

The Family Life of Jonathan Edwards – Part 1

Jonathan Edwards was dismissed from his congregation for a number of theological issues that caused conflict between him and the people. These words are from his final sermon:

“We have had great disputes over how the church ought to be regulated. Indeed the subjects of these disputes was of great importance. But the due regulation of your families if of no less, and in some respects of much greater importance. Every Christian family ought to be, as it were, a little church – consecrated to Christ and wholly influenced and governed by His rules. Family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual. If these are duly maintained, all the means of grace will be likely to prosper and be successful. Let me now once more before I finally cease to speak to this congregation repeat and earnestly press the counsel which I have often pressed upon the heads of families while I was their pastor. To great painfulness in teaching, warning, and directing their children, bringing them up in the training and admonition of the Lord, beginning early where there is yet opportunity and maintaining constant diligence in labors of this kind. Remember that, as you would not have all your instructions and counsels ineffectual, there must be government as well as instructions that must be maintained with an even hand. And steady resolution as a guard to the religion and morals of your family and the support of its good order, take heed that it not be with any of you as it was with Eli of old who reprov'd his children but restrained them not. And that by this means you do not bring the light first on your families and he did on his.”

It was not just Edwards and Henry who called families “little churches.” Christian after Christian through church history have spoken this way.

How did Edwards home work? How did he relate to his wife, Sarah? And how did he raise 10 children?

On his deathbed, Jonathan Edwards spoke of his thankfulness for the “uncommon union” he had with his dear wife, Sarah.

10 Attributes of the Family Life of Jonathan Edwards

1. It began in Jonathan Edwards’ heart. The one at the head of the home needs to have this in his heart. His family life was fueled by a man who had a passionate love for God.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 [4] "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one! [5] You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. [6] "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Listen to Edwards writing about the time of his conversion twenty years after it happened: “The soul of a true Christian, as I then wrote my meditations, appeared like such a little white flower as we see in the spring of the year; low and humble on the ground, opening its bosom, to receive the pleasant beams of the sun’s glory; rejoicing, as it were, in a calm rapture; diffusing around a sweet fragrant; standing peacefully and lovingly, in the midst of other flowers round about; all in like manner opening their bosoms, to drink in the light of the sun.”

- So much for our caricatures of Puritans as lemon-faced, cold, and stern.

Edwards also wrote: Another Saturday night, (*Jan.* 1739,) I had such a sense, how sweet and blessed a thing it was to walk in the way of duty; to do that which was right and meet to be done, and agreeable to the holy mind of God; that it caused me to break forth into a kind of loud weeping, which held me some time, so that I was forced to shut myself up, and fasten the doors. I could not but, as it were, cry out, 'How happy are they, who do that which is right in the sight of God! They are blessed indeed, *they* are the happy ones!'

- **Application: So should we.**
- **This was a man who spent much time in secret prayer, devotion, and Bible study:**

William Longstaff's hymn: *Take Time to be Holy:*

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

⇒ Edwards' wife and children saw the likeness of Christ in their husband and father - Jonathan.

⇒ **Application:** It is easy to feel bogged down with all the things you think you need to do with your spouse and children, but so much of it is accomplished simply by *you*, the discipler, being a faithful disciple of Christ yourself, by being being godly in your conduct, by being sincere in your words, by being unconcerned about receiving glory or recognition in your life, and being gentle.

Remember this great passage - notice how much Paul's *day-in day-out conduct* is emphasized:

1 Thes. 2:5-7 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness--God is witness. [6] Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. [7] But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

How important is gentleness? Philip. 4:5 "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."

Application: Yes, there are always things we are not doing that we should start. There are always things we're doing that we ought to stop. There are things we are doing that we could do better and need to do better, but first and foremost, we are followers of Christ. We delight in the Lord and love Him. We love the Word of God. We love Jesus' church.

2. Jonathan chose his wife carefully and well. As we speak with our children, this is a conversation piece that must come up frequently.

Edwards sought a wife with a common vision and desire to serve the Lord and spread His glory over the earth.

Believers are only to marry believers:

1 Corinthians 7:39 [39] A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 [14] Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? [15] And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

- **Here are some key Proverbs: 11:22; 12:4; 14:1; 18:22; 19:13b; 19:14; 21:9; 25:24; 27:15-16; 31:10-31 (especially v11, 12, 26, & 30)**

Proverbs 11:22 As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, So is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.

Proverbs 12:4 An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, But she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones.

Proverbs 14:1 The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands.

Proverbs 18:22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the Lord.

Proverbs 19:13 A foolish son is the ruin of his father, And the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping.

Proverbs 19:14 Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the Lord.

Proverbs 21:9 Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

Proverbs 25:24 It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

Proverbs 27:15-16 A continual dripping on a very rainy day And a contentious woman are alike; [16] Whoever restrains her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand.

Proverbs 31:11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain.

Proverbs 31:12 She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.

Proverbs 31:26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness.

Proverbs 31:30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

- It is good to have conversations with your children and with other young people who are interested in marriage about the things discussed in these passages.
- **The goal:** That people desiring marriage would themselves be godly and love the Lord, *and that they would be attracted to godliness in their potential future spouse.*

Edwards wrote the following about Sarah before their courtship and marriage in the margin of a Greek textbook he was studying (I'd say he was definitely a little distracted): "They say there is a young lady in [New-Haven] who is loved of that Great Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this Great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight; and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on him — that she expects after a while to be received up where he is, to be raised up out of the world and caught up into heaven; being assured that he loves her too well to let her remain at a distance from him always. There she is to dwell with him, and to be ravished with his love and delight forever. Therefore, if you present all the world before her, with the richest of its treasures, she disregards it and cares not for it, and is unmindful of any pain or affliction. She has a strange sweetness in her mind, and singular purity in her affections; is most just and conscientious in all her conduct; and you could not persuade her to do anything wrong or sinful, if you would give her all the world, lest she should offend this Great Being. She is of a wonderful sweetness, calmness, and universal benevolence of mind; especially after this Great God has manifested himself to her mind. She will sometimes go about from place to place, singing sweetly; and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure; and no one knows for what. She loves to be alone, walking in the fields and groves, and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her."

- **Notice what it was that attracted Edwards to this young lady** - she was loved by God, she loved God, she cared not for worldly things and cares, she was happy meditating upon Him, she had a sweetness in her mind, singular purity in her affections, was just and conscientious in all her conduct - she is filled with joy in singing and walking about praising God and conversing with Him. This all sounds like a description of what is found in 1 Peter 3:3-4

1 Peter 3:3-4 Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-- [4] rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

- Edwards sought a wife consumed with God *because he was consumed with God.*
- **Application: As we disciple others, we must speak of godly Christian marriage with them.**

Consider: Most young people - most of our children will *probably* end up getting married at some point. Because this is such a monumental decision which has such far-reaching implications for their futures and for the future of civilization, the future of the world, and the future of the kingdom of Christ **does it**

not make sense that it should be a major topic of conversation?

- **Even the great George Whitefield, who visited Edwards and his family at home, said this:** "A sweeter Couple I have not yet seen. She talked feelingly and solidly of the Things of God, and seemed to be such a Help meet for her Husband that she caused me to pray God, that he would be pleased to send me a Daughter of Abraham to be my wife."

- **Jonathan Edwards was a wise man when he went in search of a wife – and he definitely found what he was looking for.** And it is vital that we create this desire for such a spouse in the hearts of those we disciple.

Proverbs 18:22 [22] He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the Lord.

The future marriages of Christian young people will greatly impact the future of Christ's church and the future of our nation. There is such a thing as a calling to godly single life - God will sometimes do this in a person's life - but it is more the exception than the rule. Paul even recommends single life **1 Cor. 7:1-2, 7-9** Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. [2] Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. ... [7] For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. [8] But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; [9] but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

⇒ **Paul certainly sees advantages to perpetual single-life**

1 Cor. 7:32 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord.

But as Paul said earlier - 1 Cor. 7:2 "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." **It is the norm - and it is good and healthy to get married.**

WCF 24:2 (Of Marriage) Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness."

"mutual help" Genesis 2:18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

"increase of mankind... and of the Church with an holy seed" Malachi 2:15 But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

Jonathan Edwards recognized that he needed a godly helper in his life. And when they married, they embraced their many children as great blessings from God and as a great responsibility before God.

Children are a blessing from God Psalm 127:3-5 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward. [4] Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. [5] Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Psalm 128:1-6 A Song of Ascents. Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, Who walks in His ways. [2] When you eat the labor of your hands, You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. [3] Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine In the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants All around your table. [4] Behold, thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the Lord.

The Puritans along with Edwards himself embraced children as part of the blessing of marriage - and saw it as a way to increase the number of believers on earth. One startling reality of our day is that birth-rates in America over the past 10 years have actually fallen below replacement - we are officially dying as a nation. ½ of children conceived on American soil will be aborted. 9 out of 10 American

babies diagnosed with Downs Syndrome through amniocentesis will be aborted.

Application: Walk young people through these Psalm - 127-128. Have them look at Malachi 2:15.

One of the questions I will be asking young men interested in my daughters is: "What do you think of children? And are you eager to receive them from God?"

Application 2: Men and babies. In the entirety of my life, I have heard exactly ONE man *ask God in prayer for children*. Having listened to hundreds of thousands prayers in numerous churches from the time I was an infant child, I have heard people ask for many things from God - many good and noble things. *But I have heard one man in a group setting pray and ask God for children.*

Remember: Our God - the Creator of children - the One who gives them as gifts and as a stewardship to us - he makes man and wife *one* because "He seeks godly offspring."

Edwards: This dear man of God and his dear wife - they opened their heart to receive from God a large group of children whose discipleship they took very seriously and made a passion of their lives.

How to disciple your family? Marry well - and ask God for children.

Summary:

- 1. It began in Jonathan Edwards' heart. The one at the head of the home needs to have this in his heart. His family life was fueled by a man who had a passionate love for God.**
- 2. Jonathan chose his wife carefully and well.**