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At the end of a somewhat discouraging Sunday of ministry, David Brainerd, one of the earliest missionaries to Colonial American Indians, wrote in his diary: 'In the evening I was grieved that I had done so little for God. Oh, that I could be "a flame of fire" in the service of my God!' His allusion was to Hebrews 1:7: 'And of the angels He saith, "Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire."'

Of his inner thoughts and longings four evenings later, immediately following an intense, protracted season of private prayer, he wrote similarly: 'But oh, with what reluctancy did I find myself obliged to consume time in sleep! I longed to be as "a flame of fire," continually glowing in the divine service, preaching and building up Christ's kingdom to my latest, my dying moment.' The next day he recorded that he 'longed to burn out in one continued flame for God.'

Such was the white-hot intensity and devotion of a man who came to be regarded as one of the most eminent missionaries and among the most consecrated disciples of Christ in the history of the Church. He wished that, like the angels, he could burn brightly and continually in untiring service to the Lord. He wanted his heart, like theirs, ever to be aflame with undiminished zeal and love for God. In his Gospel preaching ministry he desired to be a bright, unfailing source of spiritual light to others.

God used this servant of such remarkable devotion in truly outstanding ways. Though he served as a missionary but four short years before his untimely death at age twenty-nine, in that





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brief span of time his ministry was blessed with an astounding period of converting revival among Indians who previously had known only abject paganism. That revival marked a belated dramatic epilogue to America's Great Awakening.

Following his death, the esteemed Puritan pastor, Jonathan Edwards, published extensive segments of Brainerd's private spiritual journal. Edwards knew it accurately reflected the intense and consistent spirituality and consecration he and many others had witnessed in their beloved friend. He realized the tremendous spiritual benefit that could come to others through a consideration of Brainerd's life and personal spiritual reflections.

What Edwards had no way of knowing was the vast and long-lasting extent of the good that would be accomplished through the publication of the missionary's personal journal. Since the earliest accounts of Brainerd's life and journal were published over two hundred and fifty years ago, they have never failed to remain in print in one form or another. For more than a quarter of a millennium Christian people throughout the world have been greatly encouraged, instructed and challenged through the contemplation of his exceptional example and perspectives.

Others, especially those who do not seem to share Brainerd's evangelical convictions, tend to depict him as an extremist who is of historical interest but not an appropriate model for spiritual emulation. Such a portrayal requires careful evaluation and correction.

It cannot be denied that in some senses Brainerd was an extremist. This appears to have been in keeping with both his upbringing and natural temperament. His rigorous Puritan upbringing, which of course played a formative role in the development of his outlook on and approach to life, seems extreme to more casual modern sensibilities. His feelings were very intense. With regard to his beliefs, he had strong convictions and definite views. But while he actively sought to win others to his point of view, he habitually did so in a gentle, patient and respectful fashion.

He was extreme in what he expected and demanded of himself, most often to a fault. As a result, he severely chastised himself for





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his shortcomings and mercilessly drove himself to fulfill his duty, even in the face of tremendous hardship and self-sacrifice. Too late in his brief ministry career he came to realize that he had carried out devotion to duty at the expense of his own health, and thereafter sought to moderate his habits somewhat.

But his radicalism was always firmly tethered and completely subjected to his considerable intellect and his Christlike spirit. Other than one brief period during his college career, he never strayed into thinking or behavior that was considered fanatical and perhaps less than spiritual. His thinking consistently manifested exceptional depth, clarity, wisdom and spirituality. His conduct was above reproach, being characterized by evident godliness and all variety of the fruit of Christ's Spirit.

On the whole, his radicalism was of a type worthy of emulation. His extremism exemplified the characteristics that Christ in His Word calls His disciples to pursue and promote: deep devotion to God; fervent worship of Him; sacrificial service of Christ and man; thoroughgoing holiness; active evangelism and missionary enterprise.

Though Brainerd himself never drew such parallels, his radical commitment mirrored that of another extremist Christian, the Apostle Paul. Like Paul, Brainerd's all-out devotion led him to endure numerous hardships in serving Christ. So consuming was his commitment to serving his Lord that, like the Apostle, he willingly chose to forego marriage and other legitimate earthly pleasures. He shared the Apostle's heart for zealously preaching the Gospel and actively expanding Christ's kingdom among previously unreached peoples. Paul's statement of himself in Philippians 1:21 was just as true of Brainerd: 'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'

For fullest exposure to and benefit from Brainerd's personal spiritual reflections, one of the editions of Jonathan Edwards' work, *The Life of David Brainerd*, may be read. (See the brief bibliography at the end of this volume for a description of three different editions of that work.) The edition most frequently cited in this volume is the Yale University Press edition of 1985, edited by Norman Pettit.





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That edition has rendered a tremendous service to readers by including in brackets the references for the numerous Scripture passages that Brainerd freely cited (but normally did not identify) in his diary. Those bracketed Bible references have been retained in the present work. While the vast majority of the bracketed references in the Yale edition are accurate, occasionally an alternate reference has been substituted when further consideration of a particular biblical citation deemed it appropriate to do so.

Most of the quotations from Brainerd's journal are not referenced in the chapter endnotes of this volume. The specific chronological designations in the main text usually make it clear where the citations are to be found in Edwards' *The Life of David Brainerd*. When the location of a quotation is not altogether clear (as when it is displaced from an earlier or later portion of *The Life*), it has been referenced in a chapter endnote.

