

'Catechism' JI Packer explains, 'comes from a Greek word meaning "make to hear" and so "instruct."' ¹ He writes:

We catechise because we must. For catechesis is both a very biblical idea and a faithful practice of the church through the ages. Where wise catechesis has flourished, the church has flourished. Where it has been neglected, the church has floundered. We catechise in obedience to the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ and in imitation of the Lord's own ministry when he walked among us. He has charged the church to make disciples from all people groups of the earth. This discipling requires a rigorous ministry of teaching obedience to all that Jesus commanded. Catechesis is precisely such a ministry. ²

The purpose of this course is to catechise or instruct new Christians, or any Christians who haven't received this kind of instruction. It has been used as preparation for a baptism, confirmation or reaffirmation of baptismal faith. It was developed in a Bible-based Anglican church and reflects Protestant, Evangelical and Reformed theological convictions.

In the material, regular text like this should be read aloud by the leader, who can clarify anything as necessary.

A grey box indicates an activity, like preparation for the leader or a group discussion. Regular text in a grey box provides a question or Bible reference, *while the italicised text provides instructions for the leader or participants.*

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Version 1.01

¹ JI Packer, *Growing in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), xxii.

² JI Packer and Gary Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 184.

1. Great News

2. Faith

3. Hope

4. Love

PREPARATION

- ☐ Provide, for each participant, a copy of:
 - this document;
 - *Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism*;
 - a Bible (preferably participants will bring their own); and
 - The baptism, confirmation or re-affirmation service (as applicable).
- ☐ Prepare a getting-to-know-you activity, if that would be helpful.

1 INTRODUCTION

The leader:

- *welcomes everyone and leads the group in prayer for the session;*
- *invites participants to share why they are participating in this course; and*
- *invites participants to ask questions at any time, reserving the right to take them 'on notice'.*

The word 'catechism' comes from a Greek word meaning 'make to hear' or 'instruct'.³ This course provides instruction in the essentials of Christian faith and life, drawn from God's written word, the Bible.

Most people undergo catechism to prepare for a service of baptism, confirmation or reaffirming baptismal faith. If that's the case for you, this course will help you approach that service with integrity and confidence. Having said that, if, during this course, you become uncertain about going ahead with that service, please share that. It will be better for you to take more time to decide that you're ready than to go ahead before you're ready.

Whether or not we're preparing for one of these services, catechism is about looking *backward* and *forward*. We're looking backward to what God has done for us in Jesus. And we're looking forward to a life of following Jesus.

2 CATECHISM: GREAT NEWS

The main resource for this course (subject to the Bible, of course) is *Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism*.

If you asked people what they think Christianity is about, what are some answers you might get?

Leader takes the group through 'Great News' section in Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism.

³ JI Packer, *Growing in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), xxii.

3 TURN TO GOD'S WORD

While catechism resources like *Faith, Hope, Love* can be helpful, the main source to which we should turn for truth is the Bible. So each session of this course will include a short Bible study on the relevant topic.

Ephesians 2.1-10

1. From what do (or did) we need to be 'saved'? (vv. 1-5)
2. What do we need to have be 'saved'? (v. 8) What do you think that means?
3. What do you think the passage means when it says 'not a result of works'? (v. 9).
4. If being saved is 'not a result of works', should we do 'good works'? Why or why not? (v. 10)

4 HOLY HABITS: READY-TO-ANSWER

In each session of this course we'll discuss a Holy Habit; that is, a healthy practice for the Christian life. This week's Holy Habit is being ready-to-answer people who want to know what we believe. The Bible says:

in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...

1 Peter 3.15

We may or may not not feel like we're ready to do that! But a baptism, confirmation or reaffirmation service is a step in that direction, because in that service we confess our faith in Jesus in front of other people.

Participants read through the baptism, confirmation or reaffirmation service (as applicable).

Is there anything in the service you're not sure you understand?*

What parts of the service do you find most interesting or appealing?

5 FOR NEXT TIME

- ☐ Read 'Faith' section in *Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism*, noting any questions you have.
- ☐ Bring your Bible (tell the leader if you don't own one), your copy of the catechism and a pen.

The leader closes the session in prayer.

1. Great News

2. Faith

3. Hope

4. Love

PREPARATION

☐ Provide, for each participant, a copy of:

- this document; and
- An entry-level Bible reading plan (e.g. *5x5x5 New Testament Reading Plan*).

1 INTRODUCTION

The leader:

- *welcomes everyone and leads the group in prayer for the session; and*
- *invites participants with a Bible to do 'show and tell' (i.e. tell the story of how they got it).*

2 CATECHISM: FAITH

Think of as many examples as you can of things people mean when they use the word 'faith'.

For some people, 'faith' means 'believing what you want to believe' or 'believing in yourself'. For Christians, however, faith means 'believing what God says'. A good summary of 'what God says' is the Apostles' Creed.

The leader takes the group through 'Faith' section in Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism, with the leader reading the questions and participants reading the answers and asking their own questions if they have any.

3 TURN TO GOD'S WORD

As was said last time, while catechism resources can be helpful, the main source to which we should turn for truth is the Bible. The Bible isn't just words about God. It's words from God. It's how God speaks to us today.

2 Timothy 3.14-17

1. What words or phrases are used to describe the Bible here? (vv. 15-16)
2. What does this passage tell us about the origin of the Bible? (v. 16)
3. What does this passage tell us is the purpose of the Bible? (v. 15)

4. List the four things for which the Bible is 'profitable' (v. 16) and explain each one:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
5. From v. 17, what can we expect if we...
 - a. ... keep learning from the Bible?
 - b. ... neglect learning from the Bible?

4 HOLY HABITS: BIBLE READING

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalms 119.105

We'll be reading or hearing the Bible once a week if we continue in church (another Holy Habit we'll discuss in session 4). However, reading the Bible once a week is like eating once a week: spiritually, we'll be starving.

Christian leaders often recommend reading the Bible each day or most days. There's even research indicating that the benefits of Bible reading 'kick in' when we engage with the Bible at least four times a week.⁴

The research found that people who engage with the Bible three times a week or less don't get much benefit from that. On the other hand, in this study people who engage with the Bible at least four times a week reported:

- Reduction in negative feelings (e.g. loneliness, anger or relational bitterness);
- Reduction in addictive behaviours (e.g. alcoholism, gambling or pornography); and
- Increased sense of effectiveness in areas like 'sharing your faith' and 'disciplining others'.

Leader shows participants an entry-level Bible reading plan, e.g. 5x5x5 New Testament Reading Plan.

5 FOR NEXT TIME

- ☐ Start using a Bible reading plan (if you aren't already) and come ready to share something you've read.
- ☐ Read 'Hope' section in *Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism*, noting any questions you have.
- ☐ Bring your Bible, your copy of the catechism and a pen.

The leader closes the session in prayer.

⁴ Arnold Cole, and Pamela Caudill Ovwigho, 'Understanding the Bible Engagement Challenge: Scientific Evidence for the Power of 4', https://bttbfiles.com/web/docs/cbe/Scientific_Evidence_for_the_Power_of_4.pdf, Accessed 21 November 2024.

1. Great News

2. Faith

3. Hope

4. Love

PREPARATION

- ☐ Provide, for each participant, a copy of this document.

1 INTRODUCTION

The leader:

- welcomes everyone and leads the group in prayer for the session; and
- invites participant to share one interesting thing they read in the Bible over the last week.

2 CATECHISM: HOPE

Share one thing that you've felt hopeful about in the past or feel hopeful about now.

The leader takes the group through 'Hope' section in Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism, with the leader reading the questions and participants reading the answers and asking their own questions if they have any.

3 TURN TO GOD'S WORD

The Bible teaches us about prayer in many ways, including by giving us lots of examples to follow (e.g. in the Psalms and Paul's letters). We find some important teaching about prayer from Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew 6.5-14

1. When people Jesus calls 'hypocrites' pray, what is motivating them? (v. 5)
2. What's one practice that will help us pray with a better motivation? (v. 6)
3. What do you think it means to 'heap up empty phrases' when we pray? (v. 7)
4. How might knowing that God knows our needs help us in prayer? (v. 8)

5. What are the priorities in the prayer Jesus provides in vv. 9-13? List all the ones you find.
6. How close are these priorities to the priorities of your usual prayers?
7. Can you find anything here to support a minimum frequency of prayer? (vv. 9-13)

4 HOLY HABITS: PRAYER

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5.16-18

When we're just getting started in daily prayer, we can simply pray the Lord's Prayer. Beyond that, there are four main types of prayer in the Bible,⁵ and as we're growing in prayer we should be including them all in our prayer life. A helpful way to remember these four types of prayer is the word 'ACTS'.

Adoration

Adoration means praising God. This doesn't come as easily to most people as other types of prayer. However, one way to practice adoration is to use part of a psalm as a prayer and/or borrow language from the psalms.

E.g.: *Lord God, there is none like you. I praise you for your goodness, your greatness and your glory.*

Confession

Confession means admitting our sin to God and asking God to forgive us. We can confess specific sins and/or our sin in general. Confession may also include asking God to help us repent of sins with which we struggle.

E.g.: *Father, I'm sorry for the ways I haven't kept your will. Please forgive me, cleanse me and change me.*

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving means expressing gratitude to God for his kindness to us. In some ways, this is the easiest type of prayer, since there is always something for which to thank God (e.g. the grace he's shown to us in Jesus).

E.g.: *Thank you, Lord, for giving us everything we need, especially the gift of eternal life with Jesus.*

Supplication

Supplication means asking God for things. The Lord's Prayer teaches us not to just ask for things we want, but to ask for things God wants (which will increasingly become things we want as we grow in Christian maturity).

E.g.: *Father, by your Holy Spirit please help our church family continue to grow in faith, hope and love.*

⁵ JI Packer, *Concise Theology*, 187. Arguably, Packer lamentably leaves-out a fifth type of prayer, lament.

Participants write a 1-3 sentence prayer of each type (below) under headings below, then share their prayers in pairs or threes. The leader then leads the participants in praying the prayers they've written.

Adoration

Confession

Thanksgiving

Supplication

The leader may conclude the prayer time with this traditional prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and constantly give more than either we desire or deserve: pour down on us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord. **Amen.**

5 FOR NEXT TIME

- ☐ Keep using your Bible reading plan and come ready to share something you've read.
- ☐ Start praying the Lord's Prayer or an ACTS prayer alongside your Bible reading.
- ☐ Read 'Love' section in *Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism*, noting any questions you have.
- ☐ Bring your Bible, your copy of the catechism and a pen.

The leader closes the session in prayer.

1. Great News

2. Faith

3. Hope

4. Love

PREPARATION

- ☐ Provide, for each participant, a copy of this document.

1 INTRODUCTION

The leader:

- welcomes everyone and leads the group in prayer for the session;
- invites participants to share one interesting thing they read in the Bible over the last week; and
- invites participants to share how easy or difficult they found praying over the last week.

2 CATECHISM: LOVE

Think of as many examples as you can of the ways people use the word 'love' (e.g. 'I love chocolate').

The leader takes the group through 'Love' section in Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism, with the leader reading the questions and participants reading the answers and asking their own questions if they have any.

3 TURN TO GOD'S WORD

Some of the Bible's most important teaching on love is the writings of the Apostle John. If you aren't sure, the person speaking in this passage is Jesus, and when he uses the word 'abide' he means 'remain' or 'continue'.

John 15.9-14

1. What does Jesus tell us in verse 9 to help us understand his love for us?
2. What do you think keeping commandments has to do with love? (v. 10)
3. What's the main commandment that Jesus wants us to keep? (v. 12)
4. In what way has Jesus shown us the kind of love he wants us to show? (cf. v. 13)

5. What do you think it looks like when we 'love one another' like Jesus? (cf. vv. 12-13)
6. How does (or how could) this passage affect the way you see other Christians?

4 HOLY HABITS: CHURCH

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Hebrews 10.24-25

There's a half-truth, half-lie: 'you don't have to go to church to be a Christian'. It's true that someone who can't attend church (e.g. someone in prison or hospital) is still a Christian. However, if we are 'neglecting to meet together' without a good reason, we're depriving ourselves of the church and the church of ourselves.

Also, the Bible doesn't just tell us to 'go to church'. It tells us that *we are the church*. And while being the church certainly includes meeting together (see verse above) it also involves some other important responsibilities.

Read the following passages / verses and list any church member responsibilities you find.

Romans 12.6-8

Colossians 3.13

1 Corinthians 9.14

Colossians 3.16

Ephesians 6.18-19

1 Peter 4.9

How closely do these responsibilities match your idea of being a church member?

5 COURSE CONCLUSION

In this course, we've covered some important things about living the Christian life (e.g. Bible reading, prayer, church). But we must remember that our relationship with God doesn't depend on how well we do these things.

Our relationship with God, start to finish, depends on what God has done for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. All we do to begin and remain in relationship with God is believe in Jesus. As Jesus himself said:

'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'

John 6.29

Having said that, if we genuinely believe in Jesus, our whole life will be transformed. Because if we genuinely believe in Jesus, God's Holy Spirit is working in us, to help us not only believe but also live as children of God.

In session 1, we said that 'catechism is about looking backward and forward'. Hopefully you are now looking forward, perhaps to a service of baptism, confirmation or reaffirmation, but more importantly to spending the rest of your life following Jesus in fellowship with his people until the day you stand before him with great joy.

Participants may take a few minutes to write a prayer, perhaps thanking God for some things they've learned, or asking him to help them keep going and growing as followers of Jesus. Then the group may pray together.

At the conclusion of this course, participants may agree to be interviewed, especially if they're preparing for confirmation, in which case the interview is conducted by the Bishop. The interview's purpose is to ensure that the participants understand the Great News and give them space to ask any questions they still have.

The leader closes the session in prayer.

Do you have any remaining questions about any of the topics raised in the course?

The Catechism

- Great News** a. What's your understanding of the Great News about Jesus? or
- b. Can you think of a Bible verse that sums up the Great News about Jesus?
- Faith** How has the Apostles' Creed helped you understand Christian faith?
- Hope** How has the Lord's Prayer helped you understand Christian hope?
- Love** How have the Ten Commandments helped you understand Christian love?

Holy Habits

- Ready-to-Answer** If someone asked you what Christians believe, what would you say?
- Bible Reading** Do you feel prepared to continue reading the Bible alone and with others?
- Prayer** Do you feel prepared to continue praying alone and with others?
- Church** Do you welcome the responsibilities of being a church member?

Baptism, Confirmation or Reaffirmation Service

Do you believe all the things the service invites you to say that you believe?

Do you recognise the importance of belonging to local, Bible-teaching church?

Are you ready to obey all of God's commands and repent of any sin in your life?

The interviewer closes the session by praying for the participant.