

# The Glory of God and the Reviving of Religion

by J.I. Packer

---

*Jonathan Edwards' theology provides a framework for understanding the importance of God's plan of grace, the role of divine supernatural light, and the significance of human events in relation to God's redemptive action.*

**Duration:** 1:15:02

**Scripture:** Psalm 85:1

**Topics:** "Gods Love", "Revival Movement"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of love and its manifestation in the early Christian community. He emphasizes that love is a commitment to meeting the needs of others and making them great. The speaker also highlights the importance of God's action in revealing Himself and the significance of His actions in understanding His word. He draws parallels between the Great Awakening and the present day, urging for a revival and a return to God's steadfast love and salvation.

---

## Transcript

I'm going to read some verses. Psalm 85, as I read the first four verses, think of the Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening in North America. Lord, you were favorable to your land.

You restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people. You covered all their sin.

You withdrew all your wrath. You turned from your hot anger. As I read the next three verses, please think of North America today.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. And please now think of Jonathan Edwards as I read two verses from Hebrews chapter 13.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

It is a privilege and a pleasure to bring a presentation, perhaps I should say a present, to Jonathan Edwards' 300th birthday party. The fact that we are a week late with the birthday perhaps should not worry us too much after 300 years. In so doing, I seek to celebrate his legacy in the way that speaks most directly to my own heart.

For, as perhaps you know, I have for half a century been carrying the torch for the Puritans, and it was said of Edwards that Puritanism is what Edwards was. And studying Edwards helps me to understand Puritanism. And then again, ever since I was converted at age 18, the theme of revival has glowed in my heart.

And on the subject of revival, Jonathan Edwards is quite simply the classic writer. No one has ever done better. No one has ever done so well.

Jonathan Edwards helps me enormously as I think about, long for, pray for revival. There again, you see, is a debt that I owe to him. If you read or listen to any of my stuff, you will know that for at least a quarter of a century, another drum that I have beaten is that evangelicalism is neither more nor less than authentic Christianity.

Christianity without additions, such as you find in the Roman Catholic Church. Christianity without subtractions, such as you find among the Protestant liberals. Jonathan Edwards, like Augustine and Luther and Calvin and John Owen and B.B. Warfield, those are just a few of my personal heroes, shall I call them.

Yes, let the word stand. Jonathan Edwards and these good men, they are so many buoys, or as you folk would say, this side of the Atlantic buoys. These gentlemen are so many buoys marking the main channel of mainstream Christianity, down the centuries.

I think these days of historic Christianity as a flowing river, and you know how rivers flow. At the center, there is a mainstream, and that's where the current is. At the side, near the banks, there are backwaters, there are eddies, there are muddy pools, there are places off-center where you don't get the flow forward that you have in the mainstream.

These men remind us where the mainstream is and help to keep us out of the backwaters and muddy pools. And I thank God for Edwards, a stellar figure amongst this group of buoys to sound Christianity, orthodox in faith, and orthopractic or orthopractical in life. And if what I say this evening sounds very much like a personal statement, well, you're quite correct, so it is.

I shall be telling you a good deal of my heart as we go along. Now this isn't, as we've already been reminded in the conference, the only anniversary that we should be celebrating this year. John Wesley also was born in the 1960s, and the way I put him in the mainstream, as you may have noticed, does appeal to me very much.

I'm very fond of him. And just to get us going, I would like for a couple of minutes to put Edwards and Wesley into the same frame, sit them side by side, compare them with each other. Each will come out, I think, more clearly when set alongside the other.

Here are some differences and parallels straight away. Edwards, tall, quiet, withdrawn, reserved, a man of the study, a Bible teacher, very much that, and a pastor, a scholar, very much a contributor to thought on themes of the intellectual life of his day. And Wesley, tiny fellow, 5'2", a whole foot shorter than Edwards, and he weighed 128 pounds.

He tells us so. I think he was rather pleased about it. And he was an outgoing people person.

He was a tremendous organizer, educator, activist. Dr. Samuel Johnson described him as the best red man in England. And he, I would describe not so much as a scholar, not so much as a theologian, rather he is a catechist, a person that is whose special strength as well as whose direct limit is to instruct people in the realities of practical Christianity, which he did brilliantly.

But then when you get right down to it, he was doing from his standpoint the same job as in his public life Edwards was concerned to do, sounding different at the beginning of the comparison. They converge at the end. Then again, they had two very contrasting careers.

Edwards, as we've already been reminded, was pastor of a single congregation, Northampton, for 24 years together. And though Northampton, Massachusetts, was supposed to be the largest congregation in New England, it had perhaps in this town and therefore in the membership of the church 1,000 to 1,200 adults, hardly more. And when he was dismissed from Northampton, he became pastor of a village church in Stockbridge.

He was there for six years looking after not more than 100 white folk and not more than 200 Indian folk. A very small scale career by modern standards and even by the standards of his own day. Whereas John Wesley's Methodist Societies contained over 70,000 members in England and over 40,000 in North America by the time of Wesley's death in 1791.

Quite a contrast there. Both men were accused of pride, but for different reasons. Edwards, because though he was humble, he was firm in his faithfulness to God's truth as he found it in Scripture.

He was even rigid in maintaining Bible truth against those who challenged it. And in his day, as in ours, that kind of faithful rigidity was regarded by many as pride, egoism. John Wesley was regarded as suffering from pride because though he was very happy for anyone to state their views, he always insisted on having the last word in every community situation where a decision had to be reached.

So it was Mr. Wesley and those who agreed with him at the end of the day. And I think there is some reason to suspect, there's more reason I think to suspect him of unmortified pride than frankly to suspect Jonathan Edwards of anything like that. Edwards wrote the Religious Affections, as we know, and B.B. Warfield described it as a great treatise, quote here, a great treatise, one of the most complete systems of what has been strikingly called spiritual diagnostics, unquote Warfield.

But John Wesley, reducing the treatise to about half length for his Christian library, prefaced it with an essay in which he described it as a piece of work that had in it, I quote Wesley, much wholesome food mixed with much deadly poison. So they weren't quite together as you see at that point. And you could have fun too comparing and contrasting their attitudes to marriage.

Edwards, who once celebrated in one of his writings the fact that it is wonderful how we are attracted to the opposite sex, had a magnificent marriage. We've laughed at the title Marriage to a Difficult Man, that excellent book back in print for us. But the truth is that it was a superb marriage between him and his Sarah.

My charitable friend, Ian Murray, writing recently on Wesley, passes this comment, by contrast, on Wesley's marriage. His marriage with the lady Molly Vazaeli. Yes, if that's how she pronounced herself, Vazaeli perhaps.

The marriage was a disaster. This might well have been the case whoever he'd married given his estimation that celibacy remained the higher state and that marrying for happiness was somehow beneath a Christian. Quote, I married because I needed a home, he tells a correspondent, in order to recover my health.

And I did recover it, but I did not seek happiness thereby and I did not find it. Who can be surprised, asks Ian Murray, and well he might. Well here you are, two very different men, both of whom God honored and used, not only in their day but in generations afterwards, in a very remarkable fashion, and used in a parallel connection, for they were both involved in movements of the spirit of God which we call revivals.

Both of them were thoroughly converted Bible believers, orthodox on the basics, and both of them passionately concerned about holiness. That should be noted. John Wesley insisted, in print, that God had raised up Methodism, as he put it, to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.

Edwards wrote that in his youth he pursued holiness, quote Edwards, with far greater diligence and earnestness than ever I pursued anything in my life. And in the preaching of both of them, while regeneration and conversion and justification by faith were all highlighted, holiness was the focus. God requires holiness, God looks for holiness, God enables holiness, holiness preaches God, holiness in one sense is what it's all about.

And they were together in insisting on that. And they were together, pastorally, in their understanding of pastoral ministry as discipling. Again I say, conversion and regeneration were highlighted, but conversion and regeneration were, for them, only the beginning of the Christian pilgrimage.

Both of them, it's interesting to discover, believed in the importance of small groups of those who were seeking and who had found new life in Christ. The groups were necessary to, as we would say, maintain the spiritual glow and to give the continuing encouragement to growth in grace, which every Christian benefits from. And while Wesley was a positive genius with small groups, indeed he was, and it was the secret of the success of the Methodist society movement as a whole, Edwards also, as I said, understood the importance of the groups for prayer and encouragement.

And if one studies Wesley's preaching, one very soon sees that for him, across the board, holiness is the focus. Holiness is what it's all in aid of. And all that he says, both by way of encouragement to those who are seeking the Lord and to those who have found the Lord, and what he says by way of warning to those who may think that they've found the Lord, but who aren't bringing forth the fruits of a holy life, all of this shows very directly where Edwards' heart really was.

So these two men are together at this point, just as, interestingly, they were together in that each of them wrote a refutation of a book denying the reality of original sin, book written by an English theologian named Taylor. Wesley's answer came out in 1756. Jonathan Edwards' answer came out in 1757, and it's interesting to compare the two answers, and for solidity and depth, one has to say, Edwards' answer is way out in front of Wesley's.

All right, I've said those few things in order to get us going with a vision of Edwards, clarified by a comparison with Wesley. But now, Edwards is our proper business, and it's with Edwards that I'm concerned, as I continue, and announce a new heading approaching Jonathan Edwards' theology. Where is he coming from, we ask, and where is he heading? General orientation first.

As has been said so often, Edwards was God-centered, God-focused, God-intoxicated, God-entranced in all his theology, theoretical and practical. John Gerstner, the late John Gerstner, did well to title his three volumes on Edwards' teaching the Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards. Rational Biblical Theology is a good description for what Edwards produced.

Here is a quote which you may be interested to hear. As to my subscribing to the substance of the Westminster Confession, there will be no difficulty. Edwards wrote that in 1750.

You know a man by the books he recommends. Well, this is Edwards in a letter. Take Maastricht, he says, Peter van Maastricht, whose work is a textbook entitled *Theologia Theoretico-Practica*, Theoretical and Practical Theology.

Take Maastricht for divinity in general, doctrine, practice, and controversy. Much better than Tarraton or any other book in the world except the Bible, in my opinion. Unquote, Edwards.

If you have never heard of van Maastricht, well, don't be too upset. Nobody else has either. But quite seriously, he was a late 17th century Dutch theologian who actually succeeded the famous Foetius, spelled V-O-E-T-I-U-S.

Would you have guessed that he was pronounced Foetius? Well, he was. He was a Puritan-type theologian at Utrecht University, and van Maastricht followed him. Richard Muller, who has served the Reformed cause so well in recent decades in what he has written about 16th and 17th century theology and the continuity of the Reformed tradition, Muller describes how van Maastricht put his book together.

On each subject that he tackles, there are four basic elements, each of which has a section of the book to itself, exegesis, positive doctrine, historical analysis and defense, and practice, practical application. And that is the theological text which Edwards thought was way out in front of all the others. So here he is, a systematic theologian of Reformed and Puritan type.

And now we get a little closer to the theology, move from orientation to description, and I lay before you five principles which really shape Jonathan Edwards' theological thinking right the way through his career. This is not, of course, an exhaustive description, it's simply picking out the key concerns to which he's always coming back in his expositions and reflections on everything. One, God's plan of grace, as set out in the Westminster Confession, is the beginning of the whole economy of divine saving love.

It began as a plan, an eternal decree of election, and the first element in it was the Father's election of the Son to be the Savior of the church. That's the element in God's decree, which in English theology has always been called the covenant of redemption, the agreement whereby the Father gave the Son, the many whom he came into the world incarnate, to redeem by his atoning death and to unite to himself in his risen life and to bring triumphantly to glory. The covenant of redemption is of great importance structurally in Edwards' theology, as it was indeed in the theology of most of the Puritans, certainly of men like John Owen, and as it is in the construction of the testimony to grace in the Westminster standards.

Second basic principle, God is naturally unknown to fallen man, because fallen man is finite to start with and now blind by reason of the inbuilt inborn perversity of original sin, which is our legacy from Adam. So it takes what Edwards called a divine supernatural life, light, that's the light of the Holy Spirit with and through the Word, to give knowledge of the reality of God to sinners, and as we've already been told in this conference, Edwards made a great deal of this. As John Owen had done before him, to understand words

is not difficult.

If you know the language into which the words belong, you can use a dictionary, consult a dictionary, and find out what they mean. But if your understanding of Christian theology is just a matter of words, knowing the things, in other words, that Christians are convinced of, but not knowing the realities to which those words refer, well you're still in darkness. It takes a divine supernatural light to bring you out of that darkness into a certainty of the reality of those things of which biblical words and sentences speak, and that awareness of their reality, when it comes, when it's God-given, is for Edwards as immediate and as certain as seeing something.

Just think, sight is like that. You look, you see, you can't doubt that you see. Well, Edwards has much to say about that, and we've been reminded so.

Surely Edwards was right to stress that, and it's a stress that we need as we seek to commend the gospel today. Apologetics, valuable as it is, is ground clearing, but not more, just as it's not less. The producing of a realization that the things of which Scripture speaks are real and true, that is something which only the divine supernatural light of the Holy Spirit can give.

Well, that's the second basic principle, the basic epistemological principle of Edwards' theology, where knowledge of God and the things of God comes from. And then third principle, God shows himself through the history that Scripture records and interprets. I expect we're all aware that in recent years, liberal theologians, no less than evangelical theologians, have been focusing on Bible history as the place where revelation takes place.

Well, Edwards was into that insight 250 years ago, and his hermeneutic, that is his interpretation, his rules for interpretation of Scripture, was historically focused. George Marsden writes about that in the following terms. History, according to Edwards, writes Marsden, is in essence the communication of God's redemptive love in Christ.

The history of redemption is the very purpose of creation. Nothing in human history has significance on its own, that is, apart from the plan of God. I'll continue the quote from Marsden.

Christ's saving love is the center of all history and defined its meaning. Human events take on significance only as they are related to God's redemptive action. I'm sorry, I'm misreading the sentence.

God's redemptive action in bringing increasing numbers of human beings into the light of that love, or as they illustrated, human blindness in joining Satan's warfare against all that is good. Yes, the revelation of God in history divides people. Edwards is very clear on that.

Marsden here is summarizing very well Edwards' basic point of view. So, it was Edwards' unfulfilled ambition to write for the church of the grand scale a systematic theology following what he called an entirely new method. It would be, and I quote his phrase, thrown into the form of a history.

His sermons on the history of the work of redemption indicate the ground which his systematic theology might have covered. As I say, he never got there. He never was able to do the job that he hoped to do.

But he had this realization which modern study confirms, and indeed any thoughtful reading of the Bible confirms, that God reveals himself not simply by word, but by action. He says what he's going to do, and he does it, and his doing of it reveals the meaning of his prediction that he will do it, so that it's in the action

that the fullness of his revelation is seen. Well, that's principle number three of Edwards' theology.

Principle number four, and this too meshes in in a very interesting way with contemporary theology. God is self-revealed as a triune society bonded, bound together by love. And in some very bold reflections, Edwards puts it this way, the personal Holy Spirit, the third person in the triune society, is himself in his very nature the love that binds the Father and the Son to each other and both to the Spirit himself and binds the Spirit to the Father and the Son also.

Augustine had said something very like that. Edwards says it, in my judgment, in a more rounded and skillful way than Augustine does. And Edwards actually went so far as to say this, which again some modern theologians are saying in almost the same terms.

Listen to the quote, Christ and his Father and they, that is Christians, those whom the Father, Son, and Spirit together save, Christ and his Father and Christians should be, as it were, one family. This is the divine goal. One family, his people should be in a sort admitted into the society of the three persons in the Godhead.

Why, yes, a lot of people are putting the doctrine of salvation in just those terms today. Well, 250 years ago, Edwards was already there. And it seems to me that that really is a very illuminating way of expressing what the Bible declares about the destiny of those whom, now this is Packer, not Edwards, those whom the divine team, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit working together as a threesome for our salvation actually bring into the life and remake in union with Christ and in the image of Christ.

And the fifth and final principle here is that God remains, when we've done all our Bible study and all our theological reflecting on the basis of the texts, God remains a transcendent mystery in the sense that there's more to him than our human minds can ever grasp. But yet, if we look back and if we look around us and if we look ahead with the Bible in our hands, there is a great deal that we can see clearly. If you want an illustration, just think of it in terms of there being a long view back, around, and ahead until what is there is lost in mist or fog, as North Americans would say, at a certain point, that's how it is.

Scripture doesn't enable us to see any further. Nonetheless, there is great clarity as far as it goes in the Bible, and in this area of light which Scripture illumines, past, present, future, the themes that stand out are the sovereignty of God, the redeeming love of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. And these are themes to which Edwards recurs time and time again.

On that phrase, God remains a transcendent mystery, which is my phrase, I would like to quote the following sentences from Edwards. I quote Edwards, in case you wondered, I am far from pretending to explain the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it to be the highest and deepest of all mysteries still, notwithstanding anything that I have said or conceived about it.

I don't intend, that is, it's not my purpose to explain the Trinity, just to go up to the limit in understanding all that the Bible tells us about the Trinity. Now, there you have the pillars, so to speak, the key ingredients out of which Edwards' theology is built. Now we come to the two particular themes of our title.

I had to fill in the frame, otherwise we couldn't have dealt with them properly. The first of them has already been covered in part by things that we've heard from others, the glory of God. We're coming closer to Edwards now.

The theme of the glory of God is a theme that touches his heart and touches many of our hearts too in this assembly. What has Edwards to say about the glory of God? Edwards inherited a dispute as to whether God's goal in creation was the glory of God, which is what Reformed theologians have been saying for a couple of centuries before Edwards came along, or the alternative view, man's happiness. And the Arminians and the Deists and the Sassinians, the Unitarians, were putting forward that idea as an alternative to the thought that the goal of creation was the glory of God.

Jonathan Edwards, Jr., the great man's son, speaks very succinctly and clearly as to what his father contributed in discussing this question. Quote Jonathan Edwards, Jr., it was said that as God is a benevolent being, he could not but form creatures for the purpose of making them happy. And many passages of scripture were quoted in support of this opinion, the Deists, Arminians, Sassinian opinion.

On the other hand, numerous and very explicit declarations of scripture were produced to prove that God made all things for his own glory. That's the classic Reformed position. Now, Mr. Edwards, that's the son talking about his father, Mr. Edwards was the first who clearly showed that both these were the ultimate end of the creation and that they are really one and the same thing.

God glorifying himself by being glorified by his rational creatures who find their supreme joy in the glorifying activity. It's a complex idea, but it's a single end. And in the treatise on which John Piper has recently commented to very good effect, a dissertation on the end for which God created the world, you've got this spelled out in full.

Just to say it in a nutshell, how does Edwards get to this? Well, he uses a lot of argument, but at a certain point, he works an induction from the way in which the word glory, kavod in the Hebrew and doxa in the Greek, expressing what kavod means, the way in which the word, the vocabulary of glory is used in scripture. Here I quote, this is Edwards. Sometimes et, this word, is used to signify what is internal, inherent, or in the possession of the person.

And under that, in that usage, come all the references to the glory that God has. And sometimes, Edwards continues, for emanation, that's his word for outflow, emanation, exhibition, or communication of this internal glory, that's the glory that God gives. And sometimes, for the knowledge and sense of these, in those to whom the exhibition or communication is made, that's God's glory seen, recognized, and acknowledged, as when Ezekiel, for instance, sees the glory of God by the river Kibar.

Or, I'm still quoting Edwards, an expression of this knowledge, sense, or effect, and that is glory given in the sense of praise, and thanks, and gratitude, and joyful response to the glory that God has shown and given. And Edwards thinks it very significant that the one word glory is used in all those connections. That gives him his clue to the thought that God's glory, in all these senses together, is the end of creation.

When asked to tell us what the word, or what the reality of God's glory includes, Edwards develops the thought that there are three aspects of it. There's knowledge, which includes, on the one hand, God's omniscience, and on the other hand, his wisdom. There's holiness, which is God's love for what is valuable and good in itself, and his hatred of sin, and perversity, and the perverting of the good things that he's made.

And the third ingredient, in one sense the most important of all, is joy and happiness. God's joy, God's happiness, God's endless delight in being God, and in being acknowledged and enjoyed as God by his own creatures. I said it would be a thumbnail sketch, and that's what it is, because then I have to move on.

But it's wonderful stuff as one reads Edwards expounding these themes, and I strongly commend the wonderful stuff to you. And the point that Sam Storms was going so heavy on this morning, namely that the process of God being enjoyed by his people, and giving more and more of himself to them, and being therefore received and enjoyed more and more by them in a process that is literally endless, and goes on for all eternity, that is part of what Edwards very explicitly spells out. Yes, it's a marvelous vision, and surely absolutely right.

Just for the record, it is the Puritan vision. This isn't John Owen going significantly further than the 17th century Puritans had already gone. And man's end, as the Puritans describe it, you see, is universal holiness in response to God.

That universal holiness of response and enjoyment of God constitutes the happiness for which man was made. Holiness and happiness are linked, just as sin and misery are linked. So say the Puritans.

Edwards is with them and going just a little further in the way that he spells this out. C.S. Lewis was mentioned in the same bracket as Edwards a little earlier in our conference. And yes, Lewis, just for the record, saw this also.

And in the last of his uneven but superb Narnia series of children's stories, he finishes the work, *The Last Battle*, with a marvelous sentence which expresses it in the pictorial form that fits his mind, which is, after all, the mind of a scholar and a bookman and a teacher of the English language. Just let me check. Who has read Narnia books? Not that many of you.

How remarkable. Well, I won't say read Narnia. I must say read your Bible.

That's the important thing to do. But the children, who are the heroes and heroines, running through the Narnia stories, meeting from time to time with the Christ figure of Aslan the Lion, they are finally told by Aslan the Lion, you do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be. And this is the Christ figure, remember.

This is what the Lord has in intention for his people. And then Aslan reveals to them that, in fact, they have come to the real Narnia to stay. This is what, in Christian language, we call heaven.

And this is the wonderful sentence with which the last of these Narnia books, *The Last Battle*, ends. For them, it was only, that is, it was truly the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page.

Now, at last, they were beginning chapter one of the great story, which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before. That's Lewis's way of celebrating the eternal enlargement, which is part of the glory of the glory which we are thinking about here. Can't say any more about that, for I must now say something about the revival of religion.

And this, I tell you, is where I come closest in concern to Jonathan Edwards, and where I think I have learned more from him than in any other connection. Take this phrase, revival of religion. Cotton Mather, actually, was the first person to use it.

How does it fit into this frame of the glory of God, we ask? Well, I say a number of things in order to answer that question. First, some ground clearing things. In the 1950s, when I began to speak and argue on this subject, I was opposed by persons, and their descendants are still around today, who maintain that there is no doctrine of revival in the Bible.

Well, Edwards would first of all reply to that by saying, what do you mean by doctrine? And he would tell you what he means, doctrine for him is a declaration of God's doings and man's duty. And then he would take us to Bible history and point to a whole series of instances of revival in the Bible story. And he would point further to many, many prophecies of the restoration of Israel, which he would argue, and I think very cogently, are images and shadows of the spiritual blessing that God promises to his people of the New Testament era.

And then there are the people nowadays who will say, surely revival is just another word for effective and fruitful evangelism. In our church, we have a revival every year, that kind of thing. Well, Jonathan Edwards would have demurred at that.

He would have said, excuse me, but revival, though indeed it involves conversions and brings about conversions, it's essentially about holiness and the glory of God. And he would insist that all our thinking about revival operate within that frame and be done from that point of view. And then there are some who would say, as Charles Finney said long ago, I have a soft spot for Charles Finney because his *Revivals of Religion* was one of the first books I read as a Christian.

And how I got from Finney's *Revivals of Religion* to where I am today, is quite a story. But Finney argued, as many have done since, that though revival is a work of God, nonetheless you can get it up by praying it down. And Edwards, though he insisted that one must pray for revival, also insisted that God is sovereign in this matter, and we must be content to wait patiently on him, we cannot force his hand.

Edwards, as perhaps you know, wrote a short treatise with the following title, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People through the World in Extraordinary Prayer*. Extraordinary there means not weird, but special. In *Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, pursuant to God's Scripture*, sorry, pursuant to Scripture promise and prophecies concerning the last times.

You have to remember that the 18th century, like the previous centuries since printing was invented, antedated the dust jacket so that if you wanted the person browsing in a bookstore to know what this or that piece of writing was about, you had to put it all on the title page. There could be no blurb because there was no just dust jacket to put the blurb on, and that's why some of these 16th, 17th, and 18th century titles are so extraordinarily lengthy. Well, Edwards wrote this treatise to support the plea by some Scottish ministers that three times a week the Lord's people, wherever they were, should unite in praying for worldwide revival and extension of Christ's Kingdom for a period of seven years to be extended if necessary.

So Edwards was for prayer for revival, but Edwards insisted that we must bow before the sovereignty of God in regard to when and how that prayer gets answered. And then finally, there are some who in a cheerful, romantic, really unrealistic way have assumed that spiritual revival would be the answer to all the church's problems. Edwards knew better.

He saw revival twice over in Northampton in 1734, as Ian Murray reminded us, and then again in the Great Awakening between 1740 and 1742, and he knew that revivals bring with them all kinds of new problems, not the problems of deadness, those go, but the problems of disorderly life and disorderly imitations of life, problems which in some ways are harder to deal with, problems of fanaticism, problems of wildfire. Be realistic about this, says Edwards, and in all his writings on revival, he makes very much of the fact that revivals of religion are mixed works in which the devil is active, no less than the Spirit of God. But now we

come to the real focus.

We ask the question, what is a revival of religion? And the answer that Edwards gives is that it's a work of God enlivening his people by accelerating and intensifying and extending his work in individual lives. Following scripture, he acknowledges that there can be personal renewal without it becoming a community reality. But when he writes about the revival of religion, it is of the community reality that he's speaking, and the community reality is a matter of many individuals being renewed in the manner described by God at more or less the same time in more or less the same local and geographical and churchly frame.

It's the presence of God giving power to his word of sin and grace. It's the Holy Spirit of God generating response to the word by sensitizing souls to God's reality with greater power and intensity than was the case before. And so a revival of religion expresses itself in new faith, repentance, praise, prayer, love, joy, and holiness, and an overflowing of life into the community which brings in folk outside who previously were spiritually indifferent.

The test of the reality of revival is not the excitement as we've been reminded already, but the fruit of the Spirit in holy living. And Edwards, in all his revival writings, is stressing that. A scheme for enumerating the elements in revival is as follows.

Edwards doesn't give us this scheme as a scheme, but all the elements in it can be validated from what Edwards writes about revival. God comes down. So Isaiah 64 verse 1, O that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might flow down at your presence.

Grant us your presence, Lord, the sense of your presence, the knowledge that you're here with us, come close. That's the burden of that prayer, and that's how revival begins, with a renewed sense of the presence of God, inescapable, searching you, turning you inside out, forcing you to face God with an honesty with which you've not faced him before. God comes down.

The Word comes to life. The Word gets inside people, and they find themselves convinced by the Holy Spirit of the truths concerning Jesus, which the Spirit was sent to confirm in people's hearts. Sin, righteousness, judgment.

You remember Jesus' words about that in John 16. The Word comes to life. Sin is seen.

It was in the power of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of a revival outpouring that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. You remember what happened. His sermon was interrupted at a certain point because his hearers were, as our English translations say, cut to the heart.

The Greek verb is one that would ordinarily be used of sawing. Their hearts were sawn through. It's a word which speaks of intense conviction and a sense of coming apart inside with the realization of the awful thing that they've done in conspiring to send the Lord of glory to the cross.

Sin is seen. Conviction goes deep, and change goes deep. It isn't just a matter of breast beating.

It's a matter of changing one's life. That's what repentance is. Not a matter of feeling remorse and stopping there, but a matter of committing yourself to a new life pattern and saying goodbye to the old one.

Christians have to do this. New converts have to do this. In our day, we don't hear enough about repentance, and that's why so many Christians continue to live as the world lives.

And Edwards would have some very stern things to say to us if he were back among us and could inspect us at that point. You remember that when Paul was at Ephesus, and people were touched by the word, which he spoke with power, many of those who were now believers came, Acts 19, verse 18, confessing and divulging their practices. A number of those who practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.

They counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to prevail mightily. Never mind the cost.

Never mind what's involved. People under conviction, with the strength of revival time conviction, they have to get sin out of their system, and that's what you see happening in gestures like that at Ephesus. And love breaks out.

And in Acts 4, we read that the believers were all together. They had one heart, one soul. Nobody lacked.

People sold their possessions, put the result into a common treasury so that there would be food and support for every believer. Whether it was prudent is a question, but that isn't the question that Luke invites us to ask. Luke is setting before us the fact that it was love.

What is love? Love is a commitment to meet the need of the other person and make the other person great thereby. So if you see hunger, you relieve it. If you see poverty, you relieve it, and so on.

And if you see folk perishing spiritually for lack of the knowledge of Christ, you witness in the hope of relieving that. So change goes deep. Love breaks out.

Joy breaks out. As Martin Lloyd-Jones used constantly to say, the whole of the New Testament until you get to the pastoral epistles and the book of Revelation seems to be the product of revival conditions, intensity of spiritual life among those early churches. And when you read 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 8 and find the Lord, sorry, find the apostle saying that though you've not seen Jesus, you love him, and you believe in him and rejoice with joy that's inexpressible and filled with glory, well, it really does look as if revival conditions were operating there.

How much do you and I know about joy inexpressible and full of glory as we rejoice in our Lord? The church becomes itself, the people of the presence, and there's an overflow. The lost come in and there are conversions, and Satan keeps pace. That's part of the pattern.

He is the wrecker. It is his profession, his business to spoil, if he can, every work of God. And when it's God pouring out his spirit for the renewal of spiritual life among his own people, Satan will be there to spoil it.

Time has beat, the clock has beaten me, so I won't read the extracts that I had lined up to illustrate that point. You will have to wait until you read the book in order to see them, but the point surely is clear. And when Paul says we are not ignorant of his designs, 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 11, well, he's concerned that we shouldn't be either.

And when there's revival, as Edwards found, Satan keeps pace and the wildfire and the fanaticism and the goofiness, the silliness, and the extravagant gestures which discredit what's going on are there in abundance. It's always been so. What is really happening is that the Father is glorifying the Son through the outpouring of the Spirit so that his own glory in being glorified by those to whom he has shown his glory and who are glorying in it may be advanced.

And it comes like a wave or a windstorm and it's glorious when it comes, it's temporary, it doesn't last any more than a windstorm lasts, but it's heaven on earth for the time that it lasts. Edwards is the supreme clinician of all of that. I'm sorry to be overrunning, concluding reflections very quickly.

What does all this say to us? Edwards helps us, I think, at all of three points. And I'm going to put them in admonitory form. I believe that these are admonitions which you need, I need, we all need today.

One, seek true understanding of religion, of sin, of regeneration, of holiness, of the glorying in God which makes for the glory indeed which constitutes the glory of God and that which he purposed when he made us and redeemed us. Seek that understanding and get clear on it. Lots of people today have an understanding that goes no deeper than Jesus makes me happy.

There is more to be said than that. Second, seek as we must seek the true reality of revival. John Howe, as cited at length in an appendix in Ian Murray's excellent book, *The Puritan Hope*, complains at the end of the 16th century that the power of the spirit which England had known in the 1650s, that was a revival time under the Commonwealth, that power had been withdrawn so that, as Howe hauntingly puts it, we preachers cannot get inside you anymore.

Friends, do you know preaching that gets inside people? Fellow preachers, I speak to you as I speak to myself, do we know anything of the blessing of preaching in a way that gets inside people and so produces the transformation of life at which we aim and for which we speak? The reality of revival would mean that the word would get inside people and personal religion and so community religion and congregational religion would be reanimated, intensified in its quality and impact in a way that we long to see. But whatever else we're seeing in these days, we are not seeing that. Seek, let us seek together the true reality of revival.

And let us finally seek a true recognition of God's sovereignty, the kind of recognition of God's sovereignty of which Edwards was always speaking. We wait on the Lord for his mercy as we pray to the Lord for his mercy. We know we can't force his hand in the matter, but we glorify him by waiting on him and refusing to take no for an answer, just as did the widow who went to the unjust judge and wouldn't take no for an answer from him, indifferent as in the story he is, at first at least, to the fact that she's always encountering him, always after him to vindicate her.

And of course the point of the parable is that if the unjust judge does that because she waits on him, it's important at asking how much more will God vindicate his own work and his own people and bless them as they wait on him for the revival of religion. I have, friends, outlived all my mentors. Yes, I have.

Edwards died at 54. Calvin and Spurgeon and George Whitefield all died at 55. And John Owen died in his late 60s.

And Augustine and Richard Baxter died at age 76. I've outlived them all. I haven't seen revival.

I don't know whether I shall see revival. But please, God, I will continue praying for revival as long as there's breath in my body to pray. And if, like John Owen put it, the time comes when I leave the church in a storm, that's what he said to a friend when he knew he was dying, well, I know that God will visit his church one day and renew it.

And every time I pray, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, my heart goes out in prayer for the revival of God's church. And I call you in this conference to join me in just that and to do so now as we pray. Almighty Father, we have been thinking together of that which was central in the heart of your servant, Jonathan Edwards, as he testified to your grace and practiced for himself the life of holiness and prayer two and a half centuries ago, in the days when he was a power under your hand in New England.

And we are asking you now to make his concerns our concerns, to give us the same spirit of understanding and the same faithfulness in prayer that he knew and sought to share with others in his own day. Teach us, Lord, to pray for revival and to wait on you for revival and, so far as we can, to prepare for revival by challenging those things in our personal lives, in the lives of our churches, which we know dishonor you. Keep us from craven acceptance of things that deep down we know are wrong.

Give us integrity. Give us humility. Give us holiness.

Give us rigidity. And if we, too, are to be thought proud because we will not shift from our priorities nor from our principles, so be it, Lord. Strengthen us to stand firm.

And so dismiss us now, we pray, with your blessing, as those committed to the vision of the glory of God in the revival of religion and committed to the quest for the revival of religion in our own lives, our own churches, and our own communities. We ask it, Lord, for your glory. In the name of Jesus our Savior.

Amen.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/14/SID14809.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ji-packer/the-glory-of-god-and-the-reviving-of-religion/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**