

# *The Big Question*

**GROWING SPIRITUALLY WITH  
HEIDELBERG CATECHISM Q&A 1**

by Sam Gutierrez and Sandy Swartzentruber



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*The Big Question: Growing Spiritually with Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1,*  
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phone: 1-800-333-8300; email [faithformation@crcna.org](mailto:faithformation@crcna.org).

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# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

“What is your only comfort in life and in death?” That’s a powerful question. It’s a question whose relevance only increases as the world around us becomes more complex.

*The Big Question* is a new kind of catechism-based course that incorporates faith formation practices into the exploration of doctrine, so that heart and head work together as young people discover their “only comfort.” These four sessions are designed to encourage young people to examine and strengthen their faith using Q&A 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism as a guide.

## COURSE SETTING

Because the sessions are designed to be flexible, you can use them in a variety of settings:

- as an introduction to your usual catechism class
- as a four-session youth group module
- as a special intergenerational series for teens and adults
- as a pre-profession of faith study

We do encourage you to consider using this module in an intergenerational setting. The life experience of adults combined with the searching questions of teens could make this a very memorable and meaningful exercise in building faith. Exploring “our only comfort” would be especially appropriate following a traumatic event in the life of your congregation or community.

## SESSION FORMAT

Sessions are designed to run for about an hour, but if your time slot is longer or shorter, you can choose the number of activity options that work for you.

**Welcome** (5 minutes): Greet group members and provide refreshments.

**Opening Activity** (5-10 minutes): This activity “sets the stage” for the discussion and activities that follow.

**Catechism Exploration/Activity Options** (15 minutes or more): These activity options range from contemplative to active so you can choose the activity that best fits your group.

**Faith Stories** (5-10 minutes): We’ve built in time for group members or special guests to share brief stories of how the session theme impacted them in real life. If at all possible, include this step. Telling and hearing faith stories is one of the best ways to encourage each other on our faith journey.

**Take-Home:** For each session we’ve provided a take-home sheet with thought/discussion questions, Scripture passages, and a spiritual practice to guide individual devotional times during the week. You can print these take-home sheets or send participants a link to them.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

We’ve tried to keep things simple, so the only materials required are this outline and some basic supplies listed in the session plans, including refreshments if you plan to offer them.

One thing you will need for each session is the text of Q&A 1 written on posterboard or projected on a screen. The words must be large enough for everyone in the room to read. Since we’ll examine a different section of the answer in each session, we suggest you format it like this:

## What is your only comfort in life and in death?

### Session 1

That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

### Session 2

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

### Session 3

He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

### Session 4

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

## TIPS FOR LEADERS

Here's some good news: you don't need to be a catechism expert to lead these sessions. Today's effective group leader is a fellow explorer, not a "sage on the stage." The approach in these sessions is active and participatory, not lecture-based.

Allow yourself to be vulnerable. If you struggle with one of the ideas in these sessions, don't be afraid to say so. Invite people to wrestle with tough questions just as you do. Tell your own faith stories when appropriate, and invite others to share their stories as well.

- If you're not a pastor, feel free to call your pastor in for help if difficult theological questions arise during discussion. And it's always OK to answer by saying, "That's a really good question, and I don't know the answer. Let me do some digging, and we'll talk more in our next session."
- We've included a variety of activity options in each session. You won't have time to do them all—just choose the options that fit your available time and the learning styles of the group. If you'd like to learn more about identifying the different learning styles of the people in your group, check out this [learning styles guide and quiz](http://tinyurl.com/jno39s9) (<http://tinyurl.com/jno39s9>).
- [Several versions](http://tinyurl.com/y7p3ghxr) (<http://tinyurl.com/y7p3ghxr>) of the Heidelberg Catechism are available from Faith Alive if you'd like to purchase copies. If you're a member of a Christian Reformed church, you can access a digital version free in the CRC's [Digital Library](http://library.crcna.org) at [library.crcna.org](http://library.crcna.org)—just follow the easy account setup instructions.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CATECHISM

- Read the Khan Academy article [An Introduction to the oant Reformation](http://tinyurl.com/zjo6fa7) (<http://tinyurl.com/zjo6fa7>) for an excellent summary of the historical background to the Heidelberg Catechism. You might also consider sending this link to group members before the first session.
- For a slightly irreverent but informative video history of the Protestant Reformation, view this [Crash Course video](http://tinyurl.com/n9ucwdf) (<http://tinyurl.com/n9ucwdf>).
- For a brief historical overview of the catechism itself, read [this summary](http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/the_big_question_hc.pdf) ([www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/the\\_big\\_question\\_hc.pdf](http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/the_big_question_hc.pdf)).

## MORE RECOMMENDED READING

If you're looking for some in-depth background to the Heidelberg Catechism, check out these resources:

- *Body and Soul: Reclaiming the Heidelberg Catechism* by M. Craig Barnes
- *Comfort and Joy: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism* by Andrew Kuyvenhoven
- *Our Only Comfort: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* by Fred Klooster
- *Catecismo de Heidelberg — Una explicación* by Herman Hofman
- *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung. And check out the *awesome rap* (<http://tinyurl.com/yawqcr6e>) that Curt “Voice” Allen wrote about this book.

## OTHER CATECHISM COURSES

If you'd like to go farther in catechism study with your group, here are some other options to consider:

- *HC & Me* by Bob Rozema, a two-year classic course on the Heidelberg Catechism for teens
- *The New City Catechism*, with introduction by Tim Keller. Visit [newcitycatechism.com](http://newcitycatechism.com) for more information. This also includes a simplified catechism for young children.

# SESSION 1: WHAT IS YOUR ONLY COMFORT?

## SESSION FOCUS

This session explores the ultimate comfort that we find only in Jesus Christ.

## CATECHISM FOCUS

**Q&A 1: Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death? A.** That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Simple snacks and drinks.
- Large sheet of posterboard with the text of Q&A 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism written on it in large letters (see “About This Resource” for formatting suggestion). Or project the text of Q&A 1 if projection equipment is available. You’ll need this for all four sessions.
- White copier paper, one sheet per person.
- Dark-colored markers, one per person.

## NOTE FOR LEADERS

All your group members have doubts and fears. Some may not know Jesus. Remember that your job is not to convince them to intellectually assent to the truths presented in this lesson. It’s to present the truths and “prepare the ground” for the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts.

## WELCOME

### 5 MINUTES

Set out snacks before the session begins. Greet group members warmly, by name if you can, as they arrive. After a few minutes, introduce this study:

Over the next four sessions, we’re going to explore a question that gets at the very heart of our beliefs about God, salvation, and our ultimate purpose in life. It’s a question that’s simple but very deep at the same time.

The question is this: “What is your only comfort in life and in death?”

The Heidelberg Catechism is a teaching tool that Christians have used for hundreds of years. It uses questions and answers to explore the deep truths of the Christian faith. This question is the very first question the catechism asks us.

And do you know what? The way we live out our answer to this question can change our lives completely.

## OPENING ACTIVITY

### 10 MINUTES

**Materials:** White paper and colored markers

Introduce the activity:

When you're stressed or sad, what person, place, or thing comforts you? For example, a quiet cup of coffee in the morning, a good friend, a certain song. Write your answer in large letters on a piece of paper.

*(pause until people are finished)*

Hold up your answer and tell the group why you chose this person, place, or thing.

Now let's try this: repeat the following words after me. but when I make this motion (*place hands in front of you, palms up*) say the word that's written on your paper. Ready?

"I belong . . . (*group repeats*)

body and soul . . . (*group repeats*)

in life and in death . . . (*group repeats*)

to \_\_\_\_\_. (*gesture with open hands, and all members of the group say the word they wrote on their paper, such as "coffee"*).

Most of your answers probably sounded weird in this context. God gave us many good things that comfort us. But real comfort isn't a warm, fuzzy feeling. The literal meaning of the word "comfort" is "with strength."

So what gives us strength? The Christian's only true comfort, the source of our strength, is the fact that we belong—"body and soul, in life and in death—to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ."

## CATECHISM EXPLORATION

### 15 MINUTES

Choose the option below that best fits the character of your group.

#### Option 1: Discussion Starters

- I wonder why the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism made this the opening question? Is that how you would have started a tool designed to teach people about the Christian faith? Why or why not?
- "Belong"—what does this word mean to you? Remember a time when you felt like you really belonged, and share that experience if you're willing. (*Leader, for more about the importance of belonging in faith formation, read [this article](#) by Laura Keeley and Robert Keeley.*)
- Make of a list of what you think are the three most important words in Q&A 1.
- Why did you choose those words? Share your thoughts with the group.

**Option 2: Activity**

- Imagine that you were hired by a marketing firm to communicate this first part of Q&A 1 on a freeway billboard. Drivers only have a few seconds to glance at it as they speed by, and they won't be able to read more than a few words. What key image(s) or words would you use to convey the main idea or feeling behind Q&A 1? Do this individually or in teams of 2 or 3. Draw your idea on a piece of paper and share it with the whole group.
- Rewrite the first part of Q&A 1 in the form of a haiku using this syllable pattern for the lines: 5, 7, 5, 7, 7 (31 syllables total). Do this individually or in teams of two. Example:  
 The most important (5)  
 thing that anyone could know (7)  
 is summed up like this: (5)  
  
 friend, no matter what happens—(7)  
 God is love, and you are his. (7)
- Imagine that you had to adapt Q&A 1 to someone in a specific situation: someone sick at the hospital, a couple getting married, someone in prison, after winning/losing a championship game, getting a rejection letter from a college, breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend, getting cut from a sports team or play, getting an “F” on a test. Write a letter to that person. Acknowledge their situation and then write some encouraging words based on Q&A 1. Share a piece of your letter with the group.

**Option 3: Video**

- Watch this brief [video](http://tinyurl.com/5swuope) (http://tinyurl.com/5swuope) together. How did Bethany experience God's comfort? How did the assurance that God will never leave her affect Bethany's life? Have you ever had a similar experience where you felt God's comfort very clearly?

## FAITH STORIES

**5-10 MINUTES**

*A week or two before this session, invite two people—one teen and one adult—to briefly tell how belonging to Jesus has comforted them. If time allows, invite group members to ask the speaker(s) questions. Alternatively, simply open the floor to the group for impromptu faith storytelling.*

## TAKE HOME

[Click here](http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/the_big_question_handout_1.pdf) (www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/the\_big\_question\_handout\_1.pdf) for a link to today's take-home sheet. Feel free to print out the sheet for group participants, send the link in a text or email, or post the link on your church website.

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGES TO MEDITATE ON AND DISCUSS IN THE COMING WEEK:**

Choose one of these passages to ponder each day of the coming week. Read each slowly, letting it sink into your spirit deeply.

- **Psalms 23:4:** Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- **Psalms 119:50:** My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.
- **Isaiah 49:13:** Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.



- **Isaiah 51:12:** “I, even I, am he who comforts you.”
- **Matthew 5:4:** “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”
- **2 Corinthians 1:5:** For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

### QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT IN THE COMING WEEK:

- Do you experience the comfort of belonging to Jesus in your everyday life? If so, how?
- The people, places, and things that God created do often bring us comfort. But can we rely on them to be our only comfort? Why or why not?
- Do you fear death? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to you that your body belongs to Jesus?
- What does it mean that your soul belongs to Jesus?
- Do you have a story about how belonging to Jesus has comforted you? Who might be blessed by hearing that story?

### THIS WEEK'S SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Every morning in the coming week, try using the song “Psalm 62: My Soul Finds Rest in God Alone” for morning devotional time. You’ll find a video of Aaron Keyes leading the singing of [this song](#) at [tinyurl.com/aaronkeyessong](http://tinyurl.com/aaronkeyessong). Then pray that God would help your soul rest in him.