

What makes Jonathan Edwards worthy of study?

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# Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield

*Historical Theology*

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What impact did Jonathan Edwards have on America and Christianity?

What makes George Whitefield worthy of study?

What impact did George Whitefield have on England, the U.S. and Christianity?

## **Introduction:**

Psalms 73:18-19 Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin

How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!

[Edwards]: It implies, that they were always exposed to sudden unexpected destruction. As he that walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall, he cannot foresee one moment whether he shall stand or fall the next; and when he does fall, he falls at once without warning.

Acts 26:28 — “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

[Whitefield]: The chapter, out of which the text is taken, contains an admirable account which the great St. Paul gave of his wonderful conversion from Judaism to Christianity, when he was called to make his defense before Festus a Gentile governor, and king Agrippa. Our blessed Lord had long since foretold, that when the Son of man should be lifted up, “his disciples should be brought before kings and rulers, for his name’s sake, for a testimony unto them.” And very good was the design of infinite wisdom in thus ordaining it; for Christianity being, from the beginning, a doctrine of the Cross, the princes and rulers of the earth thought themselves too high to be instructed by such mean teachers, or too happy to be disturbed by such unwelcome truths; and therefore would have always continued strangers to Jesus Christ, and him crucified, had not the apostles, by being arraigned before them, gained opportunities of preaching to them “Jesus and the resurrection.” St. Paul knew full well that this was the main reason, why his blessed Master permitted his enemies at this time to arraign him at a public bar; and therefore, in compliance with the divine will, thinks it not sufficient, barely to make his defense, but endeavors at the same time to convert his judges.

## **I. Jonathan Edwards**

### **A. Early Life**

1. Born in 1703 (Plymouth Colony was 1620)
2. His father was a pastor (also a teacher and farmer)
3. The town of East Windsor, CT
4. Jonathan was one of eleven children (the only boy)—The children were all tall (6 feet or more)
5. Grandfather was pastor at the largest church in New England (Northampton)
6. Jonathan was super bright and leaned toward being a scientist
7. At age 11, had an article on spiders published in a distinctive London journal
8. Went to Yale college at the age of 13
9. Bachelor of Arts at age 17
10. Master of Arts at age 19

### **B. Early Spiritual Life and Service**

1. While studying for his Master’s degree his life was changed  
“Edwards at this time was already religious but despite ‘repeated resolutions’ it was not a religion that had changed his heart or humbled his natural pride. But

now, he says, 'I was brought to that new sense of things', to an 'inward, sweet delight in God and divine things . . . quite different from any thing I ever experienced before.' '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.'" (Banner of Truth, Jonathan Edwards)

2. He went to pastor in New York at the First Presbyterian Church
3. Then went back to Yale as a tutor for two years
4. In 1726, he went to join his grandfather (now age 83) at Northampton as a second pastor.

He did not preach very often, but did the research and helped write sermons for his grandfather.

#### C. Personal Life

1. On July 28, 1727, he married Sarah Pierrepont (she was 17, he was 23)
2. They lived on the edge of Northampton on ten acres (also received 40 acres as a gift)
3. They had 8 daughters and 3 sons in the first 22 years of marriage.
4. Sarah and Jonathan were very close. She became his "inseparable helper"

#### D. Senior Pastor

1. Jonathan became the main pastor when his grandfather died in 1729
2. He was invited to give the commencement sermon at the Princeton graduation in 1731. "Salvation is a work of God from start to finish. Let us exalt God alone and ascribe to Him all the glory of redemption."
3. Edwards was concerned that the church really become cold and lifeless
4. Then came the revival of 1735-35. Edwards wrote: 'A great and earnest concern about the great things of religion, and the eternal world, became universal in all parts of the town.'
5. Out of a town of about 1,000, Edwards believed 300 had come to "the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ."
6. But the revival broke down to a quarrel involving Edwards' cousins. Over "Half-Way Covenant"
7. Edwards' grandfather had set up the "Half-Way Covenant" with people in the church that did not have a conversion but wanted to have their children to have infant baptism. Eventually, some within the church wanted the half-way people to be able to take communion too.
8. Edwards opposed this and was voted out of the church, 200 to 30.
9. Left Northampton and became a missionary to Native Americans and pastor the church at Stockbridge.

#### E. The Great Awakening

1. A bigger revival occurred in 1740.
2. July 8, 1741. Midweek service in Enfield, CT. Edwards was not there to preach. The scheduled preacher was ill. Edwards preaches a sermon that he had preached before: Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God. "The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow is pointed directly at us. We are like spiders dangling over the pit of hell, saved from the flames for the time being by a mere thread." "Christ has flung the door of mercy wide open and stands in the door crying and calling with a loud voice to poor sinners."
3. Edwards was one of the traveling preachers and also wrote theology books to support the awakening.
4. He was, sometimes, joined by Whitefield in the preaching
5. He was often physically worn out by the preaching schedule but described this time as the happiest of his life and even said he was afraid that Sarah would die from sheer joy.

**F. Princeton**

1. A son-in-law was the President of Princeton, but suddenly died (Aaron Burr, Sr.)
2. The Princeton trustees voted to make Edwards the new president
3. Edwards did not want the job, but, reluctantly, left Stockbridge to take the position.
4. He arrived at Princeton in January of 1758
5. He died from the inoculation against smallpox in March of 1758.
6. His daughter at Princeton died just sixteen days later.
7. Jonathan's wife Sarah came to Princeton to care for the two orphaned grandchildren but also died in October 1758. (Both are buried at Princeton)

**G. Take-aways from Jonathan Edwards life:**

1. Nick Needham said of Edwards, "He was America's most original and influential theologian in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and beyond."
2. True scientific study should not lead to unbelief
3. Standing for truth in doctrine and practice is not always popular
4. God uses people of all types of personalities
5. Be ready to share the Gospel with other people groups
6. Edwards devotion to teaching and preaching did not lead him to neglect his wife and family.

**II. George Whitefield**

**A. Early Life**

1. Grandfather was a preacher
2. Parents owned and operated a tavern
3. Father died when George was just two
4. His mother tried to run the tavern by herself
5. Mother remarried but this ended up in divorce
6. George did not look destined to be a preacher
7. His self-evaluation: I was 'addicted to lying, filthy talking, and foolish jesting', and that I was a 'Sabbath-breaker, a theatre-goer, a card-player, and a romance reader'.  
All this before he reached the age of 15
8. His home town did provide a solid, free education
9. At age 15, he quit school and helped his mom at the tavern
10. He liked to go to watch plays and go to church—liked to imitate the preacher
11. Eventually, he went back to grammar school and did well enough to get into Oxford at age 18.

**B. College Days**

1. Meets the Wesley brothers and joins their group
2. He had become serious about God after listening to a preacher that he was planning to imitate. The Word pierced his heart.
3. But the early days at college, he was really working to obtain salvation.
4. He tried to deny himself many things to obtain God's favor. "I always chose the worst sort of food. I fasted twice a week. My apparel was mean. I thought it unbecoming a penitent to have his hair powdered. I wore woollen gloves, a patched gown, and dirty shoes; and though I was convinced that the kingdom of God did not consist in meat and drink, yet I resolutely persisted in these voluntary acts of self-denial, because I found in them great promotion of the spiritual life."

5. Then he received good counsel and read several books including Scougal's *Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Law's *Serious Call*, Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, Alleine's *Alarm to Unconverted Sinners*, and Matthew Henry's *Commentary*.
6. From this he realized he needed "a new birth", he could only obtain salvation by God's grace through faith and not working for it.
7. At age 22, he went through an ordination ceremony. When first approached about it, he felt unworthy and unready, but then decided it was a call from God to ministry.

**C. Years of Ministry**

1. He took a temporary position at the Tower Chapel in London
2. While in London, he preached at several churches on non-Sundays
3. His message and delivery of the Gospel was a novelty in London that people were taken by surprise and he became a sensation.
4. A few months later, he was on a ship sailing for the American colonies.
5. The Wesley brothers had pressed him to see to an orphanage in Georgia.
6. When he returned to England, he got a cold reception from most of the clergy. They did not like he was preaching the need for second birth, after-all the members of the Church of England had been baptized at birth.
7. Since the pulpits were closed to him, he began preaching in the open air. He began preaching to working class people who had never been to church. (especially coal miners)
8. The working-class people, who had never dreamed of going to church, showed up for the open-air messages and many embraced the gospel.
9. He traveled all over England, Scotland, and Wales preaching in open-air meetings.
10. Often, he would preach three times a day and most of the time at least 13 times per week.
11. He took 13 trips across the Atlantic to preach in the American colonies and to return to preach in England.
12. He would also share the Gospel to sailors and passengers on the ships. On one trip, three ships were traveling together. To hear Whitefield preach, the three ships would get as close together as safely possible.
13. On one of his trips to the American colonies, he traveled to Philadelphia and became friends with Ben Franklin.
14. He also met up with and preached with Jonathan Edwards when he traveled to New England.
15. He, also, called out the colonies on the cruelty of slavery.
16. Whitefield broke from the Wesleys on predestination v. free grace.
17. He died in America at the age of 56 having preached an estimated 30,000 sermons.

**D. Take-aways from George Whitefield's life**

1. From Banner of Truth, "He left no children, but he left a name far better than that of sons and daughters. Never perhaps was there a man of whom it could be so truly said that he spent and was spent for Christ than George Whitefield."
2. Like Whitefield focus on Christ and the Gospel so you won't be corrupted by popularity.
3. Like Whitefield don't give up on sharing the Gospel because of obstacles.
4. Standing for truth in doctrine and practice is not always popular and it may cost you friendships.
5. Be ready to share the Gospel to people that have been thrown away by society.

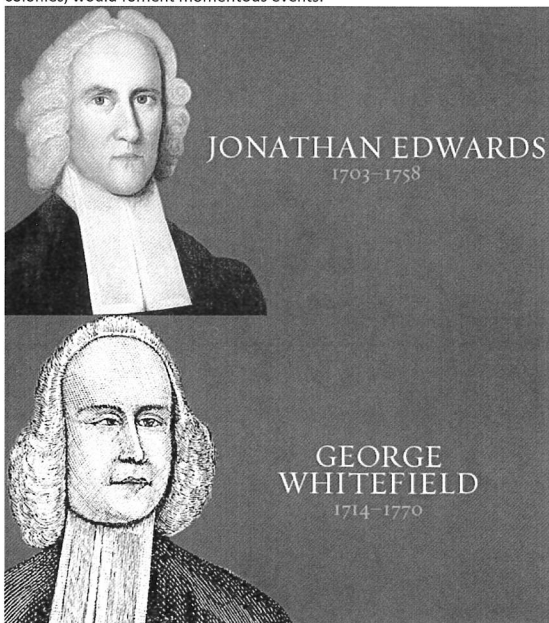
From Table Talk Magazine:

You could say awakening comes in two forms. There is *the awakening*, the raising of new life out of death. This is the call to poor sinners. But even those who have been awakened need awakenings. We

slumber in our spiritual laziness, and so we are summoned to wake up. This is the call to redeemed sinners. And it's not by human effort or by natural means. We are awakened only and always by a divine and supernatural light—only by God's grace and always for God's glory.

From Justo Gonzalez in *The Story of Christianity Vol II*

Finally, the Great Awakening had political consequences. This was the first movement that embraced all of the thirteen colonies that would eventually become the United States. Thanks to it, a sense of commonality began developing among the various colonies. At the same time, new ideas were circulating regarding human rights and the nature of government. Those ideas, combined with growing sense of commonality among the colonies, would foment momentous events.



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## George Whitefield: Evangelist of The Great Awakening

### Austin B. Tucker

George Whitefield, in October 1740, was preaching across the New England colonies, at Philadelphia, New York, Long Island, Boston, and Northampton. A young man longed to hear the great evangelist. Then suddenly one morning a messenger rode up on horseback to tell him that Mr. Whitefield preached at Hartford yesterday and was to preach at Middletown that morning at ten o'clock. The man dropped his hoe in the field and ran home as fast as he could. He ran into the house and told his wife, "Get ready quick to go and hear Mr. Whitefield at Middletown!" He ran to the pasture to get his horse. He later said, "I ran with all my might fearing I should be too late to hear him."

He mounted his horse and pulled his wife up behind him. They had twelve miles to ride in little more than one hour. They rode as fast as he thought the horse could bear. And when the horse was out of breath, he got down and put his wife in the saddle. He told her to ride as fast as she could and not stop or slow down for him. Then he ran alongside the horse until he was too out of breath to keep up. Then again mounting the horse with his wife they rode "as if fleeing for their lives" until time to spell the horse again.

When the couple came near the road that runs from Hartford to Middletown, they saw a cloud or a fog rising in the distance. He thought at first it was coming from the Connecticut River. As they came nearer, he heard a low rumbling thunder and soon realized it was the rumble of horses' hooves. The cloud was the dust they were raising.

A steady stream of horses appeared, said he, "slipping along in the cloud like shadows." As they came closer still, he saw them all lathered from a long run. There were so many horses and riders one behind the other that there was hardly a length between them for him to slip in his horse. Every mount seemed to go with all his might to carry his rider to hear the good news. As they joined the great cloud of dust and men riding as if in a race, he thought, "Our clothes will be all spoiled." Coats, hats, shirts and horses were all the same color of dust, but they rode on. They went down into a stream, but he heard no man complained. No one was working in the fields along the whole twelve mile journey. It seemed that everyone was drawn to hear the slender young preacher. They came to a meeting house where some three or four thousand were already gathered. He looked toward the river and saw row boats and ferry boats running back and forth bringing loads of people.

Soon the preacher came to his appointment. Our witness testified:

*It solemnized my mind and put me in a trembling fear. Before he began to preach he looked as if he was clothed with authority from the Great God. A sweet solemnity sat upon his brow. 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. 1*

On Edwards' preaching Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God  
Josh Moody (Crossway.org)

One tradition has it that Edwards was not even the designated or intended preacher that day. He was a stand-in. Such is the strange providence of God. A group of ministers entered the meeting house at Enfield where the sermon was to be preached. Teams of such ministers were traveling around New England as itinerants preaching revival sermons, capturing to the fullest extent possible the move of the Spirit of God that was sovereignly occurring. As one participant later recalled, when the ministers entered the church at Enfield, the gathered people were "thoughtless and vain." By comparison with other towns at the time, the people there were not even showing any particular interest—let alone great passion—regarding the things of God. In fact, they "hardly conducted themselves with common decency."<sup>3</sup> This was not an auspicious beginning. There was no 'atmosphere' of readiness and seriousness, nor even normal, polite attentiveness.

On this day in history, Jonathan Edwards started a sermon that he did not finish. Such was the impact of his preaching that the people listening shrieked and cried out, and the crying and weeping became so loud that Edwards was forced to discontinue the sermon. Instead, the pastors went down among the people and prayed with them in groups. Many came to a saving knowledge of Christ that day.