



Jonathan
Edwards'
Resolutions

*And Advice to
Young Converts*

Edited by

STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

Jonathan Edwards'
Resolutions
And Advice to Young Converts

Introduced and edited
by Stephen J. Nichols


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Illustration on page 21: “The Edwards Memorial” by Herbert Adams. A life-size bronze plaque located at First Church, Northampton, Massachusetts. This plaque was unveiled on June 22, 1900, 150 years after Edwards’ dismissal from his Northampton pulpit. Reproduced from a photograph in the Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet brings together two unique and remarkable texts by the colonial divine Jonathan Edwards. The first is his *Resolutions*, written during the years 1722 and 1723. When he wrote these seventy resolutions, Edwards was completing his schooling and ministerial training and was anticipating setting out on his life's work. He took advantage of the opportunity to pause and reflect on the type of person he wanted to be and the way in which he wanted to live his life.

In a manner that would come to typify his entire career, he took up his pen and, in the moments of quiet he could wrest from a busy day, wrote the guidelines, the system of checks and balances he would use to chart out his life—his relationships, his conversations, his desires, his activities. In short, through these resolutions he offers himself his own advice.

The second text, *Advice to Young Converts*, is not all that different from the *Resolutions*. It too consists of advice to a young person, only this advice comes in the form of a letter. And Edwards, a few years wiser, is now being called upon to guide others. Though not as broad in scope as the *Resolutions*, this letter reveals a wealth of information and insight into successfully living the Christian life. The letter was written during a fascinating period of colonial times and of Edwards' life, the time known as the Great Awakening, span-

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ning the years 1740–1742. In the letter he offers young Deborah Hatheway nineteen separate points to consider. The letter presents not just timely advice for her, but timeless advice for generations to come. As one scholar recently observed, the letter “has become a classic of Christian devotion.”

Neither one of the original manuscripts of these texts has survived. Both texts, however, have been widely reproduced and printed throughout the last three centuries. The American Tract Society distributed hundreds of thousands of copies of *Advice to Young Converts* throughout the nineteenth century, and the *Resolutions* has been reprinted since the 1700s. Both texts are reproduced again here, with extremely minor revisions that update the grammar, for a new generation of young converts in the hope that these words of Edwards will continue to be used by God in encouraging us along in our “Christian course.”

Today’s bookstores are overrun by “how to” books. Edwards’ advice to Deborah Hatheway and to himself, however, stands in a class by itself. His straightforward and biblically sound advice helps cut through the static and returns our focus to Christ and to his revelation as that which alone guides our steps.

Life of Jonathan Edwards

Born on October 5, 1703, Jonathan Edwards grew up in a minister’s home in East Windsor, Connecticut. At the age of 13, he entered Yale, receiving his B.A. degree in 1720 and his M.A. in 1723. For a brief pe-



Artist's Conception of Main Street, Northampton, Massachusetts, 1786. Drawn by Maitland de Gorgorza.

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riod in 1722–1723 he pastored a Presbyterian church in New York City, and then he returned to Yale as a tutor or instructor for a few years. In 1727 he answered the call to serve as an assistant minister at Northampton Congregational Church in Massachusetts.

Following the death of Solomon Stoddard, Edwards assumed the role of minister at Northampton in 1729, a position he held until 1750. During this time he was a catalyst for both a series of revivals in the mid-1730s and also the Great Awakening in 1740–1742. He also published a number of sermons and treatises, including *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* in 1746. Through his preaching and writing Edwards quickly gained an international reputation as perhaps the colonies' foremost pastor, theologian, and intellectual.

Ironically Edwards was dismissed from the Northampton pulpit in 1750. He then moved to the frontier town of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he served as minister at the missionary outpost to the Native American Mohawk and Mohican tribes. He continued to write, publishing such works as *Freedom of the Will* (1754) and *Original Sin* (1758).

Trustees of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University, prevailed on Edwards to serve as president. In January 1758 Edwards assumed the role. Only a few months later, however, he suffered an adverse reaction to a smallpox inoculation and died on March 22.

Edwards left behind quite a legacy through his eleven children and seventy-two grandchildren, as well as his numerous writings, many of which were published after his death. Through these writings Ed-

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wards continues his lifelong occupation of ministering to the church.

Resolutions

Edwards spent the majority of his life in the Connecticut River Valley. From the time of his birth in 1703 until 1750, he lived up and down the Connecticut River in both Connecticut and Massachusetts, except, that is, for a few months in 1722 and 1723. Young Jonathan left his home and familiar surroundings to answer a call to minister to a small Presbyterian congregation in New York City. His new pastoral charge located him somewhere in the vicinity of modern day Broad and Wall streets.

He was no stranger to adventure. As a student at Yale, he moved a few times along with his institution, primarily due to the fact that Yale had not yet found a permanent home, but also due in part to an attempt to avoid skirmishes with the forces that would eventually engage in the Seven Years' War. But now nineteen-year-old Edwards found himself in a new environment, in a new situation, and with a new and rather weighty responsibility.

To face these new challenges, Edwards, following the pattern he established early on and continued to hone throughout his life, took to writing. Like many of his Puritan forebears, he started a diary as a window into his own soul and innermost thoughts, as a way to gauge his relationship to Christ and monitor his spiritual condition. He also started a series of guidelines not only to measure his life, but also to set goals for