

DEVOTIONS ON THE  
Small Catechism





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# Contents

## INTRODUCTION

Why the Catechism in Our Daily Lives? The Beast Needs Tamed — Philip Rigdon	8
The Six Chief Parts The Importance of Parts — James Lamb	10

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

What Are the Ten Commandments? Confronted by God, Conformed to Christ — Jonathan Rusnak	12
The First Commandment What Are We Leaning Into? — Heidi Goehmann	14
The Second Commandment The Creator Has a Name — David Loy	16
The Third Commandment Secure Your Supply — Heather Culli	18
The Fourth Commandment It's an Honorable Life — Scott Rauch	20
The Fifth Commandment Redefining Murder — Faith Spelbring	22
The Sixth Commandment A Marriage Wall — Jonathan Boehne	24
The Seventh Commandment Jesus' Labor of Love — Philip Rigdon	26
The Eighth Commandment The Fire of Tongues — James Lamb	28
The Ninth and Tenth Commandments Content in Christ — Jonathan Rusnak	30
The Close of the Commandments Two Sides to Every Fear — Heidi Goehmann	32

## THE CREED

The Apostles' Creed You Believe in God, but Which One? — David Loy	34
What Does the Word <i>Trinity</i> Mean? Fuzzy Math — Heather Culli	36
The First Article The Great Sand Man Maker — Scott Rauch	38
The First Article The Ma'am with Sad Ham — Faith Spelbring	40
The First Article Our Most Loving Father — Jonathan Boehne	42

The First Article	44
God Would Know Us and Be Close — Philip Rigdon	
The Second Article	46
The Mysterious and Mundane — James Lamb	
The Second Article	48
Jesus' Blood for You — Jonathan Rusnak	
The Second Article	50
God's Kingdom Come to My Day — Heidi Goehmann	
The Second Article	52
The Linchpin — David Loy	
The Third Article	54
What Do You Do? — Heather Culli	
The Third Article	56
Going as Church — Scott Rauch	
The Third Article	58
Finished Forgiveness — Faith Spelbring	
The Third Article	60
More Than Halfway — Jonathan Boehne	
The Close of the Articles	62
Not Fashionable, Just True — Philip Rigdon	

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

What Is Prayer?	64
Our Father Meets Our Needs — James Lamb	
The Introduction	66
Approaching the Heavenly Father as a Child — Jonathan Rusnak	
The First Petition	68
Baptized into the Name of Grace — Heidi Goehmann	
The First Petition	70
Hallowed Be Thy Name — David Loy	
The Second Petition	72
Tug-of-War — Heather Culli	
The Second Petition	74
Ruling and Reigning — Scott Rauch	
The Third Petition	76
Battle of the Wills — Faith Spelbring	
The Third Petition	78
Don't Make It Complicated — Jonathan Boehne	
The Fourth Petition	80
That We Would Know His Fatherly Goodness — Philip Rigdon	
The Fourth Petition	82
Give Us This Day . . . Jesus! — James Lamb	

The Fifth Petition	84
Forgiveness That Freely Flows — Jonathan Rusnak	
The Sixth Petition	86
The Sword against Temptation: The Word — Heidi Goehmann	
The Seventh Petition	88
Overcoming Suffering — David Loy	
The Conclusion	90
The End — Heather Culli	
THE MEANS OF GRACE	
The Means of Grace	92
The Workshop of God — Scott Rauch	
The Sacraments	94
A Gift and a Promise — Faith Spelbring	
THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM	
Holy Baptism	96
Sweet Water — Jonathan Boehne	
Holy Baptism	98
Holy Baptism Gives and Takes Away — Philip Rigdon	
Holy Baptism	100
Living Underwater — James Lamb	
Holy Baptism	102
Certainty in Christ's Promise — Jonathan Rusnak	
Holy Baptism	104
Am I Savable? — Heidi Goehmann	
Holy Baptism	106
The Old You and the New You — David Loy	
CONFESSION	
Confession	108
A Little Too Personal — Heather Culli	
Confession	110
"I'm So Sorry" — Scott Rauch	
The Office of the Keys	112
Freeing the Captives — Faith Spelbring	
The Office of the Keys	114
The Two Keys and Me — Jonathan Boehne	
The Priesthood of All Believers	116
Yes, Indeed, a Right and a Privilege — Philip Rigdon	
The Office of Public Ministry	118
Who's in Charge? — James Lamb	

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR	
<b>The Sacrament of the Altar</b>	120
Real Presence — Jonathan Rusnak	
<b>The Sacrament of the Altar</b>	122
Inside-Out Grace — Heidi Goehmann	
<b>The Sacrament of the Altar</b>	124
The Power of God's Word — David Loy	
<b>The Sacrament of the Altar</b>	126
Urgent Care — Heather Culli	
TABLE OF DUTIES	
<b>Table of Duties</b>	128
The Vocation of Christians Together — Scott Rauch	
<b>Table of Duties</b>	130
Rescued from the Lord of the Flies — Faith Spelbring	
<b>Table of Duties</b>	132
The Family To-Do List — Jonathan Boehne	
CHRISTIAN QUESTIONS	
<b>Christian Questions</b>	134
Let the Mystery Be a Mystery — Philip Rigdon	
<b>Christian Questions</b>	136
Open-Book Exam — James Lamb	
CATECHISM EXTRAS	
<b>Luther's Seal</b>	138
A Simple Summary — Jonathan Rusnak	
<b>The Church Year</b>	140
The Celebration of Each Day — Heidi Goehmann	
<b>What Is Worship?</b>	142
Why Worship, and How? — David Loy	
<b>Prayer</b>	144
Such a Time as This — Heather Culli	
<b>Luther's Morning Prayer</b>	146
What Do You Want for Me Today, Lord? — Scott Rauch	
<b>Luther's Evening Prayer</b>	148
He Fills Us with Good Things — Faith Spelbring	
CONTRIBUTORS	151

## Abbreviations

AE	American Edition of Luther's Works
LC	Large Catechism
<i>LSB</i>	<i>Lutheran Service Book</i>
SC	Small Catechism
<i>WLS</i>	<i>What Luther Says</i>

## Citation Examples

AE 44:68–69	(American Edition of Luther's Works, volume 44, pages 68–69)
LC I 128–30	(Large Catechism, Part 1, paragraphs 128–30)
<i>WLS</i> § 1044	( <i>What Luther Says</i> , paragraph 1044)
SC, Question 15	( <i>Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation</i> , Question 15)

## Why the Catechism in Our Daily Lives?

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1–2)

### LUTHER'S WRITINGS ON THE SMALL CATECHISM

The world has now become very sure of itself. It relies on books and thinks that if these are read it knows everything. The devil almost succeeded in getting me, too, to become lazy and secure and to think: “Here you have the books. If you read them you’ll have the answers.” So the fanatics and sacramentarians suppose that because they have read only one little book they know everything. Against such security I pray the catechism every day like my little Hans and ask God to keep me in his dear, holy Word, lest I grow weary of it.

AE 54:163

## The Beast Needs Tamed – Philip Rigdon

The Founding Fathers of the United States had the right idea. They understood, both from a thorough study of history and from their personal experience, that there is something fundamentally wrong with human beings. While most people in the world—and even many Christians—ignore this reality, Lutherans understand it to be the sinful nature. People are by nature God’s enemies and behave selfishly toward one another. For the Founding Fathers, this meant an inclination to assume and abuse political power. For Christians, it’s the persistent temptation to neglect regular worship, reception of the Lord’s Supper, and study of God’s Word. Consequently, such Christians step away from faith in Jesus Christ and return to one of the world’s empty alternatives: atheism or idolatry and trust in one’s own works or goodness to earn God’s divine favor.

Even though Christians have full forgiveness through faith in Christ, they still retain the sinful nature. Only death or Christ’s return will terminate the reality entirely. Until then, as Luther explains, it’s vital to avail oneself of the Means of Grace, God’s Word and Sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit forgives our sins and fortifies faith in the one true Savior, Jesus Christ. It is in these Means that God’s Spirit turns our hearts and minds to the cross and the empty tomb and refreshes our souls with the joyous reality of Jesus’ full payment for our sins and the comforting good news of His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil.



CLOSING PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, keep us ever mindful of our need for Your Son, Jesus Christ, lest we turn and embrace the vanity of this world. Through Your Word and Sacraments, daily renew our sinful, burdened souls with the merits of Your Son, Jesus Christ. In Your name we pray. Amen.

## The Six Chief Parts

The Ten Commandments • The Creed • The Lord's Prayer  
• Holy Baptism • Confession • The Sacrament of the Altar

I will meditate on Your precepts and fix my eyes on Your ways.  
I will delight in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

(Psalm 119:15–16)

### LUTHER'S WRITINGS ON THE SIX CHIEF PARTS

A person who is so rude and unruly as to be unwilling to learn these things is not to be tolerated. For in these . . . parts, everything that we have in the Scriptures is included in short, plain, and simple terms. For the holy fathers or apostles (whoever first taught these things) have summarized the doctrine, life, wisdom, and art of Christians this way. These parts speak, teach, and are focused on them.

Now, when these . . . parts are understood, a person must also know what to say about our Sacraments, which Christ Himself instituted: Baptism and the holy body and blood of Christ. They should know the texts that Matthew [28:19–20] and Mark [16:15–16] record at the close of their Gospels, when Christ said farewell to His disciples and sent them forth.

LC Short Preface 18–20

## The Importance of Parts — James Lamb

“Parts is parts.” This phrase came from the commercial war between two fast-food chains in the 1980s. A commercial for the chain offering a “pure white meat” chicken sandwich suggested the competitor’s chicken nuggets consisted of various chicken parts. A customer asks, “Which parts?” Then came the now-famous answer: “Parts is parts.”

Well, not really! Parts are important. Parts help us understand the quality of the whole. Because they come from Scripture, the Six Chief Parts of the Catechism help us understand and remember God’s holy revelation to us. Not only that, but these parts also provide guidance in applying this Word of God to our everyday lives.

“What is right and wrong?” The Ten Commandments give God’s answer. “But I’ve done wrong.” Confession enables us to seek mercy. “Where do I find hope?” The Creed tells us what our triune God has done to bring forgiveness and eternal life. “How can I talk to God?” The Lord’s Prayer provides simple ways to do so. “Where do I find God?” The Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper remind us that He finds us. Through simple Means He comes to us by His powerful Word. He makes us His own through the splashing of water. He provides forgiveness, life, and salvation in the very body and blood of Jesus.

Parts are important! The Six Chief Parts help us meditate on God’s precepts, fix our eyes on His ways, and delight in and remember His Holy Word.



CLOSING PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for using Your servant Martin Luther to illuminate for us in simple ways Your Holy Word. Give us faith to delight in them, memorize them, and use them every day as we honor You and serve our neighbor. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

## What Are the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments are God's Law, His good and loving will for the lives and well-being of all people. (SC, Question 15)

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17–18)

### LUTHER'S WRITINGS ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

It must be true that whoever knows the Ten Commandments perfectly must know all the Scriptures [Matthew 7:12]. So, in all matters and cases, he can advise, help, comfort, judge, and decide both spiritual and temporal matters. Such a person must be qualified to sit in judgment over all doctrines, estates, spirits, laws, and whatever else is in the world [1 Corinthians 6:2–3]. And what, indeed, is the entire Book of Psalms but thoughts and exercises upon the First Commandment? Now I truly know that such lazy “bellies” and arrogant spirits do not understand a single psalm, much less the entire Holy Scriptures. Yet they pretend to know and despise the catechism, which is a short and brief summary of all the Holy Scriptures.

LC Preface 17–18

## Confronted by God, Conformed to Christ — Jonathan Rusnak

Some people refuse to darken the doctor's door. "I'll be fine," they say. They're not wrong to be afraid. Crossing that threshold has consequences. No more autonomy. Inspection. Diagnosis.

The Ten Commandments are the doorway. God, the Creator, stands just inside. His design and desire are simple: faith toward Him and love toward others.

You're on the examination table now. The Physician takes a good look. Your defiant disobedience has distorted His design and desire. You're not just sick; you're dying. No, worse! You've suffocated under your own self-obsession.

There is another who calls Himself the door, God's Word made flesh, the obedient Son of the Creator, Jesus. He fulfilled His Father's demands: perfect faith and perfect love. He took your sickness and died your death. Then He burst the door of the tomb and left all your disobedience buried forever. He exited there in order to enter your dead soul by His Holy Spirit. His Spirit now breathes new life into your dry bones in conformity to Himself (Galatians 4:19).

You very well may fear this Great Physician. But He teaches you to love and trust Him. He, and He alone, is your God.

There is one more doorway, though. Jesus stands behind it. The Law still stands as well. But you have already died and are "hidden with Christ" (Colossians 3:3). On the day you cross that threshold, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion" (Philippians 1:6), and you will see Him face-to-face.



CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Creator God, Your Law confronts me. I have distorted Your design and desire. Thank You for Your obedient Son, who saves me from sin, death, and hell. Send Your Spirit to conform me to Christ, according to Your good pleasure, and bring to completion what You have begun in me. Amen.

## The First Commandment

**You shall have no other gods.**

*What does this mean?* We should fear,  
love, and trust in God above all things.



You shall love the LORD your God with all your  
heart and with all your soul and with all your might.  
(Deuteronomy 6:5)

### LUTHER'S WRITINGS ON THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

So everyone made his god that interest to which his heart was inclined. So even in the mind of the heathen to have a god means to trust and believe. But their error is this: their trust is false and wrong. For their trust is not placed in the only God, beside whom there is truly no God in heaven or upon earth [Isaiah 44:6]. Therefore, the heathen really make their self-invented notions and dreams of God an idol. Ultimately, they put their trust in that which is nothing. So it is with all idolatry. For it happens not merely by erecting an image and worshiping it, but rather it happens in the heart. For the heart stands gaping at something else. It seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or devils. It neither cares for God, nor looks to Him for anything better than to believe that He is willing to help. The heart does not believe that whatever good it experiences comes from God [James 1:17].

LC I 18–21

## What Are We Leaning Into? — Heidi Goehmann

My husband loves bow hunting. He loves it so much that he began setting boundaries for himself on how much time he spent in the woods, lest our marriage take a deer-season-size hit. I love reading. I love it so much that my children have to pass a hand in between my face and the book in order to get my attention. Some people love making their homes beautiful; some people love work; some people love their ideas or their minds. Luther tells us that our hearts are inclined to one interest or another. We are all leaning into something, making something the most important part of that day, that season, or this life. We can also do this with important relationships: loving our children, our spouse, or our friends so much that it crowds out the space intended for God.

Picture inclination not just as letters on a paper but as an action of the whole body. Whatever it is, we love it so much that we lean toward *it* rather than toward God. We rest our head on its chest; we snuggle up to it so close that we can hear its heartbeat. This type of relationship is reserved only for God. We are invited to incline into Him, to lean into His heart and into His Word, and He overflows what we need for all the rest—time, energy, love, attention, and resources. Our inclination is intended only for One—the One who sacrificed everything, leaning into our world, to save us.



CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Savior, it is You we love with our whole selves. It is You we trust, You we praise. When we are tempted to incline our hearts, our minds, and our lives to other things and people, help us to rest in You and know that absolutely everything we cast our affection on comes from Your goodness. In Your name we pray. Amen.

## The Second Commandment

**You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.**

*What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.  
(Psalm 50:14–15)

### LUTHER'S WRITINGS ON THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Now you understand what it means to take God's name in vain. In sum it means (a) to use His name simply for purposes of falsehood, (b) to assert in God's name something that is not true, or (c) to curse, swear, use spells, and, in short, to practice whatever wickedness one may.

Besides this you must also know how to use God's name rightly. For when He says, "You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain," He wants us to understand at the same time that His name is to be used properly. For His name has been revealed and given to us so that it may be of constant use and profit. So it is natural to conclude that since this commandment forbids using the holy name for falsehood or wickedness, we are, on the other hand, commanded to use His name for truth and for all good, like when someone takes an oath truthfully when it is needed and it is demanded [Numbers 30:2]. This commandment also applies to right teaching and to calling on His name in trouble or praising and thanking Him in prosperity, and so on.

LC I 62–64

## The Creator Has a Name — David Loy

It is a little surprising that the Creator of the cosmos has a name. After all, before creation, God was alone. He had no one to talk to. Yet He does have a name—many names, in fact—I AM; Yahweh; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Lord. We know these names only because He has revealed them to us. This means He is not a far-off, uncaring God. Rather, He wants us to talk to Him. He wants us to thank Him for all He has given us, and He wants us to call on Him in times of trouble because He loves us and will take care of us.

How shameful it is, then, when we use His name to wish evil on others or lead them astray. And how ungrateful we are when we do not thank Him for His gifts or call on Him when we need help. To know His name and His goodness without talking to Him is just as sinful as using His name to curse or deceive. Let us give thanks, then, that He has revealed to us the only name under heaven by which one may be saved: the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is never too late to ask Jesus for help and forgiveness, and “everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Joel 2:32). That is what faith does: it calls to the Lord for help in the day of trouble.



CLOSING PRAYER: Great Jehovah, almighty God, heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for revealing Your names to us. You do not need our prayers, but we need Your goodness. Move us by Your Spirit to pray, praise, and give thanks daily, and graciously hear our prayers. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## The Third Commandment

**Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.**

*What does this mean?* We should fear and love GOD so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

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So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His. (Hebrews 4:9–10)

### LUTHER'S WRITINGS ON THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Let me tell you this, even though you know God's Word perfectly and are already a master in all things: you are daily in the devil's kingdom [Colossians 1:13–14]. He ceases neither day nor night to sneak up on you and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against these three commandments and all the commandments. Therefore, you must always have God's Word in your heart, upon your lips, and in your ears. But where the heart is idle and the Word does not make a sound, the devil breaks in and has done the damage before we are aware [Matthew 13:24–30]. On the other hand, the Word is so effective that whenever it is seriously contemplated, heard, and used, it is bound never to be without fruit [Isaiah 55:11; Mark 4:20]. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devoutness and produces a pure heart and pure thoughts [Philippians 4:8]. For these words are not lazy or dead, but are creative, living words [Hebrews 4:12].

LC I 100–101

## Secure Your Supply – Heather Culli

I'll never forget the first time I flew with my children. Being an experienced traveler, I didn't pay very close attention to the attendant's pre-flight safety speech. I was busy attempting to get my squirmy toddler and curious preschooler buckled in and settled with snacks, pillows, books, and everything else I hoped would make for an easy flight. In the midst of my busyness, a portion of the safety speech caught my attention. "Those traveling with young children, in case of emergency, please secure your oxygen mask before securing your child's." Had I heard correctly? It seemed to defy common sense, until I thought through an emergency scenario. I would need to have a generous supply of oxygen in order to help, protect, and comfort my children. Without it, I'd be struggling at best and completely useless at worst.

We Lutherans are notorious for working tirelessly to build and enlarge God's kingdom here on earth. But does our well-intentioned busyness for God sometimes cause us to miss a portion of His safety speech for us? The devil never rests, but we Christians should. That, too, seems to defy common sense. Luther's directive to "always have God's Word in your heart, upon your lips, and in our ears" (LC I 100) is only accomplished when we heed God's call to Sabbath rest. We are sinners in constant need of a generous supply of His Word to fill our sin-depleted hearts. Only when we are full of God's Word are we able to go out into the world and share what's been poured into us with those in need of God's help, protection, and comfort.



CLOSING PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, please forgive my failure to follow Your call to Sabbath rest. You promise that whenever Your Word is seriously contemplated, heard, and used, it is bound never to be without fruit. Humble my heart to not despise preaching and Your Word, but to gladly hear and learn it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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