

S T U D Y G U I D E

by Stephen J. Nichols



Jonathan
Edwards

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His Early Life

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Human beings tend to romanticize and idealize the lives of those individuals we admire, particularly those that lived in an era far removed from ourselves. We smooth out a wrinkle here, turn a blind eye to an episode there, and, poof, an impeccable figure emerges from a charmed existence. The great American theologian Jonathan Edwards has not escaped this idealizing. Yet, a full understanding of his theology and the decisions he made demands a realistic examination of his life, from beginning to end. Dr. Steve Nichols takes us through the life of Edwards in this study, illuminating the details of his life, good and bad, so that we might better understand how God cultivated and crafted Edwards into His servant—who many consider the greatest theologian the United States has ever produced.

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To examine influential elements of the early life of Edwards
2. To demonstrate how Edwards began to form intentionality in his life
3. To introduce Edwards' desire to learn two books: the Bible and the book of nature

QUOTATION

God's purpose for my life was that I have a passion for God's glory and that I have a passion for my joy in that glory, and that these two are one passion.

—Jonathan Edwards

LECTURE OUTLINE

- I. The Early Life of Jonathan Edwards
 - A. Edwards was born to Timothy and Esther Stoddard Edwards in AD 1703.
 - i. Timothy had attended and graduated from Harvard.

- ii. After graduating, Timothy, a Puritan, took the position of pastor in a church in East Windsor, Connecticut.
- iii. Edwards was the fifth of eleven children—the only boy.
- B. Timothy ministered at the church in East Windsor for fifty-six years.
 - i. Timothy's wife, Esther Stoddard, was the daughter of Solomon Stoddard, the pastor of First Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts.
 - 1. Esther, like her sisters but unlike the general female populace, received education from her father at home in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.
 - 2. She was sent to finishing school in Boston, and throughout her life she exhibited fine mental gifts and a strong personality.
 - 3. Timothy and Esther sent all of Jonathan's sisters to finishing school, and his older sisters participated in teaching him.
- C. Jonathan witnessed the many dimensions of pastoral ministry as Timothy's son.
 - i. On the one hand, Jonathan witnessed the church grow and learned the art of powerful preaching.
 - 1. The first letter extant from Jonathan describes a revival he witnessed in the church of his father.
 - 2. While in East Windsor, Jonathan learned how to preach in a school of preaching in the Connecticut River Valley.
 - a. The Puritans considered preaching an art form.
 - b. Sermons were designed to persuade by the power of words, arguments, and letting the Word of God go forth.
 - ii. On the other hand, Jonathan saw the difficulties many pastors faced during this era.
 - 1. The church at East Windsor neglected to pay Timothy his wages, forcing him to supplement his income by serving as a chaplain for the British forces.
 - 2. Timothy's absence while serving as a chaplain demanded that Jonathan's sisters pick up his education.
 - iii. During his youth, Edwards determined that a life that matters is the life lived for a singular, intentional purpose.
- D. In 1716, at the age of twelve, Jonathan prepared to attend college.
 - i. Although Timothy and much of his family attended Harvard, he decided against sending Jonathan there.
 - 1. Timothy, like many Puritans, suspected that Harvard had fallen into latitudinarianism.
 - a. Many believed that Harvard provided too much latitude on adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith.
 - b. Whereas before, this confession undergirded Harvard, by the 1710's it had ceased to hold this sort of sway amongst the faculty and student body.

2. A new college, largely in response to Harvard's theological movement, had opened in nearby New Haven, Connecticut—Yale.
- ii. Timothy sent Jonathan to Yale in 1716.
 1. Jonathan soon wrote home to his parents requesting more money to buy schoolbooks.
 2. As we will see throughout this series, Jonathan, a true Puritan, desired to study not only God's revelation in His Word but also His revelation in creation.

STUDY QUESTIONS

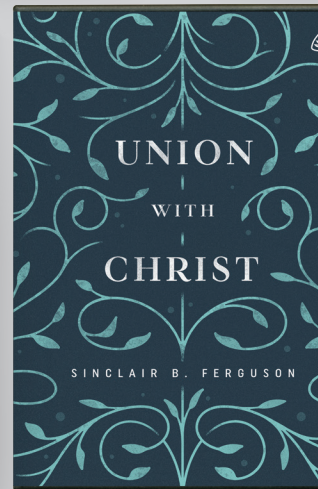
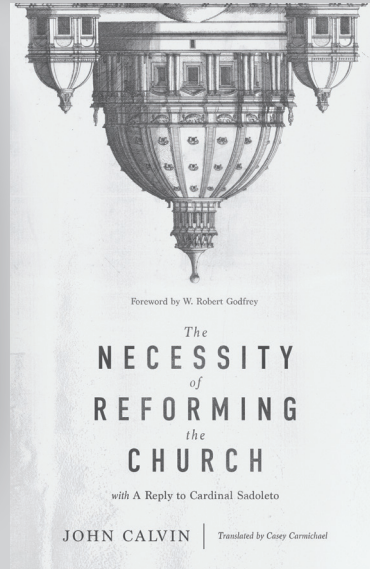
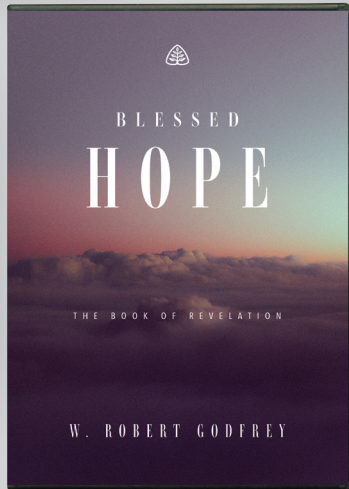
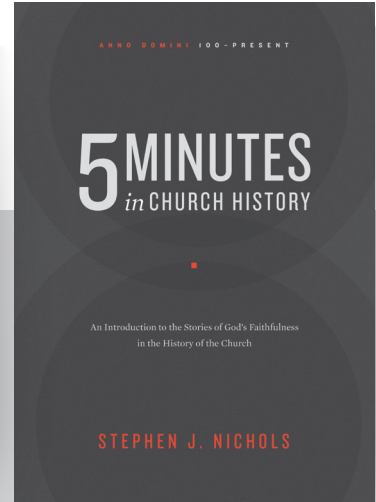
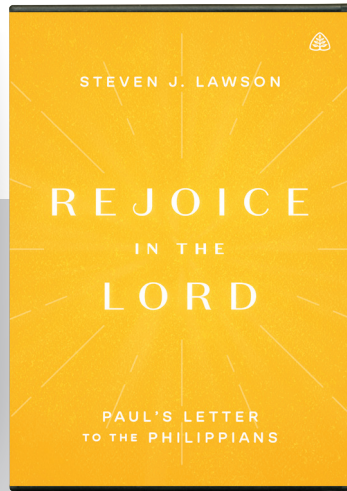
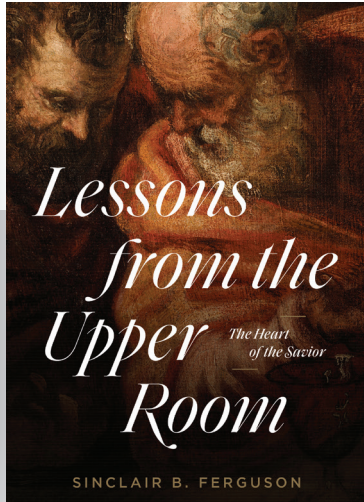
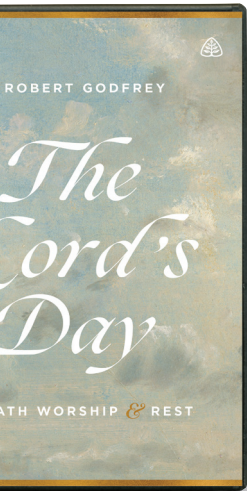
1. After graduating from Harvard, Timothy Edwards took a position as pastor in a church at _____.
 - a. Northampton, Massachusetts
 - b. East Windsor, Connecticut
 - c. Cambridge, Massachusetts
 - d. New Haven, Connecticut
2. Esther Stoddard Edwards proved a hardworking housewife, but she came up short in the area of academics.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. Jonathan witnessed the many dimensions of pastoral ministry while growing up in Timothy's household.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. Puritan preaching employed gimmicks, tricks, and theatrics to move and sway the congregation.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. At Timothy's discretion, Jonathan attended this school for his college education.
 - a. The University of Pennsylvania
 - b. Harvard University
 - c. Yale University
 - d. Oxford University

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe how Jonathan's immediate and extended family valued education among all of its members. How did this affect Jonathan's own life, particularly in regards to his mother and sisters?

2. What are some of the positive experiences Jonathan had on account of Timothy's ministry in East Windsor?
3. What are some of the negative experiences Jonathan underwent on account of Timothy's ministry in East Windsor?
4. Why did Timothy send Jonathan to Yale instead of Harvard? Define "latitudinarianism," and explain its relevance in Timothy's decision.
5. On what principles was Yale founded? Does the school exemplify these principles today? Why or why not, and what does this trend say about many of the higher academic institutions in the United States?
6. What does Jonathan's letter to his parents requesting money for textbooks reveal about his attitude toward his studies?

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