

*Family Devotions*  
*Based on the Heidelberg Catechism*

# COMFORTING HEARTS



# TEACHING MINDS



STARR MEADE



COMFORTING  
HEARTS

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TEACHING  
MINDS

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*Family Devotions*

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STARR MEADE



P U B L I S H I N G

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For Josh and Chi with gratitude.

Thank you, Josh, for the website, and thank you, Chi, for reading my books to your children.

And for their fabulous children, all eight of them (at the last count). Your friendship is a gift.





## FROM THE AUTHOR

AS I PUT THE FINISHING touches on this study of the Heidelberg Catechism, the 2012 Summer Olympic Games are beginning. As always at Olympics time, I find myself in front of the television, night after night. As always, I marvel at what human beings can do with their bodies. And as always, I have to remind myself that what the athletes are doing is *not* easy; they only make it *appear* that way.

The reality is that, to get to the Olympics for those few moments—in some cases, seconds—of glory, athletes exercise, struggle, and sacrifice for years. The human interest features make us care about the competitors we cheer for. They provide glimpses into the lives of these athletes, showing us how rigorous, even grueling, their training has been. We see film clips of very young boys taking their first swimming lessons and little girls in beginning gymnastic competitions. In the interviews, we hear what they have chosen and what, consequently, they have *not* chosen, for the perfecting of their sport. They have each spent a lifetime preparing themselves for their performances on the Olympic stage.

Our children face a future for which we must adequately prepare them. Our children will encounter times when they will desperately need a deep and vigorous grasp of the truths of God's Word. They will face temptations and long to give in. They will confront the horrors of a fallen world and question all they've been taught. They will know disappointment; they will feel grief so profound that it consumes their desire to go on living; and they will ache with the weariness of staying strong day by day in the face of grinding routine.

Why would we think that, in such demanding circumstances, our children will be able to live in the comfort God's Word provides if they have not trained for it? Why should we expect our children to remain rooted in the basics of the Christian faith if they do not know those basics well? How can we assume our children will have what they need in the face of temptation when there's been no disciplined practice in learning those things that would help them resist?

Our world is fallen. Suffering for our children is inevitable. The question is only how severely they will suffer and for how long. And not only is the world fallen, but our children themselves are sinners. Inside all of them is a traitor seeking to turn them from our God.

As parents, we long to protect our children from hurt and heartache. But we cannot. All we can do is to prepare them for it. How? What can we give our children that will enable them to go on clinging to God when they have no desire for him? What can we give them to guard their faith when there seems to be no way, in the light of what they're living, that the Christian faith could possibly be true? What can we give them heavy enough to counterbalance the weight of temptation when they feel desperate to give in?

We begin by giving them a profound familiarity with the rich truths of our faith. Christianity has answers for the agonizing questions posed by a sin-cursed world. The answers may not always be as detailed or as specific as we would like; but the answers are adequate. Those answers can only *be* adequate, though, when they are known. And those answers must be known so well that they are there to fall back on when our children are suffering too much to even ask the questions, let alone go digging for the answers.

How can we be sure that our children will know the truths of Scripture and the promises of God as well as all that? We can be sure of it by training, drilling, exercising our children in those truths and promises when they are young, when memorizing comes easily for them. In other words, we can do a great deal to prepare our children for real life by teaching them the great catechisms of the Protestant faith. A catechism takes the basic truths of Christianity and presents them in a careful, concise, question-and-answer format. The great catechisms were written by godly men who knew the Word of God well. These catechisms have stood the test of time. The Heidelberg Catechism, on which this book is based, is one of the oldest and the best.

We can train our children for life with all its uncertainties by having them memorize the answers to the catechism questions. We can discuss the catechisms with our children and compare them to Scripture. We can practice the catechisms together. We can review the questions again and again, until the answers come automatically. Then the rich truths of our faith are there for our children for the rest of their lives. They are there to undergird them when trials overwhelm, when temptations attack. Those truths become, for those who are profoundly familiar with

them, the foundation of a comfort big enough to see them through all of life and through death itself.

Does memorizing a catechism require hard work? Does discussing it thoroughly take time and discipline? Of course. Will working through catechisms always be fun? Will your children—or you for that matter—always feel like doing it? Of course not. Olympic athletes don't always feel like training either. But they know the reward it *might* bring. Even though that reward is perishable and uncertain, the athletes believe it to be of great enough value to make all their sacrifice and training well worth it. Of how much more value is it to train our children to stand strong in the face of life's greatest demands?

A catechism cannot and should not replace Scripture. But it is an invaluable aid in summarizing and remembering the most important teaching of Scripture. Learning a catechism doesn't guarantee a child's conversion. Knowing truth well is not the same as responding to truth and living in the light of it. But our children cannot respond to truth they don't know. They can't live in the light of truth with which they are unfamiliar. Helping children to learn well the truth of Scripture is where we begin. Knowing a good catechism is one of the best beginnings we can provide for our children.

This particular catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism, was arranged by its authors to be covered in a year. The questions and answers are divided into fifty-two Lord's Days. My personal opinion is that some of those Lord's Day sections are awfully ambitious—there is too much material to memorize in just one week. And all that material means a huge amount of biblical content to cover as well. For these reasons, although I have kept the basic arrangement of fifty-two sections, I have, in a few cases, made a Lord's Day section into a part one and a part two. If you are committed to working through the book in exactly one year, you will need to double up readings when you get to those Lord's Days that are divided into two parts.

The Heidelberg Catechism is a beautiful, rich, deeply devotional, and highly challenging resource for families. It has been a great joy for me to meditate on it enough to be able to create this book. I heartily recommend to you the memorization of this catechism, but I am confident that, to whatever degree you become more familiar with it than you have been, your life in Christ will be greatly enriched.



## — LORD'S DAY 1 —

Q1. WHAT IS YOUR ONLY COMFORT IN LIFE AND IN DEATH?

A. That I am not my own,  
but belong—  
    body and soul,  
    in life and in death—  
to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,  
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.  
He also watches over me in such a way  
that not a hair can fall from my head  
without the will of my Father in heaven;  
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him,  
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,  
assures me of eternal life  
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready  
from now on to live for him.

Q2. WHAT MUST YOU KNOW TO LIVE AND DIE IN THE JOY OF THIS COMFORT?

A. Three things:  
    first, how great my sin and misery are;  
    second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery;  
    third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

## MONDAY

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Do you ever imagine “what if—?” What if things went horribly wrong? What if you were seriously ill and were not going to get better? What if something happened to your home or to your parents? Because of sin, all kinds of bad things can happen in our world. Is there anything that is big enough to comfort us if the worst “what if’s” should happen?

The psalmist imagined “what if” in Psalm 46. He imagined: what if the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the sea? The psalmist comforted himself by remembering that, even then, God would still be our refuge, the place where we can go to be safe. God would still be our strength, and our “very present help,” even in the greatest trouble.

We aren’t ready to face life unafraid and live it fully until we know we have something big enough to comfort us in any “what if.” **Read Psalm 46:1-3.**

## TUESDAY

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To whom do you belong? If you belong to yourself, there is no one but you to make sure you have all you need. If you belong to yourself, you have to make all the choices about what is best for you. You have to keep yourself well and safe. If you belong to yourself, you have to find some way on your own to pay for all your sin and to be so good that you please God. What a dreadful burden it would be to belong to yourself alone.

It is so much better to know we belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He loved us and willingly suffered God’s wrath at sin so we wouldn’t have to. If we belong to Jesus, he has bought us, paying for us with his own blood. Having paid so great a price, he will never allow us to perish. Our bodies and our souls, whether we live or whether we die, are safe in the hands of one who loves us with so great a love. **Read Isaiah 43:1b-3a and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.**

## WEDNESDAY

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We know that our faithful Savior Jesus Christ will provide everything we need because of what he has already done for us. Our very greatest problem is that we are sinners. We can never solve that problem by ourselves. That’s a problem for us in two ways: first, because God hates sin. God is a just judge who can’t simply ignore sin; he must punish it. On the cross, Jesus fully paid for all the sins of all his people, no matter

how many sins they have and no matter how bad those sins are. Jesus' death could do this because he is the perfect, sinless Son of God; his blood is of very great value. **Read Romans 5:6-9.**

It's also a problem to be a sinner because it means that the devil, who hates us, is our ruler. The Lord Jesus Christ transfers his people from the kingdom of Satan to his own kingdom of light. Jesus breaks the power over us that Satan had. **Read 1 John 5:18.** If Jesus has met our greatest needs in this way, surely he is able to take care of us in every way.

## THURSDAY

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When we belong to Jesus, we know that he has done two wonderful things for us in the past. He has fully paid for all our sins, and he has set us free from the tyranny of the devil. But our faithful Savior Jesus Christ continues to do wonderful things for us. He watches over us to protect us. Because he is the Lord of all, nothing is outside of his control. He will only allow those things to happen to us that will be for our good and his glory.

Because our sins are pardoned and God the Father sees us through the perfect righteousness of his beloved Son, God the Father loves us too. Jesus taught that not a single hair could fall out of our heads unless it was the good will of the Father. The Bible doesn't promise that sad and hurtful things won't happen to God's children. It promises that, when those things happen, they have been sent by God for our good. Sad, hurtful things will never turn us from God or cause us to perish eternally. **Read John 10:11, 27-29 and Romans 8:28.**

## FRIDAY

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Another of the wonderful things Jesus does for those who belong to him is to give them his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person in the one God. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit comes to live inside those who belong to Jesus. He causes them to know and to feel certain that they are God's children and will live forever with God. The person who belongs to Jesus is still a sinner, and will be as long as he or she lives on this earth. But with the Holy Spirit living in them, God's children have a new desire to live for Jesus. They won't do it perfectly in this life, but the Holy Spirit will make them able to live a new life of obedience they could never have lived on their own. **Read Romans 8:2-3a, 16.**

SATURDAY

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Only those who know they are in danger want someone to save them. The first thing we need to know to enjoy the comfort our Savior brings is that we need to be saved! We need to be made aware of our sin and misery so we will receive what Jesus offers.

Then we need to know what Jesus has done to save us and how it becomes ours. Once we are saved from such great misery and danger, we will want to know what we can do to show how thankful we are. God tells us in his Word how to live in a way that is pleasing to him. This is not so that we can save ourselves, but so that, having been saved by Jesus, we can live a life of gratitude to God. All the rest of this catechism was written to help us understand (1) our sin and misery, (2) how we are saved from it, and (3) how to live in a way that gives God thanks. **Read Titus 3:3–8.**



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MISERY





## LORD'S DAY 2

Q3. HOW DO YOU COME TO KNOW YOUR MISERY?

A. The law of God tells me.

Q4. WHAT DOES GOD'S LAW REQUIRE OF US?

A. Christ teaches us this in summary in Matthew 22:37-40:

“You shall love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
and with all your soul,  
and with all your mind.’  
This is the greatest and first commandment.

“And a second is like it:  
‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

“On these two commandments hang  
all the law and the prophets.”

Q5. CAN YOU LIVE UP TO ALL THIS PERFECTLY?

A. No.  
I have a natural tendency  
to hate God and my neighbor.



## MONDAY

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God offers us comfort big enough for anything we'll ever face, in life or in death. To receive and enjoy that comfort, we must first know how greatly we need what God offers. Ever since Adam and Eve chose to obey Satan instead of God, every human being has been born sinful in every part. Our minds are sinful. Our wills are sinful. We don't even notice how sinful we are, because our consciences, which are supposed to show us when we're doing something wrong, are sinful too. Our hearts are sinful, and they deceive us into thinking we're fine when, really, we're in danger of God's wrath at our sin.

God, in his grace, wanted us to see our sin and misery so we would turn to him to save us from it. So God gave us his law. God's law is the perfectly holy and righteous standard that he requires us to live by. When we compare ourselves with other people, we may look pretty good. But when we compare ourselves to God's perfect law, we see what sinful failures we are. Before the apostle Paul put his faith in the Lord Jesus, he spent his whole life working very hard at obeying every rule that might possibly please God. Even so, when he read God's command not to covet—not to want what other people have—he saw what a sinner he really was. **Read Romans 7:7.**

## TUESDAY

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**Read Matthew 22:34–40.** Once someone asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment of the law. Jesus answered that the law tells us we must love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. That may sound easy; after all, when God has been so good to his creatures, how could we not love him? The best way to see how hard it is for us to love God as he requires is to compare ourselves with Jesus, who really *did* love God perfectly.

Jesus happily gave up the glory of heaven to come to earth and die for sinners because that was what his Father wanted. We find it hard to give up the best seat in the car, or to let someone else have the biggest piece of cake at dessert. Jesus always obeyed his parents right away, and he never quarreled with his brothers, because that was the will of God the Father. Could you say the same? Jesus often spent the whole night praying instead of sleeping. We find it difficult to pray for a few minutes.

Every day, in many ways, we find it so much easier to love ourselves than to love God as we should.

## WEDNESDAY

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Jesus said the other important commandment is the one that says we must love our neighbors as ourselves. It's not always hard to do nice things for people or to share with people. The hard part is in loving them *as you love yourself*. That means you will think about what other people need more than you think about what you want. Jesus told a story about a Samaritan who was going about his business when he saw a badly wounded man lying by the road. The Samaritan surely had other things to do, but he spent the rest of that day taking care of the wounded man. He took him to an inn and used his own money to pay for what the man would need to get well. He promised to come back and pay more money later if it was needed. What if we did that every single time we saw someone with a need? We wouldn't have much time or many things left for ourselves! But that's the only kind of love for our neighbor that would meet the requirement of God's law. **Read Luke 10:25-37.**

## THURSDAY

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If we could always love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and if we could always love our neighbors as ourselves, we would be able to keep God's law perfectly. We wouldn't need a Savior.

Adam was created righteous, but he chose to sin. He became sinful by nature, and he passed that sinful nature on to everyone born since then. God deserves the highest praise and the greatest love. But because we're sinners, it is natural to us to hate God.

Think of all the times when you've known what was the right thing to do, and you chose to do something else. Think of all the times that you haven't really wanted to pray or to read your Bible or to sit in church and listen to a sermon. This is all evidence that, by nature, we love ourselves more than we love God. We would rather please ourselves than please God. **Read Romans 3:10-12, 18-19.**

## FRIDAY

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There were only two children in the church nursery. They were both so young that they were just learning some basic words. They were both very cute. And they were both sinners. The nursery room was large and full of all kinds of playthings—a kitchen, a slide, cars and trucks, and boxes full of many other toys. But through the whole hour and a half, whenever one child picked up something and began to play with it, the

other child became convinced that he or she could not live without that one toy. The boy picked up a toy dish, and the girl dropped all the dishes she had to try to take away that one. The girl started up the little slide, and the boy came running from the other side of the room, crying, "My turn!" The girl sat on one side of the little couch; the boy came to sit on the other side; the girl stretched out her legs to take all the space so he could not. Both children, too young to even speak well, spent the evening trying to make sure the other one could not have or do what he or she wanted. They were a perfect illustration of the catechism's statement that we have a natural tendency to hate our neighbor! **Read Romans 3:13–17, 19.**

## SATURDAY

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Sin brings with it all kinds of misery. It is miserable to realize that God created us to be good and holy, as he is good and holy, but we have become sinful through and through. It is miserable to know that, like Adam, we choose to sin instead of choosing to obey God. It is miserable to believe that our sinful choices grieve God and hurt ourselves and others. It is miserable to understand that the God who made us to know and love him is angry because of our sin. It is miserable to have nothing to look forward to but the punishment of God for sin. And it is miserable to realize that there is nothing we can do about our misery; we can do nothing to change ourselves. **Read Isaiah 59:9–13.**







This is the misery that God's law makes known to us. But it's a mercy that God gave us his law so we'll know our misery. Like a dying person won't go to the doctor if he doesn't know he's dying, so we won't receive God's way of saving us if we don't know our misery.

**Q.** HOW DO YOU HAVE MEANINGFUL FAMILY DEVOTIONS THAT MEMORABLY COVER THE SCOPE OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF?

**A.** TRADITIONALLY, BY USING A CATECHISM!

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*"I am always eager for new resources on the Heidelberg Catechism. I hope Starr Meade's latest contribution reaches a wide audience, leading more and more families to get acquainted with Heidelberg and to think to themselves, 'Where has this been all my life?!'"*

—KEVIN DEYOUNG, SENIOR PASTOR, UNIVERSITY REFORMED CHURCH,  
EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN

STARR MEADE served for ten years as the director of children's ministries in a local church and has taught Bible and Latin classes in Christian schools. She is also author of *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds*, a year-long devotional based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

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