

## SMALL GROUP GUIDE

10/29/17

2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17

ROMANS 5:1-2 AND 15-17



### WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

What is the difference between being a Lutheran and any other denomination? Where did those differences come from?

### WHAT DOES REFORMATION MEAN? \_\_\_\_\_

Prior to the Reformation, the leaders of the church lost some clarity about who God is, and the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. They began to abuse their power, terrifying and controlling people by describing God as an angry, blood-thirsty deity. They even sold forgiveness to fearful peasants in a practice known as indulgences.

But a monk named Martin Luther saw it differently. He saw a God of unconditional love who proclaimed freedom from sin for all people – not as a commodity to be sold, but as a free gift. Luther translated the Bible into German so the “common people” could read it for themselves. He wrote scathing critiques of the religious leaders and the church, risking execution for doing so. Aided by the newly-invented printing press, Luther's ideas spread quickly, beginning a social/political revolution. The foundation of religious freedom in our own country was imaginable only because of the events that Luther set in motion.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK? \_\_\_\_\_

**GRACE ALONE.** Before the Reformation disciples were told that God's love and forgiveness had to be earned by doing good works. People longed to please God and earn God's favor. But no matter how hard they worked, they worried that it wasn't enough. Had they prayed enough? Studied enough? Given enough? Suffered enough?

Does that sound familiar? Do we still try to earn God's favor by doing good deeds? Even after 500 years of post-reformation studying, living and proclaiming God's free gift of grace for everyone, do we still struggle to believe that it's true for us? Are we wired in some way to believe that everything we're given must in some way be earned? Is there something about the idea of a merit system that is actually appealing to us? Would that arrangement make us feel more like we're in control?

Does all of this boil down somehow to power and control? Were the religious leaders in Luther's time threatened by Luther because his ideas posed a threat to their control over the people? Is that also why the religious leaders in Jesus' time were so threatened by Jesus? Why would new ideas about expansive love and grace undermine anyone's power or control? Are any religious leaders today demonizing others who proclaim an even more expansive view of God's love and grace? Why? Is the story repeating itself? Have we come a long way since Luther's time? Is there still a long way left to go?

When Luther's ideas reformed the church, was that a once-and-for-all kind of change? Is this story about re-forming theology finished, or is it still unfolding? Does the church still need to reform? What changes need to happen in our own faith community? How do we need to reform in order to be ready for the real-life challenges we face in the coming generations?

### WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP? \_\_\_\_\_

**WORD ALONE.** Martin Luther gave the people a common-language Bible that they could read and understand. Eugene Peterson gave us “The Message Bible” in our own vernacular. Rob Bell wrote a book called “What is the Bible?”, showing us how to read scripture as an emerging understanding about God. (Watch for a small group study about Bell's book on the POP website!) We have these resources, and so many more, to help us dive into God's story. Pick one up and read!

### LOOKING FOR MORE? \_\_\_\_\_

**FAITH ALONE.** For many people the story goes like this: God is angry because we're sinners, and God is obligated to punish us by sending us to hell. But God also loves us so God sends Jesus to die in our place. If we believe the right things, God will forgive us and love us. Here “faith” is part of a transaction: believe the right stuff and God will commute your death sentence.

But what if Jesus did not come into this world to change God's mind about us, but to change our mind about God? What if faith is daring to believe that promises in scripture are true – that we are as loved and forgiven as Jesus proclaims? What if faith is trusting that God is at work, making us whole and new? Dive into this topic by reading “Love Wins” by Rob Bell.