

[This article is also available as a PowerPoint here.</p> <h3>Calvinist, Evangelist and Revivalist</h3> <p></p> <p align="justify">George Whitefield was described by his contemporaries as: ◆the marvel of the age.◆ Whitefield was an eloquent preacher who electrified his audiences. He drew some of the greatest crowds ever assembled up to that time, across two continents, without any institutional support, through prayer and the sheer power of his personality. The Great Evangelical Awakening that swept across the British Isles and North America in the 18 th Century has been attributed primarily to the dynamic ministry of George Whitefield.</p> <p align="justify">◆Probably not since Luther and Calvin has there been such a vessel chosen for bearing the errands of mercy to the multitude. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he changed sterile religious wastes into verdant, heavenly pastures, and sowed on good ground those seeds of practical piety, whose fruit bless and encourage us in the institutions and habits that have been handed down to us from the Christianity of past generations.◆ Gene Fedele</p> <p align="justify">George Whitefield was born, the youngest of seven children, at Gloucester, the son of an innkeeper. His father died when he was just two years old. His mother remarried, but that resulted in a disastrous divorce. His mother, Elizabeth Whitefield, struggled to maintain the Bell Inn, with George mopping floors, cleaning rooms and serving customers food and drink. Whitefield later recalled how his mother endured 14 weeks sickness after giving birth to him, and that she would often say to him that she expected more out of him than any of her other children. George expressed his desire to ◆follow the example of my dear Savior, Who was born in a manger belonging to an inn.◆ Through the efforts of his mother, young Whitefield entered Pembroke College, Oxford, as a servitor. He would be put through college by serving the wealthier Oxford students.</p> <p align="justify">Even before he arrived at Oxford, he had heard of ◆the Holy Club◆ \(the Methodists\) of John and Charles Wesley, who were generally despised and ridiculed. George felt strongly drawn to defend them in argument. In time Whitefield was welcomed to their ◆Holy Club◆ and sought to live by their strenuous rules. At this time, while reading ◆The Life of God in the Soul of Man◆ by Henry Scougal, Whitefield declared: ◆God showed me that I must be born again.◆ George later commented that at Oxford it became clear that he was no scholar, but that he was called to be a communicator of the Gospel. He determined to be a missionary to America. However, his great devotional excesses and lengthy fastings broke down his health and he was laid aside by a long and wearisome sickness.</p> <p align="justify">When Whitefield recovered, Dr. Benson, Bishop of Gloucester, offered him ordination as a deacon. After a short time as a temporary pastor to a congregation in Hampshire, Whitefield sailed for America. He had already risen to great prominence as a popular preacher. Huge crowds had gathered in and around London wherever he spoke. Newspaper articles had been written concerning the sensation of the ◆boy preacher◆ and his intense and emotional presentations of Biblical characters and stories were attended to by huge crowds and unprecedented emotional responses. Before departing for America, Whitefield published his first message: ◆The Nature and Necessity of Our Regeneration or New Birth in Christ Jesus.◆</p> <p align="justify">In Georgia, Whitefield preached five times a week to crowded congregations. Multitudes followed him.</p> <p align="justify">When he returned to London, churches were opened on week days and](http://www.slideshare.net/frontfel/george-whitefield-calvinist-evangelist-revivalist)

constables were placed at the doors to prevent too many people from forcing their way into the buildings. At Bermondsey church, nearly 1,000 people stood outside the church, unable to hear his message. Whitefield felt a strong compulsion to go out and preach to this crowd from the tombstones. This was the beginning of his open-air preaching. Soon, at Kingswood, near Bristol, Whitefield began his field preaching to about 200 coal miners. The second time he preached 2,000 people assembled to hear him. The third time, the audience numbered up to 5,000. The numbers gathering increased until more than 20,000 people were assembled on the fields to hear this powerful preacher.

Although the common people thronged to hear him, the church authorities took great offence to George Whitefield's innovations of preaching the Gospel outside of the sanctuary of a church building and determined to prevent him preaching from any of their pulpits in future. What Whitefield had adopted by choice, now became a necessity. At the time, the idea of outdoor, extemporaneous preaching, with no wooden pulpit or even sermon notes, between him and his congregation, seemed revolutionary and undignified to the established church.

It was at this point, early 1738, that George Whitefield concluded that his calling was to be an itinerant preacher to urban areas throughout the Anglo-American world. It was during his preaching tour of the American colonies in 1739 - 1740 that the Great Evangelical Awakening erupted. Whitefield's first stop was Philadelphia - a major port city, the most cosmopolitan city in the New World, with a thriving market economy. At every stop along Whitefield's ministry tour from Philadelphia to New York, and back again, record audiences, often exceeding the population of the towns in which he preached, assembled.

Observers reported on the remarkable phenomenon of spellbound audiences listening in profound silence in greater numbers that had ever been seen up until that point in North America. Some of the most dramatic spiritual responses occurred during Whitefield's 39-day whirlwind tour of New England. On 17 October 1740, Whitefield preached in Northampton, Massachusetts, and stayed with the famed theologian Johnathan Edwards. Edwards reported: *The congregation was extraordinarily melted - almost the whole assembly being in tears for a great part of the time.*

It was after that visit that Edwards preached his famous sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.* Sarah Edwards observed that Whitefield aimed more at affecting the heart by proclaiming the simple truths of the Bible than any other preacher she had ever heard.

It was on this second ministry tour of America that Whitefield acquired a 500-acre plot for his Bethesda (House of Mercy) orphanage 10 miles north of Savannah, Georgia. By 1740 he had nearly 40 children under his care, but it was at this point, while Revival was breaking out in New England, that a disagreement arose between Whitefield and his trustees, who withdrew their support. Supplies bound for the orphanage were stolen. Soon Whitefield owed about 500 pounds - 20 years wages at that time. Then his primary sponsor for the endeavour, William Seward died without a will. Whitefield reported: *I was embarrassed with Mr. Seward's death. He died without making any provision for me, and I was at the same time much indebted for the Orphan House - I am almost tempted to wish I had never undertaken the Orphan House.* The debt against Bethesda placed Whitefield in jeopardy of being jailed for unpaid debt. The financial burdens associated with this orphanage Whitefield described as: *lying like a dead weight upon me.* It was only by 1768 that Whitefield finally managed to settle the debt.

With Revival sweeping England and North America, Whitefield sailed for Scotland. In 1742 Whitefield's preaching was received with great enthusiasm in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Whitefield's evening services attracted thousands and

continued until 2 AM, ◆there were scenes of uncontrollable distress, like a field of battle◆ all night in the fields, might be heard the voices of prayer and praise.◆ Whitefield commented that the responses in Scotland ◆far outdid all that I ever saw in America.◆ At one service 20,000 people attended a meeting that stretched late into the night. On Sunday Whitefield served communion in the fields. It was reported that wherever you walked ◆you might have heard persons praying to, and praising, God.◆ Whitefield made 14 ministry tours to Scotland and 7 to America.</p> <p align="justify">Early in his ministry a sharp conflict developed between John Wesley and George Whitefield. When Whitefield left England in 1739, he was the recognised leader of the Evangelical Awakening, and he entrusted his thousands of converts to John Wesley◆s care. When he returned to England in early 1741, he found that ◆many of my spiritual children◆ will neither hear, see, nor give me the least assistance. Yes, some of them sent threatening letters◆◆ John Wesley had preached and published against the teachings of George Whitefield on predestination and total depravity. Wesley rejected Whitefield◆s Calvinist convictions and held that sinless perfection was obtainable in this life.</p> <p align="justify">Whitefield had always respected John Wesley as his ◆spiritual father in Christ◆ and addressed Wesley in his letters as ◆Honoured Sir.◆ Although Whitefield◆s evangelistic successes far outstripped that of his former instructor, he continued to show John Wesley great respect to the very end of his life, when he requested that John Wesley preach the sermon at his funeral.</p> <p align="justify">However, the Arminianism of John Wesley was hostile to Whitefield◆s Calvinist convictions. In March 1739, while Whitefield was in America, Wesley preached and published a passionately Arminian sermon ◆Free Grace.◆ He testified that this step was only taken with great unease, and after seeking a sign from heaven and drawing lots twice. Wesley feared that Calvinism would discourage growth in holiness. Wesley ensured that ◆Free Grace◆ was widely published in America, forcing Whitefield to write a response.</p> <p align="justify">Despite some hot tempers and hard words in the exchanges, George Whitefield and John Wesley were ultimately reconciled. Not that there was any agreement on the two issues of predestination or perfection, but they agreed to disagree. Whitefield refused to build Calvinist Methodist chapels in places that already had a Methodist society. Wesley agreed to do the same. Whitefield was welcomed to preach at many of Wesley◆s societies. And more than once Whitefield acted as a mediator when the Wesley brothers fell out, notably when Charles sabotaged John◆s marriage prospects to Grace Murray.</p> <p align="justify">In 1749, Whitefield resigned formal leadership of the Calvinist Methodist Societies and posed no further ◆threat◆ to Wesley as the chief organiser of the Revival in England. Wesley lent Whitefield one of his best preachers, Joseph Cownley to minister at the Tabernacle in London. Whitefield laid the foundations for the Kingswood College Bristol, which became so important to Methodism.</p> <p align="justify">Another interesting friendship of George Whitefield was with Benjamin Franklin. Franklin and Whitefield were clearly on opposite ends of the theological spectrum. Benjamin Franklin proclaimed a religious creed which consisted primarily of good works. Whitefield◆s last public words, preached within hours of his death, declared: ◆Works! Works! A man gets to heaven by works? I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand!◆</p> <p align="justify">Yet, Benjamin Franklin and George Whitefield went beyond a partnership in publishing, to a genuine friendship of mutual trust and respect.</p> <p align="justify">As colonial tensions with the Mother Country arose, Whitefield clearly sided with the Americans. When Benjamin Franklin appeared before Parliament, Whitefield attended every

session and gave his old friend public support. Benjamin Franklin commended Whitefield's evangelistic zeal and charitable ministries. He wrote to Whitefield encouraging him to organise a strong body of religious and industrious people to settle Ohio. Might it not greatly facilitate the introduction of pure religion among the heathen, if we could, by such a colony, show them a better example of Christians than they commonly see in our Indian traders?

Some historians attribute the advent of black Christianity in America to George Whitefield's first preaching tour in Philadelphia when he sought out audiences of slaves, preached the Gospel to them and wrote on their behalf.

One of Whitefield's classic open-air preaching battles occurred in 1746 in the Moorfields of London. He began preaching at 6 in the morning when some 10,000 people had assembled, waiting for the sports events to begin. Whitefield preached three times for many hours during the day, in spite of drummers, trumpeters, players, hecklers and vulgar attacks with stones, dirt, rotten eggs, pieces of dead animals, and all manner of filth was thrown at him. When a recruiting sergeant marched his men through the midst of the audience in the hope of making a disturbance, Whitefield requested his people to fall back and make way for the king's officers and then close up again. This manoeuvre trapped the men within a mass of worshipers. When the uproar of the heathen became so great that Whitefield could not be heard, he stopped preaching and called the Christians to sing with loud voices, and so, with singing, praying and preaching he held the field throughout the day. More than a thousand letters were handed to him by persons who were brought under conviction. 350 people came to Christ and joined his congregation as a result of that day's preaching.

In his lifetime, Whitefield preached at least 18,000 times. He would preach an average of 12 times a week and spent 20 50 hours in the pulpit each week. Whitefield was America's first celebrity. About 80% of all American colonists heard him preach at least once.

Brutal mobs of non-Christians sometimes attacked Whitefield and his followers. Whitefield received death threats by letters, and once he was stoned until nearly dead. In his lifetime, he was declared: the greatest preacher that England has ever produced. It was calculated that he preached to over 10 million people in his lifetime. Whitefield usually awoke at 4 AM and began preaching at 5 or 6 AM.

While John Wesley is known as the founder of the Methodist movement, few remember that it was actually George Whitefield who formed the first Methodist societies and pioneered most of the methods used in the 1700's Evangelical Awakenings. It was Whitefield that pioneered preaching in fields rather than churches, publishing magazines and holding conferences. Whitefield published the first magazine in North America: Christian History containing authentic accounts of the most remarkable passages, historical and doctrinal from famous Christians of the past.

Whitefield pushed himself so hard and preached with such intensity that he was frequently ill afterwards. Aside from preaching an average of 12 times a week, Whitefield sometimes conducted funerals and performed weddings, often counselled enquirers, oversaw numerous congregations, maintained a large correspondence, as well as organising his charitable endeavours, and preaching at conferences which Lady Huntington described as times of refreshing from the presence of our God. Mr. Whitefield's sermons and exhortations were close, searching, experimental, awful and awakening.

Yet, despite all that he achieved amidst physical trials and spiritual labours, Whitefield wrote on the occasion of his 37 th birthday: I am ashamed to think I have lived so long and done so little.

Many times Whitefield travelled

through torrential rain and blizzards of snow in order to make his appointments. Much of his correspondence, reading and study was accomplished while travelling, and amidst a *♦* throng of business. *♦* Frequently, Whitefield ignored the advice of doctors and he continued his 1770 preaching tour in America, declaring: *♦* I would rather wear out than rust out. *♦* Struggling with breathing, nearly collapsing, needing to be helped onto his horse, Whitefield was heard to pray: *♦* Lord, if I have not yet finished my course, let me go and speak for Thee once more in the fields, seal Thy truth and then let me come home and die! *♦*

This prayer was answered as he managed to complete one final powerful sermon. The following morning he died at Newburyport. All of the bells in the town tolled, the ships in the harbour fired their canon in mourning, flags were hung at half-mast. In Georgia all the black cloth in the stores were bought up and the churches were hung in black. The governor and council met at the State House in deep mourning and marched in procession to hear the funeral sermon. Poet John Green Whittier described Whitefield as: *♦* That life of pure intent. That voice of warning yet eloquent. *♦*

Whitefield has been attributed with pioneering non-denominational, international, para-church ministry. He preached to the heart, and demanded a response. He utilized the media and blazed the trail which future generations of Evangelical Revivalists, chaplains, youth and student para-church leaders and Christian charities have followed. By all accounts, those who were awakened by his burning words to a sense of their spiritual needs and who came to Christ as a result of his Biblical preaching number in, at least, the hundreds of thousands. The lives changed by the Great Evangelical Awakening launched through his itinerant preaching ministry are incalculable.

Some quotable sayings of George Whitefield:

♦ There is not a thing on the face of the earth that I abhor so much as idleness or idle people. *♦*

♦ God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them. *♦*

♦ I hope to grow rich in heaven by taking care of orphans on earth. *♦*

♦ Young Christians are like little rivulets that make a large noise and have shallow water; old Christians are like deep water that makes little noise, carries a good load and gives not way. *♦*

♦ Suffering times are a Christian's best improving times. *♦*

♦* In mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God *♦* I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ, and so I have made it my aim to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation. *♦ Romans 15:19 *♦* 20

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