

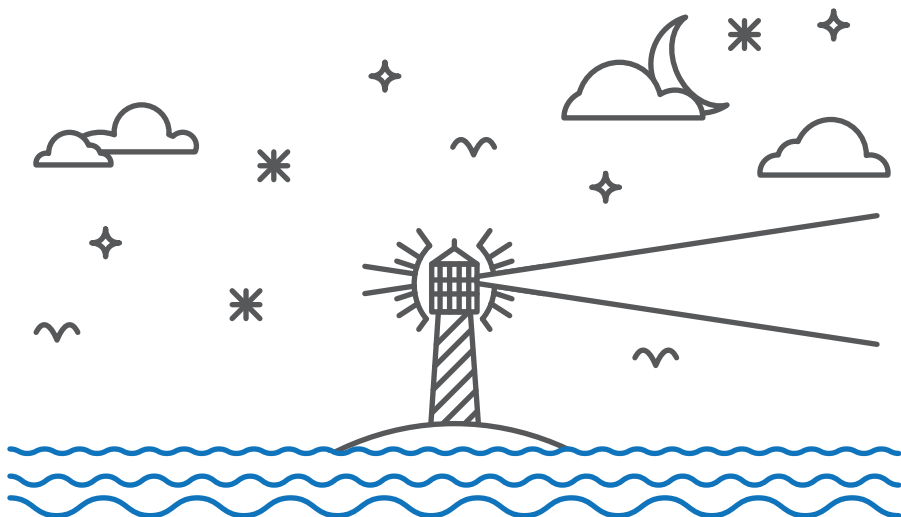
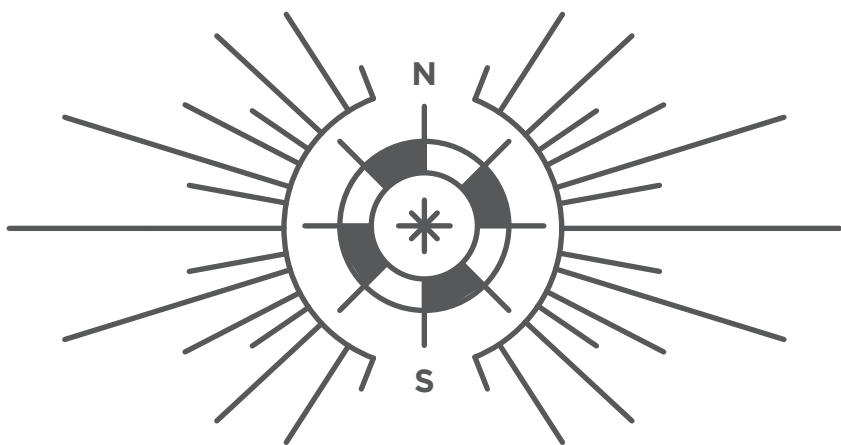


Sojourn Kids presents



The

NORTH STAR CATECHISM



NORTH STAR CATECHISM INTRODUCTION

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Why do we need a North Star?

“With mutual embraces and many tears, they took their leaves of one another, which proved to be the last leave to many of them...but they knew they were pilgrims and looked not much on those things, but lifted their eyes to heaven, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits.”

William Bradford

In 1608, a small band of discontent, reform-minded people left the British shores. They felt that old dead religion had corrupted the state church, and they wanted something more “pure” and “separate.” The congregation found religious freedom across the sea in Holland. But after ten years of living with the Dutch people, they again found themselves troubled and discontent. Their children were forgetting their English heritage and adopting instead the Dutch customs and language. They were even wearing wooden shoes!

By 1620, fifty discontent, reform-minded English Separatists were setting out again. This time they left the shores of Amsterdam and joined up with another group—fifty merchant adventurers from England. The Separatist “saints”—as they

called themselves—and the adventuring “strangers”—as they were named by the “saints”—journeyed together to the New World. This was a motley crew. One group was driven by protecting biblical doctrine and their cultural heritage. The other group was driven by the allure of wealth and discovery.

But an amazing thing happened on their journey across the Atlantic. Together, the hyper-religious “saints” and the thrill-driven “strangers” grieved over loved ones lost and left behind. Together, they fought against the sea. Along the way, they ceased being “saints” and “strangers.” They became one. Today, we rarely think about these travelers for where they came from. Instead, we use a new name—one that highlights their unity and common destination. They were sojourners to a new land, and we call them... pilgrims.

During the journey, the pilgrims covenanted together to form a means for governing their new settlement. The “Mayflower Compact,” named after their ship, has been called “the world’s first written constitution.” It gave the pilgrims the written definition and stability they needed to endure the difficult trials that awaited them in the New World.

Whether or not we sail across troubled seas, Christians are all pilgrims. And one of the great needs in the church today is for simple, but not simplistic, definition. We Christian sojourners are a motley crew of travelers with diverse backgrounds and temperaments. We need to be reminded that we have a common destination. And we need written definition and stability to guide us there.

For thousands of years, travelers have been guided on their journey by focusing on a fixed point in the night sky: the North

Star. While other stars appear to shift with the passing of time, the North Star remains anchored in the same position. This celestial gift allowed people to know *where they were* and *where they needed to go*. Our prayer is that the North Star Catechism will provide this same kind of clarity.

Why do we need a catechism?

The word catechism and the practice of “catechizing” carries with it a lot of baggage. Some immediately think, “Aren’t catechisms quirky, out-dated, and rigid?” If you are from a Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, or Lutheran background, you may remember studying a catechism in confirmation classes. Others will have never heard of a catechism at all.

So, what is it anyway? The word “catechism” comes from the Greek word *katācheō*, which means “to teach, to instruct.” The word is used in Bible passages like Luke 1:4 and Acts 18:25. It can be used for any kind of teaching or instruction, but it came to refer to a specific type of teaching very early in church history. In the early church, new converts were taught the basics of Christianity by memorizing a series of questions and answers. A catechism is just that--a series of questions and answers that teach Bible truth.

In fact, the roots of this method go even farther back than the early church. When God rescued Israel from Egypt, he gave them a whole slew of laws, ceremonies, and sacrifices to help them remember his great rescue and guide their journey to the Promised Land. These traditions were important, because God wanted Israel’s faith to be passed down to their kids with clarity and stability.

God knows that kids have questions, because he made them with curiosity and a sense of wonder. So, when God gave Israel his law, he anticipated their children's questions. In passages like Exodus 12:26-27, Exodus 13:14-16, and Joshua 4:6-7, we find a pattern like this one:

“And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them...

In these passages, God gave the Israelite parents a script for answering their kids' curiosity. In Exodus 12:27, it went like this: “It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.” God wanted parents and kids to put this little script to memory, so that they'd always be ready with answers—answers to connect the daily lives of the pilgrim Israelites to their common salvation and their common destination.

How does it work?

Building on the foundation of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1576), the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1642-47), and the *Catechism for Young Children* (1840) the North Star Catechism focuses on the basic elements of our historic Christian faith—God's gospel, God's church, and God's mission. Here are a few brief tips for using the catechism at home:

- *Start early.* Ideally, kids will begin learning answers to the catechism questions as they begin to talk. By doing so, they will add to their vocabulary words that reflect Bible truth. We suggest beginning the memory work on

a child's third birthday.

- *Memorize questions, answers, and verses.* It is helpful for kids to memorize the verses along with the questions and answers. This is a way of ensuring that catechism remains a gospel tool we use to point kids back to Jesus and his redemptive story told in the Bible. Kids should learn that the Bible, not the catechism, is the foundation for our faith.
- *Teach it “when you sit down,” and “along the road.”* Memorization will require some work. The daily devotionals we are writing to accompany the catechism are intended to aid in planned times around the living room or dinner table with your faith. Learning God's truth happens best in the context of a relationship. So parents should always be alert for teachable moments—opportunities to talk about how the doctrine learned in the catechism applies to everyday life. The catechism is really just a reference point, a sort of script that parents and children have put to memory, which must be explained and applied through informal conversations.
- *Learn it with the church community.* The North Star catechism has 78 questions so that a church community can work together to memorize one question and answer each week, and repeat the entire catechism twice over a three-year period.