



Hunger Catechism: First Commandment

BIG IDEA: Invitation to a new life | **Reading:** Matthew 6:25–26

Purpose

This Hunger Catechism lesson will discuss the First Commandment, Martin Luther’s interpretation and how we can live out this commandment with our neighbor. Also, this lesson discusses the state of hunger and poverty around the world and how we are called as Lutherans to respond to the imbalances and injustices of the world and of our country.

Commandment and focus

FIRST COMMANDMENT: “You shall have no other gods.”

FOCUS QUESTION: How would our lives change if we put our trust in God before anything else?

Luther’s lens (*Small Catechism*)

“We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things.”

Luther’s explanation (*Large Catechism*)

“There are some who think that they have God and everything they need when they have money and property; they trust in them and boast in them so stubbornly and securely that they care for no one else. They, too, have a god—mammon by name, that is, money and property—on which they set their whole heart. This is the most common idol on earth.”

Going further

The First Commandment may seem simple enough to follow—don’t have any other gods ... check! But as he does throughout the Small and Large Catechisms, Martin Luther turns this commandment from a rule not to be broken into a guideline for how we can be in better relationship with God and neighbor. Luther’s interpretation of the First Commandment calls us to “fear, love, and trust God above all things.” This shifts our focus from trying to possess a god to being in a loving and trusting relationship with God.

Being Lutheran is all about trust. God trusts and loves us and asks us to put our full trust in God. But it can be easy to put our trust in other things—money, popularity, vanity, etc.—to “save” us. We can feel at times that if we only had so much money, if only so many people liked us, or if we only looked a certain way that we would be acceptable to ourselves and others. But focusing our trust in these things can turn us away

from our neighbors, even viewing our neighbors as obstacles or opponents to overcome, rather than as siblings in Christ to love and share our gifts with. If we think this way, we can create inequality in a community by breaking and ignoring relationships in hopes of getting ahead of others.

Instead, Luther tells us that this commandment calls followers of Christ to pursue the God of relationship rather than the god of mammon, or greed. In this way, we are freed from our worries and concerns of our own life and called forward to serve and be in relationship with our neighbors.



READING

MATTHEW 6:25–26

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”



ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God’s work. Our hands.

Points to ponder

- + How does our culture view money, wealth and power?
- + In what ways does our society make fame or fortune a god?
- + What are some major distractions in life that make it difficult to fully trust God?
- + How would our lives change if we let go of our personal concerns and focused on loving God and our neighbors?

The facts

- + Globally, the **wealthiest 1 percent own more than half** of the world's wealth.¹
- + **766.6 million** people in the world live in extreme poverty (less than \$1.90 a day).
- + In 2016, **90 percent of the U.S. population** had to live on **less than one-fourth** of the nations' income, while the **wealthiest 10 percent** shared **more than three-fourths** of the nation's income.²
- + **40.6 million Americans** were living in poverty in 2016 (12.7 percent of the population).

Make it matter

Why is the world so imbalanced? Why do so many live with poverty and hunger while so few live with astronomical wealth? The world's imbalances are symptoms of deeply broken and ignored relationships with our neighbors. Think about where we put our attention, our trust, and even our love as a society. For example, how many times do you check your phone? If you're like other Americans, it could be around 80 times or more a day (once every 12 minutes). And how many times do you think about money, or your possessions or your appearance?

Phones, money and possessions are all things that we need, or at least provide a level of comfort in our daily lives. But when we prioritize appearances, money or possessions over God and our neighbor's well-being, we miss the relationship with God and the awe-inspiring things that God is doing in our lives and the lives of our neighbors every day.

In the First Commandment, God invites us into a different life—a life of loving relationship with God and neighbor. Think about when you helped someone who needed you. Being in loving service with our neighbor helps us to move away from being preoccupied with our own desires and inspires us to bring peace to someone else's life, and in turn, our own.

'Seeds of Change in Malawi'

(ELCA World Hunger 360 Video)



Link to video: [youtube.com/watch?v=o8_-78PWj94](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8_-78PWj94)

Diving deeper

- + Why do you think nsima is a staple food for many people living in Malawi? What challenges might you face if you were only able to eat a meal of nsima twice a day?
- + What impact did Christopher's new relationship with the project and the church have on him and his family?
- + How do the people in Christopher's village show their love, faith and trust in God?



PRAY

NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

Pray today that God might heal the divisions within our communities—divisions based on wealth, race, gender, ethnicity or other ways we are divided. Invite God to re-focus our attention on the things that really matter, like caring for our neighbors and trusting God's grace.

Brewing questions

What questions come to mind that haven't been talked about yet?

1 Credit Suisse. (Nov. 17, 2017). Reasearch Institute Global Wealth Report 2017. Retrieved from Credit-Suisse.com: <https://www.credit-suisse.com/corporate/en/research/research-institute/global-wealth-report.html>.
 2 Bricker, J., Dettling, L. J., Henriques, A., Hsu, J. W., Jacobs, L., Moore, K. B., . . . and Windle, R. A. (2017). Changes in U.S. Family Finances from 2013 to 2016: Evidence from the Survey of Consumer Finance. Washington, D.C.: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.
 3 Asurion. (Oct. 23, 2017). Americans aren't taking a break from their phones. Retrieved from Asurion.com: <https://www.asurion.com/connect/tech-tips/americans-arent-taking-a-break-from-their-phones/>.