

# A SIMPLE WAY TO PRAY

Martin Luther

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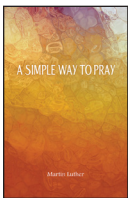
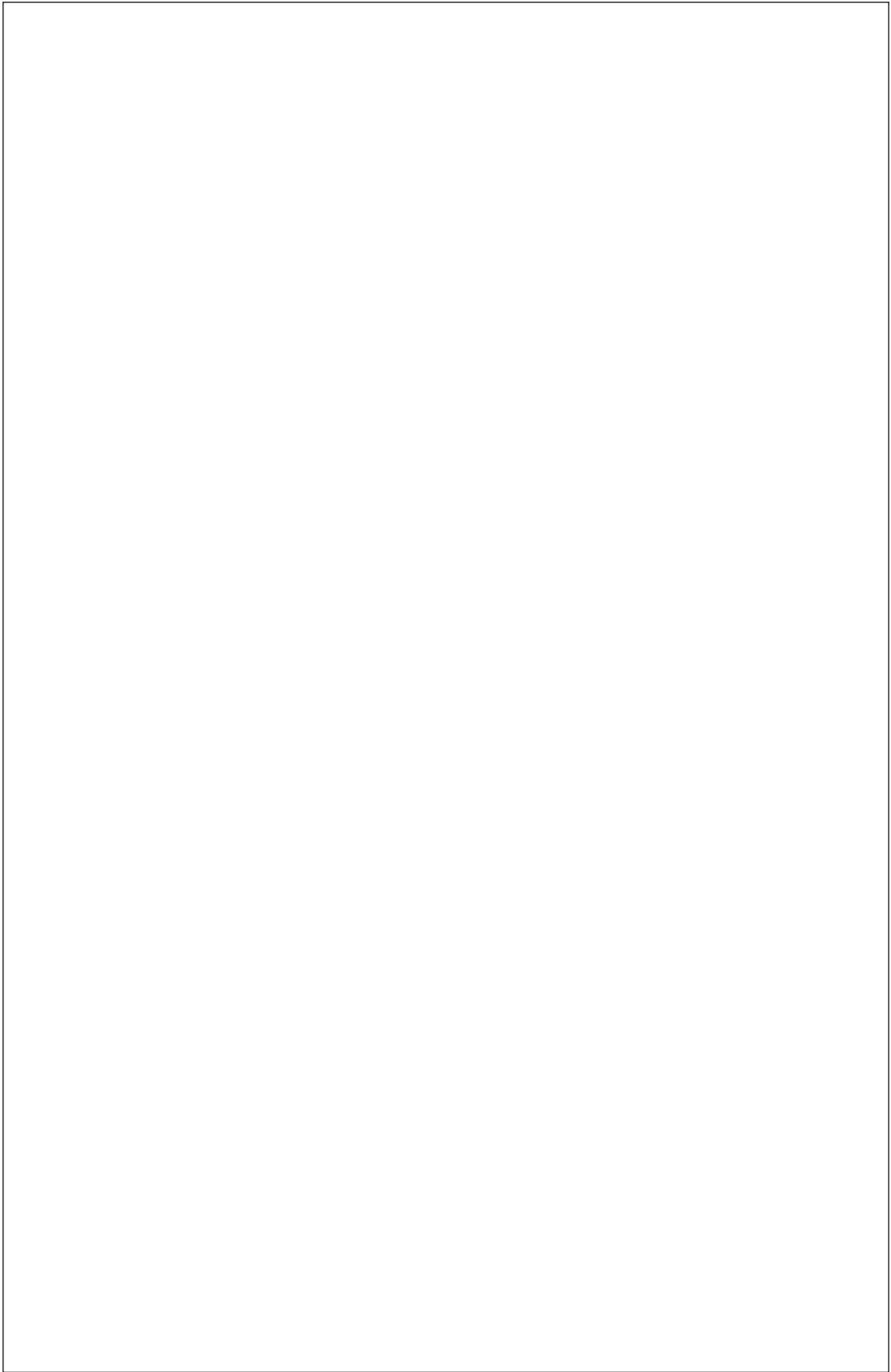
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# PREFACE

FOR A GOOD FRIEND—A SIMPLE WAY TO PRAY

1535

“A Simple Way to Pray,” written by Luther to a very good friend of long standing, Peter the Barber, turned out to be more than a letter addressed to a man exiled from his homeland. In his desire to give pastoral advice to one in desperate circumstances, Luther expanded his message into a little book.

God’s ways are often mysterious indeed. Luther may never have written “this noble, precious booklet” had not Peter the Barber, whose family name was Beskendorf, become intoxicated at a family gathering in his son-in-law’s home on the Saturday before Easter, March 27, 1535. On that occasion Peter tried to prove a boast of his son-in-law Dietrich, a mercenary soldier. Dietrich had bragged that he was impervious to sword strokes and thus had survived unscathed the many battles in which he had been engaged. Evidently, to substantiate or test his son-in-law’s boast, Peter, inebriated, stabbed him in the chest. This stabbing cost Dietrich his life and Peter his house and goods, in addition to his citizenship. Because of Luther’s pleas and those of the elector’s Chancellor, Franz Burkhard, and because the public found it regrettable that the old man was found guilty by the court, Peter was banished instead of sentenced to death. He found refuge as an exile in Dessau.

The old man needed comfort and the assurance that he was still God’s child in spite of having slain his son-in-law. It seems he sought help from Luther, who, though very busy at the university and otherwise, did his friend a great pastoral service from which every one of us can benefit. Luther took time to write this extensive essay in which he offers instructions on how to pray. He teaches us to concentrate in our prayers and to make them personal and meaningful so that they can also be instruments of

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learning and meditation, while at the same time we are given the assurance that God will hear us.

Luther had already dedicated the booklet to Peter early in 1535, and the Hans-Lufft Press in Wittenberg eventually published it. Later in 1535 there appeared an enlarged edition. Many other editions in German followed. It has experienced no fewer than 17 reprintings and revisions. Several Low-German editions, followed by one in Latin, appeared after the earliest publications.

This English translation by C. J. Trapp was first made available in 1983, in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, and has been reprinted many times since then. As we observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, we are pleased to reissue this little devotional gem in a slightly updated version.

The translation of *A Simple Way to Pray* is made from the German text found in the Weimar Edition XXXVIII, pp. 351-375, of *Luther's Works*, and entitled "*Eine einfaltige Weis zu beten für einen guten Freund.*"



# A SIMPLE WAY TO PRAY

FOR MASTER PETER THE BARBER

Dear Master Peter,

I shall do my best to let you know how I go about praying. May our gracious Lord help you and others do it better than I. Amen.

First of all, when I realize that because of other duties or thoughts I have grown cold and neglectful when it comes to praying (for our flesh and the devil resist and hinder prayer), I take my little hymnal and hurry to my room, or, if the occasion gives opportunity, to a church service with others. As time permits, I quietly recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have more time, some of the quotations of Christ, of Paul, or of the Psalms, just as children recite them.

It is good practice to begin and end the day with prayer. In this connection it is well not to entertain a deceptive idea such as this: "Wait a while, I'll pray a little later. But first I'll have to do this or that." Such thoughts divert us from praying. Instead, all our attention is given to the thing at hand. And nothing comes of praying.

Some things, no doubt, are often as important as, or even more so than, prayer, especially when they are matters of necessity. Then one can apply the saying of Saint Jerome: "Whatever a believer does is a matter of prayer" and the proverb "A faithful worker prays twice over." This is concluded from the fact that in whatever a believer does, he fears and honors God and thinks of his commandment not to wrong anyone, to steal, to cheat, or to defraud him.

Just as that is true, the counterpart must also be true, namely, that the deeds of unbelievers must be nothing other than a curse. Thus the unbelieving person's deeds are a twofold curse.



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His motives for doing what he does can only lie in his despising God and his commandments. Consequently, he can justify robbing, cheating, or defrauding his neighbor. What are such thoughts other than curses against God and man, a twofold curse? Whoever harbors them condemns himself. Such people are beggars and bunglers. Constant prayer is what Christ encourages in Luke chapter 11: to pray without ceasing. For a person should constantly guard against sinning and being unjust, which can happen when one fails to fear God and keep his commandments in mind, as Psalm 1 indicates: “Blessed is the one . . . whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.”

We must see to it that we do not lose the habit of prayer and deceive ourselves into thinking that other kinds of things are more important, when they are not. Then we might become careless and lazy, cold and indifferent when it comes to praying. The devil is neither lazy nor lax in our midst. Besides, our flesh is not too eager and desirous but is disinclined to the spirit of prayer.

When through such recitation your heart has been aroused to its need, kneel down or stand with folded hands and with your eyes heavenward. Speak or think as briefly as you can, “Dear God, heavenly Father, I am a poor, unworthy sinner, not entitled to raise my eyes or hands in prayer to you, but I come because you have commanded us all to pray. Because you also taught us when and how to pray through your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, you will hear us.

“Thus I come trusting your gracious promise and, in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, I pray with all your faithful Christians on earth, as he has taught me:





## THE LORD'S PRAYER

“Our Father in heaven . . . ” word for word, from beginning to end. After that, repeat one phrase or as many as you want.

### THE FIRST PETITION

Pray: “Hallowed be your name.” Then say: “Indeed, Lord God, dear Father, hallowed be your name, both within us and throughout the world. Destroy and wipe out the abomination, idolatry, and heresy of the Turks, the pope, and all false teachers and fanatics, who blaspheme your name, erroneously picturing you in a wretched and outrageous manner, while enthusiastically presenting their own ideas as your Word and the church’s law. Actually, under pretense of your name, they deplorably use the devil’s lies and trickery to mislead very many poor souls everywhere. And on top of that, believing that they are doing you a divine service, they kill, shed innocent blood, and persecute.

“Dear Lord God, convert and restrain such people. Convert those who shall be converted, that they with us and we with them may bless and praise your name, both in holding fast to pure doctrine and living respectable, holy lives. But restrain those who are unwilling to be converted from abusing, dishonoring, and profaning your holy name, and from misleading our poor people. Amen.”

### THE SECOND PETITION

Pray: “Your kingdom come.” Then say: “Dear Lord God, Father, you see how the world in its wisdom and knowledge not only slanders your name and dishonors you by honoring the devil but also uses all its power, might, riches, and honor, which you have given her rulers on earth to govern well and to serve you, against your kingdom. They are great, mighty, and many. They are also overly well fed. They torment, thwart, and destroy the small flock



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of your kingdom, who are weak, despised, and few. They consider such an act as carrying out your will, and do not tolerate your flock being on earth. Dear Lord God, Father, convert and restrain them. Convert those who will be children and members of your kingdom that they with us and we with them may serve you in true faith and genuine love and that we may move from the present kingdom to your everlasting kingdom. Restrain those, however, who refuse to stop destroying your kingdom with their might and power, that dethroned and humbled, they are forced to stop. Amen.”

#### THE THIRD PETITION

Pray: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Then say: “Dear Lord God, Father, you know that the world, though it cannot wholly blot out your name nor root out your kingdom, still goes about night and day with spiteful pranks and tricks, employing distortion, inventing plots, and practicing intrigues, all directed with evil intent and purpose against your name, your Word, your kingdom, and your children. For that reason, dear Lord God, Father, convert and restrain them. Convert those who shall know your gracious will, that together with us they may obey you and, beyond that, gladly and patiently bear every evil, cross, and adversity, which we recognize as coming from your perfect and gracious good will. Restrain those, however, who will not refrain from doing harm in their anger, their raving, their hate, and their ill will. Bring to nothing their counsel, evil plots, and underhanded practices, to their own shame, as it says in Psalm 7. Amen.”

#### THE FOURTH PETITION

Pray: “Give us today our daily bread.” Then say: “Dear Lord God, Father, bless us also in this temporal, physical life. Give us much desired peace and guard us against war and insurrection.



Bestow upon our dear emperor good fortune and success against his enemies. Give him wisdom and understanding to govern over a peaceful and very happy nation. Grant all kings, rulers, and leaders good judgment to govern land and people in peace and justice. Especially keep our present ruler, under whose shelter and protection you preserve us, from all evil rumors and false accusers so that his rule might be a blessed one. Give all his servants and citizens grace to serve him faithfully and obediently. Bestow upon all classes, both city folk and country folk, piety and a mutual love and sincerity. Bless our land with good harvest and good weather. Protect house and home, wife and children. Let me lead them well, bringing them up in the way of the Lord. Ward off and restrain Satan and all evil angels who would harm or distract us in this life. Amen.”

#### THE FIFTH PETITION

Pray: “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.” Then say: “Dear Lord God, Father, do not call us into judgment, for in your presence no one is righteous. Please do not condemn us for being ungrateful for all of your unspeakable goodness—both spiritual and physical—and for our daily blunders and sins—which are more than we know or mark (Psalm 19:12). Furthermore, do not consider how good or bad we have been, but look upon us with your infinite compassion, bestowed upon us by Christ, your beloved Son. Forgive also all our enemies and all those who have harmed us or done us an injustice, even as we forgive them from the heart. For they do themselves irreparable harm when they vent their anger against us. We gain nothing by their ruin. Rather, we would rather see them blessed with us. Amen.”

If there is anyone who still feels it difficult to forgive, he can pray for grace to be able to forgive. But this really belongs in a sermon.



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## THE SIXTH PETITION

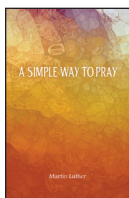
Pray: “Lead us not into temptation.” Then say: “Dear Lord God, Father, keep us brave and alert, fervent and eager in the use of your Word and service, lest we become complacent, lazy, or sluggish, as if we had need of nothing more, so that the fierce devil suddenly is able to catch us by surprise, deprive us of your precious Word, or create dissension and sects among us, or otherwise lead us into sin and shame both spiritually and physically. Rather, grant us wisdom and power through your Spirit, that as good soldiers we can conquer after resisting him. Amen.”

## THE SEVENTH PETITION

Pray: “But deliver us from evil.” Then say: “O dear Lord God, Father, this life of ours is so wretched, so full of sorrow and misfortune, so full of danger and insecurity, so full of evil and faithlessness—as St. Paul says, ‘The days are evil’ (Ephesians 5:15)—that we might justifiably be tired of life and even desirous of death. But you, dear Father, know our weakness. Therefore, help us to survive such great evil and malice. And when our time comes, let it be a blessed hour and a joyful departure out of this place of sorrows, that we may neither fear death nor give way to despair, but in unwavering faith commit our souls into your hands. Amen.”

Finally, mark this: say the Amen in every case emphatically, without doubting that God in his grace is certainly giving ear to and saying yes to your prayer. Never think of yourself as standing or kneeling alone, but as all of Christendom, or all devout Christians, joining with you in a united prayer, which God cannot disregard. And do not close this prayer without having said or thought: “Indeed, God heard this prayer; of this I am sure. For that is what Amen means.”

Also note that I am not recommending all these words become part of your prayer, lest it could end up in vain babbling and



empty chatter, read from a book or recited like the alphabet, just as laypeople use the rosary or the priests and monks say their prayers. But I want the heart to become excited about what kind of thoughts lay in the Lord's Prayer. Such thoughts the heart can, if it's properly aroused and inclined to pray, express in many other ways, either briefly or at length. For I do not bind myself to use the same expressions, but rather, today in one way, tomorrow in another, just as my heart is warmed and inclined to pray. But I do stay as close as possible to the thoughts and content. It happens often that in my meditation I come across such rich thoughts that I disregard the other six petitions. When such a wealth of ideas comes, one should forego other petitions and make room for such thoughts, listen silently, and certainly not hinder them from coming. Under these conditions the Holy Spirit is preaching, and in his sermon one word is better than a thousand in our prayer. I have learned much more from this kind of listening than I could have from much reading and reflection.

It is, therefore, very important that the heart be free and ready for prayer, as Ecclesiasticus (18:23) says: "Prepare your heart for prayer, lest you tempt God." For what is it other than tempting God when one's mouth babbles and his heart rambles? Such can be compared to a certain priest who prays in this way: "Make haste, O Lord, to save me! Lad, have you hitched up the team? Lord, come quickly to help me! Maid, go milk the cow! Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Hurry up, boy, get moving!" etc. I have heard and experienced many such prayers in my day under the papacy and almost all of them trifle with God. It would be better for people to pretend praying if they cannot do any better or are unwilling to do so. I regret that I too have prayed many canonical hours myself before I was aware that the hour was up or the psalm over with and didn't know whether I had just begun or was in the midst of the prayer.

Although people do not always pray as did the aforementioned clergyman who mixed work with worship in prayer, their minds



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wander from one thing to another, and when they have finished, they don't know what they have done or what they have prayed about. They start with "Praise . . ." and immediately they are gone, God knows where. It seems to me that a person who understands what must go on as prayer in a heart so cold and irreverent cannot but compare it to a comic-juggling act. I am now convinced—God be praised—that one who forgets what he has prayed for has actually not prayed well. For a true prayer is well thought-out from beginning to end.

He who prays must be like a good, industrious barber who has to keep his mind and eyes precisely upon his razor and hair and know whether to cut or trim, lest by too much gabbing or looking about aimlessly, he slashes someone's mouth or nose, or worse, someone's throat. Thus every job, if it is to be done well, demands the full attention of one's mind and members. As the saying goes: "One who is scatterbrained thinks of nothing and doesn't do anything right." How much more, then, will not the heart demand single-minded concentration to produce serious prayer?

This, in brief, is how I go about praying the Lord's Prayer. Like a child, I still suckle at it, and, like an old person, who cannot be satisfied, drink from it and eat of it. It is the best prayer, even better than the Psalms (which I dearly love). So it is because the Master himself composed and taught it. How shameful it is, then, to say the least, that a prayer from such a Master be treated so carelessly by so many who thoughtlessly rattle it off. Many undoubtedly pray the Lord's Prayer a thousand times a year. And though they might pray it their way a thousand years, they haven't benefited one little bit from it! To conclude: Together with the name and Word of God, the Lord's Prayer is the greatest martyr on earth. For everyone tortures and abuses it; few joyfully use it correctly for comfort.



## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

If I have more time than the Lord's Prayer requires, I do the same thing with the Ten Commandments. By taking each one piece by piece, I can more readily concentrate upon it prayerfully. I divide each commandment into four parts, thinking of it in terms of a wreath made of four strands. For example, I approach every commandment as a lesson in itself, as it is meant to be. I ask myself, what does the Lord God expect of me? Second, I find in it a source of thanksgiving, then an opportunity for confession, and, finally, an occasion for prayer. I go about it much in this fashion:

### THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

“I am the Lord your God. . . . You shall have no other gods.” Here I ponder, first of all, what God requires of me, how he teaches me that I can trust him completely under all circumstances, and his great concern that I recognize him as my God and cling to him lest I risk the loss of eternal bliss. My heart should rest its hope on him and trust nothing else—be it wealth, honor, wisdom, power, piety, or anything or any creature.

Second, I thank him for his infinite compassion, which caused him unbidden, unsought, and unmerited to seek to be a father to me, a lost person, and to adopt, comfort, protect, help, and strengthen me in every need. Otherwise we poor, blind creatures, who have sought all kinds of gods, would still be about our search had he not so generously revealed himself by our language and offered himself as our God. Who can ever thank him enough for that?

Third, I confess and acknowledge my sins and ingratitude, for having my whole lifetime so shamefully slighted such a sacred teaching and precious gift, and by idolatrous practices have



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angered and outrageously irritated him. I repent of them and pray for his forgiveness.

Fourth, I pray, “O my God and Lord, by your grace help me daily to learn and understand your commands better and live them in unshaken confidence. Guard my heart lest I continue to be so remiss and ungrateful as to seek other gods or look for comfort upon earth from any other creature, but lead me to trust and hold fast without wavering to you alone, my God. Amen, dear Lord God Father. Amen.”

### THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Then, if I desire or have time, I take the Second Commandment, which I also divide into four parts in this manner: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.”

First, I learn that I should respect, sanctify, and revere the name of God, not misuse it by swearing, cursing, or lying. I should not boast nor seek to build up my own reputation, but humbly call upon his name, pray, praise, and glorify it. Let all my honor and glory be to acknowledge him as my God and myself as his poor creature and unworthy servant.

Second, I praise him for these wondrous gifts: that he has revealed his name to me and made me his own—so as God’s servant and creature I might glorify his name, and that he has become a refuge—a mighty fortress, as Solomon says—to which the justified may flee for safety.

Third, I confess and acknowledge my shameful sins against this commandment my whole life. I have not only failed to call upon, praise, and magnify his holy name, but also showed my ingratitude toward such gifts and have misused them by committing all kinds of shameful deeds and sins by cursing, lying, deceiving, and so on. I repent of these things and pray for grace and forgiveness, etc.





Fourth, I pray for help and strength, that I may in the future learn this commandment well and guard myself against such shameful ingratitude, misuse, and sins against his name. I pray that I might rather be found grateful and esteem and honor his name.

And as I mentioned above in the Lord's Prayer, I encourage this also: if the Holy Spirit comes to you in the midst of such thoughts and begins to preach to your heart rich, illuminating thoughts, give him the opportunity. Then don't follow my method, but be quiet and listen to him who can do much better than you. Pay close attention and take note of what he says. Thus you will discover, as David says, "wonderful things" in the law of God (Psalm 119:18).

### THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." Here I learn, first, that the Sabbath is a legal holiday, not one instituted for laziness or for reveling in worldly pleasures, but a day to be kept holy by all of us. It will, however, never be hallowed by what we do, because our deeds are not holy. It will only be hallowed by God's Word, which alone is entirely devoid of sin and sanctifies all it comes into contact with, whether it be time, place, person, work, rest, or whatever. As through Word and prayer, the creation also becomes consecrated, and as Saint Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:5, our works are "consecrated" through the Word. For that reason I know that on the Sabbath I must hear God's Word and meditate on it. Then I should personally thank God for it, praise him for all his benefits, and pray for myself and all the world. Whoever conducts himself in this way on the Sabbath keeps it holy. Whoever does not conduct himself thusly does worse than those who work on the Sabbath.

Second, in this commandment I thank my God for his goodness and grace to give us the preaching of his Word. He has commanded us to use it, especially on the Sabbath, for it is a



treasure that goes beyond human appraisal. For his Word is the only light in the darkness of this life, a word of life, comfort, and salvation. Wherever this blessed Word is missing, there, as we observe daily, one finds a dreadful, frightful gloominess, deception, dissension, death, every type of ill fortune, and the tyranny of the devil himself.

Third, I confess and acknowledge my burden of sin and shameful ingratitude, to have all my life so disgracefully observed the Sabbath and so despised it and been so lazy, so contrary, so indifferent to listen to his precious Word, to say nothing of having ever admitted that I truly desired it, nor thanked him for it. In that way I permitted my Lord God to preach to me in vain and trampled underfoot that precious treasure meant to benefit me. In spite of my mistreatment of his Word, God graciously and faithfully tolerated me by continuing to let it be preached to me to my soul's salvation. I regret my actions and repent of them.

Fourth, I pray for myself and the whole world that the dear Father will preserve us through his holy Word and will not deprive us of it because of our sins, ingratitude, and laziness. May he protect us against false sects and teachers and instead give us faithful and fruitful workers in his vineyard, such as pious, devout pastors and preachers. May he also grant all of us grace to humbly listen to their words as his words, accept and honor them, and show our heartfelt gratitude.

#### THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

“Honor your father and your mother.” This commandment teaches me, first, to recognize God as my Creator, who has marvelously endowed me by giving me life through my parents. I am aware that he has given them a loving heart that cares for me with all diligence as the fruit of their bodies. They brought me into the world, fed me, and watched over me with the utmost concern. I thank him that he has up to this moment protected me, his



creature, against innumerable dangers and often helped me out of trouble, as if every hour he were creating me anew. The devil, on the other hand, begrudges me every living moment.

Second, I thank our gracious and generous Creator that he has in this commandment established and maintained the propagation and preservation of the human race, that is, on the family level and on the state level, economically and politically. For without these two ruling bodies the world couldn't survive for a single year. No place can exist without national government; without peace there can be no family life; without family life, children cannot be begotten or reared. Fatherhood and motherhood would come to an end. It is for this reason that this commandment exists: namely, to protect both family life and statehood. It instructs children and servants to obey and must be enforced. Where it is not obeyed, punishment must follow. Otherwise disobedient children would have disrupted households long ago and unruly employees, of whom there are more than there are employers, would by riots have broken down authority. It is hard to find words to express the blessings coming from this commandment.

Third, I repent and acknowledge my shocking insubordination and sin, that I rebelled against this commandment by dishonoring my parents by disobedience, that I often angered and saddened them by disapproving of their parental chastening, by my grumbling and despising their well-meaning counsel, and that I preferred the advice of evil associates and reckless companions. The sad fact is, God himself condemns such disobedient children and denies them long life, as many of them die scandalously or perish before they grow up. For he who doesn't obey father or mother must answer to the judge, or otherwise come to an evil end through God's anger. All such things I repent of and pray for grace and forgiveness.

Fourth, I pray for myself and for the whole world that God will richly bless both the home and the state, that we may become



reverent, honor our parents, and be subject to the authorities. I also pray that we might resist the devil when he tempts us to disobey or be quarrelsome and that we might improve both home and nation while we keep the peace, all to the praise and honor of God and for our personal benefit. May we recognize and be grateful for these gifts.

We should also give thanks in this prayer for the understanding and wisdom that God grants our parents and superiors to govern us in a peaceable and blessed way. May he spare them from tyranny, riot, and fury, so that they hold his Word in esteem and not reject it, lest they do anyone an injustice. For such great gifts are attained only by prayer, as Saint Paul teaches (Romans 12:12). Otherwise the devil will reign and bring everything into chaos.

If you are a father or mother, now is the time to recognize what you are and not neglect your children or household. But you should earnestly pray that the heavenly Father, who in his name has given you an honorable position and wants you also to be called and honored as father, may grant you grace and blessing to govern and provide for your wife, children, and household in a God-fearing, Christian manner. May he give you wisdom and strength to bring them up well and give them a good and honest heart to follow your advice and to be obedient. God has given you both gifts: your children and their welfare—for their successful upbringing and behavior. Otherwise, a home can be nothing but a pigpen, a school for knaves, as one finds among godless, undisciplined people.

#### THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not murder.” The first thing I learn from this commandment is that God expects me to love my neighbor, that I do him no bodily harm either by word or deed. I should in no malicious or vengeful way, led by anger, impatience, envy, hate,



or any other evil motive, try to get even with him or harm him. On the other hand, I should know that I owe him assistance and good counsel for all of his bodily needs. For God in this commandment ordered me to protect my neighbor's life and, likewise, has ordered my neighbor to protect me, as Sirach says, "He has made us mutually responsible" (Ecclesiasticus 9:14).

Second, I thank him for his most indescribable love, concern, and faithfulness over against me. God has erected such a strong abode and wall around my person that all people are obliged to take care of and protect me, and I, in turn, owe them the same. When this doesn't happen, he has ordered the government to punish those who fail to follow this ordinance. Were it not for this divine ordinance, the devil would create such murderous assaults among us, that no one could feel safe for a minute, as happens when God in his anger punishes a disobedient and ungrateful world.

Third, I confess and decry my own and the world's mischief, not only that we are so utterly ungrateful for parental love and concern, but, what is far worse, that we do not acknowledge such a commandment and ordinance. We refuse to learn from it, as if it didn't concern or affect us. In defiance of this commandment and seemingly without any pangs of conscience, we despise, desert, persecute, or injure our neighbor, or even go so far as to carry murderous thoughts in our hearts; aroused by anger, fury, and malice. And we convince ourselves of being justified in so doing!

Indeed, it is high time for us evildoers, as blind, ungrateful people, to lament and weep. We are like furious animals dealing with each other by stamping, bumping, scratching, clawing, biting, and devouring, rather than being people who heed a serious and divine commandment.

Fourth, I pray that our dear Father will help us learn to understand his holy commandment, so that we can keep it and live it. May God protect us completely from that murderer the devil, who is the master of all murder and violence. May he give us his



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rich grace that we and all other people deal in a friendly, gentle, and kind manner with each other, forgiving each other from the heart and bearing with each other's failures and shortcomings in Christian love. May we also live in perfect peace and unity, as this commandment teaches and requires.

#### THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not commit adultery." Here I learn again what God has in mind for me and expects of me. He wants me to live a pure, chaste, and godly life in thought, word, and deed so that I do not disgrace anyone's wife, daughter, or maid. Rather, I should help save and protect and do whatever helps to preserve their honor and chastity. I should also discourage the gossip of those who would ruin their name or reputation. All these things are required of me, and God expects that I not only refrain from molesting my neighbor's wife and whoever else belongs to him, but he also expects me to preserve his respectability, even as I can expect my neighbor to deal with me and mine according to this commandment.

Second, I thank my faithful and dear Father for the grace and goodness to have taken me under his protection, as well as my son, servant, wife, daughter, and maid, and to have sternly forbidden anyone from shaming or humbling them. God provides for its being carried out. At the same time, if someone should violate this commandment and appear to get by unpunished, God himself will step in. No one escapes him. The transgressor has to pay, either here or by suffering hell fire for his lust. God wants chastity. He cannot tolerate adultery. That is evident daily when we observe that all impenitent and dissolute people bring down God's wrath upon themselves and perish. Otherwise it would be impossible even for an hour for a man to protect his wife, children, or servants from some lustful devil, and have them live a decent and honorable life. Without such restraints, immorality would run rampant and bestiality would flourish, even



as it happens over and over again when God in his anger keeps his hands off and lets things go to ruin.

Third, I confess and admit all my sins, as well as those of all the world, how during my lifetime I have sinned against this commandment in thought, word, and deed. Not only was I ungrateful to God for such marvelous instruction but even murmured against God's having demanded such discipline and chastity and not having permitted all kinds of immorality and mischief to go unpunished. I despised marriage, mocked it, and even condemned it. God, however, considers sins against this commandment, above all others, to be the most disgraceful and most scandalous, since he lets them be revealed. For this I am sorry.

Fourth, I pray for myself and the whole world that God would give us grace to gladly keep this commandment from the heart, to live a chaste life, and to encourage and help others to do so.

Thus I deal with all the other commandments, if I have the time and opportunity or the inclination. As I have said, I hope no one feels compelled to follow my plan or idea. But I have presented it to anyone who wants to use it or do even better, if he can take the time to consider all the commandments in sequence or as many as he pleases. For once the soul decides to concentrate on one thing—whether good or bad—it can within a fraction of a second go over more than the tongue can speak in ten hours or the pen can write in ten days. The mind is a remarkably apt, ingenious, energetic thing that can go over the four parts of the Ten Commandments rather fast, if it earnestly wants to.

#### THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not steal.” First of all, I learn here that I must not take anything from my neighbor against his will, be it done secretly or openly. I must not be unscrupulous or dishonest in business, service, or employment, so that I do not acquire anything by cunning. But I should earn my livelihood by the sweat





of my brow and eat my own bread in all honesty. By the same token, it should be my concern that my neighbor does not lose what belongs to him anymore than I would want to lose what is mine. I also perceive in this commandment the Lord's fatherly concern for me. He protects and shields my goods by forbidding others to steal from me. If anyone disobeys him, he has ordered Hangman Hans to lead him to the gallows for punishment. Or if the latter is not involved, God himself will do the punishing, so that those who are thieves must finally become beggars. As the saying goes: "A young thief goes begging at the end." And "Ill-gotten is ill spent."

Second, I thank God for his unfailing goodness to teach me and all the world so good a lesson with the assurance of protection, for had he not done so, no one would have a cent of his own or a bite left to eat in the house.

Third, I confess all my sins and my ingratitude where I might have been unfair, shortchanged, or cheated anyone in my life, etc.

Fourth, I pray for grace, that I and the rest of the world may understand the value of this commandment and reflect upon it for improvement, so that stealing, robbing, cheating, dishonesty, and injustice may gradually decrease until judgment day, for which the prayers of all saints and creatures eagerly yearn to bring things to an end. Amen.

#### THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not give false testimony." This teaches us, first of all, to be honest with one another, shunning lies and scandal, to speak well of one another, and to prefer to hear good things about others. This commandment is erected as a wall and fortress to protect our good reputation against slanderous gossip and malicious lies, which God will not let go unpunished, as he has promised in the other commandments.





Second, we owe God thanks, both for the instruction and the safety that he so graciously offers in it. Third, confessing our guilt, we ask forgiveness for having spent our lives ungratefully defaming our neighbor rather than feeling duty-bound to preserve his honor and integrity, as we would like him to do for us.

Fourth, we pray for help to keep such a commandment, and in the future pray for a curative tongue, etc.

#### THE NINTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house . . . or your neighbor’s wife,” etc. These commandments teach us, first of all, that we have no legal right to deprive our neighbor of his goods or to alienate, entice, or extort what is his. Instead, we should help him keep his own, just as we would like him to treat us. These commandments are also a protection against clever, greedy spoilers who finally will receive their punishment.

Second, we should be grateful for such commandments by giving him thanks.

Third, we should repent and with grief and sorrow confess our guilt.

Fourth, we should pray for help and strength to devoutly keep these commandments of God.

These are the Ten Commandments, as they lend themselves to be looked at in a fourfold way—as a textbook, a hymnal, a confessional, and a prayer book. Using them in this way, a heart should be warmed to prayer. But take care lest you try to do all at once or take too much upon yourself so that the spirit tires. Besides, a good prayer should not be too long or drawn out, but frequent and enthusiastic. It is enough to take a part or half of it to enkindle your heart. That can happen only when the spirit prompts the heart, and that occurs when the heart reacts and is freed from all foreign thoughts and concerns.



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We have nothing to say here about faith and the Holy Scriptures, for that would go too far afield. But whoever is in practice can perhaps take the Ten Commandments one day or a psalm or a chapter out of the Bible on another to kindle his heart into a flame of prayer.

Instead of the two foregoing paragraphs that summarize Luther's use of the Ten Commandments, some expanded editions have included the following:

## THE APOSTLES' CREED

Anyone having spare time or being so inclined may add the Creed and make of it a braid of four strands. The Creed itself has three main parts or articles relating to each of the persons of the divinity, as they were formerly arranged and are even now in the Catechism.

### THE FIRST ARTICLE—DEALING WITH CREATION

"I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth. " First of all, this article will enlighten your heart if you let it. It teaches you briefly what books upon books and lectures upon lectures cannot adequately present: namely, what you are, where you came from, and how heaven and earth came to be. For you are God's creation, his handiwork, getting your life from him. By yourself you would be nothing, could do nothing, could know nothing, and achieve nothing. What were you a thousand years ago? What were heaven and earth six thousand years ago? Nothing, even as something that will never be created is nothing. But whatever you are, whatever you know, whatever you can do is God's creation. This is what you confess here, because you



have nothing to brag about, other than your being nothing in the presence of your Creator, who can within a split second bring you to naught. Reason cannot grasp such wisdom. Regarding heaven and earth, man, and the creation of the world, many great minds are stymied. But this article of faith simply states that God has created everything out of nothing. Contemplating this is like being in a garden for the soul, where it can take an enjoyable, leisurely walk to appreciate God's creativeness. But to dwell on such details here will take too long.

Second, it is in place here to thank God for his kindness in having created and sustained daily out of nothing so wonderful a creature composed of body and soul, having intelligence, five senses, etc. God has put under man's authority the earth with its fish, birds, and animal life, and so on.

Here chapters 1-3 of Genesis come under consideration.

Third, we should confess and lament our unbelief and ingratitude. Being worse than unmindful beasts, we have not heartily accepted, believed, considered, or even acknowledged God's fatherhood.

Fourth, we pray for a true and unshaken faith to believe in and hold fast to our dear God as our Creator, as this article states.

#### THE SECOND ARTICLE — DEALING WITH SALVATION

"And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord," etc. Like the First Article, this article also enlightens us to know that we have been redeemed by Christ, God's Son, from eternal damnation, which was our destiny through Adam's fall after the creation. And even as in the First Article it was necessary to have recognized yourself as a creature of God without doubting it, here it is necessary to count yourself among the redeemed and never to doubt that. In this connection it might be well to underscore *our* when referring to Jesus Christ *our* Lord, *our* Redeemer, *our* substitute,



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*our* risen one. All this he is for us. This is meant for you too as God's Word promises.

Second, it is proper for you to thank God for such abundant grace and to rejoice in your salvation.

Third, it behooves you to bewail and confess your shameful unbelief or whatever doubt you have of grace. Oh, what a multitude of things will come to your mind! How much idolatry you have practiced by all kinds of service to the saints and to your innumerable personal good works that contradict such salvation.

Fourth, pray that God will keep you in the true faith in Christ your Lord from henceforth.

### THE THIRD ARTICLE—DEALING WITH SANCTIFICATION

"I believe in the Holy Spirit," etc.

That is the third great light that makes known to us how to recognize such a Creator and Redeemer as present on earth and how and when to approach him and what it will lead to eventually. Much could be written about this, but let it suffice to say that wherever the holy Christian church exists, there one finds God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit, who daily sanctifies us through the forgiveness of sins, etc. One finds the church where God's Word concerning such faith is correctly preached and confessed. Here there is, indeed, much for you to meditate upon—all the things that the Spirit does daily for the churches.

Now you have the opportunity to give thanks that you were called and can come to such a church.

Confess and lament your unfaithfulness and the ingratitude caused by your negligence. Pray for a strong, unwavering faith to remain steadfast until you come where nothing will ever change. That will be after the resurrection from the dead, in life everlasting. Amen.

