

**LESSONS FROM  
MARTIN LUTHER'S  
PRAYER LIFE**

# A mighty fortress is our God

A mighty fortress is our God,  
a bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amid the flood  
of mortal ills prevailing:  
For still our ancient foe  
doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and power are great,  
and, armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.

# A mighty fortress is our God

Did we in our own strength confide,  
our striving would be losing;  
Were not the right Man on our side,  
the Man of God's own choosing:  
Dost ask who that may be?

Christ Jesus, it is He;  
Lord Sabaoth, His Name,  
from age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle.

# A mighty fortress is our God

And though this world, with devils filled,  
should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us:  
The Prince of Darkness grim,  
we tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
for lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.

# A mighty fortress is our God

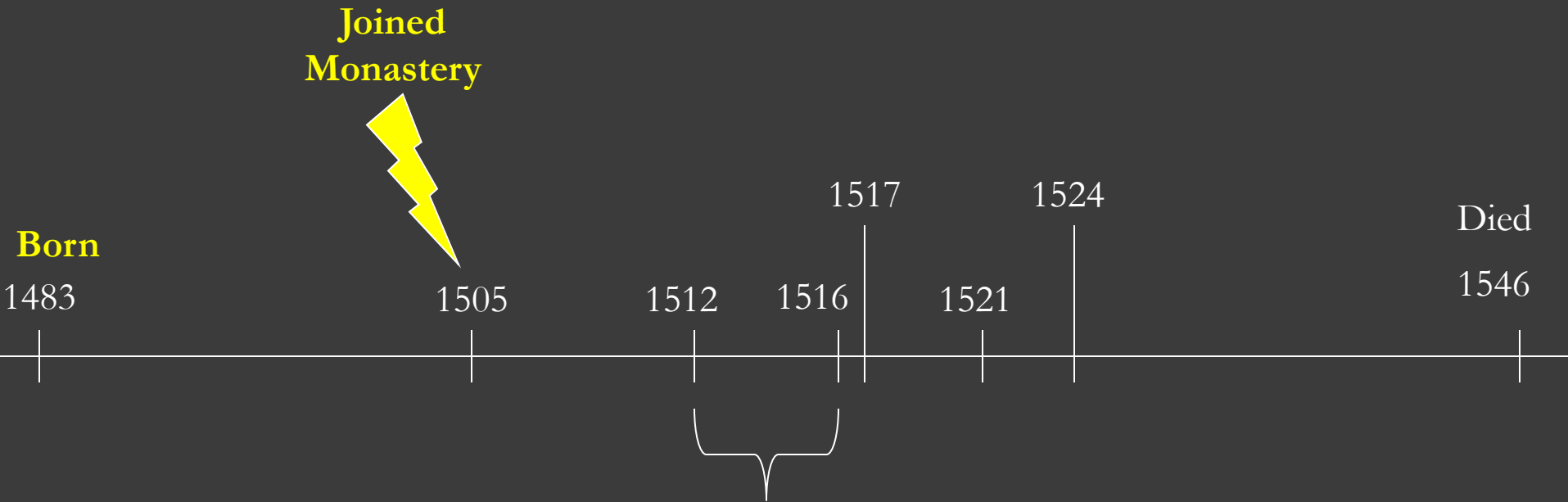
That word above all earthly powers,  
no thanks to them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours  
through Him Who with us sideth:  
Let goods and kindred go,  
this mortal life also;  
The body they may kill:  
God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.

# Introduction

## ◎ *Scriptural Reason*

- **Hebrews 13:7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.
- “...prayer is the chief and perpetual exercise of faith.”

# Luther's Life

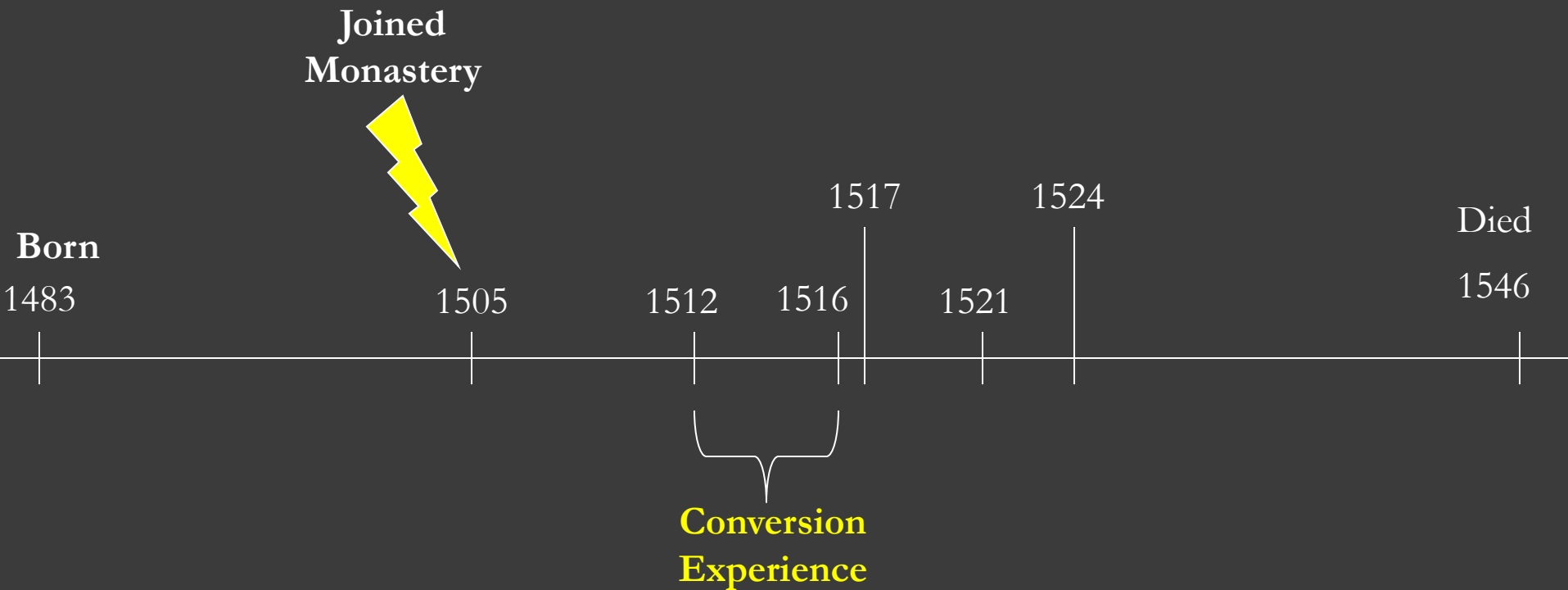




"If anyone could have gained heaven as a monk, then I would indeed have been among them."



# Luther's Life

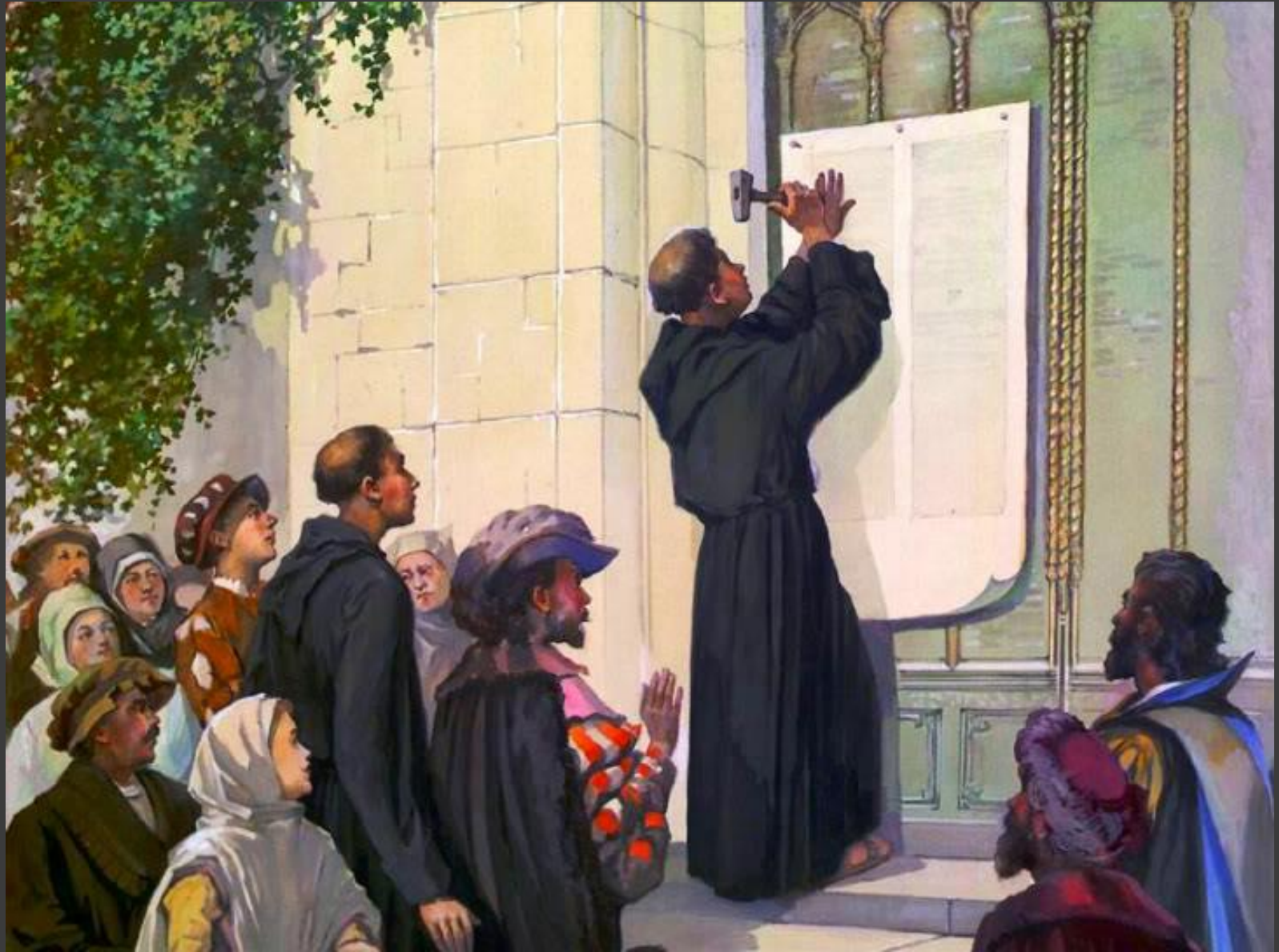


# Johannes Tetzel

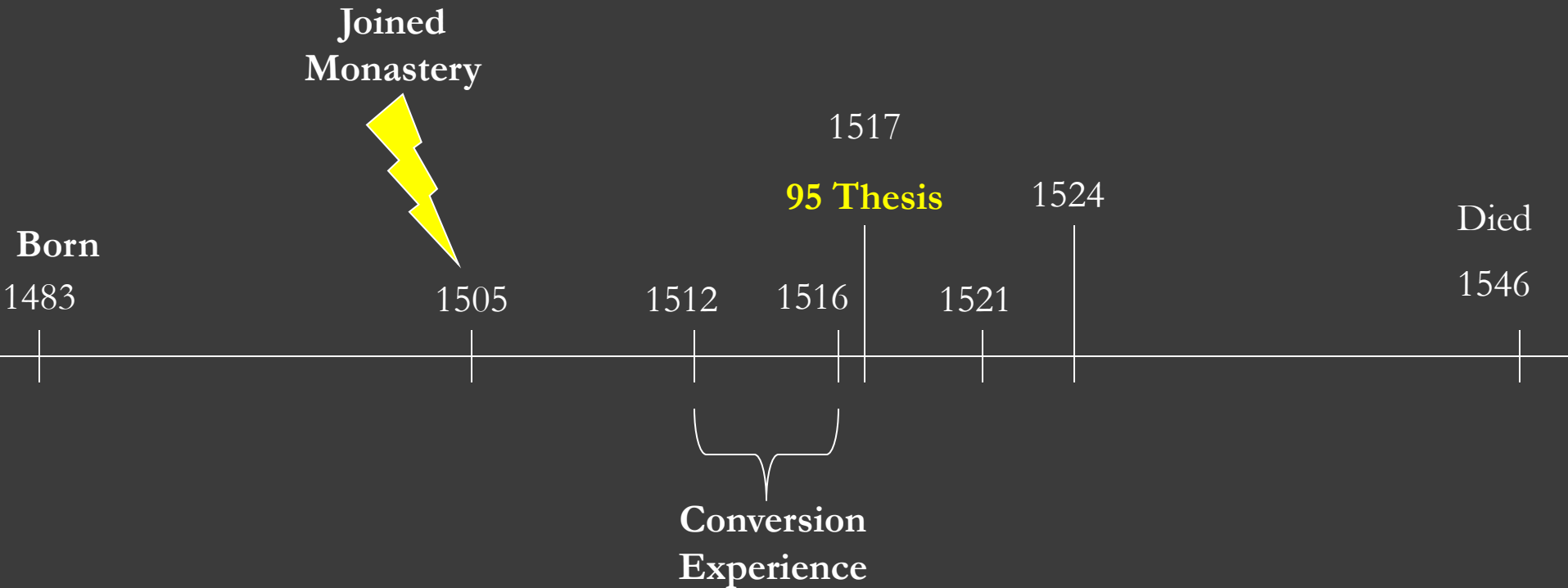


“as soon as the coin  
in the coffer rings,  
the soul from  
purgatory springs.”

# The 95 Theses



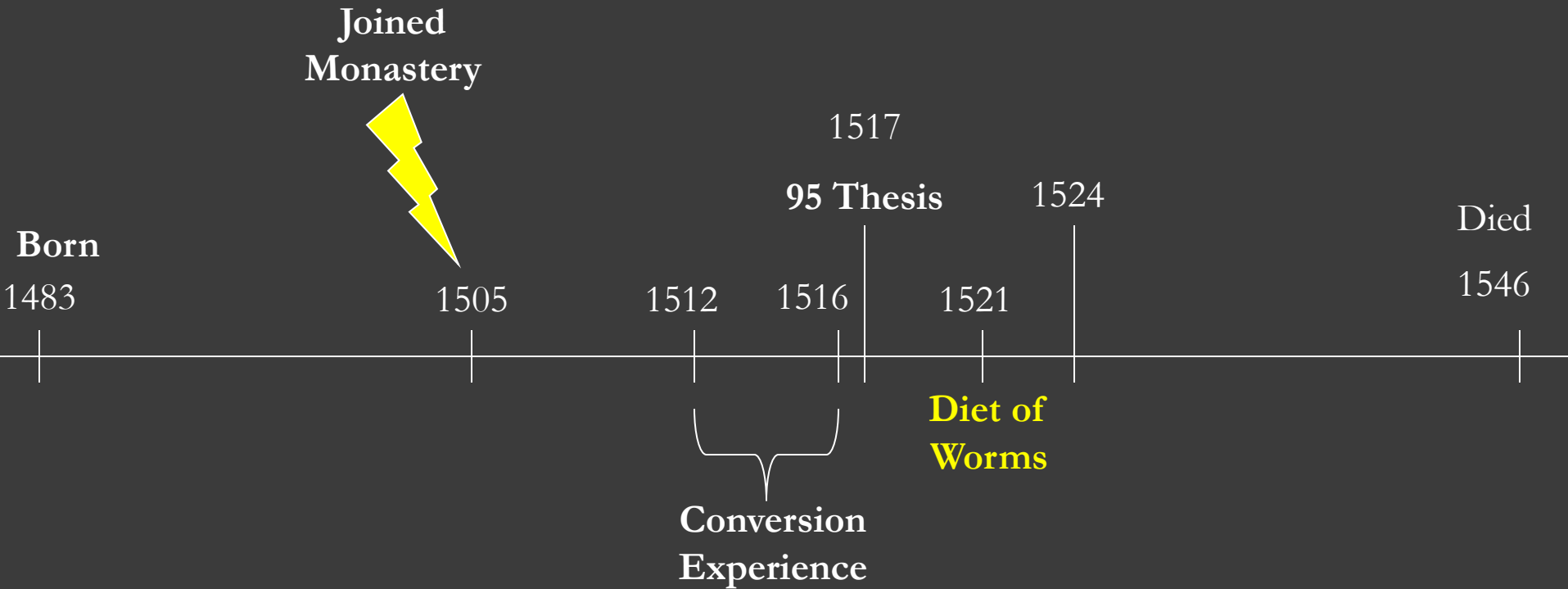
# Luther's Life



# 1521 Diet of Worms

*"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."*

# Luther's Life



# Why should we listen to Martin Luther

- ◎ *He understood the **uselessness of false praying.***
  - Looking back Luther wrote, “Prayer under the papacy was pure **torture** of the poor conscience and only blabbering and making words; no praying but a work of obedience.”
  - “How I tormented myself with those canonical hours before the gospel came, which by reason of much business I often intermitted [left out], I cannot express. On the Saturdays, I used to lock myself up in my cell, and accomplish what the whole week I had neglected. ...**From this great torment we are now delivered by the **gospel.****”

# Why should we listen to Martin Luther

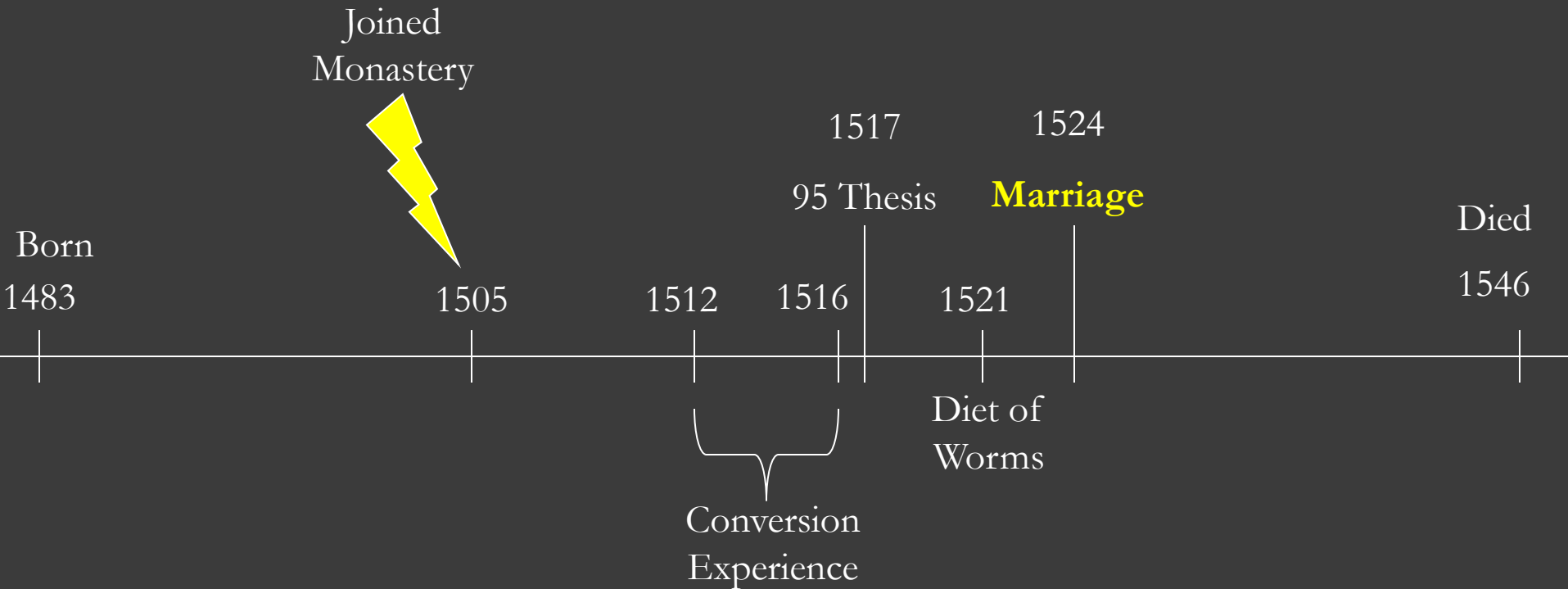
- ◎ *He felt the pressures of **work, family, finances, & health***
  - **Full time** professor at University of Wittenburg.
  - Preaching on weekends: **3000** sermons in **36** years.



Luther married  
Katharina Von  
Bora in 1524



# Luther's Life



# Why should we listen to Martin Luther

- ◎ *He felt the pressures of **work, family, finances, & health***
  - **Six** children **two** of whom died before reaching adulthood.
  - **Financial & health** difficulties.

# Why should we listen to Martin Luther

- ◎ *He kept prayer **central** to his **life** and **teaching**.*
  - Luther both **taught** and **wrote** much on prayer.
  - Luther lived constantly aware of his need for the prayers of others. Hardly a letter can be found in which Luther does not write, “**Pray for me.**”
  - Luther was **known** by close friends as a man of prayer.

# Veit Dietrich

“I cannot sufficiently admire the singular steadfastness, the happy attitude, the faith and hope of this man in serious times. . . . There is not a day on which he does not devote at least three hours, the very ones most suitable for studying, to prayer. Once I was fortunate to overhear his prayer. Good God, what faith in his words! He speaks with the great reverence of one who speaks to his God, and with the trust and hope of one who speaks with his father and friend.”

# Why should we listen to Martin Luther

- ◎ *He experienced **failure** in his prayer life.*
  - “I sit here like a fool and hardened in leisure, pray little, do not sigh for the church of God, yet burn in a big fire of my untamed body. In short I should be ardent in spirit, but I am ardent in the flesh, in lust, in laziness, leisure, and sleepiness. ... Already eight days have passed in which I have written nothing, in which I have not prayed or studied.”

# Why should we listen to Martin Luther

- ◎ *He experienced **failure** in his prayer life.*
  - "For more than a week I have been thrown back and forth in death and Hell; my whole body feels beaten, my limbs are still trembling. I almost lost Christ completely, driven about on the waves and storms of despair and blasphemy against God. But because of the intercession of the faithful, God began to take mercy on me and tore my soul from the depths of Hell"

# Why should we listen to Martin Luther

- ◎ *He experienced **failure** in his prayer life.*
  - The reality of his own struggles and failures preserved him from teaching others in a condescending or idealistic manner. His approach to prayer is characterized by **humility** and **practical** insights.



# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

## ◎ *Prayer finds its **foundation** and **power** in the **promises** of God's Word.*

- In a sermon on prayer, Luther said, "...if you wish to be well prepared [for prayer], take the promise and lay hold of God with it. ... Without faith in the promise, there is then, neither **courage** nor **desire** to pray, but mere uncertain delusion and a melancholy spirit; there is, therefore, no hearing of prayers, and both prayer and labor are lost."

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer finds its **foundation** and **power** in the **promises** of God's Word.*
  - “This is the greatest promise, that he says, ‘Amen, it shall be so’ and thereby swears by his eternal faithfulness. **For this reason you must begin the prayer so that you challenge God with his own words:** ‘God, you spoke an oath twice, by your dear Son, that I should pray and that I would be heard. Because of this assurance, which you have promised through the mouth of your dear Son, I come and pray.’ And this is the foundation of prayer.” (WA 20:379.24-29)
  - You are fit to pray when “you proceed with bold courage, trusting in the **truthful** and certain **promises** of your gracious God.”

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer is the means to **knowledge** of Scripture and spiritual **effectiveness**.*
  - “That the Holy Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent is most certain. Therefore your first **duty** is to begin to pray, and to pray to this effect that if it please God to accomplish something for His glory—not for yours or any other person's—He very graciously grant you a true understanding of His words. For no master of the divine words exists except the Author of these words, as He says: 'They shall be all taught of God' (John 6:45). You must, therefore, completely **despair** of your own industry and ability and **rely** solely on the inspiration of the Spirit.”

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer is the most **difficult** and yet the most **important** work of the Christian.*
  - “As a shoe maker makes a shoe, or a tailor makes a coat, so ought a Christian to pray. Prayer is the daily **business** of a Christian.”
  - “There is no work like prayer. Mumbling with the mouth is easy... but with earnestness of heart to follow the words in deep devotion, that is, with desire and faith, so that one earnestly desires what the words say, and not to doubt that it will be heard: that is a great deed in God's eyes.”

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ ***Prayer is the most **difficult** and yet the most **important** work of the Christian.***
  - The word 'instant' is a call to order and vigilance that everyone ... must hear and fear. For it means that praying must be a constant effort ... a labor that is harder than every other labor ... for it requires a subdued and broken mind and a high and triumphant spirit. ... Christians must practice prayer frequently and with diligence. For 'to be instant' does not only mean 'to be constantly engaged in something' but it means also 'to press on,' 'to quicken one's pace,' 'to demand earnestly.' **So then, as there is nothing that Christians must do more frequently than praying, so there is also nothing that requires more **labor** and effort and, for this reason, is more **effective** and more fruitful.**

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer should be **intentional, focused, and fervent***
  - “It is of great importance that the heart be made **ready** and **eager** for prayer. As the Preacher says, "Prepare your heart for prayer, and do not tempt God" [Ecclus. 18:23]. What else is it but tempting God when your mouth babbles and the mind wanders to other thoughts?”
  - “...It seems to me that if someone could see what arises as prayer from a cold and inattentive heart he would conclude that he had never seen a more ridiculous kind of buffoonery. But, praise God, it is now clear to me that a person who forgets what he has said has not prayed well.”

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

## ◎ *Prayer should be **intentional, focused, and fervent***

- "...So, a good and attentive barber keeps his thoughts, attention, and eyes on the razor and hair and does not forget how far he has gotten with his shaving or cutting. If he wants to engage in too much conversation or let his mind wander or look somewhere else he is likely to cut his customer's mouth, nose, or even his throat. Thus **if anything is to be done well, it requires the full attention of all one's senses and members, as the proverb says, "He who thinks of many things, thinks of nothing and does nothing right."** How much more does prayer call for **concentration** and singleness of heart if it is to be a good prayer!"

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer is the chief **weapon** in the **warfare** against the **devil**.*
  - “We know that our **defense** lies in prayer. We are too weak to resist the devil and his vassals. Let us hold fast to the weapons of the Christian; they enable us to combat the devil... our enemies may mock at us. But we shall oppose both men and the devil if we maintain ourselves in prayer and if we persist in it.”



# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ ***Prayer is the chief **weapon** in the **warfare** against the **devil**.***
  - The devil attempts to hinder praying in several ways:
    - Satan attempts to sow seeds of doubt into our hearts by reminding us of our great **sinfulness**.
    - Satan suggests that this is **not a good time**.  
“Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas, which tell you, “Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.” Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day. “

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer is the chief **weapon** in the **warfare** against the **devil**.*
  - The devil attempts to hinder praying in several ways:
    - Satan attempts to convince us of the **ineffectiveness** of prayer with thoughts like, “My dear friend why do you pray? Observe how quiet it is about you. Do you suppose that God heeds your prayer?”

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer is the chief **weapon** in the **warfare** against the **devil**.*
  - Luther encouraged Christians to counter the devil's attacks in the following ways:
    - Never let your sense of **unworthiness** keep you from prayer. If we wait to pray until we are worthy, we will never pray. He urged believers to let their sin and need drive them to God, not away from him.

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer is the chief **weapon** in the **warfare** against the **devil**.*
  - Luther encouraged Christians to counter the devil's attacks in the following ways:
    - "It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. ... Yet we must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind. Thus at the end we become lax and lazy, cool and listless toward prayer. The devil who besets us is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer." In another place, Luther encourages a **lifestyle** of prayer saying that we "should form the habit of praying daily for our needs, whenever we are aware of anything that affects us or other people around us."

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer is the chief **weapon** in the **warfare** against the **devil**.*
  - Luther encouraged Christians to counter the devil's attacks in the following ways:
    - Against the third attack of Satan, that prayer is ineffective, Luther writes: "Behold, you could repulse the devil and all his false suggestions by basing your prayer on these three things: God's **command**, His **promise**, and the **manner** and words Christ Himself taught. These things the devil cannot deny or annul."

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer should be **modeled** after the **Lord's Prayer**.*
  - “A Christian has prayed **abundantly** who has rightly prayed the Lord's Prayer.”
  - “Our Savior Christ as excellently as briefly comprehends in the Lord's Prayer all things needful and necessary. ... The first three petitions in our Lord's Prayer comprehend such great and celestial things, that no heart is able to search them out. The fourth contains the whole policy and economy of temporal and house government, and all things necessary for this life. The fifth fights against our own evil consciences and against original and actual sins, which trouble them. Truly that prayer was penned by wisdom itself; none but God could have done it.

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

- ◎ *Prayer should be **modeled** after the **Lord's Prayer**.*
  - “You should also know that I do not want you to recite all these words in your prayer. That would make it nothing but idle chatter and prattle... Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and **guided** concerning the **thoughts** which ought to be comprehended in the Lord's Prayer. These thoughts may be expressed, if your heart is rightly warmed and inclined toward prayer, in many different ways and with more words or fewer.”

# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

## ◎ *Prayer should be **sincere** and not overly **pious***

- “Look to it that you do not try to do all of it, do not try to do too much, lest your spirit grow weary. Besides, a good prayer mustn't be too long. Do not draw it out. Prayer ought to be **frequent** and **fervent**.”
- “Brief prayers...pregnant with the Spirit, strongly fortified by faith...the fewer the words, the better the prayer. The more the words, the worse the prayer. Few words and much meaning is **Christian**. Many words and little meaning is **pagan**.”



# Martin Luther's Teaching on Prayer

## ◎ *Prayer should **end** with a firm "**Amen**"*

- “Finally, mark this, that you must always speak the Amen firmly. Never **doubt** that God in his mercy will surely hear you and say "yes" to your prayers. Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common, united petition which God cannot disdain. Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, "Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a **certainty** and a **truth**." That is what Amen means.”