



Elijah
ZEAL



ZEAL DEFINED

1. Enthusiasm for a cause
2. Fervor
3. Passionate diligence



KEY VERSE

Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God.

1 Kings 18:36-37

Elijah

Zeal



LIFE SUMMARY

Elijah followed God with such zeal that he became one of the most influential figures throughout the entire Old and New Testaments. He was among the first of his day to perform miraculous displays of God, and he was God's chosen instrument to boldly confront the sin that was present in the people of Israel. Like many of us, Elijah had to face his own fear and endure the consequences of his own mistakes, but God strengthened him for the work he was called to do. Elijah's life speaks to us of how God can use our zeal to bring repentance and revival in the world.

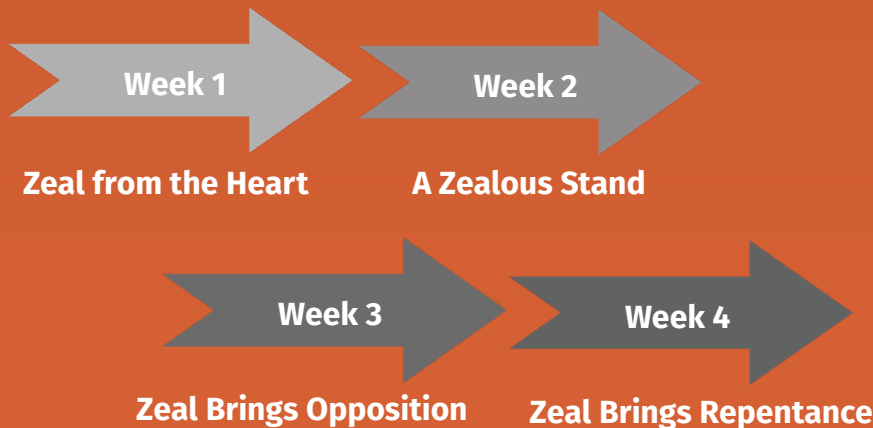


CHARACTER QUALITY

Zeal often looks like passionate preaching to people who may or may not want to hear it. Other times, zeal occurs in a more private setting when we are called to have faith in God's power to fulfill the ministry he has given us to do. Zealous followers of God are often confronted by opponents who try to use fear and intimidation to silence us, but we can allow these interactions to strengthen our zeal rather than stop it. God wants to use us in all of our imperfections to share our faith and our love for God in order to bring real change to the earth.



UNIT OVERVIEW



George Whitefield

Zeal



LIFE SUMMARY

George Whitefield (pronounced “whit-field”) was a student at Oxford in 1732, where he encountered God’s grace in a powerful way after realizing that he couldn’t earn his salvation. He decided to become a missionary, first to London and then to the American colonies. During the Great Awakening he called people to forsake empty religious traditions and turn back to a personal relationship with God. In order to make the gospel more accessible, he preached outside in fields and on country roads. His non-traditional approach was ill-received by many, and he faced opposition from clergy and governing authorities. However, his zeal for the Lord sustained him and allowed him to preach at least 18,000 times to an estimated 10 million hearers.



ZEAL IN THE LIFE OF WHITEFIELD

Elijah and Whitefield shared a holy discontent that led them to confront hard hearts. While Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, Whitefield’s zeal drove him to preach to an apathetic and hypocritical church. Both of these men faced heavy opposition to their ministries but they firmly upheld the word of the Lord with zeal.



UNIT OVERVIEW



NOTABLE QUOTE

“It is a poor sermon that gives no offense; that neither makes the hearer displeased with himself nor with the preacher.”



SERVED IN

America & England
1714 - 1770



Elijah

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KEY CONCEPT

Zeal starts with a personal encounter with God.



SCRIPTURE

- » **1 Kings 17:17-24** – Elijah raises the widow's son
- » **1 Kings 17:1-16** – Elijah stands before Ahab and God provides for him
- » **1 Kings 16:30-33** – King Ahab and Queen Jezebel's wickedness
- » **Deuteronomy 11:16-17** – God warned the Israelites about the drought



Background to Today's Lesson

King Ahab was one of the most wicked kings in all of Israel's history. God sent the prophet Elijah to call Ahab and the nation of Israel back into fellowship with him. Elijah bravely confronted Ahab and told him that there would be no rain in the land because of his sin. After this, Elijah traveled further north to a city called Zarephath, where a widow and her son cared for him. Today's story takes place during this three year period of waiting, and we will see how God used it to prepare Elijah for his ministry ahead.



Today's Lesson

Elijah stayed with the widow and her son for many days. Together, they watched God miraculously provide for them while the surrounding nations faced devastating food shortages, fear, and death (1 Kings 17:15-16). In the midst of these uncertain times, the widow's son became sick and died. Ravaged by grief, the widow blamed Elijah for her son's death. Elijah himself, moved with compassion for the son, took him to his room where he cried out to God to restore the child's life. God listened to Elijah's prayer, and the boy rose from the dead. Astounded by the miracle, the widow proclaimed, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and the word of the Lord is truth" (1 Kings 17:24).



Programming Notes

During the three and a half years of drought, God was teaching Elijah how to trust him and how to cry out to him for help. This encounter increased Elijah's confidence in God and helped him develop the skills he would need to face Ahab again. This week, help the kids identify how God may be preparing them in this season. Encourage them to boldly cry out to God for his provision for their needs. As we find God in the real and desperate moments of our lives, we will develop an unshakable trust in God and zeal for his name.

Focus your lesson on God's miraculous provision and Elijah's desperate prayer for the widow's son (1 Kings 17:8-16, 21). We can zealously cry out to God when we need his help. God loves to answer our prayers, which helps us trust him even more.



Conversion

Similar to Elijah's day, God's people in the 1700s had fallen away from true worship. Many congregations depended more on religious instruction from clergy than on guidance from a personal savior. While at Pembroke College, Whitefield joined a group led by the Wesley brothers. Whitefield did not yet know the Lord personally, but submitted his body to extreme fasting that eventually led to seven weeks of illness. Tormented by his imperfection, his spirit craved the presence of God. Remembering Christ's cry of thirst from the cross, Whitefield fell down on his bed and cried the same. Whitefield later said of that moment, "I found and felt in myself that I was delivered from the burden that had so heavily oppressed me! The spirit of mourning was taken from me, and I knew what it was truly to rejoice in God my Savior." This began a work of God that called thousands back to an intimate and personal faith.



For the Workers

Whitefield and Elijah understood that it is possible to be present in the community of faith but not personally experiencing the presence of God. The section of Piper's sermon titled "Whitefield Born Again" describes Whitefield's powerful experience of the Spirit. Share your own story of coming to Christ with your team this week.



Resources in Action

Help kids envision what attending church in Whitefield's day was like. Use the pictures to help them gain a glimpse of the old church buildings that were big and beautiful on the outside but empty and rigid on the inside. We want our church and our hearts to be filled with God's personal love and power.



*George
Whitefield*

ZEAL



KEY CONNECTION

As in the days of Elijah, the church of the 1700s had begun to grow apathetic, but Whitefield zealously called the church back into fellowship with God after experiencing God in a deeper way himself.



RESOURCES

[John Piper on Whitefield \(35:00\)](#)

[Whitefield Born Again \(pg. 12\)](#)

[Map of American Colonies](#)

[Map of Elijah's Travels](#)

[Old Churches from 1765](#)

[The Great Awakening](#)

[Pembroke College Oxford](#)



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KEY CONCEPT

Zealous followers will boldly take a stand for Christ.



SCRIPTURE

- » **1 Kings 18:1-2, 17-41** – Elijah goes back to Ahab and faces off with the false prophets
- » **1 Kings 17:1-7** – Elijah declares a drought the first time
- » **1 Kings 17:8-24** – Elijah stays with the widow and her son



Background to Today's Lesson

For three and a half years, no rain fell upon the earth as a result of Israel's sins. God preserved Elijah's life through the care of a desperate widow and her son. While staying with them, Elijah encountered God's power in a miraculous way. God had used that season of waiting to work in Elijah's heart and prepare him for the ministry ahead. As the famine grew more severe, God made it clear that it was time for Elijah to confront Ahab again.



Today's Lesson

This time, Elijah's interaction with King Ahab was a little more heated. King Ahab accused Elijah of bringing trouble on the nation, but Elijah boldly stated the truth, that it was King Ahab who had brought the real trouble (1 Kings 18:17-18). Elijah challenged the king to gather the people along with the 450 prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel for a challenge between the God of Israel and the god of the Canaanites. Although the prophets of Baal shouted and cried out to their god, nothing happened. Elijah boldly stood for God, and God responded by sending fire from heaven. In awe, the people fell to their knees in worship and declared once again that the Lord is God (1 Kings 18:39).



Programming Notes

Elijah's zeal for the Lord is evident throughout this story. We want the kids to identify what zeal looked like in Elijah's actions and help them identify ways that they can stand for God even when it seems like no one else is. We are usually willing to defend ourselves when we are misrepresented by others, but we often stay quiet when God's name is on the line. Elijah jeopardized his own comfort and safety in order to take an unpopular stand for God. In the end, Elijah's zeal brought restoration to an entire nation!

For the younger kids, show them that Elijah boldly told those who were lying about God to stop (1 Kings 18:21). Have some fun illustrating that when the other people prayed to their false gods, nothing happened. But when Elijah prayed to our God, he answered! Trusting God can feel scary and lonely sometimes, but it is always worth it.



Discipline and Ministry

George Whitefield maintained a grueling schedule. He was usually up by 4:00 AM to spend an hour or two with the Lord before beginning to preach around 6:00 AM. He preached to crowds with fervor, exhorting them to deal with God in a way that was personal and intimate. His style of preaching embodied his passion. He would often take on the role of biblical characters, displaying emotions and adding an experimental twist to his preaching. Regardless of the criticism of his radical preaching style and the rigor of his schedule, George Whitefield continued to share the gospel in a way that reached people's hearts.



For the Workers

Take some time to reflect on the portion of Piper's sermon "Not Acting in the Theatrical Sense." Whitefield may have had unusual methods of preaching, but many came to Christ as a result of his ministry. This week, think about the unbelievers in your life that need to be impacted by your boldness. How might God be calling you to share Christ in new ways?



Resources in Action

Use the resources this week to show the kids Whitefield's compelling pleas for repentance. Have some fun bringing Whitefield's acting style to life with them! Even though his methods were revolutionary for his day, Whitefield's style flowed from a sincere heart and many people accepted Christ as a result of his ministry.



*George
Whitefield*

ZEAL



KEY CONNECTION

Both Elijah and Whitefield used unconventional means to preach to others and call many to repentance.



RESOURCES

[John Piper on Whitefield \(45:30\)](#)

[Not Acting in the Theatrical Sense \(pg. 15\)](#)

[Map of American Colonies](#)

[Map of Elijah's Travels](#)

[Old Churches from 1765](#)

[The Great Awakening](#)



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KEY CONCEPT

Zealous followers are called to be bold and confident in response to opposition.



SCRIPTURE

- » **1 Kings 18:45-19:8** – Jezebel threatens to kill Elijah and Elijah flees
- » **2 Kings 2:11** – Elijah swept up in a whirlwind to heaven
- » **Mark 11:15-19** – Jesus cleanses the temple, the Pharisees plot to kill him
- » **Luke 22:41-44** – Four days later, Jesus is crucified



Background to Today's Lesson

In a mighty display of power, Elijah prayed that God would bring rain again in the land. God answered Elijah's prayer with fire from heaven. With this act, the prophets of Baal were proven to be false, and the people of Israel finally turned their hearts back to God (1 Kings 18:39). This was a massive victory for Elijah and for the people of God. Soon after this, however, Elijah was met with fierce opposition from Queen Jezebel. Today we will see how Elijah responded and compare it with Jesus' example.



Today's Lesson

As the rain began to fall in Israel, Queen Jezebel learned that Elijah had killed her prophets. Enraged, she threatened to take Elijah's life in return. Elijah became afraid and ran deep into the wilderness. He sat down and begged God to take his life, but instead God sent an angel to strengthen him (1 Kings 19:3-8). Thousands of years later, Jesus faced intense opposition from the leaders of his day. Jesus called for repentance as he flipped over tables in the temple (Mark 11:15-18). The Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus, but he did not run away in fear as Elijah had. Instead, Jesus responded with a deep trust in God (Luke 22:41-44). Just four days after cleansing the temple, he gave his life to fulfill his ministry.



Programming Notes

When we zealously take a stand for God, we are almost always met with opposition. Today we want to help the kids make connections between Elijah's and Jesus' ministries. Both of these men were zealous for God and called God's people to repent, but Jesus showed us how we can face opposition without fear. While Elijah didn't die at the hand of his oppressors, Jesus did (2 Kings 2:11)! No matter how much opposition we face and no matter how frightening God's call on our lives can be, God will meet us in our fear and strengthen us for the work he has called us to (1 Kings 19:7-8, Luke 22:43).

Focus your lesson on the help that God sent to Elijah (1 Kings 19:7-8) and to Jesus (Luke 22:43). When we stand up for God, this sometimes makes others upset. No matter how we feel, we can always trust that God will help us.



Rejection

When George Whitefield began preaching in England, other ministers welcomed him and church attendance quickly grew. However, after Whitefield had preached for a time in both England and the Colonies, other clergy members felt like their authority was being threatened and they kicked Whitefield out of the church. Despite rejection from the church, Whitefield preached the word of God powerfully to large audiences that would gather in farm fields and other open spaces. As the crowds continued to grow, so did the criticism and opposition. On several different occasions, Whitefield and his followers were brutally mobbed and beaten. Whitefield also received three letters with death threats. Even in the midst of these conflicts, he grew in boldness and continued preaching every day.



For the Workers

Whitefield once said, “the more I am opposed, the more joy I feel.” He counted it a privilege to experience suffering as he zealously preached the gospel. Consider the section of Piper’s sermon “Why Was He Acting?” and reflect on the times you have been called to press on in the midst of questioning. Did you maintain joy and zeal? How did your reaction reveal the true motives of your heart?



Resources in Action

In the face of hostility, Whitefield preached all the more. The “Challenges in Ministry” article highlights some things that others did to oppose his ministry. Help the kids see that we will face opposition when we stand up for God, but we can choose to respond like Jesus and George Whitefield did.



*George
Whitefield*
ZEAL



KEY CONNECTION

Thousands of years after Jesus, George Whitefield learned from his example and zealously continued to preach in the face of great opposition.



RESOURCES

[John Piper on Whitefield \(27:30\)](#)

[Why Was He Acting? \(pg. 10\)](#)

[Challenges in Ministry](#)

[Whitefield’s Use of Media](#)

[History of Printing](#)



Elijah

ZEAL



KEY CONCEPT

Zealous followers of God speak the truth boldly.



SCRIPTURE

- » **1 Kings 21:1-16** – Ahab wants a vineyard and Jezebel makes a plan
- » **1 Kings 21:17-29** – Elijah warns about the Lord's judgment, Ahab repents
- » **1 Kings 19:3** – Elijah had previously run away in fear
- » **Revelation 3:19-20** – God disciplines those he loves; be zealous and repent



Background to Today's Lesson

Last week we compared Elijah's zeal with Jesus' zeal. Both men confronted sin in the leaders of their day and faced opposition as a result of their ministry. Elijah responded to the opposition with fear but Jesus continued to trust God, even to death (Luke 22:43)! Though Elijah had run hundreds of miles away, God met him in the wilderness and commanded him to go back and face Ahab and Jezebel once again. Elijah reluctantly obeyed, and God used him to bring repentance to Ahab's life.



Today's Lesson

Today's lesson focuses on the story of Naboth's Vineyard, a portion of land that Ahab desperately wanted to possess. He asked Naboth if he could buy the vineyard, but Naboth declined because of the Lord's command forbidding it (1 Kings 21:3, Leviticus 25:23). Upset that he couldn't have the vineyard, Ahab went home angry and sullen. His wife, Queen Jezebel, saw that her husband was unhappy and she arranged to have Naboth killed. After his death, Ahab quickly claimed the vineyard as his own. But God saw the injustice of the situation and sent Elijah to tell Ahab and Jezebel that they would pay for the life of Naboth with their own lives. Upon hearing this news, King Ahab did something unexpected, he humbled himself before the Lord and repented.



Programming Notes

Elijah was willing to be used by God to speak hard truth to those who had sinned. Though Elijah had just run away from Ahab and Jezebel, God called him to go back to the very people he was afraid of and speak the words that God had given him. In the same way, our zeal for God will often lead us into some uncomfortable situations. Though we have no control over how others will respond to our words, we can choose to be faithful to what God has asked us to do. In this case, God used Elijah to bring about repentance in Ahab's life. God wants to use us for good in the lives of others too.

For the younger kids, focus on God's desire for us to tell others the truth. When we focus on God, we won't be afraid to tell others about how good he is. God wants to use us to help others know him more!



Preaching to Slaves

When George Whitefield came to Christ, he gained a zeal for the Lord that disregarded cultural norms and church traditions. Whitefield would eventually work to reach orphans and slaves, both of whom were generally overlooked by society. At the age of 25, Whitefield laid out a vision, raised funds, and superintended the creation of an orphan house in Savannah, Georgia. Whitefield provided ongoing support for the orphanage throughout his preaching ministry and the fruit of that work remains today. Whitefield also preached to slaves, affirming their value in the eyes of the Lord. This work led to some of the first African-American converts in the United States. Whitefield shared God's heart for the dejected, and his death was greatly mourned by the slaves and orphans he had preached to and defended.



For the Workers

Use the final sections of Piper's sermon, "Sowing the Seeds of Equality," as a reference this week. Think about the places you live and work and the expectations and unwritten rules you follow. Consider the ways that Christ is calling you to confront the norms of those who seem important and reach out to those around you who may be overlooked.



Resources in Action

Allow the details about the layout of the orphanage, the fundraising, and the class schedule in the Bethesda resources to inspire ideas for the program this week. Share with the kids how we have partnered in Myanmar to bring the hope of the gospel to some of the least-reached people in the world.



*George
Whitefield*
ZEAL



KEY CONNECTION

God called Elijah and George Whitefield to address injustice.



RESOURCES

[John Piper on Whitefield \(1:14:55\)](#)

[Sowing Seeds of Equality](#)
(pg. 23)

[History of Bethesda](#)

[Whitefield's Orphanage](#)

[Foundations of Bethesda](#)

[Myanmar Mission](#)