

INTRODUCTION

'Catechism' means 'instruction'.¹ JI Packer writes:

Where wise catechesis has flourished, the church has flourished. Where it has been neglected, the church has floundered. [Our Lord Jesus Christ] 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 this course is for catechising new Christians or any Christians who need this kind of instruction. It has been used as preparation for a baptism, confirmation and reaffirmation of baptismal faith. It was developed in a Bible-based Anglican church and reflects Protestant, Evangelical and Reformed theological convictions.

HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

The Pattern involves four sessions, each around 60-90 minutes long, depending on length of discussions.

In what follows, regular text like this should be read aloud by the leader, who can add comments as necessary.

A grey box means an activity, such as the leader's preparation, a or group discussion . Regular text in a grey box provides a question or Bible reference, *while italicised text provides instructions for the leader or participants.*

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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

☐ For each participant, provide:

- this document;
- *Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism*;
- a Bible (ideally participants will bring their own); and
- Your baptism, confirmation or re-affirmation service (as applicable).

☐ Plan a getting-to-know-you activity, if that would be helpful.

1 COURSE INTRODUCTION

The leader:

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

The Apostle Paul wrote to his apprentice Timothy: 'Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 1.13). We're here to learn that pattern.

The classic name for this activity is 'catechism', and most people do it to prepare for a service like baptism or confirmation. If that's you, this course will help you approach that service with integrity and confidence.

If you're not sure you can approach that service with integrity and confidence, please raise that with the leader. It's far better to postpone your baptism or your confirmation than to go through it with serious reservations.

Whatever the reason you're participating in this course, the Pattern is about looking *backward* and *forward*. We're looking backward to what God's done for us in Jesus. And we're looking forward to a life following Jesus.

2 CATECHISM: GREAT NEWS

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

Besides the Bible, the main resource for this course is *Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism*.

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

3 TURN TO GOD'S WORD

While a resource like *Faith, Hope, Love* can be helpful, our primary source of truth is always the Bible. So each session of this course will include a short Bible study on the topic we're discussing.

Ephesians 2.1-10

1. What's the reason or what are the reasons people need to be 'saved'? (vv. 1-5)
2. What are we saved 'through'? (v. 8) What exactly do you think that means?
3. What do you think verse 8 is telling us when it says 'not a result of works'?
4. If being saved is 'not a result of works', why should we do 'good works'? (v. 10)
5. What sorts of 'good works' might be in view here? (Glance at Ephesians 4, 5 and 6)

4 HOLY HABIT: READY-TO-ANSWER

Each session we'll talk about a Holy Habit, i.e. a healthy practice for the Christian life. This session's Holy Habit is being ready-to-answer people who are interested in 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 feel like we're ready to do that! But a service like baptism or confirmation is actually 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?

Are there any non-Christians you've invited / could invite to the service?

5 FOR NEXT TIME

- ☐ Read 'Faith' section in *Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism*, writing down 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

☐ For each participant, provide:

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

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 what 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, faith means 'believing what God says'. And a decent summary of 'what God says' is the Apostles' Creed.

The leader takes the group through the 'Faith' section in Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism. The leader reads out the questions, the participants read out the answers (perhaps taking turns) and after each answer the leader pauses for participants to ask any questions they have at that point. If any questions are off-topic or if the leader isn't sure how to answer the question, the leader can ask to take the question 'on notice'.

3 TURN TO GOD'S WORD

As we said last session, while a document like *Faith, Hope, Love* can be helpful, our primary source of 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? (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 four ways the Bible is 'profitable' or helpful to us (v. 16) and explain each one:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
5. From v. 17, what can we expect if we...
 - a. ... continue learning from the Bible?
 - b. ... discontinue learning from the Bible?

4 HOLY HABIT: BIBLE READING

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

Psalms 119.105

Share your experiences with Bible reading so far in your life.

If we continue in church (the Holy Habit we'll discuss in session 4) we'll be reading the Bible once a week. However, reading the Bible once a week is like eating once a week: spiritually, we'll be under-nourished.

Christian leaders 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.³

If possible, show the video 'What Changes When You Read the Bible 4 Times Per Week' by John Brevere (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/5_OHrY-uqel). Otherwise present the following:

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'.

³ 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.

Leader takes participants through an entry-level Bible reading plan, e.g. 5x5x5 from The Navigators.

5 FOR NEXT TIME

- ☐ Start or continue using a Bible reading plan 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.

1. Great News

2. Faith

3. Hope

4. Love

PREPARATION

- ☐ For each participant, provide 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 since the last session.

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 the 'Hope' section in Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism. The leader reads out the questions, the participants read out the answers (perhaps taking turns) and after each answer the leader pauses for participants to ask any questions they have at that point. If any questions are off-topic or if the leader isn't sure how to answer the question, the leader can ask to take the question 'on notice'.

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. I what way could we ever pray like the 'hypocrites' mentioned in verse 5?
2. What's one habit or practice that will help us not to pray like 'hypocrites'? (v. 6)
3. What do you think it means to 'heap up empty phrases' when we pray? (v. 7)
4. How does knowing that God knows what we need actually help us in prayer? (v. 8)

5. What priorities can we see in what we call 'the Lord's Prayer?' (vv. 9-13)
6. How close are these priorities to the priorities of your prayers most of the time?
7. Based on this passage, how often would you advise a new Christian to pray?

4 HOLY HABIT: 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

Share your experiences with prayer so far in your life.

A great way to get started with personal prayer is praying Lord's Prayer. But (like the Ten Commandments we'll discuss next session) the Lord's Prayer isn't an end-point, it's a starting point.

We'll grow in prayer as we practice the four main types of prayer in the Bible: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication.⁴ A helpful way to remember these is the word 'ACTS'.

Adoration

Adoration means praising God. This doesn't come as easily to us as other types of prayer. However, one way to practice adoration is by using part of a psalm and/or borrowing ideas 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 our sin in general and specific sins. This 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've been disobeying you. Please forgive me, cleanse me and change me.*

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving means telling God how grateful we are for his goodness to us. In some ways, it's the easiest type of prayer, since there are always things for which we can thank God (e.g. the grace he's given us in Jesus).

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

⁴ JI Packer, *Concise Theology*, 187. Arguably, Packer lamentably leaves-out a fifth type of prayer, lament.

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.*

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

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.

Another resource to help us pray are traditional or classic prayers from Christians before us. We use these in church services, partly just because they're so good, and partly to express our unity with other Christians.

The leader may conclude the session with this classic 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.**

1. Great News

2. Faith

3. Hope

4. Love

PREPARATION

- ☐ For each participant, provide 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 since the last session; and
- invites participants to share how easy or difficult they've been finding prayer since the last session.

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 the 'Hope' section in Faith, Hope, Love: A Short Catechism. The leader reads out the questions, the participants read out the answers (perhaps taking turns) and after each answer the leader pauses for participants to ask any questions they have at that point. If any questions are off-topic or if the leader isn't sure how to answer the question, the leader can ask to take the question 'on notice'.

3 TURN TO GOD'S WORD

Some of the Bible's most important teaching on love is in the writings of the Apostle John. The person speaking in the passage we're about to read is Jesus, and when he says 'abide' he means 'remain' or 'continue'.

John 15.9-14

1. What does Jesus tell us in verse 9 to help us appreciate 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 could this passage affect the way you relate to other people, especially Christians?

4 HOLY HABIT: 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

Share your experiences with church so far in your life.

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. But if we are 'neglecting to meet together' without a good reason, we're depriving ourselves of the church and depriving the church of ourselves.

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

What church member responsibilities can you find in the following passages?

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 the Pattern, we've covered some important things about living the Christian life (e.g. Bible reading, prayer, church). But remember that our relationship with God is not about how well we do things like these.

Jesus said: 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent' (John 6.29)

Our relationship with God, start to finish, depends on what God has done for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We begin and continue in relationship with God simply by believing in Jesus.

However, when we believe in Jesus, our whole life will change. Because if we really do believe in Jesus, it's because the Holy Spirit is working in us, to help us believe as well as live as children of God.

In session 1, we said that this course is about looking *backward* and *forward*. We hope you are 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, e.g. thanking God for some things they've learned, asking him to help them keep going and growing as followers of Jesus. Then the group prays 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.

CATECHISM

- Great News** a. If a friend asked 'What do you believe about Jesus?' what would you say? OR
- b. Can you think of a Bible verse that sums up the Great News about Jesus?
- Faith** How does the Apostles' Creed help you understand Christian faith?
- Hope** How does the Lord's Prayer help you understand Christian hope?
- Love** How do the Ten Commandments help you understand Christian love?

HOLY HABITS

- Ready-to-Answer** a. Do you think people who aren't Christians need to hear about Jesus? AND
- b. Would you welcome an opportunity to tell someone about your hope in Jesus?
- 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 life as a church member?

BAPTISM / CONFIRMATION / REAFFIRMATION SERVICE

Do you believe all the things you'll be invited to declare that you believe?

Do you recognise and rejoice in God's authority over every area of your life?

Do you have any questions that are making you hesitant about the service?

What's the reason / what are reasons you'd like to go ahead with the service?

The interviewer closes the session by praying for the candidate.