

# Revival Stories: George Whitefield

by E.A. Johnston

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*E.A. Johnston's sermon on George Whitefield explores the profound impact of revival on individuals and communities, emphasizing the need for discernment and prayer for spiritual awakening today.*

**Duration:** 23:25

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 14:6, 1 Corinthians 2:4, 2 Corinthians 13:5

**Topics:** "Biography"

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## Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker describes a momentous occasion in the town of Exeter where thousands of people gathered to hear George Whitfield preach. The speaker vividly recounts the chaotic scene as people rushed to the meeting house, with everyone and everything seemingly struggling for life. Whitfield's appearance was described as angelic, and his preaching had a profound impact on the speaker, who felt a 'heart wound' upon hearing him. Despite his weakened condition, Whitfield fervently prayed to continue preaching and spreading God's truth. The sermon transcript concludes with a reference to Whitfield's chosen text from 2 Corinthians 13:5, emphasizing the importance of examining oneself to ensure faith in Christ.

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## Transcript

There is a story about Andrew Bonar, the gifted Scottish pastor. He came to America to preach for his friend D.L. Moody, and while in New England, he visited the town of Northampton, Massachusetts, where God had come in revival under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield during the Great Awakening. Andrew Bonar walked to the town cemetery on Bridge Street, where the remains of David Brainerd lay beneath a marble slab.

Standing at Brainerd's grave and contemplating at how God had moved in that town in former days, in that mighty revival, Bonar said in his diary about his visit that, My heart was stirred within me. The study of historical revivals of religion is vitally necessary for believers today. If we desire to see God move in revival as he has done in former times, even the reading of true accounts of revival can ignite passionate prayer in us to pray that God will move again in our day, in the day of his power.

I have been a student of revival for several decades and have written six books on that subject. My Ph.D. dissertation was on the revival of religion under John Wesley and George Whitefield in Great Britain, and through the years I have prayed with pastors for revival, taken groups of men in discipleship through intense studies of historical revivals, and have made it a habitual practice to cry out daily to God to send

revival in our day. I weep over the lack of God's presence in our midst and my heart is broken over the sleepy ministers who do not recognize the dangers of our day and the short window in which to call upon God to once again do what he has done in former times in reviving religion and outpouring spiritual awakening upon our land.

My capsule definition of revival is this. Revival is the felt reality of the awful presence of the Almighty where the awful solemnity of a holy God is so manifest that you cannot fight it but bend beneath his overpowering presence. A true move of grace breaks up all false foundations, makes hypocrisy run for the doors, turns lives upside down and inside out, and transforms homes and communities in a remarkable and permanent way.

To see God show up in revival is to be like the prophet Isaiah. You are undone. You realize you are a man of unclean lips.

To be in the presence of a holy God like that is a terrible thing. It startles sinners and unnerved saints because you recognize how far away from God you really have been and you feel ashamed for your lack. Revival bends you.

Revival breaks you. Revival strips you. But joyfully, revival renews the believer and regenerates the lost sinner.

During times of revival, great numbers of individuals are brought out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and life. More good is accomplished in one month of an outpouring of grace and the salvation of the lost than years of steady evangelism. It is a wonder to behold God's dealing with men as they people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power.

In seasons of refreshing, as the plentiful effusions of grace fall upon mankind, many are born again, all to the glory of God. When the revival ends, as they each finally do, much good remains and spiritual transformation is lasting in the life of the individual and New Testament vitality is once again restored to the church. Revived people labor earnestly daily to win souls and exude a Christ-like character from lives of holiness unto the Lord.

Communities which have seen a powerful outpouring of grace are completely transformed. Sin runs through the door and the wickedness of the community which once stood boldly defiant now shrinks in shame and retreats to the shadows. In a true outpouring of grace, it is not uncommon for the most infamous characters in a community to be gloriously saved, and their testimony brings others in like a flood.

At times, God will raise up a figurehead for the revival, like a Whitefield or a Duncan Campbell or an Evan Roberts. Other times, God will delight in using the nobodies to accomplish His purposes in the salvation of men. But either way, when God shows up in revival, secular employments become unimportant and eternity becomes a primary subject of conversation on the street corner and in the place of business.

When God appears in revival, all man can say is this, this is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes. One must study historical revival to avoid pitfalls that others have fallen into during times of refreshing, and one must be able to recognize false fire and opposition from the evil one who will violently oppose any true work of grace.

Therefore, it is vitally important to be well familiar with how God has moved in former times and to be able to recognize when the hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself, for then shall the Lord go out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines. We must be familiar with the ways and acts of the Almighty as demonstrated in Psalm 103, so that we won't find ourselves on the wrong side of the revival when it comes, and fight against it like other men have done in former times. In George Whitfield's day, his fiercest opponents were men in the ministry like George Lavington of England and Alexander Gordon of Charleston, South Carolina.

These men became enemies of the revival and greatly hindered the work of grace in their day. Therefore, we must be careful not to do the same. Even friends revival can become deceived and do great harm to the revival through their injurious actions.

James Davenport became a tragic figure of the great awakening because of his unchecked, outrageous behavior which harmed rather than helped the move of God at that time. There are many warnings to us today in the pages of historical revivals. If we will only take the time to study them and also friends, we must be able to recognize false fire and condemn it when it appears.

Much nonsense has been termed revival and it is nothing more than human emotion out of control and subject to the wiles of the devil. When people start barking like a dog and roaring like a lion and twitching like they have the heebie-jeebies, it is a big blinking sign that God has left the building and has left the people to their own wild devices. Although George Whitfield was labeled an enthusiast, he knew how to deal wisely with false fire when it appeared.

In one such instance, Whitfield had just finished preaching in a New England meeting house where the pastor was none other than Solomon Williams, the grandson of the famous Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, Massachusetts. It was Whitfield's last occasion to preach to that congregation and a large number of persons from outside the parish had assembled to hear the grand itinerant preach this last time. After the service, while Whitfield and Pastor Williams left the meeting house, a bedlam took place inside the church.

The two leaders were summoned back by a godly deacon. Whitfield stood at the head of the wild assembly, gaining the attention of the boisterous mob by violently stomping his foot on the wooden floor and shouting, what means all this tumult and disorder? The noisy crowd declared that they were so filled with the Holy Spirit, they could not contain their demonstrations of joy. To this, the saintly evangelist replied, my dear children, you were like little partridges just hatched from the egg.

You run about with eggshells covering your eyes and you cannot see and know where you are going. This order ceased and the people went quietly home. Oh friends, we must be wise like a Whitfield when God shows up in revival and be able to discern the true from the false.

We must carefully study men whom God has used in times of past revivals, for it is only from a study of how God has moved in former times can we apply that knowledge to our experiences today. I hope you enjoy the first of these series of revival stories as I begin on the life and ministry of George Whitfield. May it stir your hearts within you to do greater things for God and His glory.

The first story I'd like to share with you today is the account of the revival in 1740 in Middleton, Connecticut, under the preaching of George Whitfield. Whitfield had just come from the home and church of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts, and he was preaching his way down to New

Haven, Connecticut and Yale College. On the way, he passed through the river town of Middleton, Connecticut, and we are fortunate to have a first-hand account of that remarkable day.

This is taken from a historical document of a farmer by the name of Nathan Cole. I have stood on the hill town of Middleton, Connecticut, and looked down at the point on the river bank where Whitfield preached that day. I will now present this account of Whitfield entitled, The Day Whitfield Came to Middletown by Nathan Cole.

I will let him tell the revival story in his words as he recorded it in 1740. Listen to the excitement captured in his words. Now it pleased God to send Mr. Whitfield into this land and my hearing of his preaching at Philadelphia like one of the old apostles and many thousands flocking after him to hear the gospel in great numbers converted to Christ, I felt the Spirit of God drawing me by conviction.

I longed to see and hear him and wished he would come this way. I heard he was come to New York and the Jerseys and great multitudes flocking after him under great concern for their souls which brought on my concern more and more hoping soon to see him. But next I heard he was on Long Island and next at Boston and next at North Hampton and then one morning all of a sudden about eight or nine o'clock there came a messenger and said, Mr. Whitfield preached at Hartford and Wethersfield yesterday and is to preach at Middletown this morning at ten o'clock.

I was in my field at work. I dropped my tool that I had in my hand and ran home and ran through my house and bade my wife get ready quick to go and hear Mr. Whitfield preach at Middletown and ran to my pasture for my horse with all my might fearing I should be too late to hear him. I brought my horse home and soon mounted and took my wife up and went forward as fast as I thought the horse could bear and when my horse began to be out of breath I would get down and put my wife in the saddle and bid her ride as fast as she could and not stop or slack for me except I bade her and so I would run until I was almost out of breath and then mount my horse again and so I did several times to favor my horse.

We improved every moment to get along as if we were fleeing for our lives all the while fearing we should be too late to hear the sermon for we had 12 miles to ride double in little more than an hour. On high ground I saw before me a cloud or fog rising. I first thought it was from the great river but as I came nearer the road I heard a noise something like a low rumbling of horse's feet coming down the road and this cloud was a cloud of dust made by the running of horse's feet.

It arose some rods in the air over the tops of the hills and trees and when I came within about 20 rods of the road I could see men and horses slipping along in the cloud like shadows and when I came nearer it was like a steady stream of horses and their riders scarcely a horse more than its length behind another all of a lather and foam would sweat their breath rolling out of their nostrils every jump. Every horse seemed to go with all his might to carry his rider to hear news from heaven for the saving of souls. It made me tremble to see the sight how the world was in a struggle.

I found a vacancy between two horses to slip in mine and my wife said law our clothes would be all spoiled see how they look for they were so covered with dust they looked almost all of a color coats hats shirts and horse we went down with the stream but heard no man speak a word all the way three miles but everyone pressing forward in great haste and when we got down to the old meeting house there was a great multitude it was said to be three thousand or four thousand people assembled together there we got off from our horses and shook off the dust and the ministers were then coming to the meeting house I turned and looked towards the great river and saw ferry boats running swift forward and backward bringing

over loads of people the oars rode nimble and quick everything men horses and boats all seemed to be struggling for life the land and the banks over the river looked black with people and horses all along the 12 miles I saw no man at work in his field but all seemed to be gone when I saw Mr.

Whitfield come upon the scaffold he looked almost angelical a young slim slender youth before some thousands of people with a bold undaunted countenance in my hearing how God was with him everywhere as he came along it solemnized my mind and put me into a trembling fear before he began to preach for he looked as if he was clothed with authority from the great God and a sweet solemn solemnity sat upon his brow in my hearing him preach gave me a heart wound by God's blessing my old foundation was broken up and I saw that my righteousness would not save me I was born February 15th 1711 but born again October 1741 well friends that amazing account of George Whitfield was only a sample of one of the towns he preached in as he toured New England during the Great Awakening Whitfield also

preached to 20,000 hearers on Boston Common in a day where the entire population of the Boston area was just 60,000 he had an ear of a third of the population I will close with this anecdote about Whitfield the year was 1770 and the grand itinerant only had a few days left to live it was fall in the colonies and the weather was brisk in the New Hampshire that Whitfield and his riding companion Jonathan Parsons passed through on their way to New Berryport Massachusetts for Whitfield was to preach for his good friend Parsons at the Old South Church that Sunday but that sermon would never be heard for Whitfield gasped his last breath at Parsons home the next morning at 6 a.m. but this day as Whitfield traveled through the town of Exeter word got out quickly that the great Whitfield had

arrived and soon a crowd gathered on the main square the people numbered over 4,000 and they begged the worn-out Whitfield to preach for them he agreed two barrels were rolled to a spot so he could stand upon them above the crowd as he made his way to this little platform a minister observing Whitfield's weakened condition remarked to him sir you are more fit to go to bed than to preach to which Whitfield replied true sir but turning aside he clasped his hands together and looking heavenward said Lord Jesus I am weary in thy work but not of thy work if I have finished my course let me go and speak for thee once more in the fields seal thy truth and come home and die Whitfield stood up to preach and his text was taken from 2nd Corinthians 13 5 examine yourselves whether you be in the faith

prove your own selves know you not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you except you be reprobate Whitfield paused as the New England breeze rustled the tops of the trees minutes passed he commented to the crowd I will wait for the gracious assistance of God for he will I am certain assist me once more to speak in his name did you get that friends Whitfield knew there was nothing special about him but only the Christ who he represented Whitfield knew full well that only an anointed ministry from above can change and transform lives well he preached his heart out there in the fields of Exeter for two hours this was to be his last sermon on earth Jonathan Parsons stated that George Whitfield that day in the fields of Exeter looked right into heaven and viewing the beauty of the

Lord Jesus it made his countenance shine like the unclouded sun well I have visited the little town of Exeter and I have stood on that exact spot where Whitfield preached there was a stone marker which marks the place where Whitfield preached that memorable day well here now is the conclusion of this sermon taken from a bystander that day Whitfield cried out works works can a man get to heaven by works I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand I go I go to rest prepared my son has arisen and by the aid of heaven has given light to many it is now about to set no it is about to rise to the zenith of immortal glory I have outlived many on earth but they cannot outlive me in heaven oh thought

divine I shall soon be in a world where time age pain and sorrow are unknown my

body fails my spirit expands how willingly would I live forever to preach Christ but I die to be with him well friends this wraps up this edition of revival stories with the life of George Whitfield it is my prayer that the relating of his life and what God did through it will stir you to pray passionately for revival in our day

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