**Martin Luther and the Reformation**

Bible Text: Matthew 16:13–20; Luke 4:18–19; Romans 3:21–26; Ephesians 2:8–9

Lesson Focus: Christians continually reform the church to spread the good news to every generation and culture.

Big Question: Who is Martin Luther and what does it mean to be a Lutheran?

Key Words: MARTIN LUTHER, REFORMATION, CATHOLIC, THESIS, RECANT

Prepare

**Quick Prep**

• As a young man Martin Luther struggled with choosing a career and searching for spiritual fulfillment and meaning. He came to realize that God's love is unconditional. God loves and forgives us because of Jesus Christ, NOT because of anything we do.

• Luther recognizes that sin is VERY real. We are simultaneously saint and sinner (*simul iustis et peccator*). Our sinful self needs daily drowning, in the context of God's love and forgiveness given through our baptism. Maturity toward Christlikeness is an ongoing process.

• The three *solas*—*sola scriptura* (scripture alone), *sola fidei* (faith alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone)—are central to Luther's teaching and the Reformation.

• Martin Luther made the Bible and worship accessible to every Christian by translating them into the language the people spoke and encouraging public education so that they could read.

• All people have the duty to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, not just pastors. This is called the "priesthood of all believers." All useful work serves God, not just what pastors do. All vocations, or callings, are honored by God.

• The imperfect church continues to be imperfect. The Christian church is continually changing—evaluating what has been done in the past and learning to adapt to new times and cultures.

**Deep Prep**

A View of Reformation History

Europe had seen some devastating events during the medieval era. Life in the 15th century included some startling realities—the average life expectancy was about 40 years. Childbirth often resulted in the death of the baby or the mother or both. A simple infection or virus often caused death; the bubonic plague killed more than one-third of Europe's population. There was no public education. Democracy as we know it did not exist anywhere. Most people lived in absolute poverty and had no means to work their way out of their miserable situation.

During this time, people could not even choose their own faith. The religion of the ruler determined the religion of the region where he ruled. The Latin phrase *cujus regio, jus religio* is used to refer to this fact of life. Anyone who rejected the power and authority of the ruler in this matter suffered terribly at the hands of that ruler. For those who lived in territory ruled by a Christian, there was only one Christian church—the Roman Catholic Church. Political leaders were in many ways religious leaders, because they determined what would and would not be taught in their territories. The Bible existed in its original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek versions and had only been translated once—into Latin. This meant only the priests could read it. Because manuscripts had to be copied by hand, there were not a lot of copies to go around, either. The people had to depend on their priests to tell them what the Bible said. Worship was the same. It was conducted in Latin, so most believers could not fully understand what was being said—and many did not understand it at all!

In the midst of these conditions, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. For the first time in history, manuscripts did not need to be copied by hand. This made it possible for information to be reproduced quickly and to spread widely for a relatively small cost. It also opened the door for ordinary people to acquire printed materials, which in turn increased the need for education for all people so that they could read these printed materials.

Martin Luther was born on the heels of the medieval era. As a young man, he planned to be a lawyer and began to study toward that goal. In the midst of a nasty storm, as he dodged lightning bolts, he bargained with God. He promised that if God would save him, he would become a monk. He survived the storm and began studying to become a priest. He spent part of his life as a monk—living in a community with others who had the sole purpose of worshipping and praising God with their lives.

Throughout Luther's ministry, he struggled with what it meant for someone to be "right with God." His main question was, "What does it take to please God and attain righteousness in God's eyes?" While studying the Letter to the Romans, he was smacked over the head with the realization that no one can do enough to be right with God AND that God has already solved the problem by making us righteous through Jesus Christ. This idea led to other new insights and the recognition that the Roman Catholic Church needed to change. Luther began to point out practices that he felt went against what the Bible said about God, and he called on the church leaders to make changes. Making use of the newly invented printing press, he circulated pamphlets featuring his ideas and eventually posted "95 Theses" for debate on the door of the church in Wittenberg.

News of these Theses reached the highest leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, resulting in debates and hearings and even trials. These trials, or diets as they were called at the time, pitted Luther against other leaders. At a diet that took place in Worms in 1521, Luther was asked to recant—to take back what he had been saying. Luther refused. His famous words, "Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by the clearest reasoning, unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted, and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the word of God, I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand, I can do no other; may God help me. Amen," were spoken at this trial. The church/political leaders responded to Luther's continued refusal to change his words and his ways by excommunicating him and putting a price on his head. Once labeled a criminal, Luther went into hiding, where he spent much of his time translating the Bible into German.

While we Lutherans tend to focus on Martin Luther and what he did and said, there were many other reformers both before and after Luther. Some were executed as heretics because of their teachings. Some were more successful in their work, as Luther was. These other reformers also fought for change, and as a result of their work, the Bible was translated into other languages—including English.

Some Central Theological Points of the Reformation

1. God's love is unconditional. Luther taught that God loves and forgives us because of Jesus Christ, NOT because of anything we do. The righteousness of God is what God gives to us for the sake of Christ, not something that we do in order to be right with God. The Roman Catholic Church had many teachings about what people needed to DO in order for their sins to be forgiven and for them to be right with God—the purchasing of indulgences was the most notorious of those teachings.

2. Sin is VERY real. Luther taught that we are simultaneously saint and sinner (*simul iustis et peccator*). Our sinful self needs daily drowning, in the context of God's love and forgiveness given through our baptism. There is not an immediate and total transformation of a person from sinful to sinless, godless to godly, etc. Luther spoke about "both/and" situations. We are both forgiven by God, made right in God's eyes, totally saints—AND sinners, to be judged by God, worthy only of condemnation. It is a paradox, and we struggle against the power of sin in our lives every day. It is only through God's grace that we can trust in God's promise that we have been saved.

3. The three solas—*sola scriptura* (scripture alone), *sola fidei* (faith alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone)—are central to Luther's teaching and the Reformation. These are often quoted as "the key" to Luther's teaching. Scripture alone and the plain meaning of scripture attained through clear reasoning constitute the only base that is acceptable for creating doctrine and other teachings of the church. Faith alone, and not works, is what is needed to be forgiven and to receive eternal life. Grace alone is how God gives the gift of faith that results in forgiveness and eternal life.

4. We are saved by grace through faith. Faith means "trust"—that we trust what Jesus said, that we trust God's love, that we trust God's grace, etc. Faith is not something we "do"; it is something we act upon. Luther taught that good works do not bring us into favor with God, nor do they bring us into eternal life. God gives eternal life as a gift because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. God gives people the Holy Spirit through baptism and the Holy Spirit brings people to have faith in God—to trust God and the promises God has made. Faith is not something we DO. Faith is a gift.

5. We are saved by grace, not works. No amount of good works will earn someone a place in God's house for eternity. That place is a gift. Good works are the result of being saved by grace. Once God has given the gift of eternal life, we respond by doing good works, because we desire to please God, who has been so generous and loving and merciful toward us.

6. All people have the duty to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, not just pastors. This is called the "priesthood of all believers." All useful work serves God, not just what pastors do. All vocations are honored by God. A vocation is a "calling" or something that God has called a believer to do. Luther taught that a person did not need to become a priest in order to do God's work. All believers in all walks of life can, and should, tell others about God's grace. And all believers in all walks of life are serving God with the work they do. Being a priest or a monk does not make a person more blessed than other people in other vocations.

7. The imperfect church continues to be imperfect. Luther taught that the church is a human institution. It makes mistakes and it needs to be continually learning and reforming. When the Christian church is faithful to God, it is continually changing—evaluating what has been done in the past and learning to adapt to new times and cultures.

**Adolescent Connection**

Who is Martin Luther and what does it mean to be a Lutheran?

Some youth may be keenly aware of "the difference between Sunday and Monday." They may be troubled by radical differences that they see in their world. The teachings of the church and even people's behavior while they are "at church" may be radically different from what they hear and see from these same people during the rest of the week. They may even feel pulled toward believing that this is how "church" works—that it's irrelevant to their daily lives. At best, "church stuff" is pulled out for a few hours on the weekend; at worst, it is useless and should be abandoned entirely. Those who have tried to live out their faith during the week may be persecuted, teased, and alienated by their peers. They may be wondering if "church" is worth all the pain and frustration.

Fortunately, most youth are not yet jaded by their culture. Many hold very idealistic hopes and dreams of how the world could be. Help them to explore their ideals, hopes, and dreams and to identify things they are truly passionate about. Encourage them to look for God's work in the world around them—perhaps in creative ways that did not catch their attention at first glance. Encourage them also to work for changes in their congregation, community, and world. Martin Luther and the other reformers were young men who were concerned about wrongs that they saw in their world. They worked for change, and we are the beneficiaries of their work. These youth can have an impact on their world. When they trust in God and follow God's ways, they can reach their hopes and dreams.

**Baptismal Connection**

In the Rite of Affirmation of Baptism, a five-part question addresses each confirmand's intent to continue in the covenant God made with them in Holy Baptism. Here We Stand resources help students—with support from parents, leaders, and the entire congregation—prepare to answer this question as they continue in their lifelong faith journey.

Today's lesson focuses on the clauses "to live among God's faithful people" and "to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, page 201; *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 236).

While many of their values were formed when they were small children, youth are beginning to explore what it means to live out their values in their own lives—in particular their Lutheran Christian values. They are learning to be independent of their parents, they are learning to express themselves, and they are learning what it is like to experience the heavy load of peer pressure. What they may not realize is that "peer pressure" will become "cultural expectations" when they are adults making their own way in the world. Carefully choosing what community—what peers and values—they want to live with will be very important for their future. Living and growing within a Lutheran Christian community will help them to bring the good news into a world that may not share their values, hopes, and dreams. As Luther himself experienced, God's word can become their "rock and castle" for bringing God's love and grace into that world.

Gather

**Welcome and Review**

As students and leaders arrive, play upbeat music in the background. Welcome them, thank them for coming, and sing a few favorite songs with the group if that is your congregation's tradition. Thank adult leaders for their presence and for helping pass on faith to the next generation.

Ask students to recall the previous week's Lesson Focus, Key Words, and Big Question. Reward their efforts with small treats or prizes. *(Before serving any food, always check with caregivers for kids with food allergies.)* Ask for volunteers to capture last week's lesson in their own words. Affirm all genuine responses and keep going until you're satisfied everyone has been oriented.

Project this week's Lesson Focus, Key Words, and Big Question on the screen or write them in large letters on your presentation board or overhead slide. Invite students to recite them with you and repeat a few times.

Help kids dive into the Key Words by asking for definitions and/or providing these definitions:

MARTIN LUTHER: a German monk and priest who worked to make changes in the church during the 16th century. He became known (not by his choice) as the founder of a new movement that became the Lutheran Church.

REFORMATION: time period in the 16th century when church leaders attempted to change the way the Roman Catholic Church functioned.

CATHOLIC: with a capital *C*, refers to the Roman Catholic Church, or the traditions of the Western European church before the Reformation. With a lowercase *c*, refers to all Christians in the universal Christian church; this is the "catholic" we speak of in the Christian creeds.

THESIS: a statement made to provoke an argument or discussion. Luther posted "95 Theses" (plural) on the door of Wittenberg Church in hopes of engaging church leaders in a conversation about his concerns.

RECANT: To withdraw a statement or belief. Luther was asked to recant what he stated at the Diet of Worms in 1521. He did not recant.

**Getting Started**

Choose one of the following three options to introduce the lesson. Then lead students in the Opening Prayer.

**Option 1: Guest Speaker Option: To Change or Not to Change, That Is the Question**

Invite a "mover and shaker" from your congregation or an older member who has been involved in the congregation for "ages" to speak to the class. This person may be a leader in your congregation, a community activist, someone in charge of making changes at their place of employment, or someone who has simply seen a LOT of changes over their lifetime. Ask this person to speak about how changes are made. How much planning goes into making changes? What are some of the difficult aspects of doing things differently? What are some of the joys that come with being involved in making changes? What's the connection between "change" and "reform"? If the speaker is willing and comfortable, perhaps they can even comment on their own experience with a somewhat controversial change that was made in your congregation.

Debrief the guest speaker's talk with these questions:

• What do you think is the most important aspect of planning for change, based on what the speaker said? How did he/she decide if a change was for the better or for the worse?

• What change do you think could or should be made in your community or congregation? Why do you think this would be a change for the better?

• If you were going to work toward that change, how would you start?

**Option 2: Game Option: The Hand Is Quicker. Or Maybe Not.**

Hand out paper and pens to the students. Be sure to use pens, since one aspect of this game is that students will need to start over if they make a mistake because they cannot erase the mistake. Write this sentence (or one of your own) on the board: "Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press with movable type, beginning a revolution in mass communication that continues to change the world in radical ways." Ask the students to copy the sentence three times on their paper—in legible print or cursive writing. If they make a mistake, they must start over on a new sheet of paper. Instruct them to come forward with their paper when they have finished. Give small prizes to the first, second, and third place finishers.

Debrief the game with these questions:

• What was it like to be forced to copy so carefully? Can you imagine copying an entire book this way?

• How was this activity different from the ways we can print and copy information in our modern world?

• What impact do these changes have on your access to the Bible? Your access to education? Your access to global ideas? *(Add other effects of communication as you see fit.)*

**Opening Prayer**

Instruct everyone to kneel on the floor for prayer while you remain standing. *(Be aware of any physical conditions that might make this impossible for students or leaders. Be prepared with an alternative for those individuals.)* Wait until all is quiet, keep the silence for about a minute, then pray the following prayer or one of your own.

Almighty God, many things have changed in our church and our world over the years. Changes are happening now and will continue in the future. Help us to discern which changes are good and which are not. Help us to accept those changes that are inevitable. Help us to influence those changes when we can make a difference. Help us to know the difference between them. Amen.

Teach

**My Faith Story**

Ask kids to respond to the Big Question: Who is Martin Luther and what does it mean to be a Lutheran?

Then share a part of your own faith story using the suggestion below or another way to share about changes you have witnessed within the church.

Write the words *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* ("The church must always reform") on a whiteboard or chart paper. Share some of your experiences with changes in the church. You can look back years or weeks. How have these changes come about? Have they all been changes for the better? What changes would you like to see made in the way the church functions? If you have experienced a change that resulted in a split of some kind, tell the students about that change and how you responded to it. How have changes in the church affected your faith journey? Do you think it is difficult for the church to keep "reforming itself," as Luther hoped it would?

**Open the Bible**

Have students open their Bibles to Ephesians 2:8–9. Read these verses aloud as a group. Instruct the students to highlight or underline the words *grace*, *faith*, and *gift* in their Bibles. Remind them that Martin Luther was into grace in a BIG way. He felt that the church of his day was not preaching grace or showing grace to the people. Practices such as the selling of indulgences made it look like the people were saved by what they did (works) and not by God's gift of grace.

Have a brainstorming session on the meaning of the word *grace*. Write the students' ideas on the board or a large sheet of paper that can be posted on the wall. Once the list is completed, ask students to think of times when they have experienced God's grace in one of the ways you listed. How do you feel when someone shows you grace? How can you show grace to people you meet during the week?

Lutheran Study Bible page 1923: Have a student read the Lutheran Perspectives sidebar "What is the grace of God?" Does this add ideas to the list your class made? What does it mean to you that "God always takes the initiative in forgiving and recreating us"?

Have students open their Bibles to Romans 3:21–26. (If possible, have a variety of translations of the Bible available for this activity.) Ask a volunteer to read these verses. If you have several versions of the Bible, ask a volunteer to read each of the other versions as well. Appoint a scribe, or ask for a volunteer to write for the group, and give him/her a sheet of paper. Instruct the students to put this paragraph from Paul's letter into their own words—as if they were writing a letter to someone and explaining how that person could be made right with God. Encourage them to work together and to choose their words carefully so that the recipient of the letter will have a clear picture of the righteousness of God. If time permits, share Luther's own experience grappling with this idea by reading excerpts from Luther's "tower experience" (easily found by a Web search of the words *Luther*+ *tower*+*experience*).

Lutheran Study Bible page 1857: Have students open their Bibles to the Lutheran Perspectives sidebar "How are people made right with God?" The quotation in this note is from Luther's explanation of the second article of the Apostles' Creed. Have the students recite the Creed together, paying special attention to the actions and events of Jesus' life. How does Luther's explanation clarify what those events mean for you?

Have students turn to Luke 4:18–19. Ask a volunteer to read the words that Jesus spoke in the synagogue. Remind students that during the Reformation the gospel was preached to people who were poor and oppressed. Prior to the Reformation, these people were told that God was angry and would judge them harshly or condemn them because of their sins. The good news of God's love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness was heard for the first time and the people were given hope. Do you know someone who needs to hear the good news? How can you share a word of hope with them this week (and maybe again after that)?

Have students open their Bibles to Matthew 16:13–20. Read this passage by assigning readers or asking for volunteers to read the parts of Peter, Jesus, and the Narrator in this passage. Any remaining students can read the responses of the disciples. Sketch out key players in this passage like a football play. Who's doing what? What's the goal? And why is Simon called "the Rock"? Jesus is not so much building his church on Peter the person, sinner/saint that he is, but on Peter's faith in Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of all. What does it mean to you that not even "the gates of Hades" (hell) can prevail over the church that is built on the rock? Discuss ways that you can be bold and proclaim this good news as Peter and Luther did; write a few examples in the margin beside these verses.

Lutheran Study Bible page 1634: For more on Peter's confession, read the Lutheran Perspectives sidebar "How have Christians interpreted Peter as the rock?" Discuss the various perspectives in this note.

**Open the Catechism**

Prior to class, gather the following items for each of the small groups within your class. (With a very large number of students, the craft and drawing resources could be placed on a side table for the students to share, rather than having a set for each small group to keep at their own table.)

• 2 poster-sized sheets of paper or poster board

• Markers or other drawing instruments

• Construction paper

• Scissors

• Glue

• Any other craft items that might interest your group

Student Book page 300: Have students turn to the third article of the Apostles' Creed and its meaning. Lay out the paper or poster board for each group and distribute the craft supplies among the students. Explain that their job is to create a Holy Spirit poster representing all of the things the Spirit does—as recorded in the explanation of the third article—and a second poster that shows what we do as individuals or as a church community. Read the third article and its explanation and set the students to work on the posters. Set a specific amount of time for completing this work, and hang the posters on a wall or bulletin board. There should be a significant contrast between the Spirit posters and the human posters—with the Holy Spirit doing almost all of the work described in the explanation to the Creed.

Debrief the activity with the following questions:

• What did you learn about the relationship between your work and the work of the Holy Spirit as you made your posters?

• Luther taught that we are saved by grace through faith and that this is a gift from God. How is that shown in his explanation of the third article?

• How can you tell others about what you learned through this activity?

**Quiz Show**

Form two teams of 5 or 6 students each. With a very large group, have the remaining students be an audience for the Quiz Show. With a very small group, have the students work in pairs or threes. Take turns asking the teams questions. Allow teammates to confer with each other before answering, but set a time limit of 60 seconds (or 30 or 45). If one team gets a question wrong, the other team gets a chance to answer. In the case of a tie, have a written question ready. The first team to bring you the correct answer wins the game!

1. The Reformation took place in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ century. *(sixteenth)*

2. The era before the Reformation was known as the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ era. *(medieval)*

3. Martin Luther taught that believers are saved by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ through faith. *(grace)*

4. Martin Luther was born, lived, and died in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *(Germany)*

5. Martin Luther and others who worked to change practices of the Roman Catholic Church are called \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *(reformers)*

6. Prior to the Reformation the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ determined what religion the people would have and what God they would worship. *(ruler or prince)*

7. Martin Luther translated the Bible from its original languages into \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *(German)*

8. The Diet of Worms was a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *(trial or hearing)*

**Take a Break**

If you can find some ethnic German foods, today would be a good day to serve them—knackwurst and spaetzel, anyone? If not, serve gummy bears, which originally came from Germany, where they are known by the name Gummibär (rubber bear) or Gummibärchen (little rubber bear). Hans Riegel of Bonn invented chewy candy and started the Haribo company in 1922, which produced and introduced its revolutionary treat to the world in the 1960s. This is another example of how one German fellow with a great idea could make the world a sweeter place! *(Before serving any food, always check with caregivers for kids with food allergies.)*

Connect

**Group Connection**

Select one of the options below to explore in your small group. Then finish with the Best/Worst activity and prayer.

**Option 1: Object Lesson Option: Out with the Old**

Find a portable cassette tape player to bring to class. (If one cannot be located, you could probably bring cassette tapes, vinyl record albums, or eight-track tapes as examples, and modify the activity accordingly.) Odds are, most of the young people have never used, or seen, a cassette tape player. Tell them about cassettes—25 years ago cassettes were the way people listened to music. You couldn't download songs off the Internet, and CDs were not yet available. Give each student a sheet of paper and have them make two columns labeled "Pros" and "Cons." Ask the students to make a list of the positive qualities of a cassette tape ("Pros") and the negative qualities ("Cons"). Positives could be: it plays music; it is small and portable; it doesn't skip. Negatives could be: you can't jump directly to the song you want to hear; you can't change the music unless you record over the whole tape.

Remind the class that people today listen to music on iPods, MP3 players, or CD players. On the same sheet of paper, continue the list of "Pros" and "Cons" for each of these music devices. What positive aspects of cassettes are still found in the new devices? Are there other advantages to the new technology? Are there any disadvantages to the new technology? How has the change from cassettes to MP3s or CDs made listening to music easier, or harder, for music lovers?

Debrief the activity with these questions:

• Everything in our world changes over time. How were the reformers working to change the bad things without losing the good things within the church?

• What are some of the good things and not-so-good things in the church today?

• How could you work for change that would not lose the good things and, at the same time, improve on the bad things?

**Option 2: Video Option: Luther**

Play a scene from the movie *Luther* (rated PG-13, 2003). *Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.*

Start cue: Scene 17; 1:39:00. The Count sits at his desk as Martin enters. "Who's there?"

End cue: The Count eagerly opens his present.

One of Martin Luther's projects was the translation of the Bible from its original languages into the language of the common people. When the task was complete, he presented a German Bible to an esteemed supporter.

Debrief the video with these questions:

• How many Bibles do you have in your home? How many do you think are in your church?

• Try to imagine never having a Bible in your own language. What might it have felt like to always believe what others told you about God and never have the chance to read about God for yourself?

• What might it have been like to read God's word for the first time?

**Option 3: Game Option: Pass the Buck**

Split the students and leaders into three groups. Give two of the groups a message that needs to be passed *word for word* to people in the third group, who need to bring it back to you. It seems easy. However, they will need to pass the message without the use of any modern conveniences—no cell phones, no texting, etc. Compare the final results for phrases such as "My sister Sally sells seashells by the seashore," "Papa's purple pullover has hot pepper spots," or, a more lesson-appropriate choice, "Luther authored thorough theses that reformed thousands."

Debrief the game with these questions:

• What was the most difficult part of this challenge?

• What would it be like for you to communicate this way over long distances—for example, from state to state? What other challenges are added when you try to take it from country to country?

• How can we use modern technology to spread the good news of God more quickly and efficiently than Luther and the other reformers could?

**Best/Worst and Prayer**

Go around the group and have each student share the best and worst thing from his or her week. Remind them to pay special attention to (for example) the person on their right, as they will be praying for that person in a moment. Alternate prayer partners from week to week.

Use the prayer below (or write your own) to begin a Circle of Prayer. Instruct students to stand in a circle, making sure their prayer partner is to their right. Join hands. Open the prayer using the prayer below, then pray for your partner standing to your right. Gently squeeze your partner's hand to signal them to begin their prayer for the next person in the circle, and so on. When the signal returns to you, close the prayer.

Loving and forgiving God, you have given us your word so that we can become closer to you. Your Word incarnate showed us the power of your love. Your word in scripture reminds us to share that word with others so that it will be your proclaimed word through all the earth. *(Insert your prayer for your partner, then signal the next person to pray. When the signal returns to you, close the prayer.)* We know that you have heard our prayers and that you give us answers to those prayers. Help us to see those answers, even when they are not what we expect, even when the answer is no. Help us to hear your word more clearly as we receive your answers to our prayers. Amen.

**Bible Connection**

Pass out pencils and Student Sheets. Look at the front of the Student Sheet together. Pick a volunteer to read each bullet point aloud for the group. Talk about the points with students.

• What does it mean to you that God's love is unconditional? How do you respond to the statement "Nothing you do can earn God's love or forgiveness"?

• There are a lot of Latin phrases in this lesson. How would you put the three *solas* and *simul iustis et peccator* into your own words?

• Martin Luther wanted every Christian to be able to read the Bible on their own. How would you feel if you could not read the Bible yourself (either because you couldn't read or because it was written in a language you didn't know) and had to ask your pastor to read it for you and tell you what it meant?

• How do your actions show your faith? How does your trust in God's love and forgiveness change what you do each day?

• What does it mean to you that the church is constantly reforming itself?

Turn to this week's activity called "Martin Luther and the Reformation Word Search." Invite your students to pair up to work through the activity page together. After a few minutes, discuss the answers as a group.

**Cartoon Connection**

Use the cartoon and questions on the Student Sheet to kick off a conversation.

• Luther was ridiculed for his ideas by people with whom he had studied. How does it feel to be teased or taunted by people you thought were friends?

Be aware that you might have some kids who are targets of lots of teasing. Also keep in mind that you might have some kids who dole out the hurts. Try to create a safe atmosphere for sharing any and all stories as you talk through how students can handle the hurt and anger that result from ridicule.

• Is it easier to "give in" and change your views (or at least pretend to go with the crowd) or to keep fighting for what you believe?

The kids in your group probably have a lot of experience with this one. If the conversation needs some help, try bringing up specific situations this might have happened to them. How about when someone at school was being picked on? Have they experienced a time when their friends were doing something they thought was wrong? Talking about these hard questions can be very valuable.

• Is it more important to stand up for what you believe is right or to go along so that people like you?

This question could get some interesting answers. What is right and wrong in this situation might be more clear. But asking which is more important to your kids might elicit some unexpected responses. Kids need to feel a part of a community and because of that they need to be liked. Talk about ways that they can both be liked and stand up for what is right.

**Student Book Connection**

Student Book page 165: Prior to class, write the five statements in "Five Things You Should Know about the Lutheran Reformation" on separate note cards or sheets of paper. Have the students turn to this article. Select a different person to read each of the five statements to the group. After each statement is read, offer your own synopsis of what the statement means. Use the "Deep Prep" from this session and the ideas provided in the Student Book to help.

Ask students to arrange the cards with the five points in order from the most important to the least important. Encourage them to talk about why they feel one is more important than another. Why do you feel that way? There aren't "right" or "wrong" answers to this question. The purpose is to get the students to think critically about Reformation issues.

Ask students to imagine themselves in the world described in the Student Book as you reread statement 1. How would such circumstances affect your outlook on life? Your faith? Do you think this would make you more or less dependent on God?

Many of the 16th-century reformers were not interested in creating new churches. However, that was the result of the Reformation and now there are hundreds of Christian denominations. Is this a good thing? Would it be better if we went back to having just one denomination—one "true" church?

Student Book page 231: Have the students turn to "How to Reform the Church When It Strays from the Gospel." Remind the students that Martin Luther not only was concerned about his own time, but felt that the church should always be reforming itself. Allow a few minutes for the students to read through the six suggestions. Pass out paper and pencils and ask them to make a list of things they think need to be reformed in the church today. After a few minutes, discuss their ideas with these questions:

• Are they realistic changes? If so, how could they be discussed in your congregation?

• How difficult would it be to speak out publicly if you feel the church needs to change?

**Life Connection**

Talk about last week's Life Connection. Ask your group what they did this week to live out last week's lesson. What did they learn? What might they do in the future to keep living out that Life Connection?

Luther taught that all people have a calling or "vocation" that God calls them to do and that all vocations are equally important. Invite students to talk to one Christian whose job seems "ordinary" and find out how God uses them in their job. You could also share about your vocation. Challenge them to think about how they can serve God as they do "ordinary" tasks this week.

Send

**Wrap Up**

Kids this age have lots of questions about right and wrong, stories in the Bible, and faith and life. Provide time for them to ask questions. Remember, there isn't always a right answer, but encouraging discussion is great! Questions help students explore their faith. Help them explore on their path to confirmation.

After their questions, ask one or more of the following questions to connect your conversations with the Lesson Focus:

• What does it mean to be a reformer?

• How can you be a positive agent for change in your church?

• The Bible's translation into the "people's language" is one of the profound gifts of the Reformation. How can you embrace this gift during the next week?

**Closing Prayer**

Today's Opening Prayer involved kneeling on the floor. Before the Closing Prayer, ask what the students thought about that prayer.

• How does kneeling make you feel?

• What was it like to have someone else standing and praying while you kneeled?

• Is kneeling something you want to incorporate into your prayers at home?

Based on their responses, have them kneel for this prayer (if they thought it was a good experience) or have them sit on the floor (if they didn't like kneeling). Instruct the students to close their eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths. When all is quiet, pray the following prayer (or write one yourself).

God of all wisdom, as you guided Martin Luther and the other reformers, guide us too. Help us to continue the reformation of your church so that we are always following in your footsteps, changing what needs to be changed and holding on to the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Blessing**

Before students leave, be sure each of them receives the following blessing. (Or, if you like, consider writing your own blessing based on your teaching time.) Have students find a partner. Instruct them to take turns looking their partner in the eyes, placing their hands on the person's shoulders, and offering this blessing:

May you, like Martin Luther, boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to a world in need of grace and peace.