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**Front Cover:** The cover artwork is a stylized photo by Steve Buffington. “An image of a Christian leader is the rope braking device used in repelling. If its integrity is compromised, your life could be in danger. However, a braking device that functions as its creator intended allows risks and activities unable to be experienced in any other way.”
FROM THE PULPIT TO THE PEOPLE: 
A COMPARATIVE SURVEY OF 
JONATHAN EDWARDS’ PASTORAL 
LEADERSHIP IN NORTHAMPTON 
AND STOCKBRIDGE

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ABSTRACT: Despite the notoriety of Edwards’ as scholar, preacher, and writer in Northampton, history can argue that Edwards enjoyed his greatest successes as a pastor in Stockbridge, not Northampton. This essay argues that the reason for Edwards’ greater successes in Stockbridge is because Edwards shifted his pastoral leadership from being centered on the pulpit (as it was in Northampton) to being centered among the people. This change from pulpit-centered to people-centered pastoring can be felt in several significant ways, including his approachability, his changing view and treatment of people, and the adaptation of his preaching to meet the cultural and spiritual dynamics of his congregation. Therefore, while his evangelistic involvement in the Great Awakening is rightly celebrated, it is his pastoral accomplishments in Stockbridge that provides an effective model for today’s pastor.

KEYWORDS: Congregational Hierarchy, Stockbridge Indians, Indian Schools, Preaching
On August 8, 1751, Jonathan Edwards was officially installed as pastor of the Stockbridge ministry. It had been a little over a year since he preached his farewell sermon to his congregation of almost 24 years in Northampton. Now, at the beginning of another chapter of his colorful career, Edwards found himself in a very different place. Northampton Sunday mornings began by the chiming of the church bell that called the congregation of over 400 to worship. Edwards this time would hear the melancholic sound of an enormous conch-shell to gather together a group one quarter of the size Edwards had grown accustomed to (Murray, 1987). Only about 40 miles separated the two settlements, a misrepresentation of the vast differences between the two towns. First settled along the Connecticut River in 1654, Northampton had risen to prominence, largely due to the 60-year pastorate of Solomon Stoddard, the “Pope of the Connecticut River Valley,” and Edwards’ grandfather. Stephen Nichols (Hart, Lucas, & Nichols, 2003) estimated, “Outside of Boston, this was perhaps New England’s model town, church, and even culture” (p. 47). Upon Stoddard’s death in 1729, Edwards ascended to the pulpit in Northampton, further advancing the reputation of the already prestigious church. On the other hand, Stockbridge could have scarcely been more different. An isolated outpost situated along the Housatonic River in the Berkshire Mountains, it was founded in 1737 as a mission to the Native Americans. By Edwards’ arrival, Stockbridge consisted of approximately 250 Mahicans, 60 Mohawks, and not more than a dozen English families, who seemed more interested in worldly gain than in reaching the Indians (Wheeler, 2003).

From the start, it should be noted that Edwards’ fame is largely due to his involvement in events occurring in Northampton. While he was in Northampton, the Connecticut Valley revival of 1734-35, followed by Edwards’ Faithful Narrative of it, launched the pastor and his parish to international fame and served as a preface to one of America’s most revered historical moments, the Great Awakening. While in Northampton, Edwards found further prominence through his powerful sermons, like A Divine and Supernatural Light and Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. While in Northampton, Edwards’ writings—Religious Affections, Distinguishing Marks, and Life of David Brainerd—equally found their place on the international stage.

Nevertheless, insofar as Edwards’ accomplishments as scholar, preacher, and writer in Northampton ushered him into international and historical fame, what stands as a glaring deficiency in Edwards’ ministry there was his inability to effectively serve his flock as a nurturing pastor. It is in this arena of Edwards’ life where a seminal change occurred during his time in Stockbridge. Indeed, even despite the major advantages the “model” New England town had over an obscure Indian mission, history suggests that Edwards enjoyed some of his greatest (albeit less glamorous) victories as a pastor in Stockbridge, not Northampton. One indication is that, despite the lack of revivals and remarkable conversions he had experienced in Northampton, Edwards largely kept the respect and admiration of his Stockbridge congregation. In contrast, his relationship with the Northampton folk had deteriorated to the point of the shocking dismissal of their famous pastor. This is not to suggest that his time in Stockbridge was free from controversy. During his tenure, Edwards had to navigate through the rough waters of the Seven Years War (1756-1763), and the growing tensions between the Indians and the colonists. Yet, the differences between the challenges Edwards faced in Northampton and Stockbridge are significant and bring to bear another indication of Edwards’ pastoral achievements. For instance, the conflicts in Northampton largely emerged during (and somewhat because of) his pastorate there, while the challenges in Stockbridge were already present.
by the time Edwards arrived on the scene. Not only that, but the Northampton issues were from within, due to the deteriorating spiritual and relational health of the congregation, whereas the attacks on Stockbridge were generally from external forces.

Why, then, despite the advantages of Northampton and his illustrious achievements there, did Edwards’ time in Stockbridge seem more pastorally productive? Was it due to the shifting political disposition of the pre-Revolutionary people in Northampton, as some historians have suggested, that was not present in Stockbridge? Was it due to undue pride instilled by the revivals in Northampton that Stockbridge had not directly experienced, or the hardened paradigms produced by the Stoddaridean legacy that did not carry over to the Indian mission, both of which Edwards may have believed? To be sure, these and several other factors may have played a part, but another, more significant element should also be considered—a change in Edwards himself. Indeed, Nichols (2001) credited Edwards’ personal discipline as a major reason why his time in Stockbridge “turned out to be the most productive of his life” (p. 63). Included in his personal discipline is a seismic shift in Edwards’ approach to pastoring, and it is this shift that seems to be the primary reason for Edwards’ successes in Stockbridge. To put it succinctly, this essay submits that Edwards’ successes as a pastor in Stockbridge in contrast to Northampton is significantly due to Edwards shifting his pastoral approach from being centered on the pulpit (as it was in Northampton) to being centered among the people. This change from pulpit-centered to people-centered pastoring can be sensed in several significant ways, a few of which will be observed in more depth. In the end, while we rightly celebrate his evangelistic involvement in the Great Awakening, it is Edwards’ pastoral accomplishments among the multi-ethnic citizens of Stockbridge that should be honored as an effective model for today’s pastor. Therefore, drawing from this model a few principles for practical application will be offered.

FROM “EMPTY OF POLITICS” TO A “NEAREST NEIGHBOR”: EDWARDS’ AVAILABILITY AS A PASTOR

Jonathan Edwards was never known among his congregants in the Northampton to be the sociable type (Marsden, 2003). Edwards was their pastor, yet he granted very little time to visit in the homes of his parishioners. He reasoned that he was not suited for the menial discussions about ordinary things in everyday life, and that such affairs should be tasked to those more gifted for it. To be fair, if called on in the cases of serious illnesses or emergencies, Edwards would attend to their needs, and he welcomed counseling others on spiritual things in his study. He also held private meetings in different homes and from time to time invited young people to his home for prayer and Bible study. Nonetheless, he generally occupied his 13-hour workday with studying the Scriptures and writing sermons and treatises, and he felt that gratuitous socializing stole too much of his limited energies and time (Turnbull, 1958). It should be no surprise, then, while commenting on his

1 It should be admitted that Edwards would probably have protested the very premise of this paper. As a melancholic perfectionist, he would have protested that neither Northampton nor Stockbridge became what he had envisioned. As a Calvinistic, he would have protested that any successes that may be perceived are solely due to the sovereignty of God.
concerns regarding the possibility of Edwards’ pastoring in Stockbridge, that Ephraim Williams Jr. quipped, “A head so full of divinity should be so empty of politics” (quoted in Marsden, 2003, p. 381).

To be fair, Edwards’ pulpit-focused style, while perhaps a turn-off to the average pastor and parishioner today, was often the expectation in an 18th century New England church. Douglas Sweeney (2009) explained, “People expected ordained clergy to spend the bulk of their time in study…. They wanted their pastors to be learned more than flashy, therapeutic, businesslike or even approachable” (p. 30). It also should be noted that Edwards’ aloofness was as much a learned disposition as it was natural, for Edwards had been groomed by the Puritan-era ministerial patriarchy personified by Edwards’ grandfather and greatest influencer, Solomon Stoddard. Edwards tried to emulate the same role of authoritarian father and moral arbiter that Stoddard had employed for over sixty years, but this system was getting antiquated and, unfortunately, Edwards had not learned any other approach. Patricia Tracy (1980) observed that Edwards himself began to question these pastoral techniques he too readily adopted, stating, “Edwards later confessed that he had been too young and inexperienced to foresee ill consequences in the Stoddardeanism he embraced in the late 1720s” (p. 73).

Whatever the reasons for his detachment as pastor in Northampton, Edwards’ pastoral approach was transformed in Stockbridge. Instead of the unapproachable Edwards of old, this mission-town gained a shepherd who lived among the people. Edwards located his home, not on the mountain above or a mile away from the crude dwellings of his Native parishioners, but on the plain right in their midst. Nichols noted, “In doing so, Edwards was the first of the settlers to live with his family among the Indians” (Hart, Lucas, & Nichols, 2003, p. 53). It also provided the Edwards family daily exposure and interaction with the Indians that other colonists often missed. Recalling his childhood among the Stockbridge Indians, Jonathan Edwards Jr. revealed the depth of which he and his family immersed themselves among the people, journaling that the Indians were his nearest neighbors and their boys some of his closest friends. Young Edwards’ involvement with his neighboring Natives was so constant and deep, that he even became proficient in their language. “Out of my father’s house, I seldom heard any language spoken beside the Indian. I knew the names of some things in Indian which I did not know in English, even all my thoughts ran in Indian” (quoted in Hart, Lucas, & Nichols, 2003, p. 53-54).

Admittedly, Edwards was not the perfect missionary. He himself never learned the language of his Indian neighbors as his son did, so he preached and taught in English, always with the aid of a translator. But he lived among them, sharing everyday concerns with his Indian neighbors—their sicknesses, births, deaths, marriages, care of children, and many other burdens of life. Evidence suggests that Edwards had a genuine affection for his Stockbridge congregation. In contrast to the Jonathan Edwards who had been criticized in Northampton for his “unsociable” ways, the new Edwards reported to his father that he and his family were pleased with their present situation, stating, “Here, at present, we live in peace; which has of long time been an unusual thing with us. The Indians seem much pleased with my family, especially my wife” (Edwards, 2011, p. clxxxiii). In a later letter to Timothy Gillespie, Edwards’ affection seems to have grown, as he referred to the Stockbridge people, Indian and colonist alike, as “my people” who “steadfastly adhere to me” (Edwards, p. cciii). By moving his pastorate from the pulpit to the people, Edwards became significantly effective, because he embraced the Natives as people whom God loved and called Edwards to shepherd. “Rather than use his time in Stockbridge as a retreat from worldly affairs, he poured his life into Native American ministry” (Sweeney, 2009, p. 180).
FROM FROM “NEW ENGLAND ARISTOCRACY” TO “NO BETTER THAN YOU”: EDWARDS’ VIEW OF PEOPLE

As evident as it was that Edwards’ approachability had changed, it may be an indication of an even greater change regarding Edwards’ regard for people in general. In Northampton, Edwards had lived in a society that was decidedly dependent on class, and this hierarchical structure was not merely social but also theological. Edwards saw life itself as a divinely ordained hierarchy: God, angels, humankind, animals, and so on. Likewise, within human society, some people were naturally meant to lead while others were naturally meant to follow. In addition to this, Gerald McDermott (2009) observed that the Edwards family was “among New England’s version of aristocracy” (p. 20). As such, the Edwardses were related to some of the most powerful clergymen, politicians, and military figures in the colonies. McDermott summarized Edwards’ attitude resulting from such a status: “Ever conscious and defensive of his place on the social ladder, Edwards expected deference from those below him, even as he deferred, sometimes grudgingly, to those above him” (p. 20). There is little doubt that Edwards’ demand for deference gradually became a stumbling block for the people of Northampton who were growing increasingly fond of a democratic society.

While Edwards still expected a measure of respect for his office as pastor, in Stockbridge it seems he largely abandoned his aristocratic attitude and began to see all people on equal footing. This egalitarian perspective was quite different from even the common colonists, who generally saw Indians as savages of the lowest sort. McDermott (2000) highlighted the difference in views of the Indians between the English settlers and their pastor. Most of the settlers desired little more than the extermination of the Indians, and certainly not their salvation. Few would have blamed Edwards for sharing this common sentiment, especially since Edwards could have brought to memory that Indians had murdered one of his aunts and two of his cousins and driven into captivity an uncle and four more cousins.² Still, despite their savage past, Edwards saw “no metaphysical distinction between whites and Indians” (McDermott, p. 201-203). Edwards admitted that the forefathers of the colonists had once also been in spiritual darkness like the Indians, but had received the light of the gospel only through the grace of a loving God. Now, it was the Indians’ turn to experience this same loving grace. From the viewpoint of the gospel, Edwards concluded, “We are no better than you in no respect” (quoted in Kimmich, Minkema, & Sweeney, 1999, p. 107-108).

Such ideas were socially risky for Edwards to express, but they were especially dangerous to act upon. Nevertheless, this new pastor of Stockbridge did not waste time with mere platitudes. Edwards invested a great deal of his time, effort, and personal reputation defending the Indians against the severe discriminations and horrors that were inflicted on them by their English neighbors (some of whom were in Edwards’ own family). These prejudiced and greedy colonists had been manipulating the Stockbridge Indians for years to promote their own personal and financial benefit. Even in the midst of physical infirmity and public disparagement, Edwards responded through the relentless writing of letters to the mission’s commissioners, pleading for an enforcement of his

² On February 29, 1704, Kahnawake Indians raided Deerfield, Massachusetts, killing 48 people and exiling another 112 to Canada. Among those killed were Rev. John Williams’ wife and two children. He and his four other children were taken captive, all of whom eventually freed to return to Massachusetts. One of the children, Eunice, who was four years old when captured, chose to remain with the Kahnawake Indians (McDermott, 1999, p. 542).
Indian congregants’ personal rights. One such letter, which complained that his English parishioners were exploiting the Indians for financial gain, had even reached the attention of the Archbishop of Canterbury (Hart, Lucas, & Nichols, 2003).

Sometimes Edwards had to intervene directly to squelch a conflict and promote justice. McDermott (1999) cited one such example: “When a friend of one of the whites seeking to exploit the mission struck an Indian child on the head with a cane, it was Edwards who managed to convince the offender to pay damages” (p. 555). Sarah Sedgwick and Christina Marquand (1974) recounted another incident that infamously put Edwards’ pastoral skills to the test. In the report, a Schaghticoke Indian named Waumpaumcorse was shot while pursuing two white men stealing some Indian horses. The two white thieves were caught and tried, but one received only a slight punishment for manslaughter and the other was acquitted entirely. Sensing a brewing of tension among the settlers, Edwards anxiously wrote to the governor and “strongly advised a large subsidy to be applied at once to the wounded susceptibilities of the relatives of Waumpaumcorse.” Sedgwick and Marquand noted, “The Legislature procrastinated, and finally sent a small sum of money—20 [pounds]—to the Schaghticokes” (p. 72-73). Even though his efforts did not always produce the results he wanted, such as in the Waumpaumcorse murder, Edwards nonetheless defended his congregation with the fierce passion of a shepherd. This passion was not just for the privileged but for all his flock, for Edwards no longer was a respecter of persons but placed all people on equal footing.

One of the greatest evidences of Edwards’ focus shifting from the pulpit to the people was his interest and investment in the education of the Stockbridge Indian children. By the time Edwards assumed his pastoral post in Stockbridge, fifty-five Indian children were regularly attending the fledgling day school run by Timothy Woodbridge. Largely funded from private donors, a separate boarding school had begun in 1748 with a dozen Indian boys under the tutelage of Captain Martin Kellogg, who Edwards would soon discover mismanaged the mission. Kellogg and Ephraim Williams, a leading citizen of the settlement and relative of Edwards, were guilty of embezzlement, and Kellogg (himself illiterate) used the students to “cultivate his own land” (Hart, Lucas, & Nichols, 2003, p. 55).

Contrary to Kellogg and Williams, the principal objective of the school, to Edwards, was “to prosecute the design of instructing [the Indians] thoroughly in the Protestant religion” (Hart, Lucas, & Nichols, 2003, p. 55). With that objective, Edwards took an immediate interest in not only rectifying the inequities caused by the mismanagement of Kellogg, but also in the methods of teaching the Indian students. He believed that a key to reaching the Natives was equipping them to read, so they may be able to understand God’s Word themselves. The methods that had been used to teach the children, however, proved less than effective. In a letter to Sir William Pepperell, Edwards addressed his concerns, stating that while the children are learning to read, they are really only making the proper sounds on the sight of the correct marks. They have no knowledge of what they are actually saying, nor are they gaining any satisfaction in their learning. Consequently, Edwards lamented, many of them neglect practicing it outside of school, thus they forget what they have learned. As a remedy, Edwards suggested that “the child should be taught to understand things, as well as words,” and the best means of engaging the children in learning was through stories in the Bible. Not only that, but the teacher “should enter into conversation with the child about [the words learned],” and the child should be encouraged “to speak freely and in his turn also to ask questions.”
As a result, Edwards asserted that such teaching would “accustom the child, from its infancy, to think and reflect, and to beget in it an early taste for knowledge, and a regularly increasing appetite for it” (Edwards, 2011, p. clxxviii).

Besides his teaching strategy, Edwards also recommended that girls and boys alike be educated, not only in reading, but also in spelling, arithmetic, and even singing. He suggested that, from time to time, the schools should hold public assemblies at which families and officials would be able to enjoy seeing what the children had learned. He even offered the somewhat radical ideas of integrating the English children into the Indian schools and encouraging Indian children to live a year in English homes, including his own (Marsden, 2003). McDermott (1999) added more evidence to the mix of Edwards’ personal investment in and persistent fight for the Native children. He noted that Edwards spent hours listening to the Indian children practice their language skills, diligently reporting to the Boston Commissioners of their need for blankets, food, and clothing.

Far from the pulpit-centered pastorate in Northampton, Edwards found himself among the people—teaching them, leading them, defending them, and providing for them. In short, Edwards was as much a pastor to the Stockbridge Indians as to the English, and as much to the children as to the adults.

FROM “DRY ACADEMIC” TO “PLAIN AND PRACTICAL”: EDWARDS’ ADAPTATION IN PREACHING

A commonly critiqued characteristic of poor preaching today is that there is a greater love for preaching than for people. It seems that Edwards saw himself guilty of this same weakness during his transition from Northampton to Stockbridge, because the seismic shift that Edwards makes from pulpit centered to people centered, somewhat ironically, can also be seen in his preaching. In Northampton, his preaching seemed to suffer from the same caricature of dullness as his personality. “He read his sermons in monotone, rarely looking up from his notes,” Sweeney (2009) described, “putting parishioners to sleep with dry, academic droning” (p. 75-76). While Sweeney also suggested that such a stereotype of Edwards’ preaching is a bit hyperbolic, there seems to be some merit to it, because Patricia Tracy (1980) noted that at some point in 1733, Edwards made a change in his preaching technique. “The technique, which would eventually encompass a variety of tones of voice, was to direct sermons and advice specifically to the adolescents in the community” (p. 77). In other words, Edwards learned to adapt his preaching to most effectively fit his audience. It is clear by Edwards’ legacy that he was a powerful preacher, and there is little doubt that his change in preaching style while in Northampton may have contributed to his effectiveness. Nevertheless, despite the successes he had already had in preaching, Edwards adapted his preaching even more to accommodate his new congregation in Stockbridge. For one thing, Edwards did not

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3 It was typical for churches to hire someone to teach singing to a congregation. Edwards had done this at Northampton. Now, Edwards wanted to extend this same privilege to the Indians, believing it would prove to have a powerful impact in leading the toward civilized attitudes (Hart, Lucas, & Nichols, 2003, 61-62).
merely recycle his Northampton sermons. Rachel Wheeler (2003) noted that a conservative estimate would place Edwards preaching about 250 sermons at to the Stockbridge mission. Of those sermons in Stockbridge, less than one fifth can be verified as repeat deliveries of earlier manuscripts.

Edwards also took great pains to reach both the English and the Indians in his audience, preaching separately to the two groups. While he preached in his trademark style of building a logical and doctrinal case before his English hearers, Edwards was sensitive not to overshoot his Native parishioners. To them he employed the power of story and imagery, many of which came from nature. He habitually used vivid metaphors of water and rivers and motifs of light and darkness. Preaching overwhelmingly from the New Testament and especially Matthew and Luke, Edwards drew heavily from parables, drawing biblical truths from sowers of seed, fishermen, ground too dry for planting, trees fed by rivers that never ran dry, and briars and thorns that impeded a traveler’s path. Stockbridge schoolmaster Gideon Hawley provided what may be the only surviving description of Edwards preaching in Stockbridge, recalling Edwards to be “a plain and practical preacher” whose delivery was “grave and natural” and whose sentences were “concise and full of meaning” (quoted in Wheeler, 2003, 749).

Not only was Edwards’ delivery accommodating to the Indians, even his doctrinal message seemed to have a different tone. Wheeler (2003) remarked how the sermon manuscripts from Northampton and Stockbridge “offer a clear view into Edwards’ feelings for his two congregations” (p. 736). She went on to share that Edwards preached the same Calvinistic doctrine to both the English and the Indians, but he tailored the doctrine into different applications that were more relevant to his immediate audience. While Edwards spent much time warning the colonists of God’s potential wrath, he repeatedly assured the Indians that Christ desired to save them. While he did speak of judgment of sin to the Indians, Edwards did not stress God’s judgment but his mercy. Moreover, he insisted that God’s salvation was neither contingent on skin color nor ethnicity, for “forgiveness [is] offered to all nations” (quoted in McDermott, 1999, p. 553). Wheeler (2003) concluded, “That Edwards preached differently to his Indian and white congregations should not at all be surprising: any New England minister would have agreed that the sermons’ message should be tailored to suit the audience” (p. 737). This is true, to be sure, but it nonetheless demonstrates that by tailoring the sermon to suit the audience, Edwards had moved even one his hallmark gifts from being centered on the pulpit to being more among the people.

FROM THEN TO NOW:
LESSONS FROM EDWARDS FOR TODAY’S PASTOR

Based on the evidence surveyed, it is apparent that Edwards learned invaluable lessons about pastoring during his transition from Northampton and Stockbridge, and these lessons learned became prominent features of Edwards’ pastoring in the Indian mission. As a result, these features yielded some of his greatest and long-lasting fruit in his pastoral ministry. More importantly, history has afforded today’s pastors the opportunity to learn from these same lessons. The following are at least four practical lessons from Edwards’ experiences that modern ministers would do well to heed.

An effective pastor is with his people. Jesus taught his disciples that a key characteristic of a true shepherd is that his sheep know his voice and follow him, whereas they reject the voice of strangers (Jn 10:4-5). In this lesson, Jesus unearths a key pastoral principle: A true pastor is not a stranger to his people. In Northampton, Edwards’ devotion to his studies caused him to overlook
opportunities to be among his congregation. Consequently, despite the incredible work of God’s Spirit during the Great Awakening, the people of Northampton in the end rejected the voice of Edwards as if from a stranger. On the other hand, Edwards lived among the people in Stockbridge, balancing his attention between studying and ministering. As a result, the congregation largely heeded his voice and embraced him as their shepherd. Likewise, today’s pastor would do well to recognize that he stewards both of God’s most valuable possessions: his Scriptures and his people.

As such, while fervent study is necessary for solid preaching, today’s pastor must also be with his congregation, spending as much time with people as with books.

An effective pastor sees and loves people as God does. Few can dispute Edwards’ love and devotion to Christ, however that same love had not always translated to a love for God’s children. While in Northampton, Edwards maintained the Puritan hierarchical mindset that seemingly placed him above his flock. Conversely, Edwards shifts to the more equitable view of his parishioners in Stockbridge, even to the point of perceiving and treating his Indian parishioners with the same respect and value as his fellow Englishmen. In so doing, Edwards demonstrates that, not only will an effective pastor see others as God does, he will also love them as God does. Indeed, Edwards personified in Stockbridge the biblical truth that no one—especially pastors—can love God without loving others (Jn 13:34-35; 1 Jn 4:20).

An effective pastor meets people where they are, then leads them towards where God wants them to be. One of the clearest pastoral qualities Edwards demonstrated while in Stockbridge was his willingness to meet those in his congregation where they were, spiritually, morally, and mentally. This seems to be in stark contrast to Edwards’ judgmental intolerance that characterized his Northampton tenure. Such a shift was no easy task for a man so devoted to personal holiness; still, it was a shift that had to be made. Likewise, the contemporary pastor must recognize that, while Christians are redeemed, they are not perfect. Many still find themselves ensnared in less-than-godly beliefs and behaviors. While most if not all pastors acknowledge the imperfections of their flock, effective shepherds meet the sheep in their imperfections and lovingly lead them to freedom and victory in Christ (see Jn 1:42; 21:15-22).

An effective pastor feeds his flock what they can digest. One of Edwards’ most famous features is his preaching and teaching. He was clearly gifted with the ability to articulate biblical truths through systematic arguments and vivid illustrations. Nevertheless, he honed his skill even more by learning to adapt his sermons and lessons to the level of his hearers. To the English villagers, Edwards could be forceful, intellectual, and passionate in his sermons. To the Stockbridge Indians, Edwards learned to be redemptive, simple, and compassionate in his messages. Herein lies another clear lesson for today’s preacher: Effective preaching nourishes God’s people with God’s message in clearest way possible. Only through the clear, plain presentation of God’s message will God’s people be able to learn, live, and proclaim God’s truth (see Hab 2:2).

**CONCLUSION**

The seven short years Jonathan Edwards spent pastoring the people of Stockbridge is often overlooked when one surveys the life and ministry of America’s first great Christian theologian. In Stockbridge, there was no Great Awakening and no international itinerants seeking to preach to its people. In many ways, he was simply a renowned preacher pastoring a meager congregation in an obscure town. But in no way do these years represent Edwards being in exile from meaningful ministry. For starters, three of Edwards’ most powerful treatises were produced in Stockbridge,
earning him, some view, the title of America’s greatest philosopher-theologian: *Freedom of the Will* (1754), *Original Sin* (1758), and the *Two Dissertations* (published posthumously in 1765). While these works represent a lifetime of accomplishment in some respects, they are poor representatives of Edwards’ greatest accomplishment in the mission settlement. When considering the Stockbridge years, not in light of what Edwards wrote, but in light of what he did among, for, and with the Stockbridge Indians and settlers, it can be argued that one of Edwards’ greatest works was his pastoral leadership. Quite different from his pulpit-centered approach of the Northampton days, Edwards lived among the people of Stockbridge, daily defending them, teaching them, and preaching Christ to them. He was their neighbor, their protector, their healer, and their educator. In short, he was their pastor. While history celebrates the long list of credentials Edwards earned, including theologian, philosopher, revivalist, college president, and author, his role as pastor must not be overlooked. The other achievements may serve as resources through which we may receive education, but Edwards as pastor serves us best by providing a meaningful model to emulate.

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