

The Life of George Whitefield: A Timeline

1714–1770

- 1714 December 16: Born at Gloucester, England, the youngest of six boys, to Thomas and Elizabeth Whitefield, at the family-owned tavern, the Bell Inn.
- 1716 Father, Thomas, died.
- 1722 Mother, Elizabeth, remarried—disastrously.
- 1726 Transferred to the parish school: St. Mary de Crypt, where he excelled in elocution and dramatic arts. He later dropped out for several years, to help run the family inn.
- 1728 His mother, Elizabeth, left her husband. An older brother took over the business.
- 1730 With a new religious interest, returned to school to complete his secondary studies, anticipating an opportunity to go to Oxford.
- 1732 Entered Pembroke College, Oxford, as a servitor (a work-study program).
- 1733 Joined the Wesleys' Holy Club and sought holiness through charitable works, self-discipline, and deprivation, to the point of endangering his health.
- 1735 Received an assurance of salvation by faith.
- 1736 Ordained as a deacon in the Anglican Church—despite his reservations that he was not ready or fit. Graduated from Oxford. Began a London-based preaching ministry. Led the Oxford Holy Club (the Methodists), while John and Charles Wesley traveled to Georgia.
- 1737 Sermons first published. Ministered in Hampshire and London, but preached in various cities, with a growing following.

- 1738 Visited America for the first time, intending to settle as a missionary. Spent three months in Georgia and returned to England to seek ordination and raise funds for an orphanage.
- 1739 Ordained as an Anglican priest. Because many clergymen now disallowed him—and to accommodate the crowds—he frequently preached outdoors, without pulpit or notes. Found favor with Lady Huntington, who supported his cause (and the Wesleys’) throughout her life.
- Sailed to America in August. Landed in Philadelphia, for an extended preaching tour of the Colonies that prompted what history has called the Great Awakening.
- 1740 Established Bethesda Orphan House outside Savannah, for which he raised funds as he traveled.
- Preached throughout New England. Stayed as a guest of Jonathan Edwards.
- Was invited as a guest of Benjamin Franklin, commencing a life-long friendship. Franklin published the first American volume of Whitefield’s works.
- 1741 Arrived back in England. Theological disagreements (Calvinism vs. Arminianism) prompted a painful breach between Whitefield and the Wesleys. Continued preaching ministry despite persecutions. Supporters built a “temporary” large shed at Moorfields, to protect him from inclement weather while preaching; this “Tabernacle” remained for more than a decade, on the edge of London.
- In Wales married Elizabeth James, a widow he met through (and whose affections belonged to) a fellow evangelist.
- 1742 Itinerated in England and traveled extensively in Scotland. Tensions started to ease between Whitefield and the Wesleys.
- 1743 Helped found, and then led, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Association.
- 1744 Death of his infant son. Providentially escaped a well-planned assassination attempt.

- Sailed to America. Arrived in New England in critically poor health. Ministered itinerantly in the Colonies until spring 1748.
- 1748 Traveled to Bermuda (for improved health), where he continued to preach for two months.
- Returned to Britain, where his friends were overjoyed to see him, as a magazine had reported his death in America. Overwhelmed by the debts of the Bethesda orphanage.
- Appointed as Lady Huntington's personal chaplain, lessening his financial strain and giving increased access to "the great ones."
- 1749 Stepped down as the formal leader of the Calvinistic Methodist societies, committing himself to itinerant evangelism rather than organizational management. This further eased the Whitefield-Wesley relationship.
- 1750 An earthquake strikes end-times terror in London.
- 1751–1752 After travels in Ireland, returned to Georgia, arriving in October, but stayed in the Colonies only six months, going to England before the oppressive summer.
- 1753 A new, brick Moorfields Tabernacle, accommodating four thousand, completed and dedicated. A second Tabernacle dedicated at Bristol.
- 1754 Made his fifth voyage to America. Received an honorary master of arts degree from the College of New Jersey (Princeton), being a supporter of its founding.
- 1755 Arrived in England early in the year, having left Georgia in ill health. Expressed concern for Britain and the Colonies, threatened by French forces (the French and Indian War).
- 1755–1763 Preached throughout the British Isles, and often in London, drawing large crowds, despite persecution. Increased hopes for starting a college in Georgia. Battled bad health.
- 1756 Supporters built and he dedicated the Tottenham Court Road Chapel in western London

- 1758 Opened an almshouse for “godly widows” in western London.
- 1759 Paid off the long-burdensome debts of Bethesda Orphan House.
- 1763–1765 Returned to the Colonies. Arrived in Virginia. Traveled north, into New England, then south to Georgia and returned to England from Philadelphia. Preached as much as his health allowed, to generally receptive crowds.
- 1765–1769 Based in London, but traveled also, with increased respect and less resistance.
- 1767 Gave up his campaign to establish a chartered College of Georgia, because of the crown’s demand that its president be an Anglican; Whitefield had wanted a broader foundation.
- 1768 Wife, Elizabeth, died. Preached her funeral sermon, using the text of Romans 8:28: “All things work together for good”

Presided at the opening of Trevecca college for preachers in Wales, founded by Lady Huntington.
- 1769 September 16. Preached his last sermon in London prior to voyage to America.
- 1770 Wintered in Georgia, then traveled north to Philadelphia, New York, and New England.
- 1770 Outdoors, in Exeter, New Hampshire, preached his last sermon, Saturday, September 29, weak and struggling with asthma.

September 30. Died of asthma at age 56, at Newburyport, Massachusetts, where he was buried in a crypt under the altar in the Old South Presbyterian Church.

John Wesley preached a funeral-memorial sermon in London, at Tottenham Court Road Chapel.