

# **David Brainerd**

## **Missionary to Native Americans**

### **(1718-1747)**



**CGYG**  
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Picture from [www.monergism.com](http://www.monergism.com)

# Resources

- Jonathan Edwards, *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989)
  - all page numbers are taken from this reference, unless otherwise indicated
- John Piper, “*Oh, That I May Never Loiter on My Heavenly Journey!*” - *Reflections on the Life and Ministry of David Brainerd* ([www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org), January 31, 1990)

# David Brainerd

- April 20, 1718 - Born in Haddam, Connecticut
  - sixth of nine (!!!) children (3rd of 5 boys) born to Hezekiah Brainerd and Dorothy Hobart
    - Hezekiah - justice of the peace and legislator
    - Nehemiah - pastor; died of TB in 1742 , age 32
    - John - took over David's work as missionary
    - Israel -died in 1748, age 23, while attending Yale
    - Jerusha - died in 1747, age 34

# David Brainerd

- Father died in 1727, age 46, when David was 9
  - Hezekiah Brainerd was a Connecticut legislator
- Mother died in March 1732, when David was almost 14
  - Dorothy Hobart was a daughter of a long line of ministers of the Gospel, both on her father's side and her mother's side

# David Brainerd

- Early life, up to conversion at age 21
  - dabbled in religion starting around age 7
    - “...I became concerned for my soul and terrified at the thoughts of death, and was driven to the performance of duties; but it appeared a melancholy business that destroyed my eagerness for play.” (Life of Brainerd, p.57)
  - of his teenage years, he writes
    - “But alas! all my good frames were but self-righteousness, not founded on a desire for the glory of God.” (p.58)

# David Brainerd

- Early life, up to conversion at age 21
    - April 1737-1738 (age 19-20)
      - **became more serious about faith, but very much works-based, hoping to commend himself to God and earn his salvation by his good works**
- “My manner of life was now exceedingly regular and full of religion, such as it was; for I read my Bible more than twice through in less than a year, spent much time every day in prayer and other secret duties, and gave much attention to the Word preached.” (April 1738, p.58)
- “...the more I did in duty the more hard I thought it would be for God to cast me off.” (p.68)

# David Brainerd

- Conversion at age 21
  - **in winter 1738, began to have deepening sense of own sinfulness and complete inability to please God**
    - “All this time the Spirit of God was powerfully at work with me; I was inwardly pressed to relinquish all self-confidence, all hopes of ever helping myself by any means whatsoever...” (p.66)
  - **July 1739**
    - “After a considerable time spent in such like exercises and distresses, one morning, while I was walking in a solitary place... I at once saw that all my contrivances and projects to effect or procure deliverance and salvation for myself were utterly in vain. I was brought quite to a stand as finding myself totally lost...” (p.67)

# David Brainerd

- Conversion at age 21
  - **July 12, 1739**

“I continued, as I remember, in this state of mind from Friday morning till the Sabbath evening following (July 12, 1739), when I was walking again in the same solitary place, where I was brought to see myself lost and helpless... Here, in a mournful, melancholy state, I was attempting to pray; but found no heart to engage in that or any other duty. My former concern, exercise, and religious affections were now gone.... I had been thus endeavoring to pray, though as I thought, very stupid and senseless, for near half an hour; then, as I was walking in a dark thick grove, unspeakable glory seemed to open to the view and apprehension of my soul. I do not mean any external brightness, for I saw no such thing... but it was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God, such as I never had before, nor anything which had the least resemblance of it.

# David Brainerd

- Conversion at age 21
  - **July 12, 1739**

“I stood still, wondered, and admired! I knew that I never had seen before anything compared to it for excellency and beauty; it was widely different from all the conceptions ever I had of God, or things divine... My soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable to see such a God, such a glorious Divine Being; and I was inwardly pleased and satisfied that He should be God over all for ever and ever. My soul was so captivated and delighted with the excellency, loveliness, greatness, and other perfections of God, that I was even swallowed up in Him.

“Thus God, I trust, brought me to a hearty disposition to exalt Him and set Him on the throne, and principally and ultimately to aim at His honor and glory, as King of the universe.... I felt myself in a new world...” (p. 69-70)

# David Brainerd

- Conversion at age 21
  - **thus began a life of passionate devotion to Christ and His service**
    - **Nov 4, 1742** “Oh, may I always live to God!... When I really enjoy God, I feel my desires of Him the more insatiable, and my thirstings after holiness the more unquenchable... I do not, I cannot live to God. Oh, for holiness! Oh, for more of God in my soul! Oh, this pleasing pain! It makes my soul press after God... ‘I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness’ (Ps. 17:15); but never, never before... Oh, that I may feel this continual hunger, and not be retarded, but rather animated... to reach forward in the narrow way, for the full enjoyment and possession of the heavenly inheritance! Oh, that I may never loiter in my heavenly journey!” (p.103-4)

# David Brainerd

- Experience at Yale
  - **Sept 1739 - entered Yale to begin training for ministry, as he felt called to be minister**
  - **August 1740 - obliged to take sick leave - probable TB**
    - “for I was grown so weak that I began to spit blood.” (p.72)
    - returned to school in November
  - **1741-1742 - revival sweeps Yale College, under the preaching of men like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards (part of the Great Awakening)**
    - most of student body affected; faculty less enthusiastic
    - some students began criticizing some of the faculty for being unconverted --> tensions between students & faculty

# David Brainerd

- Experience at Yale
  - **early 1742 - expelled from Yale**
    - was overheard saying that one of the tutors, Mr. Whittelsey, did not have “any more grace than the chair I then leaned upon” (p.133) and that he wondered why the Rector “did not drop down dead” for punishing the students for their zeal. (as cited in Piper) --> expelled
    - repented; tried for years to get reinstated, to no avail
    - this was especially devastating because of a law that stated that no established minister could be installed in Connecticut who was not a graduate of Harvard, Yale, or European university
    - *seemed to be the end of the line for his calling to be a minister*

# David Brainerd

- **Work among the Indians**
  - **Summer - Fall 1742**
    - licensed to preach by a group of ministers sympathetic to the Great Awakening
    - examined and appointed missionary to the Indians by the Commissioners of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge
  - **April 1743**
    - set out for the Indians at Kaunaumeeck, where he served for a year

# David Brainerd

- Work among the Indians

- April 1743 - May 1744

- worked among the Indians at Kaunaumeeek
    - a difficult year without much visible success, filled with *physical hardships, loneliness*, and struggles with *discouragement* and *depression* (with which he struggled most of his life)
    - April 1, 1743 - "I rode to Kaunaumeeek... and there lodged on a little heap of straw. I was greatly exercised with inward trials and distresses all day." (p.119)
    - April 7, 1743 - "Appeared to myself exceeding ignorant, weak, helpless, unworthy, and altogether unequal to my work. It seemed to me I should never do any service or have any success among the Indians. My soul was weary of my life; I longed for death, beyond measure." (p.119)

# David Brainerd

- **Work among the Indians**

- **April 1743 - May 1744 - hardships**

- April 16 - “Still in the depths of distress. In the afternoon, preached to my people, but was more discouraged with them than before. I feared nothing would ever be done for them to any happy effect.” (p.121)
    - May 18 - “My circumstances are such, that I have no comfort of any kind but what I have in God. I live in the most lonesome wilderness; have but one single person to converse with, that can speak English... I have no fellow Christian to whom I might unbosom myself or lay open my spiritual sorrows... I live poorly with regard to the comforts of life. Most of my diet consists of boiled corn, hasty-pudding, etc. I lodge on a bundle of straw, my labor is hard and extremely difficult, and I have little appearance of success, to comfort me.... But that which makes all my difficulties grievous to be borne is that God hides His face from me.” (p.124)
    - November 3, 1743 “I had for many months entirely lost all hopes of being made instrumental of doing any special service for God in the world.” (p.140)

# David Brainerd

- **Work among the Indians**

- **April 1743 - May 1744**

- yet, continued to be deeply devoted to God
- Jan 1, 1744 “Reflected on the goodness of God to me in the past year... May I always remember that all I have comes from God. Blessed be the Lord that has carried me through all the toils, fatigues, and hardships of the year past, as well as the spiritual sorrows and conflicts that have attended it. Oh, that I could begin this year with God and spend the whole of it to His glory, either in life or death!” (p.146-7)
- April 17, 1744 (p.159) “Oh, I longed to fill up the remaining moments all for God! Though my body was so feeble, and wearied with preaching and much private conversation, yet I wanted to sit up all night to do something for God. To God, the giver of these refreshments, be glory for ever and ever.”

# David Brainerd

- **Work among the Indians**

- **April 1743 - May 1744**

- April 1744 - called to minister to a church at East Hampton, Long Island
      - thought about going, but ultimately decided not to, resolving instead to continue ministering to the Indians
      - chose continued life of hardship, rather than of relative ease in East Hampton, which Jonathan Edwards called, “the fairest, pleasantest town on the whole island, and one of its largest and most wealthy parishes” (p.383)

- **May 1744 - reassigned to the Indians on the Delaware River, where he served for the next year**

- another year of hardship and difficulty, without much visible success

# David Brainerd

- Work among the Indians

- **May 1744 - June 1745**

- **May 8, 1744** - “My heart sometimes was ready to sink with the thoughts of my work, and going alone in the wilderness, I know not where. But it was still comfortable to think that others of God’s children had ‘wandered about in caves and dens of the earth,’ and Abraham, when he was called to go forth, ‘went out, not knowing whither he went.’ Oh, that I might follow after God!” (p.161)
    - **May 1745** - “The next day he set out on his journey to Susquehannah... He was sometimes much discouraged, and sunk in his spirits, through the opposition that appeared in the Indians to Christianity... He spent a fortnight among the Indians on this river, and passed through considerable labors and hardships, frequently lodging on the ground, and sometimes in the open air. At length he fell extremely ill... being seized with an ague, followed with a burning fever, and extreme pains in his head and bowels, attended with a great evacuation of blood. He thought he would perish in the wilderness.” (p.199)

# David Brainerd

- Work among the Indians
  - **May 1744 - June 1745**
    - in the midst of all this hardship, continued to look to God in hope
      - “While I was riding, had a deep sense of the greatness and difficulty of my work... Saw, with greatest certainty, that the arm of the Lord must be revealed for the help of these poor heathen, if ever they were delivered from the bondage of the powers of darkness. Spent most of the time, while riding, in lifting up my heart for grace and assistance.” (June 27, 1744, p.167)

# David Brainerd

- Work among the Indians
  - **June 19, 1745 - set out for the Indians at Crossweeksung**
    - “Having spent most of my time for more than a year past among the Indians in the Forks of Delaware in Pennsylvania; and having in that time made two journeys to Susquehannah River... and not having had any considerable appearance of special success in either of those places, which damped my spirits and was not a little discouraging to me; upon hearing that there was a number of Indians in and about a place called (by the Indians) Crossweeksung in New Jersey... *I determined to make them a visit, and see what might be done towards Christianizing them;* and accordingly arrived among them this day... I found very few persons at the place I visited, and perceived that the Indians in these parts were very much scattered... *However, I preached to those few I found,* who appeared well disposed...” (p.203) (emphasis added)
    - this would be the beginning of a remarkable work of grace

# David Brainerd

- Work among the Indians

- **June 1745 - November 1746**

- worked among the Indians at Crossweeksung and at the Forks of the Delaware, with remarkable success:
- **June 19, 1745** “I found very few persons at the place I visited... However, I preached to those few I found...” (p.203)
- **June 20, 1745** “Visited and preached to the Indians again... Numbers more were gathered at the invitations of their friends, who heard me the day before.” (p.204)
- **June 22, 1745** “Preached to the Indians again. Their number which at first consisted of about seven or eight persons, was now increased to near thirty.” (p.204)
- **July 21, 1745** “... baptized my interpreter and his wife, who were the first I baptized among the Indians.” (p.207)

# David Brainerd

- **Work among the Indians**

- **June 1745 - November 1746**

- **August 3, 1745** “I preached to them this day with some view to Revelation 22:17... The Lord, I am persuaded, enabled me, in a manner somewhat uncommon, to set before them the Lord Jesus Christ as a kind and compassionate Saviour, inviting distressed and perishing sinners to accept everlasting mercy. And a surprising concern soon became apparent among them... Some were much concerned, and discovered vehement longings of soul after Christ, to save them from the misery they felt and feared.” (p.213)

- **August 8, 1745** “In the afternoon I preached to the Indians; their number was now about sixty-five persons... I discoursed from Luke 14:16-23 and was favored with uncommon freedom in my discourse. There was much visible concern among them while I was discoursing publicly; but afterwards when I spoke to one and another more particularly,... the power of God seemed to descend upon the assembly “like a rushing mighty wind,” and with an astonishing energy bore down all before it.” (p.216-9)

# David Brainerd

- **Work among the Indians**
  - **by November 1745 (less than 5 months after arriving at Crossweeksung), he reported to the Commissioners:**
    - “I have now baptized in all forty-seven persons of the Indians, twenty-three adults and twenty-four children... Through rich grace, none of them as yet have been left to disgrace their profession of Christianity by any scandalous or unbecoming behavior.” (Nov. 4, 1745, p.243)
  - **his work among the Indians continued into 1746, with many more becoming believers**
    - “Numbered the Indians to see how many souls God had gathered together here since my coming into these parts, and found there were now about an hundred and thirty persons together...” (March 24, 1746, p.285)

# David Brainerd

- **Work among the Indians**
  - **both numerical and spiritual growth evident**
    - Mar 2, 1746 - “I know of no assembly of Christians where there seems to be so much of the presence of God, where brotherly love so much prevails, and where I should so much delight in the public worship of God, in general, as in my own congregation; although not more than nine months ago, they were worshipping devils and dumb idols under the power of pagan darkness and superstition. Amazing change this! effected by nothing less than divine power and grace! ‘This is the doing of the Lord, and it is justly marvelous in our eyes!’” (p.277)

# David Brainerd

- **Work among the Indians**

- **became increasingly weak with tuberculosis in Fall 1746:**

- Sept 6, 1746 “Spent the day in a very weak state; coughing and spitting blood...” (p.325)
    - Oct 12, 1746 “Was scarce able to sit up...” (p.336)

- **as he became increasingly weak, he became more concerned with making the most of every moment for God, and continued to press on with his work**

- Oct 11, 1746 (p.336) “Oh, how precious is time! And how guilty it makes me feel when I think I have trifled it away and misimproved it, or neglected to fill up each part of it with duty to the utmost of my ability and capacity!”
    - Oct 19, 1746 “Was scarcely able to do anything at all in the week past... Was grieved to see the hours slide away, while I could do nothing for God...” (p.336)

# David Brainerd

- Final days
  - **left the Indians in November 1746 to try to recover health**
  - **spent his final months between Boston and Northampton, in the home of Jonathan Edwards, who wrote of him:**
    - “Though he was constantly exceeding weak, yet there appeared in him a continual care to improve time, and fill it up with something that might be profitable and in some respect for the glory of God or the good of men... He seemed never to be easy, however ill, if he was not doing something for God, or in His service.”

# David Brainerd

- Final days
  - **spent his final weeks in physical agony, yet his words and conduct were full of passion for the glory of God**
    - **September 1747** “Bodily pains I cared not for; though I was then in extremity, I never felt easier. I felt willing to glorify God in that state of bodily distress, as long as He pleased I should continue in it. The grave appeared really sweet, and I longed to lodge my weary bones in it. But oh, that God might be glorified!... There is nothing in the world worth living for but doing good and finishing God’s work, doing the work that Christ did. I see nothing else in the world that can yield any satisfaction besides living to God, pleasing Him, and doing His whole will.” (p.365-6)
    - **Sept 17, 1747** (p.364) Edwards writes, “On that evening [there was] another sign of his approaching death, whereupon he expressed himself thus: “Oh, the glorious time is now coming! I have longed to serve God perfectly. Now God will gratify those desires!”

# David Brainerd

- Final days

- **October 8, 1747** - Edwards writes,

- “he was in great distress and agonies of body ... He manifested much concern lest he should dishonor God by impatience under his extreme agony... Notwithstanding his bodily agonies, the interest of Zion lay still with great weight on his mind...” (p.376)

- **October 9, 1747 - David Brainerd died at the age of 29,**

- “when his soul, as we may well conclude, was received by his dear Lord and Master as an eminently faithful servant, into that state of perfection of holiness and fruition of God, which he had so often and so ardently longed for; and was welcomed by the glorious assembly in the upper world, as one peculiarly fitted to join them in their blessed employ and enjoyment.” (p.377)

# David Brainerd - Lessons for today

## 1. The sovereignty of God over the circumstances of our lives

- his life seemed to fall apart before his eyes, because of a few careless words --> got him expelled from Yale
- yet, it was his expulsion from Yale that set him of his course to become missionary to the Indians, and to live a life that has been an inspiration to numerous Christians after him, including William Carey, John Wesley, Jim Elliot
  - “There is a tremendous lesson here. God is at work for the glory of his name and the good of his church even when the good intentions of his servants fail - even when that failing is owing to sin or carelessness.” (Piper)

# David Brainerd - Lessons for today

## 2. The sovereignty of God in salvation

– the remarkable work of grace among the Indians at Crossweeksung began at a time when David Brainerd least expected it, yet through which time he remained faithful to his calling:

- “It is remarkable that God began this work among the Indians at a time when I had the least hope and, to my apprehension, the least rational prospect of seeing a work of grace propagated amongst them... My bodily strength had been much wasted by a late tedious journey to Susquehannah, where I was necessarily exposed to hardships and fatigues among the Indians; my mind also was exceedingly depressed with a view of the unsuccessfulness of my labors. I had little reason much as to hope that God had made me instrumental in the saving conversion of any of the Indians, except my interpreter and his wife.”  
(p.243-244)

# David Brainerd - Lessons for today

## 2. The sovereignty of God in salvation

- the remarkable work of grace among the Indians at Crossweeksung came through preaching and teaching of God's Word:
  - the sufficiency of Scripture for the conversion of souls
- we need to learn to remain faithful, even when the situation seems impossible, to pray, and to proclaim God's Word, in faith that He is sovereign, and He will save
  - June 26, 1744 “Was enabled to cry to God for my poor Indians; though the work of their conversion appeared impossible with man, yet with God I saw all things were possible.... longed that God would purge me more that I might be as a chosen vessel to bear His name among the heathens.” (p.166-167)

# David Brainerd - Lessons for today

## **3. Single-minded devotion to God, with corresponding passion to spend himself in Christ's service**

– David Brainerd faced severe hardships

- **Sickness** - battled with tuberculosis all of his Christian life
- **Hard living conditions among the Indians**
  - poor food and living conditions
  - often exposed to poor weather out in the open while traveling - often worsened his illness:
  - May 1, 1744 - “Rode several hours in the rain through the howling wilderness, although I was so disordered in body, that little or nothing but blood came from me.” (p.160)
- **Loneliness**

# David Brainerd - Lessons for today

## 3. Single-minded devotion to God, with corresponding passion to spend himself in Christ's service

– David Brainerd faced severe hardships

- **Depression** - a struggle for his entire life

- Dec 16, 1744 “Was so overwhelmed with dejection that I knew not how to live. I longed for death exceedingly; my soul was sunk into deep waters and the floods were ready to drown me. I was so much oppressed that my soul was in a kind of horror. I could not keep my thoughts fixed in prayer for the space of one minute... It made me exceedingly ashamed that I did not live to God...” (p.186)
- Sept 3, 1746 “Was scarce ever more confounded with a sense of my own unfruitfulness and unfitness for my work than now. Oh, what a dead, heartless, barren, unprofitable wretch did I see myself to be! My spirits were so low, and my bodily strength so wasted, that I could do nothing at all.” (p.324-325)

# David Brainerd - Lessons for today

## 3. Single-minded devotion to God, with corresponding passion to spend himself in Christ's service

- faced severe hardships, yet his devotion to Christ continued to deepen, and he continued to press on
  - Nov 22, 1744 - “Such fatigues and hardships as these serve to wean me more from the earth, and, I trust, will make heaven the sweeter. Formerly, when I was thus exposed to cold and rain, I was ready to please myself with the thoughts of enjoying a comfortable house, a warm fire, and other outward comforts. But now these have less place in my heart (through the grace of God), and *my eye is more to God for comfort*... I do not in such seasons of difficulty flatter myself that it will be better hereafter, but rather think, how much worse it might be; how much greater trials others of God's children have endured; and how much greater are yet perhaps reserved for me. Blessed be God, that He makes the thoughts of my journey's end and of my dissolution a great comfort to me, under my sharpest trials...” (p.181)

# David Brainerd - Lessons for today

## 3. Single-minded devotion to God, with corresponding passion to spend himself in Christ's service

- faced severe hardships, yet continued to serve passionately despite suffering and weakness
  - June 24, 1744 - “Extremely feeble, scarce able to walk. However, visited my Indians and took much pains to instruct them... Oh, that I could always go in the strength of the Lord!” (p.166)
  - March 18, 1744 - “Was exceeding weak and faint so that I could scarcely walk. But God was pleased to afford me much freedom, clearness and fervency in preaching.” (p.158)
  - Feb 21, 1746 - “*Oh, how sweet it is to be spent and worn out for God!*” (quoted in Piper)

# David Brainerd - Lessons for today

## **3. Single-minded devotion to God, with corresponding passion to spend himself in Christ's service**

- let's learn from David Brainerd his single-minded devotion to God, and his passion to spend and be spent for God
  - May 22, 1746 - "I continued wrestling with God in prayer... till it was bed-time, and I feared I should hinder the family... But oh, with what reluctancy did I find myself obliged to consume time in sleep!" (quoted in Piper)
  - July 28, 1746 "Was very weak and scarce able to perform any business at all, but enjoyed sweetness and comfort in prayer... I longed to spend and be spent for God." (p.316)

# David Brainerd - Lessons for today

## 4. The magnificent grace of God

- “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.” (Titus 3:4-5a)
- supplies us strength equal to our days (Deut. 33:25)
- manifests His perfect power in our weakness, that His Name might be glorified in us (2 Cor. 12:9)
  - “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”