

# **DIGGING DEEPER**



**STUDY GUIDES**

**COMMENTARY, QUESTIONS & EXERCISES**

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# DIGGING DEEPER STUDY GUIDES

## *The Religious Affections*

by Jonathan Edwards

### The Purpose of Digging Deeper Study Guides

Digging Deeper Study Guides are designed to help readers get the most out of their reading by focusing attention on understanding the main message of each book studied. Readers are then challenged to wrestle with that message—do they agree or disagree and why—and then ponder, reflect and apply what they are learning.

Individuals and groups will benefit from these study guides, but the best way to get the most out of any book is by doing both. Start by reading and answering the questions alone and then find a friend or two to gather regularly to discuss what each person is learning. The informed and lively discussion by a group of committed readers will take you places that you cannot go alone. This is the great benefit of learning theology within a community.

### Why *The Religious Affections* by Jonathan Edwards

As you will learn from the introduction to almost any copy of the book itself, Jonathan Edwards is considered the greatest theologian ever born on American soil. And his work, *The Religious Affections*, is one of his most important legacies. In it, you will explore the nature of true saving faith, be challenged toward a more biblical view of what it means to be born again, and you will grow in your understanding of what true Christian assurance of salvation looks like.

As you begin to read, you will also soon discover that this book is not easy to understand nor is it for the faint of heart. There is no denying that you have hard work ahead of you. Although this book came highly recommended to me, I admit that I started it twice and never finished. In fact, I never made it past the first 20 pages in those two failed attempts. Part of the reason for my failure is that I was lost from the get go. Another reason is that I did not appreciate the difficulty of reading a book that is now over 250 years old. So, let me encourage you to read the introduction in your copy of the book. This should help locate you in the American colonial times in which this work was first written. Another suggestion would be to enlist a companion to read along with you. Having now read this work several times, I can honestly tell you that, whatever you do, do not give up. Reading *Religious Affections* will be worth the effort.

Helping you get the most of *The Religious Affections* is what Digging Deeper Study Guides is all about. I want you to read *Religious Affections* well and be glad when you are done. Most of all, I want God to use this book, as he did in my life, to get a more Scriptural understanding of what it means to have assurance of salvation. So, grab your book and get to reading, thinking, praying and being changed by the Spirit and the Word as the latter comes to us through the pen of God's servant, Jonathan Edwards.

## Format of the Study Guide on *Religious Affections*

Page numbers in parenthesis are where suggested answers can be found. This Digging Deeper Study Guide is indexed to the Banner of Truth copy of *Religious Affections*, published in 1991.

## Suggested Other Resources

Houston, James, ed. *Faith Beyond Feelings: Discerning the Heart of True Spirituality*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 2005. This is a fine abridgement of *Religious Affections* that has been printed by several publishers over the years, including Cook Communications. It is a great place to start reading *Religious Affections*.

McDermott, Gerald R. *Seeing God: Twelve Reliable Signs of True Conversion*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995. This book takes the structure of *Religious Affections* and puts the message in contemporary language. It is a very handy companion to the original.

Storms, Sam. *Signs of the Spirit: An Interpretation of Jonathan Edwards' Religious Affections*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007. Exasperated that so few Christians actually read and/or finish *Religious Affections*, Storms re-writes Edwards' work in order to help bring this classic to a wider audience. Along the way, we get the benefit of hearing Storms' wonderful commentary and explanation on the original text.

## Dedication

To John D. Hannah, Distinguished Professor of Church History at Dallas Theological Seminary, who helped me see and savor the God of Jonathan Edwards during a Jonathan Edwards Seminar over the Summer of 1997.

**Part I**  
**Concerning the Nature of the Affections,**  
**and Their Importance in Religion**  
(a/k/a: “Gracious Affections as Evidence of True Christianity”)

1. What is Edwards’ central “thesis” in *Religious Affections*? (23)
2. What is his central “text” of Scripture? (21) How does he argue from this text to his thesis? (21-23)
3. Why is this thesis valuable to us today? What is the lasting value of this subject matter? Why is this topic relevant to you (or should be relevant to you)?
4. What is meant by the term “affection?” How is it related to but different from the “will?” Is it synonymous with our word “emotion” today? If not, what are those differences? (24-27)
5. What are the two faculties of the human soul? What does each do? (24-25)
6. Why is this discussion of man’s soul relevant to Edwards’ argument?
7. To Edwards, is man an intellectual being, an affectionate being or both? Explain.
8. Edwards uses several lines of argument to prove that true religion (i.e. Christianity) consists largely in the affections (27-48). What arguments did you find most compelling?
9. Do only Christians have “affections?” If not, what distinguishes between virtuous and non-virtuous affections? (29-30)
10. What is the most characteristic affection of the saint? (35-36)
11. What gifts have God given us to move our affections toward holy affections? (44; 50-51)
12. In your own words, what is the connection between true religion and one’s affections?
13. The puritan divines called belief/understanding in essential Christian doctrines “light,” and they called affections “heat.” What is better evidence of true religion: belief/understanding in essential Christian doctrines or affections? In other words, light or heat? Be able to defend your answer. (49-50)
14. What should the believer recognize about his own heart if it is true that Christianity lies much in the affections? (51)
15. What thing is most worthy of our affection? (52-53)

**Part II**  
**Showing What Are No Certain Signs that Religious Affections**  
**Are Truly Gracious, or That They Are Not**

(a/k/a: Signs that are Inconclusive About the Existence of Gracious Affections)

1. What is the *thesis* of this part of Edwards' work? (54)
2. Does intensity of affection prove the genuineness of religious affections? (57)
3. When people talk a lot about their Christian faith, what is it that distinguishes affections that are holy and those that are not? (63-64)
4. Explain: "It is an unreasonable presumption for anyone to expect to receive the saving influences of the Spirit of God while he neglects a diligent improvement of the means appointed by grace. To expect that the Spirit of God will operate savingly upon their minds without making use of means is too emotional" (65) (quote is from *Faith Beyond Feelings*).
5. Scripture coming to mind is not a sure sign of conversion. Why? (71-72)
6. What evidence of intense love for others have you seen unbelievers display? In view of what Edwards is saying, how would you explain the fact that some unbelievers seem more loving and kind than some believers? (74)
7. Can someone be moved to holy affections by being afraid only of hell? (83-84)
8. Read the third point that begins on page 87. Where does Edward tell us not to look for signs of true conversion? Where does he tell us to look?
9. Read the fourth point that begins on page 88, including the final paragraph of sub-part VIII. Where and how have you seen this in evangelical discussions of "assurance of salvation?" What are the implications?
10. Edwards writes: "Experience shows that person from false religion may be inclined to be exceeding abundant in the external exercise of religion; yea, to give themselves up to them, and devote almost their whole time to them." Have you see this in your experience? What are the pastoral implications of this fact? (93)
11. Is it presumptuous or arrogant for the Christian to have an assurance of salvation? Why or why not? (98)
12. Do you agree with Edwards that a "true saint may doubt" his conversion in a good way? If true, what would that look like? How would you counsel someone who was "doubting" their conversion? (100)
13. What false reality is Edwards trying to refute or undermine when he writes about "evangelical hypocrites? (103-109)
14. What concluding advice does Edwards give about man's ability to determine who is godly and who is not? (110-114)

**Part III**  
**Showing what are Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections**  
(a/k/a: “How Truly Gracious Affections are Known”)

1. What is the first preliminary point Edwards makes as he begins this third section on the truly gracious affections? Why is this important to remember as we read this book? Is this book, first and foremost, for you or for others you know? (120)
2. Edwards writes: “Assurance is not to be obtained as much by self-examination as it is by action.” If this is true, what is the essence of the test spoken of in 2 Corinthians 13:5? In other words, what are we to be looking for? What biblical passages suggest this to Edwards? (123)
3. What benefit do these signs have for real Christians? (124)

**Sign #1: Gracious Affections have a Divine and Supernatural Origin**

1. What determines whether a person or thing is “spiritual?” (125-127)
2. There is a great difference between the Spirit’s influence upon the Christian and His influence upon natural man. What two reasons distinguish the Spirit’s ministry upon the Christian from His ministry upon non-Christians? (127-129)
3. How does Edward describe this indwelling ministry? What analogies does he use? (127-128)
4. Summarize the difference between the Spirit’s work on a non-Christian and His work on a Christian. (131-133)
5. Edwards spends almost 25 pages discussing impressions and imaginations. Why does he do this? What is his main point? (138, 141, 143, 154)
6. How does Edwards understand the “witness of the Spirit?” (159-160)

**Sign #2: Gracious Affections are grounded in an attraction to God and His Ways for their own sake.**

1. What Scriptural support does Edwards cite to support his argument that love, affections and/or spirituality based upon self-love (self-interest) is worthless (i.e. not gracious)? (167-168)
2. What does a love for God rooted in self-love look like? What does a truly gracious love for God look like? (172-177)
3. Edwards writes: “There is of course the kind of love or affection that a person has toward other people or things that clearly comes from self-love. It is based upon a preconceived relationship the person feels or demands of the other. But when the first thing that draws someone’s attraction to another is seeing those qualities and virtues that are recognized as lovely in themselves, love will develop very differently from love that arises from self-interest.” (167) (quote is from *Faith*)

*Beyond Feelings*) How is lust versus love an illustration of the difference between love that arises from self-interest and love that arises because the lover sees something beautiful in the beloved?

4. Is self-love for God at all a part of the true Christian's experience and motivation? If so, what part does it play? (173)
5. Why would a love built upon self-interest (as opposed to one based primarily upon a vision of God Himself) not be able to sustain someone through a life of suffering, self-denial and sacrifice?

**Sign #3: Gracious Affections are primarily based upon seeing the Beauty of God's Moral Excellency/Holiness**

1. Is the beauty Edwards is writing about an external one or a matter of right behavior? (179-180)
2. What is meant by the Moral Excellence of God? (181-182)
3. In Edwards' view, how does holiness act as a modifier to the other attributes or perfections of God? (182-184)
4. Could someone recognize the beauty of God's moral excellence (holiness) and not love Him?
5. What test (*hint*: taste) distinguishes the spiritual and natural man? (188)

**Sign #4: Gracious Affections involve a new kind of "knowing"**

1. Explain: "Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from the information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge." (192)
2. In what two ways does this happen in the believer? (192)
3. If the "key" that opens the heart to holy affections is knowledge, what role does this say about how the Scriptures are to be involved in creating and refining one's affections?
4. What role is the Bible playing in your life right now? How can you begin to saturate your life with the Bible? What will you do this week to begin to do this?
5. Is it possible to have spiritual affections without knowing Bible doctrine? Is it possible to know Bible doctrine but not have spiritual affections? Defend both answers by citing an example that Edwards uses. (192-206)
6. What would Edwards think of someone reading the Bible and taking historical instruction to a biblical character as God's instruction to that person? (205-206)

**Sign #5: Gracious Affections are accompanied with determined and effectual conviction of the historical truthfulness of Gospel Facts**

1. What distinguishes true, gracious conviction of the truths of the Gospel from those who merely have some conviction of the truths of the Gospel? (217-219)
2. Should one find comfort/assurance in his or her knowledge of Scripture and Christian doctrine or that he or she can give reasons and arguments to support the Christian faith? (221)
3. What makes a spiritual belief or conviction something that is “distinctly Christian?” (222-223)
4. Where is the Glory of God most clearly, uniquely and attractively seen? What does this suggest about how we should live, parent, worship, talk to non-Christians, and so forth? (223)
5. If a deep-seated conviction of the truth of Christianity is a reasonable conviction—i.e. one that has reasons for its confidence--is this assurance only for the educated? (229-230)
6. What is the first basis (direct) for an individual’s “spiritual conviction of the divinity and reality of what is revealed in the gospel?” How does the term “witness” help differentiate this “something more” from mere opinion? (232-233)
7. Two reasons form the second basis (indirect) for the believer’s conviction of the truth of Christianity. What are they? (233-234)
8. Where do people fall into traps when considering whether their conviction of the truth of the Gospel is truly a sign that they are saved? (234-236)
9. So how is a deep-seated conviction different from mental assent or an intellectual realization?
10. Does this mean a Christian never doubts his or her salvation?

**Sign #6: Gracious affections are accompanied with Christian humility**

1. What is the difference between the humility that may be found in a natural man (legal humiliation) from that which is found in a Christian (evangelical humiliation)? (237-239)
2. If humility is essential to true Christianity, what should we be trying to cultivate in ourselves and children when it comes to the issue of esteem?
3. What are two ways self-denial can be understood? Can you do one without the other? What implications can you make here? (241)
4. Why is it easy for a natural man to be deceived and think he is humble when he is not? (242-246)

5. Edwards suggests two ways in which spiritual pride can be, more readily, detected. What are they? (246; 257)
6. Ponder: “The greater the view and sense that one has of the infinite excellence and glory of God in Christ, and of how boundless is the length and breadth, depth and height of the love of Christ to sinners, the greater will be the astonishment one feels as he realizes how little he knows of such love to such a God, and to such a glorious Redeemer.” (249-250) (quote is from *Faith Beyond Feelings*)
7. What are some of the great signs of false humility? (246-247)
8. Why are the greatest saints not impressed by their love for God? (250-251)
9. Compare/contrast the proud hypocrite and the truly humble person? (258-266)
10. If a professing Christian is not humble, what does that suggest? (239; 248, note especially the quote by Luther)
11. How can someone get and/or grow in humility?

**Sign #7: Gracious Affections are accompanied by a change in a Christian’s character**

1. Explain: “A man may be restrained from sin before he is converted; but when he is converted, he is not only restrained from sin, his very heart and nature is turned away from it unto holiness: so that thenceforward he becomes a holy person, and an enemy to sin.” (267)
2. Do true Christians still struggle with sin? If so, what is the key distinction between the regenerate and unregenerate person? (268-269)
3. What implications can be drawn about the relationship and connection between justification, sanctification and glorification as Edwards writes about the “renovation of nature?” (270)

**Sign #8: Gracious affections produce Christlikeness**

1. Edwards mentions five aspects of Christlikeness. What are they? (272)
2. Using Edwards, try and define each of these aspects?
3. Edwards writes: “Christians are Christlike; none deserve the name of Christians, that are not so in their prevailing character.” (274) Are you Christlike? How would those around you answer this question if asked? What implications can you draw from this?

**Sign #9: Gracious Affections are accompanied by a tenderness of spirit**

1. What is the danger of false affections toward the things of God? (285)

2. To what does Edwards compare the tender heart of a Christian? Give examples. (287-288)
3. Why does a Christian's heart grow more sensitive to sin after conversion? (291)

**Sign #10: Gracious affections are consistent, proportioned and balanced**

1. What is meant by the idea of symmetry, proportion and balance? (292)
2. Why is it appropriate that Paul, in Galatians 5:22-23, identifies righteous affections as "the fruit" (singular) of the Spirit and not the fruits (plural) of the Spirit?
3. On pages 292-303, Edwards gave numerous examples of balance/imbalance. Identify these and ponder which areas you are prone to imbalance.

**Sign #11: Gracious affections are evident by an increasing hunger for God**

1. Edwards gives four reasons for why true Christians have an insatiable hunger for God. What are they? (304-305)
2. How can many professing Christians not be hungry for God yet confident in their salvation at the same time? What would Edwards have to say to them? (306-307)

**Sign #12: Gracious affections result in Christian practice for a life-time**

1. "Christian practice" is the twelfth sign of true conversion. What three characteristics are implied in this sign? Explain each (300-313)
2. Ponder: "Slothfulness in the service of God in His professed servant is as damning as open rebellion." (311)
3. Edwards writes: "True saints may be guilty of some kinds and degrees of backsliding, may be foiled by particular temptations, and may fall into sin, yea great sins. But they never can fall away so as to grow weary of religion and the service of God, and habitually to dislike it and neglect it, either on its own account, or on account of the difficulties that attend it . . . ." (313) Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Is this comforting? Challenging? Fearful? A combination of these feelings?
4. Why is "Christian practice" the best evidence of the sincerity or profession of Christians? (323-330)
5. Ponder: "Reason shows that men's deeds are better and more faithful interpreters of their minds than their words." (330)
6. Is a profession of faith in Christ "at all" involved in assessing someone's conversion? (333)

7. Edwards asks: “[W]hat profession may properly be called a profession of Christianity?” He then affirms two aspects to that answer. What are they? (333-339)
8. Does a professing Christian have to be able to give a clear account of how he or she was converted? If not, what is necessary? How is this different from where many evangelical Christians place the emphasis? (338-339)
9. Are there any outward evidences that give “infallible” proof of inward grace? (341)
10. So what can give a Christian the assurance of salvation that the Scriptures speak about? (341-347)
11. What is the gist of Argument #1? (347-348)
12. How do trials play a part in helping us discern the sincerity of our saving faith? (350-354)
13. What is the gist of Argument #3? (355)
14. What is the gist of Argument #4? (357)
15. What is the gist of Argument #5 (358)
16. How does Edwards demonstrate the reasonableness of Argument #6? (361)
17. What is wrong with the objection that Christian experience, not Christian practice, is the paramount evidence of saving grace? (370-375)
18. Is Edwards’ view in *Religious Affections* consistent with the gospel doctrine of “justification by faith alone?” If so, how? (375-382)

