

Praise for *Serious Joy*

“Jonathan Edwards is arguably the greatest mind ever produced on the North American continent. His writings cover a wide range of topics from theology to philosophy to nature and natural science. But infused in them all is his sense of reverence and awe to be living before the presence of his God. That Edwards wrote seventy resolutions as a teenager to govern his life is commonly known to those who have spent much time studying his life and work. Few, however, have taken the time to read those resolutions carefully, much less to meditate through them. In this work, Joey Tomlinson has made doing both much easier. By demonstrating the biblical thinking out of which each resolution arises, he provides us not only insight into Edwards’ mind but also opportunities to have our own shaped more practically by Scripture. I highly commend this book to all who aspire to do whatever would bring God most glory and bring to themselves their greatest good, profit, and pleasure.”

Dr. Tom Ascol

Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, FL
President, Founders Ministries

“I distinctly remember encountering the resolutions of Jonathan Edwards in college. Some of them I can still quote by heart. ‘To live with all my might, while I do live.’ ‘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.’ ‘To never suffer the least motions of anger to irrational beings.’ Joey Tomlinson has written a wonderful introduction and guide to Edwards’ Resolutions, wisely expounding and pressing them into the corners of our lives. I’m glad to commend this little book on *Serious Joy*.”

Joe Rigney

Fellow of Theology
New Saint Andrews College
Moscow, Idaho

“I am so thrilled that another generation of Jonathan Edwards scholars has discovered the Resolutions. Written when the great revivalist pastor was just 19 years old, the seventy resolutions have inspired believers for 300 years now to ‘Live with all my might while I do live!’ I am thankful that Joey Tomlinson has taken the time to study this inspiring private document from America’s greatest theologian. I hope the Lord uses this book to help people discover the writings of this God-glorifying colonial pastor.”

Dr. Matthew Everhard

Pastor, Gospel Fellowship Presbyterian Church (PCA), Valencia, PA

Author of *Souls: How Jesus Saves Sinners* and *Holy Living: Jonathan Edwards’s Seventy Resolutions for Living the Christian Life*

SERIOUS JOY

Reflections and Devotions on Jonathan Edwards'

SEVENTY RESOLUTIONS

JOEY TOMLINSON



FOUNDERS

MINISTRIES

CAPE CORAL, FLORIDA

SERIOUS JOY

Serious Joy: Reflections and Devotions on Jonathan Edwards' Seventy Resolutions

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TO MY BOYS:

Henry, Owen, and Ames—Fear God. Be brave.

I love you.

DEDICATED ESPECIALLY TO AMES:

My office became your nursery, so I wrote this on the couch. I love you, son. I am so happy you're here, and I pray that you find serious joy in our Triune God from a very early age.

“You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

PSALM 16:11

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I have so much to be thankful for. That the Lord would save a sinner like me is deeply humbling. Every day I sink deeper into the depths of God's grace and grow in my joy—*serious* joy in the Triune God. Brayden, you are a virtuous wife (Proverbs 31:10–12) and our children call you blessed (Proverbs 31:28). I could not finish a project like this without you by my side. Henry, Owen, and Ames, I wrote this book with you in mind. God is fashioning you into arrows (Psalm 127:4), and I pray this book encourages you along the way. Cobie and Isaac, you both demonstrate what it means to fear God in your various callings in life and I treasure your friendship. Mom and Dad, thank you for prioritizing Lord's Day worship every single Sunday for my entire childhood. This book would never have been written if you weren't faithful in doing that every week.

Ryan Davidson, thank you for your constant prayers, encouragement, and brotherhood in the Lord. Your friendship over the years has encouraged me more than you'll ever know. Thank you for reading some of the chapters of this book early on and giving me helpful feedback. Ben Pearce, your comments and edits are so helpful to me as always. Thank you. My fellow elders at Deer Park Fellowship, thank you brothers for serving alongside of me, praying for me, and for your constant encouragement. Thank you for serving our church so very well. Deer Park Fellowship, I love

you, and I am so grateful to God to be your pastor. The Lord has demonstrated his love to me through your love of my family. C. R. (Chris) Wiley, thank you for your encouragement with this project and your willingness to read it and write the foreword to it. I am personally thankful for your voice and clarity these days. Randy and the team at Founders, thank you for believing in this project (and for being excited about it) and for the time and attention you've devoted to it. Your partnership truly made the book better. And if you're reading this acknowledgments page, thank you for reading the book. I pray the Lord will use it in your life as you seek to have serious joy in him.

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Foreword

I LIVED IN THE LAND OF Jonathan Edwards for nearly 20 years. He still casts a long shadow in Central Connecticut. In New Haven you'll see his face all over the campus of Yale. In the bookstores he looks down on bibliophiles as they shop for titles he'd likely disapprove of. Fair's fair: many of the shoppers wouldn't have liked him, either. But no one can deny his greatness. Even unbelieving academics and public intellectuals admit his was one of the greatest minds our continent has ever seen. I have a friend whose father is both an atheist and a professor of philosophy at a major eastern university. His mother is a faithful Presbyterian who attends a famous church (if I named it, there's a good chance you'd recognize it). My friend tells me that when his father accompanies her to church, he takes along something written by Edwards. When the sermon begins, he pulls it out and starts to read. My friend says that if his father has to endure a sermon, he at least wants to hear one from a man whose mind he admires.

Edwards not only possessed a great mind, like many men in the eighteenth century, he was a morally earnest person. What you hold in your hands is 70 resolutions he made when he was only 19 years old. When you read them try to imagine your 19-year-old self resolving to do the things Edwards resolved to do.

Making resolutions doesn't automatically make someone a moral giant, but when it came to making them, he was in good company. Benjamin Franklin famously made his, as did George Washington. And you don't need to know much about them to

know that they took moral virtue seriously. Perhaps this helps to explain why we owe them so much.

As I peruse Edward's resolutions, I am not only impressed by his self-awareness, I can actually see how surprisingly relevant and practical his resolutions are for our time. We live in a world of surfaces and images. We all pretend to be better looking and more praiseworthy than we actually are. And we're satisfied with making impressions. Edwards wasn't satisfied with making good impressions. He really wanted to be a better person. Here are a couple of his resolutions that demonstrate that:

7. *"Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life."*

56. *"Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be."*

Joey Tomlinson has performed a great service by putting Edward's resolutions into contemporary speech. This is a great devotional book to accompany your reading of the Scriptures. Allow me to make three suggestions: first, be sure to read the Introduction to Edward's life. It is helpful to put the man into the context of his times. Second, read the resolutions in Edward's own words first, before reading Joey's contemporary rendering of them. It will slow you down and improve your vocabulary. And third, when you've read a resolution and the commentary, try to apply the resolution to your own life. Perhaps you might even try to put them into your own words. But keep in mind, the purpose is not to write your own book but to live a worthy life—one that both glorifies God and enjoys him.

I hope that you will seriously enjoy this book.

C. R. Wiley

November 30, 2022

Battle Ground, Washington

Introducing Jonathan Edwards

IT IS UNDISPUTED THAT Jonathan Edwards is one of the most significant and influential figures in American history. Of course, Edwards had a tremendous impact on church history, but his influence also extended into broader American culture. This means that Edwards was not someone you could ignore. He was a force to be reckoned with in many ways. Certainly, Edwards' intellectual abilities made him a prominent figure in history, but his commitment to apply the Lordship of Christ to every discipline of his study is what I think is so enduring about his work. The nature of his intellect and interests—combined with his work ethic, passion, and ability to communicate beauty *beautifully*—demonstrates his earthy fervor for Christ. Edwards was a straight shooter of the highest order. He did not equivocate in his writing, preaching, or teaching, and you'll see that some in this book. In fact, Martyn Lloyd Jones said that Edwards was “one of the most honest expositors [he] ever read. He never evades a problem.”¹

Edwards was a loving and devoted and present husband. He was a father to eleven children, a minister, revivalist, theologian, philosopher, and briefly the third president of Princeton University before he died at the age of 54 from the misadministration of the smallpox vaccine. Edwards lived well, and he died well. If you were to trace his descendants you would find a vice president, senators, governors, mayors, judges, college presidents, pastors, missionaries, and writers. Edwards had a shaping influence

1 Martyn Lloyd Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1987), 355.

on America, because, by God's grace, he had a shaping influence on his descendants. That is the sum of his biography, but for our purposes there is more we should know about Edwards before reading his Resolutions. Having more context about this faithful servant of the Lord will aid us in seeing his goal for the resolutions, the devotional value in actually reading them, and, from Edwards' own example, how *not* to use them.

Edwards' Education and Early Ministry

Considered by many to be the last Puritan, Jonathan Edwards was born on October 5, 1703 in Windsor, Connecticut. He was the only boy of eleven children. He was the son of Reverend Timothy Edwards, who was a minister in Connecticut for sixty years, and of Esther Stoddard, who was the daughter of the renowned Reverend Solomon Stoddard from Northampton, Massachusetts. Jonathan Edwards had a rich Christian upbringing. He was educated at home under the tutelage of his father, who was a distinguished scholar, where he showed aptitude and interest for *many* subjects. He had a focused mind and was a very disciplined student. Much of that discipline was driven by an obsessive delight with learning. By the age of six, he was well into his Latin studies and became well versed in both Latin and Greek not much later. As a teenager, he read the philosopher John Locke and developed a life-long appetite for philosophy which served his ministry well over the years. He loved to study nature and insects and enjoyed being in God's creation. Edwards wanted to know about God's world. It seemed that the pursuit of just about any subject brought him joy, because it connected him to the subject's Creator. He was a true Renaissance man in that he exhibited such a mastery of different disciplines. Yet even with all his academic interests and abilities, he wasn't esoteric. As he grew older, he funneled those disciplines toward one ultimate purpose—the glory and enjoyment of God. So, Edwards took all that learning and sought to be a help to those whom God sovereignly placed in his path.

Although he was certainly an academic, he was also a practitioner. After Edwards graduated from Yale at the age of seventeen, he remained there to study divinity and earned a Master's degree.

Upon completion of his MA, Edwards began his training in ministry. He served briefly as an interim pastor of a small Scottish church in New York City, then a church in Bolton, Connecticut before becoming a tutor at Yale College in 1724. It is here where young Edwards began to pen the Resolutions. Later, Edwards would become the assistant minister at Northampton where his maternal grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, ministered. Two years after Edwards became the assistant minister, Stoddard died, and Edwards took the senior minister position. Edwards was such a practitioner—so moved to act on his convictions that he would be forced to give up his twenty-year pastorate at Northampton when he refused to administer the Lord's Supper to people that did not demonstrate genuine faith despite the fact that they were baptized. You will see the seeds of that serious, practical conviction contained in these Resolutions penned by a younger Jonathan Edwards. I say again: Edwards cannot be ignored.

Edwards' Conversion

Growing up, Edwards was nurtured in the admonition of the Lord by his parents, and this had an obvious and deep impact on him from a very young age. He grew up tenderly mindful of God's presence. He was conversant with God, he was honest, he could articulate the gospel and even professed it. However, nowhere in his writings is there a clear record of his conversion. This is not surprising given how inculcated he was in a consistently Christian home and church. There never seems to be a time he didn't profess Christ and his gospel. However, there is one biographical passage written by Edwards that does recount an increasing joy and hunger for the Lord and a developing preoccupation with the happiness, enjoyment, glory, and excellency of God. Edwards writes it this way:

The first instance, that I remember, of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, 1 Tim. i. 17. *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.* As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through

it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven; and be as it were swallowed up in him forever! I kept saying, and as it were singing, over these words of Scripture to myself; and went to pray to God that I might enjoy him; and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do, with a new sort of affection. But it never came into my thought, that there was any thing spiritual, or of a saving nature in this.²

Many Edwardian scholars label this as Edwards' conversion. What we know for certain is that there was an awakening in Edwards by the Holy Spirit of God that enabled him to find happiness *through* his enjoyment of God, which at the same time was the *glorifying* of God. Joy in the Lord seems to be the conversion point for Edwards. It is where he seems to move from duty to delight. Happiness in God and glorifying God became two sides of the same coin for him. To glorify God was to enjoy God. To enjoy God was to glorify God. And this is perhaps the most important aspect of Jonathan Edwards' life. Sadly, it may be the least known thing about him in many circles.

Usually when people hear Edwards' name, they think of his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," which he preached in Northampton. While this is an important and faithful sermon, it should not be read as if it were delivered by some joyless curmudgeon. It should be read and understood in its proper context. It was Edwards' enjoyment and passion to glorify God that was the driving force behind his seemingly severe exhortation to repentance and faith. Edwards was serious about joy in the Lord. He knew better than most that the only way for man to be truly happy is to be happy *in* God. For one to refuse to have their sins forgiven and for one to refuse to be happy in God would be to their eternal misery in hell. It is wrath or happiness in the Triune God. There is no third option. In fact, man does not stand

2 *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 10, *Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach (New Haven, Yale University Press), 547–548.

on neutral ground. You are either an adopted son or daughter of the Most High King (Romans 8:17) living in his world enjoying him, or you are by nature his *enemy* (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21). Edwards spent his life through various disciplines laboring to enjoy God *and* bring others into that joy—the eternal happiness found in the Triune God alone. Repentance and faith is the only path to that joy.

Edwards and the Great Awakening

Edwards' passion to invite others into everlasting happiness drove his pastoral ministry. Edwards' preaching made much of God. Just a sampling of some of his sermon titles can demonstrate this for us:

- “A Divine and Supernatural Light Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, show to be both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine”;
- “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence”;
- “God makes Men Sensible of their Misery before He Reveals His Mercy and Love”;
- “God’s Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men”;
- “Safety, Fulness, and Sweet Refreshment, to be Found in Christ”;
- “Jesus Christ the Same Yesterday, To-day, and For ever”.

Edwards had a high view of God, a reverence for the Scriptures, and a commitment to clarity in his preaching and teaching of the Word. And, where the Word of God is faithfully preached, the Spirit of God faithfully moves, both softening and hardening the hearts of whomever he wills. During Edwards' ministry, a revival occurred which spread through Britain and the American colonies. This revival is known now as The First Great Awakening. It wasn't without its skeptics and zealots and abuses, but despite the counterfeits and critics, there was a large-scale movement of the Spirit of God. True servants of God were being used by God to propagate the gospel.

A marker of that movement was a renewed hunger for God and holiness. There was confession of sin, repentance of sin, and faith in Christ. There was a desire for righteousness. The Anglican preacher George Whitefield was a prominent and faithful evangelist during that time, preaching to thousands of people in the open air. If Whitefield was the evangelist in the movement, Edwards was the strong and steady theological voice, not only preaching the gospel, but defending and bringing clarity to the genuineness of the movement.

In 1741, Edwards' discourse *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* was given in an effort to defend the genuine work of Spirit in the revivals in opposition to the counterfeit revivals men sought to manufacture at this time. His work *Religious Affections* was also published for this purpose and is perhaps one of his most influential published works. Defending the work of the Spirit of God was nothing new for Edwards. Earlier in his ministry, he published the book *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton and in the Neighboring Towns* (1737). This work was written because of what the Lord was doing in Northampton years before The First Great Awakening. Revivals seem to be a theme throughout Edwards' ministry. And, it was his serious and reverential joy in the Lord that made him a prominent figure in these revivals and especially in The First Great Awakening. It is Edwards' serious and reverential joy in God that we now turn to.

Edwards' Serious Joy

We are on to something with Edwards that we must not rush past. We need to really see that connective tissue of serious joy that affected—or infected—Edwards' marriage, parenting, interests, studies, overall character, leisure, writing, pastoral ministry, and, as stated earlier, his progeny. Therefore, it is worthwhile for us to spend more time considering the serious joy in Edwards. The last thing I would want you to take away from this book is that Edwards was joyless. There is a danger in reading these resolutions that you could form that picture of him. In fact, it would be hard to come to any other conclusion if you read his Resolutions

without the context of Edwards' life—particularly the warmth he enjoyed in his relationship with the Lord. That “sweet inward delight” the Holy Spirit birthed in Edwards put things in high definition for him. The Lord brought his senses alive. He made him taste. He made him quite frankly, *happy*. The below quote helps capture what I'm talking about. It is a good example to show you how far Edwards' joy went. He wrote this reflection about (of all things) thunderstorms.

And scarce anything, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning. Formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me. I used to be a person uncommonly terrified with thunder: and it used to strike me with terror, when I saw a thunderstorm rising. But now, on the contrary, it rejoiced me. I felt God at the first appearance of a thunderstorm. And used to take the opportunity at such times, to fix myself to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder: which often times was exceeding entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God. And while I viewed, used to spend my time, as it always seemed natural to me, to sing or chant forth my meditations; to speak my thoughts in soliloquies, and speak with a singing voice.³

Does this sound like a cold, joyless, and rigid man? The guy is literally singing in the rain. Something that once terrorized him brought him joy after the Spirit of God changed him, because, along with the clapping of thunder and the flashing of light, Edwards *felt* God's presence—his nearness—his pleasure. And he was entertained by God's very handiwork worshiping before him. It moved Edwards to song—or perhaps better put—it moved him to join in with creation in testifying about her Creator. As the psalmist says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). This is significant for us to see, because we must learn, as Edwards did, to truly enjoy God. That is serious joy.

When you enjoy something, you want to spend time doing it. Or, if it's a person you enjoy, you want to be around that per-

3 *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, Ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, Yale University Press), 794.

son. The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards were written in my opinion to increase his joy in the Lord. They were concrete ways for Edwards to intentionally walk in the presence of God. These resolutions were crafted by a man obsessed with enjoying God. Edwards wanted to maximize that joy. Yet, enjoying something or someone is not a passive thing. It doesn't happen on autopilot. Time is invested. Sacrifices are made. Lesser things are neglected. Blood, sweat, and tears are shed. But, none of this matters when the object of your enjoyment is Christ, who is of surpassing value (Philippians 3:8).

The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards

Edwards wrote his Resolutions at the age of 19 when he was preparing for ministry with his early pastorates and tutoring. I have given you an overview of Edwards' life, including the more mature years, because I think it is important to be mindful of his life's trajectory as you read his Resolutions. Yet before Edwards was *the* Jonathan Edwards we know him to be, he was a 19-year-old kid seeking to honor the Lord and not make a shipwreck of his life. We could say that resolutions crafted by a 19 year old are devoid of experience. And that is a fair critique. One must grow older to gain experience. That's just the way God designed it. As Edwards aged, he certainly became more well-rounded, and perhaps he looked at these resolutions differently once he had more gray in his hair. But at the same time, we should not dismiss the value of any of them. In fact, we should celebrate the reverence for God that 19-year-old Edwards exhibited.

Some would consider these resolutions to be legalistic, and there is some legitimacy to that charge, but there are a few things that must be said in response to this criticism. First, these resolutions were never intended to be read by anyone but Edwards himself. Edwards wrote them to regulate his own life and not the lives of other people. These resolutions, when paired with his journal entries, showcase a man who desired to bring his inner and outer life in subjection to Jesus. Again, Edwards was after serious joy. Which meant he was after the Triune God. Secondly, I would ask

where the danger lies in our spiritual walking with God currently? In our lawless culture, are we in danger of taking God and his Scripture too seriously? I would argue that we can't take God too seriously. We can take ourselves too seriously. We can take others too seriously. But our God is holy, holy, holy; he does not compromise, and he will by no means clear the guilty (Exodus 34:7).

Some of these resolutions are open to critique, but the desire to take God seriously is not. Lastly, and as we will see in the preamble, Edwards sought to connect these resolutions to his fixed position in Christ. While he may have wrestled with his assurance because of the way he applied some of these resolutions early on, his aim was that they were the outworking of someone who is eternally secure in Christ Jesus. In other words, these resolutions were not Edwards' way of earning his salvation.

How to Read the Resolutions

The resolutions are earthy like the Proverbs of Solomon, and I think you will notice that as we work through them together. However, I would like to give a word of caution before you begin to read through them. While there is much that can be applied from Edwards' list, the aim of this book isn't to commend some legalistic application of Edwards' Resolutions. Edwards was unique, and he even wrestled tremendously with applying these resolutions. Consider this passage from his journal:

JAN. 15, TUESDAY, about two or three of clock. I have been all this day decaying. It seemed yesterday, the day before and Saturday, that I should always retain the same resolution to the same height. But alas! how soon do I decay. O how weak, how infirm, how unable to do anything of myself. What a poor, inconsistent being! What a miserable wretch, without the assistance of God's Spirit. While I stand, I am ready to think I stand by my own strength, and upon my own legs; and I am ready to triumph over my (spiritual) enemies, as if it were I myself that caused them to flee. When alas, I am but a poor infant, upheld by Jesus Christ; who holds me up, and gives me liberty to smile to see my enemies flee, when he drives them before me; and so I laugh, as if I myself did it,

when it is only Jesus Christ leads me along, and fights himself against my enemies. And now, the Lord has a little left me; how weak do I find myself. O let it teach me to depend less on myself, to be more humble, and to give more of the praise of my ability to Jesus Christ. The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? [Jeremiah 17:9].⁴

As I read a passage like this out of Edwards' journal, I am thankful to God for how he graciously humbles his children when they are on the verge of trusting in themselves. I am also reminded of the words of the Scottish Minister Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813–1843):

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Jer. 17:9. Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, and yet such meekness and grace, and all for sinners, even the chief! Live much in the smiles of God. Bask in his beams. Feel his all-seeing eye settled on you in love, and repose in his almighty arms. Let your soul be filled with a heart-ravishing sense of the sweetness and excellency of Christ and all that is in Him. Let the Holy Spirit fill every chamber of your heart; and so there will be no room for folly, or the world, or Satan, or the flesh.⁵

Perhaps the struggle for Edwards as he sought to grow in his walk with God is the struggle we all have—maintaining a mindfulness of one's complete dependence upon Christ. This comment from M'Cheyne is a balm for a soul on the brink of despair in the journey of overcoming sin and temptation. It serves as a reminder that our very sins should be viewed through the sweetness and excellency of Jesus who in his humiliation rescued us from sin's dominion. Our sins should be repented of and our resolutions made in light of there being no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1).

As you work through these resolutions, remember that Christ alone is your righteousness. In other words, your righteousness is not inherently *your* righteousness. Your righteousness is Christ's

⁴ WJE 16:764–765.

⁵ Andrew Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of R. M. M'Cheyne* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1966), 293.

righteousness. Jesus did all that was required for you to be right with God. Your sins really are forgiven (eternally so) if you are in Christ (John 6:37). As the psalmist says, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, *Whose sin is covered*” (Psalm 32:1). Your transgressions against God’s Law are forgiven. Your sins are covered because Christ kept the Law, yet became sin by taking on our sin and receiving the wrath of God for it. Jesus became sin though he never sinned, and in this unfair exchange, we became the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). The proof that this is true—that we really are justified forever—is the bodily resurrection of Jesus (Romans 4:25). We can have confidence that because Jesus rose bodily from the dead, so will we when he returns to make everything definitively new (1 Corinthians 15:20–28). Remember this truth as you work through these resolutions.

It would be inappropriate for us to take Edwards’ Resolutions and see them as some equation for righteousness. They are not a math problem. They may have served as measurable spiritual goals for Edwards, but what we need to see is more significant than that. In these resolutions, we see a young man who took time to know his own soul before the God in whom he delighted. We see slow, extended, uninterrupted introspection. We see grit. We see a resolve in Edwards to expose personal sins and chase off temptations. We see the result of meditating on Scripture—a real internalizing of it and in turn being warmed and motivated by the Spirit. We see in Edwards the priority of communion with God. All of this demonstrates for us the significance of spending time going through Edwards’ Resolutions. In them, we see the aroma and earthiness of serious joy. This book serves, through the writings of Edwards, to help you pursue the glory of God in your life. As you will see, our preoccupation with the glory of God is more “blue collar” than you may think. It is calloused hands. It is sweat. It isn’t left to the academies. It is hard hats and musk. The glory of God, which is what Edwards labored toward, should shape every nook and cranny of your life. I pray this book aids in the pursuit.

THE PREAMBLE: Sustenance for the Journey

Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake.

Remember to read over these Resolutions once a week.

THE PREAMBLE TO Jonathan Edwards' resolutions must be considered. We shouldn't gloss over it—reading it in passing in order to quickly get to the resolutions. The way you approach these resolutions depends on how well you internalize this simple, yet profound, preamble. In fact, I would argue that the resolutions *must* have a direct correlation to the preamble; otherwise, the resolutions terminate in themselves, and that is not good—the resolutions become enslaving. In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy, when Frodo and Sam (and their companions along the way) made their treacherous journey to Mordor, they ate lembas bread gifted to them by the elves. This bread was sweet, had a long shelf life, was highly nutritious, and was filling—one cake could keep a traveler on his feet for a day. The lembas provided strength in some of the most treacherous and despairing moments of the long journey to Mordor. Perhaps, as a Roman Catholic, Tolkien had the Eucharist in mind when he created the lembas in the story. While I would have significant disagreements with Tolkien on the Roman Catholic view of the Eucharist, I will still take and eat my lembas. I will just eat it as a Protestant, and I recommend you do the same. Like feasting on the lembas, so

should we feast on all that God is for us in Jesus Christ. He alone is exactly what we need for the journey. Therefore, think of this preamble as the lembas—as the sustenance for the pilgrimage through these resolutions.

Utter Dependency Upon the Triune God

A part of finding your strength and sustenance in the Lord is done by cultivating a keen awareness of your utter dependency upon him. Edwards knew he needed the Lord. As we saw in Chapter 1, he was even reminded through his own failings that he needed the Lord's strength if he were to do anything spiritually profitable. Our ability to walk in a way that honors the Lord is a work of God's grace and is intentionally nourished through the means he has given us to depend upon him. Primarily, those means are the Word, prayer, and sacrament. We avail ourselves of these ordinary means every Lord's Day. The supplemental ways the Lord grows us is through our daily spiritual disciplines like reading the Bible and prayer. God uses these things to strengthen us for good works and helps us to say, along with Edwards, "I am unable to do anything without God's help." We must see that this is not a hyperbolic statement. However, in our fast-paced, modern and Western society—a society obsessed with toys, gadgets, and the latest productivity technologies—this becomes easily lost on us. It is quickly forgotten, because we use the gifts God gives us (like technology), forget that he gave them to us, and believe (functionally) that we are not dependent upon him any longer. We may not verbalize it that way, but our tendencies in the comings and goings of life probably look more deistic or even atheistic than we are willing to admit.

Perhaps this is the concern reflected in the prayer of Solomon in Proverbs 30:8–9: "Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny *You*, And say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God." Very few of us in the West are in danger of being poor. We are surrounded by so much wealth and so much technology. As I am sitting writing this, I just received word of a package I purchased through

Amazon and had shipped to Thailand for a friend. It arrived within *days*. I did that without getting out of my chair. I could have bought myself a few books while I was at it, and they would have arrived here by the next morning. I recently read an article that said that the computing power of the iPhone in my pocket would have cost one billion dollars in 1970.⁶ I say this to drive home the point that we are wealthy. Progress has been made. And this is not a bad thing in and of itself. In fact, our advancements and ambitions in these areas are a good thing. Also, I am by no means an advocate of poverty theology. Yet we must see the danger in the deception of self-reliance. If our affections are not warmed by the Spirit of God through the Word of God, we will begin to believe the lie as we play with all of our toys that we are self-sufficient. However, self-sufficiency is an incommunicable attribute of God. Only God is the “I Am” (Exodus 3:14).

On full bellies we must be careful not to deny our Triune God and our complete dependence upon him. We must confess this with our mouth, but even more so live with a mindfulness of our place before our Creator. We need to, by God’s grace, close the gap between our confessions and our practices. When we don’t do this we end up perverting and abusing—to our detriment—God’s good gifts for us. And when we do that, we begin to worship them (or ourselves) and thus grow numb, callous, and prideful. And so begins a vicious cycle. The way out is repentance, and our song of repentance is:

I need Thee, oh, I need Thee;
 Every hour I need Thee;
 Oh, bless me now, my Savior,
 I come to Thee.⁷

While this song was written after Edwards’ death, it captures well what he was after. Edwards sought to be mindful of his dependence upon the Triune God, and there is a stillness and confidence and peace that comes with that. We need our Triune God.

⁶ Berkeley Lovelace, “Computing Power of iPhone Would Have Cost \$1 Billion in 1970, Says Tech Billionaire,” CNBC, September 12, 2017, www.cnbc.com.

⁷ Annie S. Hawks, “I Need Thee Every Hour.”

According to His Will

Far from seeking to impose his own will in these resolutions, Edwards wanted to subdue his will—to take his very thoughts captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) according to the will of God (which is in accordance with the Word of God). In fact, Edwards wanted these resolutions to fail if they were found to be contrary to God’s will, or if they clouded God’s will in any way for young Edwards. The resolutions were to be subservient to the will of God. They were designed to help Edwards delight in God (Psalm 37:4). They were to help Edwards redeem his time for the glory of God (Ephesians 5:16). They were to help him stay humble (James 4:10). They were to give him a lens by which he looked at his life and circumstances (Romans 8:28). They were to aid Edwards in putting to death the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13) and ultimately conform him more into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). They were to remind him of death (Romans 5:12–19) and the hope of heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8), our bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15) and the new world (Revelation 21:1–4). As you will see, these resolutions served that purpose. Again, Edwards’ application of them could have been criticized at times, but you will find behind these 70 resolutions a clear strategy to be submissive to God and to be poured out as a drink offering in the efforts of kingdom expansion (Philippians 2:17; 2 Timothy 4:6). Therefore, as you read through these resolutions, do so devotionally. Use them as an aid to help you subdue your own thinking and thus actions to the Word of God. Each resolution will be grounded in Scripture for that very purpose.

For the Sake of Christ

Though these resolutions were multifaceted, they all supported one goal: the exaltation of Jesus Christ over every aspect of life. In fact, this is why these resolutions cover such a wide range of issues. This is why they read like modern proverbs. Nothing is off limits in Edwards’ mind. For him, everything was to be brought into subjection. He wanted everything, including every rebellious molecule of his being, to come under Christ as Lord. These

resolutions were Edwards' way of governing himself. This isn't in opposition to justification by faith alone. If we are confusing that already, we must go back to the preamble in its entirety. Self-governance is about self-control, which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). One must be indwelt by the Holy Spirit to cultivate the self-government that Edwards was after. Self-government really is the prerequisite to all other forms of healthy government. Therefore, we see that Edwards was after the exaltation of Christ in his personal walking with the Lord, and in doing so, he was able to exalt Christ to his neighbors. Genuinely exalting Christ in your life—especially when no one is looking, has a redemptive effect on others. Edwards knew this. Therefore, these resolutions were for “the sake of Christ.” Perhaps the best way to end this chapter and send you on your journey with Edwards' “70 Resolutions” is by giving you a warning from an older, wiser Jonathan Edwards.

Trusting in Our Own Righteousness. The words of Peter to Simon Magus, *Acts 8:20*, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money”: I say these words seem to argue the very fatal consequence of men's trusting in anything of theirs, any price they have to offer for salvation. The Holy Spirit is by way of eminency the gift of God, and is the sum of salvation and of those saving benefits that are purchased by Christ. And the Holy Spirit in his ordinary saving influences, in conferring grace and glory, is a much higher benefit than the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. And there is a greater disproportion between the worth of the former and our best righteousness than between the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit and silver and gold.⁸

May we never trust in our riches or abilities. Rather, in all we do, may we trust in our Triune God who has secured our salvation in Jesus Christ.

8 *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 23, *The “Miscellanies,”* (Entry Nos. 1153–1360), ed. Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven, Yale University Press), 86.

The Seventy Resolutions
Of
Jonathan Edwards

RESOLUTIONS I & 2: The Glory of God

Original

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, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great soever.

2. Resolved, to be continually endeavoring to find out some new invention and contrivance to promote the aforementioned things.

Modernized

1. Resolved, that I will do whatever I think will bring God the most glory which is to my own good, profit, and pleasure for as long as I live. I will do these things no matter how long it takes me to do them. Resolved, that I will do whatever I think I must do that will provide the most good for mankind in general. Resolved, to do this no matter the difficulties or the severity of those difficulties.

2. Resolved, to continually try hard to find new ways to promote the things mentioned in Resolution 1.

THE FIRST TEN OF Edwards' Resolutions were written in one sitting, and this is a fitting first resolution to write in a list of seventy. I have grouped the first two together (and you will see various groupings throughout this book), because Edwards intended for them to be grouped together. The focal point is Resolution 1. The crux of his first resolution is the glory of God, and this really can be seen as an umbrella of sorts, over all the other resolutions. Although it isn't a restatement of the preamble of the last chapter, it is preamble-like in that it casts the overall vision for the resolutions. Plainly, we exist to glorify God. When we internalize

that, it sheds us of all of our silly self-importance. This resolution pairs well with the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

QUEST. What is the chief end of man?

ANS. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

That is our purpose, no matter who we are or what we do.

There are at least two noteworthy things for us in this resolution. First, notice how Edwards connects his own good, profit, and pleasure to the glory of God. This should be striking to us. There is superior pleasure, superior good, and superior profit to be found in the glorifying of God according to Edwards. Remember Edwards is young at the writing of these resolutions. So, is 19-year-old Edwards correct? Is pleasure, good, and profit something to be found in the Triune God? What does that even mean exactly?

The psalmist says, "Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). *Delight*. That is an interesting word. The idea behind it is the pampering or refreshing one's self or the taking of pleasure in something or someone. We may be onto something here that is so foreign to our church culture, because we have allowed godless hedonists to hijack words like pleasure, delight, happiness, and profit. The psalmist is telling us to refresh ourselves or take pleasure or pamper ourselves *in the Lord*. He is saying that to be in the Lord is *enjoyable*. Why don't we speak in this way anymore? Interestingly, the command to delight yourself in the Lord is followed by a promise: "And he shall give you the desires of your heart." What does a heart want that is delighted by the Lord? What does a heart want that finds pleasure, happiness, and profit in the Lord? That kind of heart wants more of what it possesses—it wants *the Lord*. The Holy Spirit-inspired psalmist says God will give himself to you.

Sadly, the experience and command of the psalmist can feel so foreign to us, because we have nurtured our sinfully bent wills in such a way that our pleasure seeking chases after our fleeting lusts and, instead of redirecting our desire for pleasure and focusing it on our pursuit of the Lord, we lump pleasure in with lusts and try to repent of them both. In reality, our repentance should include

a redirection of our pleasure. No longer do we pursue pleasure in the lusts of our flesh, but we commit ourselves to a *superior* pleasure—a better pleasure—a pleasure in the Triune God. Therefore, delight yourself in the Lord because that is glorifying to God. And glorifying him is the reason we exist. As you do this, you will find that God's glory and your good are inseparably intertwined:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (Romans 8:28–30).

Truly, *all* things work together for good—for those who love God—who *belong* to God. He is using all things to conform us more into the image of his Son and the crescendo of that forming will be our glorification. Therefore, young Edwards was right. The glory of God and our good, profit, and pleasure are intertwined. Edwards was so impacted by that glorious reality that from a very young age, he resolved to be mindful of the pursuit. And he doesn't read, especially in his later years, to be rushed in this God-glorifying journey. He didn't care about expediency in this resolution—the aim was faithfulness in the pursuit of serious joy.

The second thing that is significant is that this resolution has three *micro* resolutions. The first, we have touched on, but we see that the other two are driven by the first. The second micro resolution Edwards wrote is that he resolved to do the most good for mankind. The third micro resolution is a commitment to perseverance despite obstacles. Edwards was not one that would easily give up. Even in his darkest moments, he sought to make spiritual progress. While I can't be certain that this is what Edwards had in mind, the entirety of the resolution and it having three micro resolutions certainly seems to indicate a mindfulness of what Calvin called the two tables of the law, which is a summary of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). The first table consists of the first four commandments (which could be summarized by Edwards'

resolution on the glory of God) and the last six commandments focus on our relationships with people (which could be summarized by Edwards' resolution to do the most good to mankind).

A warm and faithful heart that delights in the glory of the Lord will manifest itself in how you treat others. You will do what is most spiritually good for them. Therefore, this resolution is one focused on loving God and loving others—the first and second greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36–40).

These resolutions are a great start to our journey through the seventy. May we learn from Edwards and pursue superior pleasure in God that in turn makes us maximally beneficial to those God providentially puts in our path.