

A JOURNEY  
TOWARD HEAVEN



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*A Daily Devotional from the  
Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*

Edited by  
Dustin W. Benge



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*A Journey toward Heaven*

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In heartfelt appreciation to

**JIMMY BURCHETT**

my friend,  
my brother,  
my co-laborer in the gospel.

“Iron sharpeneth iron” (Prov. 27:17).



## FOREWORD

By any measure of scriptural standards, Jonathan Edwards has to rank among the most important mentors of biblical piety in the history of Christianity. His writings that deal with this subject—some clearly intended for public reflection, like the classic *The Religious Affections*, which began as a series of sermons; others meant for more personal study, like the *Personal Narrative*, originally written for Aaron Burr Sr., his future son-in-law—contain tremendous wisdom for the living of the Christian life. Similar to John Calvin and the Frenchman's English Puritan heirs, the great motif of Edwards's life from his conversion in the early 1720s until his death in 1758 was how to live the moments and days that he was given to the glory of God. During the 1740s, in the wake of the Great Awakening, he also came to see that a significant part of his calling under God was to serve as a public guide and literary mentor to other Christian pilgrims imbued with the same passionate desire. Gifted with intellectual brilliance, deep dealings with the triune God, and living at a time of great spiritual advances, Edwards was ideally suited to serve as such a mentor. In fact, certain distinctive spiritual themes in his work warrant talking about Edwardsean spirituality as a distinct school of piety. And evangelical piety in the latter half of the “long” eighteenth century is very much one that is dominated by questions and matters that deeply interested Edwards. Moreover, unlike others in church history who, while adequate theological and spiritual guides in their own day have little to connect them to later generations, Edwards speaks across the centuries, as this book of Edwardsean daily readings well reveals.

Read day after day throughout the year, this group of selections from such a profound author of biblical spirituality will undoubtedly help many would-be Christian pilgrims. It is very much a labor of love. It is a privilege to know its editor, Dustin Benge, and of his desire to help Edwards speak to our day. May the living God fulfill all of his hopes for this work and that for the honor of Christ Jesus.

—Michael A. G. Haykin





## PREFACE

I was like many high school students, in that the first sermon I read by Jonathan Edwards was “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which was preached on July 8, 1741, in Enfield, Connecticut. I was enraptured and devastated by the vivid images Edwards painted of the horrors of the lost condition and ultimate destiny of man apart from salvation in Jesus Christ. It wasn’t until my college years that I purchased the two-volume works of Jonathan Edwards published by Banner of Truth. I began to work through these volumes, devouring every word, while beholding a beauty and loveliness of God that I had never seen before. I was particularly caught up in the profound way Edwards spoke through his sermons to his own congregation in Northampton as well as those beyond his own flock. Whether Edwards was writing in his *Miscellanies*, composing books and treatises for publication, or simply reflecting and meditating in a country field, it was all done that he might stand before his congregation each week and deliver God’s Word through the means of preaching. Reflecting on the preaching event, Edwards said in his 1742 work, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*,

I should think myself in the way of my duty, to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of the subject. I know it has long been fashionable to despise a very earnest and pathetic way of preaching; and they only have been valued as preachers, who have shown the greatest extent of learning, strength of reason, and correctness of method and language. But I humbly conceive it has been for want of understanding or duly considering human nature, that such preaching has been thought to have the greatest tendency to answer the ends of preaching; and the experience of the present and past ages abundantly confirms the same. Though, as I said before, clearness of distinction, illustration, and strength of reason, and a good method in the doctrinal handling of the truths of religion, is in many ways needful and profitable, and not to be neglected; yet an increase in speculative knowledge in divinity is not what is so much

needed by our people as something else. Men may abound in this sort of light and have no heat. How much has there been of this sort of knowledge, in the Christian world, in this age! Was there ever an age, wherein strength and penetration of reason, extent of learning, exactness of distinction, correctness of style, and clearness of expression, did so abound? And yet, was there ever an age, wherein there has been so little sense of the evil of sin, so little love to God, heavenly-mindedness, and holiness of life, among the professors of the true religion? Our people do not so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched; and they stand in the greatest need of that sort of preaching which has the greatest tendency to do this.<sup>1</sup>

Week after week, the clear purpose for which Edwards preached was that men might have “their hearts touched.” As far as he was concerned, it was through preaching that God raised the affections of sinners and brought them to know the truth of the gospel. It was also through preaching that God conforms a converted soul into the image of Christ. If we are to know the true heart of Jonathan Edwards, we must read and know his sermons.

For several years, I searched for a book of daily readings by Jonathan Edwards. Edwards himself never wrote or compiled such a book. I desired to find a book of daily readings that went beyond the pithy sayings and anecdotes of most modern-day devotional writings. I found a few books that looked promising but still lacked in depth and substance. Therefore, while in the midst of my seminary years at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, I set out to compile the type of Edwards daily devotional that I would like to read. I began combing through numerous miscellanies, treatises, and other works. However, I never seemed to capture the true essence of Edwards’s words that would speak personally to the heart; this led me to his sermons. Consequently, what you have before you is a project that began as a personal endeavor but concludes as an ardent desire to see the words of Edwards in the hands of a much wider audience. It is my most sincere hope and prayer that you will find these daily readings from the sermons of Jonathan Edwards challenging and edifying, touching your hearts for the glory of God as you desire to grow in holiness and conformity to Christ.

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1. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 1:391.

A grateful heart and much appreciation must be extended to Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin. His help, advice, and assistance in seeing this work through to publication has been invaluable. I would also like to thank my parents, Wayne and Vera Bengé, for their never-ending support, love, and prayers. It has been their training and encouragement that has directed me to seek Christ above all other satisfactions. Thanks, too, to all those dear friends who read over these words providing suggestions and an editing eye: Molli Hall, Heather Burchett, Cameron Debity, Kathy Barnett, and Jeff and Andrea Cavanaugh. Finally, to Jimmy Burchett, who, like Aaron and Hur—who held up the arms of Moses in the midst of battle (see Ex. 17:12)—continues to hold me up by his unceasing prayers, love, and kindness. It is to him that I devote this book. If I could speak for Jonathan Edwards I think he would say it would be his most sincere prayer, as well as mine, that as you read these pages that your hearts would be lifted to new heights of joy and affection for our triune God as you continue your journey toward heaven.

—Dustin W. Bengé



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## CHOSEN BY GOD

*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.*

—EPHESIANS 1:4-5

True Christians are chosen by God from the rest of the world. God does not utterly cast off the world of mankind. Though they are fallen and corrupted and there is a curse brought upon the world, yet God chooses a certain number for Himself. This election supposes that the persons chosen are found among others. The word “election” signifies a choosing out. The elect are favored by electing grace among the rest of mankind, with whom they are found mixed together as the tares and the wheat. They are found among them in the same sinfulness and in the same misery, and are alike partakers of original corruption. They are among them in being destitute of anything in them that is good, in enmity against God, in being in bondage to Satan, in condemnation to eternal destruction, and in being without righteousness, so that there is no distinction between them prior to election. No foreseen excellency in the elected is the motive that influences God to choose them. Election is only from His good pleasure. There is no distinction already existing in them that causes God to choose them rather than the rest. God does not choose men because they are excellent, but He makes them excellent because He has chosen them. It is not because God considers them as holy that He chooses them, but He chooses them that they might be holy.

## THE MERCY OF GOD

*Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt.*

— PSALM 123:3

It is God's manner to make men sensible of their misery and unworthiness before He appears in His mercy and love to them. The mercy of God, which He shows to a sinner when He brings him home to the Lord Jesus Christ, is the greatest and most wonderful exhibition of mercy and love of which men are ever the subjects. There are other things in which God greatly expresses His mercy and goodness to men, many temporal favors. The mercies that God bestowed upon His people of old: His advancing Joseph in Egypt, His deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt, His leading them through the Red Sea on dry land, His bringing them into Canaan, and driving out the heathen from before them, His delivering them from time to time from the hands of their enemies, were great mercies. But they were not equal to saving His people from the guilt and dominion of sin. As God would prepare men for the bestowment of those less mercies by making them sensible of their guilt and misery, so especially will He so do before He makes known to them this great love of His in Jesus Christ. When God designs to show mercy to sinners He first brings them to reflect upon themselves and consider and be sensible what they are and what condition they are in. This is God's manner of dealing with men when He gives them other great and remarkable mercies and manifestations of His favor. It is a confirmation that it is His method of proceeding with the souls of men, when about to reveal His mercy and love to them in Jesus Christ.

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## DEPENDENT UPON GOD

*For by grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*

— EPHESIANS 2:8

There is an absolute and universal dependence of the redeemed on God. The redeemed are in everything directly, immediately, and entirely dependent on God: they are dependent on Him for all, and are dependent on Him every way. The redeemed have all their good of Him. God is the great author of it. He is the first cause of it; and not only so, but He is the only proper cause. It is of God that we have our Redeemer. It is God that has provided a Savior for us. Jesus Christ is not only of God in His person, as He is the only begotten Son of God, but He is from God, as we are concerned in Him and in His office of Mediator. He is the gift of God to us: God chose and anointed Him, appointed Him His work, and sent Him into the world. As it is God that gives, so it is God that accepts the Savior. He gives the purchaser, and He affords the thing purchased. It is of God that Christ becomes ours, that we are brought to Him and are united to Him. It is of God that we receive faith to close with Him, that we may have an interest in Him: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). It is of God that we actually receive all the benefits that Christ has purchased. It is God that pardons and justifies and delivers from going down to hell; and into His favor the redeemed are received when they are justified. So it is God that delivers from the dominion of sin, cleanses us from our filthiness, and changes us from our deformity.

## SIN AGAINST GOD

*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*

— GENESIS 39:9

God is a being infinitely lovely, because He hath infinite excellency and beauty. To have infinite excellency and beauty is the same thing as to have infinite loveliness. He is a being of infinite greatness, majesty, and glory, and therefore He is infinitely honorable. He is infinitely exalted above the greatest potentates of the earth and the highest angels in heaven, and therefore He is infinitely more honorable than they. His authority over us is infinite, and the ground of His right to our obedience is infinitely strong, for He is infinitely worthy to be obeyed Himself, and we have an absolute, universal, and infinite dependence upon Him. So sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, must be a crime infinitely heinous, and so deserving of infinite punishment. Nothing is more agreeable to the commonsense of mankind than that sins committed against anyone must be proportionally heinous to the dignity of the being offended and abused. This was the aggravation of sin that made Joseph afraid of it in Genesis 39:9: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” This was the aggravation of David’s sin, in comparison with which he esteemed all others as nothing, because they were infinitely exceeded by it: “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned” (Ps. 51:4). The eternity of the punishment of ungodly men renders it infinite, and it renders it no more than infinite and therefore renders no more than proportional to the heinousness of what they are guilty of. If there be any evil or faultiness in sin against God, there is certainly infinite evil.



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## THE PERFECTION OF GOD

*Be still, and know that I am God.*

— PSALM 46:10

God is an absolutely and infinitely perfect being, and it is impossible that He should do amiss. As He is eternal and receives not His existence from any other, He cannot be limited in His being, or any attribute, to any certain determinate quantity. If anything has bounds fixed to it, there must be some cause or reason why those bounds are fixed just where they are. It will follow that every limited thing must have some cause; therefore, the being that has no cause must be unlimited. It is most evident by the works of God that His understanding and power are infinite. For He that hath made all things out of nothing and upholds and governs and manages all things every moment, in all ages, without growing weary, must be of infinite power. He must also be of infinite knowledge; for if He made all things and upholds and governs all things continually, it will follow that He knows and perfectly sees all things, great and small, in heaven and earth, continually at one view, which cannot be without infinite understanding. Being thus infinite in understanding and power, He must also be perfectly holy; for unholiness always argues some defect, some blindness. It is impossible that wickedness should consist with infinite light. God being infinite in power and knowledge, He must be self-sufficient and all-sufficient. Therefore it is impossible that He should be under any temptation to do anything amiss, for He can have no end in doing it. When any are tempted to do amiss, it is for selfish ends. But how can an all-sufficient Being, who wants nothing, be tempted to do evil for selfish ends? So God is essentially holy, and nothing is more impossible than that God should do amiss.

✠ From “The Sole Consideration, That God Is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty,” pp. 107–8

## CHRIST DEFEATED SATAN

*Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.* — COLOSSIANS 2:15

In the work of redemption, Christ has appeared above Satan. Though Satan never exalted himself so high as he did in procuring these sufferings of Christ; yet, Christ laid the foundation for the utter overthrow of his kingdom. He slew Satan, as it were, with his own weapon; the spiritual David cut off this Goliath's head with his own sword, and He triumphed over him in His cross: "Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). Then the wisdom of Christ appeared gloriously above the subtlety of Satan. Satan, that old serpent, used a great deal of subtlety to procure Christ's death. And doubtless, when he had accomplished it, he thought he had obtained a complete victory, being then ignorant of the contrivance of our redemption. But so did the wisdom of Christ order things that Satan's subtlety and malice should be made the very means of undermining the foundations of his kingdom. And so He wisely led him into the pit that he had dug. In this also Christ appeared gloriously above the guilt of men, for He offered a sacrifice that was sufficient to do away all the guilt of the whole world. Though the guilt of man was like the great mountains, whose heads are lifted up to the heavens, yet His dying love and His merits appeared as a mighty deluge that overflowed the highest mountains, or like a boundless ocean that swallows them up, or like an immense fountain of light that with the fullness and redundancy of its brightness swallows up men's greatest sins, as little [dust] motes are swallowed up and hidden in the disk of the sun. In this Christ appeared above all the corruption of man, in that hereby He purchased holiness for the chief of sinners.

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## LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

*He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.*

— PROVERBS 19:17

God tells us that He will look upon what is done in charity to our neighbors as done unto Him and what is denied unto them as denied unto Him: “He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the LORD” (Prov. 19:17). God has been pleased to make our needy neighbors His receivers. He in His infinite mercy has so interested Himself in their case that He looks upon what is given in charity to them as given to Himself; and when we deny them what their circumstances require of us, He looks upon it that we rob Him of His right. Christ teaches us that we are to look upon our fellow Christians in this case as Himself, and that our giving or withholding will be taken as if we so behaved ourselves toward Him. Christ says to the righteous on His right hand, who has supplied the wants of the needy, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40). In like manner He says to the wicked who did not show mercy to the poor, “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me” (Matt. 25:45). Now what stronger enforcement of this duty can be conceived? Is it possible that Jesus Christ looks upon our kind and bountiful, or unkind and uncharitable, treatment of our needy neighbors as such a treatment of Himself?

## ETERNAL PRAISE

*And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

— REVELATION 19:6

It may be a matter of great comfort that you are to spend your eternity with the saints in heaven where it is so much their work to praise God. The saints know what cause they have to praise God and oftentimes are ready to say they long to praise Him more and that they never can praise Him enough. This may be a consolation to you, that you will have a whole eternity in which to praise Him. They greatly desire to praise God better. This, therefore, may be your consolation, that in heaven your heart will be enlarged and you will be enabled to praise Him in an immensely more perfect and exalted manner than you can do in this world. You will not be troubled with such a dead, dull heart with so much coldness, so many clogs and burdens from sin, and from an earthly mind; with a wandering, unsteady heart; with so much darkness and so much hypocrisy. You will be one of that vast assembly that praise God so fervently that their voice is “as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders” (Rev. 19:6). You long to have others praise God, to have everyone praise Him. There will be enough to help you and join you in praising Him and those that are capable of doing it ten thousand times better than the saints on earth. Thousands and thousands of angels and glorified saints will be around you, all united to you in dearest love, all disposed to praise God, not only for themselves but for His mercy to you.

## HAPPINESS AND REST

*Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

—ISAIAH 55:3

Happiness and rest are what all men pursue. But the things of the world, wherein most men seek it, can never afford it; they are laboring and spending themselves in vain. But Christ invites you to come to Him and offers you this peace, which He gives His true followers, and that so much excels all that the world can afford (see Isa. 55:2–3). You that have hitherto spent your time in the pursuit of satisfaction in the profit or glory of the world or in the pleasures and vanities of youth have this day an offer of that excellent and everlasting peace and blessedness that Christ has purchased with the price of His own blood. As long as you continue to reject those offers and invitations of Christ and continue in a Christless condition, you never will enjoy any true peace or comfort but will be like the prodigal, who in vain endeavored to be satisfied with the husks that the swine did eat. The wrath of God will abide upon you, and misery will attend you wherever you go that you never will be able to escape. Christ gives peace to the most sinful and miserable that come to Him. He heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds. But it is impossible that they should have peace while they continue in their sins (see Isa. 57:19–21). There is no peace between God and them, for as they have the guilt of sin remaining in their souls and are under its dominion, so God's indignation continually burns against them, and therefore there is the reason why they travail in pain all their days.