

Could Jonathan Edwards' Peculiar Habit Hold the Key to the Next Great Awakening?

The bright summer sun was casting its long golden beams through a canopy of trees onto a group of children, playing in a nearby park. As they ran through a clearing they happened upon a strange man who was standing still in the middle of a single shaft of light. In his hand was a large gemstone that he held directly before one eye. He seemed oblivious to their presence. He just stood there, silently gazing through the stone, studying its facets as that ray of sunlight danced through the prism. It was an odd sight to the children and they reasoned that this man must be out of his mind.

Though this man came into town that day a stranger, I am certain his name is not unknown to you. This was Jonathan Edwards, the prominent minister of America's First Great Awakening and that was just one of his peculiar habits that often attracted attention.

Leonard Ravenhill, author of *Why Revival Tarries*, makes mention of this particular account in his classic message, *Your Day In Court*. Ravenhill reasoned that Edwards was mediating on eternity that afternoon as he looked through his gemstone. That is a likely conclusion since eternity was the constant focus of Edwards's intercession.

I write about this alongside the night Edwards preached his famous message, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" in my new book, *Trail of Fire*. There I tell the story of how a man who prayed, "Oh God, stamp eternity upon my eyeballs," was used to set eternity before America.

Is it possible that this habit and prayer of Edwards offers us a key to igniting awakening once again in our lives and

perhaps our nation? I believe it could.

What might happen if you or I would be so bold as to pray that same prayer? What if we truly desired that God would permanently burn eternity before our eyes? I propose that such an individual would become a catalyst for revival because just one look through the lens of eternity changes everything.

The lens of eternity reveals there is no time to waste!

Jonathan Edwards was an extremely disciplined man who endeavored to live his life by seventy resolutions. Number five on his list was “never to lose one moment of time.” Edwards believed that each second in this life was to be viewed as something extremely precious and priceless. He considered it sinful to waste time on anything trivial.

I imagine there are many who would immediately dismiss such discipline to be old-fashioned and religious. But are you viewing time from the present, instead of through the lens of eternity? One thing is certain, one day, we will look back on this time here on earth from the perspective of eternity. On that day, your opinion of this day will change drastically. The endless hours spent on entertainment and self enjoyment will be revealed for what it was—wasted.

A man or woman with eternity fixed before their eyes lives knowing there is no time to waste. They feel compelled to make the most of each and every moment. Imagine the good an entire church might do if every member expended their time in such a way. Cities would be shaken within the week!

The lens of eternity reveals what is worthwhile and worthless!

Edwards chose not to live a life of excess or even engage in common social activities. Evangelist and revivalist Steve Hill noted, “Edwards spent more time with the Lord and his books than in the social gatherings of his congregation. Though offensive to some, it was perhaps this devotion that brought

such an anointing to the pulpit" (*Trail of Fire*, page 23).

Again, I suspect there are many who would assert that such rigorous devotion is a waste of grace. Edwards saw it differently. He had resolved to "do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory ... and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general."

At that time, America was not in need of a man who lived as they did or affirmed them in their present state. They needed to hear from a man marked by eternity who knew the difference between what was worthwhile and worthless. Yes his messages were painful to many, but they were also profitable to those who took heed.

The lens of eternity reveals that eternity runs beside us, not before us!

As Edwards preached, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," the congregation was seized with a holy fear. Accounts from that night testify that the people clung to one another like drowning men fighting for their lives. Many became convinced that the floor beneath them was giving way and they were sliding toward hell. Edwards opened the eyes of a nation to the sobering, present reality of eternity. Oh, how America desperately needs such a revelation again!

It is a mistake to view eternity as if it is something that awaits us in the future. The truth is eternity is always with us. It runs beside us as we walk through this present life. Everyone of us are simply one heartbeat away from stepping out of this present time and directly into God's eternal time. There each man and woman will stand before the Lord to give an account for what they did with their allotted time. How much time will be judged on that day to have been wasted or spent on what was worthless? How little will be shown for what was worthwhile? Can you see now how living with eternity in view changes things?

My friend, if America is to see a greater awakening, the church must first be awakened. In our slumber, most have lost sight of eternity and become too present-minded. Our nation needs to once again become acquainted with some strange and peculiar people who have set their eyes upon the heavens and prayed, "Oh God, stamp eternity before my eyes!" Where such men and women are found, revival will not be far behind. {eo}

If you enjoyed this article, you will truly love Trail of Fire. Trail of Fire tells true stories from 10 of the most powerful moves of God. However it is more than a book about what God has done, it is a call to what God is doing. Pick up this book and break free from the dry, dull routines of religion and become a catalyst for revival!