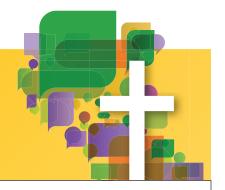
Hunger Catechism: Fifth Commandment



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.

Luther didn't just see the commandments as rules about what we should not do but also as guidelines for helping us see what we should do. For Luther, the good works mentioned in the book of James flow from faith—as we are saved by God, we are set free from sin and death to love and serve our neighbors. Real faith inspires in us real action.

Points to ponder

- + How does it change our understanding of the commandments to see them as both rules about what we *shouldn't* do and quidelines for what we *should* do?
- + How does the reading from James connect to Luther's ideas about the Fifth Commandment?
- * When have you felt unsure if you should help someone in need?
- + How does our faith call us to respond to situations in which we feel hesitant to help our neighbor?

The facts

- * 795 million people around world are living with hunger.
- The world makes enough food to provide everyone with 200–700 calories more than what is considered a healthy amount.
- → 767 million people in the world live in poverty with less than \$1.90 per person per day.
- + **42 million** Americans live with hunger, which is nearly equal to the **43.1 million** Americans living in poverty today.

Make it matter

Food insecurity is when families do not have consistent access to food in order to live a healthy and active life. It may be hard to imagine, but **food insecurity** exists in every county in the United States. This means that wherever you live, there is someone close by who is not sure where their next meal will come from. This also means that we have a chance to make a difference and take the *first step* in supporting our neighbors' basic needs.

- + Have you been in a situation where you needed help from someone else? Who helped you?
- What are some ways your congregation supports community members living with hunger?
- + How can you get involved in your congregation's mission to support your neighbor?



ACT

YOUR CONGREGATION

If you are unsure about how your congregation is helping the cause to end hunger, what could you do to find out?

Shobi's Table (ELCA World Hunger)



Link to video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7xsKXrPv-o

Diving deeper

- + How is Shobi's Table like your congregation? How is it different?
- + What is another way Shobi's Table "feeds" the community besides with food?
- + How did the people of Shobi's Table take the *first step* in supporting others?

Brewing questions

What other questions come to mind after learning about Luther's interpretation of the Fifth Commandment?				