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Christian History Made Easy Participant Guide

14. Session 8 — The Reformation (AD 1500–1600)

This session tells how the Protestant Reformation began and spread across sixteenth-century Europe. It centers on Martin Luther's rediscovery that people are made right with God by faith, then traces how that message moved through Calvin, Zwingli, the radical Anabaptists, Tyndale in England, and the Catholic response at the Council of Trent.

Key takeaways

- Luther, seeking righteousness, posted his 95 Theses in 1517 to protest the sale of indulgences and defended his writings at the Diet of Worms (1521).
- The Reformation rested on three principles: justification by faith, the supremacy of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers — summed up in the five 'solas' (faith, grace, Scripture, Christ, and God's glory alone).
- It was a theological movement that spread only because ordinary people, not just scholars, dug into Scripture for themselves.

- Calvin wrote the Institutes in Geneva; Zwingli reformed Zurich. Radical Anabaptists rejected infant baptism for believers' baptism — Felix Manz was the first Protestant martyred by other Protestants (1527), and Menno Simons led the group that became the Mennonites.
- Tyndale put the New Testament into common English (1525), aiming for even the 'plowboy' to read Scripture — laying groundwork for the 1611 King James Version.
- Rome answered at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), rejecting justification by faith alone, affirming transubstantiation, and requiring Scripture to be read alongside church tradition.

Passages worth keeping

“If God spares my life, I will cause the plowboy to know more about Scripture than you do!”

Tyndale's aim to give ordinary people the Bible in their own language.

“They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul leaps out of purgatory.”

Luther exposing the abuse behind indulgences.

How it connects

The session's theme is that transforming a society starts with one changed heart: Luther saved by grace, Tyndale determined to open Scripture to all.

Scripture referenced

- **Rom. 1:17** -- 'The righteous shall live by faith' — key to Luther's breakthrough.
- **Gal. 4:4** -- God sent His Son in 'the fullness of time' — God's sovereign timing of the Reformation.
- **Acts 17:11** -- The Bereans searching Scripture daily — model for testing teaching yourself.