

# Did Martin Luther really call the Pope the Anti-Christ?



## Where's this Going?

Kids explore Martin Luther's life and work, and grapple with the reality of how God's love manifests itself in their everyday lives.

## Supplies

### Video

- Note cards
- Marker

### What about the Bible and My Tradition?

- Whiteboard
- Dry erase marker

### Individual Activity: Here I Sit

- Toilet
- Toilet paper
- Tape
- Felt-tip pens

### Individual Activity: Here I Stand

- Video camera
- Pens

### Group Activity: Throw Your Theses

- Sticky notes
- Pens
- Various adhesives (tape, masking tape, duct tape, gum, glue sticks, mounting clay)

### Group Activity: Carnival of Indulgences

- Stuff to make a game (cardboard, plastic water bottles, aluminum cans, paper plates, deck of cards, sugar cubes, coins, and so on)

### Regroup

- Shoebox
- Shoebox
- Paper slips
- Pens
- Ice cream bucket
- Paper hat
- Water
- Rag
- Toy boat

# Did Martin Luther really call the Pope the Anti-Christ?

## PREPARE

### What's behind all this?

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was the son of a middle class family in Germany. He attended college and then law school, as his father wished. Upon finding himself in a terrible thunderstorm when returning to law school, Luther promised God that if he were spared, he would become a monk.

Keeping his promise, Luther entered a religious monastery. A troubled man, Luther was constantly fearful of God's wrath and reportedly made his confession as often as twenty times a day. His superior encouraged him to work toward a doctorate degree to focus his mind on other things. In his biblical studies, Luther came to the realization that others had suffered the same anxiety and despair that he felt about being unworthy before God. Luther found his solace and calm in scripture. Romans 1:17, "The one who is righteous will live by faith," became his inspiration. He completed his studies and became a professor at Wittenberg College.

In Luther's time, the powerful Roman Catholic Church was the only representation of Christianity in the Western world, an institution in which religion, politics, and civic matters were tightly intertwined. This blurring of lines led to many abuses, both political and religious. Many decisions that should have been spiritual were influenced by church leaders' desires to maintain or expand power and influence in civic matters.

For example, while Luther was making his discoveries in scripture, Pope Leo X was busy raising money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome—a large, ornate, and expensive church. Building projects required capital, and human sin was a convenient and limitless source of income.



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Ephesians 2:8-9  
Romans 7:19

### Consider this

"Unless I am convinced by proofs from Scriptures or by plain and clear reasons and arguments, I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

—Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms on his inability to recant his heretical writings

"We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation. The freedom they possess in relation to persons and the things of this world is no freedom in relation to salvation, for as sinners they stand under God's judgment and are incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance."

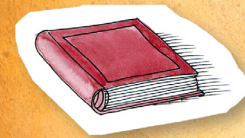
—1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church

At that time the church taught that people required a number of merits to pardon their sin before they could be allowed into heaven after death. Merits could be earned by prayer, fasting, worship, going on trips to see relics in Rome, and so on. If individuals didn't acquire enough merits, purgatory awaited them after death. Average people didn't have the resources or time to acquire the merits needed to bypass purgatory, but monks did. Monks even earned extra merits, which the Church decided to sell as indulgences for the forgiveness of sins. The money earned from selling indulgences could be used to fund the Pope's very large Basilica!

The church sent priests from town to town extracting money from peasants concerned about the fate of their souls and the souls of their dead loved ones. Professor Luther learned of this practice when Father John Tetzel arrived in Wittenberg and began alarming Luther's parishioners. This abuse and other disagreements with the church prompted Luther to write his 95 Theses (or statements of condemnation) and post them on the door of the college church (the 16th-century version of a bulletin board). Luther hoped that the Pope would read the grievances and clean house in the church. This was not the case, and Luther spent the remainder of his life fighting for and defending his understanding of the Gospel and our justification by God's mercy through our faith and not by any merit of our own. Luther referred to the Pope as an anti-Christ because he believed that term appropriate for anyone blocking people from Christ or working against scripture's teachings.

## Where are kids at?

- Standing up to unjust authority figures and summoning the courage to do the right thing—even when it's difficult and isolating—are themes that can excite teens. They are in the process of individuating—inspecting and evaluating what others believe to make it their own. Combined with their incredible ability to identify hypocrisy and tremendous loyalty to friends, Luther's story is one that can equip them to be reformers too.
- Even with the bad haircut, Martin Luther is a very relatable character for kids entering into arguably the most difficult period of life. How many teens approve of what they see in the mirror and are confident of their worthiness? Help them connect their doubts and insecurities to Martin Luther's struggle with feeling as if he were never good enough.



### Church of England/ Anglican Church

[chərch ov ɪŋ-glənd/  
ɑŋ-gli-kən tʃerch n]

the officially established Christian church in England, which seceded from the Roman Catholic Church during the reign of King Henry VIII in 1534

### con-fes-sion

[kən-'fɛ-shən]

admitting sins, mistakes, things you did or didn't do but should have done, and other burdens

### grace

[grās]

the free and unmerited favor of God

### indulgences

[in-'dɛl-jən(t)s]

merits earned to bypass purgatory

### justification

[jʌs-tə-fə-'kā-shən]

admitting sins, mistakes, things you did or didn't do but should have done, and other burdens

# encounter

15 minutes

## Video

### 1. Set up

On separate note cards write: classmate cheating on test, friend using drugs, parent cheating on taxes, friend bullying kid on bus, school lunch prices tripling, neighbor mistreating dog, pastor making racist comments, country attacking neighboring country. Shuffle cards. Place face down. Show two at a time and ask: Which of these would you be more likely to protest? Why? Mix cards and repeat.

### 2. Watch

“Did Martin Luther really call the Pope the Anti-Christ?” (DVD Chapter 1)

### 3. Unpack

- How would you react to someone twisting faith in God into something harmful?
- How is faith in God different from faith in the church or religious leaders?
- What have you publicly protested? How did it feel?
- What’s cool about knowing the Lutheran tradition was kick-started by a rock-the-boat, rabble-rousing protester trying to reform the existing church?

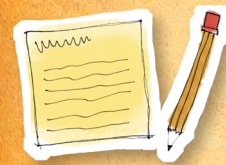
## What about the Bible and my tradition?

Label three columns on the board: Earned, Gift, and Just Lucky. Ask kids to name important things in their lives: people, stuff, homes, education, food, etc. In which column(s) would you place each item? Invite one kid to read Ephesians 2:8-9 a few times. Write, “By grace you have been saved by faith” in the gift column and draw a cross. Where would kids put *forgiveness*?

### Questions for conversation while you work:

- Would you rather get something as a gift, earn it, or get lucky? Why?
- If being perfect earns God’s love, how long could you stay perfect?
- Have you ever lost something (game, opportunity) on a technicality? How would you feel about a God that kept people out of heaven on technicalities?
- If God uses people for good, even after they mess up (Abraham and Sarah, Moses, David, Jonah, Rahab, Paul), is there anything you can do to make God stop loving you?

Make sure you’ve got the obvious stuff for this session—re:form Traditions video (DVD or download), Anti-Workbooks, Bibles, pens or pencils, paper, tape, etc.



### Get this stuff

Note cards. Marker. Whiteboard. Dry erase marker.



### Back it up

“He [Luther] had come to the realization that one cannot earn God’s grace, that it was through faith and faith alone that we receive God’s justification, God’s mercy, love, and forgiveness.”

re:form Traditions DVD

### Consider this

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.  
Romans 7:19

# engage

25–30 minutes



## 1. Here I Sit AW p. 4

Confession, like going to the bathroom, is best done daily and in private. Pass out some toilet paper. Ask kids to tape one square in their Anti-Workbook. Kids can write sins and other troubles on toilet paper while together. Invite kids to follow the suggestions for rolling out a simple confession and flushing away all the sins and burdens they carry the next time they happen to be in the bathroom. A large quantity of sins may require a courtesy flush to avoid clogging.

### Questions for conversation while you work:

- Should the pastors and church tell us what to believe or should we figure it out for ourselves? What would Luther say? Are you able to forgive yourself when you are forgiven? Why is it so hard to let go completely?
- Luther had issues with constipation and is believed to have done much thinking and writing on the toilet. Where do you have your deep thoughts?
- God forgives all our sins—the ones we know and the ones we don't recognize. How does it feel to know God deletes all sins?

Choose 1+ Anti-Workbook (AW) activities to explore the session question. The first 2 are for individual use, while the last 2 involve the whole group.

**Where's this going?**  
Kids examine and practice confession and forgiveness.

**Get this stuff**  
Toilet. Toilet paper. Tape. Felt-tip pen.

**Back it up**  
“Forgive me, father, for I have sinned. It has been three minutes since my last confession.”  
re:form Traditions DVD



## 2. Here I Stand AW p. 5

Challenge kids to interview people around church, at home, or in their community to discover where they stand. Follow the Anti-Workbook suggestions recording their “Here I Stand” responses. Be sure you find a time to watch the videos together. This may need to be the next time you meet. Then post their videos to the re:form Gallery!

### Questions for conversation while you work:

- Luther wrote 95 statements about what he believed; if you had to describe God with one word, what would it be?
- When else in your life have you had to stand up for what you believe? How did it feel?
- Should the pastors and church tell us what to believe or should we figure it out for ourselves? What would Luther say?

**Where's this going?**  
Kids help others consider what they would take a stand for.

**Get this stuff**  
Video camera. Playback equipment.

**Back it up**  
**Priest:** “Do you believe what you wrote?”  
**Martin Luther:** “Mmm ... Yes. Here I stand.”  
**Priest:** “Arrest him!”  
re:form Traditions DVD

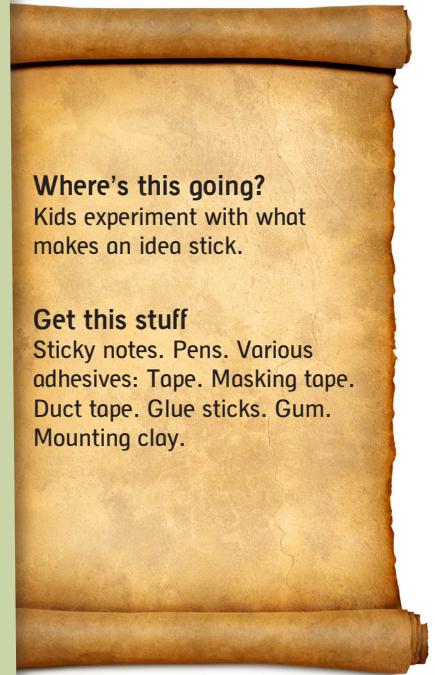


### 3. Throw Your Theses AW p. 6

Give kids a few minutes to write 9½ theses—things they believe about God, faith, our relationship to God, the Bible, what needs to change, etc.—on 9½ sticky notes. Let the games begin. Decide where to place Anti-Workbooks (floor, held upright by a partner). Provide adhesives. Read each thesis aloud and talk about it as kids attempt to stick that note to the image of the door in their book.

#### Questions for conversation while you work:

- Martin Luther posted his ideas on the church door. Where might ideas be posted today?
- The brand new invention of the printing press got Luther's ideas moving. How can today's technologies benefit faith?
- If we posted our theses on our church's front door, how would our congregation react?
- Why did Luther's ideas about the church stick while others didn't?
- What one idea sticks with you that you would you like to promote?



#### Where's this going?

Kids experiment with what makes an idea stick.

#### Get this stuff

Sticky notes. Pens. Various adhesives: Tape. Masking tape. Duct tape. Glue sticks. Gum. Mounting clay.



### 4. Carnival of Indulgences AW p. 7

Luther knew buying one's way into heaven was not possible, even though the church was advertising that possibility. Sometimes it's not possible to win a game even if it looks possible. Challenge teams to follow the Anti-Workbook suggestions to create an impossible-to-win kind of game, complete with directions and a carnie call to lure people in. Then try them out.

#### Questions for conversation while you work:

- Have you ever been tricked by a game you couldn't win? When did you know it was impossible? What was your reaction? Do think the people who win are allowed to win or truly outsmart it?
- What's the catch with indulgences? Why can't you buy or earn your way into forgiveness?
- Tetzel's traveling fun show selling indulgences raised a lot of money. Is there anything for which a church should charge?



#### Where's this going?

Kids recognize the futility of trying to earn one's way into heaven.

#### Get this stuff

Stuff to make a game: Cardboard. plastic water bottles. Aluminum cans. Paper plates. Deck of cards. Sugar cubes. Coins, etc.

#### Back it up

"Step right up! Step right up! And buy your indulgences here! The easy way to pay for your sins and keep you and your loved-ones out of purgatory!"

Tetzel in re:form Traditions DVD

# respond

15–20 minutes

## Regroup

Write “Pope’s Suggestion Box” and “Insert Comments Here” on the top of a box. Pass out paper slips. Invite kids to write suggestions to Luther’s Pope about merits, indulgences, grace, and so on. Invite one kid to play the pope, wearing the hat, holding the suggestion box, reading the suggestions, and ad libbing responses. The pope may or may not choose to put your suggestions in the box.

## Share

Go around the group and ask each person to share what they’ve done (if they’re comfortable) and explain how they did it and why. Affirm all thoughtful explanations and attempts at the work. Point out two or three things about each kid’s work that you like best. Invite others to offer thoughtful observations.

### Questions for conversation while you work:

- What kind of a reformer are you: reforming from the inside or breaking away, quietly working for change or staging an all-out protest?
- Luther had important points, but it’s hard to get past “filthy sow” and “anti-Christ” language. What reforming advice would you offer Luther?
- People say stuff like, “I don’t go to church, but I’m a good person.” How does being a good person relate to being saved by grace through faith?

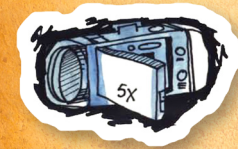
## Send

Stagnant water stinks. Even the water in the baptismal font has to be changed or floaters appear! Set a container of water in the middle of the kids. Plop a toy boat into the water. One of Martin Luther’s gifts was reminding us that sometimes you have to stir things up—even if it rocks the boat. Invite each kid to stir the water as fast as possible without sloshing any over the sides while naming one thing that he or she would like to reform.



### Get this stuff

Shoe box. Water. Marker. Ice cream bucket. Paper slips. Spoons. Pens. Toy boat. Hat. Rag.



### Capture it

Use a digital camera, camcorder, scanner, web cam, or audio recorder to capture group conversation and individual pieces of work. Upload them to your online galleries, or ask students to do so.



### Back it up

**Luther:** “Are you...are you selling forgiveness?!”

**Tetzel:** “That’s right father, what’s your pleasure? You can never have enough atonement, am I right or am I right?”

**Luther:** “You cannot buy God’s grace!”

re:form Traditions DVD

