Praying Together for True Revival
Jonathan Edwards for Today’s Reader

T. M. MOORE, SERIES EDITOR

Also in this series:
Growing in God’s Spirit
Praying Together for True Revival

Jonathan Edwards

Edited by T. M. Moore

Introduction by John H. Armstrong

Foreword by Erwin W. Lutzer
To

James A. R. Johnson
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Series Introduction

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) is one of the great figures of American church history. Pastor, theologian, evangelist, missionary, husband, and father, Edwards was mightily used of God in his day, and his written works continue to instruct and nurture those who take the time to study them in our own. During his tenure as pastor in the Congregational church in Northampton, Massachusetts, Edwards’s preaching was the catalyst God’s Spirit used to ignite two powerful seasons of revival, including the Great Awakening of the 1740s. He was a man of the Book and a man of the church, devoting himself to the study of God’s Word and the work of pastoral care and edification in congregations in New York City, Northampton, and Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he served as a missionary to Native Americans. Although he was elected president of Princeton College in 1757, his untimely death made his tenure there all too brief.

This series is devoted to bringing the sermons and other works of Jonathan Edwards to today’s readers in a form that can make for careful reading, thoughtful consideration, lively discussion, and significant growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. Edwards preached to farmers and merchants, homemakers and youth, Native
Americans and small-town professionals. Although his language can seem at times obscure and the logic of his arguments demands our diligent attention, the ordinary people of his day understood him quite well. For nearly three hundred years the works of Jonathan Edwards have instructed and inspired pastors, theologians, and lay readers to a greater love of God and more diligence in spreading God’s love to others. This suggests that Edwards’s works can serve us in our generation as well.

Edwards’s sermons and books are steeped in Scripture and employ careful exposition and rigorous logic to make the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ clear and compelling. His was indeed a “rational Biblical theology,” to borrow a phrase from Dr. John Gerstner, to whom contemporary Christians owe a great debt for his tireless promotion and exposition of the works of the greatest theologian ever to grace the American ecclesiastical scene. For a variety of reasons—among them the demanding nature of Edwards’s writing, his use, at times, of archaic or unfamiliar terms, and the difficulty of procuring his works—contemporary readers have not availed themselves of Edwards’s sermons and books as much as they might. To their enormous credit, the editors and publishers of the Banner of Truth Trust have labored to overcome these difficulties by making a large number of Edwards’s works available in two hefty volumes and by publishing individual sermons and books as separate publications. We are grateful to the Trust for granting us permission to use the edition of Edwards’s works prepared by Edward Hickman, first pub-
lished in 1834 and kept in print by Banner since 1974, for the texts in this series.

The books in this series present the works of Edwards in their original form, as prepared by Hickman, without significant modification in his language. At times we have updated the spelling of a word, altered punctuation, or included Scripture references that Edwards omitted in his texts. We have added headings and subheadings to clarify his arguments, divided some long paragraphs, and portioned each work into short chapters to allow for more careful and considerate reading. We have also incorporated study questions at the end of each chapter to promote thoughtful reflection on the meaning and application of Edwards’s arguments and to encourage use of his works in reading and discussion groups.

This series is prepared under the sponsorship of the Jonathan Edwards Institute, whose mission—to promote and nurture a God-entranced worldview—mirrors that of Edwards. We are grateful to Allan Fisher and the staff of P&R Publishing for their vision for and commitment to the plan and purposes of this series. Our hope is that the books in this series will introduce Jonathan Edwards to a new generation of readers and draw them more deeply and passionately into the knowledge of God. We offer them with the hope that God, who sent the Spirit of revival to his church in Edwards’s day, might be pleased to use this series as he moves to revive, renew, and restore his glory in his Bride once again.

T. M. Moore
The Jonathan Edwards Institute
A series of volumes dedicated to the memory of one of whom many people are unaware needs some explanation. Yet those who have known Jim Johnson understand at once why an exploration of the thought of Jonathan Edwards is a fitting tribute.

Jim was a husband to Martha and father to three sons, Mark, Steve, and David, who are dedicated followers of Christ. He was the mentor and encourager of untold numbers of young men in every walk of life and served as an elder in his church, the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, Maryland.

Jim possessed many intellectual qualifications. He was trained in the liberal arts, and he possessed a doctoral degree in jurisprudence. Far from living in academic isolation, he also held various positions within American corporate life, and he worked and moved with ease in government.

He was fully aware of the reality of the fallenness of our humanity. He lived with it and experienced some of its harshest dealings. Yet to each of his callings, and in all his experiences, Jim brought a devotion to Christ and a love of truth. He was an example of one who sought to bring all of life captive to the Word of God.

Jim Johnson serves as a model to those who seek to harness a vital, living relationship with Christ with an honest pursuit of working that out with theological integrity and ethical rigor. When faced with the diagnosis of inoperable
cancer, he showed that, as Jonathan Edwards often re-
marked, Christians can die well. Like Edwards’s faith, Jim’s
was real, true, and practical, and it demanded to be worked
out in intellectual, experiential, and ethical ways.

Redeemed by Christ, Jim lived life in gratitude, which
is why each one of us who knew him mourned the passing
of a great encourager, a powerful mentor, and a humble ser-
vant of the Lamb.

Robert M. Norris, senior pastor
Fourth Presbyterian Church
Bethesda, Maryland
FOREWORD

You are holding in your hands a book that should be read by every Christian who is concerned about the state of the church in America in the twenty-first century. If you are a pastor, you will especially find this work to be of profound importance. And if you believe, with me, that focused, earnest, and definite prayer languishes in our churches, then you too should read it, even if you are not a pastor. This is unadulterated high-octane spiritual fuel designed for a season of uncommon and serious prayer, which would likely precede a real revival. Who can argue with such an agenda in such morally dark times?

When I read Jonathan Edwards’s *An Humble Attempt*, the traditional short title by which this work is known, faith was birthed in my heart; faith that in response to focused and united prayer, God might yet do a mighty work in our day. For decades I have believed that the church in the West needs a true revival. I even wrote an account of revival in Saskatchewan, Canada, in the early 1970s. I have longed and prayed for “showers of blessing” on many occasions since I undertook that study. In reading this book I have come to see afresh how the sovereign purposes of God are uniquely connected to the extraordinary and united prayer of God’s people.
Jonathan Edwards had a different understanding of the millennium than many in our day, including me, but I still urge you to read him. Don’t let his particular view of Revelation 20 detract you from the great burden of his heart. His passion and clear instruction on how concerts of prayer can be mobilized for the renewal of the church and, above all, for the recovery of the glory of God among us is something we desperately need.

The historical introduction by my friend John Armstrong sets a context for the book and clearly shows how it can profit modern readers. Read it carefully, and then let Edwards’s arguments wash over you with deep prayer. This just may be the kindling for the fires of true revival that you and I need. Whether you know much about Jonathan Edwards, or even very little, this book is a great place to soak your mind and heart in the great truths of biblical revival and the insightful writing of the famous American theologian Jonathan Edwards.

You rarely hear it said, at least these days, that prayerlessness is a great sin. According to the Scriptures spiritual apathy, and the consequent sin of prayerlessness, is most often connected to God’s discipline of his people. If we would see the heavens opened, with new refreshing mercies of grace, then we, the people of God, must seek his face and call upon him in humble united prayer.

John Armstrong tells us in his introduction that Edwards’s book is the “classic” on the relationship between prayer and true revival. I agree with him. If you prayerfully
read these pages, the ripples of blessing just might go to “the edge of the pond” and then drift on to “eternity.”

Erwin W. Lutzer, pastor
Moody Church, Chicago
INTRODUCTION

I think I can safely say that the little book you now hold in your hands has done more to spark prayer for true revival than any other book in human history, besides the Holy Scriptures. It has generally been understood that a classic is a book judged to be of highest quality over a significant period of time. By this definition, this book is undoubtedly the classic work on the connection of extraordinary prayer to seasons of awakening.

Jonathan Edwards, who is often thought of as one of America’s greatest philosopher-theologians, was above all a devout Christian who saturated himself in the Word of God. He was taught the truths of the Reformed faith and the practice of Puritan piety from his childhood. A graduate of Yale College (1720) at the ripe old age of seventeen, he became a pastor in New York City in August 1722, shortly before his twentieth birthday. By the age of twenty-one he was a tutor at Yale, and in 1726 he became an associate minister to his famous maternal grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. It was there, in Northampton, Massachusetts, that he saw the fruit of past local revivals firsthand and learned that the Spirit was often poured out in copious showers of blessing upon the church.
When Stoddard died in 1729, Edwards became the minister of the Congregational church, where he served until a tragic dismissal in 1750. In the later years of his life Edwards was pastor of a mission church of Native Americans in Stockbridge, which was then the frontier of western Massachusetts. He left Stockbridge in February 1757 to become the second president of the College of New Jersey (later to become Princeton). One week after arriving in Princeton he was inoculated against smallpox and less than a month later died of the dreaded disease. He is buried, alongside his beloved wife, Sarah, in the cemetery just across the street from Princeton University.

The written corpus of Jonathan Edwards is of several types. Early in his career he began to publish sermons and occasional pieces. This continued until he died. His private notebooks and personal writings soon followed. (Some of these written pieces, called “Miscellanies,” are just now appearing in large academic volumes published by Yale University Press.) His philosophical and theological books, written in the latter part of his life, are perhaps the best known of his written works.

Most students of Jonathan Edwards agree that the most notable of his occasional writings, at least in his lifetime, dealt with revival. It was during the years of 1734–1735 that he witnessed a great outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the people of Northampton. Initially the work of revival began when a woman came under conviction of sin and estrangement from Christ upon hearing sermons on justification by faith alone. Her conversion
sparked an extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit that resulted in several hundred conversions (a huge number in a town of little more than one thousand people). The zeal of this movement spread to other towns in the Connecticut River Valley and waves of fresh revival were the result. Accounts of these events, written by Edwards, were then sent to Boston. From there they reached across the colonies and eventually back to Great Britain. This movement of revival subsided in 1735, but in the fall of 1740, when the famous itinerant George Whitefield came to New England, the Spirit again moved with great effect. Whitefield paid an eventful visit to Northampton in the fall of 1740, and Edwards, along with others, began to itinerate and preach in churches beyond their own town. This is the background for Edwards’s most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” preached in Enfield, Connecticut, in July 1741. Over the course of the next several years, revival fire spread once again. In time this period came to be known as the (First) Great Awakening.

Edwards’s role in this work of revival was powerfully established by his written work. Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England celebrated the revivals of this era. A Treatise on Religious Affections became an enduring defense of the true nature of a work of the Spirit, especially in movements of revival. In this particular work he defends revival and explains what does and does not constitute a work of God’s Spirit in renewing the heart. It still remains a major work of importance on spiritual discernment. After his death, A History of the Work of Redemption was
published. It demonstrated how God used revival movements to expand the kingdom of Christ over the whole earth. *A Faithful Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, written shortly after the revival in the 1730s, is what the title reveals, a testimony of the “surprising” nature and fruit of multiplied conversions.

But what about this little book, commonly known as *An Humble Attempt*, which you now hold? Why is this particular work on revival so important? The answer is to be found in two places. First, we can see the importance of this book within the work itself. The content is rich, moving, and hopeful. Second, we can observe its importance in the impact that it has had upon subsequent generations of believers.

Published in 1747, the original title contained, incredibly, 145 words! Here is a shortened version of the original title:

*An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time.*

In the aftermath of the Great Awakening there were many who felt the whole business amounted to very little when it was all over. Edwards disagreed. *An Humble Attempt* was published for this very reason. It is the fruit of many years of thought and study. As you will soon see, Edwards does more than merely defend revivals. He expounds the meaning of Zechariah 8:20–22 and urges prayer for new
outpourings of the Spirit. But the prayer he urges is of a very specific sort—namely, united prayer that will demonstrate and reveal visible union among the churches. It is not just prayer that is needed, but “extraordinary prayer.” And this prayer is not vague, for it must promote the “explicit agreement and visible union” of Christians. Literally, each word in this title bears upon the very nature of the “extraordinary” prayer that Edwards urges upon the reader.

In 1745 Edwards wrote a friend saying, “In many places where God of late wonderfully appeared he has now in a great measure withdrawn; and the consequence is, that Zion and the interest of religion are involved in innumerable and inextricable difficulties.” During the later years of Edwards’s life the situation changed very little. The tides of revival were out! Only God could bring the blessings the church needed.

So why did Edwards write this little treatise? I think there are at least two obvious reasons. First, he was a biblical optimist regarding the work of God. He sincerely believed that greater things and better times must come. He based this belief upon a multitude of texts that speak of a greater work of the Spirit bringing glory to Christ throughout the earth in the last days. He would have found nothing in the present doomsday eschatology of many modern evangelicals to fuel passion and hope for revival. His confidence was not vague; it was focused. He believed that Christ would save a multitude of people and claim the world for himself before the final judgment. (Though Edwards clearly was postmillennial in his view of Revelation 20, one does not have to share this system of...
He wrote to a friend in 1744, before this work was published, saying “that God will revive his work, and that what has been so great and very extraordinary, is a forerunner of a yet more glorious and extensive work.”

Second, Edwards believed that the revival he had seen in his congregation in 1734–1735, and again in the wider New England context in the early 1740s, was a distinct and gracious work of God. The fact that the tides were now out did not negate that they had once washed ashore with great power, changing lives and refreshing the church. He wanted to conserve the good of this movement and foster greater demonstrations of divine blessing in coming centuries. Believing that God alone would send such times of refreshing, Edwards wanted to connect the promises of Scripture to the place of “extraordinary” prayer for revival for generations to come.

The *Humble Attempt* arose from a very practical source. It was Jonathan Edwards’s response to a “Memorial” published by a group of Scottish ministers who had been involved in prayer societies, especially among young people, that began in Scotland around 1740. A group of godly ministers felt it was time to take this movement of prayer to a deeper level of resolve and practice. They created an “experiment” that would unite the prayer groups in Scotland into a unified, visible strategy. They specifically appealed to Christians to gather for revival, praying every Saturday evening and Sunday morning for the next two years! In addition, they urged special meetings on the first Tuesday of
each quarter. They set the time of two years to see what God would do and then to proceed based upon the direction they believed the Lord gave them. In 1746, when they considered what had been accomplished in this two-year period, they believed they should issue an appeal to the church worldwide, especially in the American colonies. This led to the publication of the *Memorial*. Five hundred copies were sent to Boston. One of these came into Edwards’s possession, and the result was *An Humble Attempt*.

David Bryant has suggested, correctly I think, that Edwards was prompted to write this treatise because of “its potential for mobilization, and its inherent value for holding Christians accountable to the work of prayer.” (This is a correct reading of what you will see in the opening few pages of the book.) But there was more. Edwards, always rightly concerned that piety and prayer be rooted in sound theology, wanted to provide further theological support for this “extraordinary” revival prayer movement.

Edwards regarded the idea of Christians united in prayer as “exceeding beautiful, and becoming Christians” and most fitting given the present state of weakness and division. He added that “it is apparent that we can’t help ourselves, and have nowhere else to go, but to God.” But over the course of the next few years (1744–1745) Edwards could have been easily discouraged and given up such prayer. He wrote in May 1745, in a private letter, that the concert of prayer in Northampton had been anything but a great success.
Believing that the God who has determined the end of all things must be sought on the basis of his promises of mercy, Edwards continued to work for union among believers, for he saw union as a solution to New England’s religious apathy. Christians praying together might eventually constitute “one family, one holy and happy society.” And he reasoned, “Who knows what it may come to at last?” Perhaps these concerts would be used to “open the doors and windows of heaven that have so long been shut up, and been as brass over the heads of the inhabitants of the earth, to spiritual showers.” Less than a year after Edwards expressed these sentiments he wrote *An Humble Attempt*.

The content of Edwards’s argument follows three parts. After looking at the *Memorial* of the Scottish ministers he presents his case for prayer from Zechariah 8. He demonstrates that the prophecy of Zechariah addressed a last great time of prosperity for the church. He reasons that nothing in the early ages of the church fulfilled these promises. In a masterful way he argues that earlier periods of spiritual prosperity and blessing were types or anticipations (or down payments if you please) of the last and final age. Ministers in the Puritan tradition believed that God was sometimes pictured in Scripture as “hiding himself from the church.” What are the people of God to do in such times? They answered that Christians should unite themselves with other earnest believers and seek the Lord in a constant and fervent way for showers of blessing. This is what Jonathan Edwards hoped to do by opening up this text for his readers. Finally, Edwards presents the reader
with motives for united prayer and then seeks to answer objections to such a united movement.

I noted earlier that there are two reasons for the importance of this book. One is to be found in the content, as I briefly noted. The other reason is to be seen in the impact that this small book has had upon Christians for more than 250 years. In the view of Jonathan Edwards the Bible is a book filled with “precepts, encouragements, and examples” all underscoring the church’s continual prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit. This, I believe, is what makes this book so important today.

Jesus, teaching his disciples how to pray, said:

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? (Luke 11:11–13 NIV)

I meet few Christians in the West who earnestly and faithfully ask the Father to “give the Holy Spirit” to the church. We assume that all that we should have, indeed all that we should expect, has already been given. Our prayers are small, and our passion is thus cooled. The breezes of modernism blow through evangelical congregations as well as liberal ones. We do not believe that Pentecost was a specimen day, the beginning of a new age. Pentecostal believers often assume that they have all that God will do in this age if certain gifts have been granted to them. Non-Pentecostal
believers are content with a clear evidence of faith in Christ and often settle for a passionless, arid spirituality. Edwards stands against these two paradigms. For this reason his work is not denominationally sectarian but truly catholic. It is not accidental, to my mind, that worldwide movements of prayer for awakening have been birthed and nurtured by this marvelous book. My prayer is that a whole new movement of God’s people will grow in “explicit agreement” and “extraordinary prayer, for the revival of religion and the advancement of Christ’s kingdom on earth” according to the biblical promises that warrant such an effort. Even if we do not see the greatest outpouring of God’s Spirit in history during our time, we are, by such ministries, putting “incense” into the golden bowls that are before the Lamb in heaven (Rev. 5:9). It is God’s to grant the mercies and ours to ask. “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Gen. 18:14 NIV).

John H. Armstrong, president
Reformation and Revival Ministries
Part 1

THE PROPOSAL TO PRAY

ZECHARIAH 8:20–22

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities, and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.
Chapter 1

A Vision for the Latter Days

In these introductory remarks Edwards summarizes his sense of what God intends for his church in the latter days, showing from many parts of Scripture that God is planning to bring great revival and growth to his church, subsequent to a season of united and earnest prayer on the part of his people.

Explanatory Introduction: A Prophecy for the Latter Days

In this chapter we have a prophecy of a future glorious advancement of the church of God; wherein it is evident that something further is intended than ever was fulfilled to the Jewish nation under the Old Testament. For here are plain prophecies of such things as never were fulfilled before the coming of the Messiah: particularly, what is said in the two last verses in the chapter, of many people and strong nations worshiping and seeking the true God; and of so great an ac-
cession of Gentile nations to the church of God that by far the greater part of the visible worshipers should consist of this new accession, so that they should be to the other as ten to one—certain number for an uncertain. There never happened anything, from the time of the prophet Zechariah to the coming of Christ, to answer this prophecy: and it can have no fulfillment but either, in the calling of the Gentiles, in and after the days of the apostles; or, in the future glorious enlargement of the church of God in the latter ages of the world, so often foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament, and by the prophet Zechariah in particular, in the latter part of his prophecy. It is most probably that what the Spirit of God has chiefly respect to is that last and greatest enlargement and most glorious advancement of the church of God on earth; in the benefits of which especially the Jewish nation were to have a share, a very eminent and distinguished share.

There is great agreement between what is here said and other prophecies that must manifestly have respect to the church’s latter-day glory: “The Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee: and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see; all they gather themselves together, they come to thee” (Isa. 60:2–4). That whole chapter, beyond all dispute, has respect to the most glorious state of the church of God on earth. “Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Shall a nation be born at once?” (Isa. 66:8). “Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her”
(Isa. 66:10). “I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream” (Isa. 66:12).

“But in the last day it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills, and people shall flow unto it; and many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Mic. 4:1–3). So also Isaiah 2 at the beginning. There has been nothing yet brought to pass, in any measure, to answer these prophecies. And as the prophecy in my text, and the following verse, agrees with them, so there is reason to think it has a respect to the same times. And indeed there is a remarkable agreement in the description given throughout the chapter, with the representations made of those times elsewhere in the prophets.

So that however the prophet, in some parts of this chapter, may have respect to future smiles of heaven on the Jewish nation, lately returned from the Babylonish captivity, and resettled in the land of Canaan, in a great increase of their numbers and wealth, and the return of more captives from Chaldea and other countries, yet the Spirit of God has doubtless respect to things far greater than these, and of which these were but faint resemblances. We find it common in the prophecies of the Old Testament that when the
prophets are speaking of divine favors and blessings on the Jews, attending or following their return from the Babylonish captivity, the Spirit of God takes occasion from thence to speak of the incomparably greater blessings on the church that shall attend and follow her deliverance from the spiritual or mystical Babylon, of which those were a type; and then speaks almost wholly of these latter and vastly greater things, so as to seem to forget the former.

And whereas the prophet, in this chapter, speaks of God bringing his people again from the east and west to Jerusalem (Zech. 8:7–8) and multitudes of all nations taking hold of the skirts of the Jews; so far as this means literally the nation of the posterity of Jacob, it cannot chiefly respect any return of the Jews from Babylon and other countries, in those ancient times before Christ; for no such things attended any such return. It must therefore have respect to the great calling and gathering of the Jews into the fold of Christ, and their being received to the blessings of his kingdom, after the fall of antichrist, or the destruction of his mystical Babylon.

**Observations on the Text**

In the text we have an account how this future glorious advancement of the church of God should be introduced, namely, by great multitudes in different towns and countries taking up a joint resolution, and coming into an express and visible agreement that they will, by united and extraordinary prayer, seek to God that he would come and manifest
himself, and grant the tokens and fruits of his gracious presence. Particularly we may observe:

The duty of prayer

The duty, with the attendance on which the glorious event foretold shall be brought on, is the duty of prayer. Prayer, some suppose, is here to be taken synecdochically for the whole of divine worship, prayer being a principal part of worship in the days of the gospel, when sacrifices are abolished. If so, this is to be understood only as a prophecy of a great revival of religion, and of the true worship of God among his visible people, the accession of others to the church, and turning of multitudes from idolatry to the worship of the true God. But it appears to me reasonable to suppose that something more special is intended, with regard to the duty of prayer; considering that prayer is here expressly and repeatedly mentioned; and also considering how parallel this place is with many other prophecies that speak of an extraordinary spirit of prayer, as preceding and introducing that glorious day of religious revival, and advancement of the church’s peace and prosperity, so often foretold. Add to this, the agreeableness of what is here said, with what is said afterwards by the same prophet, of the pouring out of a spirit of grace and supplication, as that with which this great revival of religion shall begin (cf. Zech. 12:10).

1. That is, as a symbolic element representing the whole—worship—of which it—prayer—is a part.
The good to be sought in prayer

The good that shall be sought by prayer is God himself. It is said once and again, “They shall go to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts.” This is the good they ask for, and seek by prayer, the Lord of hosts himself. To seek God, as the expression may perhaps be sometimes used in Scripture, may signify no more than seeking the favor or mercy of God. And if it be taken so here, praying before the Lord, and seeking the Lord of hosts, must be synonymous expressions. And it must be confessed to be a common thing in Scripture to signify the same thing repeatedly, by various expressions of the same import, for the greater emphasis.

But certainly the expression of seeking the Lord is very commonly used to signify something more; it implies that God himself is the great good desired and sought after; that the blessings pursued are God’s gracious presence, the blessed manifestations of him, union and intercourse with him; or, in short, God’s manifestation and communications of himself by his Holy Spirit. Thus the psalmist desired God, thirsted after him, and sought him (Ps. 42:2). “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee. My flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. My soul followeth hard after thee” (Ps. 63:1–2, 8). “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee” (Ps. 73:25). The psalmist earnestly pursued after God, his soul thirsted after him, he stretched forth his hands unto him, and so forth (Ps. 143:6). And
therefore it is in Scripture the peculiar character of the saints, that they are those who seek God. “This is the generation of them that seek him” (Ps. 24:6). “Your heart shall live that seek God” (Ps. 69:32). If the expression in the text [Zech. 8:20–22] be understood agreeably to this sense, then by seeking the Lord of hosts, we must understand a seeking that God who had withdrawn, or as it were hid himself for a long time, would return to his church, and grant the tokens and fruits of his gracious presence, and those blessed communications of his Spirit to his people, and to mankind on earth, which he had often promised, and which his church had long waited for.

And it seems reasonable to understand the phrase, seeking the Lord of hosts, in this sense here; and not as merely signifying the same thing as praying to God: not only because the expression is repeatedly added to praying before the Lord in the text; but also because the phrase, taken in this sense, is exactly agreeable to other parallel prophetic representations. Thus God’s people seeking, by earnest prayer, the promised restoration of the church of God, after the Babylonish captivity, and the great apostasy that occasioned it, is called their seeking God, and searching for him; and God’s granting this promised revival and restoration is called his being found of them. “For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word towards you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye
go and call upon me, and I will hearken unto you; and ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart; and I will be found of you, saith the Lord, and I will turn away your captivity” (Jer. 29:10–14). And the prophets, from time to time, represent God, in a low and afflicted state of his church, as being withdrawn, and hiding himself. “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior” (Isa. 45:15). “I hid me, and was wroth” (Isa. 57:17). And they represent God’s people, while his church is in such a state, before God delivers and restores the same, as seeking him, looking for him, searching and waiting for him, and calling after him. “I will go and return unto my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him” (Hos. 5:15).

And when God, in answer to their prayers and succeeding their endeavors, delivers, restores, and advances his church, according to his promise, then he is said to answer, and come, and say, Here am I, and to show himself; and they are said to find him, and see him plainly. “Then shalt thou cry, and ye shall say, Here I am” (Isa. 58:9). “I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain” (Isa. 45:19). “The Lord will wipe away the tears from off all faces, and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off the earth. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: This is the Lord, we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa. 25:8–9); together with the next chapter (Isa. 26:8–9), we have waited for thee; “the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in
the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early. For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” “Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore they shall know in that day, that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice, together they shall sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion” (Isa. 52:6–8).

Who are to be united in seeking the Lord

We may observe who they are that shall be united in thus seeking the Lord of hosts: the inhabitants of many cities, and of many countries, yea, many people, and strong nations, great multitudes in different parts of the world shall conspire in this business. From the representation made in the prophecy, it appears rational to suppose that it will be fulfilled something after this manner: There shall be given much of a spirit of prayer to God’s people, in many places, disposing them to come into an express agreement, unitedly to pray to God in an extraordinary manner that he would appear for the help of his church, and in mercy to mankind, and pour out his Spirit, revive his work, and advance his spiritual kingdom in the world, as he has promised. This disposition to prayer, and union in it, will gradually spread more and more, and increase to greater degrees; with which at length will gradually be introduced a revival of religion, and a dispo-

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sition to greater engagedness in the worship and service of God, amongst his professing people. This being observed, will be the means of awakening others, making them sensible of the wants of their souls, and exciting in them a great concern for their spiritual and everlasting good, and putting them upon earnestly crying to God for spiritual mercies, and disposing them to join in that extraordinary seeking and serving of God.

In this manner religion shall be propagated, till the awakening reaches those that are in the highest stations, and till whole nations be awakened, and there be at length an accession of many of the chief nations of the world to the church of God. Thus after the inhabitants of many cities of Israel, or of God’s professing people, have taken up and pursued a joint resolution, to go and pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts, others shall be drawn to worship and serve him with them; till at length many people and strong nations shall join themselves to them; and there shall, in process of time, be a vast accession to the church, so that it shall be ten times as large as it was before; yea, at length, all nations shall be converted unto God. Thus “ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, of the skirt of him that is a Jew” (in the sense of the apostle, Rom. 2:28–29) “saying, We will go with you; for we have heard, that God is with you” (Zech. 8:23). And thus shall be fulfilled Psalm 65:2, “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.”
The mode of their uniting together in prayer

We may observe the mode of their union in this duty. It is a visible union, an union by explicit agreement, a joint resolution declared by one to another, being first proposed by some, and readily and expressly followed by others. The inhabitants of one city shall apply themselves to the inhabitants of another, saying, Let us go, etc. Those to whom the motion is made, shall comply with it, the proposal shall take with many, it shall be a prevailing, spreading thing; one shall follow another’s example, one and another shall say, I will go also. Some suppose that the words, I will go also, are to be taken as the words of him that makes the proposal; as much as to say, I do not propose that to you which I am not willing to do myself. I desire you to go, and am ready to go with you. But this is to suppose no more to be expressed in these latter words than was expressed before in the proposal itself; for these words, let us go, signify as much. It seems to me much more natural, to understand these latter words as importing the consent of those to whom the proposal is made, or the reply of one and another that falls in with it. This is much more agreeable to the plain design of the text, which is to represent the concurrence of great numbers in this affair; and more agreeable to the representation made in the next verse, of one following another, many taking hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew.

And though, if the words be thus understood, we must suppose an ellipsis in the text, something understood that is not expressed, as if it had been said, those of other cities shall say,
I will go also; yet, this is not difficult to be supposed, for such ellipses are very common in Scripture. We have one exactly parallel with it in Jeremiah 3:22: “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we have come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God,” i.e., the backsliding children shall say, “Behold, we come unto thee,” etc. And in Song of Songs 4:16 and 5:1, “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits. I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse,” i.e., her beloved shall say, “I am come into my garden.” We have the like throughout that song. So “the heavens shall declare his righteousness; for God is Judge himself. Hear, O my people, and I will speak” (Ps. 50:6–7), i.e., the Judge shall say, “Hear, O my people,” etc. So Psalm 132:1–2: The psalms and prophets abound with such figures of speech.

**The manner of prayer agreed on**

We may observe the manner of prayer agreed on, or the manner in which they agree, to engage in and perform the duty. Let us go *speedily* to pray; or, as it is in the margin, Let us go *continually*. The words literally translated are, *Let us go in going*. Such an ingemination, or doubling of words, is very common in the Hebrew language, when it is intended that a thing shall be very strongly expressed. It generally implies the *superlative degree* of a thing; as the *holy of holies* signifies the most holy. But it commonly denotes, not only the utmost *degree* of a thing, but also the utmost *certainty*; as when God said to Abraham, “In multiplying, I will multiply thy seed” (Gen. 22:17), it implies both that God would cer-
tainly multiply his seed, and also multiply it exceedingly.

So when God said to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, in dying thou shalt die" (as the words are in the original), it implies, both that he should surely die, and also that he should die most terribly, should utterly perish, and be destroyed to the utmost degree.

In short, as the ingemination of words in the Hebrew generally denotes the strength of expression, so it is used to signify almost all those things that are wont to be signified by the various forms of strong speech in other languages. It signifies not only the utmost degree of a thing, and great certainty; but also the peremptoriness and terribleness of a threatening, the greatness and positiveness of a promise, the strictness of a command, and the earnestness of a request.

When God says to Adam, "Dying thou shalt die," it is equivalent to such strong expressions in English, as, "Thou shalt die surely, or indeed; or, Thou shalt die with a witness." So when it is said in the text, "Let us go in going, and pray before the Lord," the strength of the expression represents the earnestness of those that make the proposal, their great engagedness in the affair. And with respect to the duty proposed, it may be understood to signify that they should be speedy, fervent, and constant in it; or, in one word, that it should be thoroughly performed.

Such prayer a happy thing.
We may learn from the tenor of this prophecy, together with the context, that this union in such prayer is foretold.
as a *becoming* and *happy* thing, what would be acceptable to God, and attended with glorious success.

From the whole we may infer that it is a very *suitable* thing, and *well-pleasing* to *God*, for many people, in different parts of the world, by express *agreement*, to come into a *visible union* in extraordinary, speedy, fervent, and constant *prayer*, for those great effusions of the *Holy Spirit*, which shall bring on that *advancement* of Christ’s church and kingdom that God has so often promised shall be in the *latter ages* of the world. And so from hence I would infer the *duty* of God’s people, proposing a *method* for such an *union* as has been spoken of, in extraordinary prayer, for this great mercy.²

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Peter announced that the “latter days” so often referred to in prophetic literature began with the pouring out of God’s Spirit on the first Pentecost (see Acts 2:14–17). From what you know about the Book of Acts, how can you see that what was prophesied in Zechariah 8:20–22 began to be realized in the period of the early church?

2. In order not to clutter this study of prayer and revival with unnecessary or perhaps even distracting historical details, we have omitted all reference to the *Memorial* Edwards had received from Scotland concerning prayer for revival, as well as the historical circumstances leading up to that. This part of *An Humble Attempt* is found in part 1, sections 3 and 4 of the Hickman edition, vol. 1, of the *Works* of Jonathan Edwards.
2. Summarize Edwards’s vision for what we should expect to see in the “latter days.” Do you see any evidence that this is presently occurring?

3. Reflect on the church’s role in culture, society, and moral issues over the past couple of generations. Does anything about the current situation of the church in our world suggest, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding (new churches, megachurches, a thriving evangelical subculture, etc.), that God may have withdrawn himself or may be in hiding from his church at this time? In what ways can you see that the church might be ripe for a new season of revival?

4. Edwards’s point, following Zechariah, is that seasons of revival follow seasons of prayer on the part of God’s people. How would you describe the kind of prayer Edwards has in mind? What would that look like in your life? In your church? In the church in America, or in the world?

5. Set some goals for this study of Edwards on prayer and revival. What do you hope to learn? How do you hope to see your work of prayer affected? What would you like to see happen in your church? Among the churches in your community? What would that require of you?