

BIOGRAPHY AS A FORM OF DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

We have clear scriptural warrant for emulation. We see this through Jesus' earthly ministry; He made disciples and in the Great Commission, He instructed us to make disciples (Matt. 28:19). We see this precedence all throughout the New Testament. We will look at a few examples to establish the usefulness and biblical grounds for Christian biography.

The writer of Hebrews instructs us to be "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12). He also encourages us with the thought of all the saints that have gone before us. He says, "let us *also* lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race set before us" (12:1). Of course, he wisely reminds us that our supreme example is Jesus (12:2). Again, he says, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (13:7). I think here, we can deduce that many times it is a good principle to wait to imitate leaders until we have considered "the *outcome* of their way of life." This also shows us that we should not imitate them wholesale but evaluate them. We can emulate good Christian leaders, that is fine, but we must always remember that only "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8).

Paul tells us to "honor such men" (Phil. 2:29)¹ that are faithful in service to the Lord. Paul even urged people to imitate himself (1 Cor. 4:16), but only in as much as he imitated Christ

¹In this verse, in the Greek, we see the present imperative so Paul is commanding them to continually honor faithful men, in this case, Epaphroditus.

(1 Cor. 11:1).² I wonder if one reason for this is proximity. It is one thing to ask, “what would Jesus do,” it is another thing to see someone who by our evaluation tends to do things that Jesus would have done had He faced similar circumstances. It is easier to understand what love is when it has flesh on. Paul continues to say imitate me, but not just me, but also those who follow my example (Phil. 3:17). Thus, in as much as Edwards, Spurgeon, and Lloyd-Jones follow Paul as he followed Christ we should seek to learn from biography’s and emulate them.³

It is helpful for most human beings to see something demonstrated before they attempt to do it themselves; it is just how we tend to learn. This is also what we see when it comes to spiritual matters. We need someone to imitate because we are naturally imitators but not just anyone. Imitators (*mimetes*) simply means ones who follow. We see this in some of its related words: a “mime” is someone who acts out an imitation of another person or animal. And a “mimeograph” is a machine that makes copies from a template. Thus, we see the template/person we chose to copy/imitate is vital because if we do our job well we will be a lot like them.

The New Testament shows us the importance of discipleship and there is even a sense in which those who have died can still teach us.⁴ Look for example at the impact that Jonathon Edwards has had on John Piper or the impact of both Edwards and Spurgeon on Lloyd-Jones.⁵

²In both these verses from First Corinthians, we see the present imperative tells us to habitually follow the command. It is to be our long-term commitment, our lifestyle, to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ.

³We could look at many other texts here to establish the legitimacy, indeed, the blessing of biographies however; we do not have the space for that here. Here are some further texts to look at Phil. 4:8-9; 1 Thess, 1:6, 7; 2 Thess. 3:9.

⁴The Hebrew writer reminds us that we can learn even from Abel though he has long since been dead. Even Abel “through his faith, though he died, he still speaks” (Heb. 12:4) Even though we do not know very much about him we can still learn from what he “speaks” with his demonstration of faith.

⁵Ian H. Murray, *D. M. Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 421 see also idem, *D. M. Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008),

Then look at the impact that Piper has had on many others. It reminds me of Paul's exhortation to Timothy (2 Tim 2:1-2). Obviously, Paul is an apostle and Edwards is not but the principle still applies. We in the 21st century have an unprecedented opportunity to entrust good teaching to faithful men who will teach others also. Biographies are a good source to use when discipling men. It is helpful for us to see men that though they are dead, still speak by the life of faith they lived. However, we must remember to evaluate them in light of Christ and see where they succeeded to follow Him and where they failed.⁶ It is important that we learn from both the good and the bad. To this, we will turn momentarily but first we are going to look at the unique way that God gifts certain people differently yet expects everyone, though not equally gifted, to be equally faithful.

Different Levels of Gifting, Same Stewardship

Lloyd-Jones had a profound memory, "it was as if he was unraveling an endless ball of wool."⁷ Edwards had a keen intellect being the foremost of American thinkers. Spurgeon was "the Prince of Preachers." As we can see by these small examples, these men were especially gifted by God but they were not merely gifted, they were also faithful with the gifts God entrusted to them. We will all be held accountable for what God has entrusted to us but praise God I am not held accountable for the intellect of Edwards. That, however, in no way clears me from being faithful. These men were not merely amazingly gifted but amazingly faithful. We may not be able to preach like Spurgeon but we can seek by God's empowering to be faithful

196n1.

⁶ As J. C. Ryle has said, "The best of men are only men at their very best. Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles,—martyrs, fathers, reformers, puritans,—all, all are sinners, who need a Saviour: holy, useful, honourable in their place,—but sinners after all" (Murray, *D. M. Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, 752).

⁷ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 376 see also 406n1, 453, 759.

like him.

We are all stewards entrusted with different amounts, some 30, 60, and a 100 fold, but we must all be faithful (Matt. 13:8; 25:14-30; Luke 12:35-48; 1 Peter 4:10). I have not been entrusted with the same stewardship as the men of whom we are seeking to emulate, and it is highly unlikely that you have either. However, these men were not merely gifted, they were all entirely dedicated to the Lord (we will turn to this in more detail shortly). Michael Jordan, arguably the best basketball player of all time, still worked hard. What made him so great was that he was not just talented but also tough in his discipline. The men we are looking at were gifted, there is no doubt, but they were also incredibly faithful. So the first thing we see to emulate from them is their faithfulness.

They were Consumed with God’s glory. All three of these men here were greatly concerned for the glory of God, even if this desire came to fruition differently in the lives of each man. They did not all, like Edwards, write *The End for Which God Created the World*, but they all would have agreed with what he wrote and desired, like him, to glorify God with their utmost ability.

It is said that though “Edwards was intellectually brilliant and theologically commanding, his true greatness lay in his indefatigable zeal for the glory of God.”⁸ Likewise, “The chief element of Spurgeon’s entire career” was not his preaching, or anything else; it “was his walk with God.”⁹ This was also central to Lloyd-Jones: “A God-centered theology was not an addition to his personal life, it was central to it... His jealousy for God’s glory... flowed from

⁸Steven J. Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards* (Lake Mary, Florida: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 4.

⁹ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 177.

his knowing something of being in the presence of God.”¹⁰ In fact, Lloyd-Jones’ in concern for God’s glory, told Iain H. Murray, his biographer, that the biography should be done “for God’s glory only.”¹¹

We should, like these men, seek in whatever we do to glorify God. We must, however, remember that we are all gifted differently and thus the route we take may be different than that of these three men. We are all called to different things, but we are *all* called to seek to glorify God in whatever we do.

They had an All-Encompassing Commitment to Christ.¹² This section is the one of the most significant sections. We must remember however, that these men’s complete comment to God was not something they mustered up on their own. God gave even that to them. He showed Himself glorious to them, more glorious than anything else, and then their complete devotion followed.¹³ These men invested all, their time and talent, indeed, their heart, soul mind, and strength because they had been granted eyes to see that God and His glory were worth it.

¹⁰ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 764-65.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 729 see also xxiv.

¹² See: Deut. 6:5; 1 Kings 8:61; Matt. 8:22; 22:37-38; Mark 12:30 (heart, soul, mind and strength, i.e. *total devotion*); Luke 10:27; 14:25-33; 16:13; Rom. 14:7-8; 1 Cor. 7:35 (Paul wants to secure an “*undivided devotion* to the Lord”); 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:9; 14-15; Phil. 3:7-8; Col. 3:17, 23, and 1 John 2:3-6 for some examples of the all-inclusive nature of the call of Christ. Also in Romans 12:1, we are told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice because that is our reasonable (logical) worship. Thomas R. Schreiner similarly says, “Paul used the term with the meaning ‘rational’ or ‘reasonable,’ as was common in the Greek language. His purpose in doing so was to emphasize that yielding one’s *whole self* to God is eminently reasonable. Since God has been so merciful, failure to dedicate one’s life to him is the height of folly and irrationality” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998], 645 [italics mine].). In addition, Schreiner points out that “the word ‘bodies’ here refers to the whole person and stresses that consecration to God involves the *whole* person... Genuine commitment to God embraces *every* area of life” (*Ibid.*, 644. Italics mine). Christianity is all-encompassing.

¹³ God often shows His glory to us before He calls us to commit ourselves to Him in unreserved obedience. Note, for example, in the Decalogue. God gives the commands but first He adds a relational and redemptive element, namely, “I am the LORD your God [relational], who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery [redemptive]” (Deut. 5:6). This same thing is seen throughout Scripture, both OT and NT.

Their all-encompassing commitment to Christ flowed out of their understanding of the glory of Christ. Not only did these men see that God was glorious and thus worthy for themselves to entirely comment to but also that He was Lord of all. They understood the language in the New Testament that says that Jesus is our Master/Lord and we are slaves, which clearly implies that we do whatever He says, whenever He says it.¹⁴

Benjamin B. Warfield said that Edwards committed himself without reserve to God. His whole spirit panted to be in all its movement subjected to God's government.¹⁵ Edwards explained his reasoning for his total commitment. He said,

If God be truly loved, he is loved as God; and to love him as God, is to love him as the supreme good. But he that loves God as the supreme good, is ready to make all other good give place to that; or, which is the same thing, he is willing to suffer all for the sake of this good.¹⁶

Edwards was entirely committed to God because He is “the supreme good.”

Spurgeon commenting on first Kings 18:21 said, “If God be God, serve him, and *do it thoroughly*; but if the world be God, serve it, and make no profession of religion.” Later he goes on to tell us, “Either keep up your profession, or give it up... Let your conduct be consistent with your opinions.”¹⁷ What Spurgeon was saying is, if the Bible and the gospel are true we must

¹⁴ “Edwards would say that actions do reveal something about a man's will and heart. Professing Christ implies being subject to him in practice, it entails the promise of universal obedience to him” (Iain H. Murray, *Jonathon Edwards: A New Biography*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 336). Edwards understood that “none profess to be on Christ's side, but they who profess to renounce his rivals” (Idem, *Jonathon Edwards: A New Biography*, 337). Lloyd-Jones clearly saw that one cannot “receive Christ as Saviour without receiving Him as Lord” (Idem, *The Fight of Faith*, 470).

¹⁵ Murray, *Edwards*, 98.

¹⁶ Jonathon Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 257.

¹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, sermon “Elijah's Appeal to the Undecided” from 1 Kings 18:21 (italics mine).

live as though they are. We must live in line with what we believe. As the scriptures say, “The LORD is God; there is no other... *therefore* be *wholly* true to the LORD our God, walking in His statutes and keeping His Commandments” (1 Kings 8:60-61).

Spurgeon lived out what he said. People told Spurgeon that he would break down his constitution down with preaching ten times a week among all his other labors. But Spurgeon’s desire, like Paul’s, was to spend and be spent. Spurgeon could say, “If I had fifty constitutions I would rejoice to break them down in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

Spurgeon gave his money, time, and self completely to the Lord. God used Spurgeon greatly. He wrote over 140 books, penned around 500 letters a week, spoke to thousands of people each week, started an orphanage, started a pastor’s college, and led countless people to Christ among other things. That was all possible because he gave himself entirely to the Lord. One of Spurgeon’s biographers, Arnold Dallimore said, “Early in life he had lost all consideration of his own self, and his prayer that he might be hidden behind the cross, that Christ alone might be seen, had expressed his heart’s chief purpose.”¹⁹ Dallimore also said, “Spurgeon was characterized by an earnestness that almost defies description.”²⁰

Lloyd-Jones, too, saw that “our supreme duty is to submit ourselves *unreservedly* to Him.”²¹ In fact, “Essential Puritanism,” Lloyd-Jones argued, “put its emphasis upon a life of spiritual, personal religion, an intense realization of the presence of God, a *devotion of the entire*

¹⁸ Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 132.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 239.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

²¹ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 181 (italics mine).

being to Him.”²² You can see that Lloyd-Jones did exactly that all over the place in his life, he gave himself to God and the work that He had for him. “When God calls us,” Lloyd-Jones said, “He is to be obeyed in spite of all natural feelings.”²³ Lloyd-Jones not only said this but practiced it himself because he was entirely committed to Christ.

God is looking for individuals in this generation who will rise above the status quo of contemporary Christianity and say with Lloyd-Jones, Spurgeon, and Edwards, “I am completely Yours.”²⁴ We must resolve, as Edward’s did, to be the jar of clay through which God will display his surpassing power. We must seek for pleasure in God above all things. We must seek to be so heavenly minded that we can be of some earthly good. We must do all this with all the power that God so mightily works in us by His grace. “If one is to impact this world for Jesus Christ, he must live as Edwards did, with extraordinary purpose and firm determination.”²⁵

They had a Commitment to Biblical Truth. All godly men our committed to biblical truth, even at great loss to themselves, this has been true from our own day all the way back to the prophets who were uncompromising though it meant their lives. This is also true of the men we are looking at here. Lloyd-Jones said, “They can heap all the personal abuse they like on me, it will make no difference, but I will not tolerate any misrepresentation of the truth.”²⁶ This is also, what we see in Spurgeon through his stance with the Baptist Union and Edwards with his

²² Ibid., 460n1 (italics mine).

²³ Ibid., 588.

²⁴ Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards*, 60.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Murray, *The First Forty Years*, 83.

stance on communion. Both of these men did have personal abuse heaped upon them yet they, like Lloyd-Jones, would not tolerate anything less than the truth.

Edwards came to believe that the church that he pastored in Northampton practiced the Lord's Supper unbiblically so he sought to reform the churches practice. Even at great cost Edwards stuck to his biblical convictions. Edwards wrote that his "very subsistence" depended upon his defense of his conviction from Scripture on the communion controversy.²⁷ It is said that "The key to an understanding of Jonathan Edwards is that he was a man who put faithfulness to the Word of God before every other consideration."²⁸ "Herein lies Edwards' enduring strength. He was no an originator"²⁹ but sought to be faithful to Scripture.

Likewise, Spurgeon earnestly contended for the faith in what has been known as the "The Down-Grade Controversy" which started from an article he published in *The Sword the Trowel*.³⁰ In this, he suffered much "because of his faithful testimony for the truth."³¹ Lloyd-Jones himself was many-times excluded from the broader (so-called) evangelical scene because he stuck to his biblical convictions.

However, these men did not just contend for biblical truth they also exuded biblical truth in their everyday lives. It is said that, "the knowledge of the Scriptures which" Lloyd-Jones "revealed was truly amazing; he seemed to know not only chapter and verse of every quotation

²⁷Murray, *Jonathon Edwards: A New Biography*, 319.

²⁸ Murray, *Edwards*, 71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 468.

³⁰ See Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, ch. 19.

³¹ Murray, *Edwards*, 354.

made, but the exact context, and the precise meaning of every phrase.”³² It was said that you could not hear Lloyd-Jones preach for three minutes without realizing that he believed that God is speaking in His Word.”³³

One visitor came to Lloyd-Jones’ church after spending a year in a liberal theological college in Switzerland and said,

There was such an awareness of God in the church, and in hearing someone speak from the Word of God as though he believed it, was so overwhelming after studying in a liberal theological college that the tears ran down my cheeks. It reminded me of the fruitfulness of an evangelical ministry which a liberal theology can never have.³⁴

If you have ever read a sermon by Spurgeon you know that biblical truth poured out of him. In fact, he told his students “in order to impress the Word upon those to whom you preach, remember that it must be impressed upon yourself first. You must feel it yourself and speak as a person who feels it—not *as if* you feel it, but *because* you feel it.”³⁵ Spurgeon certainly had the truth impressed upon himself and it showed.

All these men certainly demonstrated the truth of the first Psalm. They meditated on the Word of God day and night and that practice bore great fruit in their lives which in turn has led to great blessing in our own lives even today. It must be remembered that these men, like in the Shema, had the Word of the LORD ever before them because He truly is the Lord of all. These men loved the Word because of their love for the Lord. James M. Hamilton Jr. helps us here:

Whole-life love for Yahweh will result in his commandments being on the heart, but

³² Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 174.

³³ *Ibid.*, 330.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 337.

³⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner*, (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1995), 92.

this relationship cannot be reverse either. Devotion to the commandments divorced from love for Yahweh also breaks the first commandment, leading only to a condemning sense of onerous duty. These laws can only be fulfilled by those who are dominated by the reality that Yahweh alone is God, consumed with a love for him that finds expression in desire to please him, commitment to obeying him, and the constant occupation of mind, heart, and imagination with the wonder of who he is. In short, only those who live to worship him—those who trust him more than what they see with their eyes—will have the law on their hearts.³⁶

They Worked Heartily unto the Lord and not Men. The men we are looking at all believed in the complete sovereignty of God and yet they were not lackadaisical or lazy about their responsibility to do the work that God had called them to do. These men were not hyper Calvinist but realized, as Edwards said,

God does all, and we do all. God produces all, and we act all... God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors. We are, in different respects, wholly passive and wholly active. In the Scriptures the same things are represented as from God and from us. God is said to convert [2 Tim. 2:25], and men are said to convert and turn [Acts 2:38]. God makes us a new heart [Ezek. 36:26], and we are commanded to make us a new heart [Ezek. 18:31]. God circumcises the heart [Deut. 30:6], and we are commanded to circumcise our own hearts [Deut. 10:16] ... These things are agreeable to that text, ‘God worketh in you both to will and to do [Phil. 2:13].³⁷ Edwards fully gave himself to God and worked hard³⁸ and yet he “understood that no matter how resolved or determined he might be, he could not glorify God in his own strength.”³⁹ These men worked with all the power that God worked within them (Col. 1:29; Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Cor. 12:6; Heb. 13:21; 1 Cor. 12:6; 15:10).

Spurgeon’s almost unbelievable work ethic is demonstrated by the legacy he left in

³⁶ James M. Hamilton Jr., “That the Coming Generation Might Praise the Lord,” *Journal of Family Ministry* 1.1 (2010): 18.

³⁷ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand: Baker Book House, 1992), 94-95.

³⁸ For instance, Edwards would commonly spend thirteen hours in his study each day (Murray, *Edward*, 183).

³⁹ Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards*, 51.

published writing, more than any other single English author. Not only that but also all his preaching engagements and all the organizations he oversaw as pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle demonstrate Spurgeon's amazing ability to work heartily unto the Lord. We must also look at the average of five hundred letters he would write each week, which it is estimated could have taken around eight and a half hours.⁴⁰ Here is just one example: "Although sick, tired, and very busy, Spurgeon took time to write to a boy—one who he had never met and of whom he had learned through the prayers of his parents."⁴¹

Lloyd-Jones' work ethic for God's glory can even be seen in how he often closed his calls: "Well, keep on!" Even late in his life he worked incredibly hard. For example at the age of eighty, when appealed to by a seminary Lloyd-Jones "read a large body of written material and from a hospital bed... dictated a statement... Most men in [his] state of health would have begged to be excused."⁴² We must learn from these men and work when it is still day, night is coming when no man will work (John 9:4) and we must work because our labor *in the Lord* is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

They Spent their Time Wisely. Edwards knew the preciousness of time in fact he wrote a treatise on "The Preciousness of Time and the Importance of Redeeming it." Why is time valuable and precious? Edwards answers, "Because a happy or miserable eternity depends on the good or ill improvement of it" for you and for others. "Things are precious in proportion to their

⁴⁰ See Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 134. Dr. Donald Whitney gives this estimation.

⁴¹ Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 225.

⁴² Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 721 see also 44, 47-48, 718 and idem, *The First Forty Years* 341.

importance or to the degree wherein they concern our welfare”⁴³ and thus time is extremely precious. Edwards knew well that, unlike many things, “time was infinitely valuable and utterly irreplaceable when lost.”⁴⁴ “He refused to be content with mere existence, simply going through the motions of meaningless activities.”⁴⁵ He “did not let himself be seduced into spending excessive time in books written by men to the neglect to the Word of God.”⁴⁶ Edwards led by spending his time for the glory of God. He would even diet and watch what he ate to maximize his energy so that he would be better able to study the things of God.⁴⁷

Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones too knew the preciousness of time. This is shown by their tremendous output both literary and organizationally, as well as through the many sermons that they preached each week. It was said that “As far as reading was concerned [Lloyd-Jones] never did relax”⁴⁸ and this could certainly be said of Spurgeon as well. We to must seek to be faithful with the time that God has entrusted to us, we would do well to consider Edwards’ words, “If God, that hath given you your time, should now call you to an account, what account could you give to him?”⁴⁹

⁴³Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards:2 Volume Set*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 233.

⁴⁴ George M. Marsden, *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 94.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁷ He even made the most use of all the time he spent on horseback (Murray, *Edwards*, 54).

⁴⁸ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 375 see also *idem*, *The First Forty Years*, 195-96.

⁴⁹Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 234 see also Murray, *Edwards*, 390, 392.

They were Humble. These men all knew that they were saved by grace alone, they merited nothing. They saw the holiness and worthiness of God and their utter unworthiness and thus they were humbled though they were gifted. Edwards was not puffed up by the grace of God in his life.

That is to say, Edwards agreed with the apostle Paul, who wrote, ‘By the grace of God I am what I am’ (1 Cor. 15:10). Only by sanctifying grace, and not by his autonomous efforts, could Edwards ‘walk in a manner worthy of [his] calling’ (Eph. 4:1).⁵⁰

Edwards realized he was, like Paul, the chief of sinners and that it was only by God’s unmerited favor that he was not being tormented in hell as he deserved.

“H. J. Heinz, the pickle manufacturer... enjoyed personal friendship with Spurgeon and spoke of him as ‘the most humble man I have ever known.’” This is a truly amazing thing, I believe, especially when it comes to Spurgeon. He was very young when he became widely known and celebrated. Yet Spurgeon also knew God and he was a convinced Calvinist. He knew that any good that he had was not of him. He also was criticized from every front and also knew great physical pain. Spurgeon, like Paul, was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble, and as Heinz attested it must have worked.

There was one who saw Lloyd-Jones on television and said, “He seemed so sincere, so understanding, so sure of his ground and yet so humble.”⁵¹ What a mixture. What could give someone these qualities? Could it be that he realized that he was what he was, and understood what he understood, strictly by the grace of God? I think this must be the only explanation. It is so easy to be puffed up, especially when we do not start with the understanding that it, that is, *everything*, is all of grace. It is surely a weird mixture of qualities because they are in no way

⁵⁰ Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards*, 48.

⁵¹ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 633.

innate to us but come from great pondering and transformation by the Spirit through the Word. Humility in many ways is in itself an alien concept but to add to humility confidence is strange to the flesh indeed. Yet we know we have a profound and supreme example of this in Jesus Himself, in a mysterious way He was the most confident man and yet also the humblest. This is truly a foreign concept and an external gift of God where it is found.

Lloyd-Jones did not just *appear* humble for good show but *was* humble. One person remembered him: “The gracious manner with which Dr Lloyd-Jones mingled with our people is a lovely memory. To dine with him was a privilege. He [who I am quite sure had more and better things to say than most anyone] did not dominate conversation but contributed warmly.”⁵² This shows his humility and I believe it also shows great discipline in self-control. It is not an easy thing to hold your tongue when you have something to say, much less when you have something *better* to say. These men were humbled under the mighty gracious hand of God, we should be too.

They had Great Boldness. Edwards was bold both in his proclamation of the truth of God’s Word and in His defensive of it. We will note just two examples. First, Edwards’ famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” demonstrates that he was not afraid to preach God’s truth however unpopular it sometimes is. Second, we see Edwards’ boldness in the stance he came to take on communion. “Edwards was under no illusions as to the seriousness of the controversy and its possible outcome for himself”⁵³ yet he boldly stuck to his convictions. “Some would like to think of Spurgeon as a man who seldom disagreed with anyone and who

⁵²Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 617.

⁵³ Murray, *Edwards*, 318.

was always widely loved and admired. But in his doctrinal emphasis he ran contrary to many.”⁵⁴ Spurgeon was likable but he boldly stuck up for the truth, see for example his controversial sermon on baptismal regeneration. “Spurgeon was militant and fearless in his stand for the truth of God.”⁵⁵

Lloyd-Jones boldly defended the gospel. There was one instance when he had preached in South Wales on the “uniqueness of the gospel as the only way of salvation” when, before closing the service with a final song the local minister said, “the gospel is only one ‘solvent’ among a series of other possibilities.” Lloyd-Jones could not let the truth he was entrusted to defend be defrauded, so pale and tense he stepped forward and told the congregation to take their seats, “and for almost ten minutes he proceeded to declare that the gospel is the *only* solvent.”⁵⁶

Lloyd-Jones said on public television that “Christianity is a very exclusive and dogmatic faith”⁵⁷ which is bold in itself but compared to a certain popular (so-called) evangelical preacher today that has been interviewed on public television, Lloyd-Jones’ boldness seems astounding. Further, it is important to point out here that Lloyd-Jones’ boldness from our vantage point in history seems not just radical but patently unbiblical. However, consider a few New Testament statements, such as “You killed the Author of life” (Acts 3:15) and “Jesus Christ... whom you crucified” (Acts 4:10). Those are some pretty bold statements. Lloyd-Jones is clearly in line with the precedence set in the New Testament. Speak with love, yes, but to

⁵⁴ Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 72.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁶ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 455 (italics original).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 634

speak with love, is to speak the truth, however unloving it may *seem*.

May we be like Jeremiah who said, “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak anymore in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (20:9). Jeremiah, indeed, could not be silent even though time and time again he was persecuted for not keeping silent (cf. Jer. 20 and 26). May Alihu’s experience be ours when it comes to being constrained to speak the truth, “The spirit within me constrains me. Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent; like new wineskins ready to burst. I must speak, that I may find relief” (Job 32:18b-20a).

They Preached with Authority. The three men we are considering here did not have the same style as they preached the Word of God but they were all used mightily of God when they preached.⁵⁸ Regarding Lloyd-Jones, J. I. Packer said, “I have never heard another preacher with so much of God about him.”⁵⁹ This was the great thing about his preaching, his great God. Surely this is the thread that ties Edwards, Spurgeon, and Lloyd-Jones together, it was not their style, it was their great God. It was said that Lloyd-Jones spoke with “divine authority” that was because he, like Edwards and Spurgeon, did. They believed that the Scripture is the very Word of God and spoke it as such. They would have likely agreed with The Second Helvetic Confession that states in a heading of a section of chapter one that “The Preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.”⁶⁰ That is why Edwards said, “A minister... is to study and search the Scriptures

⁵⁸ “Spirit-anointed preaching is not to be identified with any one type of delivery” (Murray, *Edwards*, 191).

⁵⁹ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 325.

⁶⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2010), 261. He is also so bold to say that when preachers “get it right, the Word of God is on their lips, as surely as it was on the lips of Jesus and Paul. When we hear such messages, we hear the autographic text of Scripture” (Ibid.,

and to teach the people, not the opinions of men—or of other divines or of their ancestors—but the mind of Christ.”⁶¹

Lloyd-Jones has said what I regard as one of the best statements on preaching: “Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire. A true understanding and experience of the truth must lead to this.”⁶² This it is said, “can only be the outcome of the building of a secret history with God on your own.”⁶³ Lloyd-Jones’ ability lay less in his genius as a communicator but more in his ethos, in “his deep convictions and heart-felt experiences as a converted Christian man.”⁶⁴ In fact, one of Lloyd-Jones’ hearers said, “he seemed to have been possessed, or to be discreet, perhaps, motivated, by One greater than himself, in Whom he lived, moved and had his being. All great preaching becomes a sacrament, nay, a miracle, when in and through it, it holds forth the indications and intimations of the presence of God.”⁶⁵

Spurgeon similarly said, “It is not so much that you have taken hold of your subject, but that it has taken hold of you, and you feel its grip with a terrible reality yourself, then that is the kind of message this is most likely to make others feel. If it is not impressed upon you, you cannot expect to impress it upon others.”⁶⁶

They had Differences. We see from this, once again that there are different giftings

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⁶¹Murray, *Edwards*, 312.

⁶² Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 262.

⁶³Ibid., 764.

⁶⁴Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 762.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 198.

⁶⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner*, 93 see also 136, 145.

and even different convictions on certain issues but that does not rule out usefulness as ministers of the gospel. In fact, you could say that Edwards represents the foremost of scholars, Lloyd-Jones those without (so-called) “proper” theological training, and Spurgeon the country preachers. However, God used all these different and faithful men in truly astounding, even supernatural, ways. Edwards unique contribution lay in his intellect, Spurgeon in his preaching, and Lloyd-Jones in his leadership.

Though obviously and unusually gifted, Lloyd-Jones was probably the least gifted of the men that we have looked at. He also did not have preaching in his blood as both Edwards and Spurgeon did. Though, Edwards was likely not as good as a sermon deliverer as were both Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones.⁶⁷ Lloyd-Jones was also much different in that he saw the pastors job to be wrapped in preparing sermons and preaching them, not writing books.⁶⁸ Although, ironically enough “the sale of his books went far beyond almost all expectations. In their first decade of publication the Romans and Ephesians series exceeded a million copies and the sale continues.”⁶⁹

A lot of their differences was simply the natural result of their different personalities. They were very similar in a lot of their convictions but it was lived out differently in their lives because they are different people. One thing that shows this is their use of humor. Lloyd-Jones was often funny but never in the pulpit and Edwards never used humor in the pulpit and I wonder to what extent he even did in normal conversation. Spurgeon on the other-hand was very

⁶⁷Murray, *Edwards*, 191. I do not mean to perpetrate the common error that believes Edwards' preaching to be boring and stuffy, it was not.

⁶⁸Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 345

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 651.

humorous. Here is one of his classics: “It is an infliction not to be endured twice, to hear a brother who mistakes perspiration for inspiration.”⁷⁰ Spurgeon would use humor but he used it well. He used it to communicate his point, it was not the point in itself.

All three of these men loved their parishioners very much. “During the cholera epidemic” for example Spurgeon did not try “to escape the contagion but had gone freely to the homes of the sick.” People knew that he truly cared about them.⁷¹ “Spurgeon was... available each Tuesday afternoon to meet with inquirers.”⁷² It is said that even when the membership of the congregation rose to six thousand he could remember almost every member by name.⁷³

It is said that Lloyd-Jones had “unbounded sympathy and sincere interest” for men in the ministry. “Men felt they could speak to him.”⁷⁴ At eighty after preaching “though perspiring heavily and very tired he was willing to give counsel to those who wished to see him in the vestry after the meeting.”⁷⁵ One person wrote to Lloyd-Jones thanking him that in spite of his large congregation he always dealt with people as though nothing was too much trouble for the individual soul.⁷⁶ This could have easily been said by someone in Spurgeon’s

⁷⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 115.

⁷¹ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 75.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 420.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 733.

⁷⁶ Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 593.

congregation as well though the comment would have been less likely from Edwards flock. However, that is not to say that it was not true of Edwards, only that his people did not know it was true. Edwards surely cared for individual souls he, however, failed to communicate it at times like he should have.⁷⁷ Edwards may have done well to hear Lloyd-Jones' words, "You must love people and mix with them if you are to be of service to them."⁷⁸

Not Hagiography but Biography. We must remember Paul's words here, he said, "follow me, as follow Christ." In the same way, we should follow these men, learn from them in as much as they are biblical, and follow Christ. However, we must keep in mind that they are *not* Christ and thus they mess up. We should not have blinders on so as not to see their blunders but rather note where they have diverged from the path and seek not to ourselves. If we keep in open eye as we follow them as they follow Christ we may avoid pit falls that they did not. Thus, we also can learn from their mistakes but this is only if we keep an open eye like the Bereans (Acts 17:10-11).

One of the problems I see with all three of these men is they did not have biblically qualified shared eldership. There are many advantages to have a *biblical* eldership, even beyond being biblical. For example, Edwards would have had accountability regarding pastoral care and possibly someone gifted in that area that would have been happy to pick up some of the slack for him. Spurgeon did have to secretaries that assisted him but that is quite different than a qualified elder board. Spurgeon did have men around him and his brother helped him a lot but I still feel that an elder board would have benefited Spurgeon greatly especially as his bouts with gout got worse. Lloyd-Jones was flat out against an elder board and even joked at those who "dream

⁷⁷ See for example: Murray, *Edwards*, 183, 342-43, 430 and idem, *The Fight of Faith*, 344-46, 626, 756-58, 790.

⁷⁸Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 72.

about it.” But I feel that Lloyd-Jones would have been able to *dream more* had he had elders do assist him. He would have been able to publish some of his crucial sermons in a timely manner and thus better address the issues of his day. He would have also left his congregation in much better shape after he left Westminster. All three of the men we have looked at needed to have elders or more elders because they had such constraints on their time. Although, they were uniquely gifted I cannot help but think that they should have delegated more.

Godly and faithful as these men were there are still things that we can see in them that we should not seek to emulate. Briefly, Edwards likely did not act fast enough on the communion controversy.⁷⁹ It is also said that Lloyd-Jones loved to debate.⁸⁰ He was also often slow to delegate.⁸¹ Spurgeon also had short comings, though admittedly, they are often harder to find. Obviously he was sinful like all humans but besides that some people criticize him for not taking better care of his health. There may be some truth in this critic but I am not thoroughly convinced. They did not possess the same understanding that we do regarding health concerns and it is certainly clear that he, as we have above noted, was willing to spend and be spent for God's glory.

Conclusion. These men had different God given gifts but they all sought to use them faithfully to God’s glory and as much as they succeeded we should seek to emulate and learn from them.⁸²

⁷⁹See for example: Murray, *Edwards*, , 338, 341.

⁸⁰Murray, *The Fight of Faith*, 770 also 769.

⁸¹Ibid., 497.

⁸²There are many other things we could look at if we had space. For instance we could have sections on self-sacrifice, practical ministries, wisdom and foresight, , revival, family life, and focus on heaven.

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