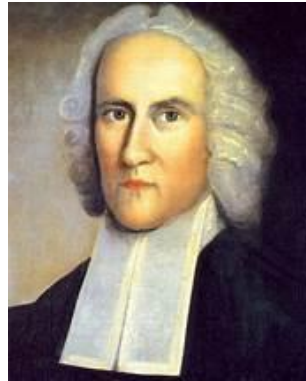


## Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

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The greatest American Congregationalist was actually a British citizen. Jonathan Edwards lived his entire life in the North American colonies. One of 11 children born to pastor Timothy Edwards of East Windsor, Connecticut, Edwards and his 10 sisters grew up under the faithful ministry of the Word and diligent training in the classics. At the age of 13, he entered Yale, graduating with a BA in 1720 and an MA in 1722. After a brief stint as pastor of a Presbyterian church in New York City he returned to Yale as tutor. He was then called to aid his aging grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, who had spent decades leading the faithful Congregational flock at Northampton, Massachusetts, then a small frontier town. Upon Stoddard's death in 1729, Edwards assumed full pastoral responsibilities at Northampton.

### Revival

This is the vital background for what we generally think about Edwards, for, in 1734, God sent revival to Northampton and the surrounding communities. At the centre of this great movement of God was the young man Edwards. Already noted as fine preacher by the clergy of Massachusetts, Edwards now became a student of revival. His **Faithful Narrative**, published in 1737 was more than a mere reporting of the surprising revival events, but it laid the groundwork for a diligent study of the means and methods of God. And yet this was just the beginning. In 1740, revival swept the colonies. In the autumn of that year, a visit by George Whitefield to New England, including Northampton and surrounding towns, further fanned the flame. By this time, Edwards was an apt student of the human soul and the process of conversion, having witnessed hundreds of men, women and children come under the influence of the Holy Spirit as he worked the Word into human hearts. Edwards' **Distinguishing Marks** (1741), **Some Thoughts Concerning Revival** (1743) and **Religious Affections** (1746) further defined and sharpened our understanding of the nature of conversion.

One might think that any church would be blessed to have as their pastor such an effective preacher and student of the scriptures. But in 1750 Edwards was dismissed from the Northampton ministry. Several issues arose that Edwards could have handled more pastorally. Yet, on one point, he clearly held biblical ground. He refused to see the Lord's Supper as means of conversion. This led him to restrict communion to the professed believers, a departure from his grandfather's position.

### Further Ministry

So, at the age of 47, with a growing family and no ministry, Edwards moved from the relative security and comfort of Northampton to the tiny settlement of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. There he served as an apostle to the Indians and minister to the small congregations of English speaking settlers. The seclusion of this work enabled him to produce the profound treatises, **Freedom of the Will** (1754) and **Original Sin** (1758).

In 1758, Edwards was called out of his seclusion to be the president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton). Soon after his arrival he was given a smallpox inoculation which led to his death on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1758. His family had not yet moved to be with him.

Edwards possessed one of the greatest minds America has ever seen. Such was the depth and power of his intellect that annually new books and articles on his work come into print. But we should be attracted to him for more than his intellect. He was supremely a man who loved and served the Lord Jesus Christ. His friends and even those who contended against him knew him as a godly man and respected both his scholarship and his piety. Amidst all the difficulties of ministry on the frontier he possessed a wonderful confidence in God's sovereignty and purpose for man. His writings, particularly his sermons, bring to us a great sense of calm and faith in a loving, righteous God who above all, is worthy of praise and service. This is the legacy of Edwards.

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