

Every Thought Captive to Christ:

Seven Questions for Training Your Family in God's Word

C onfession:	<i>Of which sins does this passage convict me?</i>
A bsolution:	<i>How does this passage reveal God's forgiveness for me in Christ?</i>
P rayer:	<i>For what does this passage instruct me to ask or thank God?</i>
T radition:	<i>How has this passage inspired the creeds, confessions, liturgy, hymns, or catechism of my church?</i>
I nterpretation:	<i>How do other passages help me to interpret this one? or How does this passage help me to interpret others?</i>
V ocation:	<i>How does this passage guide me in my life as a(n) [insert my station in life]?</i>
E vangelism:	<i>How can I share with an unbeliever what this passage has taught me about God's grace in Christ?</i>

"Fathers ... bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord." *Ephesians 6:4*

Teaching God's Word to the next generation may involve open discussion and personal life applications, but we become faithful instruments for God simply when the Word of Christ instructs our children from our lips.

It is His Word we hand down, not our own.

It is God's Law and Gospel we present, not a message from others.

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take **CAPTIVE** every thought to make it obedient to Christ." *2 Corinthians 10:5*

A Guide for Using “Every Thought Captive to Christ” in Your Home or Church

Martin Luther once recommended to his barber four basic questions to contemplate when meditating upon Scripture: What does this passage instruct me to do (*instruction*)? How does it reveal my sin (*confession*)? For what does it teach me to be thankful (*thanksgiving*)? For what does it teach me to ask God (*petition*)? (Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, 1535) The seven questions below expand Luther’s advice into an inquiry suitable for both individual and group Bible studies, whether in the home or at church.*

Some questions may be more applicable to certain chapters of Scripture than others, and the sequence of questions may be varied. The following sequence, which puts Law before Gospel and Justification before Sanctification, memorably spells C-A-P-T-I-V-E. It is through the study of Scripture that Christians learn to “take *captive* every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Co 10:5)

CONFESSION: *Of which sins does this passage convict me?* When reading of the jealousies among Jacob’s wives and their children, I recognize my own covetousness or slander (Gen 30; 37). When reading about the Pharisees, I recognize my own legalistic, self-righteous tendencies (Mk 7:1-22).

ABSOLUTION: *How does this passage reveal God’s forgiveness for me in Christ?* Heb 9:12 and 1 Jn 1:7 state emphatically that Christ has forgiven all sins for all people. This forgiveness necessarily includes even my own most shameful sins. Any specific example of God’s grace in Scripture—such as Nathan absolving David (2 Sm 12:13) or Christ absolving the adulterous woman (Jn 8:11)—apply equally to me.

PRAYER: *For what does this passage instruct me to ask or thank God?* “Every good and perfect gift” comes from God (Ja 1:17), who invites me to pray to Him as my Father (Mt 6:9). Possibilities are endless!

TRADITION: *How has this passage inspired the creeds, confessions, liturgy, hymns, or catechism of my church?* “One baptism for the remission of sins” (Nicene Creed) echoes Ac 2:38. Augsburg Confession, XXIII, applies 1 Co 7 to refute a heresy regarding marriage. Ps 95 is the source text for the *Te Deum* (Order of Matins). “Go to Dark Gethsemane” sets the Gospels’ passion accounts in lyrical form. “Not with ... silver or gold” in 1 Pt 1:18 re-appears in the Small Catechism’s explanation of the Second Article.

INTERPRETATION: *How do other passages help me to interpret this one? or How does this passage help me to interpret others?* The Lutheran Reformation heralded *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) as the source and standard for Christian doctrine. God’s people learn to “let Scripture interpret Scripture.”

VOCATION: *How does this passage guide me in my life as a(n) [insert my station in life]?* My vocation is how my station in life serves as a channel of God’s blessings to the people around me. The Small Catechism’s Table of Duties identifies specific roles for pastors and laity, husbands and wives, parents and children, rulers and subjects. Accordingly, a mother may find special inspiration in Prov 31, her husband in Col 3:19, a police officer in Ro 13:3-4, and an older woman in Tit 2:3-5. Christians then learn to apply the Psalms, the Sermon on the Mount, and other passages in vocation-specific ways.

EVANGELISM: *How can I share with an unbeliever what this passage has taught me about God’s grace in Christ?* A better question might be, *How could I not?* I reflect again upon my answer to the “absolution” question. I consider once more my cause for thanksgiving under the “prayer” question. I recognize what a treasure I have discovered when contemplating “tradition.” I identify one or more of my overlapping “vocations.” I reach out to a spouse, a child, a friend, a neighbor who does not yet know the good and wonderful things of the Lord. Whether engaging in apologetics or evangelism, I can be confident so long as it is God’s Word I speak, not my own.

*Luther’s “instruction” question has been rephrased as a “vocation” question—a concept that Luther himself promoted. Luther’s “thanksgiving” and “petition” questions have been united into “prayer,” while his “confession” question has been separated more explicitly into “confession” and “absolution.” Three new questions have been added, concerning “tradition,” “interpretation,” and “evangelism.”