and faithfully, then set him loose to carry on the ministry Paul himself had begun. This is what we as parents must do for our children. It is what we, the church, must do for the church that follows us, the church of the next generation. We must fulfill our responsibility now, so that we will be able to say with assurance, as Paul said to Timothy, “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:13–14).



# Q.1.

## WHAT IS MAN'S PRIMARY PURPOSE?

A. *Man's primary purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.*

### MONDAY

What happens when you use something for a purpose other than its *real* purpose? For example, what if you wanted whiter teeth, so you tried to brighten them up with white shoe polish? Would it work? Of course not! Shoe polish is for whitening shoes, not teeth. What would happen if you put marshmallows in your toaster? You would have a terrible mess, because toasters are for toasting bread, not marshmallows. Things work best when we use them for the purpose they were intended.

God had a purpose in mind for human beings when He created them. God intended for people to know and enjoy Him. Rocks and trees and kittens cannot enjoy God—but people can!

**Read Psalm 16:11.** This verse describes the joy and the pleasure people have in God when they live according to the purpose God has for them. Some people live as though their purpose were to have a good time or make a lot of money. People like this are never satisfied. They find that the joy of fun times or of having new things wears off. That is because they are not living according to the purpose God has for them. When we live to enjoy God, we are doing what God made us to do and our joy in Him will last.

### TUESDAY

Since God created us to enjoy Him, it is important to know how we can do that. You cannot fully enjoy a flower unless you stop and take a good look at it to see how beautiful it is and take a deep breath to see how wonderful it smells. You cannot fully enjoy an apple until you take

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a bite of it and find out how crisp and sweet it tastes. If you are going to enjoy God, you have to spend time finding out how wonderful He is.

**Read Luke 10:38–42.** Mary was enjoying Jesus. Martha was confused about the purpose God had for her. She seemed to think that her purpose was to work hard and be a good housekeeper. Jesus said Mary had made a better choice by choosing to spend time enjoying Him. The more time we spend getting to know how wonderful God is, the more we will enjoy Him.

## WEDNESDAY

One of the good things about living for the purpose God intended when He made us is that, no matter what is going on around us, we can still enjoy God. If I live for the purpose of having and pleasing friends, when my friends are gone I have nothing to live for. If I live for the purpose of being beautiful and healthy, once I grow old or become sick, I have no reason to live. If I live to make money to buy things, something may happen that causes me to lose everything. Then what will I do?

One of God's Old Testament prophets was Habakkuk. Habakkuk lived in Jerusalem, where he and his neighbors had comfortable homes and were at peace. Habakkuk lived to enjoy and glorify God. His neighbors, though, lived to please themselves. Because Habakkuk was a prophet, God showed him what would happen in the future. Enemy soldiers would destroy Jerusalem in a war. They would burn the comfortable houses, and Habakkuk and his neighbors would be left with nothing. Of course, Habakkuk did not look forward to losing everything. Since his purpose was not to enjoy *things*, but to enjoy God, listen to what he could say. **Read Habakkuk 3:16–18.**

## THURSDAY

God made everything for the purpose of glorifying Himself. That means that He made everything to show how wonderful He is. Right now, there are people who do not know much about God's glory; there are others who know about God but will not admit how wonderful He is. But God promises that someday everyone everywhere will know of His great glory. **Read Habakkuk 2:14.**

## QUESTION 1

Although some people refuse to see it, every created thing was created to show us something of God's glory, to show us something of what God is like. **Read Psalm 104:31 and Psalm 19:1.** When you look up at all the millions of stars in the night sky, what do you think about God? When you look at the strong, solid mountains that have stood for thousands of years, what do you think about the God who made them?

God's creation glorifies Him. It shows something of what He is like. We are God's creatures too. It is God's purpose that we glorify Him too.

## FRIDAY

What are some ways in which we can glorify God? How can we show how wonderful He is? One way is by praising and worshiping Him. **Read Psalm 29:2 and Psalm 50:23a.**

Jesus said we glorify God by doing good deeds. God is good, kind, and holy. When our actions are good, kind, and holy, we're showing people what God is like. **Read Matthew 5:16.**

The Bible tells us that we should do everything we do, even the simplest and most ordinary things, in a way that will glorify God. **Read 1 Corinthians 10:31.**

## SATURDAY

A strange thing happened to Belshazzar's dad. Belshazzar's dad ruled over the greatest kingdom in the world. He became very proud of his kingdom. God warned Belshazzar's dad that, if he did not give glory to God for his kingdom, God would take it away from him. Belshazzar's dad continued to be proud and, just as God had said, his kingdom was taken away from him for seven years. Not only that, but the king basically lived like an animal for seven years. At the end of the seven years, Belshazzar's dad got both his man's mind and his kingdom back again. Then he gave glory to God.

You would think that Belshazzar learned from what had happened to his dad. You would think that he would have understood that his purpose for living was not to please himself or to be a great king but to give glory to God. But Belshazzar had not learned.

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When he was king, he lived to make himself happy. He used the cups from God's temple for wine for getting drunk. One night, at one of his parties, a hand appeared out of nowhere and wrote on the wall of Belshazzar's palace. Frightened, Belshazzar sent for Daniel, God's prophet, to explain what the writing meant. Daniel reminded Belshazzar of what had happened to his father.

**Read Daniel 5:22–23** to see what else he said to him. That very night, enemy soldiers attacked, killing Belshazzar and taking his kingdom. God created us to give glory to Him, not to ourselves.

## Q.2.

### WHAT AUTHORITY FROM GOD DIRECTS US HOW TO GLORIFY AND ENJOY HIM?

A. *The only authority for glorifying and enjoying Him is the Bible, which is the word of God and is made up of the Old and New Testaments.*

#### MONDAY

Our primary purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy Him. But how do we do that? Where can we find out how to do it? The only One who really knows how to glorify God is God Himself. He is the only One who can tell us how to glorify Him.

God could have spoken to us any way He chose. He has chosen to speak to us through His Word, the Bible. Everything we need to know about God in order to glorify and enjoy Him is found in its pages. If we were to ask someone how to glorify God or if we were to look it up in a book other than the Bible, we could not be sure we were getting right information. But we can trust the Bible because it is the Word of God, who is never wrong. **Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17.**

#### TUESDAY

The Bible is a wonderful book. Inside it are letters people wrote to friends, songs, stories, and poetry. There are laws and sermons and predictions (hundreds of these predictions have already come true). Many different people wrote the Bible, including kings, fishermen, a farmer, and a doctor. All these people wrote what God wanted them to write because the Holy Spirit directed them. **Read 2 Peter 1:20–21.**

#### WEDNESDAY

God first gave His Word in written form to the Israelites. They were on their way from Egypt, where they had been slaves, to the

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land God had promised them. God met them on Mount Sinai. He wrote the Ten Commandments on two pieces of rock and gave them to Moses. He also gave Moses many other laws and teachings that Moses wrote down. Even though this was only a small portion of the Bible compared to what we have now, the Israelites were aware of what a wonderful privilege it was to have God's Word to read and to keep. **Read Deuteronomy 4:5–8.**

God is so much greater than we are that we could never discover Him by ourselves. He had to tell us what He is like and how to glorify Him or we would never know. God is good! He gave us His Word in the Bible so we could know and please Him. **Read Deuteronomy 29:29.**

## THURSDAY

Many things that we have are important, but we could do without them if we had to. God's Word is so important that we could never do without it. Without God's Word, we could only imagine what God is like and we would certainly be wrong. Without God's Word we would have to guess about how to live wisely and how to know right from wrong—and each person's guess would be different from every other person's! Of all God's good gifts to us, the Bible is one of the very best. Ask God to give you a thankful heart that appreciates the value of His Word. **Read Psalm 119:97–105.**

## FRIDAY

The Bible is the only authority on how to glorify and enjoy God. That means the Bible has the final word; it is always right. If a person or a book ever disagrees with what the Bible says, it is the person or the book that is wrong. The Bible is always right. That is because it is from God who is never wrong and never makes a mistake. The apostle Paul wrote that if someone were to teach something other than what the Bible teaches—even if that someone were an angel from heaven—he was to be accursed! **Read Galatians 1:8.** That is how important it is to reverence God's Word as higher and more important than anything else.

God commands people not to tamper with His Word. They are not to add anything to it, nor are they to take anything away from

## QUESTION 2

it. **Read Deuteronomy 4:2.** God becomes very angry with those who say something is God's Word when it is really just their own teaching or opinion. **Read Jeremiah 23:31–32.**

## SATURDAY

Even though God commands people not to do it, people *do* add to God's Word and they *do* take away from it. People do say "God says" and go on to say something that God does not say at all! Sometimes, even preachers will say things about God that are not true. It is very important to make sure that what people say is in the Bible really is in the Bible. In New Testament times, people in the city of Berea checked everything the apostle Paul said to see if it agreed with the Scriptures. **Read Acts 17:10–11.**

Since the Bible is God's Word, we should value it very highly. We are never to argue with it. Rather, we must study to know it as well as we can, respect it, and obey what it says. **Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.**

## Q.3.

### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE PRIMARILY TEACH?

A. *The Bible primarily teaches what man must believe about God and what God requires of man.*

#### MONDAY

Imagine an artist who has worked secretly for months on what is to be his greatest masterpiece. Everyone is anxious to see what he has done. Finally the day comes when the artist plans to show his painting. A crowd gathers in a room where the painting sits, covered with drapes. At the right moment, a man opens the drapes and everyone sees the painting. What was hidden has been revealed.

To reveal something is to make known what was hidden before. The Bible reveals what God is like and what He requires of man. **Read 1 Corinthians 2:7–12.** What does verse 7 say was hidden? In verse 11, who is the only One who knows the thoughts of God? Look in verse 10 to see how we come to know the thoughts of God and His hidden wisdom.

#### TUESDAY

**Read Job 11:7 and Romans 11:33.** God had to reveal Himself to us if we were ever to know what He is like. God is so much greater than we are that we would never find out about Him on our own. He is more wonderful than anything we could imagine. Left to ourselves, we would never know God. The knowledge of him would have remained hidden forever. God is loving and good. He wanted us to know Him so we could love and enjoy Him. So God gave us the Bible to tell us all those things about Him that we would never have known otherwise.

One of the most important reasons for knowing what the Bible says is so we will believe what is true about God. Many people—even

## QUESTION 3

Christians—believe ideas about God that are not at all correct. The only way to be sure that what we believe about God is true is to be sure that all we believe about God comes from the Bible alone.

## WEDNESDAY

God gave us His Word in bits and pieces over hundreds of years. We call the very first part of God's Word the Books of the Law. In these first five books, God reveals something of what He is like, and gives laws concerning how He wants people to act. There are so many laws in the first part of the Bible and those laws are so hard to keep that none of us could ever obey them all—not even for one day. This is because we are sinful on the inside—we naturally want to do things our way instead of God's way. God knew when He gave His law that we are sinners and could never keep it. So why did He give it?

All along God had planned to give His Son to save His people from sin. But He knew His people would not believe they needed a Savior unless they understood how sinful they are. By giving us His perfect and holy law, He showed us that it is impossible for us to be pleasing to Him by ourselves. **Read Romans 7:7.** How did Paul know he was wrong for coveting? **Read Galatians 3:22.** What does this verse say that the Scriptures tell us about all men? The verse also gives a reason for Scripture telling us that. What is the reason?

## THURSDAY

The Bible tells us what God is like. The main way in which it does this is by showing us who Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is and what He has done for His people. Many different men wrote the Bible over hundreds of years. Since God gave them what they should write, they all wrote about the same all-important truth: God provides salvation for His people through His Son. This is the one story of the whole Bible. The Old Testament looks ahead to the Savior who was coming; the New Testament looks back to the Savior who came. **Read 2 Timothy 3:15.** This verse says the Scriptures can make you wise. What does that wisdom lead to? **Read John 5:39.** Jesus is speaking in this verse. What does He say the Scriptures bear witness of (or testify about or tell about)?

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John is one of the men God used to write the Bible. **Read John 20:31** to see why he wrote what he wrote.

## FRIDAY

First, the Bible shows us what we are to believe about God. Then it shows us what He requires of us and helps us see that we could never do what He requires; we need a Savior! Scripture shows us who that Savior is (Jesus), what He has done to save us, and what God requires of us (that we believe in Jesus). Finally, God shows His people who have believed in Jesus what He requires of them—not to be saved, but to show how thankful they are for being saved. Once we have believed in Jesus, we are afraid to do what would displease Him because we love Him so much. Getting to know the Bible and how it tells us to live is the best way to be sure that we are living in a way that is pleasing to Jesus. **Read Psalm 119:9, 11.**

## SATURDAY

**Read Matthew 7:24–27.** Who is like a man building on a rock? Who is like a man building on sand? To learn what God's Word says without *doing* what it says is foolish.

If we know and love Jesus, we will want to do what He wants us to do. To know what He wants us to do and how to do it we need to know the Bible. It will give us all we will ever need for knowing who God is and what He requires of us. **Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17.**

## Q.4.

## WHAT IS GOD?

A. *God is a spirit, Whose being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth are infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.*

### MONDAY

**Read John 4:24.** What is God? **Read 1 Timothy 1:17.** Can God be seen?

God is a spirit. He has no body and He cannot be seen. God is different from everyone and everything else in the universe. For one thing, God alone was never created. God created every person and every thing that has ever existed. Only God has always been. He is eternal. That means He has no beginning and He has no end.

**Read Psalm 102:24b–27.**

God is also infinite. Infinite means having no limits. People are finite; they have limits. People can do many things, but there is a limit to what they can do. God can do anything; His power is infinite. People are limited to being in one place at a time. God is infinite; He is in all places at the same time. When King Solomon built a magnificent temple for God, he knew that a building cannot hold all there is of God, so he prayed this prayer. **Read 1 Kings 8:27.**

God is unchangeable. He cannot become better than He is because He is already perfect. He cannot become worse or less than He is or He would stop being God. **Read Malachi 3:6.**

God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Everything about Him—His love, His holiness, His power, everything—is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable as well.

### TUESDAY

**Read Romans 11:33 and Psalm 147:5.** What does Psalm 147:5 say about God's understanding? Infinite means having no limits.

TRAINING HEARTS  TEACHING MINDS

God's wisdom is infinite. Wisdom is knowing and doing what is best in every situation. Because God knows all things, He always knows what is best and that is what He does. Because God's wisdom is infinite, we can trust what He tells us. We can do what He tells us to do, confident that it is the wisest thing we could possibly do.

Since God's wisdom is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, we know that the Bible, which is His Word, is truth. Everything it says is absolutely true. **Read Psalm 19:7–9.**

## WEDNESDAY

**Read Isaiah 40:25–26.** Why are none of the stars missing? What keeps them from falling out of the sky?

God's infinite power keeps all of creation going. His power is eternal—it has always been, and it will never run out or become weaker. God's power is unchanging. Having all power, He will never become any stronger than He is. His power is infinite—nothing can limit it. **Read Jeremiah 32:17.** What does this verse say is too difficult for God? **Read Daniel 4:35.** According to this verse, who can stop God from doing what He intends to do?

## THURSDAY

The prophet Isaiah saw a vision of heaven. Around God's throne, he saw seraphim or angels who praise God all the time. **Read Isaiah 6:3** to find a word the angels repeat three times to describe God. **Read Revelation 15:4.** Why will all people fear the Lord and glorify His name?

God is absolutely holy. He never thinks, speaks, or does anything that is evil. All that God is and does is good, right, and perfect. **Read 1 John 1:5.** Not only does God never sin Himself, He also hates sin in any of His creatures. The word "holy" is used of God more times than any other word in the Bible. God is eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in His holiness.

## FRIDAY

There would be something very wrong with a police officer who saw a robbery taking place and ignored it. There would be some-

## QUESTION 4

thing very wrong with a judge who let murderers go free. God would not be God if He ignored sin. God hates sin and will always punish it. Right now, we see many horrible things all around us. Every day the news is full of stories of people doing terrible things to other people and sinning against God. Sometimes news of crime and hatred can trouble us. But **Psalm 96:11–13** gives us a reason to rejoice. What is it?

The Bible assures us that God is a God of justice. He will not allow evil to go on forever. When Jesus comes again, all evildoers, those who have already died as well as those who are alive, will be judged and will receive what their wicked deeds deserve. **Read 2 Peter 2:9.**

God's justice is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Even the best human police officers and judges sometimes make mistakes because they are unable to see everything that happens and there are secrets they cannot know. God sees everything and knows all secrets. He can even judge what we are thinking and feeling when we do something, because He can see into our hearts.

## SATURDAY

If God is holy and hates sin and if He will judge and punish all sin, we have a serious problem. Every one of us sins every day. None of us wants to face God's judgment and punishment.

But God is also infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His goodness. That does not mean simply that God is nice. Because of God's goodness, He is always at work to do wonderful things for the good of His people, even though they are sinners and do not deserve it. **Read Psalm 86:5.** God's goodness makes Him willing to forgive. He is holy and cannot ignore our sin, but because of His infinite goodness, He gave His Son to be punished in our place. All who believe in Jesus are protected from God's justice and will have His blessing instead. **Read Psalm 34:8.**

*Praise the LORD!*

*Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;*

*For His lovingkindness is everlasting. (Ps. 106:1)*

## FROM THE AUTHOR

AS I PUT THE FINISHING touches on this study of the Heidelberg Catechism, the 2012 Summer Olympic Games are beginning. As always at Olympics time, I find myself in front of the television, night after night. As always, I marvel at what human beings can do with their bodies. And as always, I have to remind myself that what the athletes are doing is *not* easy; they only make it *appear* that way.

The reality is that, to get to the Olympics for those few moments—in some cases, seconds—of glory, athletes exercise, struggle, and sacrifice for years. The human interest features make us care about the competitors we cheer for. They provide glimpses into the lives of these athletes, showing us how rigorous, even grueling, their training has been. We see film clips of very young boys taking their first swimming lessons and little girls in beginning gymnastic competitions. In the interviews, we hear what they have chosen and what, consequently, they have *not* chosen, for the perfecting of their sport. They have each spent a lifetime preparing themselves for their performances on the Olympic stage.

Our children face a future for which we must adequately prepare them. Our children will encounter times when they will desperately need a deep and vigorous grasp of the truths of God's Word. They will face temptations and long to give in. They will confront the horrors of a fallen world and question all they've been taught. They will know disappointment; they will feel grief so profound that it consumes their desire to go on living; and they will ache with the weariness of staying strong day by day in the face of grinding routine.

Why would we think that, in such demanding circumstances, our children will be able to live in the comfort God's Word provides if they have not trained for it? Why should we expect our children to remain rooted in the basics of the Christian faith if they do not know those basics well? How can we assume our children will have what they need in the face of temptation when there's been no disciplined practice in learning those things that would help them resist?

Our world is fallen. Suffering for our children is inevitable. The question is only how severely they will suffer and for how long. And not only is the world fallen, but our children themselves are sinners. Inside all of them is a traitor seeking to turn them from our God.

As parents, we long to protect our children from hurt and heartache. But we cannot. All we can do is to prepare them for it. How? What can we give our children that will enable them to go on clinging to God when they have no desire for him? What can we give them to guard their faith when there seems to be no way, in the light of what they're living, that the Christian faith could possibly be true? What can we give them heavy enough to counterbalance the weight of temptation when they feel desperate to give in?

We begin by giving them a profound familiarity with the rich truths of our faith. Christianity has answers for the agonizing questions posed by a sin-cursed world. The answers may not always be as detailed or as specific as we would like; but the answers are adequate. Those answers can only *be* adequate, though, when they are known. And those answers must be known so well that they are there to fall back on when our children are suffering too much to even ask the questions, let alone go digging for the answers.

How can we be sure that our children will know the truths of Scripture and the promises of God as well as all that? We can be sure of it by training, drilling, exercising our children in those truths and promises when they are young, when memorizing comes easily for them. In other words, we can do a great deal to prepare our children for real life by teaching them the great catechisms of the Protestant faith. A catechism takes the basic truths of Christianity and presents them in a careful, concise, question-and-answer format. The great catechisms were written by godly men who knew the Word of God well. These catechisms have stood the test of time. The Heidelberg Catechism, on which this book is based, is one of the oldest and the best.

We can train our children for life with all its uncertainties by having them memorize the answers to the catechism questions. We can discuss the catechisms with our children and compare them to Scripture. We can practice the catechisms together. We can review the questions again and again, until the answers come automatically. Then the rich truths of our faith are there for our children for the rest of their lives. They are there to undergird them when trials overwhelm, when temptations attack. Those truths become, for those who are profoundly familiar with

them, the foundation of a comfort big enough to see them through all of life and through death itself.

Does memorizing a catechism require hard work? Does discussing it thoroughly take time and discipline? Of course. Will working through catechisms always be fun? Will your children—or you for that matter—always feel like doing it? Of course not. Olympic athletes don't always feel like training either. But they know the reward it *might* bring. Even though that reward is perishable and uncertain, the athletes believe it to be of great enough value to make all their sacrifice and training well worth it. Of how much more value is it to train our children to stand strong in the face of life's greatest demands?

A catechism cannot and should not replace Scripture. But it is an invaluable aid in summarizing and remembering the most important teaching of Scripture. Learning a catechism doesn't guarantee a child's conversion. Knowing truth well is not the same as responding to truth and living in the light of it. But our children cannot respond to truth they don't know. They can't live in the light of truth with which they are unfamiliar. Helping children to learn well the truth of Scripture is where we begin. Knowing a good catechism is one of the best beginnings we can provide for our children.

This particular catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism, was arranged by its authors to be covered in a year. The questions and answers are divided into fifty-two Lord's Days. My personal opinion is that some of those Lord's Day sections are awfully ambitious—there is too much material to memorize in just one week. And all that material means a huge amount of biblical content to cover as well. For these reasons, although I have kept the basic arrangement of fifty-two sections, I have, in a few cases, made a Lord's Day section into a part one and a part two. If you are committed to working through the book in exactly one year, you will need to double up readings when you get to those Lord's Days that are divided into two parts.

The Heidelberg Catechism is a beautiful, rich, deeply devotional, and highly challenging resource for families. It has been a great joy for me to meditate on it enough to be able to create this book. I heartily recommend to you the memorization of this catechism, but I am confident that, to whatever degree you become more familiar with it than you have been, your life in Christ will be greatly enriched.



## LORD'S DAY 1

Q1. WHAT IS YOUR ONLY COMFORT IN LIFE AND IN DEATH?

A. That I am not my own,  
but belong—  
body and soul,  
in life and in death—  
to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,  
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.  
He also watches over me in such a way  
that not a hair can fall from my head  
without the will of my Father in heaven;  
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him,  
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,  
assures me of eternal life  
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready  
from now on to live for him.

Q2. WHAT MUST YOU KNOW TO LIVE AND DIE IN THE JOY OF THIS COMFORT?

A. Three things:  
first, how great my sin and misery are;  
second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery;  
third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

## MONDAY

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Do you ever imagine “what if—?” What if things went horribly wrong? What if you were seriously ill and were not going to get better? What if something happened to your home or to your parents? Because of sin, all kinds of bad things can happen in our world. Is there anything that is big enough to comfort us if the worst “what if’s” should happen?

The psalmist imagined “what if” in Psalm 46. He imagined: what if the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the sea? The psalmist comforted himself by remembering that, even then, God would still be our refuge, the place where we can go to be safe. God would still be our strength, and our “very present help,” even in the greatest trouble.

We aren’t ready to face life unafraid and live it fully until we know we have something big enough to comfort us in any “what if.” **Read Psalm 46:1–3.**

## TUESDAY

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To whom do you belong? If you belong to yourself, there is no one but you to make sure you have all you need. If you belong to yourself, you have to make all the choices about what is best for you. You have to keep yourself well and safe. If you belong to yourself, you have to find some way on your own to pay for all your sin and to be so good that you please God. What a dreadful burden it would be to belong to yourself alone.

It is so much better to know we belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He loved us and willingly suffered God’s wrath at sin so we wouldn’t have to. If we belong to Jesus, he has bought us, paying for us with his own blood. Having paid so great a price, he will never allow us to perish. Our bodies and our souls, whether we live or whether we die, are safe in the hands of one who loves us with so great a love. **Read Isaiah 43:1b–3a and 1 Corinthians 6:19–20.**

## WEDNESDAY

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We know that our faithful Savior Jesus Christ will provide everything we need because of what he has already done for us. Our very greatest problem is that we are sinners. We can never solve that problem by ourselves. That’s a problem for us in two ways: first, because God hates sin. God is a just judge who can’t simply ignore sin; he must punish it. On the cross, Jesus fully paid for all the sins of all his people, no matter

how many sins they have and no matter how bad those sins are. Jesus' death could do this because he is the perfect, sinless Son of God; his blood is of very great value. **Read Romans 5:6-9.**

It's also a problem to be a sinner because it means that the devil, who hates us, is our ruler. The Lord Jesus Christ transfers his people from the kingdom of Satan to his own kingdom of light. Jesus breaks the power over us that Satan had. **Read 1 John 5:18.** If Jesus has met our greatest needs in this way, surely he is able to take care of us in every way.

## THURSDAY

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When we belong to Jesus, we know that he has done two wonderful things for us in the past. He has fully paid for all our sins, and he has set us free from the tyranny of the devil. But our faithful Savior Jesus Christ continues to do wonderful things for us. He watches over us to protect us. Because he is the Lord of all, nothing is outside of his control. He will only allow those things to happen to us that will be for our good and his glory.

Because our sins are pardoned and God the Father sees us through the perfect righteousness of his beloved Son, God the Father loves us too. Jesus taught that not a single hair could fall out of our heads unless it was the good will of the Father. The Bible doesn't promise that sad and hurtful things won't happen to God's children. It promises that, when those things happen, they have been sent by God for our good. Sad, hurtful things will never turn us from God or cause us to perish eternally. **Read John 10:11, 27-29 and Romans 8:28.**

## FRIDAY

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Another of the wonderful things Jesus does for those who belong to him is to give them his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person in the one God. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit comes to live inside those who belong to Jesus. He causes them to know and to feel certain that they are God's children and will live forever with God. The person who belongs to Jesus is still a sinner, and will be as long as he or she lives on this earth. But with the Holy Spirit living in them, God's children have a new desire to live for Jesus. They won't do it perfectly in this life, but the Holy Spirit will make them able to live a new life of obedience they could never have lived on their own. **Read Romans 8:2-3a, 16.**

## SATURDAY

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Only those who know they are in danger want someone to save them. The first thing we need to know to enjoy the comfort our Savior brings is that we need to be saved! We need to be made aware of our sin and misery so we will receive what Jesus offers.

Then we need to know what Jesus has done to save us and how it becomes ours. Once we are saved from such great misery and danger, we will want to know what we can do to show how thankful we are. God tells us in his Word how to live in a way that is pleasing to him. This is not so that we can save ourselves, but so that, having been saved by Jesus, we can live a life of gratitude to God. All the rest of this catechism was written to help us understand (1) our sin and misery, (2) how we are saved from it, and (3) how to live in a way that gives God thanks. **Read Titus 3:3–8.**