

Understanding Christianity

*17 Lessons of Christian Essentials for Those
Examining or Embracing the Faith.*



William Frye

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Complements the workbook Understanding the Faith by Stephen Smallman, 2009. See introduction.

Scriptures in New International Version.
All annotations to scripture including underline, bold, parenthesis, and italic are by the author for emphasis.

Westminster Catechisms in both traditional language and modern English.

To My Students

Most recently Caleb, Eva, Maggie, and Victor
who inspired me to turn our lessons into this book.

The Seventeen Lessons

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The Seventeen Lessons

Introduction

One of the great joys in my life has been to teach young adults the fundamentals of the Christian faith. These “fundamentals” are not simply the foundation of one religion called Christianity, but properly understood are the essential basis of all truth and human purpose. I have always shared with students in the first lesson of a communicant’s class that the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism should be the essence and summary passion of their entire life.

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. The Chief End of Man is to Glorify God and Enjoy him forever.

All of life is illuminated, informed, directed, and inspired by what God has wonderfully appointed as our purpose. For all those in Christ it is a life and purpose that will never end.

One age group that I love to teach is Middle School. These young adults are at the pivotal time of life that combines wonder and openness with a growing intellect and maturity. It is a golden window of time for establishing the Christian mind and heart. This time we used Stephen Smallman’s excellent workbook - *Understanding the Faith*. I wrote lessons around each chapter in the book that explored a combination of questions and answers along with scripture reading, stories, examples, prayer, and catechism question memorization. It would be hard to express how much I was blessed to be part of their lives and explore Christianity together.

The book you are holding is a collection of those 17 lessons. During the class I provided the written lesson to both student and parents after each session. I wanted to create occasions outside of class for reflection and discussion. Within the class we prioritized open discussion as the vehicle for learning. Each

meeting was very interactive and participative, which I think we all found to be much more engaging and effective for learning than a traditional classroom where the teacher does the talking and the students take notes. We took the time needed for exploration. In fact, sometimes a single lesson (such as effectual calling) would grow and consume a number of meetings. We started to call the hard but rewarding topics: “Deep Water” discussions. Our minds grew together, and our hearts were inflamed with love for the Gospel and the glorious amazing work of our Savior.

Similarly, in this book, the topic of each lesson is propelled forward through a series of questions and answers. Scriptures, catechism questions, stories, summaries, and prayers fill out the material. My goal is to capture in book form the dynamics of exploration. Accordingly, this book is formatted to facilitate quick recognition of lesson components:

- *italic bold font for questions*
- *italic normal font for example answers*
- normal font for discussion
- **bold font for statements / stories**
- light gray hatched shading for scripture references, NIV and for table summary points
- Medium gray shading for *catechism questions* and *answers*.

I want to thank Stephen Smallman who encouraged me to publish this work as a further help to teachers and students who desire to understand the Christian faith. Thanks also to Darlene Frye and Norma Bennett for their editing and suggestions.

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Grass Valley, California

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Lesson 1

Our Purpose as People

Created for Joy and Glory

Introduction

Who are you? It is an easy question to understand. But a remarkably hard question to answer. Think about it. Try asking someone. They will probably answer the who question with a “what” answer: what their name is, what city they live in, what city they grew up in, what school they attend or company they work for. But “Who are you?” probes much deeper than our what and where answers. It drives us to address our essence and our purpose. Who are you? Do you as a human being have an essential purpose?

The Purpose of Human Life

If you were to ask one or two of your non-Christian friends what they thought was the purpose of living, what would they say?

Most would probably say something like being happy, healthy, wealthy, feeling loved, etc...

WSC 1. What does the Bible say is Man’s Purpose?

“To glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

What does this mean to you?

That he knows me better than I know myself. That I am made to live for him and that my greatest joy will come when I do that.

Why We Glorify and Enjoy God	Summary
<p>Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.</p>	<p>We are made in God's Image.</p>
<p>Romans 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.</p>	<p>All things exist for God and should glorify him.</p>
<p>Revelation 4:11 You are worthy, our Lord and God, to <u>receive glory</u> and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.</p>	<p>God alone is worthy of our worship.</p>
<p>Psalms 19:1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. 3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.</p>	<p>Creation declares that God is to be praised.</p>
<p>Matthew 22:36-40 Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "<u>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.</u>" 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.</p>	<p>The greatest commandment is to love God with all that we are.</p>

<p>Matthew 6:28-34 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 <u>So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'</u> 32 <u>For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.</u> 33 <u>But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.</u> 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.</p>	<p>God is in control of our lives and we need not worry.</p>
<p>Psalms 73:24-28 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. 28 But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.</p>	<p>We are created to <u>desire God</u> and be satisfied by him.</p>

<p>John 17:24 Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.</p>	<p>Our destiny is to be with God and enjoy his Glory.</p>
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How do we Glorify God?

What does it mean to glorify something?

To speak well of it, to praise it, put it first, cause other people to think well of it, to bring it honor or recognition.

What are some things people glorify?

Good looks, intelligence, power, leadership, talent.

What should we glorify most of all?

God, as we have learned.

How do we do that?

How We are to Glorify God	Summary
<p>Psalm 50:23 He who <u>sacrifices thank offerings</u> honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.</p>	<p>Give thanks.</p>
<p>Psalm 86:12 I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.</p>	<p>Praise him with our whole heart.</p>
<p>John 4:22-23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the <u>true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth</u>, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.</p>	<p>Worship according to God's Word and Spirit.</p>

<p>Matthew 5:15-16 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, <u>let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.</u></p>	Do good deeds.
<p>1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.</p>	Do everything to God's glory.
<p>1 Peter 2:12 <u>Live such good lives among the pagans</u> that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.</p>	Live good lives.
<p>Romans 15:5-6 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that <u>with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.</u></p>	Glorify God in unity with others.

Augustine's Quote

In the 5th century A.D. St. Augustine said something very profound:

“Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”

Why are our hearts restless unless resting in God?

We are made to glorify and enjoy God. When we don't we are unfulfilled – something is missing.

What does it mean to enjoy something?

To take pleasure in it, to be satisfied with it, to feel benefit from it.

What are some things people enjoy?

Good food, entertainment, movies, friends, vacations.

What should we enjoy most of all?

God, as we have learned.

How are we to enjoy God?

How We are to Enjoy God	Summary
<p>Psalm 16:8-9 I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure.</p>	<p>True joy comes from the presence of God.</p>
<p>Jeremiah 9:23-24 This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that <u>I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,</u>" declares the LORD.</p>	<p>We delight in knowing who God is and that he delights in justice and righteousness.</p>

<p>Romans 5:8-11 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.</p>	<p>We rejoice knowing that we are adopted by God because of the work of Christ.</p>
<p>Psalms 19:7-11 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. 10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. 11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.</p>	<p>We delight in knowing and keeping God's commands.</p>

<p>Galatians 5:22-23 <u>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.</u></p>	<p>The Holy Spirit produces Joy in our lives.</p>
<p>James 1:2-4 <u>Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.</u></p>	<p>We can have joy in suffering in trials because God uses them to mature us.</p>
<p>1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. <u>And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.</u></p>	<p>We have joy that we know that we will be with God forever.</p>

Sin

What is man's choice to disobey God and live without him called?

Sin.

WSC 14. What is sin?

Sin is disobeying or not conforming to God's law in any way.

What are some ways in which we can disobey God?

- Worshipping other gods
- Making idols
- Misusing God's name
- Not keeping the Sabbath
- Not honoring our parents
- Murdering
- Being unfaithful our husband or wife
- Stealing
- Lying
- Longing to have what belongs to another person.

The Greatest Commandment	Summary
Matthew 22:36-37 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."	It is sin not to love God with all that we are.

How does this change your thoughts about sin?

Most people think of sin as bad behavior or thoughts. Jesus is saying that sin is fundamentally a love problem – not loving God with all that we are. That is what results in sinful behavior.

God's Response to Sin – A Forgiven and Adopted Family***What is God's plan to rescue his creation?***

To provide a savior who will rescue a great number of people from sin, and adopt them into God's family.

Would God have been just (right) if He had chosen not to rescue his creation?

Yes.

Why did he do it?

For his pleasure.

Chosen by his Pleasure	Summary
<p>Ephesians 1:4-6 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be <u>adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.</u></p>	<p>Before the world was created God chose us to his holy children.</p>

The Church

What is this family called?

The Church (called out ones)

The Body of Christ

The Sacraments

The church has a responsibility to administer the ordinances that Christ appointed to benefit his church.

WSC 92. What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is a holy ordinance appointed by Christ, by which, by visible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed and applied to believers.

WSC 93. What are the sacraments of the New Testament?

The sacraments of the New Testament are Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and these take the place of Circumcision and the Passover in the Old Testament.

Who established these sacraments?

Jesus.

Matthew 28:19

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Who should be baptized?

Anyone, who confesses Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord should be baptized.

Note – some churches also baptize young children of parents who are confessing Christians. In this case, baptism is not thought of as something that itself secures salvation for the child, but rather is recognition that the child is a member of the church (a parallel to child circumcision in the Old Testament). If the baptized child subsequently makes a confession of Christ, they are then admitted to the Lord’s Supper. For more see WSC 95.

How is one able to receive the Lord’s Supper?

By confessing Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord, and usually following baptism.

Who are you? What is your purpose?

“To glorify God and enjoy him forever” (WSC 1)

It is the answer to build your life around and upon.

Review

Lesson 1 – We as people have a purpose from God: To glorify him and enjoy him forever. This purpose brings meaning and direction for all of our life.

Prayer

- Father – we ask you to help us to see your glory more clearly
 - That we would see your glory in your creation
 - That we would see your glory in your Word
 - That we would see your glory in how you have provided salvation for your people
 - That we would live to glorify and Enjoy you above all else
 - That we would give thanks continually
 - That we would live obedient lives
 - That we would love our neighbor
 - That we would worship you with other believers
- Father – prepare us to confess you as Savior if we have not yet done so; we want to know our true and God given purpose



*Lesson 2***How God Can Be Known***The Scriptures and Creation***Introduction**

Your purpose is to glorify and enjoy God. But how do you do that? Where do you begin? Of course, it must begin with knowing who God is and what it means to bring him glory and enjoy him. How do we get this knowledge? Certainly, our world abounds with different ideas about God. Many religions and philosophies (including atheism which denies God completely) assert different and contradicting claims. But which is true? Are any true? How can we be sure?