

PREFACE

It is commonplace that one of the most important figures in American Christian history is Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). His contribution to the heart and mind of American Christianity was recognized in some quarters during his lifetime, lay dormant for a good number of generations during the nineteenth century, and resurfaced with a passion in the late twentieth century.

Now, if time spent in preparation and study is an adequate indicator, Edwards considered his most important pastoral task to be the preparation and delivery of sermons. This is seen in his own reflections on the task and his prodigious sermon work. Yet, scholarly reflection on Edwards' preaching in general and his funeral sermons in particular has been relatively meagre.¹ In every generation, Christian ministers have been called upon to minister comfort in the wake of death's shadow. In the Western tradition this ministry has usually been accomplished by means of a funeral ritual and historically an important aspect of that ritual has been a sermon. Jonathan Edwards was no stranger to such sermons, preaching at least twelve sermons during his ministry. This monograph examines one of these sermons, one that must have been particularly difficult to preach: *Youth is Like a Flower that is Cut Down*, a sermon that Edwards preached following the death of his daughter Jerusha in 1748.

The monograph that you have before you has passed through several stages. It began as a fountain-pen sketch on a note pad over dinner in May 2007. By the following May it was a completed Master's thesis. One year later it has taken the form that you now see here. As I have learned over the past two years, a writing project is both a solitary and community affair. An hour here, a half-day there, and soon enough a month has passed as one is locked in the basement away from family, friends (and sunlight). Yet there are many people who contributed sig-

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nificantly to this project. Dr. Michael Haykin suggested the subject, and his vast knowledge of Edwards, his keen editor's eye, warm friendship and penchant for late-night coffee shop meetings shepherded this project from idea to completion. Dr. Adriaan Neele of the Jonathan Edwards Center was most helpful in providing electronic editions of texts, including the previously unpublished letter fragment from Jerusha that appears as an appendix below. My niece, April Enos, made an impromptu trip to the Newberry Library in Chicago to verify a footnote and even took her uncle on his first Metra ride to double-check the reference. The librarians at the James P. Boyce Centennial Library and the library of Eastern College in St. David's, Pennsylvania, assisted greatly in making rare works accessible. Dwayne Ewers read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions; his pastor's heart is always appreciated. My in-laws, Bill and Debbie Branit, made several visits at crucial points in the writing process to free their son-in-law from his responsibilities and made it possible to finish chapters on time.

I wish to dedicate this monograph to my wife, Tracy, and my son, Jonathan. They were generous in allowing dad to camp out in the basement or at the library to write and providing much needed breaks to watch *Star Wars* and drink hot chocolate. Your small acts of service were more meaningful than you know.

This work is humbly presented to the ever-growing bibliography of Edwards studies. If it proves to be useful in understanding this part of Edwards' life, I will be gratified. But this monograph is chiefly intended for pastors, who, like Edwards, labor weekly to shepherd their flocks safely through the steep heights and deep valleys of life, often carrying wounded lambs on their shoulders. If Edwards' ministry strengthens you to carry them a few steps further, my goal in writing will have been accomplished. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

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ENDNOTES

1 See Ralph G. Turnbull, “Jonathan Edwards—Bible Interpreter,” *Interpretation*, 6 (1952): 422–435; Stephen J. Stein, “The Quest for the Spiritual Sense: The Biblical Hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 70 (1977): 99. Over thirty years ago Stein could suggest that Edwards’ sermons were underappreciated. What is surprising is that in 2005, Douglas Sweeney could make this same claim: “‘Longing for More and More of It’? The Strange Career of Jonathan Edwards’s Exegetical Exertions” in *Jonathan Edwards at 300: Essays on the Tercentenary of His Birth*, ed. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Caleb J. D. Maskell (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005), pp.25–27. Kenneth P. Minkema also recognizes the lack of work on Edwards’ sermon in the post-World War II era in “Jonathan Edwards in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 47 (2004): 659–687.