

# George Whitefield

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you. And it's a delight to have Jeff and Janet here. As you know, Jeff is our new president at Regent College, and we're very grateful for him. And I hope you'll keep him in your prayers as he takes on a big role for us at Regent.

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord. There's a handout that I hope you have with the title of my talk, A Burning and Shining Light, The Zealous Spirituality of the Early George Whitefield.

Last year was the 300-year anniversary of the birth of George Whitefield. And in December, right around the anniversary, we had a chapel at Regent where I spoke and I talked a little bit about Whitefield's life, and then we meditated on this verse, Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord.

And being at Regent College and having a bunch of enthusiastic young people, we sang Happy Birthday to George. And they did it with real gusto.

It was actually a lot of fun. I did some research last autumn and then spoke at a couple of the conferences that were held to celebrate the tricentenary.

[ 1 : 16 ] What I really wanted to investigate was what are the sources? What are the sources of Christian zeal and activism? And I wanted to use Whitefield's life as a case study for that.

And so I'm going to present to you some of the things I feel like I found and give you a version of some of the research that I presented last year. On the 11th of November, 1770, this is the year that Whitefield died, John Newton preached a memorial sermon for Whitefield in his parish of Olney in the English Midlands.

And his theme was taken from the words that Christ used to describe John the Baptist. He was a burning and a shining light. And Whitefield had certainly been this over the course of his short lifetime, a burning and a shining light.

In Newton's sermon, he emphasized the warmth and the ardency, the fervor of Whitefield's zeal. This is Newton. He said, If there's one thing that it seemed to me called for explanation in Whitefield's spirituality, it is this remarkable ardor of devotion.

And I wonder if for you also, you would be asking the question, what is it that maintains a Christian's zeal? Well, maintains their ardor in serving the Lord.

[ 2 : 49 ] I decided to focus on Whitefield in his 20s, one decade of his life. The decade in his 20s as a young person. 1734 to 1744, just this slice of his life.

One decade. And to read his letters and to read the pamphlet literature and the sermons and so on from that decade. It was a remarkable decade. It's the period from his encounter with Charles Wesley.

And the strict discipline of the Oxford Methodists through until the death of his infant son. He would have another two and a half decades of ministry. But these were the years that formed him spiritually and established his discipline.

It was during this important decade that he underwent a conversion. And he merged into public ministry as what they called the boy preacher. He seemed so young. He began to preach outdoors to vast audiences.

10,000, 20,000, 30,000. He began his grand transatlantic itinerancy. Crossed the Atlantic 13 times. He ignited revival through sensational preaching in England, in Scotland and America.

[ 3 : 55 ] Visited Scotland twice. America three times. Wales several more times yet. These were also the years. So that's just in his 20s. He visited America more times beyond that.

But these were also the years during which he established, he founded and began fundraising for the orphanage he established in Georgia. One of his chief concerns for the rest of his life. He

published during this decade 52 individual sermons.

Only seven after that. Eight volumes of collected sermons. Only four after that. 28 other items. Only 16 after that. So this was the most productive period of his life in his 20s.

It's quite remarkable. I've got kids in my 20s. You know? Just all that happened to him in his 20s. By title, that means more than three quarters of his publications appeared during this decade.

More widely, we can say this is the first decade of modern evangelicalism. During which the key paradigms were established in the evangelical conversion of many leaders, such as John and Charles Wesley or Howell Harris and so on.

[ 5 : 01 ] The emergence of revival, beginning with the Connecticut River Valley revival in 1735, 1734 that Jonathan Edwards wrote about and then elsewhere.

The formation of small voluntary groups for devotion. Hymn writing. Wider trans-local evangelical networks and connections.

As I say, a practice of a new hymnody, new patterns of extemporary prayer, new patterns of preaching. Magazines. All of this is established in this period. Whitfield's there at the roots of it all. It's in this decade that you get the Great Awakening as it's described in its narrow terms in New England. He was there at the beginning of all this and remarkably, it was these years of his life that would prove central to the emergence of modern evangelicalism as a form of Christian living that would endure for three centuries and spread to five continents.

He's there at the beginning in his 20s. The spirituality of the early Whitfield, I guess I'm trying to say, is more than simply the experience of this one young man. The spirituality of the early Whitfield takes us to the roots of evangelical faith and devotion in the modern world.

[ 6 : 13 ] So why cut him off at 1744? Historians talk about periodization. You have to justify it. It can't just be round numbers, even though that's convenient. What constitutes this as a period in his life?

It's in February 1744 that his four-month-old son died. Led by inward spiritual impressions, guided by these inward impressions, he had prophesied that his son would be a great preacher.

But now he was chastened and taught by the experience, he said, to be more cautious and more sober-minded. Although he had already begun to admit some of his early mistakes.

I once wrote about all of his autobiographical writing, and I talked about putting, you know, 600 pages of autobiographical material on record in your 20s gives you plenty of time to repent.

By 1748, he decided to revise his journals. And this is what he wrote. Listen to this quotation.

[ 7 : 15 ] So this is around the end of his 20s. Alas, alas, in how many things I have judged and acted wrong. I have been too rash and hasty in giving characters, both of places and persons.

Part of what he means is like when you directly post to Facebook things about other people. Like he's publishing stuff about other people who are still alive, right? He's been too rash and hasty giving characters of places and persons.

Being fond, he says, of scripture language, I have often used a style too apostolical. He's made it sound like he's apostolical. At the same time, I've been too bitter in my zeal.

Wildfire has been mixed with it. And I find that I frequently wrote and spoke in my own spirit when I thought I was writing and speaking by the assistance of the spirit of God. I have likewise too much made inward impressions my rule of acting.

This is quite a big mea culpa, isn't it? This is a huge kind of sense of, my God, what have I done? You know, I have been immature. He owned up to indiscretion, bitterness, and spiritual presumptuousness.

[ 8 : 27 ] The characteristic flaws of a young person, right? But he also marked this off as a distinct period, right? So it's not just even numbers. At the same time, though, he in no way dismissed the spiritual significance of these years, during which, as he continued writing, he said, notwithstanding all this, he said, God filled me with so much of his holy fire and carried me, a poor, weak youth, through such a torrent of popularity and contempt.

And he set so many seals to my unworthy administrations. God used me, he says. And I'm not going to deny that. I cannot deny what God has done. Notwithstanding my errors, he feels this has been a remarkable period, as indeed it had.

So how do we characterize the spirituality of Whitefield during these years? There are a number of themes we can trace in his correspondence and in his journals and his sermons and the pamphlets.

It seems to me there was a tensile energy. So the main imagery I want to use is of tension, like a coiled spring. A compressed coiled spring.

You know, energy sort of under tension. And so I'll describe his spirituality in these years by looking at three tensions. When people talk about a dialectic, it's this kind of thing, you know, this tension.

[ 9 : 49 ] The active life and the contemplative life. Active service and prayer. What's the relationship between those things? A tension between self-abasement and self-exertion.

And between maximum spiritual communion or fellowship and minimal ecclesiastical or church order. I'm mainly going to focus on the first one and we'll see. I want to make sure I end by 10 o'clock.

But those are the themes I looked at in the paper. Why don't I show you a few images? This is, when we talked about his remarkable travels and itinerancy.

This is his, you know, it's one of his journeys through America. He's the first intercolonial hero. He's the first person before George Washington that every American in the colonies would have known about.

There's, I mean, enormous amounts written about Whitefield in early America. But these are some of his active travels just to picture it more than to go through it. But just some of the iconography, some of the pictures, so you can see.

[ 10 : 53 ] Traditionally, this is thought to be his wife, Elizabeth James. But there's Whitefield preaching circa 1742. This is right in the period that we're talking about. And notice the little bit of a squint that he has.

He had that from birth, from measles or something like that. And so he's often called, you can really see it in this Joseph Badger portrait. Often it seems like with a very, there are some creatures that have something about how they look or how they talk that seems really distinctive.

And he was called by his critics, you know, Dr. Squintum. He had that kind of look. Well, you see it in a lot of these, don't you? That's an interesting, interesting one.

And I think part of what I see, and maybe I'm reading into it in my reading of the later Whitefield, is you do see a chiding in some of the older portraits. And he said he became exceedingly corpulent. He became quite fat as he grew older. And this is my favorite portrait. And John Russell is an evangelical pastelist, a member of the Royal Academy, and beautiful pastel paintings, the leading pastels of the period.

[ 11 : 59 ] And maybe even just his sympathy. He captures, I think, in this older portrait, some of that chastening. Just a small little cameo, but I love that picture.

But Whitefield was right in the hurdy-burdy, and he was in the public eye, and much talked about. Every year of this decade, there is like 30 or 40 anti-Whitfield pamphlets and publications and so on.

And just a little picture of him in the public eye. I love this print that I found, where you have these well-mannered, sort of high macaroni manners, they call it. But these are the elite of the period.

Near St. Paul's Cathedral, going past a print shop. And in a print shop, you put all the prints up on them like this. And they are making fun of this row of evangelical preachers.

Down to here. And it includes, actually this is Wesley here, and it includes Whitefield here. So Whitefield is being made fun of by these people.

[ 12 : 58 ] But in this particular print, while they're making fun of these evangelical preachers and laughing at them, there's a dog urinating on the leg of this man down here.

And the artist wants us to see who's really the one that's been laughing at. So he's right in the middle of all this discourse, right?

All of this stuff that's going on. Anyway, just a few pictures for you to have Whitefield sort of in your mind's eye. So how do we characterize the spirituality?

The first tension we want to look at is between action and contemplation. Whitefield's spirituality is unmistakably active.

That's the zeal we're talking about. While this was true of other evangelicals, it was unquestionably and remarkably so in his case. His motto could have been, our text, Romans 12, 1, never be lacking in zeal.

[ 13 : 56 ] But keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord. In November 1737, this is just two years into this decade, he gave an example of this sort of activity that would mark his ministry. This is a quote from one of his letters.

Last week, save one, week before last, I preached ten times in different churches. And the last week, seven. Yesterday, four times. Read prayers twice, though I slept not above an hour the night before, which was spent in religious conversation and interceding for you.

There's the kind of energy of devotion. His ideals are evident again when he was ill in 1738 and asked for prayer that he would arise from his sickbed. He said to work with ten times more alacrity than he had before.

And he was soon relaying to his correspondence an even more punishing schedule of activity. Years later, sorry, a year later, his traveling companion, William Seward, remarked, he says, Our brother generally preaches twice and sometimes three times a day, besides riding 10, 15, or 20 miles.

That's quite remarkable activity. And these weren't ten-minute sermons. Amen. He wrote to his friends in Oxford from Philadelphia in 1739 with ardency, wanting them to share these ideals. [15:13] Oh, that you may be filled with a holy fire, he says. An ardent zeal for God even to eat you up. He wants them to be zealous. He read Fox's Book of Martyrs and thought often about persecution and martyrdom during these years, expecting to be imprisoned upon his return to England.

This isn't just histrionic stuff. In this period, it really is possible that he could go to prison, given some of the kind of laws that are on the books. And in this period, some evangelicals were in prison.

William Seward was martyred in mob violence. As time went on, Whitfield was more and more clear that he wanted to expend himself utterly. In active service, he wanted to die preaching as a Holocaust offering to God, an entire offering.

I intend going on, he said, till I drop, or this poor carcass can hold out no more. In the end, he had his wish. So clearly, Whitfield was an active Christian, and this was unmistakably the ethos of his spiritual life.

His friend, William Delamont, wrote in 1738, God requires that we should be active. The long history of the Church, the active life, was thought of in its relationship to the contemplative life, sometimes pictured in the typology of Martha and Mary.

[16:28] And although action and prayer were always to be held together, in the later tradition, the terms have been used to characterize different kinds of Catholic religious orders. You know, the Cistercians or the Trappists are contemplative.

The Jesuits are active because of their mission in the world. Thomas Babington Macaulay, a 19th century historian, figured if the Methodists had been Catholic, the Pope would have known exactly what to do with them and would have organized them into a religious order like the Jesuits.

It's interesting, Whitfield, in this period where there were fears of the young pretender and fears of resurgent Catholicism in the 1740s, he was sometimes thought to be a Jesuit in disguise. So was Wesley.

We need not take this seriously, but it's clear that Whitfield's spirituality was a form of devotion that didn't withdraw from the world, but it flowed over into the world with tremendous zeal.

Just like Ignatian spirituality, Jesuit spirituality, directs the fervor of Christ-centered devotion to missionary work. And it's that, so it's not just a kind of vapid, let's just be busy for the sake of being busy.

[17:36] That's a river that seeks to run on without its source. What are the sources, the genuine sources that sustain that kind of activism? Well, there's a deeper spirituality, and that's what we're going to try to get out of it.

There's so much fatigue in ministry today. Evangelicals everywhere are prone to burnout.

So my question, this is a personal question, I want to know what keeps Whitfield so fired up. What makes him a radical Christian? Well, there are three things on your handout that I've noted.

This is my best sort of account for this in this period, is discipline, boldness, and experience. So first of all, discipline. Prior to his conversion, his experience of what we call Oxford Methodism, and this is not the later Methodism.

This is a term Dick Heidson, Rader, Duke coined, for this group of young men at Oxford. And there were groups like this in London and Cambridge and elsewhere.

[18:42] It's an earnest Anglican ascetical piety. This is prior to their conversion experiences and them discovering a new dynamic for the spiritual life.

But they were, this is in the mode of some 17th century figures like Jeremy Taylor and so on. Diary keeping, earnestness, fasting, almsgiving, regular communion, studying the Greek New Testament. There's a discipline to these Oxford Methodists. His experience had made him aware of how serious was the Christian calling to it, what he called a devout and holy life, quoting William Law. He was soon writing to his boyhood friend, Gabriel Harris, to say how dangerous it was to be a lukewarm Christian, stressing the importance of rising early in the morning and devoting oneself to prayer and meditation.

He was formed at Oxford during these years in this Anglican tradition of discipline, the holy living tradition he inherited from Jeremy Taylor and William Law.

It made redeeming the time important. And he took this zeal very, very seriously to the point of the breaking of his body and his spirit. And it's part of this that leads him to seek a more direct experience of God, leads him to conversion.

[ 19 : 57 ] But the discipline of these years, the regular habits, the things that are established in his life, actually stay with him for the rest of his life. It's a period of remarkable discipline and lays down habits that will sustain him.

It's one of the sources of his activism is the attention to discipline and redeeming the time. I ordered a month ago or so a copy of one of the, this is I think the only diary extant of Whitfields.

This is from the British Library. And this is from this period of Oxford Methodism. The general questions, you know, have I been fervent in prayer?

He had a series of questions that he asked himself. This is the mode of Oxford Methodism that he asked himself every day. And so in his diary, this is the columnar format of the Oxford Methodist diaries of John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Benjamin Ingham, George Whitfield from this period. And he's recording every hour of the day, the resolutions kept and broken. And his temper of devotion throughout the day and what he's doing throughout the day, right? It's a remarkable attempt.

[ 21 : 06 ] They picked some of this up from Jeremy Taylor. But when I say that there's discipline, like I mean discipline, right? Like unbelievable. And down here though, something, this new dynamic, this is from after his conversion.

He's still keeping this pattern of devotion. But there's a new, this is partly why I ordered these journals. Very joyful and full of the Holy Ghost and joy, the joys, oh the joys and pleasures of a religious life.

There's a new element of the Holy Spirit that enters his diaries in 1735. I'll just leave that screen up for a minute.

So the first thing is discipline. Second one is boldness. Charles Wesley introduced Whitfield to the pietist August Hermann Franca, German pietist Franca, and his small but important track, a little track called, it's quite short, but it's just called The Fear of Man.

It's on Nicodemus and The Fear of Man. Whitfield often referred to this little book. And it clearly made a serious impression on him about the need to be utterly fearless, about standing up against prevailing norms and fashions.

[ 22 : 15 ] Do you feel intimidated by the society in which we live? Do you feel a little bit like cowed and like it's a difficult environment in which to be fearless? He read this and it challenged him.

Franca wrote that it was a great comfort to him personally that the men of this world speak all manner of evil against me falsely, loading me with censures and accusations. Franca said that's what's to be expected.

This was a clarion call to Whitfield to enter the list to take his stand. Franca noted how Christians easily took refuge in the idea that the age of miracles is gone. And he says they cut thereby the nerve of what?

They cut the nerve of an active faith. No, he argued, even if one could not do all the mighty works of the biblical heroes, even if we don't expect those same miracles, he said, yet ought everyone to follow in the faith of these holy men and to exert, there's the devotion again, the same faith with full power and energy.

To keep up this boldness, Franca said, required an interior life. We must continue in prayer and childlike communion with God, the inner sources of this activism. This was Whitfield's playbook, Forever After.

[ 23 : 26 ] It's this, I think, that helped make him radical. He decided, I am utterly done now with the fear of man. I will not live my life out of fear. I will not be afraid of going to prison.

I will not be afraid of being impoverished. I will not be afraid of being kicked out of the church. I am utterly done with that fear. So discipline, but also decision.

I'm done with that. Franca's theme was taken up in a pietist hymn that John Wesley translated into English and published during these years.

Shall I, for fear of feeble men, the spirit's course in me restrain? Or undismayed, indeed in word, be a true witness for my Lord?

The same year, this is a bit of a sidebar, but it's interesting. Francis Oakley and William Delamont, two other lesser-known evangelicals, were actually imprisoned in Bedford for their preaching.

[ 24 : 21 ] And from an upper room in the prison, they sang this hymn boldly and were joined by others in prison and others who gathered outside.

Within a half an hour, there was a crowd of 3,000 people singing this hymn in Bedford. And Bedford's a small town. So then, as the people gathered, through the iron grates, they preached for an hour.

Right? Like, literally. So this fear of man stuff is, it's really there. And their decision to be done with it. Time and again, Whitefield, therefore, drew a line in the sand for his hearers and his correspondence.

He demanded they make a serious break with their former life if they would be true Christians, just as he has done. There's no being a true Christian, he wrote, and yet holding with the world.

You had a break with your old acquaintances. You had to take a stand in public. Come forth, he wrote to a young clergyman and seer ancestor. Be separate, saith the Lord Almighty. Break with the world at once, and you shall become a fool for Christ's sake.

[ 25 : 25 ] And he even gave this clergyman a specimen letter that he could write to his parents to show him how to declare himself. A visible, decisive break.

Like, sociologists sometimes talk about sort of an ocular demonstration of conversion, you know? Something visible and social that actually marks the fact that I've made a break.

Something sufficiently visible and decisive to acknowledge the radical decision. No trimming, no dalliance. Frivolous activities would be rejected.

You need to speak up against any signs of worldliness, even if this made you odious to your former acquaintances. So, Whitfield counseled this young man, this young clergyman.

He said, tell your parents, I will no longer be an almost Christian. And this is from Paul's response to Festus in the King James Version, at least. Almost Festus says, thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

[ 26 : 25 ] The evangelicals were fond of saying, don't be an almost Christian, be an altogether Christian. So he said, that's what you should say to your parents. Likewise, in 1738, he provided a transcript of his prayers for John Bray.

He's on the boat just off the coast of England getting ready for his voyage. And he writes back to John Bray, a brazier in London. And he tells him what he's praying. He says, I'm praying for you. I'm praying. God, bid him not fear, men. Put him in mind that Christ's servants were always the world's fools. There is no going to heaven without being laughed at. So this remains a part of his piety throughout these years.

In the New Testament, the word *parisia* is used for the freedom, boldness, and transparency of the Christian. It's the word in ancient Greece for the freedom of the citizen to speak in the assembly in their own proper person.

And the Apostle Paul urged that the Spirit of God had given believers *parisia*. Seeing that we have such a hope, says the Apostle Paul, we use great plainness of speech, *parisia*.

[ 27 : 30 ] This, I think, was one of the marks of Whitfield's spirituality from very early. He was provoked to it by reading Franco when barely 20 years of age. His decision to be done with fear was a critical break, with the enormous social pressure exerted in traditional society to conform to expectations.

Especially with folk memories of the Civil War and the social chaos of the previous century, Whitfield's society exerted a steady, persistent pressure simply to obey your betters and maintain propriety.

Don't rock the boat. All of this Whitfield tossed aside with youthful abandon after reading Franco. I think we can translate that pretty easily into our own context about how there are so many pressures that keep us quiescent.

In addition to discipline and boldness, Whitfield became a radical Christian, I think, and this above all. This is not just three equal points.

This is the big one. Through his own direct and immediate experience of God, he directly encountered God for himself in a new and living way. Charles Wesley gave him another important book, Henry Scugol's *Life of God in the Soul of Man*.

[ 28 : 37 ] *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. Reading it was a turning point, and Whitfield marked it as especially significant in his autobiography. Indeed, he said, I never knew what true religion was until God sent me that excellent treatise.

And when he read Scugol's words, true religion was a union of the soul with God and Christ formed within us. When he read that, he said, a ray of divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul, and from that moment, but not until then, did I know I must be a new creature.

Whitfield was here pointing to something qualitatively new in his experience. Scugol's teaching would find its fruit in Whitfield's evangelical conversion in 1735 and his preaching thereafter on the new birth.

It was the difference, as he said to William Seward, from working for life to working from life. And so this is the really big thing in Whitfield's life.

And all the early evangelicals witnessed to this kind of an experience. Not that it was necessarily a dateable experience for all of them, but they witnessed to the transforming nature of a direct and personal experience of God.

[ 29 : 48 ] All of them bear witness to this. And there's many ways that I think the movement needs to be understood, that the conversion of these figures needs to be understood in terms of a new receptivity to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Scugol was one of many conduits for this kind of spirituality, a direct experience of God. So Whitfield was introduced to the possibility of a directly sensible, present experience of God.

And this would, I think, be the most important source of his active devotion. Far more important than the strictness of Oxford Methodism or the fearlessness of Franca. This was the union in secret that made him fruitful in service.

This was how contemplation and action were to be held together. So during this period, he placed enormous importance on the immediate and felt experience of God, the life of God and the soul of man.

Was Whitfield a charismatic? This might be the wrong question. A friend of mine, Matt McCoy, says he's not Pentecostal, but he's Sordocostal.

[ 30 : 56 ] And I think Whitfield was Sordocostal. He emphasized, we should emphasize, how significant was the role of the Holy Spirit in this decade in his life, in his day-to-day life in ministry.

He might not have advocated the exercise of miracles or charismata, such as glossolalia, but he made the experience of the Spirit, moment by moment, day by day, utterly central to the lived reality of the Christian life.

I'm going to skip a little bit here, but there's a period in 1739 where William Seward talks about three years ago when Whitfield received the Holy Spirit.

And if you do the math and go, what was three years ago? It was actually his ordination. And so there's at least an argument to be made that he understood the language of the Holy Spirit in ordination, about confirming with the Holy Spirit and about in the imposition of hands receiving the Holy Spirit, that there was a new dynamic there as well that he felt in terms of being released and commissioned for ministry and a kind of work of the Spirit that kind of charism in his own life.

In any case, thereafter, the direct experience of the Spirit, a direct fellowship with the Holy Spirit, was a theme in his letters. He wrote to the Earl of Leaven in Melville in Scotland and encouraged him. He said, Be still and you will then hear the secret whispers of the Holy Ghost.

[ 32 : 27 ] One of his concerns about entering into controversy too easily was the way he says, It embitters the Spirit, ruffles the soul and hinders it from hearing the still, small voice of the Holy Ghost.

To Thomas Noble in New York, he wrote, There needs to be a close adherence to the motions of the Holy Spirit. There's a tenderness and a responsiveness and a listening to the Spirit. Famously, Whitefield wrote to Bishop Butler in 1739.

And historians say famously, they mean the three or four of us who've read these texts. Moderately famously. Whitefield wrote to Bishop Butler that the Holy Spirit may be perceived by the soul as

really as any sensible impression made upon the body, as easily felt by the soul as the wind may be felt by the body.

My Lord, indeed, he said, we speak what we know. He's talking about a direct experience. The spirituality of the early Whitefield was concerned with the Holy Spirit.

In 1742, he returned to Scotland to heightened expectations. His reputation was starting to, you know, people were aware of him.

[ 33 : 46 ] He wrote back to London and he says, As soon as I came on shore, the Holy Spirit filled my soul. His reported experience was not mediated, discursively reasoned, hedged about with concessive clauses, no parenthetical phrase, so it seemed to me, it was his senses that it's utterly direct and immediate.

He often interrupts his letters in this period with exclamations of wonder to this effect. The signal was often the interjection, Oh. And the Shakespearean actor, David Garrick, in this period, said he would give 100 guineas to be able to say the word, Oh, like Mr. Whitefield.

So his letters, he would say, Oh, dear sir, my heart is now melted down with a sense of the divine love. To another, he writes from on board, ship and breaks out, Oh, the love of Christ, I feel it, I feel it, God now sheds it abroad in my heart.

He witnessed time and again to the now of God's presence. My soul is now in a heavenly frame. Dear brother, the love of God now fills my soul. Dear sir, my heart is now enlarged with a sense of the freeness and fullness of the Redeemer's loving kindness.

While I am musing, he writes to someone, to another correspondent, while I am musing, the fire kindles. Such feelings made him able to write without reserve with parusia. The love of God fills my soul, he wrote to David Erskine, and constrains me to write thus freely to you.

[ 35 : 04 ] There's an outward freedom from reserve that answered to an interior freedom. He says, I forget myself in writing of Jesus. He could use great plainness of speech. And I go on, and I kind of pay attention to some of the language of his letters, the language of daily.

He doesn't just say, this is, I experience, I have an experience of God now in the present moment. He uses the language of daily and continually. I experience daily, he writes to Jonathan Belcher in Massachusetts.

I experience daily, much of his divine presence. Day by day, God refreshes my soul. He uses the language of being filled. His presence is filling my soul and renewing my bodily strength.

I feel, I think I know what it is to wait upon the Lord in silence and to feel the spirit of God. I have been at such times filled as it were with the fullness of God, he writes. And he urges others to experience this as well.

Let me just look, let me just show you and some of the people who heard him. This spirituality has an effect. It's not just Whitfield, it has an effect on others.

[ 36 : 14 ] So this is, this is a young woman, Mary Ramsey in London. And this is a letter she writes to Charles Wesley.

She's a school teacher who follows Whitfield in London and heard him preach. And she says, I would go home in a great hurry with a great deal of the sermons in my head so that I could repeat half or sometimes three quarters of the discourse.

It made an impression and she, she felt like she could just about memorize what she heard. She says, I heard him 13 times.

Right? She went back and back again and again. This is just a young school teacher. And what are they hearing? Here is, here is Martha Jones.

From the same period, hearing Whitfield in the fields. At last I heard Mr. Whitfield a little before he went to Georgia. I heard him preach four times. But the count I had of his life, of this spirituality, the count I had of what this man, his life was like, had much more effect upon me than his sermons.

[ 37 : 24 ] The piety of the young preacher made a deep impression and I had a glimpse of how far I was from being a Christian. Right? So this has, this has an impact.

This is some manuscripts from converts in Scotland from the Candlesline Revival when Whitfield ignited revival in Scotland. And this is Anne Wiley, a 32 year old single woman who heard Whitfield and I could echo the language of filling.

In this manuscript it's taken down by William McCulloch, a minister and the different people who are preaching he gives numbers and 12 is Whitfield. So here's Whitfield on Elisha's multiplying the widow's oil which I had been reading for some time before and that concerning the Lord's looking

upon Peter came fresh into my mind so that I could almost repeat the whole of his discourse. You get that language, his preaching was electric, people could remember his preaching. And that I repeated the most of, the first of these, applying to myself and saying that I was the empty soul the Lord was filling and pouring the oil of his grace into.

So that language of being filled with God isn't just Whitfield but those, those who heard him. So that's Anne Wiley. Here's the language of melting.

[ 38 : 43 ] I think this is Anne Wiley continuing. So Whitfield will talk about being melting, being dissolved. Came, the word came home with power and melted me down and I was made to see that I was just the thing, this was just the thing that had kept me from Christ.

And this sweet melting continued with me all the rest of the sermon. We'll talk about that melting and dissolving in a minute if we have time. Oh, I like this.

The expectation was that when you heard Whitfield something would happen. I love this guy says, one time I heard him preach but I got nothing. I got nothing.

And whereas this person did get something, it's hard to read this but he says, the language is, I got much love to Christ. I was so faintish that I could not stand. The guy like, loses his bodily strength. So that's just to indicate that this spirituality is not just sort of somehow kept inside but it actually, it actually has impact on the people he's speaking to.

[ 39 : 50 ] We could go on at length and illustrate this very direct, sensible experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit that Whitfield recounts and that he transmits. But I think this is enough to see that the inner flame that burned passed over into the heat of evangelical activism.

It was here that Whitfield's spirituality held together a dialectic between outward zeal and interior warmth. An act of life that is furnished from a very deep contemplative life, a sensitivity and a responsiveness and a tenderness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

I just want to check the time here, make sure, okay we've got about ten minutes. Let me just, in outline, look at some of the remaining characteristics. This is the main one I wanted to talk about. Inward abasement and outward exertion.

This is kind of a variation on the theme. We could further characterize the spirituality of Whitfield during these years as self-abasing in the midst of self-exertion. Here's where you get the language of melting.

Time and again he spoke of his own soul melting, congregations melting under his preaching. Very early he wrote to James Hutton saying, sometimes God touches me from above and my heart, hard as it is, is melted down, quite overcome with the sense of his free grace in Christ towards me.

[ 41 : 11 ] He confided to William Seward that sometimes he was so melted by a sense of the free, sovereign, and everlasting love of God that he thought he was going to die. It's often associated with tears.

His divine love now melts my heart and draws tears from my eyes. He made this a desideratum for others writing to one female correspondent saying that the first step in becoming a Christian was a heart melted down with a sense of sin and flying to Jesus Christ.

This was how he described especially responsive audiences when he preached. In New York some 12,000 were melting and crying in 1740. At Bristol in 1741 there was a sweet melting at every sermon and Edinburgh in 1742 the same.

More melting. Little puddles everywhere of people melted down hearing him. The idea of melting like candle wax in the presence of God was parallel to his expressed desire so often to dissolve and to be with Christ.

I earnestly desire to dissolve and so overwhelmed by the presence of God I wanted to be dissolved and go to Christ. And he uses this kind of language. A different metaphor with the same sensibility appears in writing to another correspondent Jonathan Bryan.

[ 42 : 24 ] I love to see a soul lie in the dust under a sense of electing love or if you use the Moravian language of being a poor sinner sitting at Jesus' feet. He cries out to another correspondent oh that I could be lower.

I desire to lie in the dust and kiss the Redeemer's feet. This is not just sort of a bad self-image. This is not just a kind of self-hatred. Not at all actually. It's a sense of the sovereignty the grandeur the glory the highness of the Redeemer.

It's the language of Isaiah woe is me for I am undone. The sense of a holy sovereign God. It's the Calvinist Whitfield at his prayers. He said God in love empties before he fills humbles before he

exalts.

This self-abasement in response to sovereign grace is matched though by a corresponding self-exertion by the power of sovereign grace. The tender feelings of interiority melting being dissolved shedding tears seems to emphasize a receptive a yielding a tender quality to Whitfield's spirituality and yet we find this in counterpoise in dialectic not in opposition but in relationship to an overcoming strong martial imagery of battle that is in no way passive at all.

In his autobiography there's a sense that his own conversion involved spiritual warfare. The intermediate spiritual powers of the air had their role to play. The language of spiritual warfare returned as he described his experience on board ship.

[ 44 : 02 ] I longed to call the lingering battle on. Satan hath been busy with me since I saw you especially since my retirement on shipboard. He often felt especially under spiritual attack when he was alone and by himself.

As soon as he began to preach on shore the image of battle returned in full force in Philadelphia it was Israel and the Philistines. The devil and all his hosts will set their battle in array against us. The Lord has given me a sling and a stone stripling as I am I will go forth then in his strength and make mention of his righteousness only and lay prostrate the strong Goliath. In Georgia he was waiting for fresh attacks of the enemy.

In New York there was a war between Michael and the dragon and so on. His preaching in the marketplace was often described in this language of battle. William Seward wrote of what a scene it was to see our brother storm the enemy in the strong fortress of balls, assemblies, and playhouses and give him battle.

People in theatre in London were very aware of Whitfield and there's a whole interesting story to be told about Whitfield in theatre. The famous accounts of his preaching in the open fields in London and Moorefield in 1742 reflect this martial imagery and Jeff's right, this is one of my favourite pictures, painted in the 19th century from a letter written in 1742 in which Whitfield describes having had stones, dirt, rotten eggs and even pieces of dead cats thrown at him while he's preaching and the language of this letter is replete with the language of spiritual warfare and even in this picture all the lines move up like in angles like this and toward Whitfield standing and taking a stand, right?

[ 45 : 53 ] and this is all stuff in the letter people with whips, people with trumpets, a recruiting sergeant with a drum all trying to distract people from Whitfield's preaching. There's also he talked about a streaker who ran naked through the scene that the artist chose not to represent in this picture and in the midst of this this woman with her apron is receiving notes he said he received 300 notes that day from people under spiritual concern dear Mr. Whitfield pray for me the notes like the ones that I showed you earlier he's receiving notes of people under spiritual concern and indeed here is a woman with her child and I have letters from single mothers that I've heard Whitfield preach and she's in contrition in the midst of this scene of really what I'm trying to emphasize a scene of contest and battle his preaching was war his travels with those of a general I must fight my way through till I come to London he wrote to one figure even when he's more or less at home he is still he said in my winter quarters preparing for a fresh campaign so it would be a mistake to understand the self-abasing tender feelings of responsiveness to God as being all and someday it's not it's not like he you know

I'm a contemplative Christian no no it's that was matched with this outward zeal self-abasing the presence of divine love but ready to do battle royal when energized by that same love to reach lost sinners William Seward says man opposes the devil rages but God is with us and we will not fear man reprising that theme from Franca Whitfield also says there are many scoffers but God caused them to feel and fear me maybe that's one of the things he would have repented of saying later fear me in any case the image that I think unites self-abasement and self-assertion is the image of fire it is before the fire of divine love that Whitfield melts inwardly and it is filled with this holy fire that he goes forth conquering and to conquer the burning of the Holy Spirit causes melting the burning of the Holy Spirit sends us out thus he writes to Howell Harris call down fire from heaven even the fire of the Holy Ghost to do what?

to soften sweeten and refine and melt them into love to Samuel Mason he wrote that he said my own heart hard as it is is melted down and what he wants is the heart of a seraphim that he might burn with love like theirs what is the result for his ministry?

he says preaching on the Ketish coast I came to send fire into Deo the town of Deo and it is already kindled and in a holy flame he says to Mason a few months later I want to be a flaming fire

incandescent so there's the tension being emptied of self he says I threw myself into the hands of God so you see how that's another tension it's not that prayer and action contemplation and action are opposed they actually belong together it's not that self-abasement and self-exertion are opposed it's actually that they belong together I won't go through it but there's also I also look at the way in which an evangelical principle this principle of people being born again of the spirit becomes a basis for him maximizing solidarity and fellowship and his capacity to acknowledge and genuine spiritual fellowship with Presbyterians in Scotland Anglicans and non-conformists in England and congregationalists in New England and he experiences a kind of advanced pluralism in the church and he understands this work of the spirit one work of the spirit in all to be a basis for a kind of pan-evangelical unity a basis for cooperation while at the same time he's willing to defend and guard the doctrines of the faith especially doctrines related to salvation and there's and to de-emphasize outward visible order and there are problems in somehow he works that out but this is certainly a principle that has remained among evangelicals just briefly then what lessons do I take away from this for us today and I just have four here just for us to think about

I think first of all we can be encouraged by what God can do in a single human life that is entirely consecrated and given to him entirely I mean sometimes these lives God uses in secret sometimes he uses them in public but even mixed with poor judgment egotism the kind of naivety of youth what God can do in a single human life that is consecrated to him I think is an encouragement I as I was doing all this research I was thinking about my students at Regent College and praying Lord if there's even just one student in the whole course of my teaching career who can be lit up like this God give me that one student you know what God can do in a single human life young or old likewise we can be encouraged that in times where it seems the church is weak and society is hostile God can raise up women and men to bring renewal you know because we look back and it seems like everything earlier must have been better and easier and more moral and better more just society but the society into which

[ 51 : 34 ] Whitfield entered it didn't look good they've been through the gin crisis they've been through all this other stuff you know the church was dead and God raised up people like Whitfield so I think we've been encouraged about that today God nothing is beyond the arm of God to reach and to renew and to bring renewal then three other things more to do with maybe even our own lives that discipline boldness and a directly personal experience of God is something we can by God's grace aspire to today I think there's something to emulate there in the daily practice of discipline laying down those habits of holiness resolve to to reject the fear of man and a tenderness and an openness to God's spirit and a daily walk and in the Holy Spirit likewise we can respond to a vision of God's greatness and glory with both humility and boldness that self-abasement and self-assertion it's it's related to a vision of God

God in his greatness and glory humbles me but gives me confidence and lastly we can aspire to be gospel people who guard and defend sound doctrine we guard and defend the gospel while recognizing the work of the spirit and all those who trust in Christ for salvation and finding in this a basis for fellowship and cooperation in gospel projects so you know Whitefield entered his entered his thirties and in many ways the older Whitefield is one I like a little bit better than the early Whitefield he said goodbye to his twenties a wiser and more chastened man but for better or worse and I think for better these dialectical tensions action and contemplation self-surrender self-exertion maximal fellowship minimizing church order would mark the evangelical movement for years to come thank you applause applause applause applause applause applause ut yun wall iun excellent thank you