

The Family Life of Jonathan Edwards – Part 3

Review:

1. It began in Jonathan Edwards' *heart*.
2. Jonathan chose his wife carefully and well.
3. Their marriage was characterized by intense mutual affection and respect.
4. Family worship was central to family life.
5. Honor and obedience were secured from the children.

6. The home was run by an industrious wife

Proverbs 31:10-16 [10] Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. [11] The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. [12] She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. [13] She seeks wool and flax, And willingly works with her hands. [14] She is like the merchant ships, She brings her food from afar. [15] She also rises while it is yet night, And provides food for her household, And a portion for her maidservants. [16] She considers a field and buys it; From her profits she plants a vineyard.

Sarah Edwards planted a garden and had a hired man with clear instructions on how to take care of it. Jonathan was studying and writing for around 13 hours a day. There's an anecdote told that Jonathan would look to Sarah and say, "Isn't it about time the hay was cut," to which she would mildly reply, "It's already been in the barn for two weeks."

Samuel Hopkins, who lived with them for a time say: "It was a happy circumstance that he could trust everything to the care of Mrs. Edwards with entire safety and with undoubting confidence. She was a most judicious and faithful mistress of the family, habitually industrious, a sound economist, managing her household affairs with diligence and discretion. While she uniformly paid a becoming deference to her husband and treated him with entire respect, she spared no pains in conforming to his inclination and rendering everything in the family agreeable and pleasant. She accounted it her greatest glory and there wherein she could best serve God in her generation – to be the means of promoting his usefulness and happiness."

Why do we have an incredible deposit of sermons, theological papers and treatises, and Biblical commentaries from the pen of Jonathan Edwards? Answer: Sarah Edwards.

Hopkins wrote further: "At the same time, when she herself laboured under bodily disorders and pains, which was not unfrequently the case, instead of troubling those around her with her complaints, and wearing a sour or dejected countenance, as if out of humour with everybody, and everything around her, because she was disregarded and neglected; she was accustomed to bear up under them, not only with patience, but with cheerfulness and good humour. Devoted as Mr. Edwards was to study, and to the duties of his profession, it was necessary for him at all times, but especially in a season like this, of multiplied toils and anxieties, to be relieved from attention to all secular concerns; and it was a most happy circumstance, that he could trust everything of this nature to the care of Mrs. Edwards, with entire safety, and with undoubting confidence."

7. Hospitality was a trademark of the Edwards home

They had people in and out of their home all the time. **1 Peter 4:9-10** "[9] Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. [10] As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

During this time period (early 1700s), taverns were not a place you wanted to go, and so travelers would very often stay with local ministers in whatever town they found themselves in. I guess that makes some sense given that one of the Biblical qualifications for an elder or minister is: “hospitable” (1 Timothy 3:2 & Titus 1:8). As Edwards’ reputation grew (for being a great preacher / writer) and the charms of his many daughters became well known, the number of “guests” began to grow.

Dodds writes: “She was also peculiarly kind to strangers who came to her house. By her sweet and winning manners and ready conversation, she soon became acquainted with them, and brought them to feel acquainted with herself; and showed such concern for their comfort, and so kindly offered what she thought they needed, that while her friendly attentions discovered at once that she knew the feelings of a stranger, they also made their way directly to his heart, and gaining his confidence, led him immediately to feel as if he were at home, in the midst of near and affectionate friends.”

Sarah Edwards took her 11 children, with very different personalities, and involved them in their practice and vision for Christian hospitality and love. Their home was like a well-oiled machine that breathed the love of Jesus into all who stopped by. The Edwards knew how to live and work *together*.

8. The Family was made ready for adversity

Matthew 7:24-25 [24] "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: [25] and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

Proverbs 24:10 [10] *If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small.*

- It is when our families are tested that we find their strength. A bridge’s strength is only known when it is tested by someone walking across it.

David Brainerd – A young missionary who lived with the Edwards family for the last 19 weeks of his life – suffering with tuberculosis. He was nursed by Jerusha Edwards, Jonathan and Sarah’s daughter. Jerusha contracted the same sickness and died 4 months after David Brainerd. Jonathan wrote a biography of David Brainerd (only age 29 when he died) which influenced an entire generation of missionaries. Edwards wrote:

- “I would conclude my observations on the merciful circumstances of Mr. Brainerd's death without acknowledging with thankfulness the gracious dispensation of Providence to me and my family in so ordering that he ... should be cast hither to my house, in his last sickness, and should die here: So that we had opportunity for much acquaintance and conversation with him, and to show him kindness in such circumstances, and to see his dying behavior, to hear his dying speeches, to receive his dying counsels, and to have the benefit of his dying prayers.”
- **Edwards wrote this even though he must have known it probably cost him the life of his daughter to have Brainerd in his house with that terrible disease.**

Other adversities: Jonathan’s being dismissed from his 20+ year long pastorate, Jonathan being grossly mistreated and slandered as a minister, a 6 month long mental breakdown Sarah experienced at one point, some of the spouses of their 11 children died young – this happened to their daughter, Esther. When her husband died, she wrote to her parents:

“God has seemed sensibly near in such a supporting and comfortable manner that I think I have never experienced the like. Thus, dear madam [Esther’s way of referring to her mother, Sarah], I have given you some broken hints of the exercises of my mind. Oh dear madam, I doubt not but I have your and my honored father’s prayers daily for me. But give me leave to entreat you to request earnestly of the

Lord that I may never faint under this severe stroke. Oh I am afraid I shall conduct myself so as to bring dishonor on the religious which I profess.”

The Edwards home was built on a rock – so that when the winds, rain, and floods came, they were firmly attached to that rock and **did not waiver**. Let us all aim to produce this in ourselves and others as we disciple and are disciple. Fill your mind with good things, with godly things, with stories of courage and virtue.

John Todd was a man who was at the 1874 reunion mentioned in last week’s lesson. He was not an Edwards, but married one. Here is his testimony: “I married a wife. And it was years before I found out what made her so much my superior. But when I discovered that she belonged to the Edwards family, and that she had *their blood* in her veins, I gave up the contest and have admitted all that she demanded ever since.”

9. God gave them a lasting inheritance for their faithfulness

Psalm 127:3-5 [3] Behold, children *are* a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb *is* a reward. [4] Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So *are* the children of one’s youth. [5] Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

- Jonathan and Sarah saw this in their 11 children. They saw them as blessings – as arrows in their quiver. They knew it was a stewardship and a trust. They knew full well that God was filling their quiver with arrows so that they could send mighty warriors out into the world to be salt and light. And that is exactly what the Edwards family did.
- The Edwards’ grandson, Timothy Dwight, was invited to become the president of Yale. But his church voted to *refuse to let him leave*. Here was their reason: “That there hath been a constant, uninterrupted harmony and a good agreement with the people of this place.”
- Will our children be such a blessing to the world?
- In the 1874 reunion of the Edwards clan, Mrs. Mary Edwards Whiting, the only living grandchild of Jonathan and Sarah, 92 years old, was unable to attend but sent this message – “She wishes to bear her testimony at that meeting to God’s covenant faithfulness and to his covenant mercies to her and hers.”

10. Edwards’ theology is a thorough-going Calvinism with a profound sense of sin and an even profounder sense of grace. I apologize ahead of time for the lengthy quotes... but you’ve got to hear this man’s heart in his own words:

⇒ Jonathan Edwards, despite his remarkable intellectual and pastoral gifts, was a very humble man. And his humility was the byproduct of his closeness to Christ. Just listen to him in his own words from his diary:

Often, since I lived in this town, I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness; very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together; so that I have often been forced to shut myself up. I have had a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness, and the badness of my heart, than ever I had before my conversion. It has often appeared to me, that if God should mark iniquity against me, I should appear the very worst of all mankind; of all that have been, since the beginning of the world to this time; and that I should have by far the lowest place in hell. When others, that have come to talk with me about their soul concerns, have expressed the sense they have had of their own wickedness, by saying that it seemed to them, that they were as bad as the devil himself; I thought their expressions seemed exceeding faint and feeble, to represent my wickedness. My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, and swallowing up all thought and imagination; like an infinite deluge, or

mountain over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite. Very often, for these many years, these expressions are in my mind, and in my mouth, "Infinite upon infinite ... Infinite upon infinite!" When I look into my heart, and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And it appears to me, that were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fulness and glory of the great Jehovah, and the arm of his power and grace stretched forth in all the majesty of his power, and in all the glory of his sovereignty, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself; far beyond the sight of every thing, but the eye of sovereign grace, that can pierce even down to such a depth. And yet it seems to me, that my conviction of sin is exceeding small, and faint; it is enough to amaze me, that I have no more sense of my sin.

This is reminiscent of Martin Luther's and Aurelius Augustine's views of themselves. But notice next how much Edwards was thankful to God for His grace, and how it affected his understanding of God's sovereignty, and how he delighted in that great doctrine.

I have a much greater sense of my universal, exceeding dependence on God's grace and strength, and mere good pleasure, of late, than I used formerly to have; and have experienced more of an abhorrence of my own righteousness. The very thought of any joy arising in me, on any consideration of my own amiableness, performances, or experiences, or any goodness of heart or life, is nauseous and detestable to me. And yet I am greatly afflicted with a proud and selfish; righteous spirit, much more sensibly than I used to be formerly. I see that serpent rising and putting forth its head continually, every where, all around me.

Though it seems to me, that, in some respects, I was a far better Christian, for two or three years after my first conversion, than I am now; and lived in a more constant delight and pleasure; yet, of late years, I have had a more full and constant sense of the absolute sovereignty of God, and a delight in that sovereignty; and have had more of a sense of the glory of Christ, as a Mediator revealed in the gospel. On one Saturday night, in particular, I had such a discovery of the excellency of the gospel above all other doctrines, that I could not but say to myself, "This is my chosen light, my chosen doctrine;" and of Christ, "This is my chosen Prophet." It appeared sweet, beyond all expression, to follow Christ, and to be taught, and enlightened, and instructed by him; to learn of him, and live to him.

Iain Murray in: *Jonathan Edwards, a New Biography* wrote:

Edward's spiritual life was deeply affected by his belief that God owes salvation to no one and that he may justly without pardon from any. The doctrines of election and preterition (i.e. reprobation) teach that pardon is not a divine duty and, as W.G.T. Shedd writes, wherever this truth is rightly received it must have a practical effect: 'Without it, some of the indispensable characteristics of a genuine Christian experience are impossible. Hence it is that St. Paul continually employs it in producing true repentance for sin, deep humility before God, utter self-distrust, sole reliance on Christ's sacrifice, and a cheering hope and confidence of salvation, founded not on the sinner's ability and what God owes him, but on God's gracious and unobliged purpose and covenant. This is the doctrine which elicits from him the rapturous exclamation, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. For who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for ever Amen.' This is the doctrine which instructs the believer to ascribe all his holy acts, even the act of faith itself, to the unmerited and sovereign grace of his redeeming God.'

Do you recall when we preached through **Philip. 2:12-13?** “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; [13] for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Jonathan Edwards stood firmly upon the belief that the conversion of every sinner was a wholly *supernatural* thing. It was something God and God alone accomplished.

Iain Murray writes (p429) - commenting on Jonathan Edwards very important book: *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, wrote:

Man has a universal tendency to disregard God and to disobey his law. While the book is essentially theological, and possibly the foremost even written on the subject, Edwards’ intention is unmistakably pastoral. He was superficial views of the gravity of human corruption as the *primary cause of the neglect of commitment to a supernatural redemption*. ‘I look on the doctrine as of great importance’, he writes in the Preface. ‘For if the case be such indeed, that all mankind are by nature in a state of total ruin, then doubtless, the great salvation by Christ stands in direct relation to this ruin, as the remedy to the disease. The whole gospel must suppose it and all real belief... must be built upon it.

Jonathan Edwards derived his beliefs and theology from careful exegesis of the text of the Bible. The great Edwards scholar John Gerstner said that you could look at all of his writings as one giant, running commentary on the Bible.