

CAN'T BUY ME GRACE!

Leader's Guide

Background:

In the year 1517, the Roman Catholic Church taught that if you paid money to buy an “indulgence,” you could be forgiven for all of your sins and get out of “purgatory” a place where you had to suffer for your sins before you could go to heaven. Martin Luther, a young monk and professor of the Bible, learned from studying the Scriptures that we are saved only by grace, through faith, for Christ's sake, as taught in the Scriptures. Martin Luther taught these truths faithfully, even though the Pope kicked him out of the Roman church for doing so. Reformation Day celebrates the day (October 31, 1517) that Luther began to publicly teach the Gospel as well as the four “solas” or “alones”: Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone. And don't forget: Sola! Is the theme for the 2009 Higher Things Conferences!

Additional Background:

Martin Luther posted his “95 Theses” on the door of the church in Wittenburg in 1517. The purpose of these theses was to encourage debate about the church's use of indulgences and their abuse. However, because of the printing press, Luther's theses were widely distributed. Many people wanted to follow Luther not so much because he taught the Gospel but because he seemed to be rebelling against the authorities. For Luther, above all else, was Christ and the Gospel. Luther's emphasis in everything He wrote was the glory of Christ who saved us by His death alone and the working of the Spirit in delivering that salvation through the means of grace.

Sometimes, Luther is seen as being for a kind of “independent” Christianity where everyone just reads the Bible for themselves and worships from their hearts, not so much in church. Nothing could be further from the truth! Rather, Martin Luther taught the importance of pastors, but pastors who knew the Gospel of Christ and faithfully comforted sinners with the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins. Luther, as the Scriptures do, taught that the Lord sets up His church with a pastor to preach and people to hear.

Begin by discussing what you know about Martin Luther and the Reformation.

Most students might have a passing knowledge of the Reformation from a world history class. More likely, youth know the name “Martin Luther” only in “Martin Luther King” the Civil rights leader.

1. Read **Ephesians 2:8-9**. What does St. Paul say is the basis for our salvation?

Paul teaches that we are saved by grace. “Grace” can best be defined as God dealing with us not as we deserve but as we don't deserve. Paul emphasizes that grace isn't something God puts in us but the way in which He deals with us; it's all the Lord doing the saving!

2. Read **Romans 3:29**. Through what are we saved?

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Paul says that we are saved by faith. "Faith" can be described as "confident trust." In this case, faith is trust in God's promise that we aren't saved by what we do but by the death of Jesus for our sins. It is important to note that by "faith" we don't mean "my decision" or "how much I believe." Rather we mean trust in Jesus, Who is the object, that is, the One our faith clings to.

3. Read **John 14:6**. Who is the only person through whom our salvation comes?

This is an important passage since it is Jesus Himself who says that He is the Way. Most people today would probably admit that there are "many paths" to heaven or salvation. In that sense, they believe all religions to be right in some way. The Christian faith denies this thinking because Jesus Himself directs us to Himself and to no one else.

4. Read **2 Timothy 3:16-17**. What is the source of our faith and knowledge of Christ?

The Scripture are our only source of doctrine. As Lutherans, we also hold to the Book of Concord but we do so because it explains what the Scriptures teach. The Book of Concord (the Lutheran Confessions) are not in addition to the Bible but an explanation and teaching of what the Bible says. These documents are helpful in confessing what the Bible teaches and what is false teaching. (As the Creeds do).

5. In Martin Luther's day, the Roman Church sold indulgences like TV salesmen sells knives and gym equipment. One famous phrase went like this: "As soon as the coin in the box goes clink, the soul from purgatory springs." Should we be worried about where we go when we die? What promise does the Lord give us? See **Job 19:25-27** and **Luke 23:39-43**.

When we die, we are with the Lord. Not only that, but we believe that when our Lord comes again, our bodies will be raised from the dead and be with the Lord. These Bible passages demolish any notion of a "purgatory" or "limbo" or something other than being either in hell (unbelievers) or being with the Lord.

6. Many people, after they bought an indulgence, thought they could go ahead and do whatever they wanted and commit any sins they wanted, since they were "covered" by the Pope's piece of paper. Is our forgiveness given so that we can just do what we want? For an answer, read **Romans 6:1-4**.

This is a great misunderstanding and misuse of the Gospel. The Lord baptizes us to give us new life. This is a life lived to His glory and the service and benefit of our neighbor, NOT to serve ourselves or to see what we can get away with. In fact, thinking the Gospel means "I can do whatever I want and it will just be forgiven" is a pretty good sign of unbelief in the first place!

7. Most people in Luther's day thought of Jesus as a harsh judge who was ready to smite them at the drop of a hat! That made them more inclined to spend their savings on an indulgence! But what does Jesus Himself say about who He is and why He came? See **John 3:14-17**.

The common picture of Jesus shown in many books and pamphlets was the one from Revelation in which the Angry Judge has a sword coming out of His mouth. Jesus is all about forgiving sins and comforting sinners. To those who are not troubled by their sins and think they are righteous

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and holy, Jesus will indeed be a terrifying Judge. But to those who are troubled by their sins, Jesus is nothing but comfort, since by His blood our sins have been taken away.

Many clergy would preach and talk about Jesus in a frightening way with the purpose of getting them to obey and give money to the church. Read the explanation of the Second Article from the Small Catechism:

I believe 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, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

Why is this a comforting description of our Lord? How does it compare to the notion most people have of Jesus even today?

Even today, the notion that Jesus is “Lord” means somehow that He is a “boss” or is looking over your shoulder. In that way of thinking, having Jesus as Lord means that you live under the Law and God is on your back. But the Catechism teaches us that to have a “lord” means that Jesus is the One who saves us, that is, rescues and redeems us from sin and all our enemies. He is not the harsh slave master but the knight in shining armor who delivers us from Satan.

8. As Martin Luther continued to preach and teach the Gospel, his enemies began to refer to those who followed him as “evangelicals” or “Lutherans.” Luther never wanted to have anyone take his name as if they followed him! But he said he didn't mind if by “Lutheran” was meant “people who trust the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake.” How should we as Lutherans emphasize to others that we don't follow “Luther” but God's Word alone? See **Romans 1:16-17** and **1 Corinthians 1:22-24**.

The best way to do this is to know the Scriptures. Be able to discuss what the Scriptures teach. Don't be afraid to ask your pastor how to respond to questions. But more than just knowing the Scriptures, a faithful Lutheran will talk about Jesus. What He has done and how He gives that to us in the church. That is, a Lutheran talks about Jesus' death for sinners and His resurrection and the means of grace: Baptism, Absolution, The Gospel and the Sacrament of the Altar.

9. How would you answer someone who says, “I'm Christian first, Lutheran second?”

There is no difference. To be Lutheran is to be a Christian, one whose faith are in Christ crucified delivered in the means of grace, and nothing else.

10. Martin Luther did have enemies only in the Roman church. Many other “reformers” tried to change the church but for the worse. Many of these so-called “reformers” preached and taught against the Sacraments. They said that Baptism was just a symbol of our believing and that the

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Lord's Supper is not really the body and blood of Jesus but just a symbol of His death. Luther fought against these false teachings by pointing, as always, to God's Word. What does Jesus Himself say about His Holy Sacraments? Read **Matthew 28:18-20; John 3:1-6; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27; John 6:51-58.**

These are key passages in understanding that Baptism is God's Work and that the Lord's Supper is Jesus' true body and blood. It is important to know that in both Sacraments Jesus is doing the work of actually giving and bestowing the forgiveness of sins. Emphasize that the Means of Grace are the Lord's actions, not ours. They are gifts that give us what was achieved by Jesus on Calvary.

11. The church often suffers through periods of persecution and even trouble from within when preachers wander from the Word of God and Christ is obscured. Martin Luther was used by the Lord to bring the Gospel back to light. What comfort do we have that the Lord's church will always stand against such false preachers and troubles? See **Matthew 16:13-18.**

Not even the gates of Hell can knock down Christ's church! The comfort is that Christ's Word will always endure and is always sure. Heresies and false teachers and persecutors come and go, but the Lord's word will always remain and save and comfort sinners.

Close the Bible Study by singing "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word." (LSB 655)

The following are books that are fairly easy to read and give a good introduction to Luther's life. Frederick Nohl, *Luther Biography of a Reformer*.

Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*

James Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*

These are available at Amazon.com or CPH.org.

There are two very good movies available also:

Martin Luther (1953). One of the best. Black and White and a little background helps.

Luther (2003). A well done recent version with some humorous moments. A little easier to watch for youth, probably.