

How Did the Presbyterian Church Get Started?



Session 1



Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 4:13-25; Romans 5:1-11

Session Objective

In this session, participants will learn about the rich history of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and how that history influences its identity.

Faith Statement

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) identifies with the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation. The focus of these affirmations is the rediscovery of God's grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords—grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone—embody principles of understanding which continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith.

—Book of Order (G-2.0400)

Session Overview

 Enter	Telephone
 Engage	Option A: Resting with the Question
	Option B: Lots of Questions
 Explore	Option A: Reformation Basics
	Option B: Reformation Scripture
	Option C: Acting It Out
	Option D: Film Clip— <i>Luther</i>
 Express	Option A: Responding to God's Grace
	Option B: Continuing to Reform
 Exit	Interconnected Circle Prayer



Enhancements

Family Connections
Connect with the Seal
of the PC(USA)
Presbyterian Board
Game



For instructions to
download Web
Resources and the
coffeehouse version,
see page 1.

Spiritual Reflection for Leaders

Find a time and a space that will allow you to relax, breathe deeply, and connect with God's Word. Take a few moments to center yourself by paying attention to your breathing and letting go of the distractions in your life. Read Ephesians 2:1–10 a few times slowly. Let the words roll around in your mind as you reflect on the following questions:

- How can the trespasses and sins in your life bind up your heart and make you feel lifeless?
- When have you followed the course of the world and the desires of the flesh instead of following Jesus Christ?
- How would you describe God's love for you?
- What does it mean to you to freely receive the gift of grace?
- How does it feel to hear that you were created for good works?



Understanding the Scripture

Formally known as The Letter of Paul to the Romans, this book of the New Testament was written by Paul toward the end of his ministry. Though the purpose of the letter is less clear than in some of Paul's other letters, the commonly understood theme for the book can be found in Romans 1:16–17. The fourth and fifth chapters of Romans contain the foundational ideas that sparked Martin Luther's Reformation. Surely these passages inspired Luther as he became more and more disheartened by the practices of the church. The message here is clear: Our salvation is not based on our works, our actions, or any other human action.

Whereas Luther found his inspiration more in Romans, the issues raised in Ephesians 2 were central to the Reformed branch of the Protestant Reformation. This passage makes a central claim: In the face of our sins, God gives grace, as a gift, from before the time we were born. These were central matters for the Reformation, and have continued to encourage Presbyterians.



Understanding the Faith Statement

The *Book of Order*, the second half of *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, contains three main sections: Form of Government, Directory for Worship, and Rules of Discipline. The Faith Statement for this session comes from the second chapter of the Form of Government section. The chapter, titled “The Church and Its Confessions,” explains the relationship between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the confessions (communal statements of faith) that are included in *The Book of Confessions*. The faith of the Protestant Reformation is lifted up in G-2.0400.



Teaching Today’s Question

Martin Luther was a priest and theology professor who lived in Germany in the 1500s. His spirit was conflicted over some of the church’s theology and practices of the time, especially the selling of indulgences (allowing people to purchase forgiveness). On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther protested the problems in the church by nailing to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, a list of 95 Theses (ideas) of reforms he thought needed to happen in the church. His protest came after years of studying and prayerful reflection. A significant part of his reform had to do with justification: In his protest, Luther claimed that there’s nothing we can do to be justified, or be made right with God. Instead, we are justified by God’s grace that is freely given to us.

Born in France in 1509, John Calvin continued the theological ideas set forth by Martin Luther. In his twenties Calvin fled to Switzerland to avoid persecution for publicly stating his Reformed convictions and wrote the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin’s form of Protestantism, which spread across Europe and eventually to the American colonies, formed the seeds of the Presbyterian Church. Beginning in the 1600s, various communities of Presbyterians existed in the American colonies. Since then, the Presbyterian Church has split and reconnected in different ways. Our current denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is a result of the 1983 merger reuniting the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States.



Enter

Telephone



Paper and pens

As participants arrive, play one or more versions of the game Telephone:

Classic Telephone

Gather participants in a line. Have the person on one end whisper a short phrase into the next person's ear. The whispering continues down the line until the final person tells the group what he or she heard, which is usually far different from the original phrase.

Artsy Telephone

Gather participants in a line and give each a sheet of paper and a pen. The person on one end writes a word or short phrase and shows it to the person next to him or her without letting any other participants see it. The second person draws a representation of the word or phrase and shows it to the next person in line. The third person writes what he or she thinks the picture depicts. The next person draws a picture of that word, and so on down the line, with writers and drawers alternating. When each person in line has had a turn, the person who wrote the original word or phrase should reveal what that word or phrase was.

Physical Telephone

Gather the participants in a line, with each participant facing the back of the person in front of him or her. Using his or her finger, the person at the back of the line draws a simple image (e.g., a flower, a sun, stick figure running) on the back of the person in front of him or her. The drawing is passed up the line by people drawing the image on the person in front of him or her after it is drawn on his or her back. The person who made the original drawing then announces what the image was supposed to be.

After playing a few rounds of Telephone, say something like the following to the participants:

Opening Prayer

God of love, be with us today as we gather in your holy name. Help us to silence the distractions in our lives so that we can hear your voice and be transformed by your Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

 The Bible was not printed or distributed widely until several hundred years ago, when the invention of the printing press made it possible for more people to have their own copy of a Bible.

Explore the following questions together:



- Before the printing press made Bibles more accessible, who might have had access to the Bible?
- How did churchgoers hear God’s Word before Bibles were readily available?
- When people recounted Bible stories to one another, what might have happened as the stories were repeated?

Explain to the participants that the printing press came into use about the same time as the Protestant Reformation, the subject of today’s session. Tell the group that John Calvin, one of the Reformers and the father of Presbyterianism, opened all of the worship services over which he presided with Psalm 124:8.¹ Make sure each participant has a Bible, then lead the participants in saying this psalm together. Pray the opening prayer.



Engage

Option A: Resting with the Question

Gather the participants in a comfortable location and use the following questions to guide a conversation that explores the question “How did the Presbyterian Church get started?” Encourage the young people to ask their own questions that relate to this question.



- What do you know about the Protestant Reformation?
- How does the history of the Presbyterian church connect with the history of the United States?
- How are Presbyterians similar to other Christian churches? How are Presbyterians unique?

Option B: Lots of Questions



Index cards, pens, newsprint, markers

Give each person an index card and a pen and post a sheet of newsprint in a visible location. Ask each participant to write a question that he or she has about the history of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Collect and shuffle the questions and then redistribute them, making sure that no one has their own question. Give each person an opportunity to read the question on his or her index card. After each question is read, lead the group in a discussion that reflects on that question. On the sheet of newsprint, record any questions that require further information to answer. Consider inviting a pastor or an educator to come and respond to the questions on the newsprint at a later date.

1. James J. De Jonge, “Calvin the Liturgist: How ‘Calvinist’ Is Your Church’s Liturgy?”, *Reformed Worship: Resource for Planning and Leading Worship* (reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=141).



Explore

Option A: Reformation Basics

- As many different translations of the Bible as possible, a copy of “Reformation Basics” (Web Resource 1a) for each participant, “Ephesians 2:4–10” (Web Resource 1b)

Make sure each participant has a Bible and give each person a copy of “Reformation Basics” (Web Resource 1a). Read and discuss the “Early Reformation” section of “Reformation Basics” (Web Resource 1a) together. Then make sure each participant has a Bible and ask everyone to look up Ephesians 2:4–10. Read the passage out loud from as many different translations of the Bible as possible, including the translations that are found on “Ephesians 2:4–10” (Web Resource 1b). Explore the following questions together:



- In what ways are the different translations of Ephesians 2:4–10 similar? In what ways are they different?
- What does this Scripture passage tell us about God? about Jesus Christ? about our relationship with the triune God?
- How is this Scripture passage contrary to the practice of selling indulgences that Martin Luther experienced in the 1500s?
- How does this Scripture passage connect with Reformed theology?

Read together the information found in the “Calvin and Beyond” section of “Reformation Basics” (Web Resource 1a).

Option B: Reformation Scripture

- Bibles, copy of “Bible Study Questions” (Web Resource 1c) for each participant, pens

Divide the participants into small groups, with two or three people in each group. If you have fewer than five people in your group, do this activity together as one group. Give each participant a copy of “Bible Study Questions” (Web Resource 1c) and make sure each participant has a Bible and a pen. Share with the participants the information about justification and the Reformation found in Teaching Today’s Question (page 5). Then assign each small group one of the Bible passages listed on “Bible Study Questions” (Web Resource 1c) and ask them to follow the instructions on the page. After a few minutes, gather all of the participants as a large group and invite each small group to share what they learned from their assigned Scripture passage.

Option C: Acting It Out



Bibles

Share the information in Teaching Today's Question (page 5) with the group. Then organize the participants to act out the following two scenes:

1. Choose participants to create a skit about priests in the church selling indulgences. Consider having half of the selected participants act out the role of the priests and the other half act out the role of church members coming to the priests for forgiveness.
2. Have the participants who portrayed priests remain in that role. Divide the rest of the participants into three groups. If you have fewer than six participants, do this activity together as one group. Assign each group one of the following Scripture passages: Ephesians 2:4–10, Romans 4:13–25, and Romans 5:1–11. Give the groups a few minutes to create a presentation in which they protest the act of selling indulgences by using their assigned Scripture passage to tell the priests that the priests are wrong. While the groups are working, have the priests formulate their response to the upcoming protests.

Have the groups give their skits. Then explore the following questions together:



- Which of the Scripture passages was the best argument against the selling of indulgences?
- How do you think the priests reacted when Martin Luther protested against their practices?
- What do these Scripture passages tell us about God? about Jesus Christ? about our relationship with the triune God?

Option D: Film Clip—*Luther*



Bibles, *Luther* (2003, PG-13) and movie-viewing equipment

Preview the following clip from *Luther*: 9:00–13:16.

Explore the following questions together:



- What kinds of things do you have to do to earn good grades?
- Are your grades always fair? Do grades always show how much you know?
- If you had to buy grades that you had already worked for, how would you feel?
- How would you like it if you could learn everything just as well and have the same opportunities after graduation without grades being important?

Explain to the participants that, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, many people were frustrated with the Catholic Church, which proclaimed a message of having to earn salvation. Tell the participants that the film clip shows Martin Luther's response to this culture of earning God's love, like earning grades.

Watch the clip from *Luther*.

Make sure everyone has a Bible and ask everyone to look up Ephesians 2:1–10. Invite a volunteer to read the passage out loud to the group, then explore the following questions together:



- What does this Scripture passage say about earning God's grace?
- If you were alive in the sixteenth century and the church told you that you had to do certain things to earn God's love, how would you feel?
- Have you ever tried to change a rule? How did you do it? What happened?
- What are some successful ways to convince people in power (like parents, principals, and governments) to change rules?



Express

Option A: Responding to God's Grace



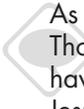
Bibles, paper, pens, newsprint, markers, music player, recording of contemplative music

Make sure each participant has a Bible and ask everyone to look up Ephesians 2:10. Invite a volunteer to read the passage out loud to the group. Explore the following questions together:



- Who created us?
- Why were we created?
- How should we live?

Say something like the following:



As the children of God, we are saved through Christ's death on a cross. Though this grace is freely given to us and we don't have to earn it, we do have a responsibility to respond to this gift of grace by living our lives for Jesus Christ.

Post a sheet of newsprint and write this question on it: *What have I done in the past week to live my life for Jesus Christ?* Give each participant a sheet of paper and a pen. While playing contemplative music in the background, invite participants to think about the question on the newsprint and to write their responses to it on their sheet of paper. After a few minutes, give each participant an opportunity to share what he or she wrote or thought about.

Post a sheet of newsprint and write this question on it: *What can we do this week to live our lives for Jesus Christ?* Invite the group to brainstorm as many responses to the question as possible. Challenge the participants to put their ideas into action in the coming week.

Option B: Continuing to Reform

Bibles, newsprint, markers

Post a sheet of newsprint in a visible location. Help the group brainstorm various issues, problems, or injustices in the world that are contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Record the responses on the newsprint. Then say something like the following:

In the 1500s, Martin Luther protested the injustices he saw in the church, and this led to reform in the church. It is important to note that Luther's reforms were based on his understanding of the Bible.

Choose one of the issues, problems, or injustices listed on the newsprint. Make sure each participant has a Bible and help the participants find Scripture that speaks to the selected issue, problem, or injustice. Consider inviting a pastor or educator to lead this part of the session. As time allows, search for Scripture for each of the items listed on the newsprint.



Exit

Interconnected Circle Prayer

Gather the participants in a circle. Have the participants hold hands by placing palms together and interlocking fingers. Give each person an opportunity to share one thing that he or she plans to do in the coming week to live his or her life in response to God's love. Explain to the participants that we need the support of our church family in order to follow through with living in this way. Tell them that the way they are holding hands is a symbol of this support: Their lives are interwoven in support of each other. Pray the closing prayer.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, be with us as we strive to live in response to your amazing love. We know that we receive love and grace from you as gifts and that we have the opportunity to respond to your love by living our lives for you. Help us to find ways to be your hands and feet in the world, spreading your love as we go about our daily lives. Amen.



Enhancements

Other Ways to Connect with the Session

Family Connections

“Family Connections” (Web Resource) has a set of discussion questions for each of the six sessions in this course that families can talk about after class. Provide each family with a copy of this resource.

Connect with the Seal of the PC(USA)

Consider organizing your group to create a large representation of the seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) while learning about the seal. Use “Creating Your Own PC(USA) Seal” (Web Resource E1) to guide you in setting up this project, which deals with a different part of the seal after each session. The focus for Session 1 is the part of the seal that depicts the Bible. See “The Seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (Web Resource E2).

Presbyterian Board Game

To learn more about the program, polity, and mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), play the Presbyterian Board Game together. Assemble the game board using “Game Board” (Web Resource E3) and print and cut apart the question cards on “Game Questions” (Web Resource E4). You will also need small items (such as candy, coins) that can be used as place holders and a six-sided die. Place the game cards on their respective locations on the game board and set each person’s place holder on Start. To play the game, each participant takes a turn rolling the die and advancing his or her game piece the number of places that appear on the die. If the game piece lands on an empty box, the turn is over. If the game piece lands on a box with words on it, the participant follows the instructions in the box. If the game piece lands on a box with a question mark in it, the participant draws a question card from that side of the game board and responds to the question on the card. This is not a win-lose game. Play for a determined length of time. When a player completes a circuit of the board, he or she may begin another trip.

TRAGICALLY, THE FIRST YOUTH
MINISTER IN HISTORY WAS FIRED
FOR BREAKING ALL TEN COMMANDMENTS.

