

MARTIN

Luther



A YOUTH STUDY GUIDE



The Lutheran Rose

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Introduction

The Small Catechism is a classical piece from the Lutheran tradition. Originally published in 1529, the Small Catechism was written by Martin Luther as a tool for parents to teach their children the basics of the Christian faith. The catechism contains the Ten Commandments, the Apostle’s Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacraments, and some daily prayers. In addition, each commandment, article of the creed, and petition of the Lord’s prayer are defined by “what does this mean”. The Small Catechism remains an integral part of the Lutheran church today as it is the foundational text used in most Confirmation instruction. Confirmation instruction gives youth another way to grow deeper in their faith so that they feel prepared to publicly affirm the faith in which they were baptized. Confirmation also aims to connect youth to their church, its theology, and its history. To form a full picture of the Lutheran church’s history, it is necessary to explain who Martin Luther was and his contribution to the Christian church.

This study of Martin Luther will center around the film “Luther” (2003)¹. The goal of this learning unit is to teach youth in 7th-12th grade who Martin Luther was, what some of the important theological concepts were that shaped the Lutheran church, and how these ideas are relevant today. Each of the six session will include three sections: prepare, watch, discuss. For the prepare section, the leader will need to have some historical perspective and be able to share the key points with the group in an engaging manner. During the watch section, the group will watch a 6-10 minute clip from the movie Luther. After watching the movie, the group will engage in the discuss section. In this section, there are 3-5 questions that help to unpack the movie, allow group members to share what they heard or found interesting, and suggest ways that the movie might be relevant today.

Acknowledgements

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¹ *Luther*, directed by Eric Till (MGM, 2003), DVD.

The Early Years

Prepare

- ♣ Martin Luther born: Eisleben, Germany; 1483
- ♣ Growing up, Luther battled with self-esteem and feared failing and punishment
- ♣ Luther planned on becoming a lawyer, but caught in a storm, vowed to become a monk
- ♣ Monastic life was severe: food, clothing, worship, self-denial (i.e. fasting, sleeping outside)
- ♣ Feelings of helplessness; concerned about his salvation
- ♣ Views God as angry and vengeful

Watch

Play the opening scenes from *Luther* (2003). 2:00-8:02

Discuss

- ♣ Have you ever had some the the same feelings as Martin Luther during his early years? Fear? Low self-esteem? Unworthiness? Helplessness?
- ♣ Have you ever been caught in a storm (literally or figuratively)? What happened? Did you turn to God for help? What did God do?
- ♣ When have you questioned your salvation? How did this make you feel?
- ♣ What does it mean to be 'saved'?
- ♣ What is your current view of God? Has this image of God changed throughout your life? If so, what other images of God have you had?

The Road to Rome

Prepare

- ❖ Rome was the central city of Christianity
- ❖ In 1510, Luther travels to Rome and encounters countless relics and indulgences
- ❖ **Relic:** object of religious veneration, especially a piece of the body or a personal item of a saint.
- ❖ **Indulgence:** a grant by the pope of remission of the temporal punishment in purgatory still due for sins after absolution.
- ❖ Luther becomes disillusioned with church practices

Watch

Play clip from the movie *Luther* (2003). 8:03-14:27

Discuss

- ❖ Why do you think it is so easy to just 'go with the flow'? How can doing this get you into trouble? What are the consequences?
- ❖ What is an ulterior motive? Give an example of when you have had an ulterior motive to do something.
- ❖ Read 1 Thessalonians 5:21-23. What is your reaction to this passage? Do you agree that wise people test the messages they hear? How can you test these things?
- ❖ What kinds of corruption do you see in the world today? What is your typical response to this? Do you feel like you are able to make a difference?

95 Theses

Prepare

- ❖ In 1512, Luther sent to Wittenberg to study and preach
- ❖ Receives doctoral degree of theology in Wittenberg.
- ❖ Through his studies, Luther comes to a new understanding of the Gospel
- ❖ On October 31, 1517, Luther posts his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg

Watch

Play clips from the movie *Luther* (2003). 14:30-15:40; 21:50-26:00; 38:20-40:30

Discuss

- ❖ How do you understand the quote “We preach best what we need to learn most”?
- ❖ Why do you suppose God created us with an intellect? How does this influence how we are to interact with the world?
- ❖ Read Ephesians 2:8-10. What is your reaction to this passage? Why is it good news? Is there any part that is challenging to you?
- ❖ What is your current view of God? Has this image of God changed throughout your life? If so, what other images of God have you had?

Diet of Augsburg

Prepare

- ♣ Luther's 95 theses were spread throughout Germany (and Europe) because of the printing press
- ♣ The church wanted Luther to recant, but Luther stood firm in his beliefs.
- ♣ DIET - a meeting of the Holy Roman Empire's princes and nobles
- ♣ RECANT - to make a formal retraction or disavowal of a previously held statement or belief

Watch

Play clips from the movie *Luther* (2003). 41:30-44:45; 51:29-56:20.

Discuss

- ♣ How would you feel if you were summoned to appear before an imperial diet? What might be a modern-day equivalent for this?
- ♣ Staupitz seems to stick by Luther through thick and thin. Who has been someone who has supported you even when it was really hard?
- ♣ Read Galatians 6:2. What does this verse tell us about how we should care for one another? How can we carry each other's burdens?

Telling the Truth

Excommunication and Diet of Worms

Prepare

- ❖ EXCOMMUNICATION - the act of banishing a member of a church from the communion of believers and the privileges of the church
- ❖ Catholic teaching taught that salvation was only possible through communion with the Roman Catholic church. Excommunication was therefore equal to damnation.
- ❖ Luther is excommunicated in January 1521.
- ❖ Diet of Worms, April 1521, Luther speaks to the chief rulers of the Holy Roman Empire (N.B. Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and Elector of Saxony Frederick the Wise).

Watch

Play clips from the movie *Luther* (2003). 41:30-44:45; 1:14:45-1:20:30.

Discuss

- ❖ "I am interested in the truth."
For what truth was Luther willing to risk everything?
- ❖ During the Middle Ages the pope and the church determined 'truth'. How is truth determined today in the different Christian churches?
- ❖ The search for 'truth' and a meaning to life is common to all people. What are some of the ways people seek 'truth' today?
- ❖ How does the issue of 'truth' impact how Christianity is presented?

Religious Freedom

Prepare

- ❖ After his trial in Worms, Luther is forced into hiding where he translates the Bible into German, and writes many other documents.
- ❖ The Peasants' War (1524-1525)
- ❖ Marriage - Katharina von Bora
- ❖ Augsburg Confessions

Watch

Play clips from the movie *Luther* (2003). 1:39:09- 1:41:12, 1:48:00-1:49:45, 1:51:10-1:55:30.

Discuss

- ❖ Why do you think Luther's work was an impetus for religious freedom?
- ❖ Why is religious freedom important, and how do you think it is viewed today? In the United States? Around the world?
- ❖ Read Romans 3:21-26. What does this say about freedom?
- ❖ In Luther's *The Freedom of the Christian*, he wrote, "*A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all.*" What does this mean to you? How does this play out in our daily lives?