



The Essential Lutheran Handbook

500th Anniversary
Even Smaller Pocket Edition

Youth Discussion Guide

SECTION ONE: CHURCH STUFF

- 1** *How to Listen to a Sermon (page 18)*
This article makes some pretty bold claims about sermons. What are they? How is a sermon preached by a preacher different from other types of public speaking?

- 2** *How to Receive Communion (page 21)*
Why do you think there are so many different ways to practice this sacrament? Are the differences logistical or symbolic? How about the many different names? What facets or meanings of the sacrament does each name emphasize? Which name and/or method is most meaningful to you? How come? Has that been the same all your life?

- 3** *The Anatomy of a Baptism (page 26)*
Why do Lutherans baptize babies as well as older people? In your opinion, should the person being baptized have a say in the matter? Does that person have to do anything to make baptism work? Why or why not?

- 4** *How to Share the Peace in Church (page 28)*
Think of three situations or circumstances that would make sharing God's peace with somebody in worship supremely awkward. Discuss some of these as a group. What makes sharing God's peace different from other kinds of greetings?

- 5** *Five Things You Should Know about the Lutheran Reformation (page 30)*
These five bits of information about the reformers and the quality of life in their era remind us how different our experience is from theirs. Think of ways you have practiced individual freedom, choice, and meeting the expectations of others in the last week. As a modern person with ideas and the ability to take action, what would you like to see reformed in your church? What are some ways these 500-year-old lessons might help you?



6 *How to Identify the True Christian Church on Earth (page 33)*

How does the Lutheran understanding of the true Christian church mess with the ways we usually organize people into groups? Of the seven visible signs under point #3, which seem the strangest? What are some signs you might expect to see on this list that aren't there?

7 *How to Avoid Getting Burned at the Stake (page 45)*

What does the word *heresy* mean? What do you think of the fact that the man credited with founding the whole Lutheran thing was officially named a heretic? What's the most effective way to argue against a charge of heresy?

8 *Luther's Seal (page 53)*

Though Luther is often associated with words, hymns, and theological arguments, the design of his seal shows us that he was also interested in how images and symbols communicate. If you had a seal to tell people who you are and what's important to you, what would it look like? What elements of your faith would make the cut? Which images would you use to show others what you believe about God? We don't use seals to press images into wax these days, but images are all around us. If Luther were alive today, where might his symbol show up?

9 *How to Be a Greeter (page 70)*

How could an overzealous greeter actually defeat their intended purpose? Why do you think having greeters is important—or is it? As a group, brainstorm and discuss five key characteristics of a top-notch greeter.

10 *Names for Lutheran Worship Furnishings, Ministers, Paraments, and Vestments (page 96)*

Does this picture look at all like the space where you worship? What's the same? What's different? Which items of decoration or furniture can be moved around? What's (literally) set in stone (or concrete)? What parts of the worship space could you get along fine without? Which things would you refuse to lose? What do you think every Christian church needs to have in it? Make your argument to the group.



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SECTION TWO: EVERYDAY STUFF

- 1** *How to Tell the Difference Between the Law and the Gospel (page 110)*
If hearing God's Word seems to make you feel sick or scared or guilty, do you think you're hearing the law or the gospel? Why? What's the most comforting thing you've ever heard in church? Why do you think our faith has its own law? Why do we need to hear the gospel?

- 2** *How to Proclaim the Gospel to Someone Who Needs to Hear It (page 113)*
What is the hardest part of talking to others about Jesus? What might make you feel comfortable proclaiming the gospel? If you were asked to share the gospel with someone but couldn't use words, what actions would you take?

- 3** *The Top Three Uses of the Law (page 116)*
If you were making a list of words that describe or define you, what are the chances that *sinner* would make the list? Probably pretty low. Nobody likes to feel like a jerk. But rules and laws, like the Ten Commandments, set expectations and boundaries (that's the first use), and they expose the gap between what we ought to do and what we usually end up doing (that's a second use). Which of the Ten Commandments set boundaries? Which ones show us what we ought to do? As you think of the commandments, which ones seem to help the community live and thrive? Discuss.

- 4** *How to Pray (page 119)*
In your experience, what's the most difficult, awkward, or uncomfortable thing about prayer? When in your life has prayer seemed most natural or appropriate? What made it feel that way?

- 5** *How to Forgive Someone (page 121)*
Which of the five "steps" in the book seems hardest to apply? What qualifies someone to deserve forgiveness? Why do you suppose some people equate forgiveness with weakness? What makes forgiveness matter to the forgiver? To the forgivee?



6 *How to Confess Your Sins and Receive Forgiveness (page 123)*

Though many Lutherans think of private and personal confession as something only Roman Catholics do, Martin Luther thought everyone should do it so we'd know with everything in us that our sins are forgiven. How do you think it would feel to be someone's confessor—hearing their sins and announcing God's forgiveness? What problems could that create? What benefits? Can you think of anyone you'd trust to hear your confession?

7 *How to Resist Temptation (page 125)*

Though the word seems old-fashioned, temptations (including activities, attitudes, emotions, causes, and such) all compete for our loyalty, trust, and faith. Name some of your strategies for discerning the difference between a bad or dangerous temptation and an aspiration or worthwhile goal. What's the best advice in this chapter? How can you use it?

8 *How to Care for the Sick (page 133)*

Make a list of all the elements that can help a person get well and stay well. What's the sickest you've ever been? What helped you feel better? Why do you think Jesus spent so much time in the presence of people who were ill? What does that tell you about God?

9 *How to Console Someone (page 137)*

In your experience as consoler or the recipient of consolation, which of the five guidelines in this chapter have been most effective? What's the difference between consoling someone and solving someone's problem for them? What are some ways we might use the act of consoling someone as a means for dealing with our own fears or concerns?

10 *The Four Most Common Heresies Well-Intentioned Lutherans Commit (page 146)*

Lutheran theology is kind of a troublemaker. It pushes against what we often assume is common sense or logic. What's attractive or compelling about each of the beliefs listed in this chapter? Which beliefs are you most tempted to hold?



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SECTION THREE: BIBLE STUFF

1 *A Brief History of the Bible (page 172)*

Go ahead and write in your handbook. Put a star beside sections of Bible history you think you know pretty well (like, you'd get at least 75 percent on a multiple choice test on it). Put a square beside sections that sound familiar, but you don't know well. Put a question mark beside sections you know nothing about or have never heard of. Circle or highlight one area of Bible history you find particularly interesting or intriguing, and talk about it with the group. Who can you ask for info or help getting to know parts of the Bible that are new to you?

2 *How to Memorize a Bible Verse (page 186)*

Share three things you know by heart (The Pledge of Allegiance, your address, some Shakespeare, a Bible verse, etc.). How have you memorized such things in the past? What are the benefits of knowing some things so deeply that they're actually mapped out in your brain?

3 *Five Facts about Life in New Testament Times (page 190)*

Let's say you're a time traveler heading back to the New Testament era (roughly 0–100 CE). What would be most interesting to you? What would you want to see, taste, or try? What would you want to tell the people you meet? What would you ask them?

4 *The Five Biggest Misconceptions about the Bible (page 191)*

Describe what was happening in your life when you first learned about these misconceptions (maybe it's right now!). How did/does it feel to get used to thinking differently about the Bible? How did/will it affect the way you read or think about the Bible?

5 *Jesus' Twelve Apostles (Plus Judas and Paul) (page 193)*

Note that many of the people listed here met untimely deaths. The word *martyred* means being killed for one's faith (*martyr* is the Greek word for "witness"). In the early years of the Christian movement, those who accepted death rather than denying Christ were seen as witnesses to the power of Christian faith. Why was it so dangerous to be connected to Jesus in those early days of the church? Does being a Christian ever feel risky for you?



6 *Five Inspiring Women in the Bible (page 199)*

Were any of the biblical women named in this chapter new to you? Who are some strong, intelligent, and thoughtful women leaders in your church? In your community? In the world?

7 *How to Locate the “Canon within the Canon” (page 201)*

What are the key ingredients in a book or passage of the Bible that, according to Martin Luther, make it more central, special, or important than others? What should we do with parts of the Bible that make us uncomfortable, or that we have a hard time believing or trusting or liking?

8 *Seven Important Bible Teachings Every Lutheran Should Know (page 203)*

What are some reasons why Lutherans really love the Bible (the technical term for this is having a “high view” of Scripture)? What does the Bible do that is fundamentally different from other ancient books, messages, or texts? Which of the seven teachings featured in this chapter brings you the most comfort? Which ones are confusing or troubling?

9 *A Brief History of God’s Covenant with the People (page 205)*

What kind of God keeps making covenants with people who regularly fail to uphold their part of the bargain? What does this strategy say about who God is and what God values? How did God’s strategy change with Jesus’ arrival on the scene?

10 *How to Read Key Types of Bible Literature (page 207)*

Which types of Bible literature seem the most straightforward and easy to understand? Which seem more complicated? Why do you think there are so many different types of writing in the Bible? How might this variety of genres change the way you read or think about various stories in the Bible?



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SECTION FOUR: LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

1 *The Ten Commandments (page 230)*

Why would we use the words “fear and love” together when thinking about our relationship with God? Can faith be based on anything other than trust? Why or why not? What do the commandments show about who God is and what God wants for humanity?

2 *The Ten Commandments (page 230)*

The Ten Commandments consist of three positive commands (numbers 1–3) and seven prohibitions (the “you shall nots”: 4–10). In his explanations, Martin Luther adds positive actions to all the commandments. Does this make the commandments harder or easier to follow and apply? Why?

3 *The Creed: The First Article (page 233)*

Is creation a one-and-done event for Lutherans, or an ongoing thing? Why do you think Martin Luther uses the present tense to describe God as Creator? How can he say that God the Creator provides things like shoes and clothing, when those things are made and traded by people?

4 *The Creed: The Second Article (page 233)*

What does it mean to have a Lord? In Luther's explanation of this part of the creed, who is the subject of the verbs (who is doing all the acting, choosing, deciding, etc.)? According to this section, what's our role in redemption? How do you feel about that?

5 *The Creed: The Third Article (page 234)*

What does it tell you about Luther and the Lutheran church that one of the major statements of Christian belief is a confession of our inability to believe? What does Luther describe as the work of God's Holy Spirit? What are ways you see the Holy Spirit at work today?



6 *The Lord's Prayer (page 235)*

The catechism's line-by-line explanation of this prayer is likely one of the most helpful and lovely things dear old Martin penned. What other parts of the church—or the nation or the world or even your own life—might benefit from this kind of treatment?

7 *The Lord's Prayer (page 235)*

Many people have been put off by Luther's claim in the fifth petition that we "deserve only punishment." It does seem a little harsh. Note, however, that he uses the first person ("we"), rather than saying something like "All those sinners over there deserve only punishment." What does that tell you about Luther's view of humanity? What about Luther's view of God? Revisit the Ten Commandments section. Keeping those rules and Luther's explanations in mind, what does it seem that God thinks people deserve? Where do you stand?

8 *The Sacrament of Holy Baptism (page 239)*

Would Lutherans perform or recognize a baptism that was done without water? Why or why not? What does Luther most want people to know about baptism? Talk about the last baptism you participated in. What made you a participant? What will you look or listen for next time?

9 *The Sacrament of Holy Baptism (page 239)*

What are the two parts of confession? Knowing what you know about Martin Luther's deep concern that the gospel be preached and heard, which part do you suspect is the most important to him?

10 *The Sacrament of the Altar (page 242)*

Trick question alert: How can a person be sure they are worthy of receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion? People have gotten tangled up in that question for a long time: Can we ever be good enough or truly prepared? How do you make sense of this requirement? *Is it a requirement?* How does Luther's explanation put our concerns to rest? According to Luther, what is the only thing necessary?