

David Brainerd

by John Piper

John Piper's sermon on David Brainerd highlights the profound impact of his life and struggles on the missionary movement and the importance of faith amidst suffering.

Duration: 59:19

Scripture: Psalm 103:2

Topics: "Missionary Work", "Perseverance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the life and ministry of David Brainerd, a missionary to the Native Americans in the 18th century. The speaker highlights the struggles that Brainerd faced, including physical ailments, loneliness, and opposition from the Indians. Despite these challenges, Brainerd never gave up and continued to press on in his mission. The speaker emphasizes the impact of Brainerd's life, suggesting that his dedication and perseverance played a significant role in the modern missionary movement.

Transcript

Desiring God Ministries presents the following message by Dr. John Piper. My name is Brad Nelson. I'm the Minister for Youth, and I'm here to introduce John.

I know most of you don't need to hear an introduction of John Piper. You know that he graduated from Wheaton College, from Fuller Seminary, and then from the University of Munich. He's written numerous books, Love Your Neighbors, The Justification of God, Desiring God.

He and Wayne Grudem are editing a book right now on recovering biblical manhood and womanhood that should be out this summer. You know that he's married to Noel and has four sons, Carson, Abraham, Benjamin, and Barnabas, two of whom are in my youth group, and they are just a joy to minister with, minister to. They are really great kids.

John's done a great job in fathering them. John is the type of person, the type of communicator, that whenever he writes an article or writes a book or preaches a sermon or does a teaching or just reflects on a person or an event or a book, I come away inspired. I come away encouraged.

I come away challenged in many different ways. Challenged in how I'm living, challenged in how I'm thinking about something. Oftentimes I'm humbled or I have to fall before the Lord, but almost always I

have a greater thirst for God.

Almost always I am encouraged and so desirous to go hard after God. And so it's with that desire that I invite John up to share with us on his reflections from the life and ministry of David Brainerd. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. The Lord works vindication and justice to all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities.

As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.

He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. Father, David Brainerd was just dust.

What dust he was. And you have encouraged me so much through what you did with this dust. I want you, Lord God, to come and sustain the dust in this room.

Breathe life into the dust in this room. Awaken and make ministers who persevere out of the dust in this room. Through Christ I pray.

Amen. David Brainerd. I wish everybody had the opportunity to spend a week or two just immersed in the 18th century, in the journals and diaries of David Brainerd.

Some people couldn't stand it, and others of us simply find glory everywhere. He was born in 1718 in Haddam, Connecticut. John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards were 14 years old when he was born.

He was to see both waves of the Great Awakening firsthand in the mid-30s and early 40s of the 1700s, and then die at the age of 29 in 1747 in the house of Jonathan Edwards. His father was named Hezekiah, and he died when he was nine years old, when David Brainerd was nine years old. I've reflected on that because I've had three sons now, and Lord willing we'll have a fourth who turned nine.

And of all the ages I would choose not to die on my boys, it would be nine, because at nine they cling and love and need so badly, I perceive. But he lost his father when he was nine, he lost his mother when he was 14, and then he went to visit or live with his 18-year-old sister who'd married in a nearby town. On top of an austere father and losing his father and mother, he inherited probably a constitutional disposition towards depression.

A man named Thomas Brainerd, writing 100 years later, 1865, wrote about his family, In the whole Brainerd family for 200 years there has been a tendency to morbid depression, akin to hypochondria. He wrote when he was young, I think it was just before his conversion, about this issue in his youth, he says, I was, I think, from my youth something sober and inclined rather to melancholy than the other extreme. Which is an understatement, I think.

You all know that melancholy is the old-fashioned word for depression. He moved in with his sister then, when he was 14, and lived with her for five years and wrestled with God. He hated the doctrine of original sin, he hated the divine law and its strictness, he hated the sovereignty of God, and he wrestled and wrestled.

He was, however, very punctilious in his religious efforts to break through. He read the Bible through twice a year as a rule while he was in that house with his sister Jerusha. Interesting name correlation there between the woman he will probably fall in love with.

But he wasn't converted. He was very, very legalistic, he said. But then the day came, and let me read you the account of his conversion.

And if you understood this account, you would understand his theology. It is Edward's theology. They write almost the same when it comes to salvation and the nature of true and saving faith.

As I was walking in a dark, thick grove, he's 21 years old now, unspeakable glory seemed to open to the view and apprehension in my soul. It was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God, such as I never had before, nor anything that I had the least remembrance of, so that I stood still and wondered and admired. My soul was so captivated and delighted with the excellency, the loveliness and the greatness and the other perfections of God that I was swallowed up in him, at least to that degree that I had no thought, as I remember at first, about my own salvation or scarce that there ever was such a creature as I. And thus the Lord I trust.

Notice the diffidence with which these old fellows spoke about their own standing. And thus the Lord I trust brought me to a hearty desire to exalt him, to set him on the throne and to seek first his kingdom, that is principally and ultimately to aim at his honor and glory as the king and sovereign of the universe, which is the foundation of the religion of Jesus. I felt myself in a new world.

Lord's Day, July 12, 1739. He was 21 years old. A few months later he entered Yale and the hardships in those first years were terrible.

He had to be sent home the first year because he began to cough up blood, and so he already had in 1739 the disease of which he would die eight years later, tuberculosis. The students were carnal. There was immense disinterest in spiritual things that year.

He went home with measles again. It was an awful thing in those days. And when he came back in November of 1740, his second year, everything was different because George Whitefield had been there and had preached and there was a great moving now among the students.

Spiritual awakening was happening and there was a division among the faculty who were not following along with what they would have called enthusiasm, but which Brainerd discerned to be genuine awakening. And the fans were flamed by Gilbert Tennant and Ebenezer Pemberton and James Davenport as they came through the college and fired the students up and created tremendous problems for the faculty and the staff. The way they decided to deal with these problems in the fall of 1741 was to call Jonathan Edwards to come preach the sermon at the graduation ceremony to straighten out the students and save the faculty from these enthusiasts.

And Edwards preached a message. Brainerd was in the audience. This message is called The Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God.

And he totally disappointed the faculty and the powers that be because he argued that this awakening was a real work of God. No matter how many excesses, no matter how many weird things were happening, it was real. Now, to understand the poignancy of this moment, you have to understand that on the morning of this address, the trustees gathered together of Yale College and passed a resolution that read like this.

If any student of this college shall directly or indirectly say that the rector, either of the trustees or the tutors, are hypocrites, carnal, or unconverted men, he shall, for the first offense, make public confession in the hall, and for the second offense, be expelled. Now, you keep those words in mind, and you hear Edwards preaching, and he comes to the conclusion of his message and says this. It is no evidence that a work is not the work of God, if many that are subjects of it are guilty of so great frowardness as to censure others as being unconverted.

It was a direct attack on the trustees, and one can't help but wonder, with Brainerd sitting in the audience, whether Edwards felt some responsibility for what happened the next term. Brainerd came to chapel, and one of the faculty members, one of the tutors, named Chauncey Whittlesley, prayed in what was called a most pathetic manner, which I think means full of excessive pathos. And the hall cleared, three people were left with Brainerd.

A freshman was walking by the door. One of the students said to Brainerd, What did you think of Whittlesley's prayer? And he said, I think Whittlesley has no more grace than a chair. And it was also reported that he said he wondered why the rector did not drop down dead for fining students for their evangelical enthusiasm.

And Brainerd was summarily expelled. And it broke his heart. He could never get back in.

He tried again and again to get back in. He rode miles through the wilderness, even after he'd become a missionary, to plead with the officers to give him another chance. He apologized profusely, and they never let him back in.

Now, I'm moved to reflect at this moment on the sovereignty and providence of God. Because had this not happened, this man with tuberculosis would have finished Yale and taken a pastorate. That was his settled purpose.

And he would have died, and nobody would have heard of David Brainerd. No impact upon the missionary movement would have happened. He was cut off in the middle of his dream.

Because, you see, a law had just been passed in Connecticut that said no established minister may be installed in Connecticut who has not graduated from Harvard, Yale, or a European college. And so he was undone as far as he was concerned. And there's a tremendous lesson here, namely that God, for his glory and for the good of his church, works through those moments when the best intentions of his servants are dashed.

And Brainerd couldn't know it, and I think hopefully came to see it before the end of his life, that this careless word, I've thought about it with people like Johnny Erickson, one dive on one Sunday afternoon, a sudden moment, and everything changes. Manila was different. Twelve years later, as she led 4,000 of us in song, lifting her hands like this, ye blind behold your Savior coming, and leap ye lame for joy.

So there's a great lesson here. In fact, I'm tempted to speculate that the modern missionary movement wouldn't have happened if Brainerd hadn't been expelled from Yale University. But that's speculation.

November 25, 1742, now, after a summer of agony, he is examined for his fitness to the missionary service. I won't go through the long process that drug him that direction, but one very dear friend, Jonathan Dickinson, who was a part of the commissioners for the Society of Scotland for propagating Christian knowledge, said, you should be a missionary to the Indians. And he said, all right.

I will pray about it. And he prayed, and he was commissioned. So he went to Countameek, which was a little village just north of Stockton where Edwards was going to become a missionary to the Indians in a few years after he got kicked out of his church.

And in April 1, 1743, he began his year of preaching among the Indians in Countameek. He lasted one year there, although he learned the language in that year, translated some of the Psalms into the Indian language, and started a school and left it behind. And the Indians came down and were ministered to by a sergeant there in Stockbridge.

His second assignment was to the Forks of the Delaware, a little northeast of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. And at the end of a month there, he rode down to New York and was ordained by the New Jersey Presbytery. The New York and the New Jersey Presbytery were on his side and on the side of the students in the Great Awakening against Yale.

And we're going to hear the implications of that for the founding of a new school when we're done and Brainerd's role in that. So he was ordained in 1744. Now, he's going to die, keep in mind, in 47.

He preached to the Indians then at the Forks of the Delaware for a year, gathering a few of God's people. And then he was assigned to Cross Weekson in New Jersey. And he went there, and there is where the great blessing came.

God poured out the Holy Spirit on the Indians in Cross Weekson, New Jersey, in an incredible way. And within a year, he had about 130 solid believers. He describes, you know, I could give a whole talk on the way God came upon the Indians through the weight of truth, as David Brainerd kept discussing it.

The weight of truth came upon them, and they'd fall off their seats and weep for hours, seeking rest and peace for their consciences. So God did a mighty work through Brainerd among these Indians. He moved them from Cross Weekson in May of 1746 up to Cranbury.

And there they built a little village and got land for the Indians so that they could have their own little reservation-like and their own church building. And he had a little hut there. And then his sickness got so bad that he spent four months in Elizabethtown with Jonathan Dickinson.

And then on March 20, 1747, he said his last farewell to the Indians, went up to Jonathan Edwards' house. There's not much evidence to go on, but almost everybody agrees he was in love with Jerusha, his 17-year-old daughter, Edward's 17-year-old daughter. She nursed him for the last 19 weeks of his life, and he died in Jonathan Edwards' house, October 9, 1747.

A short life, 29 years, 5 months, and 19 days. Eight years a believer, four years a minister, a missionary. Why, then, was Brainerd's life so powerful? Why has it made the impact that it has? Of course, practically the first reason is that Jonathan Edwards was overwhelmed with this man's piety as he met him and lived with him for 19 weeks.

And he took the diaries and wrote The Life of Brainerd. That book has been the most republished book of Edwards. The book has never been out of print.

To my knowledge, it has exerted an absolutely enormous impact upon the modern missionary movement. Why did John Wesley say, let every preacher read carefully over The Life of David Brainerd? Why was it written of Henry Martin? Perusing The Life of David Brainerd, his soul was filled with a holy emulation of that extraordinary man, and after deep consideration and fervent prayer, he was at length fixed in a resolution to imitate his example. Which has a sweet irony about it, because he died almost at the same age and of the same disease in Persia.

Why did William Carey regard Edwards' Life of Brainerd as a sacred text and have it with him along with sermons of Edwards in India? Why did Robert Morrison and Robert McChane of Scotland and John Mills of America and Frederick Schwartz of Germany and David Livingston of England and Andrew Murray of South Africa and Jim Elliott of modern America, all of them count David Brainerd a teacher and model and stand in awe of him and find inspiration from him? Gideon Hawley was another missionary that went out, inspired by Jonathan Edwards, and he wrote about the struggles that he had in the wilderness of New England. I indeed greatly need something more than human to support me. I read my Bible and Mr. Brainerd's life, the only books I brought with me, and from them I have a little support.

Now why, why did this life have this extraordinary impact? Or let me ask a more manageable question. Why has it had an impact on me? And then maybe, maybe it will transfer to these others. Why? The answer, in summary form, I think is that Brainerd's life is a vivid, powerful testimony to the truth that God can and does use weak, sick, discouraged, beat down, lonely, struggling saints who cry to him day and night to accomplish amazing things for his glory.

And so what I want to do now, in the time we have, is to talk about the struggles that he had, seven of them, the way he pressed on in these struggles, and thirdly, the effect of his life. First then, his struggles. Number one, Brainerd struggled with almost constant sickness.

He had to drop out of college, as I said, several times. He began to cough up blood in 1740. In 1744, he wrote, rode several hours in the rain through the howling wilderness, although I was so disordered in body that little or nothing but blood came from me.

He would write things like this again and again. In the afternoon, my pain increased exceedingly and was obliged to take myself to bed, was sometimes almost bereaved of the exercise of my reason by the extremity of the pain. August 46, having lain in the cold sweat all night, I coughed much bloody matter this morning and was under great disorder of body and not a little melancholy.

May of 47, at Jonathan Edwards' house, the doctor said, your disease is incurable, you will die of consumption in a matter of weeks or months. In the last couple of months of his life, his suffering was absolutely incredible. You know, there were no pills in those days, nothing to relieve what we say must be relieved today, nothing.

September 24, this is two weeks before he died, in the greatest distress that ever I endured, having an uncommon kind of hiccup, which either strangled me or threw me into a straining to vomit. Edwards' comments in the last week. He told me it was impossible for any to conceive of the distress he felt in his breast.

He manifested much concern lest he should dishonor God by impatience under the extreme agony, which was such that he said the thought of enduring it one minute longer was almost insupportable. And just before he died, he said to those around him, it is another thing than people imagine to die. The thing that strikes you about the suffering of Brainerd is not simply the severity of it, but the consistency of it.

First, he always suffered. From the time he was a student, he never had relief for any significant amount of time. It was a relentless sickness, and he pressed on in his work.

Second, Brainerd struggled with relentlessly recurring depression. He came to understand this a little, I think. Edwards said that at first he attributed far too much to spiritual desertion and far too little to the disease of melancholy.

That's their phrase, the disease of melancholy. And so his later judgments about what was happening in his blackest moods were a little more balanced than his earlier ones. But it was a horrendous thing, nevertheless.

And this was his greatest torment, not the tuberculosis. He did say that he detected a very profound difference in the melancholy after his conversion and the melancholy before his conversion, as though a great rock had been inserted underneath his life so that he never despaired of the electing love of God after his conversion. A great gift to him in his darkest days.

He would say repeatedly, black, God is gone, but I do not doubt his love. Things like that. A few words of his own to give you a flavor of what he experienced.

Much of it was owing to his intense hatred for the remaining sin in his life. November 4, 42. Tis distressing to feel in my soul that hell of corruption which still remains in me.

And his sense of unworthiness was so intense that it sometimes just paralyzed him. January 23, 43. Scarce ever felt myself so unfit to exist as now.

I saw I was not worthy of a place among the Indians where I am going. None knows but those that feel it. What the soul endures that is sensibly shut out from the presence of God, alas, tis more bitter than death.

In fact, again and again he compared it to death, and I wrote down 22 places where he longed and pleaded that he would die. Sunday, February 3, 1745. My soul remembered the wormwood and the gall.

I might almost say the hell of Friday night last. And I was greatly afraid I should be obliged again to drink of that cup of trembling which was inconceivably more bitter than death, and made me long for the grave unspeakably more than for hidden treasures. Sunday, 44, December 16.

Was so overwhelmed with dejection that I knew not how to live. I longed for death exceedingly. My soul was sunk in deep waters and the floods were ready to drown me.

I was so much oppressed that my soul was in a kind of horror. And what compounded this experience for Brainerd was that the depression began to infect and lame his devotional exercises and his ministry of preaching. March 9, 43.

Rode 16 miles to Montauk and had some inward sweetness on the road, but something of flatness and deadness after I came there and had seen the Indians, withdrew and endeavored to pray, but found myself awfully deserted and left. It was immobilized sometime in his distresses. September, 46.

Was scarce ever more confounded with a sense of my own unfruitfulness and unfitness of my work than now. Oh, what a dead, heartless, barren, unprofitable wretch did I now see myself to be. My spirits were so low, my bodily strength so wasted, that I could do nothing at all.

At length, being much overdone, lay down on a buffalo's skin and sweat much of the whole night. But Brainerd pressed on and did not quit. He never quit.

Third, Brainerd struggled with loneliness. He tells of having to endure profane talk of strangers one night, April, 43. Oh, I longed for some dear Christian who knew my distresses.

A month later, he says, most of the talk I hear is either Highland Scotch or Indian. I have no fellow Christian to whom I might unbosom myself and lay open my spiritual sorrows, with whom I might take sweet counsel and conversation about the heavenly things and join in social prayer. In December, 1745, he wrote a letter to Eleazar Wheelock.

We'll come back to him in a minute. He founded another college under Brainerd's inspiration. He wrote, I doubt not by that time you have read my journal through, you'll be more sensible of the need I stand of a companion in travel than ever you were before.

And I read two nights ago this quote that we all can empathize with, I think, about he didn't want just anybody. A horse wouldn't do, and a carnal Christian wouldn't do. He wanted a soul companion.

He wrote, there are many with whom I can talk about religion, but alas, I find few with whom I can talk religion itself. But blessed be the Lord, there are some that love to feed on the kernel rather than the shell. He, in his last 19 weeks, was nursed by Jerusha Edwards.

She was 17. And in all likelihood, it was a precious relationship. He speaks of an unparalleled precious acquaintance.

Never names him or her, but most people think that they did have a warm and spiritual relationship in those last days. Fourth, Brainerd struggled with immense external hardships as a missionary. In his first mission to Count Ameek in 43, he said, I live poorly with regard to the comforts of life.

Most of my diet consists of boiled corn, hasty pudding, etc. I lodge on a bundle of straw. My labor is hard and extremely difficult, and I have little experience of success to comfort me.

In August of that year, he said, In this weak, weak, weak, W-E-A-K, in this weak state of body, I was not little distressed for want of suitable food, had no bread, nor could I get any. I am forced to go or send 10 or 15 miles for all the bread I eat, and sometimes it is moldy and sour before I eat it, if I get any considerable quantity. But through divine goodness, I had some Indian meal, of which I made little cakes and fried them, yet felt contented with my circumstances and sweetly resigned to God.

He was frequently lost in the woods. His horse, his car, broke down again and again. His horse would get poisoned.

His horse got a broken leg. His horse got stolen. All of our car experiences happened to a missionary back then as well.

With this lung condition, picture yourself now trying to be warmed in the winter in a hut with a fire. Again and again, the smoke would so fill the room, he would almost lose his breath. He would have to go outside

in the cold.

And he said, I would either be dying of cold outside or I would be smothering in the smoke inside. And he's alone, totally alone, 15 miles from anybody in the wilderness, with tuberculosis and smoke filling his house and 29 degrees outside or whatever. The struggle with external hardships was not the worst struggle, but it was an amazing one.

And he resigned himself to it like this. Here's what he said. Such fatigues and hardships as they serve to wean me more from the earth and I trust will make heaven sweeter.

Formerly, when I was thus exposed to cold, rain, etc., I was ready to please myself with the thoughts of enjoying a comfortable house, a warm fire and other outward comforts. But now these have less place in my heart through the grace of God and my eye is more to God for comfort. In this world, I expect tribulation and it does not now as formally appear a strange thing to me.

I don't, in such seasons of difficulty, flatter myself that it will be better hereafter, but rather think how much worse it could be, how much greater trials others of God's children have endured and how much greater are perhaps those reserved for me. Blessed be God that he makes or he is the comfort to me under my sharpest trials and scarce ever lets these thoughts be attended with terror or melancholy, but they are attended frequently with great joy. So in spite of the terrible external hardships Brainerd pressed on and indeed often flourished at the moment when he suffered most.

Fifth, Brainerd struggled with a bleak outlook on nature, a bleak outlook on nature and we will forgive him for this quickly, I think, because it is hard to look at a rose when you're spitting blood. But it is a great tragedy that he did not have more of Jonathan Edwards' eyes. He never said one thing about the beauty of nature.

Never once did he talk of a sunset, a sunrise, a bird, a bee, a flower, and he lived among them, always. Edwards, on the contrary, would take walks and horse rides in the woods. He would see the excellency of God everywhere, echoes of glory in everything, from a spider's web to the sun.

Brainerd had not one ounce of this appreciation for nature. It was a howling wilderness to him, constant misery as far as he was concerned. And the great tragedy of that is that the burden that he bore blinded him, it seemed, from the antidote to the burden.

God has appointed nature as a healing means for our souls. Now, one of the ironies here, too, is that Edwards did not see this, as far as I can tell. Edwards complimented Brainerd for not having an imagination, because it was imaginations that were wrecking the Great Awakening.

You see, enthusiasm, as it was called, excessive emotionalism, was rooted in imagining things that had no grace in them. And Edwards was just fighting and fighting against people who say, oh, I saw the Lord, His arms were open wide to me, He was enfolding me in His arms, I am His child, and they lived like the devil. Edwards says, this is no true grace.

Your visions are nothing. And so he warmly congratulates Brainerd for having no warm imagination. All of Brainerd's thought was rooted in a spiritual apprehension of glory.

Well, there is a plus and a minus to not having an imagination, I'll tell you. Far healthier would have been the counsel of Spurgeon. To sit long in one posture, poring over a book, or driving a quill, is in itself a

taxing of nature.

But add to this a badly ventilated chamber, a body which has been long without muscular exercise, and a heart burned with many cares, and we have all the elements for preparing a seething cauldron of despair. Especially in the dim months of fog, nature outside his window is calling him to health and beckoning him to joy. He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather, the cooing of the wood pigeons in the forest, the song of birds in the woods, the rippling of the rills among the rushes, the sighing of the wind among the pines, needs not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his soul grows heavy.

Nobody told him to open the eyes of his eyes. At least he didn't seem to hear, or he didn't record if they did. But I repeat, we will quickly forgive Brainerd, because it is hard to see when you're suffering.

It is hard. And yet, let us consider the lilies, brothers. It was not merely Spurgeon who set us on this quest to open our eyes.

Consider the lilies. Sixth, Brainerd struggled to love the Indians. He struggled to love the Indians.

If love is known by sacrifice, he loved them. If love is also known by heartfelt, warm affection and compassion, he struggled to love them. Felt some compassion for souls and mourned, I had no more.

I feel much more kindness, meekness, gentleness, and love toward all mankind than ever. He really did get great success in this from time to time. Felt much sweetness and tenderness in prayer.

Especially my whole soul seemed to love my worst enemies and was enabled to pray for those that are strangers and enemies to God with great degree of softness and pathetic fervor. But at other times, he was empty of affection and compassion for souls, and he expresses his guilt for that, that he had no more ardency and so little desire for their salvation. 44, November 2nd, about noon, rode up to the Indians, and while going could feel no desire for them and even dreaded to say anything to them.

So Brainerd struggled with the rise and fall of love in his heart. He loved, he loved, but he longed to love more. I love them, Father, help thou my unlove.

And seventh, he struggled to stay true to his calling as a missionary. He struggled to stay true. Remember now, he was expelled from college, cut off from the pastoral ministry, bowed to what he believed was the call of God, two missions after that breaking off of his pastoral journey, and then, surprisingly, was offered several pastorates along the way, good ones too.

He was offered the church at Millington near his home in Haddam in 1744, and he turned it down and prayed that God would send forth laborers to the vineyard. And then he was offered the most lucrative parish in New York, Long Island, East Hampton. Jonathan Edwards says, It is the fairest, pleasantest town on the whole island and one of its largest and most wealthy parishes.

That's a quote. And Brainerd wrote on Thursday, April 5th, Resolved to go on still with the Indian affair, if divine providence permitted, although before felt some inclination to go to East Hampton, where I was solicited to go. Now, mark this choice.

He's spitting blood almost every day. He is alone. He doesn't have adequate food or shelter.

The Indians are often unresponsive. He is offered a parish, his lifelong dream or his dreams that he was converted. And he says no.

There were a lot of other opportunities too. He wrote, I could have no freedom in the thought of any other circumstances or business in my life. All my desire was the conversion of the heathen and all my hope was in God.

God does not suffer me to please or comfort myself with hopes of seeing friends, returning to my dear acquaintance. Who is that? And enjoying worldly comforts. He has basically surrendered them.

He probably knows he's a dying man. Well, those are the seven struggles that I wanted to mention. And now I want to turn to how he pressed on in these struggles.

We began with introduction to his life, turned to the struggles, and now thirdly to his pressing on. I personally think the reason that David Brainerd's life has exerted the power that it has is because in spite of his struggles, he never gave up. That simple.

He was consumed with a passion to finish his race, honor his master, spread the kingdom, and advance in holiness. Absolutely consumed. He could not relent from his pursuit of the kingdom, the honor of his master, and his own holiness.

He had an unswerving allegiance to the cause of Christ, so that I think we can all empathize with Henry Martin when, after reading him in Cambridge in 1802, he said, I long to be like him. Long to be like him. In spite of all the strangeness and unhealth and suffering, there is something in this man that makes us say, I must be like this.

I want to be like this. Brainerd called this passion to finish his race and not turn back a pleasing pain. He said, when I really enjoy God, I feel my desires of him the more insatiable, and my thirstings after holiness the more unquenchable.

Oh, for holiness. Oh, for more of God in my soul. Oh, this pleasing pain.

It makes my soul press after God. Oh, that I might not loiter on my heavenly journey. Oh, that I might not loiter on my heavenly journey.

He was utterly gripped by the apostolic admonition, redeem the time for the days are evil. Do not grow weary in well-doing, for in due time you will reap if you do not faint. Abound in the work of the Lord.

He is an outflowing of the pursuit of those apostolic commands with incredible devotion and single-minded fervor. April 1747 is last year. Oh, I long to fill the remaining moments.

Oh, for God. Though my body was so feeble and wearied with preaching and much private conversation, yet I wanted to sit up all night to do something for God. To God, the giver of these refreshments, be glory forever and ever.

Amen. February 21, 46. My soul was refreshed and comforted.

I could not but bless God, who had enabled me in some good measure to be faithful in the day past. Oh, how sweet it is to be spent and worn out for God. Among the means that Brainerd used in pursuing God in this way was prayer, fasting, study, and writing.

Let me say a word about each of these. Prayer. What a man of prayer.

Again and again you read, Spent the day in prayer for the Indians. Or, set aside six times today. Prayer.

Or, met with nearby family or friend to pray with them for the concerns of the kingdom. He prayed for his holiness. He prayed for the conversion of the Indians.

He prayed, perhaps above all, for the advancement of the kingdom. Oh, God, let your kingdom come in New England. He prayed and prayed that God's cause would advance.

What a spirit of prayer this man had. He was visiting the home of a friend one time, and he just went off by himself often to pray, to seek out a little place, a room, or outside. And this is what he wrote.

I continued wrestling with God in prayer for my dear little flock here, and more especially for the Indians elsewhere, as well as for dear friends in one place and another, till it was bedtime and I feared I should hinder the family, etc. But oh, with what reluctance did I find myself obliged to consume time in sleep. With what reluctance I went to bed when I wanted to keep on praying.

And he fasted and fasted and fasted. Again and again you read, fasted and prayed for the day. Fasted every time he needed guidance when he switched fields, or that summer after he was kicked out of school.

Fasting and fasting for guidance, for spiritual depth, for usefulness. And then he wrote a letter at the end of his life to young ministers, urging them to build into your lives fasting and prayer because of the spiritual benefits he had received by it. Here's what Edwards wrote about this experience.

Among all the many days he spent in secret fasting and prayer, and that he gives account of in his diary, there is scarce an instance of one but what was either attended or soon followed with apparent success, and a remarkable blessing in special incomes and consolations of God's Spirit. And very often before the day was ending. In other words, Edwards says, as he documents it, that almost every day that he fasted, something good happened in his life.

Thirdly, besides prayer and fasting, here was, in a sense, a very frustrated scholar, which every pastor is almost. Every pastor wants more time to read, as far as I know. I've never met one who says, oh, I read too much, or I get too much time to read, write.

But Edward Brainerd was an extraordinary mind. He was a genius, probably. From his language learning and his bent towards study, and he studied much.

Picture him studying. He built four little huts in his life. In each place where he worked, he built with his own hands a little hut.

And in the hut you have a candle and a fireplace. No electricity, no computers and word processors, no pencils and no paper of any significant amount. 45, December 20th, I spent much of the day in writing, but was unable to intermix prayer with my studies.

January 7, 44, spent this day in seriousness with steadfast resolutions for God and a life of mortification, studied closely till I felt my bodily strength fail. December 20th, 42, spent this day in prayer and reading and writing and enjoyed some assistance, especially in correcting some thoughts on a certain subject. He was constantly writing.

Now, one of the reasons this is significant is because we don't know what he wrote. Only the diaries and the journal are preserved at Brainerd. There aren't any other manuscripts, except letters.

And yet he was constantly writing theological things, and we don't have any of them. He was writing for himself, just like you all should do. Publishing is not as significant as writing.

You should all write because you clarify things when you write. You go deeper when you write. You get order when you write.

You grow in facility with language when you write. He said, was most of the day employed in writing on a divine subject, was frequent in prayer. Another time, spent most of the time in writing on a sweet divine subject.

That's what we just don't have any of. Another time, was engaged in writing again almost the whole day. Again, rose early in the morning by candlelight some considerable time, spent most of the day and wrote.

Another time, towards night enjoyed some of the clearest thoughts on a divine subject that ever I remember to have had upon any subject whatsoever, and spent two or three hours writing them. So here's a man with absolutely none of your benefits, none of your comforts, none of your advantages, spitting blood every day, agonizing in his breast, not adequate food, Indians clamoring for his attention, totally alone, writing, writing, writing, not for publication. And I commend it to you.

Raynard's life is one long agonizing strain to redeem the time, not grow weary in well-doing, and abound in the work of the Lord. Well, let me close with the last section, the effect of his life. The effect of his life.

And I want to begin this little section with his effect on Edwards. We know Raynard because of the impact he had on Jonathan Edwards. Had Edwards not been so moved, we would not know David Raynard.

Here's what Edwards wrote. I would conclude my observations on the merciful circumstances of Mr. Raynard's death by acknowledging with thankfulness the gracious dispensation of providence to me and to my family in so ordering that he should be cast hither to my house in his last sickness and should die here, so that we had the opportunity for much acquaintance and conversation with him and to show him kindness in such circumstances and to see his dying behavior, to hear his dying speeches and to receive his dying counsels and have the benefit of his dying prayers. Now what gives that incredible poignancy is that Edwards knew Jerusha caught the disease and died four months later.

So that he was writing this a couple of years later knowing that it had cost him the life of his daughter to have Raynard in his house and thanking God for the ministry. There's this beautiful description of his taking each of Edwards' children aside and asking them about their faith and praying with them. And you can imagine how a father would see one of the most noble missionaries of the day doing that to his children and would be deeply, deeply thankful.

As a result of this immense impact on Edwards, he wrote *The Life of Raynard*. It's been reprinted more than all of his other books and has had an immense, immense impact. And I listed all the missionaries that I could think of who had read and commented on Raynard earlier in the talk.

But if that's true, that is, if you can assemble about a dozen famous missionaries who said they owe so much to Raynard, how many countless unknowns must there be who fed on and were strengthened by this book? I mentioned colleges. Let me just refer to this briefly. Princeton and Dartmouth, in some

measure, owe their existence to David Raynard, the frustrated pastor-scholar.

It goes like this. He was kicked out of Yale. Jonathan Dickinson and Aaron Burr were getting fed up with Yale College.

They were behind the awakening. They took Raynard's side, tried to get him readmitted and couldn't. The Senate of New York and New Jersey had it up to here with the carnality of Yale and said, when it happened to Raynard, we're going to start our own school, namely the College of New Jersey, which became Princeton.

And the beautiful little touch of providential, what do you call it, irony, is that in October of 46, Princeton was chartered by the presbytery there in New Jersey. And in May of 47, now picture this, he is four or five months before he's dead. He is at the house of Jonathan Dickinson for four months, trying to recover to get back to Cross Weeks and to continue his ministry, and then giving up finally and realizing he's too sick.

During that time, Jonathan Dickinson, where he...

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/0/SID0815.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/david-brainerd/>

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