

The Great Awakening

Introduction

God's people have experienced periods of renewal and revival since Bible times. The Old Testament records for us periods when Israel would awake from its spiritual lethargy and sin, repent and begin once again to walk with their God.¹ Since the time of Christ this pattern has continued, with revivals breaking out in a myriad of locations, among Christians of vastly differing backgrounds and theological convictions. These seasons of renewal may be relatively brief in duration or last scores of years.

Historians and theologians have grappled with what to call these *seasons of the Spirit*. They have been referred to as revivals, renewals, and awakenings. The common denominator in these movements seems to be a move of God in the lives of his people bringing them out of a time of spiritual depression, apathy, nominal faith or gross sin.

In 1712 Solomon Stoddard preached a sermon in Northampton Massachusetts entitled, *On the Outpouring of the Spirit of God*. The sermon set the stage for the revivals that would follow some years later. Here is the outline of Stoddard's sermon.

Doctrine: There are some special Seasons wherein God doth in a remarkable Manner revive Religion among his People.

Question: How is it with a People when Religion is revived?

- *Saints are quickened.*
- *Sinners are converted.*
- *Many that are not Converted do become more Religious*

Observation: This reviving is sometimes longer, and sometimes of shorter Continuance. Sometimes Religion flourishes in a Country for a great many years together. So it did for twenty-nine Years in the days of Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles 29:1 . . . But sometimes it is for a less space. God is very Arbitrary [unpredictable] in this Matter. The People of God are praying, and waiting for this Mercy. Psalm 85:6- "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that thy People may rejoice in Thee? But God will take his own time for this Mercy."²

In 1724 Solomon Stoddard's grandson was called to be the associate pastor in Northampton and two years later would take over leadership of the church upon the death of his grandfather. His name was Jonathan Edwards. Edwards, along with a host of other pastors, would lead much of colonial America in a series of revivals that would

¹ Renewal came to Israel under King Jehoash (2 Kings 11, 12), King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18, King Asa (2 Chronicles 15), and especially under King Josiah (2 Kings 22, 23). Awakening also came at the time of Zerubbabel (Ezra 5, 6), and under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8, 9, 13).

² For many modern Christians the word *religion* carries with it negative connotations of dry institutionalism. In the 18th century, however, the word *Religion* was used in much the same way that Christians today would use the word *faith* or *belief* and was a positive word .

become known as the *Great Awakening*.¹ The Great Awakening took place in the late 1730's and continued well into the 1740's.

The most famous figure of the Awakening was the gifted preacher George Whitefield. Whitefield, who preached to huge crowds (without amplification!) served as a bridge to God's work in the colonies and the concurrent awakening in England. At the end of Whitefield's first American preaching tour in 1740, the young evangelist, then only 25 years old, preached to 23,000 people at Boston Common. This was more than the entire population of Boston at the time and was the largest crowd ever gathered in America to that date. At the same time revival broke out in England under the relentless preaching of Whitefield and the Wesley brothers, John and Charles.

The Great Awakening that took place in the colonies and England created a great deal of controversy. Mobs frequently attacked preachers and those who came to hear the gospel preached. Whitefield himself received numerous death threats and at one point was stoned until nearly dead. Preachers were often heckled and pelted with rocks, rotten fruit and the ever present horse manure. A favorite tactic of the mob was to attempt to drown out the preaching with the beating of drums and the blowing of trumpets! Even the Christian community was divided over the movement. Churches, denominations and colleges split over whether or not this was a genuine work of God. By 1743 America's clergy were evenly divided in their understanding of the movement. To be sure there were emotional excesses. Established church structure was challenged and many pastors felt threatened.

Jonathan Edwards set out to examine the validity of the revival in his book, *The Religious Affections*.² Edwards, a careful biblical thinker, examined emotional excesses and the tendency for revival movements to go astray. He never ignored the darker side of the Great Awakening. He outlines two enemies of genuine Holy Spirit lead renewal. The first danger is outright opposition by those who seek to maintain the religious status quo. Edwards would have none of this type of thinking and sharply criticized those who opposed what he saw as a definitive work of God. Second, Edwards was critical of some of the emotional extremism that accompanied the revival.

There seems to be too much of a disposition this way prevailing in this land at this time. Because many who, in the late extraordinary season, appeared to have great religious affections did not manifest a right temper of mind, and ran into many errors, in the time of their affection and the heat of their zeal; (*The Religious Affections*, p.48)

Edwards took a balanced position that embraced the Great Awakening, but not uncritically.

¹ Often this is called the *First Great Awakening* to distinguish it from the *Second Great Awakening* which took place about a century later.

² *Affections* is another one of those 18th century words that leaves the 21st century Christian confused. When Edward's uses the word *affection* he is referring to our heart, emotion, and fervor for the things of Christ.

For although to true religion there must indeed be something else besides affection, yet true religion consists so much in the affections that there can be no true religion without them. He who has no religious affection is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart. As there can be no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no religious affection. (*The Religious Affections*, p. 49.)

SBCC stands indebted to these great men and women who have gone before us and helped shape our heritage and led the church of Christ. It would be a tragedy to ignore their contribution to the kingdom of God. During the next four weeks we have the privilege to examine the lives and the contribution of four leaders of the Great Awakening. Their influence continues to this day and we owe them a debt of gratitude. Each study will begin with a brief biographical sketch, give a description of their particular vision for the Christian life and conclude with an examination of a biblical text (or texts) which that leader cherished.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study One

George Whitefield

A Vision for the Lost

In the fall of 1740 George Whitefield, only 25 years old, began an evangelistic preaching tour of the American colonies. Already famous in his English homeland, his dramatic and forceful preaching took New England by storm and ignited what was to become known as the *Great Awakening*. Thirty years later Whitefield came to the Colonies on his seventh and final trip. He arrived in Charleston after a particularly difficult Atlantic crossing and immediately began to preach in spite of a now frail body and failing health. For ten days he spoke of new life in Christ to large audiences. For the entire summer the irrepressible Whitefield preached as often as his failing body would allow. On September 29, after preaching his final sermon in Newburyport, Mass., he went to bed a broken man and died the following morning.

Church historian Mark Noll tells us that, *When Whitefield arrived in the Colonies, he was simply an event. Today, a President or rock star coming to a small town would generate a similar intense interest. Whitefield was the best-known American until George Washington.* Whitefield yearned to share the Gospel with people and spent his life proclaiming the good news. Whitefield's travels included seven trips to America, a dozen to Scotland, tours of Ireland, Bermuda, and Holland. He preached at least 18,000 sermons and somewhere in the vicinity of 10,000,000 people heard him!

It was not uncommon for Whitefield to preach to huge crowds, in excess of 20,000 people, without the benefit of any amplification! It was said that his voice could be heard clearly by up to 30,000 people in an open field. Whitefield was so moved by the urgency of his task to explain the gift of salvation in Christ that he never preached without crying at some point during his sermon. Most of his preaching was extemporaneous and was often accompanied by a tremendous emotional response from his listeners. While in Scotland, in the city of Cambuslang, he conducted a series of morning and evening meetings. Some of the evening meetings would continue until 2:00 A.M. The excitement was unforgettable as one observer described: *there were scenes of uncontrollable distress, like a field of battle . . . All night in the fields, might be heard the voice of prayer and praise.*

Whitefield didn't just preach to large crowds. He also had personal friends who were not Christians that he attempted to introduce to Christ. The most famous was Benjamin Franklin. Whitefield and Franklin were something of a religious odd couple. While theologically they were miles apart, Franklin the classic Enlightenment thinker and Whitefield the Bible believing Christian, they remained close and affectionate friends for thirty years. They wrote warm letters to one another and whenever Whitefield was in America he stayed in Franklin's home as often as possible. Whitefield died without witnessing the conversion of his friend.

George Whitefield burned to see people meet Christ and experience God's grace. He was an evangelist through and through, and, at one point said, *God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.* His zeal to share the good news pushed him to the point of exhaustion. He would often preach a dozen times in a week spending forty or more hours actually in the pulpit speaking! Whitefield pushed himself so relentlessly and spoke with such intensity that it was not uncommon for him to vomit after his sermons. He refers to a *vast discharge from the stomach, usually with a considerable quantity of blood.*

Whitefield pioneered new evangelistic strategies. Because of his radical call to conversion and his consistent critique of *unconverted ministers* many mainline churches would not allow him to preach in their pulpits. Whitefield responded by preaching outdoors in open fields. It was Whitefield who encouraged his friend John Wesley and other revival preachers to adopt this strategy and take the message directly to the common man and woman circumventing the confines of established churches. Whitefield went on to establish his own magazine which chronicled the work, and to hold his own independent evangelistic conferences. It was these methods of sharing the gospel that were most widely used in the evangelical awakenings which would follow.

Whitefield's intensity was due to his belief in the truthfulness of the Gospel and the eternal consequences of how people responded to Christ. The following is an excerpt from a sermon titled, *The Kingdom of God*, preached in Glasgow, Scotland, September 13, 1741.

Let me draw out my soul and heart to you, my dear friends, my dear guilty friends, poor bleeding souls, who must shortly take your last farewell, and fly into endless eternity. Methinks the very sight is awful, to think in how short a time every soul of you must die—some of you to go to heaven, and others to go to the devil for evermore.

O, my dear friends, these are matters of eternal moment. I did not come to tickle your ears; if I had a mind to do so, I would play the orator; no, but I came, if God should be pleased, to touch your hearts. What shall I say to you? Open the door of your heart, that the King of glory, the blessed Jesus, may come in and erect his kingdom in your soul. Make room for Christ . . .

My dear friends, I would preach with all my heart till midnight, to do you good, till I could preach no more. Oh, that this body might hold out to speak more for my dear Redeemer! Had I a thousand lives, and had I a thousand tongues, they should be employed in inviting sinners to come to Jesus Christ! Come, then, let me prevail with some of you to come along with me. Come, poor, lost, undone sinner, come just as you are to Christ . . .

Whitefield stands as a tremendous reminder to 21st century Christians that people who do not know Christ need salvation.

Scripture Study

What is God's attitude toward those who do not know him? What does he want to see happen in their life?

- 1 Timothy 2:4-5

- 1 Timothy 1:15

- 2 Peter 3:9

- Romans 1:16

- John 3:1-21

- 1 John 5:11-12

Why does the Bible say that people need salvation? We might ask, *saved* from what?

- Romans 3:23

- Romans 6:23

- Romans 5:12

Re-read the brief excerpt from George Whitefield's sermon above. What motivations do you see in this sermon for sharing the gospel? Be ready to share your favorite line or

phrase from the sermon. What motivates you to tell friends and family about salvation in Christ? If you are not motivated evangelistically —why?

Using Ephesians 2:1-10 only, develop a simple outline of the gospel message. Be ready to share this outline with your Home Group.

In Act 1:8 Jesus said to his followers,

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

It was shortly after this, on the day of Pentecost, that the Spirit came, filling and empowering those who had followed Jesus. The book of Acts is one long example of Christians telling others about new life in Christ. They evangelized their world. They shared, talked, argued, and pleaded with those that they meet to come to God through Christ.

Read the Scriptures below. What insights do they give you about evangelism and the early church? What motivated these disciples to share the gospel? Do you have another section from the book of Acts that has encouraged you or instructed you to share your faith?

- Acts 4:8-12

- Acts 5:17-32 (see especially at verses 20)

- Acts 5:42

- Acts 16: 11-15

Do you feel adequately prepared to share your faith with your non-Christian friends and co-workers? What would help you to be more proficient in your evangelism?

Sermon Notes . . .

Study Two

John Wesley

A Vision for Spiritual Growth

In the early part of the 18th century the Church of England stood sorely in need of reform. The established church failed to provide adequate food for hungry hearts in the age of reason. A vast and needy population waited eagerly for a new word spoken with a new power.

Just at this time when we wanted little *of filling up the measure of our iniquities*, two or three clergymen of the Church of England began vehemently to *call sinners to repentance*. In two or three years they had sounded the alarm to the utmost borders of the land. Many thousands gathered to hear them; and in every place where they came, many began to show such a concern for religion as they never had done before.¹

This was John Wesley's own account of the beginnings of what would become the Methodist revival.

John Wesley was born in the Lincolnshire rectory of Epworth, England in 1703. His father Samuel was an unbending churchman and his mother Susannah was extraordinary by any standards.² In 1725 he began to study for ordination at his father's urging. His desire for spiritual growth was clear from the beginning: *I began to aim at, and pray for, inward holiness.*³ In 1726 Wesley was elected fellow of Lincoln College at Oxford and spent the next 9 years teaching, tutoring and studying there. While there, he quickly acquired leadership of the *Holy Club*, a group his brother Charles had started with two others, one of which was George Whitefield. They met regularly for fellowship, Bible study and prayer. The goal of the club was the spiritual development of its members. In 1734 Wesley wrote to his father, *My one aim in life is to secure personal holiness, for without being holy myself I cannot promote real holiness in others.*⁴

In October of 1735 John and his brother Charles set sail for the American colony of Georgia, *to go amongst the Indian Nations . . . in order to bring them to the knowledge of Christianity.*⁵ He left America with a sense of insufficiency, a dejected feeling of total failure, and an utter lack of peace.⁶ On the ship and in Georgia he met a group of Moravian Brethren missionaries⁷ whose calm assurance of faith in the midst of storms at

¹ Quoted in Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church and The Age of Reason 1648-1789* p. 141.

² 19 children! Susanna Wesley deserves a study all her own.

³ John Wesley, *Journal* from Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church Renewal* p. 13.

⁴ Wesley, *Vulliamy* from Snyder p. 14.

⁵ From a report in *The Gentleman's Magazine* October 1735 in Snyder p. 19.

⁶ Wesley spent two frustrating years in the colony. He was such a rigorous man that he created enmity among his parish and was unable to evangelize the Indians.

⁷ The Moravians were Lutheran Pietists founded in Germany by the legendary Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf.

sea greatly impressed him. The Moravian influence upon Wesley was profoundly providential. On May 24, 1738, the light that had been breaking in upon John Wesley's soul now shed itself abroad in his heart at a Moravian small group meeting.

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, here one was reading Luther's preface to the *Epistle to the Romans*. About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.¹

Wesley had found his message but he had yet to find his medium and his method. Seen as an *enthusiast*, parish churches began to shut their doors to him. Wherever he preached, he was informed that he did not need to return.

On February 17, George Whitefield preached to coal miners in the fields of Bristol, 100 miles west of London. Within three weeks the crowds escalated to 10,000. Whitefield sent for the help of his good friend John Wesley. At first Wesley was uneasy about the appropriateness of preaching in the fields but soon surrendered to the medium that would give rise to revival. If he was not allowed to preach in the churches, he would preach in the fields.

At four in the afternoon I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people. The scripture on which I spoke was this...*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.*²

As a preacher Wesley was powerful but as an organizer he was supreme. He spent his time between London and Bristol, preaching in the fields and organizing the converts into small groups. His one objective was to form a genuine people of God. Snyder writes,

From the beginning of Wesley's great ministry in 1738, the secret of his radicality lay in forming little bands of God-seekers who joined together in an earnest quest to be Jesus' disciples. His goal was not to make converts but to turn converts into saints.³

Wesley organized folks into groups, called *classes*, consisting of 12 people each. They served as a type of house church, or homegroup, meeting once a week for about an hour in the neighborhoods where the people lived. Class leaders, both men and women, were

¹ From Albert C. Outler ed. *John Wesley* p. 66.

² Wesley, *Journal* from Snyder p. 33. Over the 52 years of his ministry Wesley traveled a quarter of a million miles and preached more than 40,000 times to unnumbered multitudes, up to 20 and even 30 thousand with no sound system! He preached in streets, in churchyards, in the fields or the moors. The world was his parish.

³ Snyder p. 2.

pastors and disciplers. Each member would report on their spiritual progress, or share a particular problem or a specific need and receive support and prayer from the others.

It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to “bear one another’s burdens,” and naturally to *care for each other*. As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And *speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ.*¹

The classes provided the community context in which believers could bear one another’s burdens, encourage, exhort, come to know, and speak the truth to one another in love. But primarily they were organized as a system of discipline in community for the purposes of spiritual growth in holiness. Wesley suggests to us that there is need for something more than hanging out, studying or praying together. There is a need for covenant, discipline and accountability within our groups and accountability of our groups to the larger church body.

Scripture Study

Consider the trajectory of your spiritual growth. How have you progressed in holiness? Give some concrete examples and be prepared to share them with your group.

Wesley repeatedly defined *holiness as loving God with all one’s being and loving one’s neighbor as oneself*. Love was the key to holiness in his life and theology. It was to be the primary motivation for holiness, empowering and moving Christians to good works.

Read the following passages. What is the connection between love and holy living? How is love a fountainhead of *all inward and outward holiness*?

- Matt. 22:34-38
- John 13:34-35; 14:15, 23-24
- 1 John 3:18
- 2 John 1:6

¹ Wesley, *Works VIII* from Snyder p. 37.

Wesley insisted that faith did not excuse believers from a life of good works; in the same way he insisted that there could be no good works without a life of faith. Love is the fulfillment of the law, *not by releasing us from, but constraining us to obey it.*¹ Faith was not genuine if it did not produce moral change, including good works. Faith not only believes; it acts. The Christian's life was to be characterized by active faith – *faith working through love.* (Gal. 5:6 NASB)

Read Galatians 5:6 The NIV gives a poor translation of this verse. It uses *expressing* rather than the more fitting *working* (NASB, NRSV). The Greek word is *energeo* (ενεργεω) from which we get the word *energy*. It means, *to be active or efficient*.

How is your faith actively, and energetically working through love? What can you do to move toward a more energetic faith that expresses itself through love and good works?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3 (notice the connection with 1 Corinthians 13:13) What is produced by faith? What is prompted by love? What is inspired by hope?

How have faith, hope, and love been genuine motivations in your life? What have they produced?

For Wesley, progress in holiness could only be experienced within the context of a radically committed community of believers. There was no place for solitary religion. *'Holy solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.*² When Wesley speaks of *social holiness* he is pointing to New Testament *koinonia*, or fellowship. For Wesley it included watching over one another in love, admonishing, advising, confronting, encouraging, exhorting and praying with one another.

Do you see your homegroup as a primary structure through which you experience fellowship, mutual encouragement and admonition within the body? How has your homegroup contributed to your spiritual growth in holiness?

Consider these verses:

¹ Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount" Discourse IV, *Works*, V from Snyder p. 119.

² Wesley, Preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems (1739)*, *Works*, XIV, from Snyder p. 88.

- Hebrews 10:24-25
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- Colossians 3:16
- Romans 12:15

Are you concerned about the personal holiness of those close to you? How can you come alongside them to gently and appropriately encourage them to grow and pursue holiness?

Wesley also organized smaller *bands* of about 6 people for the purpose of confession.

These, therefore, wanted some means of closer union; they wanted to pour out their hearts without reserve, particularly with regard to the sin which did still easily beset them, and the temptations which were most apt to prevail over them. And they were the more desirous of this, when they observed it was the express advice of an inspired writer: *Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.* (James 5:16) In compliance with their desire, I divided them into smaller companies; putting the married or single men, and married or single women, together.¹

Read James 5:16 How should the Christian apply this verse to his or her life? How have you personally applied this to your life? How has your homegroup helped you in this area? How can it improve?

Have you ever met in a smaller discipleship group or accountability group like a *band*? If so how has it contributed to your spiritual growth?

¹ Wesley, *Works*, VIII from Snyder p. 36

At the Methodist Band meetings¹ the members were asked these very specific questions regarding their spiritual lives:

Any of the preceding questions may be asked as often as occasion offers; the five following at every meeting:

1. *What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?*
2. *What temptations have you met with?*
3. *How were you delivered?*
4. *What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?*
5. *Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?*²

What do you think of these questions? Would these questions benefit or harm a believer? How? Why?

The dynamic quality of the early Methodists shines through Wesley's description of the Yorkshire societies in 1751:

I found them all alive, strong, vigorous of soul, blessing, loving and praising God their Saviour...From the beginning they had been taught both the law and the gospel. *God loves you: therefore love and obey Him. Christ died for you: Therefore die to sin. Christ is risen: therefore rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore: therefore live to God, till you live with him in glory.* So we preached; and so you believed.³

May we be found so alive, so strong, so vigorous of soul!

¹ Remember bands had about 6 people of the same sex and station.

² Wesley, *Rules of the Bands* from Outler p. 181

³ Quoted in Cragg p. 152

Study Three

Charles Wesley

A Vision for Worship

Born in 1707, Charles Wesley was the eighteenth of Samuel and Susannah Wesley's nineteen children! Only ten of these children lived to maturity. Before the brothers went to Oxford, their mother was busy home schooling! Susannah Wesley knew Greek, Latin and French and methodically taught the boys for six hours a day. Charles, who was often overshadowed by his more famous brother John, is at times referred to as the "forgotten Wesley." While the more dominant John may have received more headlines in his life, it is Charles' contributions that may have had a longer and broader impact on Christian thinking.

In addition to being a preacher, Charles wrote hymns and has been called by some the greatest hymn writer of the all time. He was certainly the most prolific. Charles wrote 8,989 hymns, and produced fifty-six published volumes in fifty-three years! Many of Charles' songs are still sung today by Christian's around the world. *Hark the Herald Angles Sing, And Can It Be, O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing, Love Divine, All Loves Excelling, Jesus Lover of My Soul, Christ the Lord is Risen Today, and Rejoice! The Lord is King!* remind us that Charles Wesley's influence continues today. His brother John referred to these hymns as a, *distinct and full account of scriptural Christianity.*

Charles, along with his brother John, their friend George Whitefield and a host of other pastors and preachers were part of a broad work of God in both England and America. The "Great Awakening" in the American Colonies and the simultaneous revivals in British Isles brought hundreds of thousands to Christ and has had a lasting influence on contemporary evangelical faith. While never officially breaking with the Anglican Church, John and Charles moved, literally, outside the established church of the day and began to preach in fields. Charles' journal chronicles these exciting years. In the summer of 1738 Charles reports that he preached twice to crowds of ten thousand at Moorfields and to twenty thousand people at Kennington Common. Charles was first and foremost an evangelist and pastor. He also went on to write an average of one hymn a day for his entire adult life.

John and Charles were the leaders of a movement called *Methodism*, that after their death would go on to become one of the most influential Christian denominations in the world. The Wesley's and their followers developed disciplined and methodical *methods* in their quest for holy living. It was these practices that resulted in what Charles called, *the harmless nickname of Methodist.* The name stuck and the movement grew.

This revival movement often found itself at odds with the established church of the day. Part of the controversy centered around the issue of worship and in particular the worship of God through singing. The revivals in both America and England were accompanied by emotional and exuberant worship through song. While George Whitefield and John Wesley wrote many hymns, it was Charles who became the movement's main hymn

writer. Methodist groups became well known, and were often mocked, for their worship through the singing of Charles' hymns.

The singing of hymns for worship was a scandal. The Church of England did not officially approve of the singing of hymns in worship until 1820! Part of the problem was that this type of worship was criticized as irrational or given to excessive emotions. The revival leaders would not budge. The worship of God through song, while not intended to be irrational, was intended to move one's heart toward greater love and appreciation of God. Charles Wesley's hymns are full of theological and Biblical content. In the 1780, Collection of Hymns for the Use of People Called Methodist, there are 2,500 specific allusions to scriptural texts which include every book of the Bible except Nahum and Philemon! This strong doctrinal and biblical content was meant to move not only the mind, but also the emotions.

The revival leaders did not always agree with each other in theological matters. The Wesley brothers were Arminian in their convictions while Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were Calvinistic. They were however united in the belief that sinful men and women needed to experience God's grace and forgiveness through Christ and that the new life that followed was to be characterized by the heartfelt worship of God. In all of the various expressions of the 18th century revivals, worship through song, was a consistent ingredient. Reflecting on Charles' hymn writing, John Wesley mused on their relationship, *I may in some sense be the head and you the heart of the work.*

Worship of God takes place in many ways. As we pray, read our Bibles, use our gifts in ministry and go to work and raise kids to the glory of God we are worshipping God. But one of the moments that the adoration and worship of God may come into sharpest focus in corporate praise through song. But why sing a hymn by Charles Wesley or the contemporary Matt Redman instead of just speaking the words? Jonathan Edwards, the brilliant pastor/theologian of the Great Awakening, gives us some help in understanding this aspect of worship.

And the duty of singing praises to God seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections [emotion]. No other reason can be assigned why we should express ourselves to God in verse rather than in prose, and do it with music, but only that such is the nature and frame that these things have a tendency to move our affections. (*The Religious Affections*, p. 44)

We sing today at SBCC, in part, because the leaders of the Great Awakening sang. They understood this activity to be a crucial component of the worship of God. Our worship is to be a combination of what we sometimes call our heart and head. Worship is to melt us, move us, and affect us as we contemplate God's glory. Charles Wesley understood this and spent much of his life writing hymns so that God's people could both reflect on and experience God in our worship.

Scripture Study

The Psalms, more than any other book of the Bible, have led God's people into prayer and worship. Read and study Psalm 95—96. Both of these Psalms tell us a great deal about worship. Work with these texts and refer back to specific verses as you answer these questions.

How does the Psalmist describe worship?

Why does he say we should worship God?

What does he say we should do in our worship?

Pretend that you are about to run out the door for Sunday afternoon worship at SBCC. Your neighbor stops you and asks where you are going. You respond, *To a worship service*. Your un-believing neighbor asks innocently, *What is 'worship'?* Since you don't want to be late for *worship* you have to give a succinct answer. How would you define Christian *worship*?

Read Revelation chapters 4—5. The setting of apostle John's vision of is heaven. It is a description of Christ how he is being worshipped. Don't press the details or attempt to understand each image. Read the text looking for the big picture. Why is Christ being worshipped? As you picture this scene does it cause you to worship?

Read Ephesians 5:17-20. What does this passage say about singing and worship? What is the connection between being *filled with the Spirit* and singing?

Consider again the statement by Jonathan Edwards about singing and worship (p. xxx) Respond to this quotation. How has singing enhanced your worship?

What hinders you from heartfelt worship of God?

Study Four

Jonathan Edwards

A Vision For God

The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which God is magnified and exalted.¹

Think about this sentence. It says so much with so few words. To rephrase this in our parlance it would read, *We will have the most fun in life when we make God our number one priority. And when we really enjoy God, he will be glorified.*

Jonathan Edwards (1703- 1759) had the biblical conviction that everything exists for the purpose of the glory of God.

All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, the glory of God.²

Edwards was also convinced that God has so structured human beings that they will find their supreme pleasure in God.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Jonathan Edwards was born on October 5, 1703 in East Windsor, Connecticut. Jonathan was the only son of Reverend Timothy Edwards, but he enjoyed the company of ten sisters and the love of his mother Esther.³ From the beginning it was evident to his father that Jonathan's intellect was exceptional. Young Jonathan learned Latin by the age of six and went to Yale at age twelve. When he graduated at age 17 he delivered the valedictory address—in Latin! At the end of his life he served, briefly, as the president of New Jersey College which eventually became Princeton University.

This towering intellect, called *America's Augustine*, by H. Richard Niebuhr, was a preacher, teacher, faithful pastor, theologian, revivalist, loving husband, father (he and his wife Sarah had eleven children) and a writer. Most of us, if we are acquainted with the writings of Jonathan Edwards at all, have read his famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. In that sermon, which the preacher whispered to his congregation from a manuscript lighted by a candle at the pulpit of his Northampton church, Edwards portrayed the anger of God toward sin and sinners with frightening

¹ From *The End For Which God Created the World*, p. 158 in John Piper's reprint of Edwards' essay in his book, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards*, (1998, Crossway Books). Quotations from this edition will be abbreviated with the word *Piper*. Piper's book is a great place to begin for those interested in pursuing the thinking and writing of Jonathan Edwards. The first half of this book is by pastor John Piper who has studied Edwards for over 30 years. The second half is the complete text (with Piper's annotated footnotes) of Edwards' book *The End For Which God Created the World* which was first published in 1765.

² From Piper, p. 124.

³ Each of the girls grew to six feet so it was said that Reverend Edwards had *60 feet of daughters*.

imagery. *The God that holds you over the pit of Hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire. . .* That Jonathan Edwards should be remembered primarily for this sermon is both ironic and unfortunate for here is a pastor who exulted in the grace of God and had a heart to see the lost come to saving faith in Christ.

To know anything about Jonathan Edwards is to know that he was earnest in his devotion to God. Edwards loved God! Furthermore he employed great discipline to grow closer to God. Sereno Dwight, Edwards' great-grandson, tells us that Jonathan's desire for holiness extended even to his diet. He *carefully observed the effects of the different sorts of food, and selected those which best suited his constitution, and rendered him most fit for mental labor.* We see his rugged earnestness in a diary entry written when he was 21 years old:

By a sparingness in diet, and eating as much as may be what is light and easy of digestion, I shall doubtless be able to think more clearly, and shall gain time: 1. By lengthening out my life; 2. Shall need less time for digestion after meals; 3. Shall be able to study more closely, without injury to my health; 4. Shall need less time for sleep; 5. Shall more seldom be troubled with the head-ache.¹

A Vision for God

John Piper has made a habit of Jonathan Edwards because he wants to savor his *God-centered, soul-satisfying, sin-destroying vision of reality.*² Where did Edwards get this

¹ When Edwards' was seventeen he wrote down 70 resolutions for his life. A sample:

1. *Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration. . .* Notice for Edwards the pursuit of God's glory and Edwards' "own good" are one and the same.
5. *Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.*
6. *Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.*
7. *Resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.*
9. *Resolved, to think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death.*
17. *Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.*
21. *Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.* Edwards and the Puritans worked strenuously on the biblical notion that this life is best seen as preparation for eternity. Here we see Jonathan Edwards preparing to have a grand time in heaven!
- 28 *Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.*
37. *Resolved, to inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent, what sin I have committed, and wherein I have denied myself: also at the end of every week, month and year.*
44. *Resolved, that no other end but religion, shall have any influence at all on any of my actions. . .*
52. *Resolved, to improve every opportunity, when I am in the best and happiest frame of mind, to cast and venture my soul on the Lord Jesus Christ, to trust and confide in him, and consecrate myself wholly to him; that from this I may have assurance of my safety, knowing that I confide in my Redeemer.*

² Piper, p. xiii.

vision? From the Bible. This pastor's *God-entranced world-view*¹ was saturated in the Scriptures. In the second chapter of The End for Which God Created The World the reader finds pages and pages of biblical references which point to the unqualified supremacy of God! Edwards approaches this fundamental truth from every possible angle.

The chapter begins,

It is manifest that the Scriptures speak on all occasions as though God made *himself* his end in all his works, and as though the same being, who is the *first cause* of all things, were the supreme and *last end* of all things.²

This is a fancy way of saying that everything comes from God and has the purpose of glorifying God. Do the Scriptures teach this?

Consider a few of the verses Edwards cites from Isaiah's prophecy which looked forward to the coming kingdom of God, the fulfillment of Israel's hopes and dreams (note the context into which these verses fall).

Look for the purpose of God's plan. Look for purpose statements in these verses.

- Isaiah 43:6-7
- Isaiah 48:11
- Isaiah 43:25
- Isaiah 55:13
- Isaiah 60:19-21
- Isaiah 61:3

Consider this same idea from Jeremiah 13:11

Providence is a word that means *God governs that which he has created*. Our world is not governed by chance, but, in the words of one confession, by the *fatherly hand* of God.³ While we often want to argue about providence (Does God really cause every drop

¹ The phrase come from Mark Noll, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Philosophy, and the Secularization of American Christian Thought*, *Reformed Journal*, February, 1983, p. 26.

² Piper, p. 183. Emphasis Edwards'.

³ The Heidelberg Catechism (1576) asks, **What do you understand by the providence of God?** The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were, by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven and earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea all things come to us not by chance, but by his *fatherly hand*.

of rain to fall?), Jonathan Edwards exulted in this profound truth. He understood that providence testified to the greatness of God.

Read and discuss Ephesians 1:11-14. Be careful not to get into an argument over predestination here. Paul marvels over God's providence in your salvation. Make sure you do no less.

Edwards points out what we should know, *Christ's ultimate end in his ministry was the glory of God.*¹

Consider this truth in the following verses:

- John 7:18 (NASB)
- John 12:27-28
- John 17:1

Finally, it was the conviction of Jonathan Edwards that our primary purpose (and satisfaction) in life is the pursuit of God's glory.

Read and discuss the following verses.

- Philippians 1:9-11
- 1 Peter 4:11
- Romans 15:5-7
- Matthew 5:16
- 1 Peter 2:12

C. S. Lewis said in a letter to a friend, *It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.*² Edwards would agree (see Resolution 21 above). It was this

¹ Piper, p. 201.

² To Sheldon Vanauken. Cited in [A Severe Mercy](#) (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 189.

eighteenth-century preacher's strong conviction that true happiness is found in God alone.

The enjoyment of [God] is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams. But God is the ocean.¹

Why is the pursuit of God's glory the only purpose which is big enough to satisfy us for eternity?

How does your life reflect the truths of this study? Do you see in your life an increasing growth into God? Are you more passionate for God than you were two years ago? Why? Why not? What can you do to ensure the pursuit of God during the years which you have ahead of you? Pray with and for one another to this end.

On February 13, 1759 Jonathan Edwards was inoculated for smallpox. The vaccination killed him. When he realized that death was imminent this man of God was ready. He was not bitter that God was cutting short his presidency at Princeton after only one month, nor did he question God's sovereignty in not allowing him to finish several writing projects. Instead, he called his daughter Lucy to his side and spoke his final words.

Dear Lucy, it seems to me to be the will of God that I must shortly leave you; therefore give my kindest love to my dear wife, and tell her, that the uncommon union, which has so long subsisted between us, has been of such a nature as I trust is spiritual and therefore will continue for ever: and I hope she will be supported under so great a trial, and submit cheerfully to the will of God. And as to my children you are now to be left fatherless, which I hope will be an inducement to you all to seek a father who will never fail you.

May we seek the same father as we conclude our study of the Great Awakening.

¹ Johnathan Edwards "The Christian Pilgrim" from Piper, p. 75.