



## Lesson 2

# Teach the Word to Children

### Worship

**Psalm 119:9-16** (spoken responsively by half-verse)

How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

**By living according to your word.**

I seek you with all my heart;

**do not let me stray from your commands.**

I have hidden your word in my heart

**that I might not sin against you.**

Praise be to you, LORD;

**teach me your decrees.**

With my lips I recount

**all the laws that come from your mouth.**

I rejoice in following your statutes

**as one rejoices in great riches.**

I meditate on your precepts

**and consider your ways.**

I delight in your decrees;

**I will not neglect your word.**

**Prayer:** Lord God, your Word is indeed a light for the path of our lives. Forgive us for the times when we have been less than eager to study it. Strengthen our resolve to learn and teach your truth. Enlighten us by your Spirit to mine the depths of your Word. Amen.



## Introduction

Education was at the heart of the Lutheran Reformation. Roman Catholic worship had developed along ritualistic lines that devalued the role of instructing laypeople. In addition, literacy rates were low and books were rare. Luther changed this culture with his emphasis on the teaching of God's Word. When, in 1527, a survey (or "visitation") of congregations was begun to assess the religious situation after the break with Catholicism, the visitors observed a low level of education. Luther penned the catechisms to improve the situation. In the Preface to the Small Catechism (1529), Luther wrote: "The deplorable, wretched deprivation that I recently encountered while I was a visitor has constrained and compelled me to prepare this catechism, or Christian instruction, in such a brief, plain, and simple version." The Large Catechism (1529) contained an expansion of Luther's thoughts for those who would teach the basic truths of the Bible to young people. The Catechisms continue to be a critically valuable explanation of law, gospel, and sacraments for the church today.

## The Power of the Word in the Early Church

### 2 Timothy 3:10-17

<sup>10</sup>You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, <sup>11</sup>persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. <sup>12</sup>In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, <sup>13</sup>while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup>and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

1. As a boy, Timothy had learned the Holy Scriptures from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (see 2 Timothy 1:5). He acquired his advanced education from Paul. Who has served as a "Lois" or "Eunice" or "Paul" in your life? Share an insight or method he or she used to make clear the truths of Scripture.

2. Divide the group in half. Have one-half of the room make a list of reasons why practical training is important for a pastor's training. Have the other half of the room make a list of reasons why classroom instruction is important for the training of a pastor. Making the lists can be done on your own or with others to generate ideas. You will have 90 seconds. We'll hear a sampling from each half of the room.

### **Practical Training**

### **Classroom Instruction**

3. Pastors and teachers are to use the Scriptures for the purposes of "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." On your own, pick one of those four purposes and write down an example of it being carried out by another Christian (perhaps even a child) besides a pastor or teacher. We'll hear samples.

### **NOTES**

## The Power of the Word in the Reformation

4. Luther encouraged continued study of the catechism. While the following portion of the Large Catechism is being read, underline the encouragements you think are important to remember.

Excerpts from the Preface of the Large Catechism (1529):

But for myself I say this: I am also a doctor and preacher; yes, as learned and experienced as all the people who have such assumptions and contentment. Yet I act as a child who is being taught the catechism. Every morning—and whenever I have time—I read and say, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Psalms, and such. I must still read and study them daily. Yet I cannot master the catechism as I wish. But I must remain a child and pupil of the catechism, and am glad to remain so. Yet these delicate, refined fellows would in one reading promptly become doctors above all doctors, know everything, and need nothing. Well, this, too, is a sure sign that they despise both their office and the souls of the people. Indeed, they even despise God and His Word. They do not have to fall. They have already fallen all too horribly. They need to become children and begin to learn their alphabet, which they imagine they have long outgrown.

If these reasons were not enough to move us to read the catechism daily, we should feel bound well enough by God’s command alone. He solemnly commands in Deuteronomy 6:6–8 that we should always meditate on His precepts, sitting, walking, standing, lying down, and rising. We should have them before our eyes and in our hands as a constant mark and sign. Clearly He did not solemnly require and command this without a purpose. For He knows our danger and need, as well as the constant and furious assaults and temptations of devils. He wants to warn, equip, and preserve us against them, as with a good armor against their fiery darts [Ephesians 6:10–17] and with good medicine against their evil infection and temptation.

Therefore, I again beg all Christians—especially pastors and preachers—not to think of themselves as doctors too soon and imagine that they know everything. (For imagination, like unshrunk cloth, will fall far short of the measure.) Instead, they should daily exercise themselves well in these studies and constantly use them. Furthermore, they should guard with all care and diligence against the poisonous infection of contentment and vain imagination, but steadily keep on reading, teaching, learning, pondering, and meditating on the catechism. And they should not stop until they have tested and are sure that they have taught the devil to death, and have become more learned than God Himself and all His saints.

If they show such diligence, then I will promise them—and they shall also see—what fruit they will receive, and what excellent people God will make of them. So in due time they themselves will admit that the longer and the more they study the catechism, the less they know of it and the more they will find to learn. Only then, as hungry and thirsty men, will they truly relish what now they cannot stand because of great abundance and contentment. To this end may God grant His grace! Amen.

**5. Choose one of the following activities:**

**NOTES**

A. In groups of three to four people (or on your own if you prefer), give at least three responses to someone who says, “Memorizing parts of the catechism has very little benefit.” Have your group pick one response to share with the other groups. You will have 90 seconds.

B. In groups of three to four people (or on your own if you prefer), give at least three suggestions as to how one could memorize the parts of the catechism. Have your group pick one suggestion to share with the other groups. You will have 90 seconds.

**6.** Luther says, “They themselves will acknowledge that the longer and the more they study the Catechism, the less they know of it, and the more they find yet to learn.” This adage holds true of learning in general. Give reasons why.

## The Power of the Word Today

7. Read the following paragraphs. As you do, circle phrases or sentences that will help you complete this sentence: Lutheran education is unique because \_\_\_\_\_.

Lutherans, now distanced five hundred years from the time of Martin Luther, often wonder just what Luther would say about the practices of the church that bears his name today. Would Luther approve of what it teaches? Does the 21st-century church rightly (rightfully) bear the name “Lutheran”? Does the mystical concept of “Luther’s spirit” live on?

What we can say is that Luther was passionate about the subject of education—especially since he perceived a prevailing attitude in German lands that disparaged the value of “book” learning. In her book titled *Martin Luther: Learning for Life*, Marilyn Harran submitted that “Luther portrayed education as a contest between God and the devil” (p. 192). He warned that neglect of education would have disastrous consequences, both for the welfare of the earthly state and the welfare of souls.

If Luther had an overarching principle for education, it would be that education must work to serve the cause of the gospel—to sustain the sharing of the life-saving message of Christ and to retain the wholesome influence Christianity has on societies engaged in the struggle against evil. In a very real sense the Lutheran Reformation was an educational movement—a return to biblical truth by *teaching* clearly and correctly what God said in his Word. Error needed to be exposed, and the truth required proper instruction. Luther wrote his catechisms so that instruction could and would happen in homes and churches and schools.

We might ask, How might Luther judge the modern instruction? The question must remain in the hypothetical, but we have clues about what Luther might say or ask. He certainly had opinions about pedagogy (the art or science of teaching). And he voiced his views about curriculum. But I suspect he would keep the focus on the gospel. He might ask, Are you teaching the chief parts of the catechism clearly—distinguishing between God’s righteous will and God’s redeeming love? Are you clearly teaching about how God’s grace comes to us in both the Word and the sacraments? How do you model a life of discipleship (carrying “the cross”) for your students? For Luther, the Word of God was paramount.

8. On your own, write down at least three things that can be done in homes, churches, and schools to make sure that we retain and maintain distinctly Lutheran education. After two minutes, share your list with a person next to you. We'll hear samples from the groups.

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9. What is one lesson from Luther you will want to remember from today's study?

## Summary

Catechetical instruction is critical for the church. Luther's clear explanations are both time-honored and timeless. The Small Catechism and Large Catechism continue to be indispensable tools in the maintenance of the scriptural, confessional unity we enjoy.

## At Home

Create a plan for reviewing the chief parts of the catechism. If you organize your daily review of the explanations to the chief parts (Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Keys and Confession, and Lord's Supper) into the smaller divisions suggested by Luther (one explanation per day), you will complete your review in approximately one month.

## Additional Reading

Harran, Marilyn, *Martin Luther: Learning for Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997).

Luther, Martin, *Luther's Large Catechism with Study Questions*, edited by Rodney L. Rathmann, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010).

## Closing Prayer

**Hymn:** "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word" (CW 203)

1. Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word;  
Curb those who by deceit or sword  
Would seek to overthrow your Son  
And to destroy what he has done.
2. Lord Jesus Christ, your pow'r make known,  
For you are Lord of lords alone;  
Defend your Christendom that we  
May sing your praise eternally.
3. O Comforter of priceless worth,  
Send peace and unity on earth.  
Support us in our final strife,  
And lead us out of death to life.