

# Lessons from the Life of Jonathan Edwards

October 5, 1703 – Jonathan Edwards born  
1716-1720 – Attends and earns degree at Yale.  
May/June 1721 – Converted to Christ

## **Lesson #1: Christianity is a spiritual and experiential faith, not just an intellectual religion.**

### **From Edwards’ “Personal Narrative.”**

“The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, I Tim. 1:17. ‘Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.’ As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before. Never any words of scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him forever!.

“From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ. and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in him....”

### **From his sermon, “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God....”:**

“This spiritual light primarily consists in a real sense and apprehension of the divine excellency of things revealed in the Word of God.” The born-again Christian doesn’t “merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart.”

## **Lesson #2: Intentionality and resolve are keys to a fruitful life.**

August 1722 - 1723 – Pastors a Presbyterian Church in New York, and writes his 70 Resolutions.

### **Some themes in Edwards’ Resolutions:**

#### 1. Live all of life to the Glory of God

Resolution 4: Resolved never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God; nor be, nor suffer it if I can avoid it.

#### 2. Dedicate yourself to searching the Scriptures

Resolution 28: Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

3. There is no progress in sanctification without whole-souled energetic involvement.

Resolution 6: Resolved to live with all my might while I do live

Resolution 56: Resolved, never to give over, not in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.

4. Examine yourself regularly.

Resolution 37: Resolved, to inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent, what sin I have committed, and wherein I have denied myself: also at the end of every week, month and year. December 22 and 26, 1722.

May 1724 – Edwards becomes a tutor at Yale

August 1726 – Becomes assistant pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts

July 28, 1727 – Marries Sarah Pierpont

February 11, 1729 – Solomon Stoddard dies, and Edwards becomes sole pastor in Northampton

### **Lesson #3: Our understanding of spiritual experiences must be shaped by the Bible.**

#### **What is revival (spiritual awakening)?**

Definition: Revival is a widespread renewal of God's people by the Holy Spirit, that results in the conversion of many outside the church.

#### **December 1734-35 – Revival in Northampton**

“This work of God, as it was carried on, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration the town; so that in the spring and summer following, in 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God. It never was so full of love, nor so full of joy, and yet as full of distress, as it was then. There were remarkable tokens of God's presence in almost every house. It was a time of joy in families on the account of salvation being brought unto them ... Our public assemblies were then beautiful; the congregation was alive in God's service, everyone earnestly intent on the public worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth; the assembly in general were, from time to time, in tears while the Word was preached.

“When once the Spirit of God began to be so wonderfully poured out in a general way through the town, people had soon done with their old quarrels, backbitings and intermeddling with other men's matters.... And the other effect was, that it put them on earnest application to the means of salvation – reading, prayer, meditation, the ordinances of God's house, and private conference,

their cry was ‘What shall we do to be saved?’ the place of resort was now altered; it was no longer the tavern, but the minister’s house, that was thronged far more than ever the tavern had wont to be.”

1737 – Edwards publishes “*A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton.*”

1739-1741 - George Whitefield comes to America and 1<sup>st</sup> Great Awakening

1741 – Publishes “Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God,” in which he presents biblical indicators that a spiritual movement is from God.

**Some things are no sign one way or the other:**

**A Work is of the Spirit of God, if it:**

1. Exalts the True Christ. (1 John 4:2-3)
  - a. “When the operation is such as to raise their esteem of that Jesus who was born of the Virgin, and was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem; and seems more to confirm and establish their minds in the truth of what the gospel declares to us of his being the Son of God, and the Saviour of men; is a sure sign that it is from the Spirit of God.”
2. Opposes Satan and sin (1 John 2:15)
3. Gives People Great Hunger and Love for the Scriptures (1 John 4:6)
4. Elevates Truth
5. Increases Love – “If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man, it is a sure sign that it is the Spirit of God.” (1 John 4:7-8)

**Lesson #4: Jesus is savior of the whole world, so we should be world Christians.**

1. Edwards mobilized prayer for missions.
  - a. 1747 – Edwards publishes *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth.*
2. Edwards published a missionary biography.
  - a. 1749 – *An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd.*
3. Edwards becomes a missionary.
  - a. August 8, 1751 – Edwards begins serving as a missionary to Native Americans in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

**Lesson #5: God Works All Things for Good for His People.**

June 22, 1750 – Edwards fired by his Northampton congregation.

August 8, 1751 – Edwards begins serving on western frontier of Massachusetts.

1751-1757 – Writes *The Freedom of the Will*,  
Writes *Original Sin*  
Writes *The End for Which God Created the World*  
Writes *The Nature of True Virtue*

**Lesson #6: We should live for eternity.**

February 16, 1758 – Edwards becomes president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton University)

February 23, 1758 – Edwards inoculated for smallpox.

March 22, 1758 – Edwards dies and goes to be with Jesus.

17 – “Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.”

“We ought not to be content with this world, or so to set our hearts on any enjoyments we have here as to rest in them. No, we ought to seek a better happiness. If we are surrounded with many outward enjoyments and things are comfortable to us; if we are settled in families and have those friends and relatives that are very desirable; if we have companions whose society is delightful to us; if we have children that are pleasant and likely, and in whom we see many promising qualifications, and live by good neighbors, and have much of the respect of others, have a good name and are generally beloved where we are known, and have comfortable and pleasant accommodations: yet we ought not to take up our rest in these things. We should not be willing to have these things for our portion, but should seek happiness in another world... We should choose to leave ‘em all in God’s due time, that we might go to heaven, and there have the enjoyment of God.” (Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, volume 17, page 430).

**Recommended Reading:**

*The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, edited by Wilson H. Kimnach, et al. (Yale, 1999)

- The best place to start reading Edwards directly is to read his sermons.

Douglas A. Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word* (IVP, 2009)

Stephen J. Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (P&R, 2001)

- Both of these are excellent introductory biographies to Edwards.

George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* – for the ambitious reader.