

Edited by  
**STEPHEN BAKER**

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**YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED** is a supplement of *Precious Seed International* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. YPS is published by *Precious Seed International*, Pitcot Farm, Pitcot Lane, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Radstock BA3 4SX, UK, and is also available separately from the main magazine.

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## Editor's comments

In the November issue of YPS there will be an article by Jack Hay of Perth on the subject of 'Separation' in the *Building Blocks of the Christian Faith* series. I thought that you might like to do some research in advance of reading the article so that you are one step ahead.

Some questions to think about are:

- Should a believer not have any contact with the world if he/she is going to live a godly life, i.e., should he/she be more monastic?
- Are there places that Christians would be wise not to visit if they are going to keep in touch with the Lord?

Have a think about this and keep alert when doing your daily reading over the next few months to see if you can see any clues that would help you and any scriptural principles that would guide you.

We are also about to start a series about things that young believers can get involved in when looking for ways to serve God. Keep on the lookout for this series, it should be interesting.

I trust that you will continue to know the Lord's help and presence

If you have any questions or ideas look me up on Facebook or e-mail me at [stepcar61@gmail.com](mailto:stepcar61@gmail.com).

**Stephen**



# Building Blocks of the Christian Faith

## Grace & Truth

By **JOHN BENNETT** Kirkby-in-Ashfield, England



These key words of scripture are frequently used and, in the New Testament, occasionally linked together. Yet they must have a different significance and meaning either in comparative terms or in contrast. One of the first occasions when these two words are brought together is found as God passed by Moses in the cleft of the rock. His statement was, 'The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands', Exod. 34. 6-7.

Against that background, grace is defined as 'favour or kindness shown without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it and in spite of what that person deserves'.<sup>1</sup> Using the same source, truth is said to be 'conformity to fact or actuality; faithfulness to an original or to a standard. In the Old and New Testaments, truth is a fundamental moral and personal quality of God'.<sup>2</sup> The differences between the two words can be put like this: the truth of God is absolute faithfulness to a standard befitting the holy character of God; the grace of God is displayed in the forgiveness of sins, and is extended to men as they are guilty.

As part of our task we might also explore these words as essential attributes of God. Space will not permit us to do justice to their fullness and beauty but a brief consideration may be helpful. For example, we can explore these words as they are applied to each person within the Godhead. *See table at foot of page.*

Although this is far from an exhaustive list it indicates the deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and their equality within the Godhead.

These are words that prove difficult in the world around us. This is typified by the words of Pilate at the trial of the Lord Jesus. He asked the question, 'What is truth?' John 18. 38. The man appointed by Rome to determine truth and administer justice on the basis of that truth acknowledged that he could not really determine what it was! In normal circumstances we would have to admit the same. However, we can rest in the assurance of the words of the Lord Jesus, 'I am . . . the truth', John 14. 6. He is the personification of truth; He is wholly reliable and His word is dependable in the changing circumstances of life.

The fact that we are linked to the God of truth in Christ brings us:

Absolute standards	Deut. 32. 4; Ps. 33. 4; Rom. 2. 2
Reliability	1 Kgs. 17. 24; 1 Thess. 2. 13
Stability	2 Kgs. 19. 17; Ps. 40. 11
Direction	Ps. 25. 10; 43. 3; 86. 11
Security	Ps. 31. 5; Isa. 25. 1
The basis of worship	John 4. 23-24
Spiritual understanding	John 15. 26; 1 Cor. 2. 14
Sanctification	John 17. 17
Hope	Col. 1. 5

Word	As applied to the Father	The Son	The Holy Spirit
grace	Rom. 1. 7; 1 Cor. 1. 3	Acts 15. 11; Rom. 16. 20, 24	Zech. 12. 10; Heb. 10. 29
truth	Isa. 65. 16; 2 John 3, 4	John 1. 14, 17; 14. 6	John 14. 17; 15. 26; 16. 13.

Whilst we can rejoice in these things as believers they are double-edged, for truth is a particularly unbending facet. The One who is the embodiment of truth is also the One who upholds it. That which now upholds us and supports us in a rapidly changing and deteriorating world once condemned us. Historically, as we were exposed to the truth of God it revealed what we were by nature and practice – sinners. We could not reach God’s standards. We could not maintain God’s standards. We were hopelessly lost.

It is at this point that we can rejoice in the grace of God. As guilty sinners deserving of God’s judgement and punishment, He extended His grace and His mercy towards us in love. We might illustrate the contrast thus:

What we deserved as sinners	Divine judgement and wrath
What God provided in grace	Forgiveness and salvation

There is an illustration of this point early in the Old Testament. As we are told of the awful wickedness of man that was rife upon the earth and the judgement that God would bring upon those involved, we are told, ‘But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord’, Gen. 6. 8. Noah was kept through the flood, provided with a means of salvation, as a consequence of divine grace.

We might summarize the qualities of grace thus:

Bestowed by the greater upon the lesser	Gen. 50. 4; Exod. 33. 13, 16-17; Ruth 2. 2
Preservation	Ezra 9. 8; Esther 2. 17
Benevolence/Blessing	Ruth 2. 10; Ps. 84. 11; Acts 15. 11
Establishment and Hope	Acts. 20. 32; Rom. 5. 2

But the grace of God has bestowed more upon us as believers than our salvation. From other passages in the New Testament, we learn that grace was not just something that provided for our salvation at a point in the past. Not only can we enjoy the reality of God’s grace in the provision made at Calvary and the blessings that were brought to us when we were saved, but we can also enjoy divine grace as a resource for us from day to day. We can summarize what divine grace has supplied like this:

Justification	Rom. 3. 24; Titus 3. 7
Salvation	Eph. 2. 5, 8; Titus. 2. 11
Election	Rom. 11. 5
Redemption	Eph. 1. 7
Acceptance and nearness of relationship	Eph. 1. 6
Spiritual gift	Rom. 12. 6; 1 Cor. 3. 10; 15. 10; Eph. 3. 7; 1 Pet. 4. 10
A testimony and the ability to maintain it	2 Cor. 1. 12; Jas. 4. 6
A spirit of generosity	2 Cor. 8. 1, 9
Provision of strength in trial	2 Cor. 12. 9; Heb. 4. 16

The purpose of this article has been to provide scripture references that we can read, explore in their context, and meditate upon for our spiritual understanding and blessing. These two facets of the divine character can and should be a resource to us in our spiritual lives.

**References**

- 1 YOUNGBLOOD, R. F., BRUCE, F. F., HARRISON, R. K., *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1995.
- 2 *Ibid.*



# Can the Bible be trusted?

PART TWO • By SIMON SHERWIN Methilhill, Leven, Scotland

## CAN WE REALLY TRUST THE NEW TESTAMENT?

*When we turn to the New Testament and consider the question of its reliability there are two issues that face us.*

**The first is the text of the New Testament itself:** Is what we have in our hands, or rather the

text from which it was translated, an accurate representation of what was originally written?

**The second relates to its content,** particularly when

we consider the Gospels and the book of the Acts, **is it historically reliable?**

Does it ring true with what we know of the period and place that it relates to? The first question is beyond the scope of this present article, for this the reader is directed for a start to F. F. Bruce's little book *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

However, the second is in a sense much more far-reaching in its consequences, for if the New Testament scriptures are not accurate in relation to historical events, people and places then how can we have confidence in what they say regarding the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus?

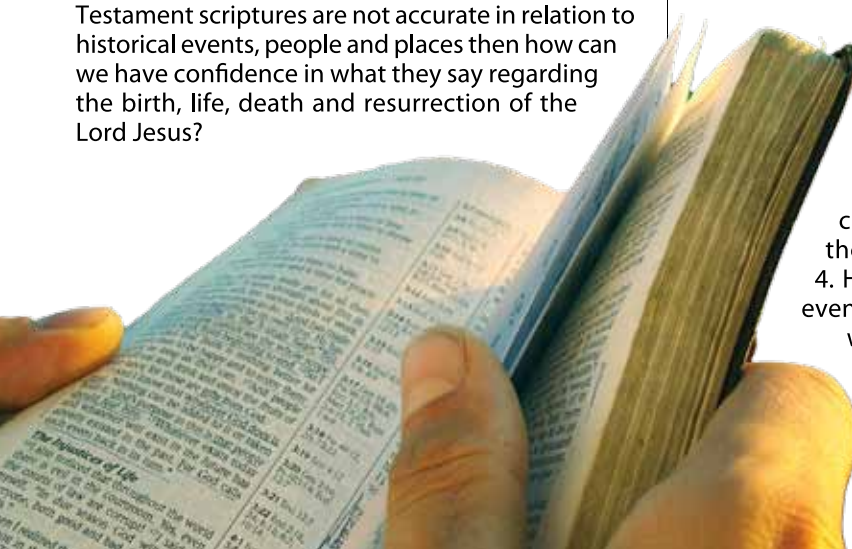
*Indeed if the New Testament scriptures are in truth the word of God and divinely inspired, then we would expect that on whatever level we might examine them, in terms of history, geography, botany, climate, or anything else that we might have a particular interest in, they will be accurate. One might argue that this is asking too much of an ancient text which, after all, is not a history book. However, this is not just any book and critics are continually looking for reasons to deny the validity of its message and more particularly its personal claims upon them. However, the closer we scrutinize the text the more we find that the New Testament is not just accurate in a general, broad-brush sense, but that this accuracy extends to the tiniest of details.*

The problem that is posed in approaching an article like this is not whether there is enough evidence to provide a convincing argument for the integrity and accuracy of the New Testament but rather that there is far too much. F. F. BRUCE's excellent book cited above is well worth perusing for any who

are interested in further reading on the subject. In this article I would like to do two things, therefore: first, to give a distillation of some of the material contained in it; and second, to look at some fascinating evidence that has come to light since his book was written. The result, I trust, will be to reinforce our confidence in the trustworthiness of the scriptures that we hold in our hands.

### Luke's Writings

I would like to concentrate first of all on Luke's writings, for several reasons. Luke, because he also wrote Acts, covers a greater timespan and a wider geographical area than any other of the Gospel writers. He is also the writer who makes the most explicit claims to base his work on the testimony of eyewitnesses with the view that Theophilus might 'know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed', Luke 1. 4. He also, by reference to people and events, firmly sets his writing within its wider historical and chronological context. In addition, because a fair proportion of his Gospel is also to be found in Matthew and Mark, their reliability is bound up in his: if it can be shown that he writes with care and accuracy then



this to a large extent validates their testimony. If on the other hand he falls then they fall with him. Yet, he does not fall. Time and again his detailed accuracy can be verified and new discoveries only serve to reinforce this fact. He shows a detailed acquaintance with cities, their administrative structure and character throughout the empire. He also shows an intimate knowledge of officials and their titles, mentioning three Roman emperors by name and in the correct order (Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius), and a host of officials, all to whom he accords their correct titles. This is no mean feat. He had no recourse to reference books, still less to Wikipedia! Moreover, in some instances titles varied over time depending upon the exact form of imperial administration in force. An example of this would be the case of Gallio the proconsul of Achaia, Acts 18. 12 - KJV has 'deputy'. The technical term is 'proconsul'. Achaia was governed by proconsuls from BC27 to AD15, and again from AD44 onwards. An inscription from Delphi in Greece, which mentions Gallio by name fixes the beginning of his proconsulship to AD51. Luke gives him his correct official title, 'proconsul of Achaia', whereas on other occasions he refers to Achaia simply as 'Greece', e.g., Acts 20. 2.



been assassinated a few months before the riot (in AD54) and that his successor had not yet arrived. The use of the generalizing plural then either refers to this limbo situation or else to his two murderers, who were the imperial representatives in Asia and may have been discharging consular duties at this time. Either way the specific, pin-point accuracy of Luke's account can be seen. In this chapter Luke's use of such terms as 'townclerk', v. 35, 'Asiarchs' (AV 'chief of Asia').v. 31, or in reference to the city itself as 'Warden of the Temple of

Artemis', v. 35 (KJV 'worshipper of the great goddess Diana') are all corroborated by external evidence. Before we leave this particular chapter mention is made of Erastus in verse 22. He is described by Paul as the 'chamberlain of the city, i.e., Corinth - Rom. 16. 23, that is, 'city treasurer' or 'director of public affairs', i.e., a high position. An inscription on a pavement from Corinth from the first century states that the pavement was laid by an Erastus, in all probability the same one.

Examples could be multiplied, not only in the Acts but also in Luke's Gospel. In chapter 3 verses 1 and 2 at the beginning of John's ministry there are a series of synchronisms

that place the Gospel firmly in its historical context. Of these the only one that there is any doubt over is Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene, and the only reason for that is lack of external evidence. (Even here there is an inscription mentioning 'Lysanias the tetrarch' which BRUCE says can only date to between AD 14 and AD 29 [ p. 88], which would attest a Lysanias in the right position at around the right time.) Indeed Luke's habitual accuracy can be seen in relation

Another interesting case relates to the time of the riots in Ephesus in Acts chapter 19. When the town clerk quietens the crowd part of what he says is that 'there are deputies, proconsuls - Acts 19. 38. The use of the plural is somewhat disturbing given that there was only one proconsul at a time. However, an examination of the chronological data available reveals that the proconsul of Asia had

to the way in which he refers to Herod (Antipas) throughout his Gospel. Whilst Herod the Great and the Herod of the Acts (Agrippa I) are accorded the title 'king', Luke 1. 5; Acts 12. 1, Herod (Antipas) is always called 'the tetrarch' because he was never elevated to kingship and 'tetrarch' was his official title.

The point about 'habitual accuracy' is important for, as BRUCE again says, 'Accuracy is a habit of mind, and we know from happy (or unhappy) experience that some people are habitually accurate just as others can be depended upon to be inaccurate. Luke's record entitles him to be regarded as a writer of habitual accuracy' (p. 91). He makes the point that if Luke can be trusted to be accurate in matters that we can test by external means then it is much more likely that he can be relied upon for those that we cannot. The implication of this part of the investigation, therefore, is that Luke, and by extension the other Gospel writers, who complement his testimony, can be trusted in what they say about the Lord Jesus as well.

### It's in the detail

Not only in terms of historical events and people do the Gospel writers show themselves to be accurate but also in terms of general knowledge of the land of Israel, its people and its customs. They show an intimate awareness of the different Jewish feasts, social classes, tensions between Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians or between Jews and Samaritans, knowledge of the geography of Palestine and of Jerusalem in particular, knowledge of the Sea of Galilee and the way in which storms can suddenly blow up, and so on. The differences between the atmosphere in Galilee and Jerusalem are also perfectly captured in the Gospels. On the part of Luke, a Gentile in particular, this would have been virtually impossible were he not presenting to us the testimony of eyewitnesses to the events (as he claims he is doing in the introduction to his Gospel). In some cases differences in detail and

perspective can seem like contradictions as, for example, in the accounts of the resurrection. Mark says that the women came to the sepulchre 'at the rising of the sun', 16. 2, whereas John says that it was 'when it was yet dark', 20. 1. In fact, both are correct because although the sun had risen on the other side of the Mount of Olives over by Jericho, the fact that the mountain lay between would have meant that it was still dark in Jerusalem. Another incident that appears strange and is often picked up on by critics is the account of the cursing of the fig tree. In Mark's account the Lord Jesus, seeing the fig tree with leaves on comes 'if haply he might find anything thereon', but it is

also stated explicitly that 'the time of figs was not yet', Mark 11. 13. If it was not the fig season, why then did the Lord come looking? Apparently figs produce two (some species three) crops, an early crop called 'breba' (What BRUCE refers to as 'taqsh', p. 73) and a main crop. The *breba* crop ripens in spring or early summer (in Mallorca these appear in June-July) but note that modern harvest times are not reliable indications of what happened 2000 years ago. We have to rely on textual evidence where we have it and it is presumably for this *breba* that the Lord is looking. What is even more

striking as far as the spiritual significance of this passage is concerned is that the *breba* appears on the previous year's growth – no fruit was found from Israel in her existing spiritual condition nor ever would be.

### What's in a name?

However, perhaps the most fascinating evidence for the reliability of the Gospel narratives that has come to light in recent years relates to the personal names of the individuals mentioned. It is well known that patterns of naming change over time – some names in fashion twenty or thirty years ago, for example, are not in vogue today – and by geographical area – the most popular names in Britain, for example will be different from those in the USA, even though both are English-speaking



countries. The same can be said for names held by Jewish people in the first century AD.

Now, there are a large number of Jewish names from this period preserved for us, not only in the Bible but also in the works of the Jewish historian Josephus or in other texts like burial inscriptions or legal texts. In some of these we know very little about the people mentioned other than their names but from them we can compile a list and discover which names were most popular at the time. It emerges that the top two most popular male names in Palestine in the first century were Simon and Joseph, whilst the two most popular female names were Mary and Salome. When we turn to the Gospels and Acts what do we find? The two most frequent male names are Simon and Joseph and Mary is the only female name to be borne by more than one individual (6 in fact). This is no coincidence, especially when we consider that in Egypt at the same time the top three names were Eleazar, Sabbataius and Joseph with Simon being nowhere in sight. Indeed, the correspondence is even more striking when we look at percentages. From the total figures we find that 15.6% of men bore the name Simon or Joseph, whilst 41.5% bore one of the nine most popular male names. In the New Testament 18.2% of men have the name Simon or Joseph, whilst 40.3% have one of the nine most popular names (pp. 71-72). Without access to the lists that we now have it would be impossible to create such a close correspondence by chance. Rather it points to the conclusion that real people are involved.

*The Gospels are not legends which grew up over a long period of time and grew wings, the end result bearing little resemblance to what actually happened, but rather the careful presentation of the testimony of selected eyewitnesses to the events that they record.*

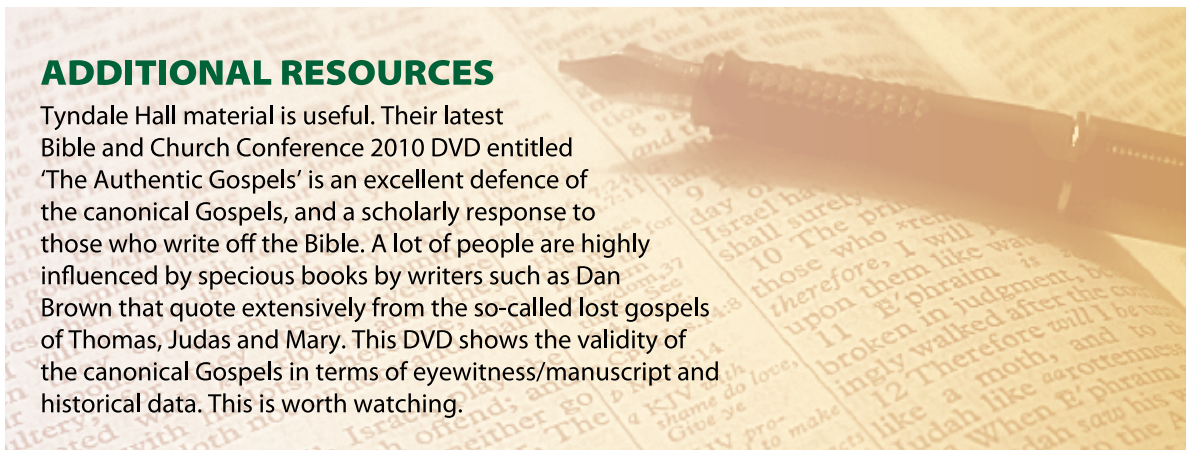
On another level we can see a difference between the Gospel writer as narrator and as reporter of what people said. The writers may refer, for example, to 'John' or 'Jesus', but when reporting direct speech they are 'John the Baptist,' cf., the alternations in Matt. 14. 1-12, and 'Jesus of Nazareth', or some other qualifying term, cf., Matt. 26. 59-74. Indeed, whilst Philip is often criticized for being inaccurate in describing the Lord Jesus as 'Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph' in John chapter 1 verse 45 (and of course technically he is) he is actually being as specific as he can be, based on what he knows. Since 'Jesus' is the sixth most popular name of the time he first qualifies the name with the place from which He comes – 'of Nazareth'. However, there would have been a number of men bearing that name in Nazareth. He therefore narrows it down

further by giving the father's name (as he supposed) – 'the son of Joseph'. In doing so he unwittingly gives us further evidence of the first-century, Palestinian, eyewitness origin of the New Testament Gospel writings. It is therefore in the details as much as in the bigger picture that the New Testament demonstrates its reliability and trustworthiness.

The evidence that has been presented here can be multiplied. To be sure we do not have the answers to every single 'problem' that is raised but that is due rather to a lack of available extra-biblical evidence than to a defect in the text itself. As more information comes to light so the case for the reliability of the scriptures is strengthened, not diminished. Truly, we acknowledge what the Lord Jesus said in prayer to His Father, 'Thy word is truth', John. 17. 17.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Tyndale Hall material is useful. Their latest Bible and Church Conference 2010 DVD entitled 'The Authentic Gospels' is an excellent defence of the canonical Gospels, and a scholarly response to those who write off the Bible. A lot of people are highly influenced by specious books by writers such as Dan Brown that quote extensively from the so-called lost gospels of Thomas, Judas and Mary. This DVD shows the validity of the canonical Gospels in terms of eyewitness/manuscript and historical data. This is worth watching.



# Jonathan Edwards

## THE GREAT AWAKENER (1703-1758)

By **STEPHEN G. BAKER** Liverpool, England

It is amazing to me that a man whose name is synonymous with godliness and was involved in the outstanding awakening of a nation to the need of salvation in his day should have only lived to the age of fifty-five. But it is true. Jonathan Edwards made his mark in his generation despite many forms of opposition. I should not be surprised however as many of the great servants of God did not serve their generation for long (Robert Murray McCheyne, Jim Elliot, to name two more) and yet they lit a flame that has long since burned and ignited the passion of many a believer to serve God with the same selfless ambition.



Since I first read the story of Jonathan Edwards (JE) I was fascinated with his life. Most people who have heard his name associate it only with 'hell fire' preaching and usually his famous sermon 'Sinner in the hands of an angry God'. To leave the summary of JE there would be to do him a great disservice. In fact, some have gone as far as to say that 'he was the greatest thinker in American history'. Others have commented that to really understand the mindset of America, and in particular New England, in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century you have to study the life of JE. He has been described as a 'revivalist, theologian, philosopher, man of letters, pastor, missionary, college president, and beloved husband and father'.

Let's start at the beginning. Both JE's father and grandfather were churchmen. His father combined this role with that of a teacher and as a result Jonathan was educated at home along with his sisters, cousins and a few village boys. The village they lived in was East Windsor in Connecticut which is between New York and Boston on the eastern side of the United States. JE loved the outdoor life and was interested most of all in observing nature. His father, Edward, often found himself astounded by the philosophical speculations of his only son. It seemed that Jonathan discovered at an early age that God had revealed Himself in the beauty of the world in which he lived as well as in the quietness of his heart.

It is well worth a couple of hours reading to get to grips with this young man and to see the dilemmas that he faced in life and how he reacted to them. He faced personal tragedy, family feuds, loss of reputation and

times of deep anxiety, but he came out of all of these experiences with a godly character that can be produced only in the furnace of suffering.

It was his personal discipline that has spoken to me the most and it is this aspect of his life that I want to emphasize. This seems to me to be the secret of his success in service for God. His knowledge of the word of God was great, his grasp of God's character was unsurpassed and his

ability to preach and hold an audience was incredible but his personal devotion and holiness were the foundation of his life. Let me illustrate.

1. He maintained daily set times for prayer. Getting before God to meditate, to pray for others, to worship God and to be quiet in the presence of God was a discipline that he cultivated and would not allow to slip. How am I in this area of my life?
2. It is said that his prayer times as described above and his study of the word of God took up thirteen hours of the day. No wonder he knew God intimately.
3. As he worked he worshipped. Study and preparation were not seen as a job to be done but as opportunities to worship the Lord.
4. He believed that the main work of his ministry was to expound the word of God. He gave God and His word first place.
5. He believed that he was a servant of God and as that his whole life was lived to know God and to bring Him to the people of his day.

My prayer is that men and women of God will be cultivated in our days who know God on an equally intimate basis. This will require discipline by all of us if this is our personal ambition. We need to spend time with God. We need to discipline ourselves to understand His word. We must pray that we will see God move again in the same mighty way that believers in previous generations have seen Him move.

### Recommended Reading

*Jonathan Edwards* by Ola Elizabeth Winslow, published by McMillan.

*Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* by Dr. John Gerstner, published by Baker Books.

*Jonathan Edwards – The Great Awakener* – Heroes of the Faith series published by Barbour Publishing Inc.