

Martin Luther: **THE IDEA** THAT CHANGED THE WORLD



REFORMATION
2017 It's *Still* All About
Jesus



COMPANION BIBLE STUDY

MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

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MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

Introduction

In 2017, we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the event that marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 1517, a young monk named Martin Luther nailed a list of ninety-five debate topics to the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This act set into motion a series of events that would change the world in ways he could never have imagined.

The documentary *Martin Luther: The Idea That Changed the World* was produced to celebrate this special anniversary. During this six-session class, you will be watching the movie in its entirety. Each session consists of watching approximately fifteen minutes of the movie and then reviewing what you saw, making scriptural connections, and discussing how it applies to our lives today.

MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 1

DVD Chapter 1: START 00:00:00 STOP: 00:16:05

Martin Luther is one of the most important and influential figures in history. After his life's work was done, the world would never be the same. He set into motion a movement that changed religion, politics, art, literacy, economics, and governmental structures. As recently as the year 2000, Luther was recognized by a modern publication as being the third most influential person in the world in the last thousand years. Few men have changed the course of history like Martin Luther. This is recognized and understood as common knowledge. However, because Luther's influence was felt across so many different areas of life, many people disagree about what was so important about Luther and what drove him during his lifetime. Some will argue that his legacy was one of social change. Some argue that his greatest contribution was as a political revolutionary. Others argue that he was a hero who showed the people of the day how to stand up to oppression. But what really drove Martin Luther? What was the motivating force behind him and his actions? Did he really set out to achieve social, artistic, political, and economic change? Or was there something else that he was seeking? Something greater? Let's examine what was truly important to Luther and what we can learn from his struggles and accomplishments.

One question plagued Luther throughout his early life: "In the eyes of God, am I a good person?" Luther concluded that he was not. This realization was crushing to Martin. He saw God as vengeful, tyrannical, and punishing. In an attempt to make himself right with God, he pursued a concept, that to him—and unfortunately, to many people throughout history—made sense: work harder to please God and get right with Him. To him, that meant entering a monastery and a life of self-denial. ***"He was scared stiff before a wrathful God. Luther hoped that punishing himself for his sins would be pleasing to God. He beat himself, fasted for days, slept outside in the cold.***

But the extreme austerity just didn't seem to be working. Luther still felt the guilt of his sin." He could find nothing to ease his conscience of the burden and weight of his sin. He tried confession, but found little assurance. So he tried to do confession "better" and confess every little thing that troubled him, getting to the point of the ridiculous. In fact, his confessor poked fun at him and told him to *"go away and come back when you have something really important to confess."* Luther found less and less reassurance in his works. In fact, the more he tried to work out his salvation, the less it worked! And it greatly scared him!

While Luther had a wrong understanding of God's forgiveness and plan of salvation, he was pretty accurate in his understanding of his sinful, human standing before God.

Luther well understood the biblical concept of sin and what it means to our relationship with God. How was he correct about this matter? See **Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23; Romans 3:23.**

- But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear. Isaiah 59:2
- For the wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23
- For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

Why were Martin's attempts to appease God through his own actions never going to work? See **Romans 3:20; James 2:10–11; Isaiah 64:6.**

- For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20
- For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of it all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. James 2:10–11

- We have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. Isaiah 64:6

In 1510, at age 27, Luther walked from Erfurt to Rome, a trip of more than 800 miles. Luther expected Rome, the seat of the Catholic Church, to be a pious and reverent city, focused on the worship of God. Instead, he was very disillusioned. ***“No one in Rome seemed to take God very seriously. The depravity here in the Church’s holy city led Luther to wonder if anything the Church had told him was true.”***

His visit to Rome would sink Luther into further spiritual despair because of what he saw.

What valuable lesson can we learn from Luther’s mistake? See **Psalm 118:8; Jeremiah 17:5–6; Psalm 146:3; Isaiah 2:22.**

- It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. Psalm 118:8
- Thus says the LORD : “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD . He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.” Jeremiah 17:5–6
- Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. Psalm 146:3
- Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? Isaiah 2:22

Whom alone should we trust to be holy and righteous? See **Luke 18:19; Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 118:14; Micah 7:5–8.**

- And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.” Luke 18:19

- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8
- The LORD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. Psalm 118:14
- Put no trust in a neighbor; have no confidence in a friend; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms; for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. Micah 7:5–8

Reflect on these mistaken concepts: (1) putting our hope and trust in our works to save us, and (2) humans to be a worthy representation of holiness and righteousness. How did these concepts greatly shape Luther and the key points of the Reformation?

- **Grace Alone.** At the heart of what we believe is the conviction that salvation is the free gift of God's grace (undeserved mercy) for Christ's sake alone: "Since the fall of Adam, all who are naturally born are born with sin" (AC II 1). The Lutherans confessed this before Emperor Charles V in Augsburg, Germany, in 1530. This inborn sickness and hereditary sin makes it utterly impossible for people to earn forgiveness. If salvation were dependent on human initiative, there would be no hope for anyone. "For God forgives," says Luther in his Large Catechism (1529), "freely and without condition, out of pure grace" (LC III 96). The basis for the grace of God that alone gives hope to sinners is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe, as Luther said in his Small Catechism explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed, "that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person . . . not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death."

- **Faith Alone.** While God’s grace is universal and embraces all people, we believe that the Scriptures teach that this grace can be appropriated by sinful human beings only through faith. Here is where Luther’s decisive break came with the understanding of the doctrine of justification that had generally prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages—that people must do good works and pay money for forgiveness.
- **Scripture Alone.** Luther’s insight that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone cannot be divorced from the fact that this all came from Scripture alone. For it was directly as a result of his commitment to Scripture that Luther came to rediscover justification by grace alone through faith alone. Together with his contemporaries, Luther held that the Bible is the Word of God and that it does not mislead or deceive us.

Luther continually sought to “get God’s love.” Nothing he did accomplished this. Why is it so important to study Luther and learn from his spiritual struggles? **Luther’s writings** help us understand how God works and how His plan of salvation works. For example, in addressing salvation and what God’s Word says about this priceless treasure, here’s what Luther wrote in his Small Catechism explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

Bonus question: Luther's father did not support Martin's decision to leave his studies of the law. Luther did not follow his father's wishes. Did he break the Fourth Commandment? Why or why not? See **Acts 5:29**.

- But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29
- While Luther thought he was obeying God by joining the monastery he did, in fact, break the Fourth Commandment. Luther thought he could earn righteousness by following church codes and laws.

MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 1—PARTICIPANT PAGE

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Why were Martin's attempts to appease God through his own actions never going to work? See **Romans 3:20; James 2:10–11; Isaiah 64:6.**

The depravity in Rome led Luther to wonder if anything the Church had told him was true. His visit to Rome would sink Luther into further spiritual despair because of what he saw. What valuable lesson can we learn from Luther's mistake? See **Psalms 118:8; Jeremiah 17:5–6; Psalm 146:3; Isaiah 2:22.**

Whom alone should we trust to be holy and righteous? See **Luke 18:19; Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 118:14; Micah 7:5–8.**

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MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 2

DVD Chapter 2: START: 00:16:35

STOP: 00:29:58

Luther continued to struggle with the idea of a vengeful God who cannot be appeased. Ultimately, Luther got to the point where he lashed out at God and at times would claim to hate Him. Seeing the torment he was going through, Luther's confessor and superior, Johann von Staupitz, persuaded Luther to get out of the cloister and into an academic setting where he could spend more time in God's Word and learn more about God's true nature. Luther was sent to the University of Wittenberg to earn a doctorate in theology. He also eventually became one of the faculty professors there. It was while he prepared for academic degrees and teaching in the classroom that he was driven to the "primary source material" of God, the Holy Bible.

The more he studied the Word, the more he saw a different God than the one he had created in his mind. Luther claimed that in studying God's Word—and the Book of Romans in particular—he found that man's standing before God is not made right by anything man does but by the activity of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Luther realized the Bible didn't promote the idea of man justifying himself before God by his works, but rather, that man is justified by the gift of God through faith in the work of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. This new and right understanding of God helped Luther to see the reason believers in Christ have every reason to live a life of joy and peace, not lives of constant fear and despair of the imminent wrath of God bearing down on them. Luther fully understood that this release from God's punishment is not man's doing; it is the work of a gracious God. Freed by this "new discovery," Luther dug deeper into the Word of God, where he continued to see the mercy, grace, and love of God.

Luther's study of Scripture convinced him to believe that the church had lost its way and was promoting and teaching practices contrary to the central truths of the Bible. The most important

of these teachings that the Church needed to reclaim was the doctrine of justification by grace through faith as the means for eternal salvation. One practice of the church that Luther particularly disliked was the selling of indulgences. In the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, “An indulgence is what we receive when the Church lessens the temporal (lasting only for a short time) penalties to which we may be subject even though our sins have been forgiven” (<https://www.catholic.com/tract/primer-on-indulgences>).

It was this practice that Luther particularly thought flew in the face of the central teachings of Scripture. So, armed with God’s Word and a passion to share the love of God with the world, Luther set out to discuss these matters with the church. And the world was about to change forever.

As Luther read the Bible, it became clear to him that salvation is the work of God, not man.

What were some of the key verses that clearly stated this to him? See **Ephesians 2:8–9; Romans 1:17; Romans 3:28; Romans 5:1; Genesis 15:6.**

- For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8–9
- For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” Romans 1:17
- For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Romans 3:28
- Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1
- And he (Abraham) believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6

The Medieval Church saw confession as a way to address humanity’s moral problem. Sins are unacceptable to God—but confessing to a priest could bring forgiveness and restoration. Yet even those who confessed regularly still expected many years in purgatory before they could reach heaven. Until John Tetzel offered to shortcut the process for money, that is.

Who was John Tetzel, and what was he doing that bothered Luther so much? Tetzel was a Dominican friar who was enlisted to travel throughout Germany and sell indulgences, and he was very successful at it. Luther hated the practice, which he said “looks an awful lot like selling salvation.” Luther believed that indulgences did nothing to save souls and only lined the pockets of the clergy. He also believed that because indulgences also exonerated deeds not yet committed, they actually encouraged sin. He had taken a trip to Rome in 1510, where he had been disgusted at the papacy’s greed and corruption.

How did the construction of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome play a part in the selling of indulgences? Work on the construction had stalled because of a lack of money, so Pope Leo X saw the selling of indulgences as a way to raise funds for the project.

From Luther’s perspective, the sale of indulgences was leading people away from God. . . . To address the problem, he invited an academic debate on the issue. He began by writing ninety-five debate topics, or theses. Then, in the most iconic moment of the era, Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg.

Why was Luther right in his assessment that the church was abusing its authority? See the verses listed in the first question. See also this quote from the Ninety-Five Theses:

Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and of the dire need of the souls that are there, if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money spent building a basilica? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial. (Thesis 82, from *Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016], p. 16)

Does it matter whether the Ninety-Five Theses were actually nailed to the church door at Wittenberg? No. The Theses got out to the people and the church, which was the important thing.

The entire Reformation might have stalled right there, except for a new invention that had recently arrived in Wittenberg—a game-changing technology—called the printing press, . . . a process that could turn out in seconds what formerly took months.

How would this new technology be used to promote what Luther had written? Why was this new technology so crucial to the advancement of the Reformation? **Printers were looking for any possible content to print, so many latched onto Luther’s writings as a readily available material. This put Luther’s tracts and books into the hands of a greater number of people.**

How did the laypeople’s view of the sale of indulgences change? ***“It was a suspicion that the whole thing was a kind of spiritual con, and it was a matter of Luther, as it were, simply lighting the tinder that was already there—and the thing blew” (00:26:23).***

MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 2—PARTICIPANT PAGE

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Romans 1:17; Romans 3:28; Romans 5:1; Genesis 15:6.

Who was John Tetzel, and what was he doing that bothered Luther so much?

How did the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome play a part in the selling of indulgences?

Why was Luther right in his assessment that the Church was abusing its authority?

Does it matter whether the Ninety-Five Theses were actually nailed to the church door at Wittenberg?

How would this new technology be used to promote what Luther had written? Why was this new technology so crucial to the advancement of the Reformation?

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MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 3

DVD Chapter 3: START: 00:29:58

STOP: 00:41:37

“When a copy of the Ninety-Five Theses reached Pope Leo X, he dismissed it, thinking Luther was a minor player who posed little threat to the Catholic Church. It would rank among the biggest miscalculations in Church History. Despite the newfound attention, Martin Luther had no desire to start a revolution in 1517. He thought the Ninety-Five Theses would help the Catholic Church, not divide it.” [Merry Wiesner-Hanks:] “He’s not intending to break dramatically with the Catholic Church. . . . If you probably told him in 1517, ‘Well, by the way, twenty years from now, this is going to be the situation.’ He would have thought you were crazy.”

Social changes and revolution at this time in history are often attributed to Luther; however, that was never the driving force behind what he did. Luther was concerned about one thing only: God’s will for His people. This is where people often mistake the importance of Luther and his motivation. While it cannot be denied that social, political, artistic, and economic change followed in the aftermath of his work, those results were never what drove him. What did? Let’s hear from the man himself.

I have done nothing from criminal, reckless, disordered motives, for the sake of worldly honor and profit; all I have written and taught has been according to my conscience and sworn duty as a humble teacher of the Holy Scripture, for the praise of God, for the benefit and salvation of all Christendom, and for the good of the entire German nation. (From a letter to Frederick the Wise dated January 25, 1521; WLS § 3775)

I have the commission and charge, as a preacher and a doctor, to see to it that no one is misled, so that I may give account of it at the Last Judgment (Hebrews 13:17). So St.

Paul (Acts 20:28) commands the preachers to watch and guard their whole flock against the wolves that were to appear among them. Thus it is my duty to chastise public sinners so that they may improve, just as a judge must publicly condemn and punish evildoers in the performance of his office. (*Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*; LW 21:44)

For what harm does it do us, if you are lords and princes? If you do not want to do what is right for yourself, and your estate and office, well, then, it is not we, but you who will give account for that. Only keep the peace and do not persecute us! We do not ask for more, and have never asked for anything else, than that the gospel be free. You could help us and we could help you to peace. If you do not do so, then we retain the honor, and you lose both peace and honor. (*Exhortation to All Clergy*, 1530; LW 34:50)

Why is it important to understand the motivation behind Luther's actions? What's the danger of misunderstanding what was important to him? How did St. Paul, once again, provide a blueprint for Luther to follow? **See 1 Corinthians 1:22–25; Colossians 1:15–20.**

- For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

1 Corinthians 1:22–25

- He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that

in everything He might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. Colossians 1:15–20

“One hundred years earlier, a priest named Jan Hus, like Luther, had criticized the Catholic Church. It was an era when the church believed it necessary to physically stop those who might lead people away from God. Jan Hus was declared a heretic and burned at the stake. . . . Luther would express a kinship to Hus’s ideas—publicly. . . . Luther assumed that when Tetzel’s corrupt sale of indulgences was brought to the pope’s attention, the church would take corrective action.”

“Leo wanted Luther brought to Rome for trial. But the extradition was blocked by Luther’s powerful prince, Frederick the Wise of Saxony, who wanted to protect his star professor.”

How did Frederick the Wise fulfill his earthly vocation by protecting Luther? **Frederick protected one of his citizens, which is one of the primary responsibilities of the government.**

How did the era in which Luther lived help the cause of the Reformation? **In the past, uprisings against the church were quashed and contained quickly, but with the advent of the printing press and movable type, written documents were able to be spread quickly and widely.**

Cardinal Thomas Cajetan was sent to question Luther and get him to retract what he had said against the church and the pope. During this questioning, Luther boldly stood up for the difference between the teachings of Scripture and the practices of the church, going so far as to say, “His holiness abuses Scripture. I deny that he is above Scripture.” This angered Cajetan greatly. The authority of Scripture is one of the main points brought out from the Reformation.

Where did Luther get the basis to claim Scripture as the authoritative source for God and

His will? See **Psalm 12:6; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Isaiah 40:8; John 7:38; 1 Peter 1:23–25.**

- The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times. Psalm 12:6

- All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16–17
- The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Isaiah 40:8
- Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” John 7:38
- Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:23–25

As the situation escalated, Luther was brought out to debate these matters publicly. This heightened the tension and raised the stakes of the discussion. At each debate, Luther brilliantly and accurately defended the truth of Scripture and the authority of God.

“As for the pope’s decree on indulgences, I say that neither the church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture. God once spoke through the mouth of a donkey. I will tell you straight what I think. I am a Christian theologian: I want to believe freely and be a slave to the authority of no one, whether council, university, or pope.”

Is there a biblical precedent for Luther’s boldness? How is this a powerful model for us to be prepared to follow? See **Romans 8:35; Matthew 5:12; John 15:18–20; Jeremiah 20:11; Acts 7:54–60.**

- Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Romans 8:35

- Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:12
- If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will also keep yours. John 15:18–20
- But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. Jeremiah 20:11
- Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:54–60

Is there still a debate concerning authority in the church today? **Yes. It is one of the central differences between Catholics and Protestants to this day.**

It is easy to forget that the start of the Reformation, for Luther, was theological. Theology wasn't the primary source of motivation for the pope, though. What was? **The pope was concerned about the challenge to his authority by Luther, maintaining his control over the German territories, and getting the funding to complete St. Peter's Basilica.**

“In the early 1500s, Germany didn't exist as a nation. The German people lived in a patchwork of separate fiefdoms, free cities, and principalities. These German states—and others—were cobbled together to form a loose union, called the Holy Roman Empire, ruled by the aging Emperor Maximilian. His death in early 1519 triggered the election of a new emperor, and just seven powerful men—called electors—had a vote. Frederick was one of the seven. Pope Leo, who had no vote, nonetheless wanted to influence the outcome. So, rather than alienate Frederick, the pope kept his hands off Luther . . . for a time.”

How did the pope's initial hesitancy to prosecute Luther help the Reformation keep moving forward? **Pope Leo wanted the political support of Frederick, so he left Luther alone for a time; this enabled Frederick to protect Luther. In turn, Luther had more time for writing and lecturing among the people.**

MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 3—PARTICIPANT PAGE

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MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 4

DVD Chapter 4: START: 00:41:37

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Luther continued to write, addressing the issues of theological reforms for the church. He addressed these concerns on the basis of Scripture. As he wrote concerning the issues of the church and its governance, other issues came to light as well.

“To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation’ laid out Luther’s ideas for church reform and addressed a particular injustice that Luther found disturbing and un-Christian. The Catholic Church had long considered priests, monks, and nuns as having a higher calling than ‘regular’ Christians. To Luther, this was all wrong. He saw the Bible leveling the playing field. . . . He said, ‘The farmer out in the field pitching dung is doing a greater work for God than the monk in a monastery praying for his own salvation.’ . . . It was the kind of message the public was ready to hear—and Luther, the writer, knew just how to grab their attention. The printers sold every copy of the treatise they could print.”

One of the great gifts of Luther’s writings is that, on the basis of Scripture, he reclaimed the importance of recognizing the way God works in His creation and the high regard God has for each of His unique creations. This was (and still is, in many circles) a radical idea that brought out the importance of the significant role that every man, woman, and child is called to play in God’s world. In fact, the deeper we examine the “doctrine of vocation,” the more we see the ways this world could be a better place if we would follow God’s design for our lives. When we look to Luther, we see him valuing all vocations, all things that people do—all people have importance.

What are some of the Scripture verses that teach us about God’s important plan for His people? See **Genesis 1:26–29, 31; Ephesians 2:8–10; Matthew 22:36–40; Exodus 20.**

- Then God said, “Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. . . . And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:26–29, 31

- For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8–10
- “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:36–40
- And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the

LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Exodus 20

How would the concept that God loves all of His people equally change your perspective and approach to life if you weren't aware of this previously? How revolutionary is the idea that God created you in His own image? **To the people of Luther's time, the concept of being equal to those who ruled over them in society or the Church must have seemed almost impossible to believe. The fact that God created us in His very image and that He cares for all equally can be a great comfort and reassurance for the believer.**

Martin Luther is well known for understanding how to use the technology and media of his time. How did his approach to communication help spread his message? He understood people, he understood the potential of the printing press, and he understood how to use effective rhetoric. He also spoke in the language of the people when he needed to.

Luther is well known for his “earthy language.” At times, this was an effective way of connecting to the common man. At other times, his lack of a filter played against him. What were the pros and cons of Luther’s rhetoric? Pro: It was fun to read. It helped emphasize his points at the time. People connected to it. He came across as confident, which helped others buy into his arguments. He certainly didn’t come across as a “stuffed shirt,” which connected him to the people of that time. Cons: Oftentimes, he broke the Eighth Commandment and did not “explain everything in the kindest way,” going so far as to criticize his opponents on a personal level and using crude and vulgar language. His worst offense may have been when he attacked the Jews in 1543 in his tract “On the Jews and Their Lies.” (This attack on the Jews was formally refuted in resolutions by both The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.)

Something that doesn’t get enough publicity is that while Luther could be incredibly brutal in his verbal attacks, he had a very pastoral side to him that was full of mercy and love for others. In fact, after the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses, “the papacy made [Johann] Tetzel the scapegoat for the uproar with Luther over indulgences. Tetzel, now discredited, was dying in Leipzig just when Luther was preparing for the great debate in that city. It was Luther who took time to write Tetzel a letter of consolation” (Dr. Kenneth Korby, “The Man Luther: Pastor,” in *The Lutheran Witness*, March, 1983, p. 6).

How does this story help us to better understand Luther? At the heart of who he was and what he did, he was a loving, Christian man.

Throughout all of the phases of Luther's career and the different issues he would address at various times, the central question that Luther kept coming back to was "What makes me right with God?" or "What makes me a righteous person in God's eyes?" Again and again, he kept pointing back to the Scriptures for the answer. It's not about us; it's about Jesus and what He does for, to, and through us.

"Luther had long been tortured by his feelings of unworthiness—tormented by the guilt of his failings—that even his devotion as a monk could not remove." [Luther:] *"The righteous person lives by faith alone!" 'The righteous person lives by faith alone!' All at once, I felt I had been born again. Immediately, I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory, and I found that other words had similar meanings. The work of God—that is, what God works in us. The power of God, by which He makes us powerful. The wisdom of God, by which He makes us wise. The strength of God. The salvation of God. The glory of God. This sweetest phrase of Paul's now for me the very gate of paradise itself.'*" [Narrator:] *"Luther's breakthrough, triggered by a passage in the Bible's Book of Romans, was his understanding that God's favor could not be earned, even partially, by doing good deeds. Instead, he saw righteousness as a gift, given by God to those with faith in Jesus."*

What would your life be like if you didn't understand the concept "the righteous person shall live by faith alone"? **Answers will vary.**

So what now? Luther's ideas then faced an obvious follow-up. If God frees people from the need to do good works to earn heaven, then what should Christians do with that freedom? Again, Luther saw the answer clearly.

[Luther:] *"Here is the truly Christian life: when a man applies himself with joy and love to serving others voluntarily and for nothing. Doing only what is helpful, advantageous, and wholesome for our neighbor, since by faith we already abound in all good things in Christ."* [Erik Herrmann:] *"So when you didn't have to worry about your future, you were free to care for the futures of others."* [Jane Strohl:] *"If you were*

caught all the time, as Luther put it, turned in on yourself, and life is just about ‘you,’ . . . what a pitiful life—when you don’t have the eyes to see others, you know, whom you could love.” [Vitor Westhelle:] “So now you can live who you really are, a loving person to love your neighbor.” [James Nestingen:] “You are free. (Laughs) Well, that’s a lot of fun. It’s about as countercultural as it gets.”

How is following God’s Word and direction always countercultural? **The world does not honor or follow God’s Word; as Christians, we live counter to the standards of this world.**

MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 4—PARTICIPANT PAGE

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How is following God’s Word and direction always countercultural?

MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 5

DVD Chapter 5: START: 00:52:59

STOP: 01:18:30

Pope Leo was not overly concerned about Luther's view of freedom or salvation, but he was increasingly annoyed at Luther's questioning of church authority.

[Brad Gregory:] *"To a large extent, the Catholic Church doesn't want a dispute about doctrine. As far as they're concerned, doctrine is not an issue. The issue is how to control one in another of a long line of medieval heresies."* [Narrator:] *"Leo tried controlling Luther by issuing a Papal Bull, a formal document that required Luther to disavow his writings."*

"Luther himself took his boldest step yet: burning the bull." [Luther:] *"As they excommunicated me for the sacrilege of heresy, so I excommunicate them in the name of the sacred truth of God. Christ will judge whose excommunication will stand. Amen."* [Narrator:] *"There was no turning back now."*

The public support for Luther was so great that the political leaders had to tread lightly. Charles took a different tack in dealing with the Luther problem, agreeing to a formal hearing on German soil in the city of Worms in 1521. Anticipation ran high for this showdown between the powerful emperor and the lowly, but popular, monk. In the center of the room was a pile of books written by Luther. He was asked to disavow all his writings to publicly retract his statements and spare himself.

[Luther:] *"I do not set myself up as a saint. Therefore, your most serene majesty, expose my errors; overthrow them by the writings of the prophets and the evangelists. If I am shown my errors, I will be the first to throw my books on the fire. . . . I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other."*

Unless I am convinced by Scripture or clear reason, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me.”

Faced with the very real prospect of his death, Luther was driven by his conscience to stand up for the Word of God. What did Luther mean when he referred to his conscience? **Luther later said,**

Now that the question is raised, we must have a look at the nature of Christian freedom. Christian or evangelical freedom, then, is a freedom of conscience which liberates the conscience from works. Not that no works are done, but no faith is put in them. For conscience is not the power to do works, but to judge them. The proper work of conscience (as Paul says in Romans 2[:15] [“They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them”])), is to accuse or excuse, to make guilty or guiltless, uncertain or certain. Its purpose is not to do, but to pass judgment on what has been done and what should be done, and this judgment makes us stand accused or saved in God’s sight. Christ has freed this conscience from works through the gospel and teaches this conscience not to trust in works, but to rely only on his **mercy.**” (*The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows*, 1521; LW 44:298)

Luther believed the conscience as defined by God, not some superstitious ethical concept, was to be understood in its standing before God and must be filtered through God and His Word in order for it to be properly defined and understood. How can you tell if your conscience is leading you to do the right thing according to God? See **1 John 4:1**.

- Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1

Charles made good on his promise to keep Luther safe after the debate at Worms. However, it wasn’t without drama. As Luther headed home, he was “kidnapped” and never made it home.

Luther was dead, at least that's what most Germans assumed when they heard the story. But the kidnapping had been a ruse, faked by Frederick the Wise to ensure Luther's safety. So, with great secrecy, Luther was hidden at Wartburg castle. Luther didn't like being cooped up in the castle, but he used that opportunity to undertake one of the most significant and important projects of his life, translating the New Testament into the language of the people. ***"If, as Luther believed, the Bible is the ultimate source of knowledge, then everyone should be able to read it."*** [John Warwick Montgomery:] ***"He translated the Bible into German, he said, so every plowboy could read God's Word."*** Think about that concept. What if you couldn't read the Bible? What if you didn't have the Word of God readily available to you? Luther made God's Word available to the German people. It also should be noted that Luther also brought church worship services to the people in their own language. Now they could actually understand what was being said in the worship service!

Unfortunately, the Christian freedom Luther sought to bring to others was being wildly abused while he was hidden away. In Wittenberg, anti-Catholic mobs were smashing church windows and destroying art. So-called prophets were proclaiming they had knowledge superseding the Bible. Luther was upset enough by this to leave his exile and go out into public to try to quash these troubles. It worked for a while. Unfortunately, this would not be the last time that people tried to use Luther as a basis for their own agenda.

Since the time when he was a teacher at Wittenberg until today, people have abused Luther to validate their ideas. What are some examples?

- Evangelicals co-opt Luther regularly but completely disregard his treatment of the Sacraments.
- Protestants continue to promote the idea that Luther's main objective is one of a social nature and so conclude that the work of the Church should continue to mold and adapt to the culture at large.

- Nazi Germany famously tried to use Luther's teachings as a foundation for their anti-Semitic destruction.
- Other Protestants tried to use Luther as a basis for destroying iconic images found in churches. This is not what Luther actually believed and promoted.

As a result of Luther's rediscovery of the treasures of Scripture and his pursuit of God's greater will, certain things did change socially. On the basis of Scripture (again, the rule and norm for all Luther did), what did Luther teach regarding marriage and celibacy?

See **1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:6–9; 1 Corinthians 7:6–7; Matthew 8:14.**

- The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted too much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 3:1–13

- If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. Titus 1:6–9
- Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. 1 Corinthians 7:6–7
- And when Jesus entered Peter's house, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. Matthew 8:14

One way that Luther helped spur on social change involved the right of the clergy to marry. Luther taught that clergy could indeed marry and that leading a celibate life is not a prescription for the clergy but is a special gift given to some people.

On June 13, 1525, Martin married Katharina Von Bora. Although he initially married her to please his father and to spite the pope, his marriage would be one of the most cherished things of his life. He once said, "My Katie is in all things so obliging and pleasing to me that I would not exchange my poverty for the riches of Croesus." And he should have regarded her highly because, by all accounts, this former nun was an incredible wife. Strong, smart, and gifted at taking care of the family, Katie was a remarkable woman! *"In an era when it was illegal for a man to will his estate to his wife, Luther did it anyway—so great was his respect for Katharina."*

MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 5—PARTICIPANT PAGE

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MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 6

DVD Chapters 6–7: START: 01:18:30

STOP: End

“In 1527, Luther fell ill. Sickness was no stranger; in the past, he’d suffered debilitating kidney stones, gout, insomnia, dizziness, and ringing in his ears. But the most challenging of all hit hard this year—a recurrence of his deep bouts of depression. At times, he would lock himself in his room for days. . . . [Gerhard Bode, Jr.:] Luther was depressed for a long period of time, and he just couldn’t get out of this depression.” On one occasion, Katie tried to shock Martin to his senses by dressing herself all in black. Katie told her husband that if that if he was going to act like God had died, she’d better dress for it.

“By late summer 1527, it might have seemed like God had died, as grotesquely masked plague doctors arrived in Wittenberg to try and stop an outbreak of the plague. The needs of others were enough to finally break Luther’s malaise, and he began to minister to the sick and console the dying. Many evacuated the city, but Martin and Katie stayed.”

In these most dire times of death and abandonment, Luther wrote his most powerful hymn, “A Mighty Fortress.”

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from eve’y need
That hath us now o’ertaken.
The old evil foe
Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

The title might suggest a hymn about battle, but for Luther, “A Mighty Fortress” was about comfort and hope in times of trial.

How does the back story of the composition of the hymn “A Mighty Fortress” provide a blueprint for Christian behavior in the midst of life’s struggles? See **Psalm 34:1–3; Romans 8:31–39; Nehemiah 8:10**

- I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together! Psalm 34:1–3
- What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:31–39
- Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength. Nehemiah 8:10

Luther made many musical contributions to the worship service that should not be overlooked. He restructured the church service to include more music, including lively songs sung by the congregation.

What was the benefit of incorporating more hymnody into worship services?

Incorporating more hymns was just one part of Luther's larger strategy to not just revitalize the church services, but to also bring God's Word—through music—into the people's everyday life.

[Robert Kolb:] ***“They could sing while they were plowing the fields or making shoes, and those hymns then did sink deeply into the religious consciousness of people across Germany.”***

Luther also placed a new emphasis on the sermon in church services, saying it was a method for teaching people the Word of God. Luther instructed people in his sermons on how to find the right things about God and life in the Scriptures. Luther found out how much the people had to learn when he visited local churches and saw how poorly trained the priests were. In his Preface to the Small Catechism, he wrote:

How pitiable, so help me God, were the things I saw: the common man, especially in the villages, knows practically nothing of Christian doctrine, and many of the pastors are almost entirely incompetent and unable to teach. Yet all the people are supposed to be Christians, have been baptized, and receive the Holy Sacrament even though they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments and live like poor animals of the barnyard and pigpen. What these people have mastered, however, is the fine art of tearing all Christian liberty to shreds.

[Erik Herrmann:] ***“Luther initially is a bit naive in how things are going to play out. What he realized after they went around and visited these churches is that nobody really knew anything about the Christian Church; or the things that they knew were just strange and odd.”***

Luther responded by writing two catechisms, basic textbooks of the faith. Luther thought parents should teach their children about the Ten Commandments, the ancient creeds, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments. He often turned teaching into a game, with rewards for the right answers. His Small Catechism guided that effort, answering the question: “What does this mean?”

“By late 1529, Luther’s reforms had spread to nearly two dozen German territories, now labeled with a new term: “Protestant.” Despite growing popular support for Luther’s ideas, the Protestants faced a renewed military threat from the emperor. To strengthen their position, a meeting of Protestant leaders was held in the city of Marburg. The plan was to iron out theological differences and build solidarity. But if the goal was mutual agreement, Martin Luther should have stayed home. Nothing in his personality would suggest an ability to compromise on matters of theology, especially with his Swiss counterpart, Ulrich Zwingli.”

“The sharpest difference between Zwingli and Luther centered on the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Zwingli saw the bread and wine as a symbol of Jesus’ body and blood. Luther believed the body and blood were actually present—in a mysterious, but very real way.”

During his meeting with Zwingli, Luther wrote what he believed to be the relevant Scripture from the Words of Institution in chalk on the table—and covered it up. At one point in the lengthy debate, Luther lifted the tablecloth and pointed out the words he’d written.

[Luther:] *“This IS my body. Here is our scriptural proof. You have not yet moved us.”*
[Narrator:] *To Zwingli, this was another example of Luther’s condescending attitude. To Luther, it was an illustration of how he would never retreat from what he believed to be a clear teaching of the Bible.”*

How were Luther’s actions when meeting with Zwingli both a positive and negative

example for us today? **Positive: Don’t veer from Scripture. Negative: Christians should follow closely Paul’s directive in Ephesians 4:13–16.**

- **Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by**

every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:13–16

Dozens of new forms of Christianity began to grow out of the church tumult of the era. In England, Henry VIII split from the Catholic Church, starting the Church of England (now the Anglican Church). The Anabaptists sought to separate themselves from the broader culture and live more simply. Their modern-day descendants are the Amish and the Mennonites, named for sixteenth-century religious leader Menno Simons. A larger group subscribed to the teachings of John Calvin—a second-generation reformer who ranks second only to Luther in his continuing influence on Protestantism. A group of Calvinists called the Puritans left Europe for the Americas so they could practice their religion unfettered. Back in Germany, churches that aligned with Luther’s teachings began to call themselves Lutherans, a name Martin Luther himself detested at first.

[Luther:] *“The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name; they should not call themselves Lutherans, but Christians. For what or who is this Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone. How did I, poor, stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name? I am no one’s master; nor do I wish to be. I simply want to share with all men the one common teaching of Christ, who alone is our Lord.”* [Narrator:] *“But by the 1530s, the movement and the name had become entrenched—bigger than the man himself.”*

How does Luther’s attitude toward the name “Lutheran” actually reflect what was so important to him throughout his life? See **1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Psalm 29:2; Psalm 22:23.**

- So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31
- For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:20

- Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. Psalm 29:2
- You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you offspring of Israel! Psalm 22:23

Luther's strong and uncompromising rhetoric influenced many people. Is it fair to blame him for the rise of the Third Reich? NO! William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* famously blamed Luther for the Holocaust; more recent scholarship refutes that view. (See *The Fabricated Luther: Refuting Nazi Connections and Modern Myths* by Uwe Simon Netto.)

What influential twentieth-century leaders actually followed many of Luther's true teachings? **Martin Luther King, Sr. and Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Ironically, in the very same decade that Hitler was beginning to use Luther to justify oppression, American Michael King visited Germany, where he was so inspired by Martin Luther's bold fight against oppression that he changed his name to Martin Luther King. He and his son, Martin Luther King, Jr., were great social reformers. That Luther could elicit massive social change without a call to arms continues to offer hope to the downtrodden around the world.

On February 18, 1546, Martin Luther died after reaffirming the faith he fought so hard to protect. Even in death, Luther remained the Protestant movement's primary leader. Knowing what Luther would have said about any issue was never a problem, because no one in history left behind a more detailed written record than Martin Luther. No Protestant church subscribes to everything Luther wrote and said. But his ideas have left an indelible mark on the lives of nearly one billion Protestants today.

Luther's lasting influence extends far beyond the church. He unleashed new ways of thinking that continue to profoundly shape the secular world. As a vocal advocate for the education of children, Luther helped paved the way for the now ubiquitous public school system. Luther included the need to educate girls at a time when no other prominent figures thought that worthwhile. *“As an impoverished outsider who stood up against kings and popes, Luther*

continues to inspire a belief that individuals can nonviolently effect change. From the American Civil Rights Movement to countless third world protests, Martin Luther still fuels an ideology of hope.”

[Mark Tranvik:] *“You cannot even, I think, see the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century without taking into account Martin Luther’s contribution to it.”*

The American notion of a separation of church and state flows from the Reformation reality that Protestants and Catholics would have to find a way to live side by side. The only practical way to do that was to allow religious freedom.

“Luther laid the groundwork for Western democracy in one other important way: he was the first to prove the power of the media to amplify the marketplace of ideas, and to serve as a check on government.” . . . [Gerhard Bode, Jr.]: *“He’s able to communicate to people in a way that not only that they’ll listen to, but will move them to action. And I think that’s really a gift.”* It cannot be overstated how influential Martin Luther was to the world. But he never set out to change the world. Despite his influence on economics, art, politics, social norms, culture, and so forth, the driving force behind Luther’s life was a spiritual one: “How can I get righteous with God?” In his attempt to answer that question in a way that was truthful to God and obedient to His Word, the world changed. But that was never his focus. Instead, Luther’s greatest legacy that we can follow is what his reason for being was: worshiping God and loving others. Despite his impact, Martin Luther wanted very little to do with politics or secular life. Luther’s focus—at all times—was the quest for the right relationship between God and people; and how to show love for others in need.

[Luther:] *“I simply taught, preached and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I drank beer with my friends, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. But I . . . I did nothing. The Word did everything.”*

“The millions of words Luther wrote, taught, and preached all boil down to one idea—the breakthrough in understanding that changed his life, summarized in just two words: ‘God forgives,’ and a forgiven person wants to help others. These were the words young Martin Luther

desperately needed to hear—the idea he most wanted to tell others. Five hundred years later, he still is.” See **Romans 1:17**.

- For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written,
“The righteous shall live by faith.” Romans 1:17

MARTIN LUTHER: THE IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SESSION 6—PARTICIPANT PAGE

How does the back story of the composition of the hymn “A Mighty Fortress” provide a blueprint for Christian behavior in the midst of life’s struggles? See **Psalm 34:1–3; Romans 8:31–39; Nehemiah 8:10.**

What was the benefit of incorporating more hymnody into worship services?

How were Luther’s actions when meeting with Zwingli both a positive and negative example for us today?

How does Luther’s attitude toward the name “Lutheran” actually reflect what was so important to him throughout his life? See **1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Psalm 29:2; Psalm 22:23.**

What influential twentieth-century leader actually followed many of Luther’s true teachings?