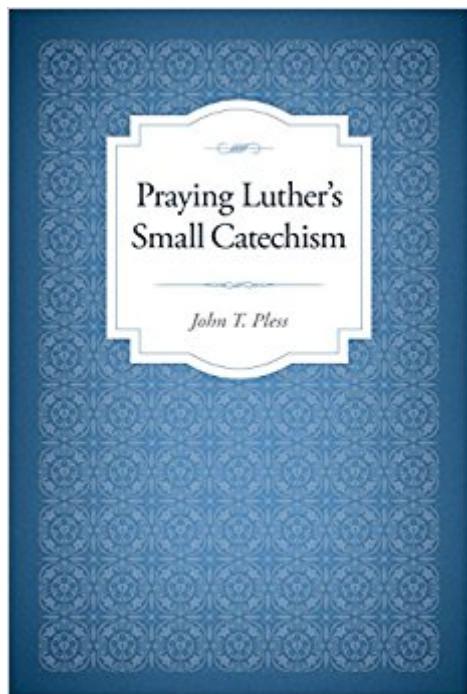


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# Praying Luther's Small Catechism



## **Synopsis**

"To pray the Catechism is to learn how to speak to God the Father in the name of the Son through the Holy Spirit. Praying Luther's Small Catechism moves sequentially through the Six Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine with prayers developed out of the catechetical material. Commentaries on the doctrine of each passage reflect on how the teaching shapes our praying. Accessible to the beginner but insightful for the wisest, this is a wonderful resource for pastors and veterans of the Church, and for laypeople who serve as the heads (and catechetical teachers) of their households."

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Pless is assistant professor of pastoral ministry and missions and the director of field education at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Pless is the author of two chapters in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* and writes for *Logia*, *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, *Lutheran Quarterly*, *Lutheran Forum*, *Lutheran Witness*, and other publications. He is a regular speaker at various conferences and workshops on topics related to liturgy and catechesis.

This lovely little volume is a necessary addition to anyone, pastor or layman, desiring a deeper understanding of Luther's Small Catechism as something more than an instructional manual. Luther's Small Catechism has served as the "laymen's bible" for centuries as it so simply yet beautifully captures the essence of the faith that all Christians should believe, teach, and confess. While the catechism has consistently been used primarily as a catechetical resource, it has

seldom been seen as a prayer book. But as Pless explains in the opening chapter, "...to pray the catechism is to learn how to speak to God the Father in the name of the Son through the Holy Spirit who call us to faith in the Gospel." To pray the catechism then is to take these words of scripture and make them your own, just as Luther would have desired. It seems that we constantly pursue the latest and greatest devotional material which is often vapid and lacks any lasting value, thus leaving us with the desire for more. Meanwhile, we have a wonderful devotional right in front of us! As Pless faithfully teaches, the catechism serves as the pattern for sound words, not only for doctrine, but for prayer. Prayer that is pleasing to the Father is prayer that speaks back to Him all the wonders He has worked through His Son in the Holy Spirit with all heartfelt praise and thanksgiving. Just as the Small Catechism is for all ages, this little companion is as well. Not only have I used it to gain a deeper understanding of the catechism and how to pray, but I've used it for catechesis and visitations. This is a welcome resource that will serve the Church for years to come.

This book can be used in many ways. As a devotional, group study and a tool for catechetical instruction. Great!

Luther's Small Catechism is a prayer book. It is a spiritual companion on a man's journey from cradle to grave; the Christian's daily prayer and meditation. (Gottfried Kodel) First and foremost the catechism is meant to be prayed, as a daily exercise, as Luther wished it to be. (Werner Kien) John T. Pless rediscovers this for our time. In his new book, *Praying Luther's Small Catechism*, Pless reveals how you can pray the Small Catechism. You can speak to God about the most important things in life and death, in time and eternity. You can do it with simplicity and with a sound form of words. Amazingly, this is much easier than one would think, because in catechetical prayer, God takes the initiative and puts into our mouths the very words He loves to hear. In this kind of prayer, even the commandments are promises, and we pray with faith in God's promises to give us all things, especially his promises to give us himself. In chapter 1, Pless introduced the basics of praying the catechism. In chapters 2 through 9, he moves through the Six Chief Parts, Daily Prayers, and the Table of Duties. Four appendices treat the Catechism as the handbook for the vocation of the laity in worship and prayer, Luther's morning and evening prayers as reflections of the Our Father, the Psalms organized according to the Lord's Prayer, and preparation for Confession and Absolution according to the Ten Commandments. Each section begins with material from the Small Catechism followed by a prayer developed out of that material.

Then commentary on the teaching of the passage shows how the teaching shapes praying. Here are a few example prayers in the book. On the Third Commandment: "By Your Word and Spirit, draw us away from our restless labor that we might find rest in You alone, merciful God. Grant that, fearing and loving You above all things, we may never despise the preaching of your Word of Life, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen." On the Second Question concerning Baptism: "Lord Jesus Christ, by Your death You have purchased and won for us forgiveness of sins, rescuing us from death and the devil and obtaining eternal salvation which You now work in Baptism. Give us Your Spirit that we may believe what You have said, *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,* and so receive these gifts of forgiveness of sins, victory over death and the devil, and eternal salvation, as Your words and promises declare. Amen." On how bodily eating and drinking of the bread and wine can do such great things: "Lord Jesus Christ, as we eat Your holy body and drink Your holy blood, draw our hearts to trust in your promise that Your body and blood were given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Give us the confidence that whoever believes Your words has exactly what they say: *forgiveness of sin;* for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God. Amen." Praying to God from the catechism also turns out to be God speaking from the catechism to you. Through praying and meditating on the Small Catechism, insights from the catechism come to light. One such insight is how the first three parts gel together. For example, the petitions of the Lord's Prayer request nothing else but the fulfillment of what is commanded in the Ten Commandments. Pless presents a table showing how the parts gel. For example, the command and promise of the First Petition (Hallowed be thy name) correspond with the command and promise of the Second Commandment (You shall not misuse the name of the Lord). The Fifth Petition (forgive us) corresponds to the Third Article (how the Holy Spirit sanctifies us). While pastors and teachers will find great uses for this book, some of the most powerful uses will be in the home. Husbands and wives, read this book together. Sit down for 10 minutes and read a selection aloud to each other. You almost certainly will find yourselves commenting to each other about what you've read. This is a supreme and ready-made form of marriage enrichment and of mutually building each other up in our most holy faith. Bringing enlivened, enlarged, and shared understandings from home to the Divine Service, you will find yourself more in communion with your spouse during and following congregational worship. There will be dozens of ways to use this book. Buy it and begin a new, breathing chapter of your life.

Not only is this book a great read, but I use it as a tool for daily prayer. This is a book that needs to

be in every Christian's library! It truly deserves a five star rating.

Pless is an incredible author. This book is essential for understanding the mind of Luther.

A long time ago Michael Reu produced a helpful little prayer book based on the catechism that was mostly just rephrasing Luther's Small Catechism into prayer form. I was hoping this would be in the same spirit, but perhaps with a bit more freedom from the Luther's text so that it could include thoughts from Luther's Large Catechism. However, this volume is too much about Luther and too academic in its writing style. As such it makes relatively poor prayer book. It is probably better considered a commentary on the catechism.

Wonderful devotion

Can't beat foundational truth.

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