

(Men of Whom the World Was Not Worthy) Brainerd, David Oh That I May Never Loiter in My Heavenly Jou

by John Piper

David Brainerd's life was a powerful testimony to the truth that God can and does use weak, sick, discouraged, beat down, lonely, struggling saints to accomplish amazing things for his glory.

Duration: 1:23:08

Scripture: Psalm 103:1

Topics: "Perseverance In Faith", "Christian Sanctification"

Description

The video is a sermon about the life and ministry of David Brainerd. The speaker highlights the struggles that Brainerd faced, including loneliness, physical ailments, and spiritual battles. Despite these struggles, Brainerd remained steadfast in his pursuit of spreading the kingdom of God and advancing in holiness. The speaker emphasizes the importance of being consumed with a passion for God and not giving up in the face of challenges.

Transcript

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're just a joy to minister with and 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. I come away 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. 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. And I reflected on that because I've had three sons now, and Lord willing we'll have a fourth who turn nine.

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. 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, 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 paltitious 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 would 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 Edwards 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, 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.

The 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. 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 a 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. The message was 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, 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 forwardness 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 Wittlesley, 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 Wittlesley's prayer? And he said, I think Wittlesley 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 had 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, 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 12 years later as she led 4,000 of us in song, lifting her hands like this. Be blind, behold your Savior coming, and leap, you lame, and die. 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 25th, 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 for the Indians.

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 Edward was going to become a missionary to the Indians in a few years after he got kicked out of his church.

And in April 1st, 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, 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 Brainard's role in that.

So he was ordained in 1744. He was 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 Weeksville 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 Weeksville, New Jersey, in an incredible way.

And within a year, he had about 130 solid believers. He described, you know, I could give a whole talk on the way God came upon the Indians through the weight of truth, as David Brainard 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.

God did a mighty work through Brainard among these Indians. He moved them from Cross Weeksville 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 Edward's 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 Edward's house, October 9, 1747. A short life, 29 years, 5 months, and 19 days.

Eight years a believer, four years. Why, then, was Brainard's life so powerful? Why has it made the impact that it has? Well, 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 Brainard.

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 Brainard? Why was it written of Henry Martin? Perusing The Life of David Brainard, 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. Why did William Carey regard Edwards' Life of Brainard 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 Brainard 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 humans to support me. I read my Bible and Mr. Brainard's life, the only books I brought with me, and from them I have a little support.

Now, why did this life have this extraordinary impact? Well, let me ask a more manageable question. Why has it had an impact on me? And then maybe it will transfer to you. Why? The answer, in summary form, I think is that Brainard'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 in, his struggles. Number one, Brainard 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. The thing that strikes you about the suffering of Brainerd is not simply the severity of it, but the consistency of it. 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 treasure." 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.

Sunday, 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 the 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. But Brainerd pressed 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." 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 Countermeek in 1743, he said, "I live poorly with regards to the comforts of life. Most of my diet consists of boiled corn, pasty 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 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. 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 than 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 formerly 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, for 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.

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.

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. 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 said, 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 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 burdened 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 goes. 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.

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 unloved.

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 to 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, Mark this choice committed, 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. 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 did that. 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's it. 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. I long to be like him.

In spite of all the strangers and unhealthiness and suffering, there is something in this man that makes us say, I must be like him. I want to be like him. 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 of evil. Do not grow weary in well-doing, for in due time you will lose if you do not think.

Abound in the work of the Lord. He is an outflashing of the pursuit of those apostolic commands with incredible devotion and single-minded fervor. April 1747, his last year.

Oh, I long to feel the remaining moment. 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 friends 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. He just went off by himself often to pray.

He would 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. With what reluctance I went to bed when I wanted to keep on. 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.

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 Edward 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 ended.

In other words, Edward says that he documented 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. I get too much time to read. But Edward Brainerd was an extraordinary man.

He was a genius probably. In his language learning and his bent towards study. And he studied much.

Picture him studying. He built four little huts in his life. A 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 pencil.

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 the 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. There aren't any other manuscripts.

Except letters. And yet he was constantly writing theological things. And we don't have any of this.

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 en route. 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. Here's a man with absolutely none of your benefit. None of your comfort.

None of your advantages. Spitting blood every day. Agonizing in his breath.

Not adequate food. Indians clamoring for his attention. Totally alone.

Writing, writing, writing. And I commend it to you. Brainerd'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 Brainerd because of the impact he had on Jonathan Edwards. Had Edwards not been so moved, we would not know David Brainerd.

Here's what Edwards wrote. I would conclude my observations on the merciful circumstances of Mr. Brainerd'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 Derusha caught the disease and died, so that he was writing this a couple of years later knowing that it had cost him the life of his daughter to have Brainerd 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. 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 Brainerd*.

It's been reprinted more than all of his other books and has had an immense, immense impact. I listed all the missionaries that I could think of who had read and commented on *Brainerd* 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 *Brainerd*, how many countless unknowns must we stand 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 Brainerd, 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 Brainerd's side, tried to get him readmitted and couldn't. The Senate of New York and New Jersey headed up to here with the carnality of Yale and said, when it happened to Brainerd, we're going to start our own school, named 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's staying, is appointed the first president of Princeton. The classes begin in his house, and David Brainerd is called the first student of the College of New Jersey.

And numerous scholars write about the indirect inspiration and impact that his expulsion from Yale and his passion for the ministry and for thinking had on the founding of Princeton College. There's another interesting story about Eliezer Wheelock. Brainerd went to work among the Indians on the Delaware River at the Forks of Delaware, the Susquehanna Indians, and he felt like a total failure.

He worked there a year, gathered a few believers who later, by the way, went on to Cross Weeks and then joined the community there, but left feeling a failure. However, his journal about his time there was read by Eliezer Wheelock, a friend of his who was absolutely enthralled with the prospect of working among the Indians there, the Iroquois in particular. And so he took up the challenge among the Iroquois, then moved to Connecticut, pressed on, formed a school, and started a college which became Dartmouth College, owing in a very remarkable way, a significant way, to the inspiration of the journal and model of David Brainerd.

In 1740, Yale, Harvard, and William & Mary were the only colleges in the colony, and they were not sympathetic to the Awakening. None of them was. But in the tide of the Awakening came, with the

Presbyterians, Princeton, with the Baptist Brown University, with the Dutch Reformed, Rutgers, and with the Congregationists, Dartmouth.

So the educational spinoff of the Great Awakening. And isn't it remarkable that this nobody who served for four years in the wilderness was a key element in the founding of half of those schools, two out of the four? The lesson is that had he abandoned his missionary career, the writing of his journals, and suffering, in order to take up a peaceful, settled, scholarly, pastoral life, the schools may not have been founded. We've never heard of him.

The missionary movement would not have had that impulse. It is an amazing thing. I close with two last comments.

The most awesome effect of David Brainerd's ministry is the same as yours. There were about 150 Indians who will be in heaven because of his direct preaching ministry. I can't begin to estimate how many millions of people from all the tribes and tongues who will be because missionaries went under the inspiration.

But let's just take his life as it stood. He had gathered about 130 souls of whom he was fairly sure of their conversion by the time he left. And it went on growing under the ministry of his brother John.

And I think Sinclair Ferguson has made plain to us the inestimable value of one soul plucked from everlasting destruction and brought into the eternal joy of God. Had he suffered what he suffered for only one Indian, that would still be his greatest achievement. And if he has 130 or 40 or 50, then all the more amazing.

It might be fitting for me to close by opening up a journal that is far weaker and far more worldly. This is from a journal entry of mine, June 28, 1986. Remember that day? You don't keep a journal, Tom.

Maybe you do. June 28, 1986. This afternoon, Tom and Julie and I drove to Northampton.

We found the gravestone of David Bringer. A dark stone slab the size of a grave top and a smaller white marble insert which said, sacred to the memory of Reverend David Bringer, a faithful and laborious missionary to the Stockbridge, Delaware, and Susquehanna tribes of Indians who died in this town October 10, 1747. Tom and Julie and Ruth and Hannah and I took hands and stood around the grave and prayed to thank God for Bringer and Jonathan Edwards and to dedicate ourselves to their work and their God.

It was a memorable and, I hope, powerful and lasting. Father, my heart is thankful to you 250 years later for this man. Broken, sick, tormented, lonely, beat down, frustrated, glorious man.

And I thank you for what you've taught me, what you've worked in me. And I long so much for us all now to be thankful. Father, give us some measure of his good spirit and oh, that we may not loiter.

I pray this now in your name. Well, we've got 20 minutes, I think, for us to reflect on Brainerd's life, the very prejudiced account that you've heard here. Unashamed admiration.

What would you like to talk about? Anything at all that defines me, corrections or additions or queries? Go ahead, Bear. Father, I haven't read one other book about Brainerd. All I've read is this, the Yale critical edition of the diary and journals and all of Norman Pettit's introduction and Brainerd's, I mean, Edwards'

comments.

So my exposure is very, very, very limited. It's not based on the secondary literature at all. And I commend that approach to life to you.

Forget secondary literature and go to the sources. I am so glad that I did not read Norman Pettit's introduction before I read Brainerd because I got so angry at the way he talked about Brainerd. I was angry at him.

He talked about joylessness again and again and I underlined 50 places where he talked about joy. Unbelieving literary critic from the University of Chicago, Handling Pearl. He knows nothing about.

So don't go to secondary literature. Go to the sources. No offense, Bear.

You did, you did. I'm glad. I didn't think you would be.

Go ahead. Yeah, yeah. So did Henry Martin, that lovely man.

Fritz, if I were a homiletics teacher, I would require that my students try every time. I have read enough of history to know that God could take Thomas Chalmers who read laboriously and transform a people and God could take a Spurgeon who could prepare in 45 minutes and deliver an unforgettable message with a half sheet of notes. You must find your own way.

I write out every Sunday morning sermon for 10 years because I think I have a gift for delivering it without people knowing that. Not everybody does. And anybody that looks like they're reading should get rid of their manuscript, all right? But I do because I can't get my thoughts straight any other way.

I can't get them straight. I can't get my ideas in order. You have to write if you have a weak mind.

I believe this with all my heart because I went one time and talked to the faculty at Fuller Seminary in 1978 and I remember Ralph Martin, a New Testament teacher, in a kind of demeaning way said, Oh, do you do that arcing stuff that Dr. Fuller teaches? Isn't that just a crutch? That's an exegetical device that requires writing out the text. Isn't that just a crutch? And I said, That's exactly what it is because I'm a cripple in lecture. So unless you are like Jonathan Edwards and Albert Einstein and Carl Sagan or whoever and can take an idea and for an hour or two hold it and turn it like Dr. Ferguson said, I agree with him.

That is not the prerogative of a genius. But I have to do it on paper. I cannot do it.

I think of the shutters banging and the cars going by and food and my mind won't hold an idea without a pencil in my hand. So know thyself, brother, and proceed. Go ahead, go back.

I don't, but I'll tell you who can tell you. Mark Noll has just written a history of Princeton, and you can find, I'm sure, a very profound treatment of that move. It's a troubling phenomenon, I agree, Tom, to see what happens, what seems to always happen with my own alma mater.

I fear, I don't know what might happen there, but it's a tragic thing, which is why I suppose there has to be constantly new schools being created like there is in Florida now. Two of them. There.

I don't know where the hands are coming first. This is right here. Go ahead, baby.

No, I was looking behind you, but go ahead. We'll jump back in. My only exposure to John is the little I read in the introduction here by Pettit, who says that John took over the work in Cross Weekson, pressed on until he was 60 years old, that the work prospered, and that's it.

So I just don't know what else to say. John, he had two favorite brothers, John and the other younger one, Israel. Maybe I'm not sure what his name was, but they both were evidently very warm and successful men.

The people in his own day did not regard Brainerd as a weird, sick guy. When we read these kinds of personal testimonies and the self-deprecation, we Americans, from our psychological perspective, immediately indict him with sickness. They didn't, and it may not have been as sick as it looks to us.

We have been told to esteem ourselves so consistently for so many years that anything that looks like the lack of self-esteem looks sick. Now, I suspect there was a measure of sickness in Brainerd, but not as much as the average reader today would think, probably. Now, David, oh, there's so many things he has to teach us.

Community, oh, he just cried out for Christian community. He loved friends. He loved to talk with people.

If there'd only been somebody with him to say, Come on, David, quit it. It didn't go that bad yesterday. You have a very bad perspective.

It was good. They listened to you. Somebody forgiven.

We are not made to function alone in the ministry. We will not judge our ministries correctly if we're left alone. We will either be excessively proud or excessively despairing.

We must get the orientation of friends. So there's a first thing to learn, partnership and community in the ministry to give us balance. Oh, my goodness, that's so important.

A second thing is we must learn to use, no, that's not the right way to say it. We must learn to perceive our successes as the works of grace and delight in them, delight in them. And he does that periodically.

He's just very, very hesitant, I think, to say anything that would come close to looking like he is extolling himself. And we must find language that can say, it was a wonderful service yesterday. The Lord blessed.

I felt freedom. I thanked the Lord for his goodness to me as a minister. I'm not perfect.

I made mistakes, but it could have been a lot worse. So find language that can extol the mercy of God in our lives when he does one little fraction of kindness in us and through us. That's my alternative to self-esteem.

Grace esteem, I like to call it. Cultivating the esteem of grace in all of the little dimensions in our lives. That's my counseling approach.

If somebody thinks they're too useless to go on in life, I don't generally try to find some feature in which they can boast, but I can point out so many evidences of grace in their lives, that God is at work in their lives, and he's the kind of God who really doesn't need much to work with. Witness David Brainerd in order to get on with them. So that's an approach that I think he would point us toward.

I think the biggest lesson he has for us along those lines is God-centeredness. An utter, absolute passion to keep God at the center of everything. Now, the danger of that is that people, some Puritan types, don't have the theological sophistication or depth to learn how to value the creation for God's sake.

They feel that any delight in things is idolatry. In my book *Desiring God*, I wrestled with that in the chapter on prayers, as well as I know how to wrestle with it, and got my answer from Augustine, who prayed, Father, he loves thee too little who loves anything together with thee, which he loves not for thy sake. Now, what that does is free you to obey 2 Timothy, or 1 Timothy 4, where all these things were freely given to you to enjoy.

Marriage, bed, and food is the specifics in view. Sex and eating are not to be demeaned. And so when I say God-centeredness, what I mean is not that all you think about is God, but that you think of all in relation to God.

Food, sex, children, shoes, health, sunshine, broken clutches, and everything else. Everything relates to God. And what I just cry for in my people is that they would be just God-besotted.

I love that phrase that Mark Noll used in describing John to them. He was a God-besotted person. They didn't need touch.

Those are two or three things that come to my mind. All the historical implications of faithfulness. Who knows what will come in a hundred years? That was Tom's point.

We have not bothered to compile a list of biographies, but a good... What? Can I make a... That's exactly what I would have said. So that's the first thing to say. And my second thing to say is this.

Most contemporary biographies are very thin. They are excessively atheological. You read Mary Drury on William Carey, you can't find a thing about his theology.

You don't know what drove the man. Contemporary biographies don't give a rip about what drove the early missionaries. And that's all I care about.

So you know what you do? You go to the library and you get these old, tattered versions that have no more copyright laws on them anymore. And you photocopy it. Because they're not available.

And you say, now what would you pay for this in a used, rare bookstore? \$60, \$40, \$50 for one of these old gems? Like the *Journal of Henry Martin*? You can't get that. But you can photocopy it for \$15. Or cheaper, depending on where you get your machine.

So if I were you, I would pick out the people you want to read. And then go back and find their journals and their diaries and their letters. And copy them out of the library on paper.

Bind them yourself with a loose-leaf binder. And read a few each day. Or if you can find a classic biography that is theologically astute, then spend your time on that.

But there's just a lot of stuff that's so thin today. You've got more important things to do with your time. It's not just age.

The original is what I'm aiming at, mainly. That's a very good point.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/2/SID2924.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/men-of-whom-the-world-was-not-worthy-brainerd-david-oh-that-i-may-never-loiter-i/>

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