

Heroes of the Faith:

William Tyndale (c1494–1536)

Born into a time when the Bible could only be read in Latin to the laity in church – by a clergy ignorant themselves of even the basics of the Christian faith – William Tyndale set about the task of translating the Scriptures from the original Greek and Hebrew into the English language, that all might be able to read and understand God’s Word for themselves.



Criticised by a priest for his ambition, Tyndale replied with the oft-quoted retort, “If God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou doest.”

Because of the Church ban on English translations, he had to seek permission for his project from Bishop Tunstall, who refused his request. So, because of the opposition from the Church, and because he was convinced it was God’s will for the people to be able to read the Bible in their own language, Tyndale was forced

to continue his work abroad. The first copies of his New Testament were smuggled into England in 1526 – only to be bought up and burned by Bishop Tunstall. Undeterred, Tyndale simply used the money to print further Bibles!

Betrayed by a ‘friend’, William Tyndale was eventually tried and burnt at the stake in 1536; his famous last prayer being: “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.” This prayer was answered when, within three years of Tyndale’s death, King Henry VIII ordered that a copy of the English Bible be displayed in every church in the land.

“Today, William Tyndale is considered the single most important reformer of the English church ... his impact on English translations of the Bible is greater than anyone else in history ... He coined many of the cherished phrases and familiar expressions we know today: ‘fight the good fight of faith’, ‘give up the ghost’, ‘daily bread’, ‘God forbid’, ‘scapegoat’, and ‘my brother’s keeper’...” [William Tyndale Biography: English Bible Translator and Christian Martyr].

*Elizabeth McDonald,
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