



Hunger Catechism: Fifth Commandment

BIG IDEA: The first step | **Reading:** James 2:15–17

Purpose

This lesson discusses the Fifth Commandment, Martin Luther’s interpretation, and how we can live out this commandment with our neighbor. It also introduces ways that this commandment calls people of faith to respond to the need of our neighbors facing hunger and poverty.

Commandment and focus

FIFTH COMMANDMENT: You shall not murder.

FOCUS QUESTION: What does it mean to support, protect, and be in relationship with our neighbor?

Luther’s lens (*Small Catechism*)

“We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor, but help and support them in every physical need.”

Luther’s explanation (*Large Catechism*)

“This commandment is violated not only when we do evil, but also when we have the opportunity to do good to our neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury, but fail to do so. If you send a naked person away when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone who is suffering from hunger and do not feed her, you have let her starve.”

“It is God’s real intention that we should allow no person to suffer harm, but show to everyone all kindness and love.”

Going further

Martin Luther understood God’s commandments as both law—what we should not do—and grace—what we are invited to do as God’s people. When thinking about the Fifth Commandment, this means that we do not act in ways that may directly or indirectly harm others. It also means we are called to take the first step in helping others meet their needs when some do not have access to basic necessities (healthy food, clean water, good jobs, a place to live, etc.).

Luther was very serious about this commandment and how it fits in our lives as we try to be good neighbors to one another. Whenever we have a chance to help someone, we should take it. Luther wrote, “If you see anyone who is suffering from hunger

and do not feed her, you have let her starve.” This may sound harsh, but it is exactly how Luther wants us to understand this commandment. Whether it’s walking past someone who is hungry or ignoring a friend who has fallen off their bike, we are breaking this commandment.



READING

JAMES 2:15–17

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill”, and yet do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.



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