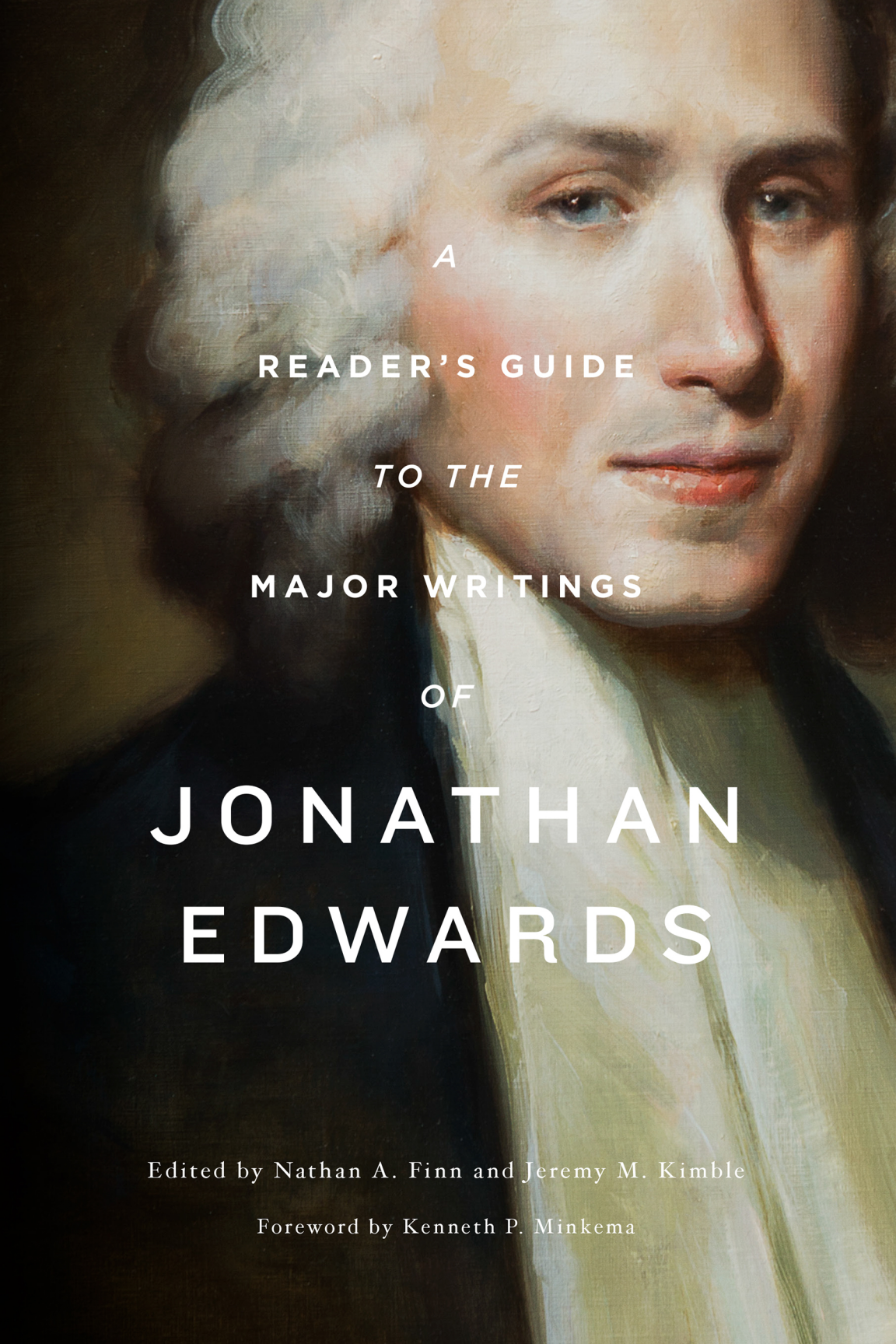

A READER'S GUIDE TO THE MAJOR WRITINGS OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

Edited by Nathan A. Finn and Jeremy M. Kimble

Foreword by Kenneth P. Minkema

"Christians wanting to dip into Edwards's daunting prose but seeking expert help in doing so will find it in this book. The tour guides are clear, edifying, and reliable. They don't discuss all of Edwards's massive body of work, but they treat most of his greatest hits—and do so in the service of what Edwards, quoting James, called 'true religion.'"

Douglas A. Sweeney, Distinguished Professor of Church History and the History of Christian Thought; Director, Jonathan Edwards Center, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"Kudos to Nathan Finn and Jeremy Kimble for bringing together a first-rate team of scholars to provide a marvelous introduction to the most important works from the pen of Jonathan Edwards. This readable and accessible guide provides a treasure for students to explore the most significant themes in the prolific writings of America's greatest Christian thinker. It is truly a joy to recommend this superb resource."

David S. Dockery, President, Trinity International University

"Academically rigorous and spiritually stirring, Finn and Kimble's book offers an outstanding introduction to the essential writings of Jonathan Edwards, the most important theologian in American history."

Thomas S. Kidd, Distinguished Professor of History, Baylor University; author, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America*

"This volume is a wonderful addition to the ever-increasing corpus of volumes devoted to Jonathan Edwards or about some aspect of his theology. What makes this book especially helpful is its focus on Edwards's major theological treatises by scholars who are admiring students of the great New England Puritan. That doesn't mean they write uncritically. These essays are an engaging and discerning interaction with Edwards's thought and will undoubtedly prove to be the standard for this sort of treatment in the years ahead. If you've been hesitant to read Edwards, or perhaps somewhat intimidated by the depth of his theological insights, this book is the perfect place for you to begin in your study of this remarkable pastor and author. Highly recommended!"

Sam Storms, Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

A Reader's Guide to the Major Writings of Jonathan Edwards

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Edited by Nathan A. Finn
and Jeremy M. Kimble

Foreword by Kenneth P. Minkema

CROSSWAY®
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Dedicated to John Piper

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Foreword

Jonathan Edwards believed that only the regenerate, those graced with the converting power of the Holy Spirit, were able to read the books of Scripture and of nature most deeply and most truly. Yet for him, regardless of any presumed spiritual chosenness one may or may not have, all were obliged as human beings created in the image of God to search the Bible, creation, and human experience continually for knowledge of "divine things." The "business," the ultimate end, of all humankind was religion and the knowledge of God.

This volume presents handy portraits, if you will, of some of Edwards's most important and influential reflections on how "perceiving beings" (that's you and all other human beings) answer their ultimate end. While there are summaries and reading guides for single writings by Edwards, this is the only book, to my knowledge, that takes on so many titles in one swoop. Edwards is one of the most published authors in early American history, so attempting to read all his publications (not to mention all the additional manuscript materials) simply takes time and effort—and in my humble opinion, it's time and effort well spent. But this digest provides the tools to get a quick handle on most of the major works printed during and after Edwards's lifetime. Each essay explores the respective composition's all-important historical context, gives a summary of the contents or textual analysis, and finishes with a contemporary application. The authors, your guides, are among the very best interpreters of Edwards, and from their expert commentary, you as a reader, thus better equipped for the journey, can then engage the Edwards text of your choice in an informed, grounded manner.

Edwards is read, and read profitably and profoundly, by a wide spectrum of readers, non-Christians as well as Christians across many traditions or from no traditions at all, who come from diverse areas around the globe, each differing in their views on the faith and on what "true" Christianity looks like. And this is as it should be. Edwards has something to offer—challenges and consolations, indictments and insights—to individuals in many stages of life and in many conditions, spiritual and physical. Each reader can take away something—or many things—from a serious encounter with Edwards that can educate, edify, even enrage. And that too is as it should be, for an index of any writer of import is how much he or she has to say to the generations and centuries following.

May you realize your ultimate end.

Kenneth P. Minkema
Jonathan Edwards Center
Yale University

Acknowledgments

The two of us have been talking about Jonathan Edwards almost since the day we first met in the spring of 2012. That semester, Nathan taught a doctoral seminar at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary on the history and theology of spiritual awakenings. Jeremy was a student in the class and wrote a research paper on Jonathan Edwards and church discipline, which was subsequently published in the journal *Themelios*. We kept in touch. A year later, while auditing a class on the theology of Jonathan Edwards taught by Gerry McDermott, Nathan thought of the idea for this book and immediately recruited Jeremy as coeditor. We discussed the project off and on for a couple of years, bounced the idea off some trusted friends, and finally pulled the trigger. We couldn't be more pleased with the lineup of contributors who agreed with us that this book was needed, including McDermott, whose outstanding class first inspired the idea. Thanks to each of you for trusting us with your excellent work.

We are grateful to our friends at Crossway for championing this project. We especially want to thank Justin Taylor, who was a sounding board as we developed the idea for this book, and Dane Ortlund, who agreed to contribute a chapter. We are also grateful for the administrations and our faculty colleagues in the School of Theology and Missions at Union University and the School of Biblical and Theological Studies at Cedarville University. We are blessed to work in Christ-centered universities that are supportive of faculty engaging in scholarship for the sake of the church. Our wives, Leah Finn and Rachel Kimble, are among our most precious gifts from the Lord. They've supported us throughout this project. We're also thankful that our children have

been patient with us as we've worked on a book that none of them are old enough to read yet. We pray that all the latter will be captivated by the same God-centered vision of the Christian life that characterized Jonathan Edwards. We want to thank Ken Minkema of the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University for graciously contributing a foreword and offering some helpful critical comments at the eleventh hour. We also want to thank Desiring God, Crossway, and *Reformed Journal* for granting us permission to reprint John Piper's essay "A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards" as an appendix to this book.

Speaking of Piper, we owe him a particular debt. At the time of writing these acknowledgments, we're both in our mid-thirties. Like so many of our generational peers, our first real introduction to Jonathan Edwards—not counting high school readings of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"—came through Piper's writings. Over the past generation, no single individual has done more than John Piper to introduce North American pastors, seminarians, and collegians to the life and thought of Jonathan Edwards. Our prayer is that this book will be a key resource that blesses students and pastors who, like us, first heard about Edwards from Piper or another well-known Christian leader and have decided to learn more about the famed pastor-theologian for themselves. Though neither of us knows him personally, it is our joy to dedicate this book to John Piper as a way to thank him for the influence he has had on our lives and ministries by putting Jonathan Edwards on our spiritual radars. Thank you, John. We trust we speak for thousands of others.

Nathan A. Finn and Jeremy M. Kimble
October 1, 2016

Volumes in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*

All sources abbreviated *WJE*, followed by volume and page numbers, are from *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Perry Miller, John E. Smith, and Harry S. Stout, 26 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957–2008). Individual volumes from *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* are as follows:

Vol. 1 ..... *Freedom of the Will*, edited by Paul Ramsey, 1957.
Vol. 2 ..... *Religious Affections*, edited by John E. Smith, 1959.
Vol. 3 ..... *Original Sin*, edited by Clyde A. Holbrook, 1970.
Vol. 4 ..... *The Great Awakening*, edited by C. C. Goen, 1972.
Vol. 5 ..... *Apocalyptic Writings*, edited by Stephen J. Stein, 1977.
Vol. 6 ..... *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, edited by Wallace E. Anderson, 1980.
Vol. 7 ..... *The Life of David Brainerd*, edited by Norman Pettit, 1985.
Vol. 8 ..... *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey, 1989.
Vol. 9 ..... *A History of the Work of Redemption*, edited by John F. Wilson, 1989.
Vol. 10 ..... *Sermons and Discourses, 1720–1723*, edited by Wilson H. Kimnach, 1992.
Vol. 11 ..... *Typological Writings*, edited by Wallace E. Anderson and Mason I. Lowance Jr., with David Watters, 1993.
Vol. 12 ..... *Ecclesiastical Writings*, edited by David D. Hall, 1994.

Vol. 13.....*The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, edited by Thomas A. Schafer, 1994.

Vol. 14.....*Sermons and Discourses, 1723–1729*, edited by Kenneth P. Minkema, 1997.

Vol. 15.....*Notes on Scripture*, edited by Stephen J. Stein, 1998.

Vol. 16.....*Letters and Personal Writings*, edited by George S. Claghorn, 1998.

Vol. 17.....*Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, edited by Mark Valeri, 1999.

Vol. 18.....*The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. 501–832*, edited by Ava Chamberlain, 2000.

Vol. 19.....*Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, edited by M. X. Lesser, 2001.

Vol. 20.....*The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. 833–1152*, edited by Amy Plantinga Pauw, 2002.

Vol. 21.....*Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, edited by Sang Hyun Lee, 2003.

Vol. 22.....*Sermons and Discourses, 1739–1742*, edited by Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch, with Kyle P. Farley, 2003.

Vol. 23.....*The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. 1153–1360*, edited by Douglas A. Sweeney, 2004.

Vol. 24.....*The "Blank Bible,"* edited by Stephen J. Stein, 2006.

Vol. 25.....*Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758*, edited by Wilson H. Kimnach, 2006.

Vol. 26.....*Catalogues of Books*, edited by Peter J. Thuesen, 2008.

Introduction

Nathan A. Finn and Jeremy M. Kimble

Jonathan Edwards is widely considered the most influential theologian in American history. This was not always the case. Before Perry Miller's groundbreaking intellectual biography of Edwards in 1949, the famed Puritan pastor was best remembered for his alleged hellfire revival preaching and, among more careful scholars, for being the progenitor of the so-called New England Theology, a tradition that lasted into the nineteenth century.[1] Things have certainly changed. Theologian Robert Jenson called Edwards "America's Theologian" in his 1988 study of Edwards's thought, while historian and Edwards biographer George Marsden dubbed him the "American Augustine" in an essay on interpreting Edwards's intellectual legacy.[2] Many pastors and other ministry leaders feel the same way, even as they sometimes express their sentiments in more or less creative ways.[3]

Miller's biography marked the beginning of a significant scholarly renaissance among historians, theologians, and philosophers interested in Edwards's life and thought. By far, the most important fruit of this renaissance thus far is the publication of the critical edition of *The*

1. Miller's biography has been republished in recent years. See Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (1949; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005). For an influential pre-1949 study of Edwards and the New England Theology, see Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907).

2. Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); George M. Marsden, "Jonathan Edwards, American Augustine," *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* 5, no. 6 (1999): 10–12.

3. For example, a much-discussed book about resurgent Calvinism among younger evangelicals includes on its cover a picture of a T-shirt that reads "Jonathan Edwards Is My Homeboy." See Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

Works of Jonathan Edwards, originally edited by Miller and published by Yale University Press in twenty-six hardcover volumes between 1957 and 2008. An additional forty-seven volumes are available in electronic form through the website of the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University (edwards.yale.edu). In addition to *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, scholars have written thousands of dissertations, theses, monographs, journal articles, book chapters, semischolarly studies, and other works related to Edwards.[4] Dozens of conferences have been convened, often resulting in published anthologies. Scholars and students have read hundreds of papers at the meetings of scholarly societies. Newer Edwards study centers have been established in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Japan, Poland, and South Africa, as well as a second American center at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

The renaissance in Edwards studies has coincided with a growing interest in Edwards among evangelicals, especially (though by no means exclusively) in North America and on the British Isles. In fact, many Edwards scholars are themselves evangelicals who personally resonate in various ways with Edwards's vision of the Christian life. On a more popular level, evangelicals have published numerous works about the New England theologian aimed at a more general readership. These include biographies, general summaries of his thought, and more narrow introductions to his views on topics such as revival and Calvinism. Reformed and evangelical publishing houses continue to offer a seemingly never-ending stream of uncritical reprints of Edwards's works. *A Reader's Guide to the Major Writings of Jonathan Edwards* exists to bridge the gap between the work of scholars and the interests of general readers, especially pastors and ministerial students.

For our purposes, Edwards's major writings include his lengthy treatises and his most influential works. Some of these works, such as his famed biography of David Brainerd and his earliest revival writings, were best sellers. Others, such as his important treatise on religious affections and his later writings on revival, have significantly influenced

4. For a comprehensive bibliography up-to-date through 2005, see M. X. Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729–2005* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

evangelical theology and spirituality. Still others, such as his ethical writings and some of his personal writings, appeared in print posthumously but have nevertheless proven to be works of enduring significance. Among Edwards's best-known writings, the only works we have chosen not to address in this book are his sermons, since others have ably treated them in a similar volume.[5] For our part, we discuss Edwards's sermons only insofar as they were later revised and incorporated into larger writings, which was often the case.

You may notice a fair amount of overlap and some recurring themes throughout the various chapters. This in part reflects Edwards's approach to writing. He was a capacious thinker who constantly built later writings on the foundations of earlier writings, developed certain ideas across his corpus, and teased out concepts from different angles in different volumes and sometimes even within a single work. In particular, readers will find frequent references to Calvinism, spiritual awakening, and religious affections, even in chapters that might not seem at first blush to relate to those concepts.

Each of our contributors is a scholar with expertise in Edwards's life and thought who is able to navigate the contours of scholarly discussions about Edwards and offer readers a helpful and informative introduction to one or more of his major writings. Each is also a convictional evangelical who resonates personally with Edwards's spiritual vision and wants to commend his writings to others so that they too might be encouraged, convicted, and challenged by this great pastor-theologian. These are trustworthy guides for those who wish to venture into Jonathan Edwards's major writings. In every chapter except the first, we will introduce the text(s) being considered, provide the historical background of the text(s), summarize and analyze the text(s), and apply the meaning of the text(s) to contemporary readers, with a particular focus on our fellow evangelicals.

In the first chapter, Dane Ortlund offers readers suggestions for how best to read Edwards's writings. He provides a clearly learned but intentionally edifying perspective, and he rightly encourages readers to move past this book and dive into Edwards's own works as soon

5. Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

as they can. In the second chapter, Nathan Finn examines Edwards's autobiographical spiritual writings, a selection that includes his "Resolutions," "Diary," and "Personal Narrative." These works are considered classics of evangelical spirituality. Next, Jeremy Kimble introduces Edwards's revival writings, which are arguably his best-known works among general readers. Edwards helped his generation to chronicle, defend, and interpret the phenomena of spiritual awakening in ways that continue to influence evangelicals and others in our time.

In chapter 4, Michael McClenahan addresses Edwards's treatise *Justification by Faith Alone*, a volume that is less familiar today but that at the time represented an important critique of the aberrant view of justification identified with the Arminianism of that era. Edwards's views on justification have sparked some debate and even controversy among scholars, so McClenahan's chapter is especially helpful to readers unaware of that discussion. Chapter 5, written by Gerald McDermott, focuses on Edwards's most famous treatise, *Religious Affections*. This work has become a classic among those interested in spirituality, religious psychology, and evangelical theology. One sign of its influence is that the other chapters in this book reference *Religious Affections* more than any other single work by Edwards.

In chapter 6, Rhys Bezzant offers readers a helpful introduction to the best-selling work in Edwards's corpus, *The Life of David Brainerd*. This volume is another spiritual classic that has inspired missionaries and other readers for generations, though the book has a more interesting history than many readers familiar with the work may realize. The seventh chapter is dedicated to Edwards's tome *Freedom of the Will*, which presents a philosophical defense of a tightly Augustinian understanding of free will. Joe Rigney provides a winsome overview of a volume that can be difficult to read and that has proven controversial since the day it was first published. In chapter 8, Robert Caldwell introduces Edwards's volume *Original Sin*. This work creatively and constructively defends the Calvinist understanding of human depravity in response to a contemporary challenge from a lapsed Calvinist theologian who had rejected this traditional doctrine.

In chapter 9, Sean Lucas discusses Edwards's posthumously published *A History of the Work of Redemption*, a sermon series Edwards

had originally hoped to rework into a theological treatise. This volume anticipated the sort of biblical theology that has become popular among many Reformed and evangelical biblical scholars and pastors since Edwards's time. Paul Helm addresses Edwards's ethical writings in the final chapter. He briefly revisits *Religious Affections* before focusing on the technical treatise *The Nature of True Virtue* and the popular sermon series *Charity and Its Fruits*, both of which were published after Edwards's death. The book closes with an appendix by John Piper wherein he recounts his personal encounter with the writings of Jonathan Edwards. Since Piper has inspired so many evangelicals to become interested in Edwards, this essay seems like a fitting way to conclude this book.

We trust that you will find *A Reader's Guide to the Major Writings of Jonathan Edwards* to be helpful. Because of its structure, the book can be read in its entirety, and we hope many readers will do just that. However, you might prefer to focus your attention on those chapters that either pique your curiosity or address works by Edwards that you are already interested in reading. If that is the case, we recommend reading Ortlund's essay along with the chapter or chapters that most interest you, saving the rest for later. However you choose to engage with this book, we encourage you to quickly find your way into Edwards's writings themselves. This collection of essays is an appetizer—hopefully a tasty one! But the main course is found in Edwards's works, so we hope you'll save most of your appetite for that rich feast. And we pray that you'll find it to be as spiritually nourishing as we have.

1

How to Read Jonathan Edwards

Dane C. Ortlund

To read Jonathan Edwards is to see God. Not because Jonathan Edwards looked like God but because he looked at God—steadily, accurately, insistently. And then he wrote down what he saw. The result is that to read Jonathan Edwards is to have the horizon of one's inner vision opened up to irresistible beauty and uproarious joy, the overflow of which created the universe. It is to be coached into becoming truly human: radiantly, deeply calm; delightin g, in this world of relentless pain and frothy joy alternatives, to receive and return love from Love himself. To read Jonathan Edwards is to see God.

This is why his writings have captured the Christian church since his death, especially in our generation. It is why Ezra Stiles, president of Yale from 1778 to 1795, was wonderfully wrong when he predicted of Edwards's writings that "when posterity occasionally comes across them in the rubbish of libraries, the rare characters who may read and be pleased with them will be looked upon as singular and whimsical."[1] And it is why, perhaps, you have picked up this book.

The purpose of this opening chapter to a book introducing you to

1. Ezra Stiles, *Literary Diary*, as quoted in Joseph A. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 3.

the major writings of Jonathan Edwards is to provide a general orientation in "how to read Jonathan Edwards." As I give guidance in how to read Edwards, though, I feel like what I suspect the baroque expert feels when told to guide a class of students in how to listen to Bach. The best way to listen to Bach is to put on the Brandenburg Concertos, turn up the volume, and open up your ears. The best way to learn how to read Jonathan Edwards is not to listen to someone else talk about him but to listen to *him*. Guidance from a baroque expert can help but only to quickly launch you into enjoying Bach. Guidance from this chapter and this book can help but only to quickly launch you into enjoying Jonathan Edwards. The book you're holding will be a sage tour guide for you, but don't read more about Edwards than you read of Edwards himself. I'll give some suggestions for where to begin later on. For now, I want to open this chapter by clarifying that there is no secret recipe to understanding and enjoying Jonathan Edwards. Just taste and see.

The first point to get clear in our minds, then, is not *how* to read Jonathan Edwards but *why*. And here is why. He turns our postcard views of Christ and the beauty of authentic Christian living into an experience of the real thing. What we had only smelled we now see. What we heard others call magnificent and considered overstatement we now see as magnificent and recognize as understatement. Jonathan Edwards gives us longings for God and for holiness that are more satisfying than even our best joys currently are. For some, he may bring us to realize that we were never converted at all. My own journey with Jonathan Edwards has walked me into a life of discipleship with Christ captured well by what Jewel the unicorn expresses as the new Narnia dawns: "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now."[2] The Christianity Edwards walked me into was the Christianity I had been longing for without knowing it. It is my true home. Reading Jonathan Edwards doesn't send you out into some foreign and bizarre spiritual experience. You come home. Your humanity is restored. Edwards saw who God is in all his resplendence and wrote it down with

2. C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, book 7 of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1956), 171.

such elegance and penetration that to read his writings is like moving from insanity toward sanity or from sickness toward health.

To be sure, Edwards had his quirks, and his distinct emphases, and his weaknesses, and so on. Every fallen theologian does—and every theologian is fallen. Only one man is worthy of all-embracing commitment (Heb. 12:2). But Jonathan Edwards has few peers across the landscape of church history so uniquely effective in making real to the heart what had only been true on paper in a Christian's life concerning the loveliness of Christ.

In the rest of this chapter we will reflect on some of the furniture that, when put in place, helps us understand and benefit from Jonathan Edwards in the ways I've been describing. After getting out before us the necessity of the new birth in order to fully benefit from Edwards's writings, we will consider his theological framework and his historical context. We will then reflect on where to begin reading Jonathan Edwards and what to expect.

The goal of this chapter is twofold: (1) more immediately, to prepare you for the chapters that will follow; and (2) more broadly, to launch you into a lifetime of reading Jonathan Edwards, so that you die one day a more radiant man or woman than you would otherwise have been.

The Great Prerequisite

The fundamental prerequisite to reading Jonathan Edwards is that you must be born again. Only the regenerate can read Edwards as life giving rather than threatening. How do you read Jonathan Edwards? First, be a Christian.[3]

Many theologians down through the history of the church could be read and pondered profitably by those who are not born again. A theologian such as Abraham Kuyper spoke thoughtfully to cultural and political issues of his day even while doing theology. A thinker such as Martin Luther had an evangelistic bent to many of his writings. In his

3. I would certainly not want to discourage non-Christians from reading Edwards. Some of his sermons were specifically evangelistic, after all. And anyone sincerely desiring to know more about who Christ is will find wise counsel from Edwards. My point is simply that those who are spiritually complacent or hard hearted or merely intellectually curious will have difficulty tracking with Edwards, since he was experiencing and writing of a reality that transcends such states of the heart.

theologizing Thomas Aquinas drew on widely accepted philosophical frameworks from the past, such as Aristotelian thought, so a wide variety of readers could track with him.

But Jonathan Edwards lived and saw and preached and penned a vision of God and of walking with him that will be foreign to someone who has not begun to taste the same thing. He exhaled the air of eternity. When you read Jonathan Edwards as an unbeliever, you find yourself bewildered, perhaps even amused. When you read him as a believer, you find yourself enjoying the scent of something high and deep and beautiful that is beyond you, to which you are irresistibly drawn but find yourself unable to contain or domesticate. Edwards spoke of God not mainly as a system to be dissected or even a Being to be pondered but a Lover to be loved and a Beauty to be enjoyed. This will not compute for those who have not tasted and seen that the Lord is good. And these taste buds are made alive in regeneration, or new birth.

What is regeneration, according to Edwards? It is "that great change that is wrought in man by the mighty power of God, at his conversion from sin to God: his being changed from a wicked to a holy man."[4] Edwards is famous for describing the fundamental change that is wrought in regeneration as the supernatural implanting of a new "sense of the heart," or inclination toward God and beauty and holiness.[5] Without this new "sense," reading Edwards will mainly mystify.

We could take this one step further. Not only must one be regenerate, but one must also be mature and maturing as a believer in order to fully benefit from reading Edwards. If a Christian has lapsed into a crippling habitual sin, Edwards cannot be absorbed aright. When a broken conscience comes into contact with the high summons of Jonathan Edwards, the guilt-ridden heart will withdraw and resist. Rarified air needs properly adjusted lungs. And the works of Edwards will feel deeply threatening to those laboring under cherished sin. To be sure, some of Edwards's writings—one thinks of his lengthy sermon series *Justification by Faith Alone*[6]—will be soothing balm to a troubled con-

4. *WJE* 17:186.
5. E.g., *WJE* 2:272–75.
6. *WJE* 19:143–242, treated in chap. 4 of this book.

science. But because Edwards is so unswerving and lofty in his vision of the Christian life, so faithfully apostolic in presenting the Christian life as given to us in the pages of the New Testament—namely, as supernatural—only a guileless heart will let in such piercing light.

We could put the point not only in moral but also in doctrinal terms. If a Christian has settled into a defective view of sanctification that sees growth in godliness entirely as a matter of enjoying one's justification (a key element of sanctification but not the whole of it), reading Jonathan Edwards will be threatening, not uplifting. We will feel crushed, not wooed. And if so, that is likely our fault, not his. I add the qualifier *likely* because I do suspect that Edwards was overly introspective and tended to encourage his people to look inside when at times he ought to have encouraged them to look outside.[7] But this is a minor chord, not a major one, to his writings.

At the same time, Edwards knew and loved the grace of God and comforted his people with the great mercy of God in Jesus Christ. It is impenitent strugglers, not penitent strugglers, who will feel threatened in reading Edwards. A sincere heart, whatever weaknesses beset it, will find green pastures and still waters. And such sincerity of heart comes only through new birth.

Why Edwards Wrote

Jonathan Edwards was Reverend Jonathan Edwards. He was a pastor by vocation; he was a pastor at heart. His work was soul work. And he wrote accordingly.

To be certain, many pastors then and now were animated by less noble motives—notoriety, influence, external pressure. And many over the centuries who were not vocational pastors have made remarkable contributions to people's souls. Most of us would testify that some of those who have most helped us spiritually were fellow laypeople, college professors, parents, and others. But for Edwards, the two realities did indeed converge beautifully—vocational pastoring and spiritual shepherding.

We must quickly add that just as Edwards's supreme goal was soul

7. I engage this matter at length in Dane C. Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God*, Theologians on the Christian Life (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 177–92.

work, his supreme tool in this work was the Bible. His lifelong labor was that of studying, meditating on, writing about, preaching, and in any other way honoring the Scripture. Without a Bible, Jonathan Edwards would have had nothing to say.[8] He was a miner of the Word of God.

Edwards himself acknowledged that he wasn't really suited for any other purpose; shepherding souls, through study of and preaching on and writing about the Bible, was all he was good at. At age forty-six, the day before he was kicked out of his church, he wrote to a friend,

> If I should be wholly cast out of the ministry, I should be in many respects in a poor case: I shall not be likely to be serviceable to my generation, in a business of a different nature. I am by nature very unfit for secular business; and especially am now unfit, after I have been so long in the work of the ministry.[9]

But it is not just because Edwards thought he would have made a poor banker or carpenter or farmer that we should read him as a pastor. It is his profound and searching understanding of the human heart, in both the depths to which it easily sinks in its God-forsaken depravity and in the heights to which it can rise in its God-enabled spirituality. All his writing and preaching aimed at the heart. He did not have two different strategies—on the one hand, writing sermons to laypeople to engage the heart, and on the other hand, writing treatises to intellectuals to engage the mind. Rather, his sermons were intellectually demanding while always aiming at the heart, because Edwards knew that even the farmers in his congregation could track with him if they listened well. And likewise, his treatises were finally aimed at nurturing the heart, no matter how intellectually demanding, because Edwards knew that even the most brilliant scholars of his day were sinners in need of saving.

Edwards wrote his densest theological treatise, *Freedom of the Will*, to deconstruct Arminianism. But why? Not just to win an argument but to combat trends in the church that lowered the ceiling on how

8. See Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), esp. 3–11.
9. *WJE* 16:284.

much God is glorified in salvation. He wrote a lengthy discourse on the doctrine of original sin to show just how deep and profound the human plight we have inherited from Adam is. One of his most difficult essays is *The Nature of True Virtue*, which Edwards wrote not so that Christians would merely analyze in a detached way what virtue consists of but so that they would truly and deeply taste it for themselves instead of obeying God out of self-love. To borrow his analogy, just as a chef cares ultimately not about the chemical composition of honey but about its taste,[10] so Edwards cared ultimately not for the form of his writings but for their effect. In a 1752 sermon, he said that detached, heartless theologizing is actually compatible with spiritual deadness; in fact, the demons themselves are the best theologians in the universe—if theology is valued according to doctrinal precision without reference to a heart warmed with love for God:

> The devil has, undoubtedly a great degree of speculative knowledge in divinity; having been, as it were, educated in the best divinity school in the universe, viz. the heaven of heavens. . . . The devil is orthodox in his faith; he believes the true scheme of doctrine; he is no Deist, Socinian, Arian, Pelagian, or Antinomian; the articles of his faith are all sound, and what he is thoroughly established in.[11]

We must therefore read Edwards with an eye to what animated him. He wrote as a pastor to care for souls and, *through* truth, to woo the heart. Even his dense theological treatises were undertaken to guard truth for the greater aim of the care of souls and the glory of God. PhD students may write dissertations on Edwards's thought to play an academic game. Edwards himself never concerned himself with such sport.

In short, Edwards was driven by a "publish or perish" mindset. Publish books, or sinners perish.

Theological Framework

There are two ways to get at Jonathan Edwards's theological framework. One approach is to come with preexisting theological categories and assign to him the labels and identity markers provided to us. The

10. *WJE* 2:206–9.
11. *WJE* 25:614, 617.

other approach is to understand Edwards from the inside and allow Edwards himself to create the categories by which his doctrinal outlook is understood.

The two approaches are equally valid and have complementary strengths. As for the first approach, Jonathan Edwards was a Christian Protestant Reformed evangelical Calvinistic Congregationalist. Think of these descriptors as concentric circles with Christian as the biggest circle and Congregationalist as the smallest. To be sure, Edwards was willing to articulate things in fresh and creative and even provocative ways in his efforts to follow the biblical text.[12] But he worked out of a mainstream, historic, orthodox, Reformation framework.

He was a *Christian* in that he believed God created the world as narrated in the Bible and sent his Son Jesus Christ to redeem humanity from sin. He was *Protestant* in that he worked as a grateful heir of the Reformation, standing on the five *solas* that held high the gratuity of salvation apart from human merit. He also rejected Roman Catholic teachings on the sacraments, Mary, and the pope. He was *Reformed* in that, as well as standing within the historic river of the Reformation that included various streams such as Lutheran or Baptist, Edwards stood specifically in the stream flowing from John Calvin that elevated the sovereignty of God in all things and embraced a particular view of the sacraments. He was *evangelical* in that the theological bull's-eye for him was the *evangel*, the gospel itself, that in his great love God sent his Son to rescue trusting sinners through his life, death, and resurrection.[13] Indeed, from one angle Edwards can be understood to be a father of modern evangelicalism.[14] He was *Calvinistic* in believing in a big God with big grace for big sinners—a big God in that every atom is

12. An example of this approach is Edwards's wrestling with the doctrine of justification and how to express its utter gratuity while joining it to the necessity of a transformed life, on which see most recently Josh Moody, ed., *Jonathan Edwards and Justification* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

13. British historian David Bebbington describes evangelicalism under a well-known quadrilateral of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism. David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). This is a description of evangelicalism that is largely phenomenological, however, assessing the movement based on perceived emphases from the outside; a term like *biblicism*, moreover, can be easily misunderstood and even pejorative.

14. See Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys*, vol. 1 of *A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements, and Ideas in the English-Speaking World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003).

controlled by him, big sinners in that all humans are not just sick and in need of healing but dead and in need of resurrection, and big grace in that all of salvation from first to last is always and only of divine grace. He was not a loyalist to Calvin, though, the way many today are to Edwards himself, remarking at one point in *Freedom of the Will* that he "should not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction's sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin."[15] Perhaps he would have felt most comfortable with how Martyn Lloyd-Jones would put it two centuries later in describing himself as "a Bible Calvinist not a system Calvinist."[16] Edwards was a *Congregationalist* in terms of church polity, believing in a church government that reflects the priesthood of all believers in a maximally transparent way.[17]

All this is true and provides a general frame of reference for beginning to understand Edwards and plot him among other well-known theologians down through church history. But especially for a thinker like Edwards, we cannot do justice to his theological framework until we probe more deeply into his thought and, under the second approach mentioned above, consider his theology from the inside.

When we do so—when we leave aside for the moment the preexisting theological categories and simply see what Edwards emphasizes and how he articulates his understanding of ultimate reality—we observe that he saw Christianity not essentially as a system of truth onto which one maps one's existence but as a fountain of love into which one is swept up. Both are true, but one is more pervasive and fundamental for Edwards. His theological framework could be summarized in three words: *triune beauty enjoyed*. The three-in-one God created galaxies light years away and the twigs under our feet and everything in between to reflect the resplendence of his love and to sweep undeserving sinners into that ocean of affection.

15. *WJE* 1:131. Edwards's younger friend Samuel Hopkins wrote that Edwards "took his religious Principles from the Bible, and not from any human System or Body of Divinity. Though his Principles were Calvinistic, yet he called no Man, Father." Quoted in *WJE* 10:207. On Edwards's greater dependence on the Puritans than on Calvin, see Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 24, 267n120.

16. Christopher Catherwood, *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: His Life and Relevance for the 21st Century* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 31.

17. Edwards did confess toward the end of his life, on the other side of many church quarrels, that he suspected that presbyterian church government (in which a group of selected elders govern the church) was the most biblical and wisest form of church leadership. *WJE* 16:355.

Edwards was insistently God centered. But what do we mean by that? We mean that God was at the center of Edwards's vision of reality not as the bull's-eye on a target (central but unrelated in any organic way) but as the sun is related to our solar system: not only central but also giving orbit and luminosity to everything else. As George Marsden puts it, "The key to Edwards' thought is that everything is related because everything is related to God."[18] Edwards did not look at created reality—birds, sunsets, consciences, intestines, spiders, sleep—and add God to the list as the most important. He looked first at God and then viewed all other things in relation to him. A rippling stream, a sweet friendship, and a warm fire exist not mainly for our joy but to tell us something of God's. Human beings and the earth on which we live are nothing more than the result of the uncontainable overflow of that joy.

But we must add something here if we are to really get inside Edwards's theological vision, and that is the notion of beauty, noting what for Edwards are close synonyms: holiness, love, harmony, excellence, loveliness, sweetness. Jonathan Edwards's theological framework was shot through with *elegance*. The very word *framework* is therefore perhaps misleading, connoting as it does a hard, bland structure. To get inside Edwards's theology is to step into a dance, not into a warehouse. We find ourselves in a sun-bathed meadow, not a sterile laboratory. What then is *beauty* in Edwards's theology? For most of us, the term is an aesthetic one. A painting or a sunrise or a person's face is *beautiful*. For Edwards, the term is a moral one.[19] Or more precisely, for Edwards morality itself has an aesthetic dimension. The moral is the aesthetic, for morality is not really about behavior but beauty. To grow in godliness is not simply to grow more obedient but to grow more lovely, more attractive, more exquisite, as we wade ever more deeply into the loveliness, attractiveness, and exquisiteness of God. Sanctification, for Edwards, could really be called beautification. The instantaneous, unreasoned attraction one feels toward a beautiful painting parallels the instantaneous, unreasoned attraction the regenerate feels toward God and holiness.

18. George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 460.

19. Reflected in the title of the book by Roland A. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards: An Essay in Aesthetics and Theological Ethics* (1968; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006).

In short, Jonathan Edwards's theology was thoroughly in keeping with historic Reformation orthodoxy. But to understand him, we must recognize his captivation with the radiant beauty of God—supremely displayed in Christ and graciously offered to sinners—as coloring and animating that Reformation orthodoxy through and through.

Historical Context

It would be easy to exaggerate the differences between Jonathan Edwards's historical context and ours. Both Edwards and readers of this book, for example, speak English—which cannot be said for Augustine (Latin), Calvin (French), Luther (German), Bavinck (Dutch), and many other great theologians across the ages. More fundamentally, as someone made in the image of God, fallen yet redeemed, who loved the Bible and wrote of what he saw there, Edwards shares many similarities with readers of this book that transcend any cultural or historical particularities. A thoughtful Christian from another century or another part of the world may be far more intelligible to us than our next-door neighbor.

Yet while one can get deep help from Edwards without paying much attention to his historical context, understanding that context will only enhance one's reading of Edwards. What was Jonathan Edwards's world like?

We could summarize his historical context by calling it post-Reformation, mid-Enlightenment, and pre-Revolution. The first of these refers to his theological context, the second to his intellectual context, and the third to his political context. A whole book could be devoted to any one of these. We will restrict ourselves to a few lines on each for the sake of space.

First, Edwards lived in a *post-Reformation* time in world history. The great break from Rome, initially begun as a reform movement but eventually forced to become its own stream of Christianity, preceded Edwards by two hundred years. Why does this matter? It matters because it reminds us that Edwards lived as a Protestant pastor who self-consciously held forth those articles of faith by which Protestants distinguished themselves from Catholicism—the five *solas*, for example, as mentioned above.[20] To

20. Richard Muller closes what he calls the "post-Reformation" era around 1725 (in the early years of Edwards's ministry) and articulates how Protestant theology moved in a somewhat differ-

be sure, Edwards was fresh in his theological reflection and on many points thought things through more deeply and creatively than many of the key Reformers. We should add that Edwards, like many of the Protestants of his day, viewed the Catholic Church as the Antichrist of Scripture, largely assuming rather than arguing for this. In this respect, he was clearly operating in a way that he would not have had he lived before the sixteenth century.

Yet the Reformation was more than a matter of doctrine. It was also a cultural moment, a period of compressed historical impact, the effects of which we continue to feel today. It was during this time, for example, that the world began to really feel the effects of the printing press invented by Gutenberg around 1440. A short tract dashed off by Martin Luther in an evening could be distributed with a speed and a scope far outstripping anything previously feasible. Ideas went farther and faster than ever before.

Second, Edwards's age was *mid-Enlightenment*. This was a time of intellectual and especially epistemological upheaval and transformation. The autonomy and normativity of human reason was beginning, among the intellectual elites, to displace God as the central arbiter of truth and falsehood. Edwards came onto the scene as the Enlightenment (for which it is difficult to assign exact dates) began to get widespread traction. We should be careful to avoid anachronism, however; Edwards would not have been familiar with the label Enlightenment, a term coined in the decades after Edwards's death.[21] Moreover, Edwards was far more absorbed with the biblical and theological reflections than the philosophical writings of his time,[22] even as he was clearly versed in the broader intellectual currents of the day.[23]

The point here is that readers of Edwards should be aware that the writers and thinkers of Edwards's day, and the generation or two

ent direction around that time. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). I use the label *post-Reformation* not as a technical distinction from *Reformation* but simply to indicate that Edwards stood broadly as an heir of the Reformation.

21. On the Enlightenment and caricatures of it to avoid with respect to Edwards, see Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 25–26.

22. As noted by Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 7.

23. As noted by Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 498–99.

that followed him, were questioning everything from the ground up. What is truth? Why trust the Bible? What do we really know about God? The Enlightenment manifested itself in different ways in nations leading the way in the world's intellectual climate such as Germany, France, and England. Yet while not uniform, Enlightenment thought was united, taking as axiomatic the superiority of reason over revelation, the human over the supposedly divine, that which comes from within over that which comes from the outside. We see the influence of Enlightenment thought, for example, in Edwards's interaction with John Taylor in *Original Sin* or in his volume *Freedom of the Will*. In treatises such as these, Edwards engaged structures of thought that enthroned reason to the dethroning of revelation.

Third, Edwards lived in the *pre-Revolution* period of American history. It would be fascinating to know, had he lived longer, how Edwards would have viewed the American struggle for independence from Britain that culminated in 1776—eighteen years after Edwards died, in 1758. Along these lines George Marsden has a nice, brief work on Edwards's life that sets it in contrast to that of Benjamin Franklin.[24] At any rate, Edwards understood himself to be a British citizen—a member of the global British empire, plagued in Edwards's time by the threat of an encroaching and often militant Catholicism (as represented in Britain's struggles with Catholic France and in Edwards's typical view, as a British Protestant, of the papacy as a sinister enemy). Though we rightly call Edwards the greatest *American* theologian, then, the fiercely independent and individualistic spirit of modern America would have felt quite foreign to him.

We should also bear in mind what it would have been like to stroll through Northampton on a normal day.[25] What would perhaps strike us most forcefully would be the *locality* of this community. As opposed to the remarkable globalization in which digital technology has immersed today's world, Northampton folk largely lived off of what they produced there on their own farms and by their own ironsmiths

24. George M. Marsden, *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

25. Doug Sweeney gives a nice window into life in Northampton in Edwards's day in *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word: A Model of Faith and Thought* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 23–30.

and carpenters and seamstresses. The town had been settled next to the Connecticut River so as to provide a steady water source. One should also remember that this was the edge of the frontier. Northampton, in western Massachusetts, was effectively the farthest west that the English settlers had yet spread in New England. Indian raids were a regular occurrence. Edwards himself had close family members who were part of the military force set to protect the people, and his own father served as a chaplain to the military for a time.[26]

Where to Begin

You must be born again to read and profit spiritually from Jonathan Edwards. You must understand that he was a pastor first. You should have a general knowledge of his doctrinal framework. And you should be aware of his historical context. Beyond these things, here is the key to reading Jonathan Edwards: read him. Open up one of his books and read one sentence, then another, then another. Just read him. I am even compelled to add, you can get enormous help from Edwards without most of this furniture in place. You do need to be born again; that one is nonnegotiable. You need eyes if you are to perceive the beauty of the sun. But the other issues discussed here, such as understanding his theological framework or historical context, do not *determine* but *enhance* how much help you will get from reading Jonathan Edwards.

Where then to begin? The other chapters in this book will give you sure-footed coaching in his major writings. Perhaps a few words of guidance will also help to get you going in the primary works.

Edwards was above all a pastor; the place to begin is his sermons. A nice starting point is *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, edited by three trustworthy Edwards experts, which provides the text of several of Edwards's most important and representative sermons.[27] A second option to begin to wade into Edwards's sermons is *Charity and Its Fruits*, a beautiful series of sermons on 1 Corinthians 13.[28] But if I had to identify the single sermon that captures Edwards's ministry

26. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 17.
27. Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).
28. Kyle Strobel, ed., *Charity and Its Fruits: Living in the Light of God's Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

more essentially than any other, I would direct you to an exposition of 1 John 4:16, which is a particularly Edwardsean verse in its emphases: "God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." The main point of the sermon is that "the spirit of the true saints is a spirit of divine love."[29] Edwards reflects beautifully on this verse and brings in many of the key themes and metaphors of his ministry as a whole—love, light, beauty, joy, eternity. Here's a taste:

> The very nature of God is love. If it should be enquired what God is, it might be answered that he is an infinite and incomprehensible fountain of love.[30]
>
> Light is not true that is not accompanied with love. Light without warmth is false light.[31]
>
> They who love God set their hearts on the secret of happiness which will never fail them, and they will be happy to all eternity in spite of death and hell.[32]
>
> God in Christ allows such little, poor creatures as you are to come to him, to love communion with him, and to maintain a communication of love with him. You may go to God and tell him how you love him and open your heart and he will accept of it. . . . He is come down from heaven and has taken upon him the human nature in purpose, that he might be near to you and might be, as it were, your companion.[33]

This, and not "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," represents the heart of Edwards's ministry.[34]

After reading several of his sermons, you could move to one of his revival writings, since perhaps Edwards's greatest and most lasting

29. Jonathan Edwards, "The Spirit of the True Saints Is a Spirit of Divine Love," in Michael D. McMullen, ed., *The Glory and Honor of God*, vol. 2 of *The Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (Nashville: Broadman, 2004), 297–344.
30. Edwards, "Spirit of the True Saints," 305.
31. Edwards, "Spirit of the True Saints," 312.
32. Edwards, "Spirit of the True Saints," 328.
33. Edwards, "Spirit of the True Saints," 339.
34. McClymond and McDermott note that the hellfire sermons tended to die out by the middle of Edwards's preaching ministry in the 1740s, increasingly replaced with preaching that emphasized the themes of this sermon on 1 John 4:16. McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 498–99.

contribution to the church is as a theologian of revival.[35] Three shorter revival writings are *A Faithful Narrative*, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, all of which are collected in a single volume in Edwards's *Works*.[36] A longer work—and Edwards's most famous treatise—is *Religious Affections*.[37] All of these pick up several of the same core themes crystallized in the sermon on 1 John 4 quoted above.

After working through one of Edwards's revival works, you would be poised to wade into deeper waters, such as his *History of the Work of Redemption*,[38] *Original Sin*,[39] or *The End for Which God Created the World*.[40] The last books to tackle would be his two most difficult writings, *The Nature of True Virtue*[41] and *Freedom of the Will*.[42]

What to Expect

We all come to Jonathan Edwards with a distinct set of life experiences and theological presuppositions and innate predilections. It would be artificial to expect Edwards to influence all of us in the same way.

But there are certain benefits that any open-minded reader can prayerfully expect. The overarching impact of reading Jonathan Edwards that a sincere, regenerate reader can expect is a calming reorientation to the eternal realities in which we live and move but which we tend to neglect for the sake of the immediate and the concrete. Reading Edwards feels like pulling the shades up on a bright spring morning to let the light stream in after waking from a nightmare. Or stepping into an air-conditioned home on a hot, humid day. Or walking through a tunnel into the open air of an enormous football stadium and trying to take in what you're looking at. It's simply a new world.

Jonathan Edwards is not for those who have their lives together and are simply ready for an intellectual challenge. His writings are for tired Christians who on the one hand have tasted the sweetness of know-

35. See chap. 3, by Jeremy Kimble, in this volume.
36. *WJE* 4.
37. *WJE* 2. See chap. 5, by Gerald McDermott.
38. *WJE* 9. See chap. 9, by Sean Lucas.
39. *WJE* 3. See chap. 8, by Robert Caldwell.
40. *WJE* 8:405–536.
41. *WJE* 8:539–627. See chap. 10, by Paul Helm.
42. *WJE* 1. See chap. 7, by Joe Rigney.

ing Christ but on the other hand find this sweetness constantly getting fizzled out through boredom, weakness, failure, loneliness, disappointment, or weariness. There is simply no one like Jonathan Edwards when it comes to reoxygenating us back into the sweetness, the blanketing shalom, the *sun*-like nature of walking through life with Christ as our beautiful and beauty-nurturing Friend. Jesus, says Edwards, "is infinitely our greatest Friend, standing in the most endearing relations of our Brother, Redeemer, Spiritual Head and Husband: whose grace and love expressed to us, transcends all other love and friendship, as much as heaven is higher than the earth."[43]

If you long to live out of a stable serenity and nobility beyond the reach of circumstance, weather, and finances, I hope you will continue to read this book—and that it will launch you into a lifetime of reading Jonathan Edwards, enjoying the calm radiance that such reading will nurture.[44]

43. *WJE* 3:199.
44. I am grateful to David Barshinger for his helpful interaction as I drafted this chapter.

Jonathan Edwards—widely considered one the most important theologians in American history—has influenced generation after generation with his transcendent vision of our great and glorious God. But reading his writings for the first time can be a daunting task.

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The Life of David Brainerd
Rhys Bezzant

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Joe Rigney

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Robert W. Caldwell III

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Sean Michael Lucas

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Paul Helm

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