GEORGE WHITEFIELD

1714-1770

1. **HEBREWS 12:1–2**: Scripture reveals our need for spiritual heroes as we run the race set before us, Hebrews 11-12:1-2. This is true for us with the heroes of church history - those who’ve already completed the race. 1 Cor 11:1; 4:16 - imitate me as I imitate Christ. We have clay feet, but we also have the grace of God upon us. Heroes of the faith become an incarnation to us of what it looks like to press on. Their lives are highly motivational for the Christian life.
2. Whitefield fanned the flame which Edwards lit. He was the most dynamic evangelist God has given to the Church since the Apostle Paul. He was the central figure used by God in Scotland, England, and Wales in the evangelical awakening. At the same time, he was the leading influence in The Great Awakening in the Colonies.
3. **A TIRELESS PREACER:** He sailed across the Atlantic Ocean 13 times. Three years of his life were spent on ship. He became the unifying factor in The Great Awakening. He preached for 34 years. A total of 18,000 formal sermons. Thousands of people would follow him after the sermon to the place where he was staying. Often preached in large, vast estates. He would also preach on the ship during those long journeys. When you add up all of this, it is a total of 30,000 sermons that Whitefield gave. An average of 3 to 4 sermons a day. 1000 times a year. 80% of the colonists heard Whitefield preach in person. He was seen by more American colonists than even George Washington. His name was more widely recognized than any name in England or in any of the Colonies except for British royalty. Estimated he stood in front of 10 million people during his lifetime. J. C. Ryle wrote, “I believe no English preacher has ever possessed such a combination of excellent qualifications as Whitefield. Whitefield in my opinion stands alone.” Spurgeon, “My one mentor in ministry aside from Jesus Christ is George Whitefield.” “Other men seem to be only half alive; but Whitefield was all life, fire, all force.” Dr. Jones: “Other men merely existed; Whitefield lived.”
4. **EARLY YEARS: 1714-1732**:

* Born 1714 in Gloucester England. His father died when he was only two years old. His mother remarried when he was eight. Born in an inn and worked in the inn. His Mom’s remarriage ended in divorce. He lived a sinful life during this time.
* He had experience in stage and theater and learned to project his voice which would be very helpful later in large audience preaching.
* At age 18 he started his education at Oxford University in 1732. He was a brilliant, young man who had already taught himself Greek, and had become proficient in Latin. Whitefield had an extraordinary memory. He was hired to work a variety of chores to pay for his education. He developed a tremendous work ethic. [God develops skills in us before we are saved which then can be used after we are saved to serve Him.] God is always “previous”. He is always preparing us for tomorrow.

1. **SALVATION**:

* At Oxford, Whitefield was invited by a fellow student, Charles Wesley, to a small Bible study. Along with Isaac Watts, Charles is one of the two greatest hymn writers the Church has known. John Wesley was also in the small Bible study.
* All of the men in this study were unconverted. All were under the delusion of a self-works righteousness. They were doing all that they could to achieve a standing before God. The “holy club” was the name of this study. They were trying to become as holy as they could possibly be so that God would forgive their sins. They worked harder and harder. The harder they tried, the more they drifted further and further away from God.
* Knowing the conflict within Whitefield’s soul, Charles Wesley gives a book to Whitefield entitled, The Life of God In The Soul Of A Man, written by Henry Scougal. It is a book on the new birth which helps Whitefield understand salvation through faith alone by grace alone. Whitefield cried out, “I must be born again or be damned!“. At age 21, Whitefield is dramatically regenerated.
* A five-year stretch of searching for acceptance from God was now realized in his heart in the new birth. The new birth became the dominant theme in Whitefield’s preaching. Whitefield states, “God was pleased at length to remove the heavy load and enable me to lay a hold of his dear Son.” Whitefield understood that God must change his heart before he can believe in Christ. He knew the difference between a dead faith and a living faith.
* Whitefield was gripped with passion to know Christ more intimately. He woke up every morning no later than 5 AM to study his Bible on his knees, along with his Greek New Testament, and Matthew Henry’s commentary. He read through the Bible again and again.

1. **1736, GRADUATION FROM OXFORD**. The Great Awakening had already started in the colonies; it began in 1733. In 1736 Whitefield returned to Gloucester to be ordained as a deacon in his church. He wrote, “I gave myself up to be a martyr for Him who hung upon the cross for me.” Whitefield had such a burden to preach that his Bishop gave him opportunities. Immediately the giftedness of this young man was recognized.
2. **OPEN DOORS**:

* The door was now swung open for Whitefield at the age of 22 to begin to preach. George Whitefield received a letter from John Wesley and Charles Wesley who were in Georgia. The Wesley brothers went to the mission field still trying to earn their salvation. Immediately Whitefield determined to sail to the Colonies. However his ship was delayed and during this time he preached in various places in Great Britain. News spread of this young preaching prodigy. Whitefield’s popularity took off. He learned that only one commendation matters, God’s.
* When Whitefield arrived in Georgia, John and Charles Wesley had already departed. Whitefield begins to preach in Georgia where he knows no one. He noticed the number of orphans in the area. He went back to Great Britain to organize the funds to build an orphanage in Georgia. When Whitefield gets back to Great Britain, the Wesleys had come to know Christ; now the three of them would advance the gospel together.

1. **FIELD PREACHING**:

* The Wesleys and Whitefield preached that even the clergy were not yet born-again. As a result, the church doors were shut that previously were wide-open to Whitefield.  This forced Whitefield to go outside the Church. When God closes one door, he opens another door, per Lawson.

* Whitefield goes to Bristol after determining that he will preach in an open field. The 1st day of field preaching, his audience was made up of about 30 coal miners. These were very hard men. As he’s preaching the gospel, Whitefield looks down into their faces and saw white lines on the cheeks of the men who stood there, the flow of tears that was washing their blackened faces leaving channels of white skin exposed. Whitefield states, “Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, they were glad to hear of a Jesus who was a friend of publicans and came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of there being affected was to see the white gutters made by their tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks as they came out of their coal pits.”
* He preached in this field for five weeks. The crowds grew large and there was much spiritual fruit. People began to come out from the cities until there were thousands of people gathered in this open field. No church was large enough to house the number of people attended his preaching.
* Whitefield became deeply committed to field preaching!
* At the end of these five weeks, Whitefield stood in this field before 23,000 people. You would have to go back to the birth of the Church for such large crowds. The Bishops who had closed their churches to Whitefield were now envious because people were leaving their churches to go listen to George Whitefield.
* In the summer of 1739, Whitefield traveled to London. He preached in large parks. The lower class would go to the parks on weekends and holidays. They had no other place to go.
* These parks took on a carnival like atmosphere. They were jammed packed. It was like going to the beach on Labor Day on the East Coast. People were drawn to Whitefield as he preached with power and authority that you must be born again. People began to come under deep conviction of their sin. In the summer of 1739 alone, [when you add it all up] he preached before 1 million people.

1. **SECOND COLONIAL TOUR, 1739-1741**. Whitefield preaches the Word of God in the colonies. He travels north to see what God was doing in the New England area. In Philadelphia, he launched his 1ST tour . It is considered the all-time greatest preaching tour in church history. He took the cities by storm.